

HOW DO WE LIVE TOGETHER IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH?*

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1. ON AIRS, WATERS AND PLACES

In one of his most seminal treatises titled *On Airs, Waters and Places* Hippocrates, the Greek physician of the Age of Pericles regarded as the father of modern medicine, argues that the changes of the seasons bring about a series of changes in the ways we live and behave. In what is considered to be the first systematic attempt to understand the effects of climate and situation upon health, the great physician reminds us that we are indeed the people of our times¹. In a sense, we cannot separate our lives and in extension the ways we think, the ways we feel, the ways we experience the world around us from the places where we live. Following this train of thought, and since the grounds on which we live are constantly shifting, I would like to ask, how can we ‘be’ continuously unsteady?

2. “SPEAKING NEARBY²”

I was invited to speak to you from distance. “What you have is the voice of a person who little by little comes to situate [her]self through the

¹ In Greek, this phrase would translate into «οι άνθρωποι των καιρών», where *καιρός* holds its double meaning describing the weather conditions as well as the opportune and decisive moment for action.

² I would like these thoughts to be seen as an extension of what Trinh T. Minh-ha has introduced to us as a praxis. Listen to the words of Trinh T. Minh-ha (13’05”-13’ 45”) as part of the public talk ‘Just Speak Nearby’ organized by 356 Mission, Los Angeles, April 21, 2016: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zYpXm4E63S0&ab_channel=356SMissionRoad

diverse social and political positions [s]he assumes³". As I attempt to find a comfortable speaking position, the words 'refuse' to come out as definite answers. Just like the way I was refused to come close to you, to be with you. In this process of narration, I might have more questions to raise than answers. Yet any answer that I might be able to give can only depart from a lived experience which is both temporal and spatial, my experience as a cultural worker in the city of Athens where I currently stand.

3. SEASONS CHANGE

Seasons change and so does our bodily reaction in order to adjust to the weather –coming back to Hippocrates. But the change of seasons also brings forth certain kinds of 'sicknesses' against which the bodies need to perform. In places where the changes are more frequent and abrupt one observes a broader differentiation amongst the various bodies which are usually more alert and full of energy. There is this critical moment in the progression of a disease where it either triumphs or it retreats allowing the body to recover. This is what we call a 'crisis'. I assume you are familiar with this word that has been used extensively over the past decade to mark the economic collapse of 2008 and forward, and has served as an adjective ever since to describe the dysfunctionalities of the Greek social and financial system. I would like to draw on a different, perhaps more positive, connotation of this specific word that is often overlooked; its etymological route in the Greek word *κρίνω* which refers to one's ability to judge, to choose, to take a stance or to make a decision.

I cannot speak for a fact of how things worked in the Athenian art scene before 2008, since that is the year that my adult life officially began and only a few years later did I start to get actively involved with what we can broadly refer to as the Athenian art scene. What I heard though is that things weren't much different B.C. (before crisis). Perhaps we doped up

³ Nancy N. Chen, "'SPEAKING NEARBY:' A CONVERSATION WITH TRINH T. MINH-HA", in *Visual Anthropology Review*, Vol. 8, no. 1, 1992, 82-91.

to cross the finish line of the marathon during the 2004 Olympic Games before time was up. Unfortunately, we didn't consider the side-effects.

4. A PUBLIC SECRET⁴

Seasons are marked by particular weather patterns resulting from the earth's changing position to the sun. Every pattern produces its own affect. In a way, seasons repeat themselves and by doing so they get inscribed in our embodied and social memory turning over time into 'good old habits'. The dominant affect of our season is precarity, a constant state of uncertainty and insecurity mostly in regards to employment or income. But in order to 'read' the affect one first needs to 'speak' the pattern.

In July 2020, shortly after our gradual return from a period of lockdown, the Greek Ministry of Culture announced a new campaign in an attempt to support the cultural sector that was severely hit by the COVID-19 global pandemic. The campaign was given the following title: «Όλη η Ελλάδα, ένας πολιτισμός⁵», which literally translates into "All of Greece, One Culture". For a period of three months archaeological sites and other open-air spaces across Greece, whose operations are supervised by the Greek state, hosted contemporary cultural activities produced either by public or private entities that were available to the public for free as long as they could cover any entrance fees where applicable. Greece's cultural heritage is marked safe and gets celebrated once more. The bridge between contemporary cultural production and archaeology is indeed much needed. There are however two critical points that we need to pay

⁴ Looking back to my first years of working in the arts, when I still considered it important to gain experience and tick the boxes at all costs with the hope to reach a certain kind of financial and social stability, I feel close to the following definition: "Public secrets are typically personalised. The problem is only visible at an individual, psychological level; the social causes of the problem are concealed. Each phase blames the system's victims for the suffering that the system causes. And it portrays a fundamental part of its functional logic as a contingent and localised problem." Institute for Precarious Consciousness, "We Are All Very Anxious", in Plan C, April 4, 2014, online: <https://www.weareplanc.org/blog/we-are-all-very-anxious/#f1>

⁵ "All Greece, one Culture" included 270 performances and cultural activities including theatre, music, dance and visual arts exhibitions held across 122 different venues throughout Greece. See the promotional video here: <https://youtu.be/S8n0iSxoA4U>

attention to. First of all, the rather bold claim for singularity that underlies the whole campaign in the condensed phrase ‘one culture’. Why one? Why not many? Of course, that’s not news. The systematic attempts to enforce a linear narrative that connects the glorious ancient past to the present were crucial for the establishment of the Greek modern state in 1830 and for the formation of a national identity that was closer to the West rather than to the East. The ancient heritage served as the exemplary for the ideological construction of a national imagination that would further reinforce the dominant position of what we consider as the ‘great’ western civilization. Just like a good hostess archaeology opens its doors to receive her temporary guests. In return, they are to take all that she has to offer without asking for more.

The second point I would like to draw here takes us back to the issue of precarity and how this gets perpetuated as an individualised problem through the use of language. During the official announcement of this new campaign back in July the Greek Minister, having first referred to culture as a public good, made the following statement: “In this way we establish a sustainable model based on values, a substantial offering to the local economies, while we also provide employment for hundreds of artists, creators and technicians.”⁶

Leaving aside what a ‘substantial offering’ to the local economies might be, what is not made clear is how this is considered to be a sustainable model. What kind of employment and resources is offered by whom and to whom? Are we speaking about the contractual workers in temporary often seasonal positions that serve as guards or invigilators of the ‘sacred’ sites? Are we speaking about cultural workers in the performing arts whose temporary hourly-waged contracts were suspended during the lockdown? Are we speaking about the contemporary visual artists most of which are expected to work without contracts, whose fees get lost into the production line? Or are we finally speaking about the private

⁶ In Greek the Minister’s Statement reads. «Με τον τρόπο αυτό καθιερώνουμε ένα βιώσιμο αξιακό πρότυπο με ουσιαστική προσφορά στις τοπικές οικονομίες και δίνουμε απασχόληση σε εκατοντάδες καλλιτέχνες, δημιουργούς και τεχνικούς.» The announcement was released on July 14, 2020 by the Press Office of the Ministry of Culture. See: <https://www.culture.gov.gr/el/Information/SitePages/view.aspx?nID=3366>

companies and foundations who benefited financially and symbolically by getting access to these specific sites and resources?

The lack of public funding and infrastructural support towards contemporary art, and the visual arts in particular, is a longstanding phenomenon, at least in Greece. It goes hand in hand with the overall absence of any strategic planning towards the arts⁷. If you are looking for the side-effects, I would suggest you rather look for the symptoms. Take for example the story of EMST, the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens. The museum, which is a state-funded public institution, was founded in 1997. It began to operate in 2000 in temporary locations, and opened the doors of its permanent building in 2016, after a 14-year period in limbo awaiting the building's reconstruction. It took another four years for its collection to be installed and for the museum to open 'fully operational to the public in February 2020' and without a permanent director since the open call⁸ published after the end of the tenure of the previous director apparently failed to be successful. In monitoring the body's most basic functions the measurement of its vital signs is a rather important step. In our case: 'Vital to EMST's creative continuity was a €3,000,000 grant from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation [...], which enabled completion of the works necessary for the Museum to operate to its fullest potential.'⁹

⁷ Although this is not considered as proof for a cultural policy currently in place, there are some small speculative steps that have been implemented recently towards that direction. In March 2019, the Ministry of Culture announced the updated digital platform of cultural institutions in Greece, a call for new registrations, as well as a series of project grants addressed to already registered institutions. More recently, in June 2020, and as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Culture announced an emergency relief fund for cultural institutions registered in its platform and more importantly an open call for research grants in visual arts that for the first time addressed individuals as well as organizations and other legal entities.

⁸ It's worth to note here that this was the first time that the selection process for a director of a state-funded museum was done through an open call. In June 2019, a second open call was announced by the Ministry, but had to be temporarily suspended due to the calling for early national elections that eventually led to the change in the Greek government and the subsequent replacement of the former Minister of Culture to the current one.

⁹ Excerpt from a statement published on the museum's own website in Greek: «Καθοριστική για τη συνέχιση της δυναμικής πορείας του ΕΜΣΤ υπήρξε η έγκριση της δωρεάς των 3.000.000 ευρώ από το Ίδρυμα Σταύρος Νιάρχος (ΙΣΝ) τον Ιούλιο του 2018, η οποία επέτρεψε την εκτέλεση των

To cut a long story short, a check-up of the financial framework within which cultural activities in Greece operate is necessary for the condition's further examination. So, where does the money come from and who gets to be paid? On the one hand, money is outsourced through funding schemes that have been devised abroad, a) larger grants that often extend through time and aim to develop and sustain programming with a strong focus in collaborations between institutions from different geographic localities, such as the Creative Europe programme, b) smaller project grants that cover designated production costs and c) mobility grants usually provided by the cultural institutes of countries that cover travel expenses, perhaps accommodation and daily allowances and are usually intended for those moving towards Greece. On the other hand, money can also be sourced locally from Greek or international private foundations based in Greece, such as [NEON organization](#), the [Onassis Foundation](#), [Outset Contemporary Art Fund Greece](#), the [Stavros Niarchos Foundation](#) and [Schwarz Foundation](#), amongst others. Their art funding schemes include academic scholarships, commissions, highly-paid internships, international exchange programs, exhibition and project grants, performance and dance production grants, as well as research-based residency programmes.

It's interesting to observe how the advent of the financial crisis and the degradation of public or state funded cultural institutions coincided with the dynamic entry or recharge of private foundations that made an unspoken promise for the cultural regeneration of the city. The Onassis Cultural Center opened its doors in 2010. NEON was founded in 2013 and the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center that was gifted to the Greek state was officially inaugurated in 2017. Shortly after, [ARTWORKS](#), the SNF Artist Fellowship Program kicked off by awarding 60 and by now 80 fellowships in the form of a lumpsum to practitioners in the fields of visual arts, moving image, curating and dance. Filling in the gaps and creating more opportunities for artists and art practitioners is of course essential. But replacing public institutions and state support is an entirely different story.

εργασιών για την ολοκλήρωση του κύριου στρατηγικού στόχου του μουσείου, της πλήρους λειτουργίας του. » See: <https://www.emst.gr/en/museum>

Treating the symptom does not cure the disease. Although the origins of the sources differ the issue gets reproduced. What is being reproduced then is a social body in bad shape. Living with chronic illness can indeed feel rather lonely, especially when your condition has been associated with a non-communicable disease, considered as non-transmissible from one person to another. What differentiates [chronic conditions](#) from other kinds of illnesses is that they might have extended periods of remission, when the symptoms remain invisible, and periods of relapse when the symptoms become visible once again. In our case, as cultural workers in Greece, it seems that our main symptom has for the most part stayed invisible under the existing legal and fiscal framework that prevents a large part of people working in the arts to legalize their profession. On the one hand, due to the mere absence of professional categories that describe and protect the work of art practitioners identifying themselves as curators, exhibition makers, art theorists, and cultural managers. On the other hand, due to the extremely high taxation (up to 45%) imposed to freelance professionals across sectors officially registered in Greece. As a consequence, people are often forced to engage in projects without working agreements, doing unpaid or badly paid, black work, without any kind of social security for many years. Lacking any official proof of their work the art workers most of the times do not even qualify officially for unemployment support. At the same time, the lack of structural funding and support towards non-profit spaces and the promotion of a project-based, DIY logic further accentuates the problem of employment, as most spaces do not have the means to cover salaries in addition to their running and operating costs.

Art work is not an ephemeral project. But even though some wish to treat it as such, then they should definitely not boast about it as a successful or even sustainable one. Under the wider socio-economic structures, art workers are treated as disposable commodities and what gets perpetuated is an internalized feeling of self-constraint that things cannot be done differently. You might thus wonder: how do we do what we do, and why do we do it?

5. ON LOVE LABORS¹⁰ – TACTICS OF REFUSAL

Opposites are the treatment for opposites. During an infection, our body generates a Y-shaped protein that through a binding mechanism – analogous to a ‘lock-and-key’ interaction– tags itself to a specific pathogen that is the cause of the infection in the first place in order to neutralize it. These proteins are the basis of every immune system and they are commonly known as ‘[antibodies](#)’.

In Athens, over the past decade we have witnessed the proliferation of a large number of offsite spaces founded and ran by artists and curators, as well as the establishment of a number of non-profit spaces operating as small-scale art institutions¹¹. This phenomenon, which saw a rise amidst the ‘crisis’ years, coincided on the one hand with the return of a younger generation of art professionals who had just concluded their studies abroad, and on the other hand with the arrival of a large number of international artists and curators who moved to Athens shortly before and after the international art exhibition *documenta 14*.

In an attempt to counteract the precarious conditions that they confronted, arts professionals sought to regain control over their practice by foregrounding spaces that foster more process-oriented practices, collaboration and exchange with peers. The flourishing of the

¹⁰ Excerpt on the sharing of joy. See Audre Lorde, *Uses of the Erotic*, audio excerpt 11’34’’-11’50’’, <https://youtu.be/aWmq9gw4Rq0>

¹¹ The differentiation I am making between these two categories is based on the following factors. First of all, artist-run spaces are highly idiosyncratic. They usually constitute the studio or living spaces of one or more artists which are not always officially registered as ‘non-profit legal entities’ and open up to the public through irregular intervals. Furthermore, their programming evolves organically and responds from the artist’s ideas and interests as well as from the interpersonal relationships with other artists and curators. As a result, they often don’t receive any kind of funding to support their activities which are based on a more DIY ethics. On the other hand, non-profit exhibition spaces are registered entities initiated by art theorists or curators with a working experience in the field and with a clearer mission that drives their programing. They have a regular exhibition program and systematically pursue funding applications to sustain their activities. I’ve counted 52 artist-run spaces and 12 non-profit exhibition spaces as currently active. I would like to avoid the term independent and propose instead the term interdependent. Visit my Athens Art Map: <https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=162OygN9IOhHuaBLEgnh02jGzIqW-VJFK&usp=sharing>

independent artistic activity comes from a very strong need to establish a sense of community. To the lack of funding and of institutional spaces where they could showcase their work, this newly formed art community responded by creating its own working conditions that not only allows it to become visible, but furthermore acts as an alternative network for the circulation of thoughts and the sharing of knowledges. By crafting time into more horizontal and affective structures of relating as well as on reciprocal cultures of sharing and exchange of resources, what is being reproduced is essentially the social. Self-organisation and self-education as the opposites of alienation and isolation. In a way, communities come together through acts of refusal. The refusal to be one while 'being with', the refusal to be silent while in dialogue with others, the refusal to be separate while creating a space with others.

I would like now to bring a few examples for the Athenian case.

BUILDING NETWORKS

A first collective attempt of creating a network in order to highlight and map the contemporary artistic production in Athens took place in 2017 through the [Athens Independents Art Index](#)¹². This took the form of a digital as well as printed map, distributed freely to cultural institutions across the city, that brought together non-profit and artist-run spaces, residencies, community networks and curatorial projects and their activities during and beyond the duration of *documenta 14*. A similar intent has been expressed more recently through [Athens ArtCore](#) which was formed in the beginning of 2020 as “an association of artist-run spaces in Athens, with the goals of creating a network of support, advocacy, collaboration, and shared curatorial programming, as well as

¹² The map was initiated by members of the art community, and was subsequently supported by the Schwarz Foundation.

raising the visibility of the value of these types of non-commercial spaces”. A 3-day festival hosted in and by the different spaces of the network was planned to take place last March, but had to be postponed eventually due to the pandemic. Another moment of collective gathering took place in 2019 through the year-long project [Time Takes Time](#)¹³ facilitated by A-DASH artist-run space. The project connected Greek and international artists, designers and publishers through a series of studio meetings in order to exchange practices and processes, techniques and skills through the lens of printed matter as well as towards a moment of co-creation in the form of a week-long series of interconnected workshops and public presentations in September 2019. Last but not least, focusing on the life cycle of materials that are used in artistic production, Maria Adela Konomi initiated in 2018 the collaborative platform [OnMaterials](#)¹⁴. From a network of materials used in artistic production towards a network of artists, designers and cultural institutions, the platform aims at raising awareness for waste prevention and for the development of new strategies towards sustainable cultural practices through material redistribution and creative reuse.

SPEAKING THE UNSPOKEN

One great step towards understanding and hopefully resolving a problem is its articulation and more importantly the process of reversing the perspective. By weaving together different experiences and stories we are moving from the private to the public sphere opening up a discourse, challenging the assumptions that have been naturalized and dismantling the public secrets that sustain the culture of silence. In a rather playful manner, 3 137 artist-run space, one of the oldest spaces of this time

¹³ *Time Takes Time* was created by Eva Isleifs, Noemi Niederhauser and Andreas Brunner.

¹⁴ *OnMaterials* is a pilot project of the capacity fellowship program START – Create Cultural Change, a program of the Robert Bosch Stiftung, conducted in cooperation with the Goethe-Institut Thessaloniki, and the German Association of Sociocultural Centers, supported by the John S. Latsis Public Benefit Foundation and the Bodossaki Foundation.

period in Athens, pursued a subversive way of addressing directly the dysfunctionalities of the art institution both inwardly and outwardly. In 2018, they established GABRIELA¹⁵, an immaterial and speculative institution that performs the organizational structure of the space through a series of actions that appropriate usual tactics of the corporate sector –directorship, administration, branding and communication campaigns– in order to speak about the incompatibility of such an organizational structure within the operation of an institution founded and ran by artists. One of the very first tracks that GABRIELA performed as a newly founded body was applying for the director’s position at the National Museum of Contemporary Art which was publicly announced through the social media accounts of the space as well as through an open letter distributed via the organisation’s mailing list that explains this decision. “Our application was aiming to envision and think across a collective and non-hierarchical institutional/management model.” GABRIELA got rejected. Its application¹⁶ was considered inappropriate, not meeting the terms of the application, the main reason being that collectives could not apply for the role but only individuals. By claiming a space within the public sphere and the web through its communication campaigns GABRIELA not only sought to make itself visible among its peers but first and foremost established a first level of transparency that is essential in the process of building a new collective imaginary. But the story continues. In January 2020, GABRIELA contracted its own director, curator Ilaria Marion Conti, to further investigate “the material and immaterial conditions of labor in the work field of contemporary art in Athens” through meetings with practitioners in Athens and through research on international initiatives on the subject. The director’s tenure concluded with a public event that took the form of an online conversation¹⁷ between representatives of two art workers’ collective

¹⁵ According to its founders’ statement, “GABRIELA’s program unfolds through a music tracklist”, that can be accessed here: https://www.3137.gr/assets/gabriela_pdfs/gabriela_10_songs.pdf

¹⁶ The full application file is accessible online: <http://www.3137.gr/assets/gabriela-emst/gabriela-goes-emst.pdf>

¹⁷ The event titled ‘– IS THIS LOVE? LABOR / ART / AURATIC CONDITIONS’ is available to watch online: <https://youtu.be/uJgroXxG9rI>

initiatives in Greece and Italy as well as through a publication¹⁸ that brings together the conducted research and includes the ‘performative’ contract, an auratic mapping of contemporary spaces in Athens, texts by curators and scholars active in Athens on issues of labor in the arts, the Greek translation of key tools developed by the US-based organization W.A.G.E., a sustainability exercise, a labor tracker, a proposition for a collective bibliography on labor as well as an artist commission.

This last track which was performed amid the COVID-19 global pandemic coincided with the emergence of a collective effort to bring forth issues of labor rights in the cultural sector in Greece. The initiative under the name [Cultural Workers Alliance Greece](#)¹⁹ started as a Facebook group in March 2020 that brought together visual artists, curators, writers, art critics, cultural managers and other practitioners mainly from the field of contemporary visual arts that felt the strong impetus to gather online and openly share the challenges they were facing in terms of their employment status and social welfare more broadly as cultural workers in Greece and which had been exacerbated under the pandemic. At the time, the emergency measures announced by the Ministry of Culture for the cultural sector adopted the logic of an open call format in support of new productions that were thought as part of a cultural policy that should have already been in place. The announced measures did not include any sort of immediate relief funds addressed directly to the workers. The weekly general assembly generated a core group divided into smaller working groups that worked in parallel and focused mainly on the dissemination of an open letter addressing the workers’ issues and directed to the Ministry, on laying the foundations for a union, on a cultural policy analysis of the sector in Greece, on research in relation to the existing unions and ways of collaboration as well as on the creation of a radio podcast that would highlight some of the aforementioned issues through the voices of the people. While the working groups were closed, the general assembly, moderated by members of the core group on a

¹⁸ “The publication’s title *Around Labor, Art, and the Auratic Condition (This is Not a Love Song)*, provides the authors’ answer to the question: *Is This Love?*, thus directly addressing whether love should be part of the equation that connects art, labor, class, and exploitation.”

¹⁹ Cultural Workers Alliance Greece is a public Facebook group. The minutes of all meetings are publicly available within the group in Greek and English.

rotation basis, remained open to new members who wished to contribute to this dialogue and were also used as a platform to exchange practices with other unions or grassroots initiatives based in Europe such as [SOTA](#)²⁰ in Brussels and the [SNAPcgt](#)²¹ in France.

PRACTICING PLACES

A place holds a certain kind of potentiality, that of becoming a space. I am following here the thoughts of Michel de Certeau and the distinction he made between the notion of place and that of space. A space is produced by the ‘ensemble of movements deployed within it’.²² One of the most characteristic examples of such an ensemble in Athens is the case of [Communitism](#)²³ initiated by Natassa Dourida in 2015. Housed in a formerly abandoned cultural heritage building in the area of Metaxourghio, Communitism started from the need to create a cooperative relationship between building owners and community members for the revival and the preservation of abandoned cultural heritage buildings to gradually become a participatory structure for an open community of creative professionals with shared responsibility on the uses of the space based on practices of commoning –such as the sharing of spaces, means of production, competences and time. The ensemble is enacted by the different interconnected spaces –the

²⁰ “State of the Arts (SOTA) is an alliance that was formed in 2013 when artists, artworkers and organisations rallied to address their concerns with the austerity measures that Belgian/Flemish politics in general – and its cultural policy makers in particular – took in relation to art & artists.”

²¹ Le Syndicat national des Artistes Plasticiens de la *Confédération Générale du Travail* (CGT) is the national syndicate of visual artists in France.

²² “A space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. Thus, space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. [...] it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts. [...] In short, space is a practiced place.” See Michel de Certeau, ‘Spatial Stories’, in Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, University of California Press: 1988, 115-130.

²³ *Communitism* started as a pilot project of the capacity fellowship program START – Create Cultural Change.

makerspace, the incubator, the communal space, the artists' studio and living space, the gallery, the cinema, the free shop— that, collectively manage and transform the place. Practices of mutual learning, the generation and distribution of new knowledges beyond the capitalist modes of production as well as the creation of a space that allows for such encounters, drives the ethos of [FAC research](#) a community-based research center which opened its doors in 2019 in the area of Agios Panteleimonas. The center's affective structure unfolds through reading groups and community courses, that employ enquiry-based teaching and learning methods and whose thematics are informed by the needs and interests of the participants, as well as through a growing feminist library, a summer school and research projects focusing on horizontality, intersectionality, and embodied knowledges.

6. A COMMUNITY 'AS-YET UNIMAGINED'²⁴

The degrees to which we see ourselves in relation to others informs the kind of subjectivities we attest to. The Athenian art community might be perceived from the outside as disorganized or fragmented. This is not an ordered whole –not one, but many. It is made up of heterogenous²⁵ and simultaneous spaces each of which retains its own aesthetic practices while at the same time developing relational practices that inform new ways of being together in difference. By practicing spatial and social arrangements that are based upon interpersonal dialogues and the collaborative production of meaning, we allow for a new sociality to emerge, one that does not conform with the established construal of the self as an autonomous or independent body, but rather as one that is

²⁴ I am borrowing this term from Janet Sarbanes' essay on the rebetika subculture, where she addresses the relation between individual and collective and the "anti-structural mode of sociality that takes form in and through aesthetic practices." See Janet Sarbanes, "Musicking and Communitas: The Aesthetic Mode of Sociality in Rebetika Subculture", in *Popular Music and Society*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (2006), 17-35.

²⁵ "Unity implies the coming together of elements which are, to begin with, varied and diverse in their particular natures." Audre Lorde, 'Learning from the 1960's', in Audre Lorde, *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*, Penguin Books, 2018.

interdependent, a body where relationships become the functional units for transformative action.

7. IN DISTANCE, WE ARE CLOSE

The immune system is never really immune. It holds the potential to be one. And this potentiality gets activated through memory, a 'social' memory that travels through the airs that our bodies share with each other as well as with the various pathogens that float around and within us. My connection to Athens is measured by the distances I've covered every time I had to stay apart. That seems like a paradox indeed, but that's the thing with travels. In search for affinities, we project our own images of the spaces we consider as familiar in order to feel closer to the place we've just reached. Closeness is defined by distance. Wherever you are at the moment take my words as an invitation to imagine your own familiar spaces and let the images flow through the shared airs²⁶ that will bring us closer once again.

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* Transcript of Myrto Katsimicha's podcast "How do we live together in sickness and in health", accessible online at: <https://postdocumenta.net/2021/03/11/myrto-katsimicha/>. Part of [*about, by, through, towards, despite*](#), a podcast series on different aspects of the independent Athens art scene, commissioned for the program *post documenta: contemporary arts as territorial agencies*.

²⁶ In the Hippocratic corpus air, or elsewhere translated as breath or wind, is the fundamental element of human life and the cause of all diseases. Not only is it everywhere to be found, but its regular or irregular flow determines the health or sickness of the body.