IDENTIFICATIONS

Performing Counter Discrimination

International Conference

ABSTRACTS & BIOS

Panel 3

Ca' Foscari University of Venice

Department for Philosophy and Cultural Heritage

Aula Magna Silvio Trentin

November 20, 2024.

Panel 3

Counter-Identification and Performance. From Historical Perspectives to Contemporary Art and Institutional Change

Chair: Dr. Rosaria Ruffini (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)

Keywords: counteractions; antiquity and the far-right; migration and the cultural sector; asylum and artistic practices.

1. Classical Identifications in the Post-fascist Era: Refractions of Antiquity from Historical Fascism to the Contemporary Far Right

Eleftheria Ioannidou

A common trait among far-right movements and parties in contemporary Europe, spanning from neofascist extremism to right-wing populism, is the use of classical references and ancient-looking symbols. Extremist movements leverage the historical legacies of Greece and Rome to call for militant action in defending national borders against perceived external threats. Likewise, ultra-right populist parties of the mainstream turn to Greco-Roman antiquity to stress the need to protect Europe from what they view as encroachments posed by immigration and multiculturalism. These references to the classical past evoke the prominent place of classical antiquity within the fascist regimes of the interwar period. However, in contemporary far-right contexts, antiquity helps to cultivate a sense of identification with a common 'European' culture alongside national or racial narratives.

This paper will examine the functions of Greco-Roman antiquity within the contemporary far right, drawing on examples from different European countries. First, I will focus on how the classical civilisations are co-opted within neofascist contexts. These acts of appropriation often occur within ritualised political events, such as commemorations, that induce strong embodied affinities to a distant past. Secondly, I will explore how ultra-right populist parties use the classical past to bolster the notion of a superior European culture and shared heritage, pitted against a globalised, multicultural world. Applying Enzo Traverso's interpretation of post-fascism, I will demonstrate that the far right's attachment to antiquity allows us to trace its genealogies to historical fascism. However, far from serving as a mechanism to disguise these genealogies, I will argue that the appropriation of the past is inextricably linked to the far right's ability to mobilise emotive and affective identifications, offering disaffected segments of

society a seemingly affirmative outlook for the future. Understanding this phenomenon can be instrumental in countering the proliferating narratives of the far right.

Eleftheria Ioannidou is a Senior Lecturer of Theatre and Performance Studies at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. Her research explores the 20th-century reception of Greek theatre and drama, with a particular emphasis on national identity, politics, and ideology. She has authored the monograph Greek Fragments in Postmodern Frames: Rewriting Tragedy, 1970-2005 (Oxford University Press, 2017) and has published extensively on the uses of the classical past under fascist regimes during the interwar period and the contemporary far right. Recently, she co-edited two special issues on fascism and classical antiquity; the first focuses on the processes of embodiment and performativity characterising the fascist appropriations of classical antiquity (Fascism: Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies, Brill 2023). The second explores the revival of Greek drama in the open air under Mussolini (Classical Receptions Journal Oxford University Press, 2024).

2. Theatre and Asylum Hearings: Finding alternative means of Identification
S E Wilmer

Refugees around the world have been undergoing interviews, hearings, and court cases to determine their identities and rights to enter or reside in individual countries. In many instances this process is less than transparent as most countries seek to render the process invisible. Theatre and film, on the other hand, have opened a window on the process and allowed the public to view what has been kept hidden. In this paper I want to contrast different national approaches to the asylum process and consider specific case studies of theatre and film productions that represent and critique national judicial practices. Amongst others, I will consider the performance of Illegal Helpers in Potsdam (2016), Dear Home Office in London (2016), and the documentary film A Well Founded Fear (2000), as well as Michelle Castañeda's recent book on Disappearing Rooms (2023). Such works interrogate the practices that assess the credibility of asylum seekers, the accountability of those deciding such cases, and the possibilities for introducing counter-vailing strategies for acceptance. They also illustrate how theatre and film have made more transparent, borne witness to, or undermined the asylum process, such as through "subversive over-identification" (Žižek) or mis-identification.

S. E. Wilmer is Professor Emeritus at Trinity College Dublin, where he was Head of the School of Drama, Film, and Music. He has served on the executive committees of the American Society for Theatre Research and the International Federation of Theatre Research, and as a visiting professor at Stanford University and the University of California at Berkeley, and as a research fellow at the Freie Universität Berlin. He has also taught in doctoral summer programmes for many years at the University of Helsinki and the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz. He co-edited a special topic on 'Theatre and Statelessness in Europe' for Critical Stages in 2016. Recent books are Performing Statelessness in Europe (Palgrave, 2018), Deleuze, Guattari and the Art of Multiplicity (2020), Life in the Posthuman Condition (2023), and The Palgrave Handbook of Theatre and Migration which he co-edited with Yana Meerzon in 2023. He is co-editing a book series for Palgrave Macmillan on "Performance and Migration".

3. Counter-Actions: Agency, Identity and Sweden's Transitional Moment
Vicky Angelaki

The past few years have marked a period of movement and flux in different forms of what might be described as public life in Sweden (to include society, politics, culture, education and the arts). Emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic as a global paradigm for differing management of the greatest health crisis of the recent period, Sweden additionally found itself negotiating the immediate impacts of another crisis, the Ukraine military conflict, not least because of the country's (meaning Sweden) geographical position and strategic significance in the Scandinavian and broader Northern European region. Sweden's recent entry into NATO solidifies the transition, implementing a shift in the context of Sweden's historical neutrality. As Sweden experiences these changes, it also revisits its history and histories, as the large-scale and widely publicised television programme Historien om Sverige (The History of Sweden), streamed by the national broadcaster (SVT) in 2023-24, and covering a remarkable historical span, also evidences.

This paper, then, proposes to discuss: the monumental changes in ideological, social and political currents that Sweden has been experiencing in the recent period and as also recorded in the results of the 2022 national election; and the artistic counteractions to this shifting ecology. Key concerns will include: the ways in which migration has been appropriated as a lever for the incitement of conservative sentiment; the ways in which the cultural and academic sector has been responding to this changing atmosphere; and the ways in which funding and

subsidy structures have become impacted by the turn in Sweden's political climate. The paper will follow a scale moving from the national to the local, and from institutional to open spaces (taking on the very question of what an 'open' space means), addressing concerns of access and ideology, and taking on key examples of the ways in which artistic boldness, diversity, inclusion and agency have continued to be prominent in the broader performance and public art sector in Sweden, mindful of the conclusions that can be drawn from these.

Vicky Angelaki is Professor in Comparative Literature at Mid Sweden University (Department of Humanities and Social Sciences). She was previously based in the UK, where she held full-time, permanent roles at Birmingham City University; University of Birmingham; University of Reading. Major publications include the monographs Martin Crimp's Power Plays: Intertextuality, Sexuality, Desire (2022); Theatre & Environment (2019); Social and Political Theatre in 21st-Century Britain: Staging Crisis (2017); The Plays of Martin Crimp: Making Theatre Strange (2012); and the edited collection Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground (2013; 2016). Her latest monograph Staging Interspaces in Contemporary British Theatre: Environment and Fluidity is published open access by Palgrave Macmillan in the summer of 2024.

Chair

Rosaria Ruffini *is Marie Skłodowska-Curie Global+1 Fellow at Ca' Foscari University of Venice (Performance Studies and Migration Studies), in collaboration with Ibn Zohr University of Agadir, Morocco. Her interdisciplinary project "Playing at the Gateways of Europe: theatrical languages and performative practices in migrant reception centres of the Mediterranean area" has been funded by the European Commission, Program Horizon 2020. After a PhD in Theatre Studies at the Sorbonne Nouvelle University with the thesis "Les Afriques de Peter Brook" (published by Linea Edizioni in 2020), and a double PhD at Alma Mater Studiorum University of Bologna, she devoted her first publications to relationships between European theatre and African performing arts. She has taught Theatre and Performance in various institutions, in France (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Université Saint Denis-Vincennes, Université Franche-Comté, Ecole des Mines of Paris, Paris Sciences et Lettres, Ensta Institut Polytechnique de Paris), and Italy (IUAV University).*