

The last few years have been saturated with anger, frustration, grief, oppression, insecurity, and a sense of pervasive distress. The static, predetermined, and socially detached reality of the recent pandemic crisis, followed by the dramatic developments in the health sector, not only brought the physical repercussions of a deadly epidemic disease to the forefront, but also changed our actual life as we knew it in the public and private sphere alike. The exhausting curfews, the abundance of emergency measures, the ever-changing state guidelines, the deprivation of physical contact, and the prolonged indoor confinement made our winters longer, rendered our bodies stiff, and strained our mental health. Guilt became an integral part of our daily biological expression and experience, while our need for intimacy was bound and replaced by the notions of responsibility and (self-) protection. Social distancing enabled a phobic perception of the presence of other people, their skin and lips. Consequently, eroticism was perceived as a threat¹ and thus completely paralysed, while the joy of social interaction fell apart. Any attempt of spontaneous and unregulated bodily expression in public that was not in accordance with the health protocols, now seemed abnormal and reinforced the general sense of oppression. At the same time, the rapid social and political developments² – combined with the absence of social osmosis – left any initiative for social gathering and collective action utterly unfulfilled, while leading to an even worse feeling of bodily numbness. There's no doubt that our losses have been multiple and rather poignant; however, under these unfavorable conditions, I believe we are all making our best to find ways of restoring our ability to connect, while our desire of feeling euphoric has grown more than ever. ¶ In particular, the restriction of dance and music³ – partly due to prohibition, but seemingly serving other purposes, too – has caused a collective trauma that is easily overlooked or underestimated. Many people may find this of minor importance compared to the widely dystopic state of our lives in the recent past and present. Moreover, the public expression of this aspect could be perceived or even criticized as an overreaction that is incompatible with our current reality. This exact conflict situation – combined with the demonization of gathering in outdoor spaces, and the evident police brutality, mainly towards younger people who occupied public squares – made me reflect on the actual consequences of this loss in the realm of collective experience. These manifestations

and restrictions di- and/or revolutionary of euphoria, while mentalization of fear, a common denomina- throughout the entire way that suggests an any resistance from In this respect, this fact that, in various geographical regions prevalence of social sion, dance and mu- two of the most radi- sion, providing outlets collective spaces where mination and empow- importance, while di- flourish unhindered. text, focusing on dance forms of “spring”⁴ and physical eupho- ideas, associations, and through the experi- condition – without ical analyses, concep- comparisons – and to occasions in which emotional, festive and ments that constitute to the addressing of existential challenges start with the ex- a place strongly asso- hood due to my fam- *Vlach Wedding*, which that survives to this ding embodies beliefs⁵ as it is related to god- ous celebrations in his described as a variation in Thebes – the mother city with the intention of satirizing the customary life of Greeks and, also, creating and retaining social ties, alongside a genuine connection to the land. All the constituent elements of the Vlach Wedding⁶ reach for “ευετηρία” (pronounced *evetiria*), which means a good year of fertility and fruitfulness. This means the fertility (“ευφορία,” in Greek) of land and harvest, along with the fertility

rectly attach a radical element to the concept revealing the instru- which appears as ator of state repression pandemic crisis, in a attempt to eliminate younger generations. could be related to the historical periods and characterized by the restraints or repres- sive have proved to be cal means of expres- for the development of coexistence, self-deter- erment are of great versity and freedom Therefore, with this and music as two that lead to mental ria, I intend to present thoughts that emerged ence of our current proceeding to theoret- tual distinctions, or describe three separate dance, music, and the communicative ele- these two, contribute social, political, and and crises. ¶ Let’s ample of Thebes, ciated with my child- ily’s origins, and the is a springtime custom day. The Vlach Wed- of ancient traditions,

Dionysus and the vari-

honor. It’s commonly

of pastoral weddings, held

of Dionysus – since 1830,



GROOM AND BRIDE, 1950



WEDDING PARTY, 1950s



VLACH WEDDING, 1905

and good health of people and livestock, that rural communities tried to achieve by indulging in ritualistic practices during the period that signifies the passing of winter and the coming of spring, as well as the deeper dependence of man on nature (Megas 2001). The first day of the Wedding takes place on the last Sunday of the Greek Carnival and the final day of the Wedding coincides with Clean Monday. Throughout history, Thebes has welcomed various ethnocultural communities (Vlachs, Sarakatsani, Asia Minor Greeks, Arvanites) who eventually became part of the city. The main reason the Vlach Wedding survives through the centuries and cultural adaptability intact, is the preservation of the unity of this heterogeneous and regional “traditions” and “identities,” especially when some of their characteristics are at risk of extinction.⁷ ¶ The gathering procession gradually evolves into a joyful social festivity, in which the audience and visitors are invited to dance, facilitating the dynamics of the relations developed among all participants, in terms of extroversion, companionship, parody, joy, friendship, and laughter. Based on the Dionysian origin of the tradition, the dancing – combined with the consumption of wine and the use of obscene language – is an inseparable part of the celebration, allowing the expression and encouragement of internalized – under “normal” conditions – primordial instincts, and an outlet from the norms of everyday life, connecting the “We” and the “I”⁸ through forms of association that do not reflect existing social structures but constitute interactions which overcome and challenge them (Nietzsche 2008). The Dionysian element is also reinforced by the subversion of gender roles through cross-dressing,⁹ as in most cases the role of the bride is performed by a man. Despite the existence of many analyses stating that this subversion is attributed to the social practices of patrilineal society, I will attempt an additional reading of the custom. Cross-dressing could further suggest a profound desire for a critical revision of stereotypes, not only in relation to genders and masculinity but also in regard to the



OISTROGONES, 2021.
PHOTO: ALEXANDRA MASMANIDI



OISTROGONES, 2020.
PHOTO: ALEXANDRA MASMANIDI



OISTROGONES, 2021.

mystery of marriage family, in a society reproduction of coexistence and the constructed genders. On the basis of the using the rigidity and in traditional soci-point, it would be safe bodies that dance dur-create the spectacle, sequence of events role-playing in an im-a potentially anti-con-which is unified and ety and spring, sub-order, satisfying phys-boundaries, and re-ing the social con-¶ Would it be possible state of euphoria in protests? In broad terms, political engagement is identified as a sum of civilian activities that aim to affect political reality (Van Deth 2014). Of course, these activities include participation in public protests and demonstrations, where elements of synchronicity, rhythm, and choreography are clearly present. That said, how often do we see such broadened forms of political engagement and activism in Greece? The occurrence of dance and music in feminist demonstrations is certainly not a recent development. The most well-known correlation between political action and dance is attributed to a slogan, associated with anarcho-feminist Emma Goldman: “If I can’t dance, it’s not my revolution.” In Greece, there are several ex-dancing and singing such as the organized outside GADA (Gener-Attica)¹¹ in 2019, Ath-Liberation March; all new pathways for fun, connection and lib-strictly political and tivities. At this point, I role of Oistrogones and and playful attitude slogans of anger and in various feminist ¶ In March 2021, and following a sec-of lockdown, I came watched them walk-of Athens,¹² using body singing as forms of aiming to denounce

and the institution of that still aims at the servative models of fulfillment of socially and roles (Butler 2009). aforementioned, while conservatism of morals eties¹⁰ as a starting to assume that the ing a Vlach Wedding set in motion the and become fields of aginary metaphor of formist social body, imbued with inebri-verting the established ical desires, abolishing versing and/or equat-struction of genders. to achieve a similar the context of public amples of employing in massive protests, animated performance al Police Directorate of ens Pride, and Queer of them have created personal expression, eration in otherwise distinctly formed ac-will focus on the active their strongly positive amid the resounding despair, as experienced or unrelated protests. on Women’s Day, ond prolonged period across Oistrogones and ing through the streets movement, dance and political engagement cases of systemic,

gender-based and governmental violence, along with deep-rooted patriarchal and neoliberal social structures. The group of Oistrogones formed and started to develop in the spring of 2020, after the first lockdown, amid intense economic, political, and social developments. The groups's constitution is open and fluid, while its activity includes the witty paraphrasing and revision of popular Greek songs,¹³ shared publicly to invite protesters into its circle. The members do not consider themselves artists, nor are they associated with performance art. They do, however, believe in the concept of singing and dancing in protests and demonstrations, arguing that these particular elements make their existence and necessity even more meaningful. Their creative, emotional and all-inclusive ways of expression, never negating their militant and denunciatory purpose, emits a communicative energy with an obvious impact on the demonstrators' interactive spirit and reinforces the collective cause and – at least, momentarily – eliminates gaps of ideological differences by focusing on the real the streets. Even the group's denomination, which alludes to mental stimulation, in-fertility, intellectual or and exuberance, possibly derives from their desire to induce productive discourses and relationships in the context of political engagement. According to its members, the main reason for their activation was an overwhelming need for exaltation and euphoria,¹⁴ following the deeply unsettling conditions of unconfined, inactivity, and apathy. Expecting their form of protest has been confronted with the argument that it does not reflect the seriousness of the social matters at hand. Nevertheless, no one can deny the comfort they provide to the crowds, after the numbness, fear and despair of the recent past. ¶ The dancing movements, the delivery of the lyrics, and the participation in the team's circle immediately evoke feelings of intimacy, solidarity, pleasure, and even ecstasy, that ease the strain and soothe the underlying mental burden. The bodies respond to the need for touch, follow their inner rhythms and remember how to breathe and feel. The female element starts to precede the “machismo” that is usually dominant

in demonstrations and public gatherings, as a sign of empowerment and self-sufficiency. The tense and rigid bodies soften, relax, open up and reform through collective processes, obtaining an “erotic” status. This erotic element¹⁵ emerges, as defined by Audre Lorde: “...a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane. [...] We have been taught to suspect this resource, vilified, abused, and devalued within western society” (2017). According to Lorde, the belief that we – as women – can be truly powerful only by repressing the erotic element in our lives and consciousness is illusory, because it is formed in the context of male models of power. More specifically, in current times that are characterized by incidents of repression and police brutality, our vulnerability / interdependence are on the rise, our bodies exposed more than ever and our participation in dancing and the sound of melodies can create an informal work of support, along with a shield of protection around our bodies, as they constantly repel aggressive behaviors. So, dancing and singing can serve as physical shelter, allowing bodies to find safety from agents of abuse. At the same time, they provide a fertile field where bodies vibrate and visibly resist the internal and external social codes defining our place in the world, along with the recurring incidents of sexism, abuse and policing that shape our values. ¶ In a similar way, in *S W E A T* (2020), visual artist and filmmaker Vera Chotzoglou allows us to witness how dance and music serve as cores of empowerment, rejuvenation and assertion in which transformations of identities bear fruit to identities that don’t fall within specific gender constructions, are widely considered abnormal, and are being oppressed. These dynamics unfold as a cinematic recording – on one hand – of an invisible unity of bodies during Tsiknotekno,¹⁶ an art rave initiative born in the spring of 2014 intended to provide a sense of creative potential and a safe space for all preferences and – on the other hand – of the narration of DJ Fro’s and performer Reject001’s personal experiences during their pre-show routines, reminding us of Stuart Hall arguing that identities are not simply about who we are or where we came from, but also what we could become, how we are represented and how we represent our own selves (Hall 1996, 4). ¶ This exact combination of individual and collective experience creates a voice that addresses Queer culture ethics and a point of view that embraces the central figures it observes, capturing their emotional aspects with tenderness,

VERA CHOTZOGLU, *SWEAT*,
2019–2020, (FILM STILL)



without attempting to perpetually label them, but rather treat them with affection by discarding stereotypical representations of gender, sexuality and aesthetics, and provide visibility to whoever chooses to “disappear” in plain sight or “be present” without being subject to socially imposed roles. It also connects us with a non-homogenized, but multigerm¹⁷ – almost transcendental – world existing under the dominant culture and all the commonly accepted associations; it can be found on the outskirts of known social institutions, far from the widespread “hip”¹⁸ anhedonia that glorifies style over substance and aims at profit over originality. This world, though ephemeral in its essence, is fueled by music, dance and the

charm of the dance floor: it annuls rivalries and conflicts – originating from within or outside the community – while elevating night time to a safe space for meetings, wider acceptance and diverse identification. Within this world, personal freedom and unapologetic self-identification are the only conventions valid to survive. ¶ The synaesthetic, contemplative and – at the same time – “trippy” filming of images, sweat, voices, disguises, darkness / colors, sounds and exuberant dance movements balances between the spiritual haziness and excitement of lavish midnight parties, and the confessional alertness found in the light of dawn and backstage moments as well as clarity of the two individuals they

talk to. Moreover, the scenes that present the figures of pulsating bodies diffusing into an intoxicating and ever-changing galaxy of reflections automatically make us nostalgic of the dancing and musical aspect of going out at night, and our almost teenage-like carefree and naïve life we led prior to the pandemic crisis, in a time when we were still able to lose and find ourselves with no restraints, to confront longings and desires, to be full of excessive euphoria by using chemical substances or releasing our inner instincts, to swing around, to touch and listen to each other, to close our eyes and open our souls until the slow fading of catharsis. Whether this type of euphoria is considered

an excess depends on the cultural-social and historical, normative context; however, in this case, it doesn't necessarily indicate negligence, lack of restraint, respect or deviation. On the contrary, "exceeding the limits" according to Vera's gaze mainly serves as a promise of liberation from social constraints and as a multi-layered subject of artistic exploration. ¶

While current expectations are proved wrong, democracy seems void of meaning and happiness feels utterly elusive, how can we give new meanings to pleasure, coexistence, and co-action? Our generation (millennials) is constantly called upon to devise ways of managing its exhaustion, nakedness and loneliness in the face of an unbearable sociopolitical and existential drama, fueled by impending doom and/or conflicts planted among us. According to Mark Fisher (2009), "the pandemic of mental anguish that afflicts our time cannot be properly understood, as a private problem suffered by damaged individuals." Until recently, I had not realized the potential of dance and music as practices of collective resistance, liberation, empowerment, political engagement and survival, under conditions of uncertainty,

frustration, and polarization. I now see that, especially through the aforementioned examples, dance and music – no matter if they take place in the streets, in traditional customs, in clubs or elsewhere, in daytime or night time – can arouse and regenerate dynamics of euphoria that free the spirit of self-determination, eroticism, and self-realization, serve as a catalyst for healing and emancipation, and create a protective shield from the stigmatization of everyday life. They are driven by the need for connection with oneself and our social context, and generate a form of energy that, even in most urgent of situations, eliminates any possible distance and/or obstruction. Only

when our bodies in-
– totally free from
phoric feeling of
where trauma, sad-
failure are replaced
life, and (up)rising,
ground for utop-
c r i t i c a l

tertwine and coexist
inhibition – the eu-
spring emerges;
ness, death, and
by hope, elevation,
forming a fertile
pian unities in
t i m e s .

ENDNOTES

1. When Konstantinos Konstantinidis, director of the Andrological Institute of Athens, presented his personal research in a TV show, he stated that the statistical increase of sexual intercourse during summertime contributed dramatically in the rise of Covid-19 cases (Markezinis, 2020).
2. Refugee crisis, Golden Dawn trial, police brutality in public spaces, #metoo movement, demonstrations for artists' rights, destruction of the Moria refugee camp, protests against the implementation of laws that undermine the natural environment, femicides, destruction of forests, rain and snow blockades, armed conflicts and the likelihood of their escalation into a world war, increasing cost of living, etc.
3. This is a reference to the music ban in restaurants and bars (May and December 2021), *ToVIMA Team (2021): "Covid-19 – No music and standing in restaurants – Guidelines for New Year's Eve."* Link: <https://www.tovima.gr/2021/12/29/society/koronoios-xoris-mousiki-kai-orthious-i-esti-asi-ti-isxyei-gia-to-revegeion-tis-protoxronias>.
4. By using the word "spring," I refer not only to the improvement of the weather conditions, the rebirth of nature and the fertility of the land, but also to the concept of revolution as it has been attributed to the Spring of Nations (1848), the Prague Spring (1968), and the Arab Spring (2011).
5. The phallic folk festivals of antiquity were celebrated by animal breeders and farmers, as celebrations of the fertility in livestock and nature, and as an appeal to the god of fertility himself (Dionysus). They were collective and communal, while some of them mocked the sanctity of marriage using ancient phallic symbols.
6. The Vlach Wedding includes cultural events such as ritual dances, litanies, songs accompanied by the intense sounds of ancient musical instruments (*pipiza* traditional wind instrument and *dauli*, a small drum) and other festive yet theatrical practices, dedicated to the fertility of nature and man. The participants in the Vlachs' gatherings are all dressed in traditional costumes, except for the main performer who dances frantically wearing *katsaria* tied to his white socks, footwear reminiscent of ancient sandals, and ivy branches on his head, as a reference to the satyrs of antiquity. They all dance across the city streets following a circular route, passing through areas of special importance to the locals, and end up at the central square for the closure of the ceremony.
7. Lykesas A. (2021). "As decided by Lina Mendoni, there is no Vlach language!," *I Efimerida ton Syntakton*, Athens.
8. "...[T]he ecstatic rapture, which rises up out of the same collapse of the principium individuation is from the innermost depths of a human being, indeed, from the innermost depths of nature, then we have a glimpse into the essence of the Dionysian, which is presented to us most closely through the analogy to intoxication. Either through the influence of narcotic drink, of which all primitive men and peoples speak in their hymns, or through the powerful coming on of spring, which drives joyfully through all of nature, that Dionysian excitement arises; as it intensifies, the subjective fades into complete forgetfulness of self.self" (Nietzsche 2008).
9. Cross-dressing can be found in various celebrations honoring god Dionysus and many theatrical texts, such as Euripides's *The Bacchae* and Aristophanes's *Thesmophoriazusae*, *Ecclesiazusae*, and *Lysistrata*.
10. "For example, public space was not available to everyone. If you happened to be a shepherd, you were not allowed to sit in the central tavern under the plane tree. This temporary reversal of roles and the loosening of morals was very important" (Evangelos Karamanes, director of the Hellenic Folklore Research Center of the Academy of Athens).
11. A public intervention that took place on December 15, 2019, spread in various locations of Athens (starting from Thiseio and ending in front of GADA in Ambelokipoi) against rape, femicide, transphobia, racism, and police brutality, in response to call from the Athens Museum of Queer Arts (AMOQA).
12. For a view of the Oistrogones' street action, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JlmfG326l6c>.
13. Oistrogones' cover of Alkistis Protopsalti's *Benzinadiko*, on the occasion of Hatzidakis's environmental legislation <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uyNqUZH8oiA>, and a song by Kaiti Garbi https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oX-QJ-IZn_4Q.
14. "It's a sign of our times. In 2008, you couldn't even consider throwing a street party. It wasn't a serious action, politically speaking. No one could suggest something like that. Now, we are strong enough to exist in the streets. Back then, we would be considered ridiculous. There is a great need for this. It's no wonder that new people get actively involved. There's a great need for exaltation" (Oistrogones 2021).
15. "When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives" (Lorde 2017, 25).
16. "When we started, we wanted to create something that would make us feel at ease, to be openly queer and have a good time. We had never imagined where the combination of hardcore dance music and performing arts could lead us to!" Alex Aravantinos, founding member of B L N K. B L N K was founded by students of the Athens School of Fine Arts and operated as a cultural platform dedicated to curating, producing, and creating artistic events.

17. "Club culture cannot be described as a unitary culture but rather as a set of subcultures that share a territorial affiliation and maintains their own dress codes, dance styles, musical genres, and a catalog of authorized and illicit rituals (...) by taking part in the culture of the clubs, we build affinities, where the socialization of its participants within a knowledge (and a belief), (...) allows us to perceive the senses and the values of the culture" (Thorton 1995, 200).

18. "Queer is the cohesion of everything in conflict with the heterosexual capitalist worlds. Queer is a total rejection of the regime of the normal" (Nardini Gang 2018).



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MARE SPANOUDAKI

Mare Spanoudaki is a researcher and curator who works in broad arenas that relate to social movements, identity politics, folk and popular culture, institutional critique, communality, archive management, and exhibition studies. Her education includes a BA in Communication, Media and Culture from Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, an MA in Cultural Policy and Management from City (University of London) and an MRes in Exhibition Studies from Central Saint Martins (University for the Arts London). She is actively involved with the production and organization of cultural events, and has curated community projects and contemporary art exhibitions in Greece, the UK, and Germany, both online and offline. She has been a fellow of the *Start – Create Cultural Change program* (2017–2018) and is an awardee of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF) Artist Fellowship Program (2019–2020). Since 2017, she is co-founder of the two-person female synergy This is not a feminist project. Currently, she is a member of Mophradat, an organization that creates opportunities for artists from the Arab World. She is an amateur photographer and dj, and a collector of archival material and vinyls.

EP & EPJ

Enterprise Projects is an Athens-based project, run by curator Danai Giannoglou and artist Vasilis Papageorgiou. This venture aims at experimenting and conversing; experimenting with the curatorial proposal, artistic creation, self-organized function, and conversing with the local artistic scene, the Athenian audience, and the very place that houses the project. As a structure, Enterprise Projects has been functioning independently and periodically since September 2015 in Ampelokipoi, Athens.

In 2018, Enterprise Projects founded *EP Journal*, a publishing initiative in the form of an online publication of newly commissioned theoretical and research essays, in both Greek and English. The reader can browse through the journal online, and download or print individual issues, communicated by a design that resonates with each commission's subject matter.

ARTWORKS

ARTWORKS was established in 2017 through the support of its founding donor, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF), and with the aim to create a fertile and nurturing environment for Greek artists through funding and public engagement opportunities. Through the SNF Artist Fellowship Program—its core activity—ARTWORKS awards monetary prizes to individuals artists and curators in recognition of their skills and qualifications. Apart from financial support, the organization offers access to skill sharing events and professional development tools, as well as networking opportunities with arts professionals through partnerships with cultural institutions and international artist residency programs. The goal is to create a dynamic alumni network, a support system for the Fellows that can function with care even after their participation in the Program.

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The text is dedicated to Theodore, Markos, Mitsos, Thanasis, Niki, Yiula, and Valia.

EUPHORIA

MARE SPANOUDAKI

One day, the sadness will end.
—Log Lady, *Twin Peaks*

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Text by MARE SPANOUDAKI Editorial Coordination by DANAI GIANNOGLOU
Translated from Greek/Proofread by GELI MADEMLI & ELEANNA PAPATHANASIADI
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