



For all of us, Vyrsopeiseio was not just a space but also a cause; a locus of collective expression, a network of artists and citizens, a cradle of contemporary art, but also, ultimately, an open experiment answering the question: “How can we make art using collaborative management models?” Thanks to the dimensions of the space—over 3,000 square metres—, the new home of ODC Ensemble became a meeting point for hundreds of artists and activists; a vivid hub for exchanging ideas.

I managed Vyrsopeiseio from 2011 to 2016, when it shut down, marking the end of an era and the beginning of a new, equally creative period. During its active years, the prolific weekly program of Vyrsopeiseio encompassed theatre, dance, and music performances, as well as festivals and educational workshops featuring a number of co-productions. Over forty new theatrical and dance performances were staged, along with ten music festivals, annual platforms of drama and contemporary performing arts, two international site-specific festivals, and many programmes of international artistic exchanges and residencies. Special emphasis was given to international networking. ODC Ensemble collaborated with numerous international organisations, being a full member of the Trans Europe Halles (TEH) and IETM networks and currently a partner in three Creative Europe programmes: *Creative Lenses* (2015-2019)<sup>1</sup>, *Europe Grand Central* (2016-2018), and *Polar Circle* (2017-2020).

Since its founding, Vyrsopeiseio ran under the auspices of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture; it should be noted, however, that it has never received any state funding whatsoever.

## The New Map and ODC Ensemble

When any semblance of certainty vanishes due to the historical circumstances, a New Map reveals itself to the individual; a distant horizon, replete with obscure and thus far unheard-of interconnections between humanity and the ecosystem, emotions and weather phenomena, the most vulnerable person and the most powerful leader, poetics and reality. While time appears to be confined to a merciless present that takes all our newfound strength to open time up to the future, this New Map depicts an expanded, infinite Universe, open to imagination and human potential. The New Map reveals to us fresh categories and connections across things, pushing our thinking and therefore our art into new, unfamiliar directions.

Co-founder Dimitris Kamarotos and I named ODC Ensemble after Homer’s *Odyssey* (*Odyssey*/ODC), marking adventurousness as one of ODC’s integral components. In 2011, though, thanks to the political reality and the launch of Vyrsopeiseio, I radically shifted the orientation and aesthetics of ODC.



In the intersection between real life and our secret worlds, ODC Ensemble created outrageous and diverse work. Our unrefined and raw aesthetics clashed with the aesthetic imperatives of bourgeois, slick, flawless works of art. Instead, we chose to draw on the raw, fresh reality, on the violence and extremities that were manifest in the public sphere. The industrial space of Vyrsopeiseio allowed us to do things that would normally be prohibited in conventional theatrical venues; we were now free to flood the entire foyer of the theatre with water, or to light Shakespeare's *Richard II* exclusively by means of torchlights and real fire.

We gradually became more interested in the topography of the public space; the great, corporeal presence of the masses protesting in the streets led us to works of epic proportions and collective dramaturgies. As a collective, we investi-gated rehearsal techniques favouring pluralism and confrontation, convinced that it is not enough to tackle 'political' plays if the very process of rehearsals lacks freedom or encourages passive attitudes.

Since its formation, our Ensemble runs on an 'open' contract basis, in terms of commitment, beliefs, political musings, choice of performative spaces and production conditions. The new solid core of ODC Ensemble was shaped over time, consisting of composer Tilemachos Moussas, visual artist Pantelis Makkas, set designers Telis Karananos and Alexandra Siafkou, dramatist and actress Stella Raptit, lighting designer Olympia Mytilinaiou, photographer Alex Kat and actors Adrian Frieling, Valia Papachristou, Rosa Prodromou, and Anastasia Katsinavaki. For all of us, the members of the ODC Ensemble and Vyrsopeiseio, the years of the crisis were years of hard work; a break with everything we had taken for granted.

It is a blessing to connect with people who dare go against the grain. This book is dedicated to all these restless spirits who, in the face of social fragmentation, conceive life in artistic terms and make art in life's terms. Dedicated to all those eclectic artists and persevering craftsmen of life, thanking them for (still) being there for me, fellow travellers in this fortunately ongoing *Odyssey*...

**Elli Papakonstantinou**

*Director*

*Artist director of ODC Ensemble*

## **ΜΑΝΙΦΕΣΤΟ ODC MANIFESTO**

In this shifting world we live in, theatre of the polis is from/with/about the citizens of various social backgrounds and positions. Dynamic entities that we don't want to neutralise or come to terms with: they meet on stage and off stage. An active gathering of citizens in a politically polarised world. Our work is to voice conflicted stands: our viewers are not our friends.

Art is an unconscious and fast exchange of survival codes.

Theatre is a provocation that stimulates challenge.

Theatre of the polis embraces parallel realities and the dramaturgy of the Many, the dramaturgy of the Present citizens can perform on stage.

What if we need to reshape the structures of our organisations and the ways we produce and rehearse altogether in order to challenge dominant narratives?

Stop ticking the right boxes in the subsidy forms.

Don't go home!

New needs are linked to new ways, other than the existing.

Real life has by-passed civilised manners long ago: raw aesthetics for neo-medieval times without a God.

Content is at the core of the new rupture with the past: allowing conflicting narratives to be heard.

Raw is beautiful.

Chaotic structures are harmonious.

Open questions!

Any site is a stage: Perform in flooded theatre spaces, turn foyers into rivers, turn real spaces into Utopias, turn Utopias into real spaces.

Embrace the bewilderment of the audience in the face of persistent dislocation.

Displacement of the viewer is a political act.

**E.P.**