Engaged Art Education

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Introduction

Why did we start InSEA seminars and how did it work?

The world of art education has been concerned with the ongoing global issues such as poverty, climate change, cultural diversity, inclusion, migration, political radicalization, marginalization, artificial intelligence, digitalization, posthumanism, eco-justice and post-colonialism. Although the field has been established as important subjects of school curriculum, the advocacy endeavors continue to take place all over the world. The advocacy attempts stem from the global financial crisis that threatens the funding for education, as well as the accountability that is connected with the market jeopardize the significance of the skills that an individual may develop when they engage in art practices. Eventually along with the advocacy attempts, a new interest arises for the usage of arts as a therapeutic and integration tool in marginalized communities (e.g. poor, immigrants, refugee communities). Also, an increased need rises about how education and arts education may support the cohesion of the society over the political radicalization.

Therefore art educators and other cultural workers are seeking for alternative modes of critique and collective action through the arts. This publication is an outcome of the InSEA seminar held during 16-18 July 2018 at the School of Early Childhood Education, Aristotle University in Thessaloniki, Greece. The roots for this seminar can be traced in events and actions created by art educators, artists and researchers from countries in the peripheral western south coast of Europe: The Iberian Peninsula, where the survival kit for art education was created by the members of the activist art education group C3. The group C3, coordinated by Cristina Trigo and Mª Jesús Agra-Pardiñas is an educational and artistic resistance cell proposing alternative ways for research and praxis in art education. The survival kit presented in the European InSEA congress in Lisbon 2015 suggested a slow pace way of living, promoting pauses and the creation of spaces to think/feel, to slow down, to restrain, and to make. The idea to start InSEA seminars followed the same logic: we wanted to create a possibility for encounters where art educators can be together, share their practices, inspire each other, and initiate conversations by making things together. Spaciousness was the main flavor of the event - we tried to offer not only counter-narrative to linear and goal oriented passes of time, but to create fertile intervals that sometimes provoke confusion, but also can be a potential for play, creation and learning.

Furthermore, it became a common sense to claim that knowledge production is certainly not neutral - the process is instilled with norms and values, which are being passed on through academic action. It is based on epistemologies that seek to confirm western hegemonic structures (Thielsch, 2019). Within the European framework, knowledge production is taking place in the “centres of Europe” reflecting the existing imbalance of power between East and West, North and South. What is considered to be socially engaged art education among scholars is often based on Western European concepts such as relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002) which is considered as a door-opener for community participation, collaboration and collective actions. The purposes of such efforts mirror the main European
values – participation, diversity, civic engagement and democracy, and socially engaged artistic practices are seeing as a possible catalyst for change, although sometimes being very costly and elitist projects. Furthermore, different events within the academic context are happening inside the logic of hegemonic knowledge production, and often they reproduce inequalities and confirm imaginary differences between European center and periphery. Not forgetting the relevance of symbolic realm, this is also a consequence of the huge disparity in available resources and support that academics and students receive within their context. Certainly, there are efforts to transcend those divisions by suggesting different conference fees for different countries depending on their GDPs, or offering bursaries for PhD students. Still, these measures did not manage to overcome inequalities and those events where discourses are produced and reproduced are still dominated by Western European institutions. As the organizations of the academic conferences is a very expensive endeavor, big events often take place in developed countries, making it even more unattainable to “the periphery”.

After the financial crisis hit Europe, austerity measures were introduced to Southern countries and their image was constructed as a kind of a teenager who was incapable of taking good care of the future, recklessly spending money guided by the principle of instant gratification. These European children were seen as “unable to organize their lives democratically without guidance from another” (Buden [2009] in Petrović, 2014, p. 10). The somewhat infantilized representational position, transforms these geographical areas into objects of knowledge production. “The role of the periphery is to supply data, and later to apply knowledge in the form of technology and method. The role of the metropole, as well as producing data, is to collate and process data, producing theory (including methodology) and developing applications which are later exported to the periphery” (Connell, 2014, p. 211). The Balkan region specifically is constructed as a field of study: Yugoslav studies, post-communist studies, post-conflict etc., thus making a geographical area into a research one without agency.

Other European countries can also be part of the peripheral map, specially when we talk about art education. Models of cultural agency, education and art education coming from North Europe and North America had been a great influence upon curriculum development, teacher training and research in art education. The global art education landscape is characterized by the centrality and certain invisibility of geographically marginal practices and knowledge mainly because of the dissemination of academic publications in English language in journals with high impact factor, texts that are largely distributed in universities. A rush for number of quotations and publications with ‘impact factor’ is undermining the universities; carrying out a multinational business model of distributing information. Maybe is time to start to react against the model.

Another interesting factor is related to the places and types of congresses and conferences art education researchers use to attend. Normally in universities of Northern countries with very traditional formats of displaying information such as lectures by keynote speakers, presentations by participants and some workshops. Even if in the InSEA European congresses from the last eight years we can observe a move to more dialogic formats, we still need to enlarge the focus, the scope and the places.

We urge to consider how academic praxis and intellectual work produces place and what kind of critical-creative endeavor is needed as a counter action. Therefore, we see the seminar Research and practice of socially engaged art education as a proactive response to hegemonic knowledge production as we tried to take into account social, political and geographical context of knowledge making, talking, and writing. The seminar took place in Thessaloniki with the
attempt to create space for gathering and sharing that was organized beyond regular conference logic that follows rigid structure. The model of the seminar was dialogical and non-hierarchical, including interactive sessions where everyone had an active role, workshops and performances reminded us the crucial role of the body interaction in communication. Making things together, walking together, performing together removed participants from their comfort zones of written and spoken languages creating spaces for emotional conversations. Due to the small size of the seminar the dialogue was fruitful and everyone got connected overcoming linguistic difficulties and cultural differences. In the difference we reached connections and constructed links. We were able to be attentive to the small details, to perceive the subtle varieties of art education in its many forms and contexts, without judging from the academic gaze, but trying to understand through the slow pace of making together the small nodes of collective actions.

‘As long Thessaloniki exists; everyone will have a homeland’ wrote the Byzantine scholar Nikiphors Choumno in 14th century. The majority of the participants came from Balkan and Mediterranean regions, but the seminar in Thessaloniki also welcomed people from some Northern European countries, Brazil and Japan. The InSEA seminar took place at a crossroads of social transformation throughout history. Since ancient time Thessaloniki invited and offered shelter to many different groups and communities that eventually flourished. As a consequence these circumstances gave prominence to the significance of its location. In our days, Thessaloniki is still a solidarity center even if it has suffered from the contemporary financial crisis. The topic and content of the seminar was a response to a contemporary need for collaboration and creative exchange in Balkan and Southern Europe in order to foster interdependence of the several communities and prevent hostility.

*Why socially engaged art education?*

Contemporary artists have been eliminating the boundaries between the arts and the audience, creating relational forms for human communication and knowledge construction. They opened up completely different perspectives on levels of interaction between things and people proposing diverse roles for the arts in the society and providing tools that can be most useful in educational settings involving image, sound and movement as ways of knowing and interconnecting people. Globalization phenomenon caused a sense of fragmentation, loss of social bonds and alienation in many population groups in the world. Engaged artists believe that close working relationships among artists, arts organizations, and the broader community enable better living conditions for all and create a more sustainable environment for the arts, claiming a return to a social function of the arts and a non compromised role of the artist in the society. Some cultural workers point out the need to merge art in collective experiences often performative and political. Activist movements are growing in all the continents, raising critical interventions, provoking situations and creating collective situations to raise urgent issues and polemical questions that are often hidden by the hegemonic media discourses. In its many variations, such as “relational art,” “participatory art,” “community art,” or “socially engaged art,” these manifestations often facilitate collective situations and promote greater participation and cultural agency (Emmelhainz, 2016).

Socially engaged arts education (SEAE) began as a pedagogical direction which purposes the civil engagement of participants. Whether it takes place in educational institutions or in the community, the evaluation of the projects depends on the ethical responsibility on the social concerns that the members of the action undertaken. In educational settings and especially in
public schools the aim is to shape the students' civic role. Arts are seen as a means to enrich the experience of the participants with playful and creative ways. Yet, the interdisciplinary character of the SEAE is obvious in order to foster a dialogue and a direct social change. Whether this is only a short-term change, marking the difference with the goals of traditional politicized art, or a more enduring and influencing process, time will tell (Emmelhainz, 2013). The processes usually include collaborative and interdependent activities that make visible the individual perspectives and how the location affects the critical responses and thinking. As a consequence a sense of “community” is created through the elimination of conflicts that the SEAE evoked. Further, SEAE evokes a radical reappraisal of the modes, purposes and context of arts education. Schlemmer (2017) draws the pedagogical implications of Socially Engaged Art practice that foster a hybridized space beyond formal instructions. Art practice is encountered as an educational experience and vice versa. The critical and reflective actions as perquisites of an educational space become traits of art practices that are formed through an aesthetic process.

The participants

The seminar attracted many valuable contributions, also from other regions than the Balkan and the Mediterranean regions, but the majority of the articles submitted for this publication were from the latter. The focus on the Balkan and Southern European countries in this seminar gave space to certain topics to appear in the fertile intervals. Some might also appear in other places, others are site-specific.

Public space is seized by art education, stimulating energies and possibilities that sprout from the locations and, if needed, giving people alternatives to respond to a dominant way in which space is organized. In Czech Republic the grassroots art association Trafajka (2006-2014) initiated street art activities for young people and worked together with teachers to pass on techniques. This led to the new concept of ‘Public Pedagogy’, as noticed by Kamila Karagavrilidisova. In Serbia installations in the form of windows or portals were put in public space inviting people to paint their vision. Jelena Joksimovic explains that the aim is to express and then combine different feelings and understandings of educational practices. Vanja Zarić and other students of adult education at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade reveal that socially engaged art in liminal spaces has a great potential to initiate the transformation of individuals through the processes of participation and learning, as well as social practice and reality itself.

The senses play traditionally an important role in art education and in the Thessaloniki seminar the use of senses was stimulated in a specific way. They caused individuals to be more aware of the body and its surroundings. Antonio Félix Vico Prieto presents the idea of “turning vision into sound” which involves a technique of recording audio that reproduces the real conditions of human hearing, to show how a visual image may be transformed into a soundscape. María Lorena Cueva Ramírez presents ‘My hands tell you’, a practical proposal to work with hands, gestures and paint to get the message across. Her workshop has benefit from the cultural and linguistic diversity of the participants. Without oral language they are able to communicate messages, concepts or sensations to other people only using colors and hands. Another way of communicating without speech was developed by María-Isabel Moreno-Montoro, María Martínez-Morales and Nuria López-Pérez, in a system of body expressions. Ideograms that represent concepts are proposed in a performative act with a technical basis of action and documentary recording. Also Katia Pangrazio shows art as a common language in the project ‘Art
Lab x Kids’. The project was developed in Italy but the aim is to create a “travelling place” of creativity and knowledge, experimentation, discovery and learning through play. It is a place for educational meetings, training and collaboration. A space to develop the ability to observe with eyes and hands and to learn to experience reality with all the senses.

Myriam Romero Sánchez, reviews the dualism of standardized and real beauty and explores its socio-cultural consequences. She makes a distinction between divergent bodies and convergent bodies and then she explores those typologies with a large installation with an empty face in which the participants may temporarily transform. Melissa Lima Caminha uses embodied inquiry that is based on feminist and queer theories in order to uncover perspectives of the social construction of gender and sexuality. Combining video and photography with drawing made it possible for María de la Paz Barrios Mudarra to carry out artistic investigation of daily experience. With those means, sensations you have while doing routine actions in your house can be intensified as in the work ‘Invisible Woman’ is shown.

*The artistic, nature, ecology and the social* came together in new projects in Spain and Brazil. Carmen Andreu-Lara, and Rocio Arregui-Pradas describe a new Masters degree of Art at the University of Seville intertwining ecology, art and social contexts, as in the concept of ‘ecosophy’ by Guattari. The authors acknowledged the connections created by Spanish, Moroccan and Latin-American students in their curriculum. In Brazil Rosana Gonçalves da Silva also involves ecology in social contexts of learning - a tripolar process of self-learning, learning from others and learning from the earth expressed in Poetic language to raise the principles of the Earth Charter. In a public elementary school located in Brasilia she developed an experience of artistic ecoeducation/ecoformation and sensitive experience in school routine.

In Cyprus and Greece, socially engaged art education is also about war and refugees. Spyros Koutis started his artistic research dealing with war from a personal question: what is my responsibility as an artist in regard to war? With use of ‘Agnostic arts practice’, a form of arts based research, which explores the potential of art to have political impact through process of disruption, subversion, and participation, he developed socially engaged art projects-workshops related to Syrian war and refugees. He carried out the projects with children at a primary school and with young adults at the Birmingham City University.

Martha Christopoulou describes the project “depictions of a refugee’s journey” which aimed at (i) enabling primary school students to critically assess information provided by the mass media (ii) enhancing their understanding of empathy and (iii) increasing compassion and empathic behaviour towards distant strangers who face extreme circumstances in their lives. All the students that participated in this project managed to locate, identify and label the different facets of migrant-refugee crisis, in a way that was meaningful for them.

*Cultural regional traditions* often are defended in war contexts with different population groups. In this seminar very interesting art educational projects were organized concerning local community and cultural traditions. Maria Letsiou describes socially engaged art education (SEAE) in which the primary goal of art learning is students’ involvement with the community’s concerns and issues. She delineates how studio-oriented learning is enriched by the collaborative learning experience and by students’ meaningful participation in the process and content of learning. Antonia Batzoglou describes practical applications of the praxis of Mythagorgia: an interdisciplinary praxis that draws from mythology, the educational art of psychagogia, as defined by Socrates, and the therapeutic and reflective qualities of performative storytelling. Socrates describes psychagogia as the educational art of leading the psyche towards dialectical examination of the good. In mythagorgia, myths are the tools that
enable an embodied experience and dialectical reflection of social and personal themes. Ismini Sakellariadi presents the results of a project carried out by 15-year old students of the Experimental School of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, who used art to research and communicate a new understanding of their cultural identity and history. They looked at the way the past permeates the present in various ways, studied the multicultural past of their city and discovered untold stories. They then proceeded to communicate their artwork and their findings with the wider community, hoping to help bring about change in attitudes and beliefs regarding history, identity, minorities, multicultural symbiosis, human rights and social justice.

Conclusions and recommendations

Some of the topics, or parts of them, that appeared in this seminar, could also be discussed in Western-European conferences. But the focus on Balkan and Southern-European countries shed a light to different aspects. This publication brings up so many voices, different tunes, different colors but the same concern: education through art, an approach to arts in education that although old - Herbert Read seminal book ‘Education Through Art’ was published in 1943 - is still relevant. More than ever we need to believe in the power of the arts as a tool for making collective actions, as a pedagogical strategy to enable cultural participatory skills. Maybe we are witnessing a recession of arts in schools, we see that art education is not as valued as it was in the twenty century. But through the voices and stories of this book we can look further and embrace the different places where education may be art and art may became education.

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MYTHAGOGIA

Abstract:

The essay presents the methodological premises and practical applications of the praxis of Mythagogia: an interdisciplinary praxis that draws from mythology, the educational art of psychagogia, as defined by Socrates, and the therapeutic and reflective qualities of performative storytelling. Socrates describes psychagogia as the educational art of leading the psyche towards dialectical examination of the good. In mythagogia, myths are the tools that enable an embodied experience and dialectical reflection of social and personal themes. A performative workshop based on Mythagogia took place during the three-day seminar of InSea at Thessaloniki 16-18 July 2018.

Keywords: Myth, psychagogia, self-reflection, adult education, improvisation

Standing by the seafront looking out to the horizon, Thessaloniki was wondering if the rumors for her half-brother’s death, the world famous Alexander the Great, were true or not.

Thessaloniki was a Macedonian princess, the daughter of King Philip II of Macedon and later the wife of King Cassander who built and named a city after her. A city that gained its fame throughout the years and remains till now as important as in antiquity. The famous Alexander the Great was an older half-brother who was often away completing quests, conquering new worlds or fighting wars. The legend says that during his quest for the fountain of eternal youth, Alexander brought back home a flask of the sacred water in which he washed Thessaloniki’s hair. One day however, when he was again away conquering new lands, Thessaloniki accidently spilled the sacred water not knowing if her brother ever taste it or not.

When rumors for Alexander’s death reached her, Thessaloniki, grief-stricken was passing her days looking out at the sea and waiting for a sign that her brother is alive. Once, her grief overtook her and tried to end her life by jumping into the sea. But the gods took pity on her, or perhaps the sacred water performed its magic, and instead of drowning, she was transformed into a mermaid. Since then it is said that Thessaloniki swims the Greek waters
during the centuries and passes judgment on the mariners. When a ship comes across her, she would ask: “Is Alexander the king alive?” To which if the sailors answer that “He lives and reigns and conquers the world”, she would allow the ship to sail away safely and even aid their trip swimming along and singing. But any other answer would awaken her raging grief, and her tears will raise the waters of the sea into mighty waves sinking the ship and every man on board.

Using this myth as a tool, I offered an experiential workshop of the praxis of Mythagogia during the InSea seminar this July 2018 at the city of Thessaloniki, north of Greece. The myth was chosen for its immediate relevance with the city, addressing both a mythological and topographical reference of the past, the present and the future of the site.

Undoubtedly, a praxis is constantly developing being informed by both its theoretical framework and its practice. Likewise, this time, I facilitated the workshop following a well-studied and researched methodology while at the same time, the interdisciplinary and multicultural qualities of the participants enabled new learning and discoveries. The workshop happened on the last day of the seminar and thus, the established familiarity allowed the group of participants to be open and playful in their explorations and responses to my suggestions. Consequently, this openness fed my reflections and thoughts afterwards. Through this piece of writing, I intend to shed light on both my methodology and my reflections afterwards.

The practice

For those readers who were not present, a brief description of the performative workshop may support the theoretical analysis of this writing. And for those whose soma and psyche were involved during the performance, these words may highlight my objectives and methodology.
Firstly, the duration of the workshop was agreed for 90 minutes and I have arranged with the committee to start in the provided studio but then to move with the participants outside, in a quiet and shadowed area of the university. The change of location from indoors to outdoors was chosen in order to connect physically and viscerally with the city of Thessaloniki while engaging with her story.

After introductions and a brief description of my work, we started indoors in a standing circle moving simply in order to awaken the breath and the body. The image of water was introduced asking the participants to each perform a hand movement related to water while the rest of the group copied it. Following that task, each one of us invented a physical way to “pass” around the circle an imaginary quantity of water that could alter in shape, quantity, quality and texture. No words were used leaving the movements and the imagination to lead the communication amongst the participants. With my guidance, the collective imagination of the water expanded in order to “fill” the room. People were invited to move freely in the space imagining that they are surrounded by water; that they are held by water; and that they are water themselves; bodies of water moving with the qualities of water. The sustained movements created the impression of a water dance where everyone was attuning in similar flow. The water was introduced as a symbol relevant and central to the story and because of its resonance with feelings and emotions. Furthermore, the water is often associated with the unconscious and its mysteries. The focus on the body and the absence of words prepared the group for the desired concentration and psychological attunement in order to collaborate easily for an improvised performance. Indeed, it was observed that the group maintained a sustained physicality, concentration and a sense of depth in both their personal explorations and interactions. Silence was respected and experienced without force offering a common ground of being together.

A selection of rhythmical and natural instruments were introduced and explored initially in the room before choosing one individually and going outside. Without losing the gained synchronisation, we exited silently and recreated the circle in the allocated outside space where we continued exploring both the musicality of the instruments and of our voices. When sounds and singing stopped and silence was regained, I narrated the story. Participants listened attentively and afterwards shared their impressions from it as suggested. The improvisation of the story focused on a agreed theme extracted from the story and thus, the group used movement, instruments, vocal sounds and speech to explore it. The closure of the performance took place outdoors and then we gathered again the instruments in order to return back in the studio to conclude the performative workshop. Participants were invited to reflect on their personal relevance to the story and more
specifically, to write their own question; perhaps something that lingers in their minds after the three days of the seminar. This one personalised question from each participant mirrored Thessaloniki’s question and legend. Furthermore and since there is not statue of her in the city, a white face mask was provided in order to fill it in with questions in many languages. This modern representation and sculpture of the mermaid Thessaloniki was later in the day placed by the seafront where we agreed that it belonged to as a way to honour both her myth and our experience with it.

The methodological lens

*Mythagogia* is a made-up word, a compound of the words *mythos* and *agogy* and it is based on the educational concept of *psychagogia* as introduced by Socrates. Very simply, it suggests an experiential use of myths for education. Its praxis highlights the use of storytelling, performative acts and sensory stimulation for an on-going process of education through the arts. It is a praxis that seeks to produce a reflective and interactive process of learning, thought, feeling and engagement in society.

In *mythagogia*, story is not examined in service of a narrative or through a specific category of thought analysis but rather as an active event that emerges in the place between one person and another in the way of *storying* (Batzoglou, 2017). *Storying* refers to the act of doing, practicing, moving, sounding, performing, imagining, feeling the story. It is not in the *what* of doing but more in the *way* of doing it; it is in the *how* that the practice is essentially and radically interdisciplinary within the context of Bryon’s methodology of *active aesthetics* (Bryon, 2014). The active aesthetic is embraced as a way to look at and examine the interdisciplinary dialogue of education and art, not as a series of combined rules and techniques but within the act of doing and specifically from the position of the practitioner.

Etymology

As mentioned above *mythagogia* was invented and inspired by the concept of *psychagogia* as introduced by Socrates. The word *psychagogia* derives from the ‘ancient Greek ψυχαγωγός = psychagogue that is found and defined by the following entries in the Oxford English Dictionary:

1. conjuring up the dead, (noun) a necromancer, leader of the departed souls
   – as said of Hermes
2. a person who directs the mind; a teacher, an instructor and
3. a medicine that restores consciousness or revives the body
Etymologically, the word is a compound of the words psyche and agogy meaning leading or guiding [as in pedagogy]. In modern Greek, the term psychagogia is translated in English by the words “recreation, entertainment and amusement” (Collins Greek-English Dictionary, 2003). In my praxis, I argue for the application of the ancient Greek word because although entertainment and amusement entice the meaning of an “action of upholding or maintaining; of occupying (a person's) attention agreeably; of an interesting employment; of amusing, or a thing done to amuse” (O.E.D) do not reflect any aspect of the words psyche, guidance or education. Specifically, it does not translate any relevance to the meaning of the word psychagogia as in Socrates’ philosophical teachings. (Batzoglou, 2012)

Mythos is central to theatre as developed in ancient Greece and its aims alongside amusement were to educate, to raise questions and thoughts about ethos and morality and to express ideas. For that reason, in ancient Greece the performance of a dramatic play, especially of tragedy, was called didaskalia – meaning instruction - and so the spectators, on leaving the theatre, had gained awareness from witnessing a theatrical piece. In that context theatre was psychagogia, meaning the education or cultivation of psyche by guiding the spectator toward reflection and critical thinking. Aristotle declares tragedy as the greatest form of psychagogia (τά μέγιστα, οίς ψυχαγωγεί ή τραγῳδία) and highlights myth as the most important agent through which tragedy serves as psychagogia (Aristotle, Poetics 1450a33).

When Aristotle mentions theatre as the highest form of psychagogia, he is borrowing the term from Socrates who uses it in reference to philosophical and ethical teachings about education. Psychagogia is the central theme in Plato's Phaedrus where rhetoric is associated with the Socratic conception of education as 'soul-leading' or guiding the psyche. According to Muir (2000) it means the educational art of leading the psyche towards the "good", providing an account of the way in which the individual is drawn toward dialectical examination of the "good" (Muir, 2000). More specifically, Muir explains that the text:

“[P]rovides a unified argument concerning rhetoric and philosophy, which are false and true psychagogia respectively (Phaedrus 271d), and their relation to education. Central to this argument is Plato's examination of the relative merits of speech writing and dialectic as means to achieve true psychagogia, and the roles of Love (or Eros), knowledge, and the criterion of truth in such "soul-leading." (Muir, 2000: 234)
Socrates’ intention is to use the conception of truth as a starting point of examining what is “good”; concerning both the educator and the student. Furthermore, he integrates three components of psychagogia: love, the psyche and psyche’s desire for ‘good’. We should consider here that the Greek language distinguishes at least four different ways as to how the word love is used: agape, eros, philia, and storge. For example, the word philia is the first component in philosophy meaning love for wisdom and knowledge. Psyche’s love and desire for ‘good’ suggests being a pursuit of knowledge, knowledge that comes from within the individual rather than given from an external authority. However, our opinions and choices about love, truth and “good” are according to Socrates, both relative to our level of knowing ourselves, according to his maxim “know thyself”. The variety of perception and depth depends on the individual but the most vivid experience of the ultimate goal of being in itself comes from engaging with other human beings and the recognition of their qualities.

For Socrates the dialectical relationship based on love between the educator and the student is of supreme importance for psychagogia. Muir (2000) takes this further by acknowledging what Plato recognises as the most important thing in educational terms:

“[T]he movement of two souls toward each other, and then together toward knowledge of the good, constitutes not only a binding friendship but also the process of mutual education of the two friends. This mutual education culminates, ultimately, in these friends’ participation in the philosophical (and according to Socrates, the best) life.” (Muir, 2000: 240)

These ideas reflected on the art of storytelling, recognise myths and theatre as an absolute art of speech and movement that in a compelling and convincing way try to persuade its audience for the good and truth of what is being represented. Furthermore, we could draw parallels between the relationship of theatre with therapy. Meaning that the myth provides the archetypal scenario and space to project personal stories, feelings and references. Thus, both the act of witnessing and engaging with the myth personally motivate the psyche subsequently corresponding to psychagogia. This correspondence can become therapeutic and reflective pursuing the “good” or “truth” for self-development.

We know, that in antiquity the relationship between myths, theatre and therapy was established in the sanctuaries of health dedicated to the god of healing, Asclepius. There the value of myth’s therapeutic qualities and the role of the theatre within the community were recognised as an art form that corresponds to the health of psyche and soma as an
inseparable union. In the sanctuaries of Asclepius, myths, movement, voice, theatre and dreams are employed to promote the amplification of self-awareness and thus healing.

Undoubtedly there is an archaic interplay where the two disciplines of psychology and performance meet, collide or co-exist. My very praxis has its own interdisciplinary dialogue between performance and psychology/therapy as these two disciplines influenced from early in life my way of learning, my thinking and my doing. After a history of study and work experience in both, this gained knowledge continues to develop and emerge through a dynamic and active process of interplay between the two. Myth and stories are positioned at the meeting point between psychology and performance where I witness the doing of my doing; what happens in the way of doing.

A story or myth is employed in my praxis not for the emphasis on narrative – logos - and the cognitive understanding of it. Neither, is story offering the literal scenario for a performance. Instead, this praxis explores the silent stories that our self communicates in the act of being and doing that go beyond the predetermining narrative. It reflects on what Todd (1937) stated in her book The Thinking Body:

‘Living, the whole body carries its meaning, and tells its own story – standing, sitting, walking, awake or asleep, pulling all the life up into the face of the philosopher or sending it all down into the feet of the dancer’ (Todd 1937: 295).

The engagement is singular and subjective; is in constant flow of changing and becoming offering a possibility for observation that is pregnant with meaning. From my perspective, this type of reflective engagement through an experiential approach to myths contributes to education. Consequently, mythagogia is the way of learning, reflecting, experiencing the self through the myth.

Furthermore, in this praxis performance appears or re-defines itself differently every time depending on the constitution of the participants and the wider context. Personally, I have an understanding of performance that varies from classical theatre productions to experimental devised performances based on auto/biographical narratives; to multisensory promenade storytelling in specific sites and the use of storytelling in performance training. The aesthetics may vary, however the way of doing is based on the same methodological principles. Most often the performance takes the shape of a dynamic amalgamation of improvisational actions and reactions. Individuals respond physically with actions, sounds or movements creating a collective improvisation. The improvisational
manifestations of these personal imprints of the myth create almost another story, or another interpretation of the myth. The meeting place between the personal stories and the performed one, I refer to as the act of *storying*. In *storying* we are exploring the process of the unconscious made conscious in the moment; the way that intangible elements do the “telling” or “making” or re-enacting or sharing of the story. The real merging is taking place between the personal and the imaginative, the mythical and so the collective. (Batzoglou, 2017)

**Reflections**

The aesthetics of the impromptu performance do not inflict the result or the experience of the work. The aim is never to create an artistically pleasing performance but instead to experience and engage with the myth in a personal and meaningful way. The participation does not satisfy an audience but it ‘offers an “educational” experience to the one who is involved. Therefore, the aesthetic result of the improvisation is not judged by theatrical, choreographical or musical terms. Nevertheless, I am aware that in a group of participants that includes artists a further attention to aesthetics could be given if that is desired. However, the significant section of the praxis is the last reflective one where participants are invited to reflect on their personal engagement and learning. More specifically, during the performative workshop at Thessaloniki, the reflective section involved the suggestion to create a personal question that can be written on the mask and thus, create a new symbolic artefact of Thessaloniki. The participants offered questions in their own languages that reflected their engagement with both the myth, their attendance at the three days seminar and their experience of the city of Thessaloniki. These were written on the white mask in different colours, sizes and languages. When I asked the group to decide on what to do with the final product of the mask covered with questions, participants concluded in positioning the mask near the great statue of Alexander the Great that is situated near the sea at Thessaloniki’s seafront. Somewhere there, watching the sea, Thessaloniki’s symbolic artefact lingers in time, space and imagination.
References:


Short biography

Dr Antonia [Tania] Batzoglou is an independent artist and researcher whose work merges storytelling, performance and dramatherapy. Her praxis focuses on sensory and emotionally engaging ways that performance can connect with specific audiences and participants and aspire social and personal growth. She has created multisensory promenade and site-specific performances for museums and historic palaces in the UK. Recently, she returned to Greece living and working in a place near the ancient site of Delphi. (t_batzoglou@hotmail.com)