

Re-visioning the Political in the Performance Works of Arianna Economou: The Context of the Seascape of Trauma in Cyprus

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Abstract

The seascape of trauma in Cyprus has been integral to the island's history. The colonial legacies of the past, the 1974 Turkish invasion, the displacement, and the ethnic and gender divides have foregrounded contesting subjectivities of where and to which side of history one belongs. Performance art in Europe and the United States emerged as a site of contestation against the grand narratives imposed by the canon of art historical discourses and as a commentary on social-political themes. However, in Cyprus, performance art arrived later and faced barriers to being accepted as a credible mode of artistic inquiry. Traces of artistic representations in performance followed the European avant-garde and were foregrounded in the experience of aspects of political life. Artists arriving on the island with influences from abroad who rejected traditional art forms of dance and theatre were treated in dismay. Arianna Economou, one of the pioneering figures that introduced avant-garde performance art in Cyprus, unfolded in her practice theories of the performative as a political subject that challenged conventional modes of artmaking through her body and through her activism in bringing together inter-communal exchanges with Turkish Cypriots artists as well as her contribution to the performance art scene of Cyprus.

Keywords: Performance Art, Arianna Economou, Seascape of Trauma, Activism in Cyprus, Political Subjectivity

1. Introduction

The political in performance is found in dance and theatre, from the oldest play of Aeschylus, *The Persians*, to Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty*, in the numerous efforts of Erwin Piscator and Brecht's *Epic Theatre*, the Existentialists with the *Theatre of the Absurd*, the Judson Dance Theatre, the understanding of contact improvisation, the body on stage, where all had a responsibility towards the audience to create a 'forum

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that [dealt] with questions that were politically a taboo'.² In this regard, performance art that emerged from the 1960s avant-garde was seen as an 'essentialist resistance to the representationalism of dominant theatre practice'³ and came to deploy radical acts in extreme and experimental settings, and question the complexities of power matrices by being subversive, notwithstanding its intention to be essentially political in methodology and meaning. The participatory nature of performance, the presence of the live body, and the unconventionality of movement were also 'intended as an effective practice of politicization of social life'.⁴

In terms of theoretical frameworks, performance art aligns with theories of performativity as the public sphere gains an opportunity to be turned into a 'battleground where different hegemonic projects are confronted'⁵, impelling activism, elaborating on how 'art [can] mimic the intricacies of public grievability and memorialization'⁶ of certain events in light of how different forms of oppression and situations affect the body, thus telling a story on stage and at the same time blurring art and life.⁷ The phenomenon of memorialization serves as a focal point for the examination of memoro-politics, a concept articulated by gender theorist and philosopher Judith Butler, alongside feminist scholar Athena Athanasiou, in their 2013 collaborative work *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*. Memoro-politics delineates a dynamic socio-political process characterised by the contentious negotiation surrounding the creation, ownership, and accessibility of memory within a given society. While being like the idea of enacting memories, memoro-politics is a process that engenders ongoing debates and struggles concerning the determination of what warrants remembrance, the distribution of authority over memory, and the identification of entities or narratives susceptible to marginalisation or exclusion from collective remembrance.

In the context of performance art, memoro-politics is explored through the interventions of Arianna Economou, who has often been referred to as a pioneer in the field of performance art, as she was one of the first to introduce the ontology of

² Leo Kerz, "Brecht and Piscator" (1968) 20 *Educational Theatre Journal* 363.

³ Simon Shepherd and Mick Wallis, *Drama/Theatre/Performance* (Routledge 2004).

⁴ Andrea Pagnes, "Notes on Performance art, the Body and the Political" (Society for Artistic Research 2017) <<http://dx.doi.org/10.22501/rc.343455>> accessed April 7, 2024.

⁵ Chantal Mouffe, "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces" (2007) 1 *Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*.

⁶ Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (John Wiley & Sons 2013).

⁷ Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life: Expanded Edition* (University of California Press 2023).

performance in Cyprus, aligning with the framework that has been grounded by performance studies and feminist theorist Peggy Phelan that describes how performers unveil a new language between “interactive exchange” of the audience and the performer on stage along with “supplement[ing] the real”⁸ in locales where the parameters of memorability are established and enshrined within the communal consciousness of Cypriots. This article seeks to scrutinise acts of reclaiming, interrogating, or subverting prevailing narratives in Cyprus, particularly considering its historical division in 1974 between the north and the south and the intricate power dynamics entwined with the construction of memory from its colonial past until the present. More specifically, the primary aim of this article is to narrow its focus to the specific lived experiences of Arianna Economou, within the framework of the *seascape of trauma* that revolves around the complex history and translucent impact of the colonialism and division on the bodies since 1974 found in the north and the south of the island, as well as the gendered positionality that resides in the physical topos of the island.

This article employs a methodology grounded in semi-structured interviews with Economou, conducted from January 2023 to March 2024, with the objective of re-visioning three seminal performance pieces: *Σώμα, Χώρος* (1983) (transl. Body – Space), *Walking the Line* (1983), and *Shared Echoes I & II* (2004). This study seeks to elucidate how Economou persistently asserts an alternative subjectivity, critically interrogating the notion of memory and home as a form of belonging that diverges from the dominant nationalist narratives that have prevailed in Cyprus since its independence from British colonial rule in 1960. Through these interviews, specific themes have been extracted, focusing on *the seascape of trauma*, as it will be further elaborated, and the intricate relationship between the personal and the political.⁹ The idea is centered around the feminist axiom coined by feminist activist Carol Hanisch, who first claimed that “the personal is political” as a subtle yet profound framework for understanding the interplay between individual experiences and broader political structures. This concept is instrumental in contextualising how Economou’s work challenges entrenched cultural narratives by highlighting how personal experiences of trauma and displacement are intrinsically linked to political realities and power dynamics. Tracing a trajectory from the second wave of feminism in the 1960s, in the United States, where women vigorously advocated for the recognition of their

⁸ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (Routledge 2003).

⁹ Carol Hanisch, “The Personal Is Political,” *Notes from the Second Year: Women’s Liberation: Major Writings of the Radical Feminists* (NY Radical Feminism 1969).

voices in the public domain, the relevance of this framework connects these historical feminist movements to the under-representation of female artists in Cypriot historiographical texts and unpacks the ways in which Economou's performances operate as acts of subversive resistance against normative gender roles and exclusionary cultural practices that have historically marginalised women's contributions.

In the context of Cyprus, the exclusion of women has been markedly evident following the island's independence, where nationalist discourses have predominantly exalted male figures and militaristic ideologies. Women were systematically relegated to traditional domestic roles, thereby constraining their engagement in public and artistic spheres. This marginalisation extended to female artists, whose creative contributions were frequently overshadowed by those conforming to dominant nationalist themes. In the context of Cyprus, women in colonial and post-colonial Cyprus could not have been considered professional artists as the 'majority of Greek-Cypriot art historians... until recently privileged the "fathers" of Cypriot art'.¹⁰ Therefore, the work of female artists was systematically underrepresented in major art exhibitions and historiographical documentation, reflecting a pervasive societal tendency to prioritise male-dominated narratives and perspectives. The normative framework of the period reinforced these exclusions, presenting formidable challenges for female artists seeking acknowledgment and validation of their artistic practices.

Economou's performances, as this article seeks to show, directly confront and subvert these exclusionary practices by reclaiming space for female narratives and contesting traditional gender norms. Her embodiment on stage serves to question and disrupt societal expectations imposed on women, while simultaneously redefining the concept of belonging beyond the restrictive confines of nationalist discourse. Through her artistic practice, Economou embodies the convergence of the personal and the political, utilising her performances to elucidate the complexities of gender, identity, and cultural memory within the Cypriot context. By re-visioning her historical performance pieces, Economou's oeuvre offers a compelling critique of the systemic marginalisation of women in Cyprus, presenting an alternative narrative that seamlessly integrates personal experiences with broader political and cultural discourses. This re-visioning highlights the enduring significance of feminist principles in challenging exclusionary practices and advocating for the equitable recognition of female contributions in the arts and broader societal contexts.

¹⁰ Elena Stylianou, Evanthia Tselika and Gabriel Koureas, *Contemporary Art from Cyprus: Politics, Identities, and Cultures Across Borders* (Bloomsbury Visual Arts 2022)

As one of the themes involved the political aspect in the work of Economou, the focus of this article will be narrowed down on the public perception of her work, in other words, how the audience received and interpreted her work, her personal resistance towards dominant narratives of nationalism that came in making the specific performance pieces as a female subject and female practitioner, along with the tools that helped her maintain performance as a mode of activism. One should bear in mind that Economou through her long presence in the Cyprus art scene has been viewed as a dance activist on the island,¹¹ mainly because of her practice as a performance artist, her active contribution in bi-communal exchanges with Turkish-speaking Cypriots at a time where bi-communal work in 1980-1990 was not predominantly deployed through personal initiatives, and her input to the field of performance in Cyprus by being the co-founder and director of the Dance House in Nicosia in 2012 for more than ten years,¹² a space that aims to fulfil the needs of the (dance) community in Cyprus.

2. The Seascape of Trauma

Before re-visioning Economou's work, it is imperative to establish a foundational understanding of *the seascape of trauma*. This entails the transcendence of the model implied by traditional trauma studies, which often adhere to a limiting event-based model, as articulated by the post-colonial scholar Stef Craps in his work *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* which initiates a new phase in postcolonial and trauma studies.¹³ Craps challenges how the traditional trauma model construes trauma as stemming from a single, extraordinary, catastrophic occurrence, an understanding encapsulated in definitions such as 'a frightening event outside of ordinary experience'.¹⁴ However, Stef Craps contends that this paradigmatic framework may not adequately capture the experiences of non-Western, minority groups, or even certain individuals within Western societies. Moreover, it overlooks the multicultural and diasporic dimensions of contemporary culture hindering a nuanced compre-

¹¹ Melissa Hakkers, "The Maturity of a Compelling Dance Artist" (*melissahekkers.com*, August 7, 2014) <<https://melissahekkers.com/maturity-compelling-dance-artist/>> accessed April 14, 2024.

¹² Karin Varga, "Arianna Economou" (*Goethe Institut Cyprus*, 2021) <<https://www.goethe.de/ins/cy/en/ueb/60j/mem/22609668.html>> accessed April 14, 2024.

¹³ Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (Springer 2013).

¹⁴ Otto Hart van der and Besse Kolk van der, "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma" (1991) 48 *American Imago*.

hension of trauma.¹⁵ Trauma theory's fixation on this conventional model warrants scrutiny, particularly concerning racial inequalities and gender-based trauma experienced by women. Judith Lewis Herman, a prominent psychiatrist in the field of trauma and its recovery, posits that for women trauma often extends beyond commonplace misfortunes, encompassing threats to life, bodily integrity, and encounters with violence or death.¹⁶ The gendered aspect of trauma adds layers of complexity, shaped by societal norms and expectations imposed on women.

Approaches to trauma by theorists like Elizabeth Loftus and Richard McNally, who rely heavily on empirical evidence, illuminate how trauma narratives can be affected by false memories, potentially overlooking the multifaceted nature of gender-based trauma and racism. These traumas resist easy categorisation or repression, often manifesting in violent, whether exerted mentally or physically. Acknowledging these complexities underscores the necessity for trauma theories to broaden beyond Western-centric definitions, exploring the intersections of racial, class, and gender-based traumas, particularly those inflicted on female subjects and colonial histories. This expansion involves decolonising trauma definitions, recognising global contexts and diverse forms of suffering, and varied representations of trauma. While Craps introduces models addressing the everyday, normative nature of racialised trauma, there remains a need to interrogate the personal experiences of those involved—the colonial subjects—in defining trauma. This paradigm shift opens avenues for understanding how gender, societal norms, and colonial legacies intersect with trauma experiences and lived realities, a notion that is embedded in articulating *the seascape of trauma* in Cyprus. Hence, the work of Michael Rothberg, a scholar specialising in memory studies, literature, and postcolonial theory on the 'multidirectional memory'¹⁷ proves invaluable for cross-cultural analyses, acknowledging memory as an intercultural, multidirectional process involving negotiation and borrowing among communities, and in this context, involving Turkish-speaking and Greek-speaking Cypriots. This approach emphasises the dynamic interplay between memory, gender-based trauma, and colonial legacies, urging a more inclusive perspective accommodating diverse strategies of representation and resistance.

¹⁵ Rosanne Kennedy, *Word Memory: Personal Trajectories in Global Time* (Palgrave Macmillan 2003).

¹⁶ Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence--From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (Hachette UK 2015).

¹⁷ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford University Press 2009).

Consequently, in what follows, the discourse on trauma theory will be expanded, incorporating the words from the interviews conducted with Arianna Economou to frame *the seascape of trauma* to address the complexities of female positionality experienced by female colonial subjectivities within the context of colonial legacies and the history of Cyprus from antiquity to the present. This expansion involves a theoretical framework, where Arianna Economou managed push and challenge social and cultural rules creating alternative spheres and spaces of civic engagement between the audience and the live body which addressed the 1974 division of the island. This investigation seeks to understand how Economou has negotiated the complex terrain of bodily materiality and the immateriality of her work within an art scene that operates under the exigencies of control and power and the negotiation of her subjectivity with this framework. Her embodiment on stage and beyond is examined through the lens of the 'performative turn',¹⁸ which elucidates how the theory of performativity can manifest in performance art. This is achieved through an 'intermediality approach'¹⁹ that considers various elements, such as the surrounding, and the topos as a physical space, which aligns with memoro-politics extending beyond the body and its experience on stage.

Hence, as Arianna Economou's artistic practice has evolved in response to the historical context of Cyprus, beginning with the island's partition, colonial legacies, and the division between Turkish-speaking and Greek-speaking Cypriots, these notions have influenced her deeply, leading to an active negotiation with her own body on and off stage and igniting her passion for activism within the island's artistic scene. As *the seascape of trauma* in Cyprus has been applied throughout this research, it works as a framework that considers Cyprus as a contentious space where several histories have come to define the sea and a contribution to the literature that contextualises her physical place surrounded by the fluidity of the waters that is in contrast with the static nature of the landscape, extrapolating how certain boundaries of the sea engage bodies to swim in it. The sea of the Mediterranean has been an integral part of historical continuity from the past to the present. Also, it marks the geographical space and a specific topography as the material, but it sentimentally reverts to abstract notions of identity. The shores of the sea gain a morphology as the door that works either as

¹⁸ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* (Routledge 2008).

¹⁹ Sarah Bay-Cheng, Chiel Kattenbelt and Andy Lavender, *Mapping Intermediality in Performance* (Amsterdam University Press 2010).

an entry or exodus point for the ones who have invaded the island and the ones that have left, often presented through dominant narratives and historical information.

The sea salt that chuckles in the rocks on the shore, brought out by the waves, resonates with the history that unfolds that is never truly ours but fabricated from narratives that dominated, from colonial legacies to the 1974 Turkish invasion, to gendered positionalities and political subjectivities. The seascape is not simply an experience but a condition that manifests several times. It could be a process of challenging grandiloquent nationalist narratives, where different subjects have positioned themselves against Hellenocentric Cypriot nationalism that remains attached to Greece, the motherland, and the Greek Orthodox Church often seen in discontent.²⁰ It could also refer to how the category of women within the socio-political saw them unfit for any political involvement as ‘women’s place was primarily [thought to be] in the home’²¹ and the broader nexus of the personal that becomes political. In this process of searching for one’s identity, there appears an abyss. The abyss is the darkest element of the seascape; it is where subjects are homogenised and defined by one dominant narrative comprising a singular dimension of the subject; the one who praises nationalism differentiates oneself from all those branded as traitors and maintains that of which remains as *truly* Cypriot: the white, the male, the protector. The one who sustains Greek Cypriot nationalist discourse evoking ‘the purity and chastity of the land as the body of the nation, equated with femininity (Greece the mother, Cyprus the maiden)’.²² On the other side, it may also involve the discouragement of women’s initiatives in the public sphere, through art and other modes of civic engagement to create a metadiscourse of voices and desires for peace, reunification, articulation of one’s trauma, and resistance to the norms that have defined them—a process in which Economou has constantly found herself and renegotiated her very essence through her work and practice.

3. Re-visioning the Works of Economou

Re-visioning the work of Economou, one such notable work is “*Shared Echoes I & II*” (2004), a collaborative project focusing on peacebuilding and participatory art in conjunction with the European Mediterranean Artist Association (EMAA) supported

²⁰ Leonard W Doob, “Cypriot Patriotism and Nationalism” (1986) 30 *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 383.

²¹ Maria Hadjipavlou, *Women and Change in Cyprus: Feminisms and Gender in Conflict* (IB Tauris 2010).

²² Cynthia Cockburn, *The Line: Women, Partition and the Gender Order in Cyprus* (Zed Books 2004).

by the United Nations, that involved two guest teachers, an invited artist, Joshua Bisset, musician Edward Shocker from the US and Alexandra and Horst Waierstall. It was performed at Kastellotissa Hall in Nicosia in 2004 where the visual artist, Horst Weierstall, led a group of Turkish-speaking visual artists with Nilgun Gunay. This bi-communal project challenged dominant narratives of the Cyprus Problem, which has kept both communities separated and their stories unshared by bringing to the surface the shared experiences of the two communities, transcending the guilt of being labelled as traitors for seeking to connect with the corresponding divided part of the island. The performance involved all artists coming together to achieve a collective approach of remembrance elaborating on the idea that inter-communal exchanges were limited, making Economou's approach fundamentally participatory at the grassroots level as well as fitting into socially engaged artistic practices that focus on the community and the social which 'encompasses a genealogy that goes back to the avant-garde and expands significantly during the emergence of post-minimalism'.²³

The most important aspect of the work, however, was the initiation to work around shared stories of the two communities that had been marginalised due to the division of the island and who worked around the notion of their limited interaction. In this aspect, the project worked on how trauma can be redefined, interrogated, or sometimes shared for conflict transformation. Simultaneously, Economou's active negotiation to leverage performance art as a platform for creating spaces of emotional and interpersonal vulnerability echoes the notion put forth by queer theorist Eva Kosofsky Sedgwick when referring to how bodies can perform and enact vulnerability.²⁴ Such vulnerability is not a fixed, innate quality but rather something that is socially constructed and enacted to either challenge or negotiate the norms that constrain those bodies in given spaces. In this aspect, and through expanding Sedgwick's concept on vulnerability beyond a queer theory framework, there is a connection on how the performative can be observed in Economou's work, particularly in how she chooses to negotiate her vulnerability in relation to other subjectivities (the Turkish-speaking Cypriots).

Economou through this project encouraged participants to openly express their emotions, memories, and personal narratives. Such intercommunal projects led by Economou involve dialogical engagement between participants, both verbally and

²³ Helguera P, *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook* (Jorge Pinto Books 2011)

²⁴ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (University of California Press 1990).

non-verbally through performance. This form of dialogue requires a level of vulnerability as individuals open themselves to the perspectives and experiences of others. Economou's exploration of such vulnerability through shared historical experiences encourages participants to actively listen, empathise, and connect with one another, leading to a deeper understanding of shared histories and the complexity of the Cyprus conflict. This dialogical vulnerability challenges existing narratives of conflict and division. Through the act of performing and engaging with one's own and others' stories and emotions, all subjects involved became part of a shared experience that transcends historical divisions and challenges societal expectations that wished to keep the two communities separated in the past, as well as in the present. While *Ech-oes I & II* did not fall into the domain of what has been defined as performance piece in Cyprus at the time, it was a socially engaged art in a 'new genre of public art'²⁵ that consisted of series of actions and activities that would have been impossible to repeat because of the time and the context, focusing on the presence of bodies from both sides of the divide. The body, as discussed by Judith Butler is not merely an isolated entity but rather a complex interplay of relationships intricately entwined with infrastructural and environmental conditions,²⁶ shared not only among humans but also with the space in which they reside. This vulnerability becomes most apparent when infrastructural support deteriorates, or when individuals find themselves in a state of radical support in precarious circumstances. Thus, Economou has managed to cultivate the notions of memory, creating a space for memoropolitics to allow potentially an emancipatory dialogue that is central to the understanding of socially engaged art practices that produce a generative process of activism through performance²⁷.

It can be deduced that Economou's work represents a departure from traditional demarcations that have historically delineated Turkish-speaking and Greek-speaking Cypriots. Within the framework of her research and artistic initiatives, the performative aspect of shared vulnerabilities serves as a catalyst for transcending these delineations, both physical and emotional. This form of performative vulnerability entails a willingness to venture beyond one's accustomed sphere and engage with the concept of the 'Other'. Drawing upon the theoretical insights of discourse analyst and linguist Teun Van Dijk, who has extensively examined the intricate dynamics

²⁵ Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Bay Press 1995).

²⁶ Judith Butler, "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance," *Vulnerability in Resistance* (Duke University Press 2016) <<http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11vc78r.6>> accessed May 5, 2024.

²⁷ Grant Kester, "Conversation Pieces: The Role of Dialogue in Socially Engaged Art" in Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung (eds), *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985* (Blackwell Publishing 2005).

of ‘us’ versus ‘others’, Economou’s interdisciplinary approach seeks to deconstruct entrenched societal divisions and challenge the prevailing polarisations within Cypriot public discourse, fostering thereby a nuanced understanding of collective identity and communal belonging.²⁸

As a gendered subject, socially inscribed with specific norms, the piece *Σώμα/Χώρος* (1983), which translates to ‘Body/Space’, marks the inception of Arianna Economou’s career. This performance involves the embodiment of the topos of Cyprus, with the performer engaging on stage with a white fabric, interacting with other performers through contact improvisation. This work, which was televised by the Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation (RIK CyBC), received contentious criticism from the press at the time. Several factors contributed to the negative criticism Economou received. Her work challenged the prevailing paradigms within the performance art scene, provoking diverse reactions from the public—hereinafter referred to as ‘the audience’—and signifying a paradigm shift in the representation of movement and the body within performance. This shift disrupted established norms and expectations, highlighting the tension between traditional and contemporary artistic languages in Cyprus. The selection of Arianna Economou for this research is informed by the intersection of social narratives that have historically dominated the island and have been intricately woven into her artistic practice. Economou has often been referred to as a dance activist due to her inclination to challenge social expectations and redefine the artistic canon within the Cypriot art scene—a canon that historically favoured male artists at the expense of female practitioners. In this vein, Economou’s work not only interrogates the gendered dimensions of performance but also offers a critical commentary on the sociopolitical context of Cyprus. Her performances serve as a site of resistance and transformation, where the body becomes a medium through which broader cultural and political discourses are both contested and reimaged. This research aims to elucidate how Economou’s practice contributes to a deeper understanding of the performative body within the context of Cypriot art and society, foregrounding the ways in which her work navigates and negotiates the complexities of gender, space, and identity.

In that regard, her work, particularly her embodiment on stage, serves as a ‘corporeal resistance to the processes of social inscription’.²⁹ Analysing the reasons why the public perceived her as a dance activist, I came to realise that throughout my encoun-

²⁸ Teun Dijk a Van, *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (Sage 1998).

²⁹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Indiana University Press 1994).

ter with Economou she articulated her methodology as a performance artist around processes of ‘drawing parallels of the landscape of Cyprus and its long history and because of this [she has been referred to by the dramaturgist and scholar Dorinda Hulton]³⁰ as an ethno-anthropologist who thinks of traditions, history, colonialism, digesting how [her] parents were being affluent and had ties with the British”.³¹ These parallels are not utilised to reinforce dominant narratives but rather to serve as tools to challenge norms, interrogate intergenerational and historical trauma as evident in many of her pieces that focus on inter-communal exchanges between Turkish-speaking Cypriots and Greek-speaking Cypriots. Extrapolating from the above, the choice of Arianna Economou as the subject of exploration in this research is grounded in how she has challenged and founded Cyprus’ performance art scene and her profound engagement with the socio-political and historical complexities of the island.

In her solo performance piece *Walking the Line* (1998), there is an evocative exploration of a significant moment in the life of a Cypriot woman. The concept of this performance art piece encapsulates the multifaceted experiences of the protagonist, who finds herself increasingly constrained by various literal and metaphorical lines and borderlines. Central to the narrative is the omnipresent Green Line, a poignant symbol of the island’s enduring division and conflict, which infiltrates every facet of her life. In her pursuit of liberation and understanding, the performance adopts the structure of a journey. This journey is reminiscent of the mythological figure Io in ‘Io in the presence of Prometheus’,³² where Io, tormented by a gadfly, embarks on a restless and agonising quest for relief. Similarly, the protagonist (Economou herself) in *Walking the Line* traverses her metaphorical wounds, embodying the pain, restlessness, and desperation for emancipation and clarity. Through this allegorical and deeply personal journey, Economou not only highlights the physical and psychological ramifications of political and social divisions but also highlights the universal struggle for self-determination and inner peace.

Economou used her voice and invited the audience to relate to the fears which connects to the idea of lines as symbols once they are created as borders and certain divisions manifest. Stretching a long string from one side of the stage to the other, as an allegorical performative of the real –the borderscape that is visible across Cyprus and herself—she became the subject that divided the space into two and, at the same

³⁰ Dorinda Hulton, “The One Square Foot Project” (2007) 27 *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 155.

³¹ Interview with Arianna Economou, Nicosia, January 19, 2023

³² Echo Arts, “Walking the Line 1998” (*Echo Arts, Living Arts Centre*, 2013) <<https://www.echoarts.info/index.php/projects/24-solo-performances/53-walking-the-line-1998>> accessed May 12, 2024.

time, the performer who experienced the division she has created for herself and others. The audience was invited to draw parallels, consciously or unconsciously, with the topos of Cyprus, as she began using the shape of her body as a border iconography that forms a sculptural idealisation of a fictional border using paper at one end, slowly embodying a shift in who she is—the victim or the perpetrator—but in a fluidity that cannot be easily defined. The work creates an insider language, blurring the borders of art and life, especially considering 1998 when the re-opening of the checkpoints on the island was not yet introduced until April 2003. The border semiotics in the performance was two-fold: first, it forestalled how the line that divided affected bodies concerning the conflict. At the same time, it engaged with tactile sensations through the sense of touching and creating and forming it in space that entailed a storytelling on how the division began involving one's subjectivity. But the presence of Economou on stage, carrying her multiple identities and subjectivities, may open another account that suggests how women took on the conflict in Cyprus, but it was more precisely translated into an artistic language and the body on stage.

4. The Political Self/the Political Body in Performance

In conducting this research, and in re-visioning the works of Economou, I had to go back to the meaning of the political of the female body in a phenomenological perspective where lived experiences are presented in modes of being in the world. It is where the 'I cannot' superimposition had been implemented and restricted for the female.³³ Lived experience is contested in feminist theory,³⁴ but the thinking derives from Merleau-Ponty where the experience of the body is not separated from the 'natural' and the 'social'.³⁵ In this regard, the political embodiment of Economou becomes related to the material world in the natural that has been analysed as affecting 'all perceiving, moving and acting bodies'³⁶ suggestive of a memoro-politics that is enacted through the theory of phenomenology. Aspects of the political in Economou's work indicate how she has been forced to embody an imposed gendered and post-colonial subjectivity, as expected by societal norms in Cyprus at the time. This has been profound through Economou's words and her urgency to speak up that opens a

³³ Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays* (Oxford University Press 2005).

³⁴ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (Psychology Press 1993).

³⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Motilal Banarsidass Publishe 1996).

³⁶ Sara Heinämaa, "Embodiment and Feminist Philosophy" in Ann Gary, Serene Khader and Alison Stone (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy* (Routledge 2017).

phenomenological thematisation that includes the lived experience of the artist concerning the contentious space of Cyprus and the essence of the political. Contextualising the above, the female political bodies in such contentious spaces were formed from contesting narratives from Turkish-speaking Cypriot and Greek-speaking Cypriot communities that related their positionalities to the same historical events and periods from the early 1960 when the unrest between the two communities started up until the lines of division that were drawn in 1974. Examples can be found in the 2001 organisation of 'Hands Across the Divide' (HAD), which brought together Cypriot women from both communities to present their struggles. 'HAD [was] the first women-only group that included both Greek and Turkish Cypriot women, [bridging] a revolutionary stance in and of itself, defying the status quo by envisioning a non-divided, non-militarized and non-patriarchal Cyprus'.³⁷ The HAD initiative involved women across Cyprus that had been put on the margin and 'subjected to a vicious personalized and directly threatening attack'.³⁸ The conditions that marginalised and hindered women in their resistance until today constantly remain in flux and are products of a *seascape of trauma* that cannot be essentialised. Women's involvement in the contentious Cypriot society indicates how specific constructions have been made, positing the female solely at home, marking their resistances as less important in shifting narratives of the occupation and their work in peace and gender equality in Cyprus.³⁹ Their bodily presence in the streets is indeed performative, falling outside the notion of performance art but invigorating how their mobilisation could contribute differently to given discourses and grand narratives. Therefore, to resist as a female subject, to go against the habitus that contains a 'system of internalized structures, common schemes of perfection, conception, and action, which are the precondition of all objectification and apperception', requires a return to the body as a domain of experience to create an alternative discourse that opposes cultural significations, manifesting the political.⁴⁰

Patrice Pavis (1996), a distinguished French theatre scholar, is widely recognised for his seminal contributions to performance studies and theatre theory. Pavis posits that the performing body becomes inherently 'political' due to specific 'inscriptions of

³⁷ Sophia Papastavrou, *Women's Organizations for Peace: Moving Beyond the Rhetoric of the Cyprus Problem* (Springer Nature 2020).

³⁸ Maria Hadjipavlou and Cynthia Cockburn, "Women in Projects of Co-Operation for Peace: Methodologies of External Intervention in Cyprus" (2006) 29 *Women's Studies International Forum* 521.

³⁹ Cynthia Cockburn, *The Line: Women, Partition and the Gender Order in Cyprus* (Zed Books 2004)

⁴⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford University Press 1990).

culture' and internalized 'ensembles of rules of behavior'.⁴¹ In response to these behavioural norms, Economou enacted the political through her practice, which, though did not manifest in the streets, was fundamentally rooted in a methodology she obtained by walking in the streets, or rather by interacting with others. This approach aimed to provide an alternative narrative within the Cypriot context, challenging the prevailing cultural conditions influencing Turkish-speaking and Greek-speaking Cypriot relations. The complexities of marginalisation in Cyprus are deeply entwined with the persistent Cyprus Problem, which reflects the enduring partition and the de facto border separating the south and north. This situation amplifies feelings of ambiguity and complexity regarding notions of belonging, dislocation, and the intricacies of longing for return—specifically, to where and to whom. Narratives of belonging are diverse and unique to each individual on the island. The societal trauma experienced by Turkish-speaking Cypriots can be traced back to the 1950s, characterised by a constrained existence within enclaves. For Greek-speaking Cypriots, the trauma of dislocation is marked by the events of July 1974, following the Turkish army's incursion into northern Cyprus.⁴² Having grown up on a divided island and educated in the south, my exposure to history has been shaped by a one-sided perspective, predominantly highlighting the Greek-speaking Cypriots' loss of homes and family members in 1974. Hence, the production of competing discourses of nationhood in Cyprus is inevitable, heavily influenced by one's upbringing, as well as the colonial legacies and the ongoing division both physical as well as mental between Turkish-speaking Cypriots and Greek-speaking Cypriots, with the years of non-reunification resonating profoundly in the collective memory of those who remember.

In this aspect, Economou's performance works reject nationalist rhetoric and instead focus on how the body is 'not a machine, but an active relation to other social practices, entities, and events'⁴³, and consequently, this active relation is the reasoning behind Economou's stepping in front of dance activism and the inter-communal artistic exchanges found throughout her career, such as the *Sites Embodied Cyprus Festival* (2017), a bi-communal Festival in the Akamas Peninsula, in the villages of Androlikou and Droushia in Paphos, as well as the *Shared Echoes I & II*. The festival evolved around themes that constantly questioned the essence of home and belonging for all Cypriots. Economou, in her embodiment as a postcolonial subject, always

⁴¹ Patrice Pavis, *The Intercultural Performance Reader* (Psychology Press 1996).

⁴² Vamik Volkan, "Trauma, Identity and Search for a Solution in Cyprus" (2008) 10 *Insight Turkey*.

⁴³ Grosz E, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Indiana University Press 1994)

thought of ways to bring dialogue into the public sphere through art and performance in a society that never accepted the non-heterogeneous bodies that questioned their belonging and association in relation to grand narratives found in the *seascape of trauma*. Contextualising her practice, therefore, such artistic practices and initiatives in the context of this *seascape of trauma* may evolve as processes of conflict transformation art that, as art historian Evi Tselika states, have been gaining focus between 1990-2000 when ‘experience-based artistic endeavours’ began integrating ‘peace-building artistic practices’.⁴⁴ Literature informs us how in post-violent conflict zones, art can be used as a bridge of communication with the Other.⁴⁵

However, Economou’s political performances may to an extent not only be related to her direct conversation with the socio-political themes and her inter-communal exchanges, but it was the methodology she used, ‘from the streets’, that intersects with the alterity she experienced as a female practitioner, as well as a postcolonial subject living in a post-conflict zone. In our interview with Economou, which prompted one theme in my broader research, she broached the preconceptions of what it meant for a woman artist and her body to be present and resist on stage as a mode of enacting possibilities of future representations of female artists. In her words:

I learned techniques and styles of dance from pioneer women and men that made them, but I so needed to have my own voice as a creative, away from Martha Graham and Cunningham and all that history. To explore and not to be shown what and how to do it. Going back to the body for me after learning dance, theatre, and ballet techniques was so liberating. I finally started learning to stand in my own centre line or figure out what that line was about. I flourished away from the constraints of being judged as to whether I was good enough to learn others’ moving styles. I suppose I have always been an anarchist. I was never able to follow the rules. Rules of what is the way to do things. I had enough of being under others’ understanding of what dance is. After all, Cyprus dance under colonialism is and has been the Royal [pause]—the ballet. By rejecting this, at least, I was free to own my body.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Evanthia Tselika, “Conflict Transformations Art in Nicosia: Engaging Social Groups across the Divided City through Artistic Practices.” in Evanthia Tselika, Elena Stylianou and Gabriel Koureas (eds), *Contemporary Art from Cyprus Politics, Identities and Cultures across Borders* (Bloomsbury Visual Arts 2021).

⁴⁵ Candace Jesse Stout, “The Art of Empathy: Teaching Students to Care” (1999) 52 *Art Education* 21.

⁴⁶ Interview with Arianna Economou, Nicosia, January 19, 2023

Analysing the above, it is worth mentioning how Economou arrived in Cyprus in 1981 from Dartington College of Arts in England, where she received her Theatre Studies and Movement for Performance training. Her methodology in performance, which has been taught in Theatre Studies and dance, incorporated elements of post-modern dance that emerged from ‘the use of pedestrian movement; the denial of meaning and spectacle’s use of tasks or games as structural devices’.⁴⁷ Having her ‘own authentic voice’ was precisely the primary purpose—as we learn from history—of performance art that came in conjunction with the avant-garde and that allowed women ‘to enter the art scene through performance’.⁴⁸ Since males mainly dominated the art world, performance art became inextricably linked with feminism as a platform for female artists to engage in the politics of everyday life. In a way, Economou, in searching for her ‘own voice’ outside the knowledge she has been given, asserted her female body as being political by rejecting the male trope and notions of the spectacle, focusing on how her lived experience on stage can interact with the audience and that was to an extent a radical gesture. From a phenomenological perspective, feminist theorist Helene Cixous contributes to those mentioned above and could reflect how Economou enlarged from the confinements of Theatre studies, reconfiguring her subjectivity through a ‘body-presence’ on stage that permeated how ‘life is lived’ expanding it ‘by her look, her listening’.⁴⁹ Situating the authenticity of Economou’s voice in Cixous’ discovery reveals how her path on stage, her artistic practice, and her relationship with the audience’s gaze, as well as the history of Cyprus, can demystify ideological perspectives and practices dominating the Cypriot art scene which, as mentioned, favoured the ‘fathers’, or in other words the male artists who worked around the production of culture after the independence of the island in 1960.

Even though, in the 1980s, Cyprus entered a new phase of economic prosperity after the 1974 Turkish invasion, and people started to have access to more education, there was limited understanding of the ‘paradigm shift’ that extended theatre to performance studies, and as the Cypriot art scene was surrounded more by painting and dance in its conventional form, Economou was working around the shift.⁵⁰ As Econo-

⁴⁷ Judith Mackrell, “Post-Modern Dance in Britain: An Historical Essay” (1991) 9 *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research* 40.

⁴⁸ Lynn Leeson Hershman, “!WAR Women Art Revolution” (*ZKM*, 2010) <<https://zkm.de/en/media/video/war-women-art-revolution>> accessed April 15, 2024.

⁴⁹ Hélène Cixous, “Aller à La Mer” (1984) 27 *Modern Drama* 546.

⁵⁰ Richard Schechner, “A New Paradigm for Theatre in the Academy” (1992) 36 *TDR* (1988-) 7.

mou forestalls in one of our interviews, society could not accept interdisciplinarity in theatre, dance studies and avant-garde performance. In our interview, she explained how Cyprus at the time was a society that did not follow institutional recognition in performance practices outside the ballet: the ‘Royal’, as she mentions. Art at the time was still judged by standards where beauty norms were paramount. It followed the colonial legacies of the past that considered ballet the only acceptable form that a female performing body could be viewed through. The dancer’s body, in the means of ballet aesthetic, remained “in service” that was dependable to the ‘support of the ruling class’.⁵¹ Upon her arrival in Cyprus, Economou did not focus on the techniques of the theatre and dance but insisted on a different language, that involved contact improvisation, ‘release work’ based on the ‘language of axis’ methodology that was influenced by Mary Fulkerson⁵² that required her to ‘move rather than execute a particular set of moves’.⁵³ In that aspect, Economou incorporated what the postmodern dance has taught us: the ‘language of the street’, positing her as the ‘anarchist’ who fell outside specific structures and boundaries.⁵⁴

Her practice moved beyond the ideal body and instead focused on the phenomenology of dance, which impelled movement as an immediate experience.⁵⁵ Rejecting what was considered ‘high’ art in cultural matrices, Economou reimagined forms and content of performance outside the aesthetic objectification of the body. While she stretched the boundaries of conventional ‘high’ art, she also rejected embodying the glorifying ballerina who was ‘an object of beauty and desire’.⁵⁶ As ballet entered a phase of being recognised as a ‘female profession’⁵⁷, the prejudice began from literary critic, Théophile Gautier, who believed that ballet developed ‘from the lines agreeable to the eye’.⁵⁸ Based on this, for Economou, going against ballet did not only go against

⁵¹ Peter Stoneley, “Ballet Imperial” (2002) 32 *The Yearbook of English Studies* 140.

⁵² Stephanie Jordan, *Striding Out: Aspects of Contemporary and New Dance in Britain* (Dance Books Limited 1992).

⁵³ Novack CJ, *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture* (University of Wisconsin Press 1990)

⁵⁴ Interview with Arianna Economou, Nicosia, January 19, 2023

⁵⁵ Sondra Fraleigh, “A Vulnerable Glance: Seeing Dance through Phenomenology” (1991) 23 *Dance Research Journal* 11.

⁵⁶ Ann Daly, “The Balanchine Woman: Of Hummingbirds and Channel Swimmers” (1987) 31 *The Drama Review: TDR* 8.

⁵⁷ I Karthas, “The Politics of Gender and the Revival of Ballet in Early Twentieth Century France” (2012) 45 *Journal of Social History* 960.

⁵⁸ Théophile Gautier, *The Romantic Ballet as Seen by Théophile Gautier, Being His Notices of All the Principal Performances of Ballet Given at Paris During the Years 1837-1848* (Dance Horizons 1947).

an aesthetic inquiry but also made her a pioneer in a place where her methodology focuses on communication with her embodiment in space as well as with the audience who observes it, and did not comply with the external matrices of power that were internalised and inhabited. By referring to her 'own voice' and 'gravity',⁵⁹ she incites a contestation with the institutionalisation of performance arts, introducing a cultural form outside existing genres and institutions. Articulating performance art as a space of new possibilities, contradictory to institutional boundaries, she resisted the codification of one specific practice and re-visited an autonomy and agency that was a transgression between her relationship with the audience as a performer, but also her relationship with existing normative thinking of how the female should penetrate in society.

Hence, in her practice, Economou exemplifies the concept of gender theorist Judith Butler, who explores subversive bodily performance, a notion deeply rooted in both theory and practice. By articulating her subjectivity through her embodiment on stage, Economou engages with Butler's articulations on gender performativity, yet distinctly challenges the rigid, formalised iterations of how her gender should appear.⁶⁰ Economou's rejection of conventional beauty standards and societal expectations constitutes a deliberate act of resistance, using her physical expression to disrupt and redefine traditional gender norms. Butler asserts that gender is produced through the stylisation of the body, creating the illusion of a stable, gendered self; however, Economou's performances subverts this by presenting an alternative way that questions and deconstructs these norms that posited her in specific structures. This subversive approach not only critiques the societal constructs of gender but also serves as a form of political expression, demonstrating how performance art can transcend the stage to challenge and reshape public and private perceptions of identity. Through her embodiment on stage, Economou's work foregrounds the political, engaging in a cultural and historical discourse of the art scene in Cyprus and perhaps subtly opens up the the limitations and possibilities experienced by female artists, thereby forestalling traditional narratives and fostering new understandings of gender and identity.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Interview with Arianna Economou, Nicosia, January 19, 2023

⁶⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (Routledge 2011)

⁶¹ Victor Witter Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (Paj Publication 1988).

5. The Public Reception

The public reception often corresponds with how audiences are being involved within a “non-matrixed” participation⁶² while observing a performance piece on and off stage. Within these structures, non-hierarchical spaces are ideally instigated as forms in which performance art can be found highlights a potentiality of political consciousness and agency that registers how subjectivities (both performer on stage as well as the person viewing it) and representation unfold in the broader nexus of power. Economou, having the above in mind, entered a new direction that incorporated the live body in its material form, actively resistant in its praxis against the formalities she had been taught in her training and the societal expectations of the female subject while performing on stage that came along from the ballet. Her practice did not focus on representation but rather the presentation of her corporeal on stage, and her subjectivity which suggests an immediacy of authenticity. Distinguishing representation from presentation becomes integral in analysing the political in Economou’s work. There is no “destruction of aura,” as Benjamin would describe, as her bodily presence sustains an authenticity “that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from [her] substantive duration to [her] testimony to the history which [she] has experienced”.⁶³ As a result, the presentation of Economou on stage, when performed, maintains an aura that focuses on her embodiment on stage, inextricably linked with liberation from all constraints and an all-embracing aspect of one’s lived experience in certain spaces and places in which she has experienced. However, the public reception of her works does not necessarily follow the binaries of authenticity that have been suggested. Economou focuses on an ambiguity of interpretation toward points of view, and her interactions with the public may sometimes come across as unwelcoming, as it will be further discussed.

In our interviews, we kept going back and forth on how her gender meant that she was obliged to participate in specific representations that hailed her subjectivity in the context of Cyprus. Referring to her piece, 1983 *Σώμα- Χώρος* (transl. Body – Space), Economou confessed how the public perceived her first-ever piece performed in Cyprus at first glance. The received reactions to the performance that were published in traditional newspapers were primarily adverse, as she referred to a newspaper review that mentioned how “this was an ανωμαλία (transl. perverse) and not

⁶² Michael Kirby, “The New Theatre” (1965) 10 *The Tulane Drama Review* 23.

⁶³ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (HMH 1968).

art”.⁶⁴ The specific performance was a rejection of any authorial and directorial authority as it was a collaboration with Theodoulos Gregoriou, Nicolas Economou, and Panikos Economou. Still, it was Economou’s body that came forward on the screen and received the negative criticism. I developed an urgency to understand how this piece that referred to the space, the *topos* of Cyprus as a locality, focusing on re-enacting the landscapes of Cyprus through the performer’s body and a veiling cloth instigated so much negative criticism. Going back to Goldberg, it seemed clear that “the material and means of performance were limitless” and perhaps did not serve its purpose of being “art for all”.⁶⁵

The “art for all” rhetoric, of course, is rhetoric that sometimes contests the very nature of performance art that goes against normative modes of artistic representations and the canon. However, contextualising how female artists had no room for possibility in Cyprus as they received little and no attention in art history textbooks, an artistic inquiry was essentially the art the male masters created in a predominantly gendered field. The presence of a female artist and her ability to disrupt any voyeurism⁶⁶ reintroduced how the female body was no longer merely the muse or the model and called upon a radical bleakness and the confrontation which precisely resided in Economou’s piece and received an unwelcoming approach. Despite this, one cannot neglect that there was an essence of reclamation in the performance piece and its entirety, albeit the veiling cloth that covered Economou’s body parts. Even if the responses were reactionary and hostile, her bodily presence was pioneering, and an “alternative mode of perception [was] brought to the public”.⁶⁷ The reception, albeit being televised and received on screen, referred to the composition and the material in which Economou’s choice exposed her very own intimacy, a connection to the object; her body, concerning the *topos*; the space. It was woven against the expectations of media culture and the public representation of the female body on screen, stage, and performance. The question remains on the reasoning behind the criticism: was it a product of Economou’s avant-garde that went against the exigencies of the consumer ideals, or was it because she was no longer the female, the performer seen in ballet that fulfilled the spectator’s desire?

⁶⁴ Interview with Arianna Economou, Nicosia, January 19, 2023

⁶⁵ RoseLee Goldberg, “Performance--Art for All?” (1980) 40 *Art Journal* 369.

⁶⁶ Sophie Anne Oliver, “Trauma, Bodies, and Performance Art: Towards an Embodied Ethics of Seeing” (2010) 24 *Continuum* 119.

⁶⁷ Bonnie Marranca, *The Theatre of Images* (John Hopkins University Press 1996).

On this basis, it was then that Economou's body became abject⁶⁸ - the point of negative criticism – in the public eye. She became the failure of a particular categorisation, a subject that initiated a specific *undoing* by undermining existing interpellations that constructed her identity as a female performer. As Judith Butler explains, bodies become a matter through a “process of materialization that stabilizes over time produces the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface” that is prevalent in “regulatory power”.⁶⁹ Hence, for one's subjectivity to avoid abjection, exclusion, and marginality, it must embody the materialisation of the norms wielded in power to produce culturally viable subjects, which Economou did not do.

For the spectators – and it is intended that I am avoiding the term audience, as no physical presence and interaction were activated due to the televised form of the performance - Economou did not comply with the predominant components of the female body, hence redefining a subjectivity that did not appropriately signify specific boundaries. Perhaps it was then and there that Economou re-oriented a new logic of artmaking and the female body, positing her as a pioneer in the field. The lack of the feminine body to be presented in performance through a discovery of a new body that did not involve the flesh, so to speak, but a political praxis was “a transformation of understanding performance outside the theoretical frameworks of theory”.⁷⁰ However, one shall not consider this an endpoint of the personal moving to the political. Economou's style moved beyond the marginality and enacted a different language in the masculinist economy that term the conditions of the female artist in Cyprus. She refused to follow any given knowledge or predisposition that privileges colonial legacies and masculinist modes of thought of how the female body should be performed and understood on stage from the 1980s up until today. Going against traditional understandings of what was considered “high” art, the ballet, her movement presents an agency that is assertively feminist in style.

On the other side of the spectrum, the public cannot be considered homogeneous; it is not one and cannot be defined in singularity. This thinking stems from Economou's live re-enactment of the same piece *Σώμα - Χώρος* at the Nicosia Festival in Famagusta Gate, a few months later, which received a positive response. This aligns with the literary critic, Hans Robert Jauss's reception theory, which posits that au-

⁶⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (Columbia University Press 2009).

⁶⁹ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (Psychology Press 1993).

⁷⁰ Interview with Arianna Economou, Nicosia, January 19, 2023

dience interpretation varies widely based on cultural and historical contexts⁷¹, and is further elaborated through the work of political philosopher Jacques Rancière's where he describes the audience as active participants rather than passive consumers, through his theory on "the birth of the audience," which frames the audience as an active and fluid collective which occurs when both entities are present within performances. Rancière's notion emphasises the emancipated spectator who actively engages with and interprets performances, highlighting the diversity and dynamism of audience reception.⁷² Influenced by our conversation with Economou, we discussed how the live, the ephemeral nature of performance might have affected the reception of the piece, reflecting the work of performance theorist Erika Fischer-Lichte and her discussions on the transformative and transient qualities, specifically her theory of the autopoietic feedback loop and the transformative power of performance⁷³, which highlight the co-creative role of the audience and the dynamic interaction between performers and spectators. For Economou, this opened a new dimension on how the female artist is historically and culturally positioned to negotiate the space she resides in, compelled to enter a mode of acceptance to public perception while simultaneously rejecting consumerist ideals to be taken seriously.

6. The Spaces of Negotiation

Thinking of the contesting responses that Economou received in the early stage of her career, I began investigating the relationship between her art practice and the space she works and performs. Her work, albeit being criticised as perverse, years later entered a new domain as she was referred to as a 'dance activist'.⁷⁴ However, the lack of historical bibliography on performance artists on the island shows no exact trace of where this label came from. Still, I remember reading it, considering that Economou's work was soon seen as a revitalisation of a resistance that was very much needed in the art scene of Cyprus.

The 1980s also saw the establishment and growth of cultural institutions in Cyprus. The art scene in Cyprus, significantly shaped and still is by the geopolitical

⁷¹ Paul Hunter Rockhill, *The Reception Theory of Hans Robert Jauss: Theory and Application* (Portland State University 1996).

⁷² Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (Verso Books 2021).

⁷³ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* (Routledge 2008).

⁷⁴ Melissa Hekkers, "The Maturity of a Compelling Dance Artist" (melissahekkers.com, August 7, 2014) <<https://melissahekkers.com/maturity-compelling-dance-artist/>> accessed April 17, 2024.

division of the island in 1974 and ensuing modernisation initiatives, exemplifies a complex interplay of external influences, predominantly because of the Greek cultural ties. The lack of substantial artistic academic infrastructure until the late 1980s necessitated that aspiring Cypriot artists and art historians sought education abroad, predominantly in Greece and the United Kingdom. Even if this fostered a robust cultural and academic exchanges between Cyprus and Greece, it profoundly shaped the ideological orientation of Cypriot art, which often incorporates an expansive Hellenic narrative linking. The opening the Cyprus State Gallery of Contemporary Art in 1990 marked a pivotal institutional advancement, establishing a dedicated space for the exhibition of Cypriot art and symbolising broader state-driven modernisation efforts and consolidating that such practices were essential. Concurrently, the rise of both private and public educational institutions that incorporated art history into their curricula—albeit often as a supplementary subject allied with disciplines such as architecture or multimedia—reflects an emergent yet fragmented interest in formulating a distinct Cypriot art historical narrative that resonates with both national and regional identities. Understandably, the island’s division continues to influence educational practices and cultural policies, with institutions in the north, under Turkish influence, often deemed ‘illegal’ by the Republic of Cyprus and the United Nations.⁷⁵ This distinction complicates discussions concerning art education’s legitimacy, highlighting the persistent challenges related to cultural identity and heritage in a politically segmented landscape. As a result, the evolution of the art scene in Cyprus mirrors the broader socio-political dynamics of the region, highlighting further how art serves as a medium for negotiating cultural and political identities amid ongoing national and intercultural tensions, making it clear that there has been an ideological perspective that has undervalued the arts.

Considering all factors, when Arianna Economou invited Steve Paxton, a prominent dancer and choreographer, to Cyprus in 1989 following his tour of the Goldberg Variations, it underscored Economou’s profound pioneering influence in the island at that time. In my interviews with Economou, I have realised how she has contributed to these developments of modernization through her close ties with Paxton and their shared project *Extended Mobility* (1997), a workshop and conference that took place in Cyprus and focused on able and disabled people coming together in dance through contact improvisation. She shared with me how ‘everything was so new for

⁷⁵ Areti Adamopoulou, “Born of a ‘Peripheral’ Modernism: Art History in Greece and Cyprus,” *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe: Transnational Discourses and National Frameworks* (BRILL 2012).

everyone, and I had all these ideas to teach contact improvisation for the first time in Cyprus with Steve Paxton'.⁷⁶ The new methods of working, which might not have been so unique in Europe, were re-orientated and negotiated in the Cyprus art scene for performance artists to follow later. The methodological tools of contact improvisation introduced a sense of awareness in 'sensing time'⁷⁷ between bodies on stage. Economou's ability to stretch the language in a different, more abstract apparatus in performance art began a relational disruption to the broader space in Cyprus outside the rehearsal room and the stage.

Going deeper into Economou's vision to move outside the specific instructions in choreography and theatre assumed emancipation, where her embodiment on stage became a tool of resistance. Her methodology on contact improvisation introduced a new dance practice of non-stylised movement that aimed to eliminate restrictions and raise a 'freer type of movement and contact'.⁷⁸ This freer capability attunes a corporeal communion on stage that engenders a deconstruction in subjectivity and suggests a conjunction between the 'physical world that enables [one to freely] act'.⁷⁹ Hence, the body, even if it is in a conversation with its surroundings, with the space it inhabits, while entering the space of performance art, can assume a new domain that engages dialogue and witness. The philosophical implication of this approach suggests a matrix between space, relationality, and the body in which autonomy is not invoked as a possibility but rather as a process of experimentation. This remains, to an extent, a cross-examination of the importance of place and its impact and connection to Economou's sense of responsibility as an artist concerning the *seascape of trauma* I am trying to articulate.

I went back to the works of Economou in their documented form, which move beyond the ephemerality found in performance pieces. In the writings of performance art history, this process is thought to 'lessen the promise of [the performance's] ontology';⁸⁰ however, it does not lessen its impact. In this aspect, I understand how I moved beyond the artist's presence in the physical space. She negotiated intentions concerning the performance piece and entered a domain where I extrapolated new

⁷⁶ Interview with Arianna Economou, Nicosia, January 19, 2023

⁷⁷ Steve Paxton, "Contact Improvisation" (1975) 19 *The Drama Review*.

⁷⁸ Robert Turner, "Steve Paxton's 'Interior Techniques': Contact Improvisation and Political Power" (2010) 54 *TDR/The Drama Review* 123.

⁷⁹ Kate Rigby, Deborah Bird Rose and Ruth Fincher, "Contact Improvisation: Dance with the Earth Body You Have" in Katherine Gibson (ed), *Manifesto for Living in the Anthropocene* (Punctum Books 2015).

⁸⁰ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (Routledge 2003).

modes of trauma presentation through her own works. In her piece *Walking the Line* (1998), Economou uses her voice and invites the audience to relate to the fears inherently brought when lines are created as borders and divisions manifest. Revisiting the work done in 1998 in a linear progression of time, 25 years later, I realised that my questions were contained from memory and history, perhaps internalised by my interpretations of *the seascape of trauma*. I situated this re-visioning through certain predispositions which were unavoidable. The line pulled through the string in the performance resonates in the context of Cyprus, carries a precise connotation, and can be identified in the discourse of trauma I grew up with. It brings to the surface the seascape I am referring to as a cultural setting, circulated by trajectories of certain narratives that extend as records of personal experiences. The understanding seascape of the island, which is an integral part of the identity, does not simply work as a memory container but shapes how memory is experienced, performed, and remembered from the past in the present—through the body of the performer, to the audience that experiences it either live or documented. For Economou, this notion of trauma is connected to a cultural setting. In our interviews, she states: ‘Trauma is a cultural setting, and this is how trauma works. It is in the body. It is cellular, and it has a repeating effect, whether it is with the topos that serve to remind us or with the individual. The person and the topos are intertwined’.⁸¹ Her words shed light on putting the *seascape of trauma* into a cultural setting to understand how trauma works in her understanding. Anthropologist Eric Hirsch informs us that landscapes cannot be representational, as they are part of people’s everyday practice in constant flux.⁸² This flux avoids essentialism or stasis in meaning. In this way, the repeating effect might unveil. The landscapes are engaged with the body as we create relevance, a symbol connected thoroughly through fabricated narratives or imposed subjectivities that are often repeated. Connecting her words to the performance piece, it is relevant to how the string unveils. It opens possibilities for a new understanding of a seascape that remains in fluidity. At the same time, the static nature of the physicality of the string, as a division visual symbol in Cyprus (that divides the north and the south), questions the boundaries of the political space that has been shaped and mediated through the artist’s subjectivity and the audience’s subjectivity when perceived, juxtaposing further how the person and the *topos* can be intertwined. As a tool in her per-

⁸¹ Interview with Arianna Economou, Nicosia, January 19, 2023

⁸² Eric Hirsch and Michael O’Hanlon, *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space* (Clarendon Press 1995).

formance, there is communicative competence of an explicit material which involves an assumption of accountability, while she listed names of people who shared their traumatic experiences of 1974 and thus creates a verbal connotation of the trauma in the actual context of Cyprus, where the performance piece negotiated the immaterial (the body/ thevoice) with the material (the string) in a constitutive domain that reinstates a verbalism that is shared through the use of language that co-creates the performance piece.⁸³ In her piece, Economou is concerned with the narratives of who has left us, who preceded us, and who has crossed the lines, questioning specificity in haziness. She becomes a singular voice that speaks of the sociality of bodies presented in grand narratives. She refers to this as ‘invoking previous generations of women and their stories’ in the present.⁸⁴ All those names mentioned in her performance, Andri, Maritsa, and Persefoni (among others), were practices of remembrance, of stories of women she had been told as a child in Paphos and Nicosia of people who had to abandon their land in search of another, exercising endurance as they were on the run looking for a home. She creates a dynamic of relatedness and mutual vulnerability by bringing her body to perform and on stage, along with the stories of other females that preceded her. In that position, her role appears as a challenger



Photo 1: Still from the performance piece Walking the Line (1998), Kasteliotissa Medieval Hall. Courtesy of the artist.

⁸³ Jones D and Bauman R, “Verbal Art as Performance” (1986) 45 *Western Folklore* 34

⁸⁴ Interview with Arianna Economou, Nicosia, January 19, 2023

or a creator of certain *Othered* narratives that have been suppressed but articulated to mediate different understandings of a *seascape of trauma* that has not yet been defined in history books in Cyprus.

When I asked Economou to comment on what the string meant for her, she referred to it as ‘the line, the horizon, the mountain, the line that is fluid, the line on the shore’.⁸⁵ I found myself crisscrossing these boundaries of ordinary life in the performance of Economou with her negotiation with both the symbolic and the literal space of Cyprus as a contentious society with all the narratives that carry their meanings, along with my personal ones. Through that, the relationality to the fluid structure of the line that moves (as embodied in the string) is where the *seascape of trauma* can be articulated. As a fluid transition in which subjectivities are often asked to negotiate with, through, and within their lives.

Economou’s negotiation with the space can not only be interpreted solely on the experimental quality of her performance but rather on the part where she embodies (borrowed by performance artist Vito Acconci’s teachings) a ‘social dimension, projecting social, political and ideological influences that reflect social conditions’.⁸⁶ By doing so, *Walking the Line* (1998) invites the audience to an awareness of the complex surrounding events and situations, albeit not met in the streets in the form of protest. As art historian RoseLee Goldberg identifies, it coincides with the viability of the performance art to create a field of interdisciplinarity through poetry, literature, dance, and other domains, in a combination that would enact a reconstruction of thinking.⁸⁷ In a visual interpretation, the tactile presence of the string that indicates a border iconography envisions a monumental-like figuration that captivates or posits the audience in a narrative of an existing situation that is relatable and helps us explore the past in a rewriting of history.

In our interview, when I narrowed down the discussion to this specific performance piece, prompting Economou to describe her thinking and process behind the performance:

I considered it my duty. What kind of an artist would I be if I had not addressed the fact that every day, I wake up looking at the mountain of Kyrenia, pretending it does not exist or is not there? I wonder what this did to me and my whole

⁸⁵ Interview with Arianna Economou, Nicosia, January 19, 2023

⁸⁶ Thomas Finkelpearl, *Dialogues in Public Art: Interviews with Vito Acconci, John Ahearn* (MIT Press 2000).

⁸⁷ RoseLee Goldberg, “Performance Art from Futurism to the Present,” *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader* (Routledge 2013).

life. In this process, we almost all see it and pretend we are not seeing it. This cultivates personalities of denial. Seeing that landscape and pretending, deciding it was not important whether we were seeing it or not. Perhaps this is a result of trauma. I didn't think of all this when doing my work related to the Cyprus conflict. I didn't go deeper into it as the politicians created this denial. Nobody addressed the fact that we were grieving. Grief was not acknowledged, so people went further in their denial. We never received an acknowledgment or recognition of the pain, the sorrow, and the fact that the island we grew up in was founded on loss, on the restriction of mobility of what was throttling my throat, as that was prohibited from crossing all streets in one island. I recognise the denial twenty-three years after (1998 marked the twenty-third year of the invasion). And then said no, this can't be it, and started putting into context all this trauma in my work.⁸⁸

In analysing the above, her words during our interview opened up space for other understandings, where I stopped examining subjectivities in concrete ways and started thinking about the *seascape of trauma* more broadly and how identities have been fluidly constructed. I narrowed down the words: *duty*, *denial*, *grief*, and *trauma*, and began exploring how these words were used interchangeably. This witnessing of the traumatic history of Cyprus compelled Economou to accept that there is a collective responsibility to remember—that one should take it in as a 'duty'—and invert it in her performance practice to a relational embodiment in conjunction with the space, in its broader sense, Cyprus—a process in which has been referred to as 'memoration'.⁸⁹ In her words, it can be inferred that scripting history and performing the trauma in her work was a vital process to transcend in time and space that required her to recognise the denial. The land as a space opens how the landscape can work as a monument of remembrance, aiming the same way as the monument to be an 'emblematic embodiment of power and memory'⁹⁰ and, at the same time, serve its purpose to remind that intergenerational trauma exists and is still very much profound. The space transfers into a collective memory where fragments of personal memory are gathered and reconstructed. The land is not a blank slate, it comprises parts of an

⁸⁸ Interview with Arianna Economou, Nicosia, January 19, 2023

⁸⁹ Leah Decter, "Dis/Locating Preferential Memory within Settler Colonial Landscapes: A Forward-Looking Backward Glance at Memoration's Per/Formation" (2022) 7 *Performing (in) Place: Moving on/with the Land* 51.

⁹⁰ M Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (MIT Press 1994).

identity, and histories and the body are entangled within it.⁹¹ In this vein, once embedded in identified places, trauma suggests that our knowledge of particulate sites, like landscapes of seascape, is 'linked to knowledge of the self',⁹² suggestive of how memoro-politics function. It is questionable whether such formations are the rubric of ethnogeography that preserves the lived-in-worlds of the subjects situated in each space at a given time. However, for Economou, it seems that the physical space she resides in has inescapably worked in her practice's political and social framework. Her understanding of space introduces us to a way of seeing and knowing the deep history of events in Cyprus.

Going back to *Walking the Line* (1998), the semantics of the string in this regard, activate a representation of the material ground of Cyprus and its division since 1974, and her embodiment on stage suggests that there is an experience of that landscape, and the *topos* through a sensual and sensing body. By re-staging a metaphorical division on stage, she performs an identity in action the same way it is constituted in the identity already formed by the conditions of the *seascape of trauma* and her subjectivity. All these come with the boundaries of remembering. However, those acts of remembering are reclaimed when her body is assembled to exercise a particular performance piece that is then moved into the public domain as a performative force aiming to be read as a process of 'we are still here', meaning 'we have not yet been disposed of'.⁹³ As she mentioned, she reclaims agency that has been taken from her, not being allowed to cross all streets, and not being able to have a voice as a female practitioner. Borrowing from Butler and Athanasiou on the politics of the performative, I cross-connect Economou's activism with that of protest through art, which enacts a different story in a body politic that might be different on stage but can be kept as a historical record of memoro-politics and constant contestations of how silenced our memories have been in the *seascape of trauma* in Cyprus.

I was particularly entangled with her words that mentioned 'grief' and 'denial', extrapolated by the interview, as they reveal a constituting personal and public memory in the aesthetic space she has created and negotiated in her praxis. In the form of witnessing, LaCapra informs us how testimonies in history are complex as they

⁹¹ Dan Hicks and Mary C Beaudry, *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies* (OUP Oxford 2010).

⁹² Keith H Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (UNM Press 1996).

⁹³ Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (John Wiley & Sons 2013).

initiate a 'secondary witness' that intertwines both a subject-position in the form of testimony that confess the story as the witness.⁹⁴ Economou's work, to an extent, incorporates this theoretical framework of witnessing by simultaneously embodying other people's narratives and her narrative as a postcolonial gendered subject. The question is whether Economou adapts her performing body in an overlap between the real, the fictional, and the potential. To answer this question, her linear body sets up the space, and the borderscape becomes the imaginary perception of what could have been. At this point, the seascape can be fully articulated as a fluid spectrum in which one can explore and embody different notions of the self and others and in re-defining identities imposed by certain narratives and various understandings of the political as a being in the world and with others.

Walking the Line (1998), therefore, obtains a threefold structure in terms of intentionality: the autobiographical, the documentary, and the visual. This range of re-visioning adapts our understanding of grief and shapes how we exist and negotiate with the space in a present understanding. In some of our e-mail exchanges, Arianna Economou replied to these thoughts interestingly, positing herself similarly to a mythology character. As "Io beaten by the gadfly in Aeschulus Tragedy of Prometheus, where I run look in for the end of the road. I am not looking for a home, but I ask where will this road lead me to?"⁹⁵ The notion of being at home, of belonging, is perhaps what has instigated Economou to elaborate on an artistic practice that constantly searches for other meanings, always having in mind her lived experience, as well as the experiences of others in the context of Cyprus.

Reflexively, I have focused on the aesthetic and political aspects of Economou's performance through a perception where affect has been introduced based on a corporeal dynamic with her body on screen for those that saw it live and in our discussions. I acknowledge that most of the analytical aspect of *Walking the Line* (1998) was a result of contextualising the unclaimed memories of Economou and the urge to adjust this research on the work of disremembered female artists in the context of Cyprus.

7. Maintaining Dance as Activism

Economou's work is multifaceted, and one of the central aspects it carries that disrupts dominant systems is her methodological tools and her political self that initiat-

⁹⁴ Dominick LaCapra, "Trauma, Absence, Loss" (1999) 25 *Critical Inquiry* 696.

⁹⁵ Interview with Arianna Economou, Nicosia, January 19, 2023

ed intercommunal collaborative youth projects in 2004. As mentioned, throughout our meetings, we went back to the definition of the *seascape of trauma* that I kept mentioning and her relatability of it being referred to as a ‘dance activist’. In one of our discussions, she confesses: ‘I was isolated from some that would dare to call me a traitor. Some thought that working on inter-communal works was a betrayal, and even the state officials would not fund such projects’.⁹⁶ What was particularly intriguing is how Economou’s feminist activist-aesthetic method grew resentment in Cyprus, either because of the political contestations or because of other types of internalised traumas that did not allow the notion of mutual respect for both communities (Turkish-speaking and Greek-speaking Cypriots) to flourish, either coming from the state or the people.

While I explored *Shared Echoes I* (2004), a collaborative project with Joshua Bisset, Edward Svhocker, Alexandra Waierstall, and Horst Waierstall, I realised the aim of Economou in collaboration with EMAA (The European Mediterranean Artists Association) did not stop her peacebuilding initiatives through the physical existence and presence of bodies and the articulation of various performance events. As she mentions, *Echoes II* followed *Echoes I*, which also focused on establishing through a creative process a common ground of personal histories and relationships with a common thematic framework that incorporated peace and understanding for both communities. Both collaborative projects stimulated social and political action, referred to as ‘redressive performances’,⁹⁷ where several subjectivities embodied in space politicise their presence, that aimed for change. In the context of the *seascape of trauma* in Cyprus, initiating new thinking in performance outside the mere physical presence of just one artist was foreign, let alone incorporating other subjectivities that were further marginalised (the Turkish-speaking Cypriots). This assembly of different subjectivities and audiences was a pedagogical tool that could easily be standardised as an essential hidden curriculum embedded in a space that has endured division and conflict for 50 years.

Economou ruptured with institutions and dominant narratives since 2004, and trim work has been made or was widely accepted as expected in terms of intercommunal exchanges. Doing this, she entered or voiced art’s autonomy as a value. The collaborative project was a valorisation of a new language that moved beyond ‘sub-

⁹⁶ Interview with Arianna Economou, Nicosia, March 15, 2023

⁹⁷ Meiling Cheng, *In Other Los Angeleses: Multicentric Performance Art* (Univ of California Press 2002).

jection [as a] negative disciplinary definition of a subject by discourse, to subjectification: the self-creation of a new subject-position through the imagination and performance of other forms of (artistic, social) subjectivity'.⁹⁸ Hence, the production of several collaborative projects with all the artists involved, as well as the audience, opened a space of radical engagement that forged a challenge in dominant narratives that insisted on separating the two communities for so long. As mentioned, 2004 marked the opening of checkpoints that allowed the two communities for the first time after so many years to re-communicate. Art's involvement in its autonomous form suggested a visible form of artistic and political engagement that insisted on a sovereign structural reform of thinking and practice. The fact that Economou was referred to as a 'traitor' because of the agency to follow political art and openly share her stance on the Cyprus Problem suggests that performance art in its form must not only be viewed as an artistic inquiry but also in terms of a socio-political context.

Further in her contribution to creating and initiating collaborative pedagogical inter-communal projects, Economou was also involved in the initiative to set up the Dance House of Nicosia, which aimed to be a space for collective and individual action for all performers residing on the island, and the future generation to come. For her, the creation of new space was:

To provide a physical space for professional work to develop and create programmes for dance development that will lead to a broader understanding of performance art in an interdisciplinary approach. I had envisioned a space for the artists to work and cultivate new audiences, to work on the ideals of audience development.⁹⁹

Even if Economou did not refer to it as a characteristic of feminist art, her involvement in creating a space that would question 'aesthetic and social assumptions [with] a new respect for [the] audience' was not simply fused with activism and education. It was a pioneer way to address the under-representability of a field that has long been on the margin.¹⁰⁰ It was a mode of moving against the inscribed normative thinking of what performance meant outside ballet and the colonial rhetoric ingrained in certain stereotypes. As performance studies scholar Sovini Madison argues, 'performance

⁹⁸ G Grindon, "Surrealism, Dada, and the Refusal of Work: Autonomy, Activism, and Social Participation in the Radical Avant-Garde" (2011) 34 *Oxford Art Journal* 79.

⁹⁹ Interview with Arianna Economou, Nicosia, March 15, 2023

¹⁰⁰ Lucy R Lippard, "Sweeping Exchanges: The Contribution of Feminism to the Art of the 1970s" (1980) 40 *Art Journal* 362.

pedagogy has moral, artistic, political, and material consequences', which calls upon new voices to strike in, including the differences that reshape subjectivities, audiences, and performers.¹⁰¹ It brings along a mode of inquiry where performance is, by default, activation of the political in its true meaning. The artist's role in this regard is further negotiated in a public sphere that inscribes a new mode of artistic education and unravels a contribution to mapping performance in a politically discursive domain. It is unavoidable, given how artmaking is created in a spatial-temporal dimension that may, at times, move beyond the setting it is initially created in. The role of human agency in art cannot be put aside as it is 'influenced by the historical circumstances in the given time and space' that formulates its shape.¹⁰² In this conception, therefore, Economou, through her inter-communal exchanges and involvement in creating a dance space, encapsulates the essence of the political, the one whom, as philosopher Hannah Arendt defines, is political through speech and action.¹⁰³

8. Conclusion

This article focused on only three specific performance pieces: *Σώμα, Χώρος* (transl. Body, Space) in 1983, *Walking the Line* in 1998, and *Echoes I & II* in 2004. All these works refer to the context of Cyprus and its deep history of colonial legacies, displacement in 1974, and the gendered ramifications resulting from years of suppression and alterity that formed subjectivities. Economou's positionality is negotiated through her gendered subjectivity imposed by normative matrices of power; nonetheless, through my encounters with Economou, I have realised how this suppression made her articulate the political in her life that translated into her practice. Performance art has been an under-represented field in Cyprus precisely because of what comprised 'high art' in the public's general understanding, as well as the divisions between the north and the south.

Economou, as a pioneer in the field, did not simply let her practice on stage speak. Instead, she worked on pedagogical tools, determined to change the broader scene of how performance has been perceived and understood on the island. Our one-to-one interviews discussed the works referred to in this chapter with Economou. Several

¹⁰¹ Sovini Madison, "Performances, Personal Narratives and the Politics of Possibility," *The Future of Performance Studies: Visions and Revisions* (National Communication Association 1998).

¹⁰² Girma Negash, "Art Invoked: A Mode of Understanding and Shaping the Political" (2004) 25 *International Political Science Review* 185.

¹⁰³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition: Second Edition* (University of Chicago Press 2018).

extrapolations were being made on how the public perceived her early in her career, placing her as an ‘inappropriate/d other’ that refused to align with the reiterated female subjectivity being imposed on her.¹⁰⁴

There has been an overlapping use of the *seascape of trauma* that was intentionally not given a specific definition, but instead was unpacked in a way that unravels the fluidity of trauma where all subjectivities are formed that are often negotiated by the surrounding, a concept that coincides with memoro-politics and can be symbolic of the geographical locality of Cyprus on the map as an island in the Mediterranean. What was kept from our interviews with Economou is how she always referred to her ancestry as one that defines her. At times she mentioned them as ‘the ones that preceded her or came before’, suggesting that the intergenerational trauma does not reside in temporality; and, relatively, it is fixed, but its impact on those who witnessed it as an actual event, alongside with the meta-witnesses of the narratives that we have been told.¹⁰⁵ Perhaps it is there that the responsibility or how Economou refers to it as a ‘duty’ to be political in her work prevails. The trauma in Cyprus needs to be addressed as it entails a seascape of violence that comes in waves in a spatial setting, where depending on the time is amplified or silenced.

It is worth mentioning that Arianna Economou’s practice emanates from her subjectivity located in a contentious space.¹⁰⁶ Contention in this analysis was used to describe contradictory experiences of space in terms of the spatial conditions of Cyprus and its partition that lay in Cyprus’ British colonial legacies long before the line of division between the Turkish-speaking Cypriots and the Greek-speaking Cypriots was drawn. Locating Economou’s practice in this terrain is based on her active negotiation to offer the alternative in the art scene both in content as an activist that worked with inter-communal projects between Turkish-speaking Cypriots and Greek-speaking Cypriot creators and audiences and her body on stage as a medium that differed substantially by the societal and aesthetic expectations of the time. Considering that there is ‘an aesthetic dimension in the political and a political dimension in art’, this

¹⁰⁴ Trinh T Minh-Ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Indiana University Press 2009).

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Arianna Economou, Nicosia, March 15, 2023

¹⁰⁶ Martin D and Miller B, “Space and Contentious Politics” (2003) 8 *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 143

research re-visions the political in Economou's subjectivity that is expanded in her practice.¹⁰⁷

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¹⁰⁷ Chantal Mouffe, "Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces" (2007) 1 *Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*.

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