

Trans*Late Architecture

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Abstract

-----This paper attempts a spatial reading of autobiographies written by greek trans* prostitutes born in mid-20th century, aiming to examine how spatial values can affect the formation of gender identity and vice versa. The narratives of transgender individuals offer valuable information on this field as they reveal a constant exchange between spatial stimuli and the gradual construction of the self-as-a-gendered-body. This paper shall closely examine how this exchange affects not only the understanding of gender identity, but also the decisions on body modification processes. The reading of these books evinces repeated spatial types that are present in the narratives either in the form of indefinite archetypes in which several stories unfold, or as historically and geographically precise locations that affect the life and times of our subjects through their peculiar spatial attributes. The narrowing of the research in the socio-historical frame of post-war Greece enables a insight in the way that authoritative narratives interplay with personal confessions in the shaping of factual and/or imagined spaces of transgender praxis, as well as in the construction of collective identity for the trans* movement of Greece.

Introduction

-----The title signalling the beginning of this paper (Trans*Late Architecture) is a wordplay bringing together architecture, translation, transgender identity and a sense of delay, hence revealing both the *themes* and the broader *inquiries* of this research. Although there is obviously no intention to exhaust either the semiotics of architecture, or the -sometimes- problematic attempts to correlate gender and space, this paper aspires to present original material that could forward the discussion in the aforementioned fields through the spatial reading of transgender narratives.

-----The idea behind this venture came alongside the very first reading of the narratives. As part of a course paper for the School of Architecture in Athens some years ago, I tried to document the history of gay cruising sites in Athens. The only *published* sources offering a historic perspective in this field that I was able to trace¹, were a series of autobiographies written by trans* women working as prostitutes in Greece, who were focusing their narrations largely in their Athenian experiences over the last 50 years. In these books, the urban or rural landscape, either in Athens or in the rest of Greece, is loudly present and described in parallel with the growth of the greek trans* community and with the expansion and establishment of prostitution and cruising channels. It soon became clear to me that the wealth of the information provided surpassed the needs of the small piece that I was writing at the time.

-----Since then I was able to trace ten books written by greek individuals who deliberately identified inside the spectrum of trans* identity² with all but two being published between 2000 and 2014. While the autobiographical books have been the primary origin of information for this

¹ There were affluent narratives on current cruising practice in Greece in internet gay fora, gay tourism sites and personal blogs, a few fictional books, while I was also able to collect narrations via interviews.

² There are four trans women who have undergone -and describe their- reassignment surgeries and one who hasn't, while there is also a case of a famous cis male writer, working as "cis female" prostitute -a fact that he never tried to hide in his life- whose autobiography was published posthumously.

research, it was considered wise to supplement the narratives with other sources³ that verify events, dates and claims mentioned by the individuals, as well as they provide a broader understanding of the LGBT fermentation and the socio-political situation in Greece in the years covered. For reasons of concision, the present research will make background use of this archival constellation in order to attempt an introductory spatial decoding of the aforementioned published autobiographies. Given that all individuals are different and thus, there are always exceptions that might prove the rules in major or minor degree, effort was made to focus on books that share basic stems, as are the decades and general themes covered, but in the same time are different in terms of narrative tropes and viewpoints, providing useful variations of the spatial understanding⁴.

-----The balance between an archetypical representation that constructs trans* communal mythologies of space and the particular locations that redefine such archetypes, while also link the greek trans* community to broader historical and geographical formations, is the core of the present research. Nevertheless, this paper will also attempt to comment on the ways that spatial stimuli affect the decisions on trans* body modification processes, hence shaping the trans* body; a hypothesis that might bring gender and space closer than the mere spatial /anthropomorphic metaphors usually used as “translation” materials in these fields.

-----This corpus of autobiographical narratives alongside its archival constellation has remained, to this date, largely unrecognised by the (greek) academics who are working on gender and,

³ Including conventional press references, underground queer press references, movies, documentaries, presence in TV/radio shows or other A/V material, legislation policies and parliament proceedings from the Greek state, records from the first gay syndicate (1977-1990), the first (2003-approx.2008) and second (est. 2010) trans* syndicate, network references, personal blogging, personal sites in social networks (prostitution networking included).

⁴ The books chosen as *primary* sources for this research were: “*Betty: Captain of My Soul*” by Elisabeth (Betty) Vakalidou (1950 - today), first published in 1980 and re-published in 2007, “*Why is That I don't Have One Like Yours, Mom?*” by Anna Kouroupou (1964 - today), published in 2011 and “*Journey of my Life*” by Eva Koumariou (1954 - today), published in 2012. The first two books were produced and distributed by conventional publishing companies, while the third, by the only LGBTIQ oriented publishing company in Greece. It is important to note however, that all three books appear in both conventional and LGBTIQ oriented bookstores. In these three narratives the individuals choose to present events from their whole life, in chronological order (Eva), in an assemblage of asynchronous reflections (Anna), or in a combination of both styles (Betty). Of course material is traced, where needed from other books as well.

particularly, on gendered expressions of space. This fact becomes impressive and accountable should we consider the wealth of information that these narratives can provide for a wide range of disciplines, the never-ending need of deliberate narratives from members of relatively closed communities, as trans* prostitutes are, and finally, the number of these published narratives comparing to the small size of our country -accordingly, of the greek trans*community- and the conservative treatment of gender and sexuality themes in Greece; tendencies clearly manifested in Greek Authoritative and social violence towards trans* individuals.

-----This analysis does not aspire to exhaust the material found in the narratives, or offer the international audience with the level of insight that a close translation of the books would, as it acknowledges that it will always remain a theoretical abstraction, a small piece to be added in the archive that supplements the books. Its purpose is to constitute a threshold for the broader hearing of these voices and to venture their first -belated- “translation” in space-oriented theory.

the Need for (Common) Spaces

-----The existence of events and locations that are repeated in all narratives is striking when reading the books that describe in first person the lives and times of greek trans* prostitutes, however it should not come as great surprise. This repetition occurs majorly because 20th century Greek homosexual and trans* community was forced to live in secrecy, hence fostering the creation of closed “underground” homogeneous groups that followed similar lifestyles as well as ways of self-protection and alliance. This atmosphere is vividly and explicitly present in the narratives:

The social space of a transvestite is very limited. It is Syggrou Avenue, some bars in Plaka district and our home -should we have one of course. (...) We want to hang out in the same

place in order to feel that this place is ours, like the black people feel in Harlem. There, we meet and sometimes things go crazy. We chat, we laugh, we tease, we gossip. (Vakalidou: 1980, 226,228)

-----The aforementioned narration refers to 1980's Greece and is a great introduction to this era and the sense of enclosure that "transvestite" community experienced. Although today it might seem improper to use the term "*transvestite*" or blend the notions of *homosexuality* and *transgender* identity, at the times when the lives of our subjects unfold, these notions in Greece were not easily distinguished even in the contours of the inchoate LGBT community⁵. Particularly, trans* identity with its contemporary pluralistic meaning, was largely unknown and only the word "Transvestite" was used as a coarse label for this unprecedented gender expression. As patriarchic discrimination at the time was mostly based on what Ki Namaste⁶ (1996) would call *Genderbashing*, -a hateful rejection focusing on gender blurring characteristics than sexuality-, large part of the homosexual men who were perceived as "feminized" faced similar problems with "the Transvestites", hence forming strong alliance and fostering a zone of gender identity (con)fusion. As a consequence, "the transvestites" were not a sanitised and well framed group based on the solid acknowledgment of contemporary labelling, but a blend of homosexual men, trans* women, crossdressers etc. who gathered with their lovers, clients and friends.

-----This small mixed community was of core importance for the formation of 20th Century Greek Queer Culture. Homosexual men (and few lesbians) organised during the 70's around passionate trans* individuals in order to manifest for equality, while in the same time "the transvestites" were becoming an indispensable part of athenian night culture. Athens, capital of

⁵ This confusion is evident in the first issues of "Ampí", the journal of "AKOE" -practically the first organised homosexual movement of Greece- where there is lots of discussion on claims for the distinction of the homosexual from the "transvestite" movement.

⁶ Namaste Viviane Ki , 'Genderbashing: Sexuality, Gender and the Regulation of Public Space', in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, edited by S. Stryker and S. Whittle, p. 584-600, New York: Routledge 2009

Greece, becomes the bright scenery of most descriptions, as all the authors of the books we examine ended up in the 60's-70's in the "queer hotspots" of this noisy and developing city, where they could relate to other queer individuals, gain money, attract sexual partners and start their journey of self awareness. The urgent need of our subjects to abscond from "home", either this is a small village far away from Athens, or a bourgeois apartment in the capital, is directly correlated in all narratives with the dream of getting "lost" in the capital. Violence in domestic environment -or the neighbourhood- constrained the individuals -sometimes literally, sending them to borstals (cf. Koumarianou/Vakalidou)-, hence transforming Athens in a utopian spatial *emblem* where the subjects could both take distance from their torturers and correlate with people with whom they shared interests.

Panayota⁷ had been several times in Athens and each time that she came back, she was arousing my imagination: «You have to see the life they do there», she said. «A huge city, full of lights, beautiful shops, entertainment centres. It has also places that they call "bars", with low lights and people sit in big stools. Should you go there, in the bars, you will be spotted by someone who will love you, will dress you, will adorn you, will give you money, will make you a Queen! You'll do a big life in Athens»! (Vakalidou: 1980, 30)

-----This gradual transposition of trans* individuals in Athens as documented in the narratives however, is not detached from the broader population movements of the 60's era in Greece. After two world wars, the province of Greece was impoverished and people were sometimes coarse in attitude. In the same time the capital was getting rebuilt and the urban line was sprawling with great eagerness⁸. The ideal of modernity and hygiene, which was largely expressed by the vast

⁷ "In the second year of high school I met Panayoti (male name), or Panayota (female name), as he was being called. Panayota was the faggot of the village" (Vakalidou: 1980, 25) Trans* subjects formed networks of alliance since teen years where they could feel "at home" in rather aggressive environments.

⁸ See Papamichos N., "The post-war city, city of part-exchange construction", in the "1949-1967: Two explosive decades", Society of Greek Culture and General Education Study, Athens: 2000

construction of apartment buildings and hospitals inspired by the modernist movement, brought money and work in the city centre, hence attracting working hands. Soon the capital was filled by native immigrants who tried to get used and adapt in this “new life”.

-----Unavoidably, during these decades, the existence of common spaces where homosexual and trans* individuals frequented was crucial for the exploration, the acceptance and, to some part, the formation of gender identity. As we saw before, the existence and the location of these spots was disseminated through rumours. However, it seems as if these rumours were not at all misleading.

I started to hear rumours about “Hawaii”, a night club where transvestites gathered, but I knew nothing about that place in particular. The others used to ask me “You! Why don’t you go to Hawaii?” (...) I got into that strip club with awe, as if I entered the sanctuary of a Church. (...) Lots of boys dressed as women, low lights and smoke. (Vakalidou 2007:50,52)

-----In the “bars” like Hawaii, one could find transvestites, cis men who identified or not as homosexuals, patrons who exploited their protégées, soldiers, singers etc. It was a vivid collectivity where trans* individuals could seek for sexual partners and/or friends. Inside these bars there was a high exchange of gender models, the imitation and iteration of which became a safe life path for many of our subjects. Mature homosexuals and/or trans* individuals who already ventured solicitation in drag, openly celebrated their newly formed lifestyle, their advanced earnings and their daring feminine appearance in these “safe” environments in a way that appeared appealing and emancipatory in the eyes of those who were younger and still in search of role-models. However, even when transgender identity was acknowledged as such and was well established in the individual’s psyche, encounters as the ones described above helped in the exchange of methods, ideas and even hormone shots in this closeted community.

One of my friends took me to the tavern of Kotseas (...) There I saw some dressed women. Actually, they were neither men nor women. (...) I wanted to look like them. I noticed that they were carefree. They had success in men. So I started imitating them. I started speaking like them, in Kaliarda. I started to put on make up and get dressed like them. (Vakalidou 2007:51)

-----As implied from the above quotation, apart from the choice of specific “safe” underground locations, a peculiar way of protection, recognition and achievement of community cohesion among greek trans* individuals has been the usage of a coded dialect, holding the name Kaliarda, which deserves some attention here for further linking trans* identity, semiotics and space. Kaliarda was officially recorded for the first time in 1971 by Elias Petropoulos in his homonymous lexicon which is believed to be the first gay slang dictionary, published one year before the American “*Queen’s Vernacular*” by Bruce Rodgers, -probably the most renowned of this kind.

-----The mere need to compose and use a lexicon as a guide to the understanding of 20th century Queer culture is indicative of its highly enclosed character. As Douglas Mount states in his forward of “The Queen’s Vernacular”: “*This is a book about oppression for words are a means by which the oppressed deal with that condition and with the pressure and tension that results from living a secret life*” (Mount:1972). The Lexicon of Kaliarda is paradigmatic of this need. According to Petropoulos and oral testimonies, the product of this vernacular linguistics was not only incomprehensible but being also performed in high speech rate, accompanied by gestures and body signs, it became totally untraceable by an uninitiated stranger. This way trans* individuals could communicate their thoughts, warn each other about upcoming dangers, discuss “socially unaccepted” themes and identify with their peers. Nevertheless, it is reported that due to the blend

of different subcultures in the same underground hangouts, Kaliarda was partially understood -but not easily reproduced- also by cis prostitutes, patrons, thieves, drug dealers etc. further revealing the importance of space for the socialisation of the trans* individuals⁹ with other minority groups.

This way Kaliarda become a common space for our trans* subjects as well. A performed space comprised of approximately 3,000 new words, each of which reflects the way that trans* people conceived and “translated” their environment, be it human relationships or even literal space.

the Public Space of the Trans* Body

-----The usage of a coded dialect in public is only a small example of the ways that trans* individuals employed in order to protect themselves during their public appearances. Other ways that are commonly mentioned were the avoidance of daylight exposure and public transportation. As described eloquently by Betty in 1980:

We are forced to take taxi's all the time, no matter where we go, because people in the bus don't want us around. They stare weird, they become provocative and violent. They bestow us with the privilege to exist but in the same time, they block us in the margin limit. And we pay a whole salary every month just for hiring taxi's. (Vakalidou 1980:225)

-----The idea of “Passing”, that is commonly cited in trans* related sources today and actively implied in our subjects’ narratives, reflects the need of transgender individuals to minimise uncontrolled reactions towards their transition. In other words, it expresses the need of these subjects to communicate their history and experiences whenever, or to those who, they wish without

⁹ This is how Elias Petropoulos, a heterosexual cis man and rather homophobic managed to record this dialect.

having their appearance bespeak their identity in public encounters as the ones described above. This idea arises primarily from the alarming threat of the violent (physical and psychological) reactions against transgender subjects, by people who reject appearances that transgress “commonly accepted” gender binaries.

-----Should we accept that the human body, and especially the gendered body, is shaped comprising miscellaneous stimuli from our environment, then the transgender transition and ideas such as “Passing” can help in order to “measure” this influence and examine how spatial inputs can be “translated” into design vocabulary. As the methods employed in trans* body modification, the intensity of their use and the order in which the changes occur vary for each transgender individual, corporeal design becomes an ultimately personal trajectory, in which the body passively records, while also actively affects the life-course of the subject. Nevertheless, several protocols, as the ones expressing the need of our subjects for protection, have been developed over the years coercing the possible design sequences to predefined paths, with the most sovereign ones being those indicated by Medicine and Law. These protocols designate steps that must be followed during the transition as well as technologies, doses, performances etc. that are acceptable. In the case of our subjects, sub-protocols that might require totally different steps than the authoritative ones (eg. exhaustive use of cosmetic surgery, excessive drag design instead of “beautified” transition, avoidance of bottom surgery etc.) hold equal strength being spread in the contours of the trans* community according to unwritten laws of prostitution and trans* communal belonging.

-----The “social”, everyday “Passing” as a cis woman ideal however unavoidably affects the “legal” Passing, that is the processes by which “sex” and “gender” (where this difference exists) are determined in public documents, hence providing—or not— the transgender subject with the permission to participate in public events, to marry etc. In his study *“From Functionality to*

Aesthetics: The Architecture of Transgender Jurisprudence”, Andrew Sharpe¹⁰, refers to various cases where the prerequisites for the alteration of gender identity in public documents involves the subject’s sterilization by means of having internal or external reproductive organs removed, a vagina or a penis shaped, so that it can serve heterosexual intercourse and the overall configuration of an appearance that is conducive to “social” passing. Such processes are still under discussion in the greek legislative system with trans* individuals being violently coerced towards painful choices.

-----Nevertheless, during the life course of our subjects this “passing” choice was neither easy to accept, nor easy to achieve, as it required costly and radical body modification procedures, which at the time were not even secure and technologically advanced (cf. Vakalidou 1970:185). The processes were mostly illegal and clumsy, following the goading or prompting by trans* peers. Maybe the most discussed procedure was the bottom surgery. Hidden intentions concerning prostitution rates among trans* individuals who had and those who did not have surgery were the major factor of the dissemination of misleading information on this field, that either stimulated or disheartened the individuals from this process.

«You should go have the surgery» -Diana told me. «And when you will do it you will regret all this time that you hadn't done it. You'll feel perfect.» (...) After some time I started to suspect that all these advantages of the surgery where pure fiction. Diana used to be the mistress of all queer spots of Athens: “Kotseas”, “Omonoia”, “Syntagma”, “Plaka”. (...) She got bored of all and went to Casablanca for the surgery. Then she became totally unstable. (...) Fontaine told me «Are you crazy? Why do you want to get the surgery? Me, I am pleased, I ejaculate a lot but you, you are a damn hot transvestite! You should better go

¹⁰ Sharpe Andrew, “From Functionality to Aesthetics: The Architecture of Transgender Jurisprudence”, in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, p.621-632

to Paris to the famous Lidilaque to get some kind of cosmetic surgery instead» (Vakalidou: 1980, 186/188)

As eloquently described in the above quotations, since Greece in the 70's-80's was not at all developed in the field of body modification, the trans* women who desired to proceed to bottom surgery or refined cosmetics had to travel. Casablanca in Morocco was one of the famous sites where a trans* woman could undergo, illegally, bottom surgery, cited also by Anna Kouroupou (Kouroupou 2011:138), who had her surgery there. It is also evident however, that surgery - related travels are referred in the narratives next to travels for liftings, nose-jobs, breast implants and HRT's, even though most of these procedures could be done in Greece as well.

-----Before reaching at this level of “hard”, or “irreversible” body modifications however, most subjects frequented a series of “common spaces” where they invested most of their income in order to have “soft” procedures: hair removal and other beauty-related practices. Although these practices were not as radical as the surgeries, it is notable how liberated the individuals felt once they gained through them a certain “passing” level:

Once I had my first laser hair removal I went crazy. I started to circulate all the time in the morning because the hideous fuzz was gone. I was entering from one bus to the other as if I wanted to express my freedom. (Koumarianou:2012,58)

-----Despite all these efforts however, “Non-Passing” appearances also exist as many transgender subjects were either unable or unwilling to form a morphologically and/or structurally “Beautified”, “Passing” body. This area, as an area of “minimum privilege”, has been highly theorized by gender studies, as academics dealing with such matters are usually eager to recognise

anticonformist dynamics on the “non-Passing” body. Indeed, there are transgender people who consciously choose a “non-Passing” appearance in order to advocate their rights. However, trans* people working in the field of prostitution as our subjects are, occasionally intentionally design their bodies as “non-Passing” coerced by the desire and the gaze of the “customer” who wishes to easily distinguish trans* from cis prostitutes and choose accordingly. “*I get amused when the passers realise that I am not an authentic (sic) woman*” (Vakalidou 1980: 232) This kind of “excessive” design is a form of deliberate adoption of a “non-Passing” surface, which, however, is not always purposefully “subversive” in the way that the academia would like to consider it to be. Non-Passing appearances is one more protocol affecting body design that further renders our subjects vulnerable to Genderbashing, and/or condemn them to circulate only during the night for a lifetime following the violent paths of prostitution.

the Space of the Public Trans* Body

-----Greek authoritative and communal prejudice that linked trans* identity to sexual practices coerced homosexuals and trans* individuals to sex trade, -especially “streetwalking”-, as sole biased earning solution, hence resulting in a metonymy of trans* identity to prostitution. “*No School accepted me. I was disappointed and started to hang out during the nights at Zappeion Park.*” (Vakalidou 1980: 50) Prostitution, as the word reveals (< pro+ statuere, in latin: placed in public) is an activity that further complicates spatial experience as it demands constant public confrontation in a zone of ambivalent “*desire and disgust*”¹¹(Hubbart: 2000) regulative comprehension schemes. This double understanding provoked peculiar reactions from our subjects.

¹¹ Hubbard P., Desire/Disgust: Mapping the Moral Contours of Heterosexuality, Progress in Human Geography, 24,2 (2000) pp. 191-217

-----Prostitution, apart from being the only way to earn money, was also seen as an experience of drag performance that enabled greek trans* individuals to celebrate their feminine side. *“There were nights when she had great fun.(...) She felt like being in the catwalk. And she knocked her high heel in the pavement. Tack-Tuck. She loved that sound”* (Kouroupou 2011:99). As trans* prostitutes largely avoided patrons, they also reportedly experienced prostitution as a way of reclaiming what society was taking away from them; the ability to control their own body and life.

Do you want a show? Take it in its full glory. But you shall take it in my way. Look at me, bully me, desire me, condemn me, but only because I allow you to do so.(...) I am the whore of your city and you are all under my feet. (Kouroupou 2012:104).

-----After the fall of the latest greek dictatorship on 1974, trans* and queer friendly bars where our subjects met their lovers and found clients populated the centre of Athens, while the venues of trans* prostitution became metropolitan trade junctions where billions of drachmas (and later euros) changed hands. Omonoia Square with its train stations, public restrooms and cafe’s became the first cruising and socializing spot for queers, while Athena’s street, full of brothels at the 60’s connected Omonoia to Plaka district, which was the Soho of Athens during the same period. Park Cruising was another essential part of trans topography as most of our subjects made their first disguised steps behind tree’s shadows to end up almost inevitably at the pavements of Syggrou Avenue, a huge motorway designed in late 30’s in American style connecting Athens centre to the sea.

-----Syggrou Avenue rapidly became a metonymy of prostitution and especially trans* prostitution. In late 60’s and during the latest greek dictatorship (1967-1974), trans women were forced out of their hotspots in the centre of Athens by the police. They then searched for money and companion in protected spaces towards the south of Athens, following the trench of this Avenue,

upon which dark isolated areas, distanced from the city centre would provide them with privacy (Tachtsis 1989: 303).

Hawaii was the first organised nursery of the transvestites, who pounced out of there after the putsch. (...) They rushed out and broke the social dam of Omonoia and Vathis Sq. and started to climb up, -not towards Kolonaki district which seemed like an impregnable fairy tale castle in their eyes-, but towards the sea, lengthwise Syggrou Avenue. (Tachtsis 1989:304)

It did not take long for the first clients to come since cis prostitutes already had discovered the place establishing a quite prostitution venue, yet the appearance of the transvestites forced them away founding the domination of trans*related sexual activities. Syggrou was quickly divided into prostitution slots where different kind of sex and bodies were traded. As Athens grew, Syggrou Avenue developed also in a modern highway full of brothels, strip clubs and night clubs supplementing the streetwalking experience, while trans* prostitutes became famous for car-provided oral sex inaugurating new ethos in greek sex trade with their fabulous drag appearances in the low-light side lanes:

The blowjobs of Syggrou are famous now. (...) the fame of the avenue made the transvestites multiply. In parallel raised the number of the clients who started to express new or suppressed appetites. (Vakalidou 1980: 133),

-----However, not everything in prostitution was drag and show. The police constantly went after the trans* prostitutes, most of the times using extreme violence. All of our subjects describe in detail their experiences from the penitentiary, which became a routine for them.

The police chased us a lot. Almost every second day I found myself for a few hours in the penitentiaries of the police departments around the avenue. (...) Our greatest fear was the “Morality” department. They came a lot of times with the paddy wagon or with black cars and we tried to run away. When they picked one of us they were hitting her hard. (...) In the penitentiaries where we were taken the stink was horrible. (...) these places were full of whores, mostly soliciting in Athena street (Vakalidou 1980: 128,129)

-----As if state violence was not enough, random passers were either choosing their prey or having fun by harassing the exposed prostitutes. The idea to use a car as an alternative to streetwalking was a solution that helped the trans* individuals to protect from unwanted or violent solicitations, while also signalling the movement of Athens towards the motorway era. Most subjects, however, chose the side-walking as a way to trade their bodies more efficiently.

A lot of poor guys come with their motorbikes hoping that a transvestite will like them and they will fuck her for free. A lot of bourgeois kids also come with expensive cars sitting next to their girlfriends in order to make fun of us. Most of those kids I’ve seen them in gay bars. (...) They throw eggs or yoghurt and call us names. (...) Even full families come with babies in their arms. They stop the cars in order to laugh and see the sinful creatures. (Vakalidou 1980:239)

-----This biased public exposure in the harsh channels of prostitution had tangled effects in the life of the subjects, effects that are eloquently reflected in the narratives. From working to domestic and institutional settings, trans* prostitutes redefined the borderlines between sanctum and

penetrable, limiting public from private territories either in urban space or on the geography of their bodies. Anna Kouroupou describes it rather literally:

You are selling yourself. What kind of security can protect you from this? Which pieces of yourself, of your body, do you share? Which ones do you keep for yourself? Who puts the limits? The client? The whore? The money? (Kouroupou:2011)

Reclaiming Public Space

-----Through these dark lanes however emerged the hope. The first trans* movement grew as a reaction to a law (1193/1981¹²) that prohibited solicitation linking prostitution to STD's. As feminised and drag appearances were stereotypically correlated to prostitution, this law practically worked as a trojan horse in the hands of the police, so that they could have a reason to arrest homosexuals and trans* women. Such practices linking sexuality to medical danger are resurgent in the governance of western states, however through the narratives we can testify the effect that biopolitical acts have in the life of our subjects.

-----In the greek case, trans* subjects presented a magnificent power and started to immediately and actively claim their right to public space. Under the motivation of several highly active trans* individuals, "the transvestites", formerly absent in public life, docile subjects to violence and sexual assaults, started to react to police and client violence while they also organised their first manifestations under the daylight in the centre of Athens. While the gay movement started to push with a series of publications towards the rescission of the law, "the transvestites" actively reclaimed

¹² The parliament started to discuss this law in 1976, following the fall of the dictatorship, provoking the reaction of the trans* and homosexual community since then.

the public space. It is remarkable here that during such acts, most homosexuals wore masks in order to hide their faces, while trans* women gathered in first row without such protection.

-----One of the most emblematic moments of this effort was the first public press conference of the transvestites in Louzitia theatre (25.04.1977). This moment was crucial because for the first time the transvestites would be treated equally as the rest greek citizens and would be given a space in the public sphere. Up to this time their presence was limited to trans prostitution, porn movies, strip shows and transvestite beauty contests. It was hence, the first time that trans subjects would be treated without a sexual layer blurring their will. Betty Vakalidou, one of our subjects was chosen as a spokesperson:

A transvestite with woman dresses would break for the first time the barrier of anonymity, would publicly speak for homosexuality, transvestites, prostitution. She would say: «Yes. I am a homosexual, a man-whore, a transvestite!» (Vakalidou 1980: 169)

-----These lines are important for they reveal how mere words, in this case a single *public* speech, can constitute for one person and the community that this person represents, a literal passage from anonymity to identity, from the dark lanes of private secrecy to the public space of activism, from being object to being subject. It is also evident that at the times that we examine, trans* individuals were still constructing their unique identity being still mixed with homosexual men. Despite the fact that gay men through their newly formed syndicate (AKOE), had sometimes refused alliance with the transvestites -claiming that their appearance and activities was besmirching the gay movement (Theodoropoulos 2005: 24) -, it is clear that there was a strong kinship between the two groups that further delayed the self-identification of the trans* community. As a consequence this public appearance in Louzitia press conference was one of the first acts

that helped in the identification of trans identity. Some more words, this time written and not spelled were also a stimulus for this process. These are the words found in the narratives that we examine.

-----Betty, was the first to write a book on her life, inspired by her active implication in the greek queer movements of the 70's and 80's, hence being the pioneer in the autobiographical trans* genre in Greece. Her book, an otherwise conventional narration, became well known for being a straightforward "*J'Accuse*¹³" written by a trans* prostitute in the year 1980, when gender and sexuality claims were still inchoate. The coarse narration of her difficult life and the descriptions of open-air streetwalking prostitution experiences are full of interruptions where the writer reflects on the sexual oppression in Greece, clearly addressing the middle class. The book became a classic and got republished lately after high demand as it was paradoxically both sold out and censored shortly after its publication, provoking a tugg-off war with academics and personalities as Jean Genet (Genet in Vakalidou 1980/2007: 261) taking positions in order to defend it.

-----Since then things have changed. Despite the successful political demands of the trans* and homosexual activism of the early 80's, the following decades assimilated once again the trans* imagery into a well framed scandalous peephole. The last decade saw an explosion in the demand and publication of such narratives (explaining the sudden demand for this kind after 2000), mainly following the late 90's vast exposure of trans* individuals through TV yellowish broadcasts exploiting notorious erotic scandals (cf. Cheiloudaki: 2003 a,b, 2013). However it is striking that few of the books produced orbit around tabloid themes and clawing language. Given a chance to express their views the trans* prostitutes end up doing something more important thought their words.

¹³ Allusion to the title of the open letter written by Emil Zola and published in "L'Aurore" Newspaper in 1898, in which the writer addressed to the President of France and accused him for the Dreyfus case.

-----Starting with the publication of Betty's polemic books and onwards, each of the narratives that we examine helps in the establishment of a common emblematic past that works as a history archive for the transgender collectivity of Greece. In the next, last section of this paper we shall examine the interplay between spatial references and this historical record process.

Constructing Trans* History Through Spatial Archetypes

-----All of the narrations under review evolve in a specific time frame covering 50 years, - roughly from 1960 to 2010,- which are practically the life years registered in the memory of our subjects. Nevertheless, most voices persist and present in greater detail the "Golden Years" (ie. 80's, 90's) of greek trans* activity for it was this period that the public presence of trans* individuals reached a peak, exacerbating ironically both the pleasure of unprecedented acceptance and the degree of public confrontation, the basic themes narrated in the books.

-----The parallel reading of the trans* autobiographies reveals repeated spatial types that become important being actively implicated in the process of trans* fermentation. These spatial types are presented either in the form of indefinite archetypal settings in which several stories unfold -eg. the home, the borstal, the prison, the boat, the bar, the brothel,- or as historically and geographically precise locations that affect the life and times of our subjects through their peculiar spatial attributes -eg. as Syggrou Avenue. Sometimes this double presentation is simultaneous as specific locations become emblematic, acquiring a certain archetypal status through their repeated citation by the authors. This distinction becomes more easily understood when a particular location, eg. "Tommy's Bar", emerges from its genre "*the trans* friendly bars*" or "*the Plaka district bars*" etc., through its *repeated* labelling/naming.

-----However, when this identification and repetition occurs in the contours of one narrative and refers to a location of singular significance, as for example is the family home of one individual, then we could claim that the personal narration provides material for the description and understanding of a general archetype, eg. in this example the “family home”. These spatial descriptions enable the comparative examination of other narratives that might delineate the experience from this “family home” archetype. In contrary, when a location is named and repeated as a reference in multiple narratives, while also being cited in them as a magnet of communal belonging, it acquires a different kind of symbolic surplus for having core importance for the trans* community.

-----The mapping and therefore the understanding and the communication of the spatial archetypes involved in the shaping of trans* culture, as well as of the specific locations that act as the rhizome of these vague archetypes in space, provides a geographical record of the trans* community in Greece. This record is of core importance for the creation of trans* collective understanding as it enables the spatial densification of memory upon real locations. It does not really matter if all the stories described in the narratives really happened in the places where they are located. What is important is that the individuals start to deliberately identify some spots that they consider as important and use them as the scenery for their endless stories and/or mythologies.

-----The books describing the aforementioned stories become this way the record of the history of the small though vibrant greek trans* community. It is important to note that these books are not written in the “folk”, traditional language of trans* individuals, in Kaliarda. Through these books our subjects break the barriers of their closed community and decide to communicate their life, times and spaces with non-trans* (cis) people too. This way we are able to understand the shaping

processes for some places we inhabit without really knowing how they reached their present state. Plaka district for example, which transformed from queer underground neighbourhood full of brothels and bars into a fully gentrified touristic destination in the shadow of Acropolis is an example. Furthermore, Syggrou Avenue being currently transformed from a metonymy of trans* prostitution into a cultural avenue is also a paradigm of the need to read, decode and understand the spatial diffusion of the trans* individuals.

-----The underground trans* prostitution system, rocketed at 2004 Olympic Games, only to face a dramatic fall afterwards with the rise of economic crisis. Worldwide trafficking networks also fertilised this sudden fall; according to sociologists (Lazos: 2002 a,b) the import of different porn habits and coerced subjects since 1990's altered the tastes of male greek clientele bringing "transvestite" (nowadays diversified as trans*, crossdressing, shemale etc.) venues to a halt. As trans* individuals still live in a state of precariousness being socially unrecognised and hence forced in prostitution in order to cover their basic needs, their spatial status changes all the time according to the available clientele. Facebook and other social networks become their stable reference as they constantly change cities and/or venues in the same city to attract clients.

-----The ease by which these bodies move -or are forced to move- from one place to the other further magnifies their invisibility and renders them vulnerable to authoritative and social violence. Now that Syggrou avenue has degenerated as a prostitution venue and the hope for a new era in trans* rights is emerging, the need for a spatial rhizome which would serve as the scenery and the emblem of this new social identity seems to be more urgent than ever. The seeds for this location seem to be planted again in Syggrou, in a small apartment that serves as the first office of the trans* syndicate. A syndicate that that is extremely active, achieving for the first time unbiased press coverage and an official hearing in the Greek Parliament (28.11.2013). The reclaim of Syggrou

avenue by trans* individuals for a new start is the most hopeful end for this narrative on other narratives.

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