

Podcast transcript in English

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The De-publicized Territory: Institutions and Territorial Policies

Part 1: Policies of Soil

I would like to begin with the framework of this program, to which you so kindly invited me to contribute: [post documenta: contemporary arts as territorial agencies](#). Reading the first clause as a simple temporal attribute, I wonder how I could paraphrase the second to find a starting point, but also to deal with the nonstandardized translation of both agency and territory into Greek. I come to the free, but I believe fruitful, rephrasing “contemporary arts and policies of soil.” I think that the rendition of agencies as “policies” allows for including the term’s intentionality, while at the same time implying not only the mediations, as in one of the usual translations of the term, but also the hierarchies and the power relations of these mediations. Furthermore, it allows me to think of territory in its absolute literalism, as soil, earth. Indeed, territory as materiality and territory as a point of view, the point from which one looks and a border between the human things and all that is infernally latent beneath its surface, has recently reappeared with urgency in Greek cultural affairs, and in fact as a node where many contradictions, conflicts, antinomies – in short, interests in the sociologic and economic sense of the term – of social and political life meet.

For example, in the case of the ground and the underground of Venizelou Street in Thessaloniki, where during the rescue excavations for the Metro construction that begun in 2006, [the city’s main Byzantine road, Decumanus Maximus, was found almost intact](#). Located on the same axis for over 1,500 years, the city’s main road has been sinking for 1,500 years on the same axis, becoming ground and then underground successively, creating layers of use and layers of history. Around the findings’ future, that is around the ghost of a subterranean state, [a major scientific and political dispute has been taking place in Greece](#) concerning the excavation’s coexistence with the Metro facilities: whether the findings should be kept in place and the station should be built around them, implying that they will retain their authenticity, metaphysical aura, and informative power for future study; or whether they should be detached and later repositioned in the same place as an exhibit, a saturated exhibit in the sense that saturation holds in chemistry, namely an exhibit that cannot provide more information, cannot create relations.

Although, in 2017, the Central Archeological Council had approved the monument’s preservation onsite, and although the respective technical study had been completed, under the next government and with a new composition, the Council recalled its previous decision and approved the detachment. Naturally, shady speculation and clear personal feuds played an important role in this dispute;

nevertheless, it would be worthy to examine, in another circumstance, the established beliefs that were expressed by the various poles about what authenticity is and what an archive is. How authentically archeologic does the State consider a discovery that doesn't belong to antiquity and how authentically Byzantine is a finding that isn't religious in character? When is the authenticity of an object lost? What is urban and economic growth and what is national and cultural identity? What is history's cultural imprint? What is soil in the case of the Thessaloniki Metro? Soil has depth and is at the same time pierced, empty just like the Metro tubes, but also full, full of secrets and stories; it contains the past but it opens up to the future, it has materiality and it is the completion of the city's past history or its future infrastructures. It is like the two meanings of underground are being combined over the literalism of Thessaloniki's ground and underground: the one meaning is the underground urban railway, and the other the infernal, Dionysian part of history, the marginally criminal aspect of archeology that Freud was so attracted to.

A second recent case similar to Decumanus Maximus is [the covering of the corridor with reinforced concrete that directs the visitors and facilitates wheelchair accessibility at the Acropolis site](#). The protagonists are the same: the Ministry of Culture, the Central Archeological Council, and against them are those who assert that the intervention, through its design and chosen materials, alters the monument's character, reifies it. Amongst them, the Association of Greek Archeologists and architect Tasos Tanoulas, supervisor of the restoration works of Propylaea until 2010. What is at stake, once again, is the soil, which becomes a field of politics and dispute. Of course, the Acropolis complex is an emblematic and identifying monument, considered to be the peak of the Ancient Greek Spirit, while Decumanus Maximus is a recent discovery that hasn't yet been studied, and being a road, it is more related with the Byzantine "low materiality" (*bas matérialisme* in Bataille's sense) than the high-flown classical Greece. Furthermore, the interventions at the Acropolis are reversible and, to come back to the aforementioned metaphor of chemistry, they do not saturate the monument. Under the layer, the ground preserves its informative value and its ontological wholeness.

However, examining the two cases together sheds light on transformations of authenticity as well as aspects of territoriality, both at the center of what we call here "territorial policies." Indeed, contrary to the "Dionysian," underground, chthonic character of the Byzantine excavation, the intervention at the Acropolis takes place on the surface flooded with light. The territory is not the solid, uniform Earth, an opaque, unspeakable real, the Earth that hides its wealth until the archeologist or the Metro constructor anatomizes and digs the monumental object out of the ground, in order to either symbolize it or destroy it. On the contrary, it is the territory of earthly power, earthly in the sense of the secular, the nonreligious power of history. It is the territory where successive layers of sovereignty – from the prehistorical to the contemporary touristic – have left their imprints, often by smothering and destroying the previous

forms of sovereignty, disturbing memory – to think of Freud again¹ – demolishing, so to speak, the traces of the former Ottoman Athens. The territory of the Acropolis is a monument of sovereignty but also a point of view of sovereignty, a point of view that sprawls on the horizon and a point of view of an identifying monument, i.e., Parthenon, Erechtheion, and Temple of Athena Nike.

To return to *documenta* for a moment – it should be noted that the Athens exhibition, *documenta14*, had used as labeling [small pieces of marble, resembling fragments from a temple, instead of other labels for artworks](#) – a reminder of the intertwining between sovereignty and ground in the city of Athens. That was not the case with the exhibition in Kassel – this metaphor couldn't have been exported from the city of Athens, just as the marble couldn't have been exported without accusations of antiquities smuggling.

The dispute over the visitors' corridor is a dispute over authenticity: in this case, Manolis Korres, architect and supervisor of the Acropolis Restoration Service, and member of the Central Archaeological Council that permitted the dislocation of Decumanus Maximus, degrading the authenticity importance of a finding inside a Metro station, supports the creation of the corridor because it substitutes the "authentic" point of view of the Parthenon – authentic here meaning the ground's height in the classical era. Conversely, those who criticized the use of reinforced concrete, insist on a monument's essence, rather ahistorical than intertemporal essence, which is supposedly altered by the contemporary material. At the same time, they point to [the interventions in the Acropolis' surrounding area with simple materials by the architect Dimitris Pikionis in the '60s](#), restoring the historical reading of the ground as part of the monument. This is an old antinomy of the Acropolis, exemplarily summarized by architectural historian Lucia Allais, who attributes to the Acropolis the smart characterization of *documoment*: "In the very act of being interpreted, then, every artifact from the past would sustain this oscillation and become what I propose to call a documoment."²

It is worth noticing that, contrary to Thessaloniki, in the case of the Acropolis there is no mechanism of residential gentrification or economic growth that could be considered as acting against the monumental character of the territory and threatening its wholeness or authenticity. The interventions are carried out by the public institution that is responsible for the monument's management. There is, however, interference of a private actor who, although one could argue that it does not function in competition but in favor of the monument, nevertheless alters it. It doesn't alter its public character, but its communal character, the character of cultural heritage as commons, as a common good, namely as a field that no single individual or private entity can benefit from. Indeed, the technical study for the corridor construction was funded by the Onassis Foundation, according to the Ministry of Culture, within the framework of a

¹ *A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis: An Open Letter to Romain Rolland on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*. SE, 22:239-48.

² Lucia Allais, "Documoment," in Brooke Holmes and Karen Marta (Eds.), *Liquid Antiquity*, DESTE Foundation: Geneva, 2017, p. 258.

broader funding program that [concerns the upgrade of the offered services at the Acropolis of Athens](#).³ Onassis Foundation has assumed the illumination of the monument, and the funding of an elevator for better accessibility of visitors with disabilities. As mentioned on the foundation's official site, "The Acropolis, as a monument that expresses Athenian Democracy, cannot help but comprise a priority. The monument continues to stand there, with or without us. But we have an obligation to renew its symbolism, according to the needs of the era."⁴ [As for the illumination of the Acropolis](#), designed by light designer Eleftheria Deko, it mentions that "When invited by the Greek State to assist in the redesign of the Acropolis lighting in Athens, it was the duty of all of us at the Onassis Foundation to rise to the occasion, to help shine a light on this intangible quintessence of history." [In 2019, the Onassis Foundation had undertaken the funding of the festive illumination of Vasilissis Sofias Avenue](#), a central Athens roadway, justifying its choice with the argument that "[it is the road that leads to the heart of Democracy, the Parliament and Constitution Square](#)." This concerns a crucial post-democratic point: a private organization is not only assigned to substitute public functions, but produces public discourse using the first-person plural. When the President of the Onassis Foundation states that "we have the obligation to renew its symbolism" he asserts that "we have the obligation to provide meaning" and thus, speaking in the name of democracy and the State, he interprets the monument, and essentially links its cultural activities with the core of democracy and its symbols. "It decorates the Constitution and the laws," one could say, paraphrasing the public oath.

Part 2: 1,200 Bags of Pixels

At the beginning of May 2020, while the first lockdown was still in force, the Onassis Foundation launched [the project ENTER](#), a series of "original artworks" created "in the conditions of the 'here and now' in order to surpass it and bring us together through the world of our digital platforms." In this framework, playwright and actress [Lena Kitsopoulou presented online the thirteen-minute video *Lalka*](#). The work is shot at the homonymous village in the mountains of Nafpaktia. It features the artist in short monologues, looking provocatively at the camera while smoking, or shooting with a shotgun at off-camera sights, as well as a hybrid highlander, named "Indian" in the video titles, skinning and cutting a deer, bloodily eating its raw innards, cleaning and gutting sardines. The video ends on black cards with written advice: *shoot your TVs, shoot your fear of death, shoot the shit out of your brains*, etc. *Lalka*, like all of Kitsopoulou's work, draws upon Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty and is militantly direct, often raw. *Lalka*

³ "The Foundation's financial support is important for the improvement of the infrastructure and services that are offered to the thousands of visitors that come to the archaeological site of the Acropolis.", Lina Mendoni, Minister of Culture, quoted in: <https://www.onassis.org/news/onassis-foundation-improves-acropolis-infrastructures>. Official announcement by the Ministry of Culture (in Greek): <https://www.culture.gov.gr/el/Information/SitePages/view.aspx?nID=3296>

⁴ Antonis S. Papadimitriou, President of the Onassis Foundation, quoted in: <https://www.onassis.org/culture/acropolis-whole-new-light/>.

seems to advocate a grassroots country life where violence and death are supposedly parts of the unhindered, natural life; seems to incite insurrection against the health, propriety, and decency rules that essentially are thought to constrain freedom and its pleasure; seems to imply that the pandemic is a consequence of our perverted relation to desire and death.

Although *Lalka* has some good moments, including the Buñuel-inspired shot of chickens struggling to get out of their hen house with a psychedelic ballad by composer Nikos Kypourgos in the background, the overall work has obvious signs of a hasty art commission and a sloppy production. It instantly received severe criticism for its unnecessary violence and intentional provocation, for documenting violence on an animal for nothing and making a spectacle out of an act of barbarism, for being [“the resurrection of a kind of provocation that has worn out after excessive use and the stereotype’s variations,”](#) or for reproducing the systemic, patriarchal, speciesism violence under the pretext of overidentification, “the snuff film of ‘art liberation,’ ‘man and animal,’ ‘the Indian’ [...] all this disgusting machismo now by a female artist [...] all these isn’t neither over, nor smart, it is plain and straight, absolutely literal, identification,” [as artist and writer Despina Sevasti wrote on Facebook.](#)

Here, we are not interested in *Lalka* with regards to the work’s quality, but because it brings us back to the question of territory. Actually, two systems of deterritorialization/reterritorialization function within the work’s center, worthy of further examination. I should note that the use of this twin term inevitably invokes Deleuze and Guattari, who introduced and conceptualized it in their two-volume work *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, initially in the first volume, *Anti-Oedipus*, and consequently in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Territory, according to Deleuze and Guattari, cannot be objectively defined. It is always determined by a grid of relations and actions of a group, a grid which enables the group to feel safety and stability; deterritorialization is the detachment of social, cultural, and political practices from a territory and can either be relative, leading to a deterritorialization, or absolute, leading to what Deleuze and Guattari call “plane of immanence.”⁵ Deterritorialization, according to the French thinkers, is what essentially “constitutes and expands territory.”⁶ It is metaphorically the environment in which the subject acts, where it is constituted and where it returns, as Antaeus of Greek mythology returns to earth to gain strength. The theory of deterritorialization/reterritorialization could provide us an interesting interpretation tool for *Lalka*, especially as Deleuze and Guattari develop it in close relation to the concept of “Body without Organs,” borrowed from the French writer Antonin Artaud – also a point of reference for Lena Kitsopoulou. The “Body without Organs” is an “eternally renewable product of alienation from the civilized world.”⁷ Thus, *Lalka*’s “Indian,” alienated from the civilized world, cured of the discontent of civilization, eats the animal’s entrails in such a brutal way as part of a ritualistic metonymy: he metaphorically eats his own

⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, pp. 266-267.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 149-150.

entrails in an attempt to become a body without organs himself, to be deterritorialized from the civilized world without being territorialized anywhere.

I would rather not further insist on Deleuze and Guattari. I use the twin term deterritorialization/reterritorialization in the way it has been used mainly in globalization theories, in particular cultural globalization. Since new media are being multiplied and the population movements are being accelerated, many cultural activities, actions, and performances become independent from the environment where they were initially formed. Moreover, the prevalence of digital flows renders any geographically defined environment, any environment related to territorial coordinates, redundant and superfluous regarding the reception and action of cultural activities or artistic gestures. I quote the sociologist Gil-Manuel Hernández i Martí: "Deterritorialization, considered a central feature of globalization, implies the growing presence of social forms of contact and involvement which go beyond the limits of a specific territory, a kind of 'weighing of anchors' of social relations, which takes us to a closer involvement with the external, which generates closeness in distance, and to a relative distancing from what is close." And, further below: "Deterritorialization speaks of the loss of the 'natural' relation between culture and the social and geographic territories, and describes a deep transformation [...] of our everyday cultural experiences. [Deterritorialization] causes contrary and reflexive mechanisms of reterritorialization, although one should not see deterritorialization and reterritorialization as successive moments of a dialectical process exclusively, but rather as different modalities of the same phenomenon. This is expressed in the anxious search for cultural diversity, for particularism, for the reinforcement of the local, which even resorts to deterritorialized media."⁸

To return to Lena Kitsopoulou's *Lalka*, as mentioned above, two systems of deterritorialization/reterritorialization function at its center. The first is internal, it comprises one of the work's themes, and it is on its ideological and aesthetic aspects where the criticism against the work was mainly focused. It literally declares a displacement. It is about the relocation from the city to the countryside, a movement that is here conceived as liberation from technology, from the mechanisms of spectacle and the control of power, from the constraint of instincts induced by civilization. In a sense, the reterritorialization is performed through the restoration of the food chain, or rather through the subject's redetermination within it, as it is shown, for example, in the twofold rawism/male hunter. *Lalka* draws upon a nexus of ideologies of degrowth and territorial claims, a supposedly authentic territory, free of the relations of civilization discontent. Behind the idealization of the highlander "Indian," one can see a humanistic poetics of the hunter, as in Marx's chiliastic formulation in *German Ideology*: "in a communist society, society regulates the general production and thus make it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the

⁸ Gil-Manuel Hernández i Martí, "The deterritorialization of cultural heritage in a globalized modernity," *Transfer: journal of contemporary culture*, Nº. 1, 2006, pp. 92-107.

afternoon, [...] criticize after dinner [...].”⁹ However, praise for meat-eating, unhealthism, denouncement of the linguistic manipulation from the supposedly dominant political correctness, are rather linked with far-right discourse and neo-Nazi movements that claim racial and gender purity.

The claim to liberate desire and instincts in the mountains of Nafpaktia resembles more an adaptation of the hillbilly highlander far-right of Proud Boys in Greek territory, almost like [the film *Blood on the Land*, a 1966 adaptation of Westerns in the Thessalian flatland](#). It is true that Kitsopoulou creates counterpoints that undermine and invert the literalism of this deterritorialization/reterritorialization. A kind of literalism that was repeatedly expressed during the years of crisis in Greece in both aesthetic and political form, for instance in [the music video *Back On My Feet* by Leonidas Balafas](#), where an exclusively male population of an atemporal province is considered to be representative of the political body, with a distinct cultural, musical imprint, and gender performances, archaic and suffocating. It is precisely these archaic elements in the video that contradict with the political discourse that is represented by the talking heads on the TV, and the good old enclosed and phobic manhood acquires an insurgent character. On the contrary, in *Lalka*, Kypourgou’s music and Kitsopoulou’s wide-angle self-filming, her off-camera shootings, aim to cultivate ambiguity, to induce double readings, a swing between literalism and irony, a wobble between overidentification and identification.

However, the film failed to achieve this thin and dangerous equilibrium. For many reasons. Certainly, the rushed commission from Onassis Foundation, the anguish to produce works [“in the conditions of ‘here and now’ in order to surpass it and bring us together through the world of our digital platforms,”](#) played their part. In May, only shortly after the pandemic outbreak, without the health, political, social, economic, and mental dimensions of a crisis that still overwhelms us being clear yet, the project’s specifications rather reminded us of the Onassis Foundation’s strategic choice to claim in every chance the role of the main transmitter of cultural production, to become contemporary art’s national voice, instead of guaranteeing the creation of works that are reflective, or at least supportive, in a period of deep concern. Also, as mentioned above, the praise and naturalization of violence, the naturalization of gender, the lack of respect in Otherness, the scorn on universal, ecological, antispecies awareness, the unhealthiness, have been saturated as issues of edgy, marginal, and borderline negotiation. Not the least since these issues have become privileged fields of expression for the far-right, leaving just a few cracks for sarcastic didacticism. Finally, because while Kitsopoulou’s aggressive, grotesque, deconstructive of nation and gender, dramaturgy has provided theater with innovative readings of Greek family or Greek history, the video that is viewed on a pc or tablet, at home, seems to lose its artistic gravity, its artistic imprint, subsumed in the same paradigm as yet another tab in the browser, next to hate speech and the misanthropic reproduction of racial distinctions regarding territorial purity.

⁹ Karl Marx with Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, Prometheus Books, 1998, p. 53.

And this is the second deterritorialization/reterritorialization system that functions in *Lalka*. It was hardly discussed, and certainly, it was not discussed at all as a determining factor of its reception and interpretation. It was an element of the work's distribution and framing – and in that respect, one could say that it is a deterritorialization external to the work – which, however, redetermined its form and became the prism through which its content was deflected. Of course, I refer to the deterritorialization that takes place once the work enters the digital flows; that takes place once the time and place of its articulation are redetermined on the internet, mainly in the continuum of social media; that takes place once the work's public character becomes hybrid, once it is deteriorated as a public event, once it enters, disenchanted in a way, the privacy of their receivers through their pc, their tablet, or their smartphone.

Speaking of deterritorialization here, I don't mean territory in its materiality, a contradistinction between the digital and the material, which is already awkward enough. I perceive territory in the sense of Deleuze and Guattari, as something defined through “a grid of relations and actions of a group, a grid which enables the group to feel safety and stability.”¹⁰ I consider it is the stability and safety that provided the art field, processed and internally coherent according to the topological metaphor of Pierre Bourdieu,¹¹ evaluation criteria that have been tested in universities, art history, museums, artistic antagonisms, essays, and exhibitions. These criteria are reterritorialized into a new environment of connectivity: in the user's browsing conditions, in their interpersonal interactions of all sorts, in their cookies and the content that these create, but also into the commercial strategy of each social media platform through which they are is mainly acquainted with the work, all those that, rather incorrectly, we are used to calling algorithms. Additionally, the work is intertwined with the user's other open tabs on the screen, becoming part of a personal streaming that is probably not exclusively artistic and may be interrupted by the reading of other texts, discussions with other users, by parallel flows. In this environment, a work can very easily be reduced to its description, blurring all those tiny, sometimes indiscernible, morphological choices that guarantee its uniqueness and form the base of the artistic gesture.

I believe that, among its other weaknesses, *Lalka* suffered from the consequences of precisely these deterritorializations. One should be cautious though! The above shouldn't be considered as some sort of advocacy for the exclusively material work of art, as some kind of denunciation of the Internet. Essentially, my point is the opposite: that as digital flows increase, as the work is reterritorialized in an environment of connectivity, the artist should bear in mind their work's articulation parameters, to make in some way Duchamp's gesture in the *International Surrealism Exhibition* in 1938, hanging 1,200 bags of coal from the ceiling of Galérie Beaux-Arts. That is, to turn their gaze upon digital flow just as Duchamp turned his upon the exhibition venue, to point out its limits, to make it part of the work, to make their work the flow itself.

¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Ibid.* pp. 266-267.

¹¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, Columbia University Press, 1994.

Part 3: The De-publicized Territory

The artwork's reterritorialization into the environment of connectivity, its digital dissemination and distribution, contrary to the opposite deception, makes its access even more controllable, and creates stronger centralizations and manipulation mechanisms. "[T]he commons of speech are vulnerable, and can easily be destroyed by the encroachment of modern means of communication [...] namely anyone with a stronger voice," as Ivan Ilich wrote in his essay "[Silence is a Commons](#)."¹² Works like *Lalka* and art projects such as *ENTER* are distributed exclusively through social media and, as we know, the architecture of those networks foster the accumulation and the reproduction power. In social media, there is no such thing as commons of speech, and the cultural producer, the artist that is adopted by a strong voice, immediately acquires a broad audience. Otherwise, they lie in danger of perishing. During the first global lockdown in the spring of 2020, social media were flooded with art in all its forms – music, theater, dance, visual arts, film. During this tough period, art was considered a mechanism of social coherence, support, and empowerment, a portal to keep up with concern through entertaining. However, it was precisely through this tendency that the deep inequalities that govern cultural production and distribution emerged. On one hand, because the largest part of distributed material came from big producers and powerful cultural institutions that opened their archives and gave access to their collections, and not from individual artists who, with the exception of certain popular ones, settled with their personal circle, just like before. On the other hand, because while during this period major institutes gained excessive publicity and unprecedented social penetration, the artists themselves and the small cultural producers faced serious difficulties worldwide, under threat of bankruptcy, without gaining in the least their vast majority from the free-of-charge multiplication and inflated distribution of the artistic content they, themselves, created.

In any case, we should examine which systematicities govern the paradigms of forms and practices that "go beyond the limits of a certain territory,"¹³ to recall Martí again. To examine, for example, how the EU culture financing model aims for a turnover of tasks in which the artists are involved only incidentally, as part of an economic mechanic, of which they are not even the best paid contributors. Moreover, to examine how funding cultural proposals that aim to serve broader, so to speak, humanistic policies, such as social expansion or the integration of immigrant population, favors participatory, transient, and intangible works in order to meet the standards of "synergies," albeit with evaluation criteria and critical assessment external to the artistic field, to recall Bourdieu again. Or, one could see how phenomena of deterritorialization

¹² Ivan Ilich, "Silence is a Commons," *The CoEvolution Quarterly*, Winter 1983, accessible at: <https://dlc.dlib.indiana.edu/dlc/bitstream/handle/10535/5962/Silence%20is%20a%20Commons.html?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>).

¹³ Gil-Manuel Hernández i Martí, *Ibid.*

are related to what one might call “privatization of the private,” a major economic mechanism nowadays, the main mechanism of social media, which creates surplus value from private life by integrating aspects of private life that hitherto remained outside of economic transactions, such as self-image, home, or personal bonds, into the sphere of exchangeable goods.

Certainly, if one wanted to systematically study the phenomena of deterritorialization in contemporary art, at least in Greece, they would soon realize that a large part of their research should focus on the function and policies of the major cultural funding centers and, more precisely, the major private cultural foundations. And vice versa: the policies of major cultural foundations revolve around productions which, in one way or another, are related to phenomena of the deterritorialization of cultural production. There are plenty of relevant examples: for instance, this is the reason for the ever-increasing preference for visual works with temporal parameters, e.g., of performative or participatory character, that favor the organization of events and in fact reduce artworks to events that can generate wide media coverage and Instagram posts, from which the foundation derives surplus value. Respectively, these organizations carry out large-scale, expensive publicity campaigns, while funding just a handful of publications, catalogs, or projects that could leave traces over time. And certainly, it is again the policies of foundations and the mechanisms of the deterritorialization of the work of art that relate to similar changes in the field of theater. Thus, while theatrical productions tended to unfold in time, allowing them to be tested and mature through their relationship with their public, they now last only a few days, attributing the character of a constant festival to the foundations’ big theatrical stages. The same applies to stage set standards, which used to be designed according to the aesthetic, or even ideological, choices of the directors, as for example in the cases of Karolos Koun’s small theaters, or Michael Marmarinos’ “Thiseion – A Theatre for the Arts”, designed by the great architect Christos Papoulias. In contrast to those examples, the major foundations’ stages flatten any sharp stage distinctions.

Even more important, and with a deeper impact, are the ongoing scholarship and residency programs, such as Onassis AiR or ARTWORKS of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation. These programs, not specific to a Greek context, of course, nourish the disconnection of the artwork from the organic relationships that develop within a certain place, funding creators who are constantly on the move and therefore can only develop occasional connections with the respective creative environment. And more importantly, they place artists into a condition of unprecedented emotional toil, as funding often depends on the direct competition between candidates.

In September 2020, Christos Karras, independent researcher and Executive Director of the Onassis Cultural Foundation, published an article in Greek titled [“The European Non-](#)

Profit Cultural Sector and the Coronavirus Pandemic.¹⁴ The article refers to the pandemic's impact on the cultural industry, and describes the EU support to cultural actors and producers, the need for major actors to be in touch with the important problems of the time, especially climate crisis, the organizations' digital transformation, and the challenges they have to meet. As it is quite rare for officials of major cultural foundations to formulate political and strategical priorities, or to try to base their work on some kind of theoretical framework, this well-written article is all the more important. But what is particularly interesting here is how many times and in how many different ways the issue of territory and territoriality reappears in the article. The author highlights the urgent need for a connection between the cultural organizations and the community: "the resilience of an organization is probably connected to the strength of its relationship with its community, in a broad sense."¹⁵ He puts forward environmental issues as the most important problem that cultural creation should be concerned with, and highlights the dangers of online content excessive use: "it is clear that the online transition implies a radical restriction of artistic possibilities. Not to mention the loss of direct contact between artists and audience, so essential for visual arts."¹⁶ Even the article's illustration brings back the territory question: all three accompanying images are related to projects by Onassis Stegi that concerned territoriality, locality, literally earth and its fruits.

Without stating it explicitly, the article by Christos Karras gives the impression of responding to certain earlier criticism linking the foundations' hegemonic expansion with the deterritorialization of the cultural product. It is as if it tries to reassert that, contrary to the respective criticism, major cultural organizations don't aim for deterritorialization at all, instead they put territory at the core of their policies. However, the article seems to miss two crucial main points.

Firstly, the centralist, hegemonic policy that aims to absorb more and more artistic productions, gives back to the artists very little and produces very few coherent artworks that endure over time, while it mainly aims at empowering the foundation itself, in its leviathanic gigantism. As for "the need for major actors to be in touch with the important problems of the time," this needs to come under closer scrutiny. Much as is the case with the respective European funding schemes, it is very doubtful whether the instrumentalization of art offers anything, either to art or to the important problems of our times. However, the second critical point is more important. Because there is indeed an issue of territory, an issue of soil, which lies at the center of the cultural policies of major private organizations. It is the actual soil, the actual territory, the literal territory, the public territory, the territory which, as we saw in the case of the Acropolis, is essentially linked to issues of authenticity, history, and sovereignty.

¹⁴ Χρήστος Καρράς, «Ο ευρωπαϊκός μη-κερδοσκοπικός πολιτιστικός τομέας και η πανδημία του κορωνοϊού», September 2020, <https://www.dianeosis.org/2020/09/o-evropaikos-mi-kerdoskopikos-politistikos-tomeas-kai-i-pandimia-toy-koronoiou/>

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

The Onassis Foundation is not alone in claiming to speak on behalf of democracy and its symbols, as we've seen earlier here. The Niarchos Foundation financed the construction of the new building infrastructures of the National Library of Greece and the Greek National Opera, associating its name with two of the most important public cultural institutions. Furthermore, it sponsors the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center (SNFCC), which is officially considered public. However, the relationship of the Niarchos Foundation with SNFCC and its productions, both in terms of funding and staff, is much more complicated than any transparent democratic condition would dictate. Finally, it is worth mentioning the NEON Foundation, established by businessman and contemporary art collector Dimitris Daskalopoulos. NEON might be less economically powerful and not as large scale as the aforementioned foundations, but during the past years it has succeeded in organizing big contemporary art exhibitions on major archeological sites, such as the Ancient Agora of Athens and Delos island. Most recently, [NEON announced that it has taken charge of organizing a major visual arts exhibition in 2021, in the former public Tobacco Factory – Hellenic Parliament Library & Printing House, transforming it into “a new, very promising and emblematic cultural venue.](#) It should be noted that Dimitris Daskalopoulos also funds [the organization diaNEOsis](#), an association for debate and funding of independent research, that aspires to intervene in political life.

Thus, it seems that a double procedure lies at the center of the major cultural organizations' policies. On the one hand, the deterritorialization of the cultural commons, and on the other, the de-publicization of the territory, the alteration of its public character. Not regarding the territory's ownership per se – these foundations have adequate economic power and do not take interest in acquiring public property – but regarding its relation with institutions, history, and the function of polity. To conclude with a reference back to the first clause of the program's title, *documenta14* certainly had many weaknesses: hegemonic function over the domestic field, political and anthropological exoticism, involvement in the excessive growth of sharing economy in Athens – all of which are phenomena of deterritorialization.¹⁷ However, it attempted to strengthen the institutional function in the city, to bring the territory as a public common back to the center of the debate. A very important gesture, even if this was the most colonial of all its colonial attitudes.

Athens, December 2020

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¹⁷ For a detailed analysis regarding these points, see: Theophilos Tramboulis and Yorgos Tzirtzilakis, “When Crises become Form,” in: *The Borders of Europe. Stedelijk Studies Journal*, Issue #6, Spring 2018, <https://stedelijkstudies.com/journal/when-crisis-becomes-form-athens-as-a-paradigm/>

<https://postdocumenta.net/2021/03/11/the-de-publicized-territory-institutions-and-territorial-policies/>.

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