Performing in ancient Greek theaters in modern Greece is an activity which often finds itself embroiled in the cultural politics surrounding a classical heritage which is conceptualized as venerable, unbroken, and exclusive. The first ever instance of a non-Greek production of a Greek play at the ancient theater of Epidaurus was the British Royal National Theatre’s *Oresteia* directed by Peter Hall in 1982.1 Despite Hall’s adherence to key conventions of classical theater, such as an all-male cast and the use of masks, the admission of a non-Greek group to the theater of Epidaurus did not go uncontested. Yannis Varveris, a well-known critic, maintained:

I do not think that this generosity is to our own cultural benefit, especially when it comes to Epidaurus. We are—as Rondiris has at least proved—capable of articulating our heritage better than anyone. A place of such sanctification like this *koilon* [the spectators’ area in ancient amphitheaters] could be reserved for the whatsoever most legitimate interpretation of ancient drama and not yielded as an arena for international theater acrobatics, especially if the genre itself is not amenable to them. It is a matter of category. The tragic word is not just one page in theater repertory. It is morally and aesthetically adamant, most of all because it is sacredly ontological. Epidaurus is its natural manger. On the contrary, the foreign director, having not the affinity of language and the umbilical cord—of both language and place—with the source deigns well-intentioned experimentations which are perhaps irreverent.2

This passage encapsulates the most cherished Greek views about ancient drama: uniqueness, legitimate interpretations, and the authenticity of
a highly acclaimed tradition established by past Greek directors (Dimitris Rondiris, 1899–1981). It is telling that the theatrical space is discussed in a language pregnant with religious allusions (sanctification, manger) which, in turn, generates the view of a “sacredly ontological” text. Most notably, performing in Epidaurus, in the critic’s view, presupposes a biological relationship with the place and the language (umbilical cord, source) which naturalizes the idea of Greek continuity from antiquity down to the present day. The view of the theater of Epidaurus as a sacred place continues to come up in disputes over stagings of Greek drama by, most characteristically, non-Greek directors. In the 2009 production of Dimiter Gotscheff’s *Persians*, for example, the audience was exasperated every time the actors set foot on the ancient *thymele*, the altar of the god Dionysus, which is not meant to be stepped over according to a well-established Greek theater custom.3 The spectators responded in indignation against the supposed act of desecration with hisses, loud jeers, and massive walk-outs which nearly interrupted the performance.

The sacralization of the ancient theater of Epidaurus within modern Greek culture requires serious scrutiny in relation to the Greek claim of an exclusive authority over classical antiquity and the sense of cultural preeminence. However, the idea of sacred ancient ruins was not unknown to the nineteenth-century European imagination. The foundation of Greek state itself in the mid-nineteenth century triggered the Romantic Hellenism of European travelers, by providing the actual place where they could connect to the classical past through the ruins of antiquity.4 In this spirit, leading theater figures of that time sought the very origin of the theatrical art in the ancient theater of Dionysus on the slopes of the Acropolis. When great Italian tragic actresses toured to Athens, their visits to the ancient monuments was filled with a sense of worship. Adelaide Ristori marveled at the theater of Dionysus in 1865,5 while it is submitted that Eleonora Duse went on a pilgrimage there on the evening before her Athenian performance in 1899.6 In the same period the French actor Jean Mounet-Sully was planning a tour to Athens, deeply moved by the idea of performing “at the sacred theater where Sophocles won victories and Aeschylus received great honours,” as he said in an interview (added emphasis).7 In the first half of the twentieth century, though, it was the ancient theater of Epidaurus which eventually assumed the role of a
“sacred” theater for the Greeks, and not the theater of Dionysus, which was never used for modern performance.

Before getting into a more detailed discussion about the use of ancient theaters in modern Greece and its cultural and ideological repercussions, I propose viewing the function of Greek theaters within modern Greek culture through Michel Foucault’s concept of heterotopia. Foucault defines heterotopias as follows:

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias.8

Heterotopias are, thus, geographical as much as ideological places, which, unlike utopias, organize the community’s imaginings around an existing site. These other spaces are, according to Foucault, constitutive of the society since they enable it to effectively regulate and negotiate with the space of quotidian life. Foucault distinguishes between heterotopias of crisis in primitive societies and the modern heterotopias of deviation or desire. Heterotopias of crisis were often imagined as sacred places related to liminal or transitory states, while heterotopias of deviation and desire assume several forms, from prisons and psychiatric asylums to gardens and shopping malls within an urban environment, respectively. Foucault concedes that even contemporary space has not been entirely desanctified;9 and although he is not concerned with the role of heterotopias in the making of national communities it could be argued that the sanctification of certain spaces in the modern world is inextricable from the significance that national imagination bestows upon them.

Recent theories of nation and nationalism tend to emphasize the processes at work in the transformation of neutral space into national territory. Especially in the case of Greece, archaeological practices applied to ancient monuments were key in both legitimizing national space as well as enabling the nation to imagine itself antique.10 Artemis Leontis views the ancient ruins in modern Greece as the heterotopias of nineteenth-
century Europe. Yet, their heterotopic function was no less significant for the Greeks themselves, as they were seeking to ground their national and cultural identity in the material reality of the newly founded state. Yannis Hamilakis also uses the term *heterotopias* to emphasize the physical presence of the ancient monuments in Greece which, he argues, is construed as tangible evidence of continuity with antiquity. Among all ancient ruins, Greek theaters can be seen as the foremost national heterotopias, lying at the junction between the actual sites and Greek cultural imagination. The quasi-religious reverence of the ancient theater of Epidaurus invokes precisely the idea of an essential and self-existent relationship between ancient and modern Greece.

The emergence of Greek theaters as heterotopias is closely tied with the foundation of the modern Greek state despite (and because of) their much longer history. Most Greek theaters were brought to light by excavation works undertaken as soon as Greece itself emerged as a spatial entity on the European map after the Greek War of Independence. Unlike other ancient monuments, several Greek theaters have resumed their original function as theatrical spaces; this alone can account for their effectiveness as to the implementation of the Greek narrative of continuity. In the course of time, ancient Greek theaters evolved into the “effectively enacted utopias” in which modern Greeks have *formed and performed* their much fantasized continuity with the ancient past.

The use of ancient theaters for performances of ancient Greek drama would, in fact, seem to enhance the heterotopic dimension of the monument in a complex manner. For Foucault himself, the theatrical stage is an exemplary heterotopia due to its ability to conflate several sites incompatible with each other. In the actual time of the performance the ancient theater juxtaposes the ancient ruins and the classical text with current theater practices and the presence of a contemporary audience and its conceptualizations of the ancient world. Besides, the experience of the performance would seem to broaden the experience of the monument: here the static materiality of the monument is combined with the dynamic materiality of the performance medium. Both the materiality of the performance and the co-presence of the audience, which are constitutive principles of every performance event, transform the projection of commonly shared ideas about antiquity onto the monument into a communal experience
of the ancient past in the present time. In other words, if ancient ruins give physical presence to Greek national iconography, ancient theaters also warrant the material experience of the ancient site.

An attempt to propose a rough periodization of the use of ancient theaters in modern Greece would identify three phases corresponding to an evolution of their heterotopic function. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the idea of performance in Greek theaters is governed by the ideal of edifying the Greek people at the same time that the nascent discipline of archaeology aspired to discover the remains of the great ancestors which would enable Greece “to join the ranks of the civilized nations.” In this early phase, the ruins of the newly excavated theater of Dionysus were viewed as a token of the resurrected Greek nation. The actor Konstantinos Kyriakos-Aristias was invited to Athens from Bucharest in 1840 to contribute to the organization of professional Greek theater. The proclamation he co-signed with fifteen literary men urged his contemporaries to elevate the Greek language on a new theater near “the sacred and primordial core of arts opposite to the Parthenon,” while it closed with the wish that “the ancient Greek theater by the Acropolis buried from time immemorial would be excavated and resurface from the grave” (added emphasis). As the time was not yet ripe for the development of a national theater, Aristias soon left Athens.

The second phase spans the first half of the twentieth century. In this period the burgeoning interest of both Greek theater practitioners and official culture in ancient theaters prompted various attempts to establish ancient drama festivals. The establishment of the Epidaurus Festival in postwar Greece provides the pivotal moment in the process of accommodating Greek antiquity as part of a celebrated cultural heritage, marking the beginning of the third phase. From that point onwards the ancient theater of Epidaurus has provided the foremost site where Greek antiquity is regulated by both official policies and dominant cultural discourses. In marked contrast to the initial stakes in the performance of Greek drama, in this phase the relationship between Greece and the “elevated” European states is reversed; the institutional context of the Epidaurus Festival contributed to the formation of a discourse of Greek exceptionalism on the basis of a direct relationship with both ancient texts and spaces.
Foucault identifies heterotopias of illusion as spaces that break down social boundaries and question real-life structures, distinguishing them from those of compensation, which oppose a perfected image of space to the disorderly space of everyday life. Yet, these two modes of interaction with real spaces would not necessarily exclude each other. As pointed out by Lieven De Cauter and Michiel Dehaene, theater in classical Athens suspended the usual distinction between the political agora (place of assembly) and the private oikos (household):

During the City Dionysia, for example, the rules of in- and exclusion adopted within the political realm were explicitly suspended. The whole community was free to participate in these theatre festivals, not only the citizens of the polis but also ambassadors of other (colonized) cities, women, the foreigners living in Athens and even slaves. The issue of ownership—private or public—is often simply irrelevant for the heterotopian character of these places.18

All the more significantly, it could be added, the participation of citizens and noncitizens in the festivals had its parallel on the theatrical stage itself, which in the ancient Greek world offered a space for the representation of barbarians, women, and slaves. During the festivals the ancient theater indeed provided a space of illusion where sociopolitical boundaries were lifted; on the other hand, it could be argued that it functioned as an idealized image of Athenian society by allowing only a temporary and regulated deviation which compensated for traditional civic order.

In modern Greece, performance in ancient theaters might not entail a break with the existing social order, but it often allows a break with historical time, which is reminiscent of Foucault’s description of the relationship of heterotopias to traditional time.19 The illusionary conflation of ancient past and Greek present experienced during the performance in ancient theaters seems to compensate for contemporary Greek reality. Since the first modern stagings in ancient theaters, performances were expected to propagate the idealized view of modern Greece as an inheritor and successor of classical antiquity. In this respect, the heterotopia of the ancient theater strove to efface aspects of modern Greek reality which would attest to Greece’s Ottoman and other non-Greek legacies. It may not be fortuitous that the philologist Georgios Mistriotis, one of the most keen exponents of the performance of Greek drama in ancient sites at the end of the nineteenth century, was also a leading figure within the
movement of ethno-linguistic nationalism which defended the purity of Greek language and culture against European claims about their infiltration with Slavic elements.

This history of ancient theaters in modern Greece constitutes a heterotopic genealogy which, in the most Foucauldian sense, can disclose the discourses underlying the appropriation of Greek antiquity. The idea of staging Greek drama in ancient amphitheaters was not limited to Greece: indeed, it is directly connected to a European trend going back to the end of the nineteenth century. In fact, the first attempt to use the theater of Dionysus in Athens is part of this trend. The director of the French School of Archaeology in Athens, Théophile Homolle, invited Mounet-Sully to present his famous production of *Œdipe roi* at the theater of Dionysus in 1896 on the occasion of the School’s jubilee. Mounet-Sully’s *Œdipe* had been performed at the Roman theater of Orange in 1888 and 1894 with great success. The production did not pass unnoticed in the Greek press either; a reviewer pointed out the similarities between the theaters of Orange and Dionysus, noting that it would have been more appropriate to perform during the day. According to Homolle’s initial plan, the staging of *Œdipe* in Athens would revive the conditions of the ancient performance: the play would be performed in daylight, while the space would be adjusted with the installation of a wooden stage and seats following the theater’s original structure. For all Mounet-Sully’s zeal to play Oedipus in Athens, the outbreak of the 1897 Greek-Turkish War called off the whole endeavor. Instead, when the production finally toured to Athens in 1899, it was performed on the Italian stage of the Municipal Theatre of Athens. The Greeks received Mounet-Sully’s *Œdipe* with enthusiasm; it is thus remarkable that one of the few negative responses the performance elicited bemoaned the failure of the set design to represent the spatial conventions of Greek theaters: there was “neither orchestra with the *thymele* in the middle for the chorus or any other of the divisions of the ancient *skene* [stage-building].”

A contemporary Greek attempt to stage ancient drama at the theater of Dionysus was initiated by the academic circles of Mistriotis, who was a professor of classical philology at the University of Athens. This time the quest was not triggered by the European classical ideal as much as by the indigenous narrative of Greek continuity. The proclamation of the Society
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for the Instruction of Ancient Drama (Εταιρεία υπέρ της διδασκαλίας των αρχαίων δραμάτων) founded by Mistriotis in 1895 leaves no doubt about the view of the ancient theater as part of Greek cultural inheritance. The text opens with the assertion that “the theater of Dionysus by the Acropolis is not only the oldest in the world, but also the sacred space where the noblest of the arts was born,” and continues: “Our ancestors produced the noblest of the sciences, but they were above all artistic people. We, their inheritors, may have lost many of their virtues, but some artistic vein remains within us.”22 Yet, the society did not perform at the theater of Dionysus or any other ancient space23 until 1905, when it was allowed to stage Sophocles’ Antigone at the recently renovated Panathinaiko Stadium for the 1896 Olympic Games, which was often adjusted after the model of a Greek theater in the following decades.

Until the advent of the twentieth century the relationship between the ancient texts and the ancient theater was far from self-evident. The reluctance of both local authorities and the European schools which conducted excavations at the sites to allow their use for performance posed a considerable impediment, while the majority of professional companies continued staging ancient drama in closed, indoor theaters. The Odeion of Herodes Atticus, also situated by the Acropolis, was used for an amateur production as early as 1867; yet, there are indications that this space was largely treated as a closed theater: an added platform with a drop-curtain was placed in the middle of the stage, while the orchestra was used to seat the officials.24 Most significantly, although the performance was largely promoted as a rendering of Greek drama similar to those in antiquity, the juxtaposition of the Roman Odeion with the Greek theaters occurred. A critic decried the use of a theater “in which ancient drama was never staged in the ancient times. There can be no greater shame. We often boast as inheritors of the ancient Greeks publicly, while apparently deriding the best of them ridiculing their works.”25 The derogatory view of the Odeion still pertains and it is reflected in the fact that, contrary to the Greek Epidaurus, which was until recently reserved exclusively for ancient Greek drama, the Odeion is used for opera and modern drama performances as well as for music concerts.

Greek theater professionals became increasingly aware of the architectural arrangement of the ancient Greek theater and attempted to reproduce
Eleftheria Ioannidou

it in closed spaces when staging Greek drama. In marked contrast to the earlier adjustment of the Odeion to the conventions of a closed theater, in the production of *Oedipus Tyrannus* in 1877 by the Euripides theater company the space in front of the proscenium arch was turned to a form of *orchestra*, where the *thymele* was also placed, so that the chorus would be separated from the protagonists.²⁶ The director Fotos Politis (1890–1934) was generally skeptical as regards the use of open-air ancient spaces for modern performance, especially after his own staging of *Hecuba* at the Panathinaiko Stadium of Athens in 1927.²⁷ Nonetheless, he also referred back to the structure of the ancient theater in a closed space. In his staging of *Oedipus Tyrannus* at the Olympia Theatre in Athens in 1919 Politis dispensed with the fourth-wall stage: the proscenium arch was sealed by a wall representing the entrance of the palace. In addition, the space usually occupied by the musicians was covered so as to resemble an ancient *orchestra*, in the middle of which an altar was placed.²⁸

The idea that ancient Greek theaters could help to restore the links to Greek drama preoccupied theater professionals at the beginning of the twentieth century. The fascination with the ruins of the ancient theaters signifies a shift in their function as modern Greek heterotopias; ancient theaters were seen not only as part of national heritage, but also as places with inspirational qualities which could elevate contemporary theater practice. Konstantinos Christomanos (1867–1911), often referred to as the first professional Greek director,²⁹ viewed the ancient theater as a space of initiation. Christomanos used to visit the theater of Dionysus with his theater group in order to awaken in his “initiates”—as he used to call his actors—“the desire for the revival of Greek tragedy.”³⁰

The Delphic Festivals organized by the poet Angelos Sikelianos (1884–1951)³¹ and his philhellene wife Eva Palmer-Sikelianou (1874–1952) in 1927 and 1930 precipitated the systematic use of ancient Greek theaters and the establishment of ancient drama festivals outside Athens. The influence of the festivals in this direction was rather irrelevant—if not contradictory—to the Delphic Festival’s initial scope. Sikelianos was not interested in the revival of Greek drama or the performance in ancient theaters. His choice of Delphi as well as the use of Greek tragedy and the performance medium served his broader vision to found a universal spiritual centre. In a conversation he had with Palmer several years before
the first festivals he explained his view of the site: “Each great civiliza-
tion possesses such a site or sites…. In Greece we possess many such
sites, Eleusis, Dodona, and Delphi being best known. The last especially
seems to have been the basis of all Greek Culture. But also, to the extent
to which Greece has influenced all European countries, all of America,
North and South, and even to a certain degree Asia and Africa, to all
these, whether consciously or unconsciously on their part, this site is a
mother country” (added emphasis).³² The subsequent performances of
Aeschylus’s *Prometheus Bound* in 1927 and 1930 and *Suppliants* in 1930
were a means to achieve the higher cause of uniting people “in the same
great theatre,”³³ which was envisaged as a return to a primordial origin.

The Delphic endeavor greatly boosted the significance of ancient the-
aters, in particular, as places where the Greek community could connect
the ancient past with the Byzantine and folk lineages. The wide-ranging
program of both festivals featured ancient-themed events, such as athletic
games, enactments of ancient rituals, musical execution of the Homeric
hymn to Apollo, Greek pyrrhic dances performed by men in suits of
ancient armour, as well as Byzantine music concerts, Greek folk dances
and exhibitions of handicraft from different parts of Greece. Although
the performance of tragedy was thought of as a means of transgressing
all national, political, and religious boundaries, the Delphic Festivals
pronounced the supremacy of Greece, while also celebrating the tripar-
tite scheme of Greek continuity: antiquity, Byzantine times, and modern
Greece.³⁴ In fact, it seems that the numinous significance accorded to the
ancient site and the representation of Greek continuity reinforced each
other on the symbolic plane.

The establishment of official ancient Greek drama festivals in the
decade following the Delphic Festivals was instrumental in sustaining
and expanding the systematic use of ancient theaters which character-
ized postwar Greece. The National Theatre of Greece³⁵ introduced the
annual Ancient Drama Weeks (Εβδομάδες Αρχαίου Δράματος) at the
Odeion of Herodes Atticus in 1936 at the initiative of Kostis Bastias,
who was responsible for the repertoire at, and later director of, the
National Theatre. Bastias was convinced that the regular performance
of ancient drama should be among the main purposes of the National
Theatre, while also aligning this project with outdoor performances. As
director of the National Theatre, Bastias made a strong case for the use of the ancient theater of Epidaurus.  

The theater was used for the first time in the modern era in 1938 for the production of Sophocles’ *Electra* directed by Dimitris Rondiris, which had premiered two years earlier at the first Ancient Drama Week (see fig. 1). The use of ancient spaces in this period should not be seen as an attempt to revive the conditions of ancient performance either. It is best understood, I would argue, as part of the movement to use ancient sites in order to promote forms of popular theater, an ideal shared by authoritarian governments across Europe, including Ioannis Metaxas’s para-Fascist dictatorship, in which Bastias held a key position.

The ancient drama festivals in outdoor spaces were discontinued due to WWII and the ensuing Greek Civil War. The use of the theater of Epidaurus was interrupted until the postwar period, when the production of *Hippolytus* by the National Theatre of Greece directed by Rondiris in 1954 paved the way for the official establishment of the Epidaurus Festival the following year. The physical characteristics of the theater of Epidaurus affected significantly the role that it acquired within the Greek culture. Its status as one of the best preserved ancient theaters, apart from enabling its use for performance, gave it a central place within the tourist industry. The dimensions of the space, which can accommodate over twelve thousand spectators at full capacity, warranted the wide-reaching character of the productions. On the other hand, the cultural associations that impinge on the participants in an ancient drama festival have also affected the performance event in a broader sense. Ever since the festival was established the large numbers of tourists who came to attend the performance of Greek drama entrenched the space as the site of representation of the modern country and its relationship with antiquity.

The institutional context of the Epidaurus Festival has functioned similarly to a system of “opening and closing,” which, according to Foucault, defines access to the heterotopic site. The exclusions from the theater of Epidaurus applied to theater organizations and artists as well as to the performances themselves. The National Theatre monopolized the space for two decades, until the period of political reforms following the fall of the colonel’s dictatorship in 1974. However, even thereafter only state companies—such as the National Theatre of Northern Greece,
Fig. 1. Sophocles’ *Electra*, ancient theater of Epidaurus, 1938, directed by Dimitris Rondiris, National Theatre of Greece. Photo reproduced courtesy of the National Theatre of Greece.
the Theatrical Organisation of Cyprus and the already world-renowned Theatro Technis (Art Theatre) founded and directed by Karolos Koun—were allowed to perform in Epidaurus.

The Epidaurus Festival affirmed the close association between space and text which was already insinuated in earlier quests to reuse ancient theaters. The idea that the only meaningful way of dealing with ancient drama would be through its performance in ancient theaters was intertwined with the almost exclusive use of the theater of Epidaurus for productions of Greek drama. For instance, whilst the comedy of Menander has received some scarce stagings at the festival, Roman drama has been totally excluded. The privileging of the Greek plays, and tragedy in particular, over not only modern but also Roman drama testifies to the idea of a “singular antiquity” that has been formed as simultaneously a foundation and a reflection of modern Greek identity.

The impact of the ancient theater spaces on the modern Greek perceptions of antiquity is evident in the contemplation of the ancient Greek texts and their performance in spatial terms. It seems that the physical characteristics of the ancient theaters prefigured two prevalent directorial approaches to ancient drama:

1. The ancient text is treated as a supreme architectural artifact characterized by an austere geometry that the codes of the performance should reproduce.

2. Ancient drama is read with recourse to modern Greek topography in an analogy with the ancient theater which is embedded within the modern Greek landscape.

The former view is mainly represented by the directors who have tended to praise the so-called “plasticity” (πλαστικότητα) of the classical text. Politis defined the plasticity of tragedy as “endurance in eternal change.” For Politis plasticity is understood as a density of expression which is also found in Greek folk song. Politis underscored the distance separating ancient drama from the contemporary spectator and the need to adjust the Greek plays to the requirements of modern perception. The director of the National Theatre, Alexis Minotis (1898–1990), who regarded the ancient theatrical space as a precondition for the revival of ancient drama, emphasized the importance of the “plastic posture” in performance.
The director Sokratis Karantinos (1906–79) was a keen advocate of the performance of Greek tragedy in ancient theaters. As an artistic director of the National Theatre of Northern Greece in the 1960s he established an annual ancient drama festival at the Greek theaters in Philippi and Thasos. Unlike most Greek directors who systematically staged Greek drama, Karantinos also produced numerous theoretical essays on the staging of Greek tragedy and comedy. Although he denounced the “kolossal,” as he terms them, productions by Rondiris, he often talks of the ancient text as the supreme artifact, comparing its structure to that of ancient temples: “[There is an] order and an organization characterized by an astonishing analogy; whoever understands well the form of ancient drama, he senses that this analogy can’t be changed, in the same way that one cannot imagine the tilt of a Parthenon column moved inside or outside.” In a talk he gave at the Sorbonne in 1952, he argues that “[l]earned philologists and great Hellenists, analysing and presenting the work of the ancient tragedians, compare it to the pediment of the ancient temple. They find in it the same completeness of the form which is achieved by a geometrical composition and vibrates full of life, atmosphere and natural rhythm with its plastic expression.” According to an earlier text by Karantinos, the plastic quality of the Greek text originates in the plastic quality of the Greek landscape itself: “The first and foremost characteristic of the ancient text is the plastic quality of the word, identical to plastic quality of the happily sun-lit Greek nature, of the mountain, the slope and the sky—so equal to the plastic feeling which can be found at any other creation of the ancient Greek: sculpture, drawing, pots etc.—this is the harmony, the music of the austerely written verse.”

Karolos Koun’s (1908–87) approach to ancient drama stood in sharp opposition to the monumental stagings by the National Theatre. In particular, Koun took issue with the School of the Austrian director Max Reinhardt, which, in his view, had been reproduced by the established performance practices in Greece. By contrast, his own takes on Greek drama first with Laiki Skini (Popular Stage) and later with Theatro Technis pursued the innate Greekness of the ancient plays. His stagings of both tragedy and comedy abounded in visual and musical elements drawn from the Byzantine, oriental, and folk traditions, which he considered to be deep-seated in Greek life. Furthermore, Koun viewed ancient drama
as a vibrant part of contemporary Greek culture which can be accessed through enduring and familiar elements within the landscape. His productions offered elaborations of his early concept of “Greek folk expressionism” which he linked to the sense of “the unfeigned plasticity as it is manifested in life, in mountains, in flumes, in trees, in animals, in birds and in humans.”

After Theatro Technis was accepted into the Epidaurus Festival, this sensual connection with Greek of antiquity is subjected to the impact of the ancient monument. Koun’s later views on ancient drama did not evade Greek exclusive claims over Greek drama or references to the “sacredness that the space [Epidaurus] itself has.”

In the concluding part of this essay I shall briefly discuss the representations of the ancient theater in two more recent large-scale popular events held in Greece. The opening ceremony of the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens was directed by the choreographer Dimitris Papaioannou, whose avant-garde performances in the 1980s and 1990s counted numerous engagements with Greek myths and plays. Papaioannou’s high-tech and highly artistic show culminated in a pageant of artifacts from Minoan times to modern Greece exhibited in the form of a linear float parade. The image of an ancient theater featured prominently among the fragments, while the voice-over narration reminded the international audience of the birth of theater in classical Athens. The Eurovision Song Contest hosted by Athens in 2006 was blatantly influenced by the 2004 opening ceremony. The set of the whole show was inspired by the Greek theatrical building: the background consisted of six big constructions representing the rows of an ancient theater, while a round space resembling the ancient orchestra was placed on the actual stage. This space arrangement allowed the crowded auditorium of the contest and the empty theater of the set to share the orchestra-stage. The dance performance during the interval of the show enacted the different periods of Hellenism as acts of the same play. A group of dancers resembling a tragic chorus entered the stage signing a hymn to the Greek god Iacchus, an obvious reference to Aristophanes’ Frogs. A second group of dancers performed a kind of choral performance which was largely based on Aristophanes’ Birds, with both choreography and music alluding to Karolos Koun’s 1959 landmark production of the play. The interval act continued with the performance of a Byzantine ritual, while Byzantine icons were projected on the set. At
the end, modern Greek folk imagery took over to complete the picture of a continuous cultural tradition from ancient to modern Greece. The interval act ended with the performance of the popular Greek dance syrtaki, which was very much in keeping with Greece’s representation within the tourist industry. In both instances, the displacement of the discourse of continuity from the performance of Greek tragedy to the sphere of popular culture, especially in events in which countries are represented in terms of achievement, unwittingly reminded of the cultural stakes underlying the performance in ancient theaters.

The use of ancient theaters in modern Greece has served the urge to affirm the unfailing links with the ancient past through the powerful means of performance. The long-standing quests to stage ancient drama in ancient theaters since the foundation of the Greek state led to the use of several Greek theaters in the first half of the twentieth century, which enabled the material experience of ancient sites. In postwar Greece the ancient theater of Epidaurus developed into the heterotopia of Greek continuity governed by the institution of an official ancient drama festival. The efficaciousness of heterotopias as regards the implementation of national narratives, as the paradigm of ancient theaters in modern Greece demonstrates, may invite further reflection upon the various ways in which heterotopic imagination partakes in the formation of the Greek nation itself.

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Notes

1 This performance was a staging of Hall’s 1981 production of Aeschylus’s trilogy.


3 The thymele is located in the middle of the orchestra, the large space where the chorus danced.


6 Ibid., 146.
7 Ibid., 149.

8 Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” *Diacritics* 16 (1986): 22–27 (24). The article was first published posthumously under the original title “Des espaces autres” in the journal *Architecture-Mouvement-Continuité* in October 1984. The text was initially planned as a lecture that Foucault was invited to deliver at the Cercle d'étude architecturales in 1967 following his addresses on heterotopias on the French radio.

9 Ibid., 23.


17 Even after the reforms in the Epidaurus Festival’s policies in 2006, this discourse often survives in the critics’ and audience’s responses to productions of non-Greek directors and theater companies at the ancient theater of Epidaurus.


20 Sideris, *Το αρχαίο θέατρο*, 144.

21 Ibid., 154.

22 Ibid., 115.

23 Sideris refers to some unverified information that the society aspired to perform in the theater of Epidaurus. Had this been the case, it would have provided the earliest attempt to use Epidaurus for modern performance. Although Sideris does not consider the information reliable, the participation in the society of the archaeologist Panagiotis Kavvadias, who conducted the excavations at the site of Epidaurus, makes the hypothesis particularly tempting. See Sideris, *Το αρχαίο θέατρο*, 125.


25 Sideris, 42–43.
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26 Ibid., 70.


28 For a detailed description of the set design, see Sideris, 267–68. It is also notable that the old disciple of Mistriotis, Alexandros Philadelfeus, thought highly of Politis’s production and published a letter arguing for the use of the theater of Epidaurus. See Sideris, 278.


31 The young Sikelianos was among Christomanos’s “initiates” and he participated in productions of the Nea Skini, including the 1901 production of Euripides’ Alcestis, where he was a chorus member.


33 Ibid., 66.


35 Known as the Royal Theatre at the time.

36 See the biography of Giannis K. Bastias, the director of the National Theatre: Κωστής Μπαστιάς: Δημοσιογραφία-Θέατρο-Λογοτεχνία [Kostis Bastias: Journalism-Theater-Literature] (Athens: Kastaniotis, 2005), 237, 247, 284–86. Bastias was also planning the building of an ancient-like theater of ten thousand seats in Athens, 298.

37 The production of Aeschylus’s Persians by the Groupe de Théâtre Antique de la Sorbonne, performed in Epidaurus in 1937, was an informal staging with limited impact.

38 Bastias was director of the Letters and Arts Department of Metaxas’s Ministry of Education from 1937 to 1940.


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42 Politis, “Η δραματική τεχνοτροπία” [The Dramatic Technique], in Επιλογή κριτικών άρθρων, 102 (originally in Πρωία, 29 April 1931).

43 Politis, “Η Αντιγόνη εις το θέατρον Ηρώδου” [Antigone at the Herodus Atticus Theater], 9–11 (originally in Ελευθέριον Βήμα, 11 June 1928).


45 Karantinos, Προς το αρχαίο δράμα, 24–25.

46 Sokratis Karantinos, H ερμηνεία του αρχαίου δράματος / L ’ interprétation du drame antique [pamphlet] (Kavala, 1963), 4. The text was a talk delivered at the International Theatre Conference in Athens in 1957.

47 Karantinos, Προς το αρχαίο δράμα, 92.

48 Ibid., 14.


51 Koun, Κάνουμε θέατρο για την ψυχή μας, 156 (originally in Καθημερινή, 9 September 1984). See also 33–34.