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Laughter from Hades: Aristophanic Voice Today*

The current Greek political situation again brings to light, and on stage, many ancient dramas. Contemporary Greek theatre professionals, not turning a blind eye to reality, have come up with 'the revival' of old texts, staging them in new circumstances. Aristophaniad is an original play with a subversive content inspired by Aristophanes and a contemporary street graffiti reflecting contemporary Athenian life. It is a mixture of various comic and other dramatic elements, such as ancient comedy, grotesque, pantomime, musical, ballet, opera, standup, even circus. Additionally, staging methods developed by the Greek director, Karolos Koun (1908-1987) are also evident in the production. Idea Theatre Company, exploiting excerpts from Aristophanes' plays and starring the comedigrapher himself, manages to depict a fictional and real world in one. The performance starts with the rehearsal of Aristophanes' new play, Poverty, which is in danger of being left unfinished since Hades plans to take Aristophanes to the Underworld. The play ends with Plutus. In the meantime, the performance entertains its audience, leading them to experience Aristotelian catharsis through laughter. This collective 'purification' of the soul is supposed to be mediated by laughter and provoked by references to serious life issues, given in comic mode and through a vast range of human emotions. The article deals with those comic features and supports the thesis that in spite of the fact that times change, people never cease to fight for a better society. Ifigenija Radulović is an associate professor of Classics in the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Novi Sad. She deals with the reception of Antiquity in different historical periods and with ancient Greek rhetoric and drama as historical sources. Ismene Helen Radoulovits Petkovits holds a BA in English, MA in Greek Philology and is writing a PhD thesis in Comparative Literature at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. She translates from Greek/English into Serbian and Croatian and vice-versa, and collaborates with many Greek and Serbian Theatres on modern adaptations of the classical repertoire.

Keywords: Aristophanes, *Aristophaniad*, contemporary life, Hades, laughter/*spoudaiogeloion*, philosophical theatre, politics, poverty, reality

The ritual context, religious foundations, and poetic expression of ancient tragedy¹ and comedy make their staging quite a difficult task, because modern theatre is predominantly a secular institution. Purists often find numerous objections to contemporary staging of ancient dramas, maintaining that both the poetic dimension of the original texts and the genuine poetic messages are lost.² On the other hand, ancient texts cannot remain petrified, mere museum relicts, to be understood only by the masters of the Ancient Greek language who understand the historical circumstances of the play, the characters involved, and the mythological or historical context. Yet, due to this alienation and disconnection from the ancient circumstances, later manuscript copyists could not understand the various political allusions and real-life characters of Aristophanes' comedies, all of which were written for a single performance and referred to quite specific political momentum; that is why they gave priority to comedies of the Middle and New Attic periods. It was only in the 1960s that Aristophanes' comedies were 'rediscovered' as inspirational poetic material suitable for contemporary socio-political satire and critique.³

Staging Aristophanes' comedies, either in the form of classical performances or their adaptations, was never an easy task, quite probably, even in antiquity, when Aristophanes personally 'directed' his own plays, two thousand five hundred years ago. Being a genuine artist, highly sensitive and creative, intelligent and profoundly moral – a divine poet of his time, immersed in the *Weltschmerz* – Aristophanes must have felt obliged to write something witty and didactic, thus daring to address the most prominent and most influential people of an elitist society, as was democratic Athens at the end of the 5th and the beginning of the 4th century BC. Harsh times always require extraordinary and bold individuals. We propose that nowadays things are not so different and that they have not changed radically in the last 2,500 years. Aristophanes was recently revived at an Athenian theatre, by means of a completely new and unusual adaptation titled *Aristophaniad*. No one remained indifferent.⁴

Aristophanes never ceased to dwell in Greek society. Greek people never lost possession of the Aristophanic spirit which helps them face reality through laughter. The reason that the Theatre of the Absurd could never thrive in Greece is that in Greece, life itself seems to be more absurd than any theatre. For foreigners and tourists who visit Greece, it is the land of the seaside, of the summer sun, of great cuisine; decades ago, it was the land of Nescafe Frappe, and today of espresso freddo-coffee, in short of many tasteful delights – of pleasure in general. Nevertheless, the daily news we keep on hearing for many long years speaks of a different place. It is a place where life is difficult, where it is hard to earn and live, where many new refugees seek their place under the sun, while the old ones have not yet found their own and settled down. It is the place of rich ship magnates and cunning politicians, demagogues and newcomers of all kinds, as well as of ordinary people. After having hardly recovered from the bitter civil war (1946-1949, often considered the first proxy war of the Cold War), followed by the dictatorship (1967-1974), and the

unsolved Cyprus crisis, ordinary people are once again hopelessly tangled in wage labour and the pre-Solonian debt,⁵ not to mention the resulting crisis of neoliberal austerity measures imposed within a ruthless global financial framework. All this explains why this place and its citizens are desperately craving for *seisachtheia* (cancellation of debts), once again in their history,⁶ and why Aristophanes never ceased to be contemporary in Greece.

In this respect it is noteworthy that in post-WWII Athens, Aristophanes' comedies were well-known from theatrical stagings by Karolos Koun, which helped form the contemporary audience for Aristophanes.⁷ Karolos Koun was a Greek refugee of Jewish origin from Asia Minor. It is extraordinary that during the German occupation of Greece in 1942, he founded the Art Theatre⁸ in hunger-stricken Athens and promoted progressive modern Greek writers such as Kampanelis, Anagnostakis, Kechagias, Skourtis, Mourselas and Armenis, as well as the global trends of the time, including Shakespeare, Ibsen, Beckett, Chekhov, Miller, Ionesco, Max Frisch, Weiss and Pinter. Koun was to become famous for his staging of Aristophanes' comedies,⁹ an activity he started in 1929 while still a lecturer at the American College of Athens. In 1959, at Herod the Attic's theatre, *Birds* was produced for the Athens Festival, but it was banned by the Greek authorities since they reacted vigorously to its content and socio-political criticism. Nonetheless, the political situation in Greece did not hinder this play's award-winning path and it received excellent reviews at the Paris theatre festival the same year. Along with productions of ancient tragedy, Koun continued to direct and produce Aristophanes' comedies. What links his comedies to *Aristophaniad* is the 'popular' spirit,¹⁰ which is inherent in Greek customs and performances,¹¹ and "a living popular language that would revive the spirit of the ancient play, producing an experience that could engage his present-day audience."¹² Elements of 'Koun's Aristophanes' were successfully recaptured at the *Cultural Olympiad* (the cultural prelude to the 2004 Athens Olympic Games), where, in the ancient theatre of Epidaurus, the powerful scenes and unforgettable moments from all Koun's stagings of Aristophanes were revived, produced and directed by Koun's students, Giorgos Lazanis and Kostas Kapelonis, under the title *Half century of Aristophanes*.¹³

Aristophaniad demonstrates that Aristophanes' play texts are always fresh, always relevant, representing an everlasting wisdom, like an ancient prophecy.¹⁴ The vigour which makes Aristophanes' plays relevant even today is reinforced by Thucydides' thesis that over time, regardless of whether we deal with centuries or millennia, human nature does not change at all – this is the very reason why events from the past can prove to be didactic today.¹⁵ Aristophanes is not only loved for the entertainment his plays offer – entertainment is a mere side effect. Aristophanes' modern-day significance is not confined only to "his continuing subterranean presence," but is "as well repeatedly rediscovered in arenas of entertainment."¹⁶ His plays and the modern productions of his texts are based on the contemporary satirical discourse, which is linked to political and social criticism. In the spirit of the ancient *spoudaiogeloion*, Aristophanes and his modern interpreters teach their fellow citizens how to become better citizens and ultimately better people. The language in

Aristophanes' plays is impulsive and uncompromising, and it is in this spirit that the *Aristophaniad* of the *Idea* Theatre Company was created and staged. Its premiere took place at the ancient theatre of Herodes Atticus in Athens, July 11, 2016.¹⁷

Composed of conglomerates of different scenic forms, such as ancient comedy, grotesque, pantomime, musical, ballet, opera, standup and circus, and with minimalist scenography, *Aristophaniad* enacts a deep plunge into Aristophanes' texts.¹⁸ The very title, *Aristophaniad*, refers to the structure of the play, which consists of fragments of all Aristophanes' surviving plays, carrying the message of a single play. The fragments are thematically interlinked in such a manner that they form a unified whole. Every fragment provokes laughter, but after a while, during the intermediate parts (which are usually musical), followed by the judgment on the fragment just performed, the audience regrets having laughed. This, in turn, is exactly what is at stake here: the very thinking and rethinking, which eventually leads to *catharsis*. This performance does not convey meanings at the level of the rational, decent, appropriate, pre-learned mechanisms of perception. It influences the audience in another, more profound and elemental way, engaging various kinds of feelings, like anger or rage, which awkwardly seems to bring about compassion, sympathy and empathy. It is primarily humanistic, in that it is about that little ordinary man who loves to rejoice when he is happy, who cries and yells when something hurts him, who loves his neighbour and wholeheartedly gives him what he wants in spite of his own poverty, but who sometimes tells a lie, who from time to time gossips, and who, after all, is an honest and decent person. In short, it concerns a man of flesh and blood who loves life and fights for it. It is a play that keeps all the senses awake, which positively charges its public and, clearly and plastically, with no blurred vision, conveys messages usually hindered from coming to the surface by the triumph of everyday routine. It does all of this in ways that are funny and dead serious at the same time.

In its short manifesto, the *Idea* Theatre Company reveals its agenda:

We are against postmodern aesthetics which, dominating our theatre for many long years and reducing performing arts to a succession of frigid, coded images and words, deprived our stages of emotions, leaving them without a truncheon of humanity and imagination. We believe that art should appeal on the basis of human relationships, that it should be full of compassion and truth [...] We are dreamers and we genuinely believe that in this 'virtual and viral' epoch of ours, theatre should create a vibrant, warm, pulsating and disturbing social fabric and, as such, should be engaged in the creation of a 'new world,' a brighter and a more secure one for everyone. Art is a lighthouse in a terrible storm that, in its very vortex, creates ethos, humanity, boldness, and strength to help us until the clouds break apart. If anything, art has to be solar, an experience of light.¹⁹

This elucidation is by no means crucial for those who are unfamiliar with Aristophanes' verse. On the one hand, it is crucial for traditionalists who stubbornly refuse to accept that modern Greek society of the last several decades has radically changed and now consists of groups of people with no Greek traditional upbringing

and education. Quite the opposite, the director is aware that modern Greek society consists of various groups of newcomers, from the former Eastern Bloc, refugees from Africa and migrants from Asia and the Middle East. That is why this modernised Aristophanes also includes different forms of entertainment which could easily be recognised and accepted by those recently integrated into Greek society. For all those who are well acquainted with Aristophanes, this is an unusual and bold attempt to interpret his work. Provided they are open to new experiences, every spectator could now be responsive to the intention of the manifesto of the *Idea* Theatre Company. In order to give an impression of how the *Idea* company conveys its meanings to the audience, some fragments from the *Aristophaniad* will be given in English translation, which in turn will help us further elaborate on the efficiency and modernity of the Aristophanic discourse today.

Quite strangely and unexpectedly, this comedy begins with the structure of an old Attic comedy: in the *Prologue* or the Introduction, one of the characters, Inspiration, informs us that Aristophanes has written a new comedy. Structurally speaking, at the very beginning of any ancient Attic comedy performance, we initially learn which moral and political notions are to be elaborated upon in the play.²⁰ In the case of *Aristophaniad*, Inspiration actually urges Aristophanes to make his contribution to the city of Athens, by means of writing a new comedy:

ἘΜΠΝΕΥΣΗ: γι αυτό...
Γράψε, γράψε, γράψε,
Σώλησε την πόλη σου,
Γράψε, γράψε, γράψε,
Μίλα για όλους εκείνους τους
Πολιτικούς...
Τους λαοπλάνους, τους δημαγωγούς.
Γραψε, γράψε...

ΑΡΙΣΤΟΦΑΝΗΣ: Παψε!

ΕΜΠΝΕΥΣΗ: Το ψέμα κάψε!

ΑΡΙΣΤΟΦΑΝΗΣ: Πάψε!

ΕΜΠΝΕΥΣΗ: Γράψε,
Τους κλέφτες θάψε,²¹
Γράψε!²²

(INSPIRATION: that's why...)
Write, write, write,
Save your city
Write, write, write,
Speak about all those
Politicians...

Destroy the deceivers of people, the demagogues,
Write, write, write...

ARISTOPHANES: Shut up!

INSPIRATION:
Burn the lies!

ARISTOPHANES: Shut the f...

INSPIRATION: Write,
Bury those thieves
And write!)²³

At this point a modified *agon* (a contest) ensues between Aristophanes and Inspiration, and also between Aristophanes and the actors, with whom he begins the rehearsals for his new comedy, *Poverty* (Πενία). During the rehearsal, Aristophanes, who is extremely annoyed, hits the ground so strongly that he provokes the arrival of Hades. This part already belongs to the *parabasis* (the intervention of the poet himself), and Hades, as a stand-up comedian who still remains unnoticed by the actors and Aristophanes, addresses the audience, while the poet is still arguing with his actors. Hades then freezes the scene, descends closer to the audience, 'recommends' the poet, whom he introduces, and explains his appearance:²⁴

ΑΔΗΣ: Ποίος με τα ποδοβόλητα του την πόρτα μου
Δονεί
Και με καλεί στο χωραφάκι μου τη Γη;
(...)
Κύριες και κύριοι λοιπόν, θέλω να σας πω
Μια ιστορία που όσο παλιά κι να είναι,
Μοιάζει καινούρια. Άλλωστε ο χρόνος είναι
Κάτι που εγώ ποτέ δεν μπορούσα ακριβώς να
Καταλάβω. Πολλοί κατέβηκαν στον κόσμο
Μου, άλλους τους κατέβασα εγώ, μα αυτό
Που θα γίνει ήταν απλώς μια παρεξήγηση.
Ο Αριστοφάνης και οι ηθοποιοί του
Χτύπησαν με τα πόδια τους τη γη στη
Πρόβα και γω το πέρασα για χθόνιο
Κάλεσμα...²⁵

(HADES: Who, indeed, by a kick of his leg is breaking my door?
Is calling me to Earth?
(...)
Ladies and gentlemen, I want to tell you a story which
Albeit an old-fashioned one, a modern one resembles.

I must say, it's about time: which I was never able to understand.
 Many came to the Underworld, some dragged down personally by me,
 But what happened then, a misunderstanding turned out to be.
 Aristophanes and his actors
 Hit the ground during the rehearsal
 Which I interpreted as a Chthonic,
 A cry profoundly universal...)

While the rehearsal continues, with the actors exchanging pantomimic signs indicating that Aristophanes must have gone mad, the character called Inspiration appears on stage just behind Hades in an attempt to clarify the situation, uttering words from different historical periods like the ancient *archon* (άρχων) and Turkish *effendi*:

ΑΔΗΣ: Αμάν, αμάν, πεθαίνω.
 Όχι, δεν μπορεί να συμβεί αυτό,
 Στου Δία κάθομαι το πλευρό,
 Αθάνατος είμαι κι εγώ.
 Έμπνευση σου χω πει χίλες φορές
 Από πίσω μην πλησιάζεις στα κρυφά!
 Αν και είμαι θεός
 Έχω ύπατα, νεφρά.

ΕΜΠΝΕΥΣΗ: Του κάτω κόσμου άρχοντα
 Και του Αχέροντα αφέντη...
 Είναι φανερό
 Χρειάζεσαι ενημέρωση και να λάβεις
 Γνώση,
 Ας μην χάνουμε λεπτό.
 Για του πάνω κόσμου την όψη
 Πρέπει κάποιος να σε κατατοπίσει.
 Αν στον κάτω κόσμο επικρατεί
 Συνωστισμός
 Λόγος και αιτία
 Δεν είναι ο Πόλεμος ο Πελοποννησιακός,
 Αυτός έχει από καιρό τελειώσει.
 Μα ήρθε του πολέμου ο λογαριασμός,
 Των μαχών τα δάνεια και οι τόκοι.
 Χιλιάδες οι αδύναμοι
 Από το άρμα της ζωής
 Ξεκαβαλάνε πρώτοι.

ΑΔΗΣ: Αυτοί χοροπηδάνε δυνατοί,
 Σαν να φάγανε στα κρυφά
 Μέλι, καρύδια και φακή.

ΕΜΠΝΕΥΣΗ: Τουαρσιτοφάνη είναι παραβολή.
 Στον κοινό να διδάξει
 Πώς να βρίσκουν τροφή
 Χοροπηδάν ψηλά
 Τάχα απ' του Δία το παλάτι
 Αποφάγια να τσιμπήσουν λιγοστά.

ΑΔΗΣ: Ωιμέ...
 Σίγουρα δυστυχή γεράματα
 Το έχουν με ορμή χτυπήσει
 Κι έχει αποτρελαθεί.
 Μα δίνουν οι θεοί φαΐ;²⁶

(HADES: Alas, alas, I am dying,
 But is it possible at all
 Zeus's Brother am I not,
 An immortal soul, or what?
 Inspiration, I told you before,
 I do not have a back door
 Although I am not poor at all
 Do not sneak behind me, so sadly
 For you are threatening my kidneys badly...)

INSPIRATION: Ruler of the Underworld, Oh you Mighty Master of Acheron,
 (...)
 Obviously, you need to be informed
 Of what up here is going on.
 What's that hustle and bustle all over the Underworld?
 The cause and the reason is not the Peloponnesian War,
 It is over and done long time ago,
 However, an invoice was received, the dose of
 The credits to be paid, for past battles, with merciless interest rates:
 Thousands of those poor off the wheel of fortune come,
 They are the first to go down...

HADES: As far as I can see they are jumping so fearlessly at odds
 As if they all secretly ate honey, walnuts and other food of the Gods.

INSPIRATION: It's just an adaptation of Aristo-fun
 Teaching the audience where the food is to be found,
 How to jump up, high as the Olympian woods
 In hope of getting some of the divine goods.

HADES: Oh, the poor man, unfortunately, is completely undone,
 It seems that by dementia severe damage to him has been done.

Who has ever seen that those mighty creatures
Would indeed provide people with honey and cream?!)

Hades starts singing as if he were in a musical. Then Aristophanes stumbles, falls and dies. In Hades (the Kingdom of the Dead), he is initially welcomed by the divine singer Orpheus who shows him around, continuing his master's musical performance. Aristophanes and his Inspiration try to convince Hades to bring him back to life for at least another week, until the beginning of the next Dionysus Competition in which he is to present his best work ever:

ΕΜΠΝΕΥΣΗ: Όχι, μια ευκαιρία πρέπει να του δώσετε,
Για μια φορά έναν θάνατο να ακυρώσετε!
(...)
Ακριβώς πρέπει οι πολίτες να
Αφυπνιστούν,
Γιατί ασφαλώς όλοι το ξέρουν, αλλιώς θα
Πρέπει να το μάθουν,
Ότι αν δεν ληφθούν μέτρα σωστά και
Δραστικά,
Θα βγούν τα δόρατα παιδιά και τα σπαθιά.
Γ' αυτό του Αριστοφάνη η ψυχή πρέπει
Στο σώμα να επιστρέψει
Και με έργο τολμηρό
Από τα χειρότερα τον κόσμο ν' αποτρέψει.²⁷

(INSPIRATION: One more chance to him should be given,
In order for some deeds to be forgiven!
(...)

INSPIRATION: Maybe you'd ask for a reason but,
You know, citizens should be released from the brain prison
Everyone knows, and if they know not, they need to hear it at once.
If they do not take severe measures and indeed very radical ones
There will soon be children warriors around, with razors and spears.
The soul of Aristophanes is to return to life this very instance
With a bold play to chase evil far away, to a safe distance.

Hades, finding this very interesting and entertaining, searches for the legal basis for such a procedure, because even he, the ruler of the realm of the dead, must follow certain rules:

ΆΔΗΣ: Ίσως στα κιτάπια βρω
Μια συνθήκη αραχνιασμένη,
Απ' τους αιώνες των αιώνων ξεχασμένη.
(...)
Εύρηκα, εύρηκα!

Μια υποσημείωση που παράθυρο ανοίγει
 Σε μια παράταση υωής.
 Αν ποιητής εν μέσω προβας πεθάνει,
 Εν προκειμένω σαν τον Αριστοφάνη,
 Έχει δικαίωμα παράσταση εδώ να στήσει,
 Προσπαθώντας τους νεκρούς να πείσει.
 Κι αν το πιο σκληρό ομόφωνη
 Απόφαση πάρει
 Στου ποιητή την ψυχή θα δώσει χάρη.²⁸

(HADES: Maybe in an old book, covered in dust and spiderwebs,
 In oblivion forgotten, some convention of old does dwell.
 (...)
 Eureka, Eureka...
 One footnote points out there is a possibility of extensions... to life.
 If a poet goes tits up in the middle of an act,
 As is the case of this one, who knows how to direct,
 And who performs a show for the dead in order to pervade,
 Curious to see if their dead souls he is still able to persuade.
 If in his favour decides this most audacious of all the auditoria,
 Life will be given back to him, and not to be spent in sanatoria.

Inspiration informs Aristophanes that Hades has agreed to give him back his life on the condition that he shares the richness of his comedies with a new audience, in a new light. And then, as the *Aristophaniad* unfolds before the eyes of the audience as a new play, it shows how vivid, imaginative, and up to date Aristophanes' comedies remain, and how vigorous their power to reveal reality still is.

Fragments from various comedies by Aristophanes are majestically mantled into a whole, matching one comedy to another, with allusions to parts of other plays (such as *Knights* and the *Acharnians*) appearing within the sequences of the relevant Aristophanes' play performed on stage:

ΕΜΠΝΕΥΣΗ: Χίλιοι να τον ανασύρουν δεν φτάνουν ιππείς.²⁹
 (INSPIRATION: Not even a thousand knights would be able to recover him.)

ΑΡΙΣΤΟΦΑΝΗΣ: Παρακαλώ, ακολουθώ.
 Οικόπεδο ψάχνω φθηνό
 Στα Ιλίσια πεδία.
 Χωρίς κορόιδο να πιαστώ
 Σπίτιγυρεύωεξοχικό.³⁰

(ARISTOPHANES: Oh, please, OK, here I go,
 A cheap land to find
 In the Elysian Plain of mine—³¹

Not to be a bloody fool
 A cottage to get as everybody would.)

What follows immediately afterwards are allusions that the Chorus's songs are mystics' initiation rites from the Eleusinian mysteries in the *Frogs*, as well as from other plays.

Aristophanes hesitates to start his performance. He almost loses it for a second, seduced by the song of the Underworld's blessed ones, those initiated into the mysteries while still alive. Then Hades brings him back to reality, demanding that he steps into "a life or death" battle with *Lysistrata* at once. Aristophanes is immediately engaged in a quest searching for the 22 phalluses, which he frequently uses in his comedies as powerful comic tools. Hades then announces the new propositions of the comical genre, full of conditions, which closely resemble the current political situation in bankrupt Greece, which is addicted to IMF and EU loans intended to pay previous debts. He is amused by his new role as a television persona. Every time Aristophanes says an inappropriate word, for example when he starts swearing like an ordinary Greek, we hear a 'beep.' At the end of each fragment from Aristophanes' sequences, representatives of dead souls appear; a judge, or a group of judges parade, giving their vote – 'Pro' or 'Contra' Aristophanes' life. These judges are characters from famous classical plays, Hollywood movies, pop culture and circus. *Lysistrata* gets a positive assessment from Oedipus, a classical tragedy character.

Full of energy, Aristophanes then continues with the *Birds*, a play which he himself characterises as his masterpiece. It is, by all means, the most fictitious and most imaginative of all Aristophanes' plays, featuring "silly aids to making projects, frivolous and beautiful constructions of air towers, accompanying the futile expectation of the promised land to be found here, on earth."³² This is a country without politicians, money and taxes. A country where citizens share all the common goods, a country where the gods (that is, those in power) would have to give in without receiving sacrifices. Unfortunately, the representatives of these progressive ideas, who were outcasts, made a coalition with the birds, and when they finally came to power, they became worse than the previous leaders in Athens, whom they criticised and fought against, in the same way that Tsipras' 'progressive' government became worse than the previous governments that ruled Greece for the last four decades.³³ Thus, the protagonists of the *Birds* could be identified with the politicians of the two most prominent contemporary political parties, who shared power during the last four decades and took enormous loans to finance infrastructure and other grand projects of their populist agenda. The criticism from the ancient *Birds* is perfectly applicable to the modern Greek bankrupt society. This notion is followed by allusions to those great infrastructure projects of the last two decades, undertaken all over Greece by construction and other large multinational companies. Hamlet, another classical hero, comes to give his verdict with his famous dilemma "to be or not to be"; the final decision is "not to be" and, of course, not in favour of Aristophanes.

Then follows yet another comedy, namely *Thesmophoriazousae*. Thesmophoriae were religious rites in which only women were allowed to participate. Men break this restriction in the play by disguising themselves as female swans. Consequently, these 'transvestite' swans then perform the famous Tchaikovsky ballet in the form of a grotesque. Instead of a black-into-white swan transformation, an allusion is made to the modern phenomenon of female politicians, who are expected to make this world a better place, when what they do, after all, is to behave in exactly the same way as their male counterparts would; then there are more allusions, to daily news about domestic violence, immorality, 'bimbos' and tabloid journalism. All these things extract a negative verdict from Rose and Jack of the famous Hollywood movie, *Titanic*, who are shouting 'Nooooo...', as they struggle to stay alive in the massive sinking disaster, which is recognisable to the audience as an allegory for a troubled state.³⁴

Charlie Chaplin, in the character of the Little Tramp, with his specific walk, is a very strict judge for the *Wasps*. He expresses his judgment as a chain of poetic images in a pantomimic trailer. In this sequence, a general impression of the modern legal system and bribery at courts is given. Lawsuits are shown as entertainment for individuals or the masses who are craving to consume more and more victims, thus reinforcing the ceaseless production of scapegoats. *The Acharnians* follow, depicting the current circumstances of the Greek state, such as the ceaseless succession of harsh austerity measures imposed upon Greeks by their creditors and the EU administrators, the tendency to depopulation, the trafficking of children, all framed by neoliberal, global capitalism, where almost everything is for sale. It is quite a parade of fake patriots and alleged traitors, quasi-democrats, hypocrites and technocrats, who march to the rhythm of techno music that gradually turns into a familiar traditional Russian melody. While quarreling with each other, Chekhov's three sisters cast one more vote in favour of Aristophanes.

Peace is presented in the form of a puppet show. Pointing out that peace's destiny is identical to that of the marionettes, whose strings are pulled by the powerful, this segment shows how peace is convicted to constant and eternal submission and suffering, always endangered by the machinations of the politicians. Ultimately Superman, a comic book and sci-fi movie character based on the Übermensch archetypal hero, appears as a judge. Convinced that his beloved Lois (Peace-Irene) is in danger, he jumps in to offer some help. Then, the voice of the *Assembly women (Ekklesiazousae)*, personified by Praxagora, is heard on the stage, and an adaptation in the form of an opera unfolds, where the potentially better world, guided by women, is shown. By means of this fragment, the audience is provided with a *leitmotif* focused on the consumer society, money circulation, its cruelty and ruthlessness.

Hades decides to engage the Phantom of the Opera as a competent jury for this sequence. Despite the fact that his song is barely understood even by Hades and Aristophanes, due to his difficult opera-like singing, the Phantom of the Opera gives his positive judgment to the benefit of the world of solidarity. In the *Clouds*, a father

sends his son to school to learn the art of persuasion from the Sophists, which is just a polite way to speak about ‘the skills’ of the demagogue politicians who lie, steal, ruin the truth, and even manipulate their own families in order to serve their opportunist goals. This part is presented in the form of a circus show, where the actors strive and compete for the favour of the audience, exactly as is the case in Greece’s new ‘entertaining’ education system, with the students playing the role of the audience to be entertained. There are also many allusions to the unsolved Cyprus crisis, and how the ‘No’ of the 2015 Greek referendum became the ‘Yes’ of the Memorandum that followed it. More precisely, one of the fragments refers to the 2015 referendum by means of which Greek people were asked to decide ‘for’ or ‘against’ the new Memorandum with the creditors, which meant further austerity measures and even worse debt crisis for the country. The outcome was a ‘No’ to the new Memorandum which subsequently, after negotiations of Greek officials (that is, the controversial finance minister Varoufakis and, after his resignation, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras) with the creditors, turned into a ‘Yes’ – an outcome that the majority of voters interpreted as a shameful capitulation of Greek democracy. Such a complicated and perplexed situation could only be resolved by a divine intervention, performed by a wizard, and that is why the play also features Gandalf from the *Lord of the Rings*. He gives a negative assessment to the entire plot.

Next follows the play *The Knights*. Greece is auctioned off, it is sold piece by piece, city by city, island by island, area by area. The middle class, in the form of knights, disappears from the scene and struggles to survive by means of cheap market machinations, that is, shadow economy practices and illegal activities. Suddenly, an unknown person appears in the character of a judge who demands that we lead theatre to its new role in the modern world, a role meant to foster philosophical and social rethinking.³⁵ To put it in the words of Srećko Horvat, the founder of the Philosophical Theatre:

If we do not come out of a theatre as different people, what is then the purpose of theatre? And why do we even go to the theatre, if we do not expect that something will happen to us, that we will feel something, that we will change our minds, that we will see ourselves and meet the others.³⁶

Anyone familiar with Aristophanes’ comic oeuvre might assume that the last segment presented in the *Aristophaniad* would have to be *The Frogs*, but it is not staged at all. Hades realises that Aristophanes has outwitted him and that the entire performance has been a competition between the poet and the ruler of the realm of the dead, exactly as in the original *Frogs*. Hades hesitates and smiling, he decides to return the comedian to the world of the living where he, as if nothing has happened, requires that his actors concentrate on the new play that is to show all the witty parts of the previous ones, namely *Plutus (Wealth)*.³⁷ Thus, in a very imaginative way, the circle is closed. It begins with *Poverty* and ends with *Wealth*, with Praxagora still singing that the world should be a better place.

Throughout the entire performance, there are a number of references to current events, politicians and politics in general:³⁸

ΣΤΡΕΨΙΑΔΗΣ(τραγούδι): Η πιστωτές με κυνηγούν
Τον ύπνο μου ταράζουν
Την πόρτα μου βροντοχτυπούν
Φωνάζουν και ουρλιάζουν.

Γιε μου άσε τα παπλώματα
Απ το κρεβάτι σου ξεκόλλα
Σου το'χω πει χίλες φορές
Ο Τσίπρας φταίει για όλα.³⁹

**(STREPSIADES: Creditors are chasing me,
Waking me, freaking me,
Banging on doors,
Shouting and kicking.**

Get up, out of your covers, move!
Out of the bed!
I told you before
Tsipras⁴⁰ is to be blamed for all.)

ΦΕΙΔΙΠΙΔΗΣ: Πατέρα μη μιλάς
Και άλλαξε υφάκι
Αλλιώς θα στείλω μήνυμα
Στον Τζον τον Βαρουφάκη
Πίσω από τους φόρους
Όποιον και να διαλέξεις
Να ξέρεις ότι θα κρύβεται
Ο μπούλης ο Αλέξης.⁴¹

**(PHIDIPIDES: Shut up, you old dude,
If you don't stop that preaching,
Immediately I'll be switching
to Varoufakis's engine.⁴²
Behind every tax
Of whatever kind,
Behind all that stands
Alexis's socialist brands.)**

ΔΙΚΕΟΠΟΙΣ: Γελάτε ανόητοι, μα βάλτε καλά στο νου σας,
Πως η Δημοκρατία έχει για κόρες, δυο
Πουτάνες:την Εξουσία και την Ισχύ κι έναν
Γιο μπάσταρδο που το λένε Χρήμα. Κι αν
Τα ηνία στην δημοκρατία πάρουν τότε

Στους πολίτεςέρχεται...⁴³

(DIKEOPOLIS: Laugh, you wicked pricks, but you have to know
That Democracy two daughters has,
Both whores: Governance and Power,
And one son, sweet as honey,
A whoreson called Money.
When ultimately the reins they take,
It won't be any kind of a mistake!)

Aristophaniad's authors also referred to the crucial role of the intellectuals:

ΑΔΗΣ: Έχω ακούσει από τις νέες μας παραλαβές
Τις προσφάτως νεκρές ψυχές,
Πώς οι άνθρωποι κουράστηκαν στα δεινά
Να κάνουν υπομονή
Και έχουν στις αγέλες των πολιτικών
Υποταχθεί
Και στων πνευματικών ανθρώπων τη
Σιωπή!⁴⁴

(HADES: I've heard from our recent contingents
Of the dead
That people above are sick and tired of being sad,
With open arms they embrace the politicians
Due to the silence of the academicians!)

This certainly reminds us of the role of intellectuals in contemporary society which is also analysed by Franco Berardi in his book *Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*:

[...]the role of intellectuals has been redefined: they are no longer a class independent from production, nor free individuals assuming the task of a purely ethical and freely cognitive choice, but a mass social subject, tending to become an integral part of the general process of production.⁴⁵

In short, what the play aims at is to encourage society, and especially the intellectual elite (represented in the *Idea* Theatre Company itself), to realise what exactly their position is and, based on human rights and the universal moral values, to return to their active social role, as proclaimed from the times of Enlightenment and Romanticism, in order to secure that human rights would be guaranteed to everybody, no matter what their race, class, gender or ideology might be.

Not simply another play from the classical Aristophanic repertoire, *Aristophaniad* is a new play that is Aristophanic in spirit. It is a bounteous collage of a great variety of comic (and not only comic) forms, including the ancient Old Attic

Comedy, grotesque, mime and pantomime, musical comedy, ballet, opera, standup, Chaplin's walk and moves, television and even circus. Curiously enough, for a brief moment in the play it seems that in spite of all those forms and contents, the communicative power of the *Aristophaniad* is endangered, since modern media and cultural fusions of the consumer mass society (with all their colourful variety of tastes and goods) are so effective in spreading the ceaseless flow of information, that the information itself merely reaches us, superficially touches us, leaving in our consciences just a vague hint of the data contained in it. But, all of a sudden, there is a new feeling for the audience of the *Aristophaniad*, the feeling that something is terribly wrong with the world – some of the powerful media's 'news attacks' seem, finally, to be reaching us, suggesting that the global situation is getting worse and the poor will become poorer and more oppressed. But it is as if the media suggested that it's just *the way of the world*, and ultimately for the general benefit. Thus contaminated with all of Aristophanes' comedies and conglomerates of various dramatic and scenic forms, this performance captures our attention, aiming to shake us and wake us up from our lethargy, to make us react to the subliminal messages that are served to us daily and which commit violence against us in an attempt to convince us that we cannot do anything to stop it. Everyday violence and its role in entertainment are spoken in the initial verses of the play, where the actors, in their effort to perform what Aristophanes demands of them, do not see anything funny in all that violence for sale:

ΗΘΟΠΙΟΣ Α: Ρε Αριστοφάνη/
Γιατί τόση ωμότητα τόση οργή;
Αντί να γελάει κανείς, αναριγεί, ανατριχιάζει,
μόνο με κωμωδία δε μοιάζει.

(**ACTOR A:** Why so much rawness and anger?
Why so much stress?
Instead of having fun, I'm jealous and disgusted?
This has nothing to do with fun)

Aristophanes responds: Σκάστε ηλίθιοι...
Η εποχή μας απαιτεί σκληρότητα και αίμα.

(Quiet there, you fools...
Time requires vigilance and blood.)⁴⁶

Aristophanes did not win first prize at the Dionysus Festival for the comedy he considered to be his best, *The Birds*, but later audiences, as well as Aristophanes' readers of later centuries, recognised in it what made Aristophanes estimate it so highly. *Aristophaniad* lived its life as a performance for some period of time on various Greek stages. With the rapid change of the political and social circumstances, the text needed to be modified, but due to its engaging, uncompromising spirit, and its powerful philanthropic messages, *Aristophaniad* found a way to survive, in a new 2019 production by the Theatrical and Artistic Laboratory of the Experimental

Lycaeum of the city of Heracleion, in Crete. The messages of *Aristophaniad* are universal and humane, inspired by the contemporary Greek way of life too, a life recorded at random everywhere, even on the facades and streets, in the form of a one-line-graffito that appears as a *leitmotif* of the play: “Αγία Κατανάλωση στάζεις αίμα” (“Holy Consumption, you are soaked with blood”). This graffito line is included in the lyrics of the soundtrack which is interwoven through the play’s text.

There seems to be an irresistible urge for people of all eras to search for new answers to old questions. In this sense, we have to keep in mind that this production of a new text is inspired and motivated by the old ones, while it preserves the essence of the ancient Attic comedy. This, above all, refers to its verse, because the whole comedy is written in verse; what is more, it is politically engaged, and, very interestingly, there is a chorus,⁴⁷ representing the voice of the people, or the voice of reason, a voice perfectly disguised in the image of Inspiration, certainly in the image of Hades, and perhaps even in the image of the poet himself, Aristophanes, as well as in the roles of the judges from the Underworld. The authors of the text of the *Aristophaniad* and the director of the play carried this out in such a clever way, that it remains almost completely unnoticed by the audience.

An important element of the ancient drama, according to Aristotle, is the experience of catharsis. *Aristophaniad*, in a cathartic sense, has a function identical to that of the aforementioned contemporary Philosophical Theatre – its purpose being to wake up, to revive, to change, to lead a dialogue.⁴⁸ *Aristophaniad* aims precisely at boosting our human dimension, empathy and love, all this, with the help of its funny characters, and the profound and healing role of laughter.⁴⁹ Aristophanes is back, after all, providing the message that laughter will always prevail over mourning, happiness over violence, love over hatred, compassion over the idea that might is right – ultimately, that life triumphs over death, forever and ever. *Aristophaniad* tries to awaken us with harsh criticism of politicians, voters, intellectuals, individuals, ourselves, apathy and society in general and activate us so that we get initiated by the *Idea* Theatre Company’s Manifesto – in order for present-day theatre to get rid of futile postmodernist elitism and to become once again a genuine institution, as in the times of Aristophanes. Therefore, after watching this play, it seems that the main idea from the company’s Manifesto is accomplished and that, through laughter, the attention of the audience is captured and redirected to the burning issues of mankind, aiming for a positive transformation of society from within.

* We would like to express our gratitude to Mrs Konstantina Panopoulou-Didi for inspiring us to write this article.

¹ See Κωνσταντίνος Τρυπάνης, Σύγχρονες προτάσεις αρχαίων δραμάτων, *Νέα Εστία*, vol. 107, no. 1266 (1980):497. Cristine Sourvinou Inwood, *Tragedy and Athenian Religion* (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2003), 11 and passim. Some other scholars, such as J. P. Vernant, J. Winckler, A. Henrich, and W. Storm question drama’s religious origin.

² A similar attitude, in a 'Nothing to do with Aristophanes' manner, is still preserved by a minority of modern day (sc. Greek and not only) traditionalist scholars and critics in their purist effort to approach and influence modern day staging of ancient drama. See Τρυπώνης, *ibid.*, 498 et passim (see note 1).

³ We owe it to two very different books on Aristophanes, Alexis Solomos' *Ο ζωντανός Αριστοφάνης* (Αθήνα: Δίφορος, 1961), English edition *The Living Aristophanes*, trans. A. Solomos and M. Felheim (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974) and Carlo Ferdinando Russo's *Aristofane autore di teatro* (Firenze: G.C. Sansoni, 1962), which articulated what "seemed like a radically new, performance-based approach to the dramatic texts of antiquity." Edith Hall, "Introduction: Aristophanic Language across Centuries," in *Aristophanes in Performance 421 BC-AD 2007: Peace, Birds, and Frogs*, eds. Edith Hall and Amanda Wrigley (London: Legenda, 2007), 2.

⁴ Exactly as Aristophanic comedies require. There were critics that encouraged such an interpretation of Aristophanes and others who totally humiliated and cruelly attacked this performance. To stage a single comedy by Aristophanes and successfully modernise it is an extremely difficult task. To stage them all in one performance is an effort, if not worthy of praise, then at least of paying attention to it.

⁵ The Athenian citizens/farmers, small landowners of poor and unfertile soil, unable to return loans to the rich landowners, had to guarantee the payback by their own bodies and the bodies of their children. Due to this enslavement the state was gradually weakened. Athens was losing battle after battle with other city-states and that caused great political tensions. When Solon was elected *archon* in the year 594 BC, he made political and economic reforms. One of his economic measures was to make a repatriation of the enslaved debtors by cancelling all debts and abolishing enslavement of free citizens for debt. He ordered that the stones or pillars as land-marks of the enslaved ones should be removed. This felt like lifting the burden from the debtors backs and that is why this act was named *seisachtheia* (from the verb *σειώω*-shake off and the noun *ἄχθος*-burden, debt).

⁶ The famous one in Solon's time, 6th century BC, and the modern "wannabe" debt release, promised (but never accomplished) by Alexis Tsipras in his campaign running for the office of the Prime Minister in 2015. When the recession took its first casualties globally, Greece was among those that were severely hit. The loans that previous governments took, in agreement with their creditors, economic experts and international partners, proved to be exactly those who led Greek people to pre-Solonian debt enslavement. That is why the new Prime Minister and his team created a program according to which Greece would on its own manage to deal with its enormous debt, without ultimately having to leave the Eurozone (a potentially negative outcome of this program, named Grexit). The creditors, not satisfied with the prospects of the program, imposed harsh economic measures on Greece through a Memorandum, which, in turn, led to the 2015 Greek referendum, regarding the signing of this Memorandum. A *No to Memorandum* prevailed at the referendum, but Tsipras did not follow the results of the referendum, and as a consequence, his Finance Minister Yannis Varoufakis withdrew from the Government. Then Greece started to fulfil the measures imposed by the Memorandum Troika (IMF, EU and the creditors) as if no referendum had ever taken place. Many people lost their jobs, homes, firms, shops, etc. See Eleni Panagiotarakou, "Opinion: Debt, Democracy and Ancient Wisdom in Greece," *Montreal Gazette*, June 2, 2015, accessed December 15, 2019, www.montrealgazette.com.

⁷ Koun is not the only one who dealt with Aristophanes' comedies. The famous performances of his students, Alexis Solomos, in a completely different spirit, or of Spyros Evangelatos, are well known but beyond the scope of this article. More about them can be found in the article by Kaiti Diamantakou-Agathou, "Aristophane sur la scene grecque modern. Un theater populaire ou un theatre fait par et pour les meré-few?" *Cahiers balkaniques*, Hors-série (2015): 1-7.

⁸ In 1933, together with Yannis Tsarouhis and Dionysis Devaris, he founded *People's Scene* (Λαϊκή Σκηνή) in an effort to create a theatre hub where theatre would not be considered a professional engagement, but a socially engaged institution.

⁹ *Plutus* in 1936 and 1956, *The Frogs* a year later, *Lysistrata* in 1969, *The Acharnians* in 1976, *Peace* in 1977, *Women at the Thesmophoria* in 1985. His revival of ancient drama is considered to be his most important contribution to the contemporary Greek theatre. Koun's staging of Aristophanes' *The Birds* and Aeschylus's *The Persians* are the starting points for any future staging of those plays. He also wrote two studies on ancient drama, *Ancient Tragedy and Comedy* (Η αρχαία τραγωδία - κωμωδία) and *The Director and the Ancient Drama* (Οσκηνοθέτης και το αρχαίο δράμα).

¹⁰ The editorial article by Victor Emeljanow in the first issue of *Popular Entertainment Studies* 1, no. 1 (2010): 1-5, elaborates on different viewpoints and the development of popular theatre and popular entertainment.

¹¹ One of the performance forms satirising the Ottoman rule in an utterly comic and grotesque way is the popular Karaghiozis shadow theatre. When someone plays funny or acts stupid in everyday life he is characterised as Karaghiozis. Elements of the Karaghiozis characters infiltrated the Aristophanes plays of Koun. Marina Kotzamani, "K. Koun, Karaghiozis and the Birds: Aristophanes as Popular Theatre," in *Clowns, Fools and Picaros: Popular Forms in Theatre, Fiction and Film*, ed. David Robb (Amsterdam: Rodopi 2007): 179-194. See also Ioanna Papageorgiou, "The Mountain-Bandits of the Hellenic Shadow Theatre of Karaghiozis: Criminals or Heroes?", *Popular Entertainment Studies* 5, no. 2 (2014): 79-102.

¹² Angeliki Varakis, "Aristophanic Performance as an All-inclusive Event," in *Classics in the Modern World: A Democratic Return?*, eds. Lorna Hardwick and Steven J. Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 216.

¹³ See Angeliki Varakis, "The Use of Masks in Koun's Stage Interpretations of Birds, Frogs, and Peace," in Hall and Wrigley, *Aristophanes in Performance*, 191.

¹⁴ See Alexis Solomos, *Ο ζωντανός Αριστοφάνης* (Αθήνα: Δίφορος, 1961), Hall and Wrigley, *Aristophanes in Performance*.

¹⁵ In this regard, we attach a chapter by the aforementioned Yannis Varufakis, titled "Response of the inhabitants of the island of Melos" from his book *And The Weak Suffer What They Must?* (London: Penguin Random House UK, 2016), as an example of a lesson from the past: "Forty years later, in 1988, while looking through Keynes's papers and books at King's College, Cambridge, I noticed a copy of Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War*... There it was, underlined in pencil, the famous passage in which the powerful Athenian generals explained to the helpless Melians why "rights" are only pertinent "between equals in power" and, for this reason, they were about "to do as they pleased with them." It was because "the strong actually do what they can and the weak suffer what they must." These words were ringing in my head during the spring of 2015 as I faced Greece's lenders and their unwavering commitment to crush our government. Keynes's head, I am certain, must also have been ringing with these words at Bretton Woods. I wonder, however, if he was tempted, as I was, to address his adversaries with a version of a line from the Melians: "Then in our view (since you force us to base our arguments on self-interest, rather than on what is proper) it is useful that you should not destroy a principle that is to the general good – namely that those who find themselves in the clutches of misfortune should [...] be allowed to thrive beyond the limits set by the precise calculation of their power. And this is a principle which does not affect you less, since your own fall would be visited by the most terrible vengeance, watched by the whole world." In the case of the arrogant Athenians, these words surely resonated years later when their mortal enemies the Spartans scaled the walls of Athens intent on destruction. After the Great War, Keynes had used a logic similar to the Melians' argument to warn the victorious Allies that the vengeful terms they had imposed on Germany at Versailles were a boomerang that would come back to strike at the foundation of their own interests – which is of course what happened after the Versailles Treaty engendered an economic crisis in Germany that brought Adolf Hitler to power. Perhaps the Melians' words also reflect how the surviving New Dealers felt in the mid-1960s when the Bretton Woods system that the White House had forced through against Keynes's better judgment began to unravel. But by then it was too late to do much about it. Bretton Woods was at the end of its tether, and the Nixon Shock simply demonstrates the ruthless efficiency with which American officials come to terms with new unpleasant realities, in sharp contrast to their European counterparts, who will hang on to failed projects for as long as possible. When it came, the Nixon Shock saw to it that America, unlike Athens, would continue to enjoy the trappings of uncontested hegemony – at least till 2008. That was in essence what John Connally, Nixon's Treasury Secretary, had proposed to his president: screw them before they screw us! Europe and Japan were consequently badly screwed, but so was the political project of the New Dealers, who had pushed aside Keynes's proposals in 1944. Indeed, after 1965 the New Dealers and their successors lost every domestic battle they fought against the resurgent Republicans. Their abject failure to revive the spirit of the New Deal, even under Democrat presidents who may have wanted to resuscitate it (such as Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama), can arguably be traced to their dismissal of Keynes's proposals back in 1944." (30-33.)

¹⁶ Edith Hall, "Introduction: Aristophanic Language across Centuries" in Hall and Wrigley, *Aristophanes in Performance*, 4.

¹⁷ Directed by Kostas Ghakis, script by *Idea Theatre Company*: Kostas Ghakis, Athena Moustaka, Konstantinos Bibis and Dimitris Zougos, scenography by Pangiota Kokkorou, music by Kostas Ghakis, sound designer Stefanos Tortopoglou, costume by Vasiliki Syrma, produced by Lefteris Plaskovitis. For photos of the production see: Onlytheater, accessed January 10, 2020: <https://www.onlytheater.gr/buzz/news/item/i-aristofaniada-sto-irodeio-deite-stigmatiypa>.

¹⁸ It is noteworthy that the next *Idea Theatre Company*'s performance from 2017 was titled *Oedipus' Tree* and was a similar project, in so far as its compilation and dramatic structure were concerned. In a European frame, the *Mount Olympus* project by Jan Fabre was similar; it opened the 51st BITEF Theatre Festival in Belgrade 2017, which was a kind of "digest of ancient tragedies," from the perspective of the contemporary events and audience.

¹⁹ *Idea Theatre Company*, *Αριστοφανιάδα (Aristophaniad)*, (ΔημοτικόΠεριφερειακόΘέατροΚρήτης [Municipal Regional Theatre of Crete] 2016), 6.

²⁰ Милош Н. Ђурић, *Историја хеленске књижевности*. Miloš N. Djurić, *History of the Hellenic Literature* (Belgrade: Naučna knjiga 1990), 342.

²¹ This constant onomatopoeic repetition of the consonants "ps" in the verbs *grapase*, *thapse*, *papase*, *kapse*, sounds like words whispered by Interpretation, the character emerging from Aristophanes' subconscious as his alter ego.

²² *Idea Theatre Company* *Αριστοφανιάδα*, 16.

²³ All translations are provided by the authors of this article.

²⁴ On the structure of Ancient Attic Comedy see Gregory M. Sifakis, "The Structure of Aristophanic Comedy," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 112 (1992): 123-142.

²⁵ *Idea Theatre Company* *Αριστοφανιάδα*, 19.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

³¹ This refers to a suburb of Athens.

³² Милош Н. Ђурић, *Историја хеленске књижевности*, 350.

³³ Alexis Tsipras (leader of SYRIZA – Coalition of the Radical Left, a pun on the Greek adverb σύρριζα, meaning 'from the roots' or 'radically') served as Prime Minister of Greece from January 26, 2015 to August 20, 2015 and from September 21, 2015 to July 8, 2019.

³⁴ Alcaeus of Mytilene, an ancient poet from the 7th century BC, is the first who used a poetic image of a ship as an allegory for a state led by bad captains, i.e. incompetent state leaders. Fragments of this poem are considered to have served as inspiration for "The Ship of State," a poem poetically recomposed by Horace in the 1st century BC.

³⁵ *Philosophical Theatre* is a project initiated by the Croatian National Theatre from Zagreb in 2014 with a desire to re-establish a close connection between philosophy and the theatre. The initiator of the project, Srećko Horvat notes, "the connection between philosophy and theatre was always stronger than the connection between philosophy and any other medium. The most famous and influential works of Jean-Paul Sartre are undoubtedly his dramas, while Brecht approached the radical politics through theatre, and by means of it he elaborated the idea of the *epic theatre*. Theatre has always been a place for active rethinking of society and social processes, and it is in this sense that "Philosophical Theatre" opens its gates to public discussion; this is exactly what a National Theatre should do, since it is our society's great necessity at the moment." Accessed March 7, 2017, <http://www.narodnopoistoriste.rs/filozofski-teatar>. Theatre, in this sense and function, becomes the meeting point of the most inspiring contemporary philosophers, sociologists, psychoanalysts, writers and economists who speak in various ways about today and contemplate social change. In this case the public is not treated as a mute observer of events but as an active participant in a public debate that opens after every performance at the Philosophical Theatre. Among others, one of the key players in Horvat's Philosophical Theatre was Yannis Varoufakis, the former Greek Minister of Finance and author of the book mentioned in notes 15 and 42.

³⁶ Микојан Безбрадица, *Филозофски театар – предавање Франка Бифоа Берардија, 1. Децембар на сцени „РашаПлаовић“, 20.30.* (Mikojan Bezbradica, *Philosophical Theatre– Lecture by Franco Bifo Berardi, December 1, 8.30PM at the Rasa Plaovic Scene*), accessed March 7, 2017, <https://www.narodnopoistoriste.rs/filozofski-teatar-predavanje-franka-bifoa-berardiya-1-12-na-sceni-rasa-plaovic>

³⁷ This last of Aristophanes' works, in which all the previous ones are contained, is considered to be a play in the new spirit of the potentially universal, timeless, humane dimension (read: theatre). A recent Greco-Serbian adaptation of *Plutos* by Nikita Milivojevic, which had its premiere at the Epidaurus Festival last summer (2018) testifies to that.

³⁸ After all, politics is just another form of entertainment in Greece. All day long, people talk about politics, elaborate on politics, watch politics live or on TV, radio, internet. Politics is everywhere, so after all, for the Greeks it must at least be entertaining.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

⁴⁰ Greek Prime Minister.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴² Former Greek Minister of Finances, author of the book, *And The Weak Suffer What They Must?* (London: Penguin Random House, 2016).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁵ Franco Berardi, *The Soul at Work. From Alienation to Autonomy* (Los Angeles: Semiotexte, 2009), 43.

⁴⁶ *Idea Theatre Company, Αριστοφανιάδα*, 19.

⁴⁷ Gordan Maričić and Marina Milanović, "The Tragic Chorus in Ancient Times and Nowadays: Its Role and Staging," *Istraživanja 27* (2016): 58-68.

⁴⁸ This trend that the modern avant-garde public craves seems to have inspired yet another performance, to set all ancient tragedies in a single show, namely in Jan Febre's 24-hour spectacle titled *Mount Olympus*, with its shortest and most appropriate description being that of "one uninterrupted scream." This performance certainly strikes the audience with its vigour and imaginative power, awakens from lethargy, causes unrest, rage, sadness, distress, rebellious feelings, fear, as well as a whole wild bunch of other mixed emotions. Its heroes are "stripped of their explanatory mode, their excess of sympathetic humanism, and thus successfully reduced to the primal substance of their stories – a substance cruel and shocking." Luk Van den Dries's *Mount Olympus / 24H*, accessed December 27, 2017, <http://mountolympus.be/about>. The World premiere of *Mount Olympus* was at the Berlin Foreign Affairs Festival/ Berliner Festspiele, June 27, 2015.

⁴⁹ According to Franco Berardi, the arts, especially poetry, are supposed to be therapeutic. Franco Berardi, *After the Future* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011), 128 et passim.