

# *Chōra*

Adrienne Kalfopoulou

“And there is a third nature, which is space ... and admits not of destruction and provides a home for all created things, and is apprehended without the help of sense, by a kind of spurious reason ... Of these and other things of the same kind, relating to the true and waking reality of nature, we have only this dreamlike sense, and we are unable to cast off sleep and determine the truth about them.”

Plato, *Timaeus* 52b-52c (trans. Benjamin Jowett)

“... only our dreams have not been humiliated//”

Zbigniew Herbert “Report from the Besieged City”  
(trans. John and Bogdana Carpenter)

## *The Man on Soutsou*

My friend was telling me a story of a man who regularly cleaned up Soutsou Street. “He had special gloves and a particular kind of dustpan that had a long handle so he could reach the bottom of the large garbage bins.” He was meticulous about his work, which was daily and very thorough. This was quite a few years ago, before the homeless had become a

part of the city's streets, and rummaging through garbage a practice of the sometimes not-so-badly-dressed. Soutsou is a street that runs between Vas. Sofias and Alexandras, two main thoroughfares of Athens. It is lined with trendy bars and cafés, and off to the side of it is Mavili square with a kiosk that carries the most complete selection of foreign press magazines and newspapers in Athens.

"It didn't matter what the day was," my friend explained. "He was out there with his dustpan and work gloves that reached well above his elbows." He neatly stacked all the garbage in their canisters, piling the bags carefully on top of one another in the larger bins as he then cleaned up whatever was not in them. "He did the job religiously, every day, usually in the late afternoons and evenings." I was curious to know what he looked like, "in his early forties perhaps," my friend said, "with a neat, bushy mustache." Apparently there was nothing lost or crazy about his appearance, a dark haired man concentrated on doing the job of cleaning up as much of the garbage as he could on his street.

We started to imagine some of the reasons for his obsession. "There's always the pathological part of it," my friend said.

"But there's the story too," I added, around any pathology, or *pathesi*, as the Greek root of the word defines the term, something that has been done to one, something "received," but in the case of any pathology, received with damage. In Plato's *Timaeus* the place, or space, of reception is what he defines as *chōra*, a space continuously shaped by what enters it, therefore never static, never "captured" (to use Jacques Derrida's verb) by *logos*, the logic that would name and so control its ever-changing state. The word in *Timaeus* is *dekhomai* (to accept what is received). What was the context of this man's *pathesi*, bent as he was on cleaning up Soutsou, if daily the street again became "contaminated" by whatever garbage happened to have dirtied it? His actions were a symptom of something larger. Like Greece today he too was trying to stay a contagion to a personal cosmos infringed

on, which for him were literal accumulations of trash. “You always knew when he had gone by if you didn’t see him,” my friend laughed. “There was such a difference, the street was pristine.”

This man from Soutsou stays with me; if he does not exactly haunt me he has entered my imagination as someone driven by a demon, or trauma. Like Soutsou between two main thoroughfares, or Greece on its peninsula in a greater Europe, his choice to order the garbage reflects a personal, if impossible, effort to control something much bigger than anything he can in fact control.

“What do you think happened?” I said, thinking perhaps of a love gone wrong, his sanity lost to hurt.

My friend had another idea: “Maybe a beautiful event took place on that street, and he wants to keep the memory clean.” We had our imagined narratives. Our different points of view shaped by what we were bringing of our own worlds to the circumstance of this man’s *pathesi*. In discussing the section of *Timaeus* that refers to “*Xōρος*” (48e- 53c), or “*khōra*,” Derrida explains this “*triton genos*” as a third nature that lies between the polarities of what is “immutable and intelligible.” This state, always “in the process of becoming,” is what Plato speaks of as a “receptacle.” What is received, “*dekhete*,” determines “the relation of *khōra* to everything which is not herself, “it/she is *pandekhes*, that which receives all” (111). This “she” (always the feminine receptor, the one entered, as in motherland, country, womb), has therefore “nothing of her own,” which is also “the situation of the site,” (105), the condition of what happens on site, a continuously changing dynamic.

I read Greece now as *khōra*, or more exactly those of us living in Greece today live it as a space -- that “‘place,’ ‘location,’ ‘region,’ ‘country’” (93) – of continual mutability. Also “*chōra*,” the generic Greek term for country, a space in flux, the frail vessel of the fickle shaped and reshaped by its states of *pathesi*. Greece, and more recently Cyprus

(that sunk vessel), are *pandekhes* (bodies of reception) that simultaneously take in and subvert the *logos* (both logic and discourse) of those who have imposed their states onto them.

“*What’s tomorrow, who knows what tomorrow is...*”

Austerity has raped us.

Paul Krugman<sup>1</sup> and Slavoj Žižek have been among the passionate voices that have addressed the economic and humanitarian crisis austerity has created in Greece. Then, unpredictably, the IMF (International Monetary Fund) publically admitted to the failure of the measures it had initially insisted on. In its sixth year of recession, with unemployment at 27% and “massive tax hikes and pressure for wage cuts” requirements for the first loan tranche to Greece, the country is in still further debt, still alienated from investors. The IMF’s chief economist Olivier Blanchard told Reuters last month (June 2013) of the “notable failures’ made in Greece’s bailout programme from 2010.”

To the chagrin of the EU Commission and its Merkelian hegemony, Blanchard admitted the IMF’s mistakes had worsened the country’s economic crisis. The statement brought immediate reaction from the EU Commission, and on June 6 Simon O’Connor, a spokesperson for Olli Rehn, the EU economic official, said that the report was “plainly wrong and unfounded,” noting that any restructuring of the Greek debt before a bailout would have had “devastating consequences” on the Eurozone who “back then had no appropriate firewalls” to protect itself from a “systemic contagion.”<sup>2</sup>

What of firewalls and borders? The nature of *pathesi*, or trauma, shapes the nature of those borders put in place to control, among other things, potential epidemics. Our spaces are now overrun with what austerity has brought. “Who knows what tomorrow is...” says Elina, a friend who has not been paid in eight months. Though the state owes her more

than 9000 euros she still goes to work expecting, hoping, to be eventually paid. She works with the elderly and mentally challenged. Her question is not “What will tomorrow bring?” but what tomorrow “is” – a site, a shape. Of what? Of something becoming other from what it was. In *Timeaus*, the *chōra* as receptacle is “the natural recipient of all impressions... stirred and informed by them” (16b); a space that receives (*dekhete*); “more situating than situated” (Derrida 92), shaped by, as it too shapes, what generates it. This is Greece, the country and space of the Eurozone most traumatized by measures that have reconfigured (resituated?) it on Europe’s cultural and economic map.

Trauma destroys, contests, unveils what is a construction to begin with. Before a *pathesi* there is no need to think about the problem; the country’s trauma has unmasked the larger pathology of a global economy, unsettling the seemingly settled.

This is Slavoj Žižek on what links the protests in Turkey, Greece, and the Occupy movements:

Global capitalism is a complex process which affects different countries in different ways....Greeks are protesting against the rule of international financial capital and their own corrupt and inefficient state....Turks are protesting against the commercialisation of public space and against religious authoritarianism....None of these protests can be reduced to a single issue. They all deal with a specific combination of at least two issues, one economic ... the other politico-ideological. The same holds for the Occupy movement....The movement had two basic features: first, discontent with capitalism as a *system*, not just with its particular local corruptions; second, an awareness that the institutionalised form of representative multi-party democracy is not equipped to fight capitalist excess, i.e., democracy has to be reinvented.

“Trouble in Paradise” (July 18, 2013 *The London Review of Books*)

Borders and firewalls are meant to stay a danger. They don't repair anything. The reaction to Greece's crisis has proved ruinous because those who could have helped restructure its debt chose instead to wall off its economy. The beginning of the contagion had begun very far from its own borders with the closure of Lehman Brothers in 2008, and what that did to market and investment confidence. Boundaries and binaries, polarities for Derrida, ignore the space, the "*triton genos*" that partakes of both, what "exceeds" polarities. As receptacle, that which always receives (*pandekhes*), this third nature reconstructs the terms brought to bear upon it – a bearer of "imprints," rather than a place bounded by fixed terms, or *logos* (89) – it is a meaning-bearer ("what is tomorrow?"): bankruptcy, debt, contagion.

"What is tomorrow?" asks Elina, a concept undermined by what has come to bear upon it. Derrida again: "What is said about *khōra* is that this name does not designate any of the known or recognized or... received types... the *ontological logos* which lays down the law" (96). So "tomorrow" as defined from the perspective of Simon O'Connor of the EU Commission, is up for grabs. O'Connor says the bailout in Greece was "a learning process," that "its approach is now bearing fruit." A fruitful tomorrow whose fruits remain out of reach? Fruits for the few?

A raped body can also bear the fruit of its violation. A raped body, receptacle of what has entered it, becomes foreign to itself as a result of its *pathesi*; a trauma of *logos* too (how to speak of the violation to those unfamiliar with or afraid of being violated?). Those who have walled-in the raped body, who do not want to know the fruit, afraid of the contagion it bears. As in *chōra* this space of reception expresses "a hybrid, bastard, or even corrupted reasoning (*logismo notho*)... 'as in a dream'" (52b). I began to write of the days as I lived them, as they braided in spaces, a *chōra* of "ceaseless re-launchings..."

failures... superimpositions... overwritings” (Derrida 99),  
violations and fruit:

This, from “The Country of my Days and Many Nights”

“One source of respect is memory – the understanding of  
where we have come from and who we have been –”

Adrienne Rich, *Blood, Bread, and Poetry*

Elina says “We will be forced, like those in war, to eat cats.”  
I remember the cats in the entranceways

of my evenings stretching in humid air,  
the trees caught their scent, damp like the moon

behind the walls of an abandoned house, “For Sale”  
swinging on a broken shutter, a smell of turpentine

like pain. “There’s nothing to say, except for the tragedy  
of it.” Elina talks of where people are from.

It matters, she believes, to investigate this,  
understand what people do, and why.

She finds out the German finance minister  
(on his mother’s side) had a connection to the Nazi.

She said he was a Nazi officer, his grandfather.  
It’s only been several generations since the last world war.

Maybe this is why we are talking of war again, perhaps  
none of this means much, the large questions intruded on

by small urgencies, the way my wallet was stolen.  
A gypsy girl selling me a bread ring, cursing into her cell phone

dropped the bread on the ground (I was looking for change). Did I drop my wallet when the bread ring dropped?

The graffiti has been cleaned off, this is Athens after all, a city beautiful with stencils

being destroyed, the wonder of art, and the pitted walls. I will wake with my eyebrows flecked in grey.

“Avenue”... “Avenue ...” of what? The sign was in French. We ate olives and bread in the evenings, dipping crusts

into oil, spitting out the pits. He said the wine was a caress, smooth as flesh. We were speaking of what had happened

to Europe, what was still Europe, the vision of it anyway, a continent once lighted by its enlightenment.

IMF's Olivier Blanchard said “the main lesson” to be learned of the “mistakes” of the Greek crisis was that “reality must be faced at all times.” This is a statement after the fact, after the IMF did not face, and the EU continues not to face, the reality of Greece's unsustainable debt. The country's former prime minister, George Papandreou, proved himself one of the blindest as he spoke of democracy during a June 2013 TED talk in Edinburgh. “Politics today is going down a blind alley,” he said without any sense of irony, having blindly led the country into austerity's death embrace. Metaphors of blindness and sight, like those of contagion and health, continue polarities that remove the nature of in-between spaces, of a “*triton genos*” that blurs borders. It is what crisis does, dismantling, upsetting, but here too are new beginnings. Unless that possibility is reduced, again, to binaries, the either/or of contagion in expressions like “We have to make sure we do not become Greece,” (a phrase Mitt Romney used in his 2012 presidential campaign).



Paraphrasing Derrida in *Towards the Chōra*, Thomas J. Rickert explains it as the space that “disrupts representation itself (and hence rhetoric) even while it remains fundamental for the passage to representation” (258). In trying to isolate Greece, those still outside the economic contagion represent the country as the *object* or thing (*eidos*) of contagion, as if “it” can be separated from what has entered its space, determined and shaped its contagion. Rather, it is a location *for* representations while never fixed by those representations. Rickert, like Derrida, interprets Plato’s *chōra* as being approachable only “through its effects,” which, “as if in a dream” Plato tells us, are approached through “bastard discourses” (*logismd tini nothd*, 52b) (269).

In “Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding),” an essay Hannah Arendt published in 1954, at the heart of American McCarthyism, she remarks on one of the dark consequences of our inability to think beyond our given assumptions: “What is frightening in the rise of totalitarianism is not that it is something new, but that it has brought to light the ruin of our categories of thoughts and standards of judgment” (318). Refusals to acknowledge the common ground as opposed to the differences in our moments of social and political vulnerability have led to more *pathesi*, more denial.

At an April 2010 summit meeting in Brussels, George Papandreou admitted to coming to the decision to involve the IMF, and troika, in “10 minutes”; the Greek deficit was revealed to be 15.6% (as opposed to the 6% the previous government had publicized), and “one of the prime ministers there kept pressuring us to reach a decision before the markets opened in Japan.” In the same tone of earnestness with which he delivered the rest of his TED talk on democracy, Papandreou failed to implicate his failure of leadership, slipping seamlessly into what Arendt diagnoses as a dysfunction if not a pathology

in the “categories of thought and standards of judgment” of her time. In ours, saving the markets and their expectations meant refusing to investigate the human cost that would complicate those expectations. The markets opened in 10 minutes, in 10 minutes the fate of a nation was forced into a space it would now complicate, the effects of such discourses bastardizing more than the bastards.

*The Man on Soutsou*

I asked my friend if he had ever spoken to the man on Soutsou. He said he personally had not though a friend of his had. They would sometimes ride their bikes down that street in the very early dawn noticing how clean it was. They occasionally grabbed one of the milk bottles left outside of kiosks and stores, “especially if it was chocolate.”

“Did he ask why he kept cleaning the street?” My friend nodded. “Was the reason something bizarre?” I was sure the story would be tragic.

“You know there was nothing strange about him except for the fact that he had that ritual of his. He was very neat, his clothes I mean.”

“So what did he say to your friend?”

“He said he lost the bet.”

“The bet?”

My friend nodded.

I was speechless for a minute; it wasn’t anything I had expected. “Who knows what that was about?”

“Obviously something he took seriously,” he said, adding, “That’s a man who keeps his word.”

*“What’s tomorrow, who knows what tomorrow is...”*

Greece has lost the bet too. We now have to clean up the mess. The Eurozone is not just unforgiving but punishing. No matter how much Greece manages to clean, gather, and make

neat piles of the garbage, it still lies (like Soutsou) between much larger thoroughfares with their own piles of garbage. Unlike the man on Soutsou, George Papandreou seems not to have realized that the bet was lost on his watch. While he spoke so publicly, and earnestly, of his effort to persuade the rest of Europe to “get involved in a global evolution of democracy,” he refused to look at his own contribution to its demise in the *chōra* he proudly reiterated, with power points and visuals, to have been that country where the concept was born.

The Greek economist Yanis Varoufakis argues that the failure to address the consequences of the economic problems taking place in the country means the troika will rely more and more on authoritarianism:

The behavior of the putative European leaders is wildly reckless and irresponsible. It's a fundamental renunciation of what society is supposed to be about, which is a sharing of effort and burdens for the collective good. The elites may think they can stay in their cocoon while the masses suffer, but as social decay progresses, you'll see a breakdown in services, in public health, and more and more difficulty in maintaining security.

Authoritarianism (and its inefficiencies) was flagrantly demonstrated when the Greek national public radio station (ERT) was shut down on June 11, 2013, by the Antonis Samaras government. In the government's zeal to show the troika its readiness to act authoritatively to meet their requirement to lay off 2000 civil servants by May, TV screens went dark at 23:17 and 2656 people lost their jobs. Like George Papandreou, Mr. Samaras seemed unaware of how his actions, despite his self-justifications, spoke their own narrative.

While Mr. Samaras described ERT as “the last bastion of privilege” for civil servants whose “inflated pay” was one of the reasons for the country's bankruptcy, he did no more than to express his allegiance to the reigning pathology. Shrinking the work force and/or reducing salaries was an option the

Samaras government might have chosen for those employed at ERT without demonstrating their appalling indifference to democratic protocol. The station was shut down without a parliamentary vote. Banners immediately hung from the building that read NOT FOR SALE; “This is the Price of the €”; “ΑΝΤΙΣΤΕΚΟΜΑΣΤΕ!” (“WE RESIST”). Inside the building was the sign: THE REVOLUTION WILL NOT BE TELEVISED.

National television channels in France and Italy related the news in Greek; YouTube became a source of information through various live streams; there was a collective, and immediate, demonstration of solidarity. Along the concrete walkway that wrapped around the outdated monolithic structure that was the ERT building in its strangely consoling blandness large speakers continued to broadcast the news. In a Europe that is seeing a steady growth of fascist and far-right parties, the move to silence the nation’s public television and radio that had stayed open during the junta and Nazi occupation, expressed a clear insult to democratic principals, and cultural memory.

The knoll of green on the ERT grounds was overrun with people, organized shifts to clean up the trash, distribute leaflets, provide first aid. “*Alites!*” someone said, “Bastards with no shame!” There were jokes too. “It’s one thing to go to the ATM and know all the money you’re about to withdraw is going to government taxes. And another thing not even to have an ATM.” Yorgos Avgeropoulos filmed those days in “THE LOST SIGNAL OF DEMOCRACY” (ΤΟ ΧΑΜΕΝΟ ΣΗΜΑ ΤΗΣ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑΣ) now on YouTube; a person interviewed kept asking, “Is this Europe? All this is being done in the name of Europe!”

In one of the parking spaces of our apartment building there’s a rotting car, if it could only rot. Instead we stare at its rusted muffler that has now detached; the woman who owned it, or rather her dead husband who had owned it, made us all witness to the decaying carcass – some metaphor

for the happily decaying husband? Every time I come out of the building I have to face the rusting metal that was once an expensive Mercedes. Finally someone in the building complained. Even if that parking space was Kyria Sofia's we did not all want to stare at the rust streaks over the flagstones, or look at the faded metal, its discolored blue like a skin disease. Kyria Sofia, herself now aged, finally had someone tie the detached muffler with wire so it was lifted off the ground, but it fell again. I barely noticed it anymore unless someone in the building happened to mention it, which they did.

The eyesore in our building is minor next to the boarded-up cafés and shops where the homeless are now huddled in filthy blankets, wadded newspapers and cardboard. Even issues of LIFO, a free press newspaper, which comes out on Thursdays, don't last long since the paper is now precious to those who use it for their more basic needs. An email going around says it best:

The Greek government  
today,  
together with the austerity measures,  
announced that it is changing its flag to a CONDOM  
because it more accurately reflects the government's  
political stance.

A condom allows for inflation,  
halts production,  
destroys the next generation,  
protects a bunch of dicks,  
and gives you  
a sense of security while you're actually being  
screwed.

*Coda: The Writing on the Wall*

The writing over the surfaces of metro stations, statues, banks, universities, apartments, stores, cafés, stadiums, ministries, is the crowded polyphony of hurt over the surfaces of smashed, marked, and coming-apart spaces. The borderless potential of the long ago telling of the *chōra* in *Timaeus* is this overlay of story, narratives that answer with other narratives of hybrid and bastard discourses: “Each tale is thus the *receptacle* of another. There is nothing but receptacles of narrative receptacles, or narrative receptacles of receptacles” (Derrida 115), as I read the markings, reading too Derrida’s reading of *khōra* that is Plato’s reading on creation: that which has been touched cannot be walled-off or walled-in. What is received continues its *logos* over surfaces unable to separate what has entered, marked, and changed the shaping.

The condition of the *chōra* is this condition of the borderless moment; now the condition of the country. Borderlessness, the “formless (*amorphon*) is this very singular impropriety...” (Derrida 97) which simultaneously gives shape, *morphi*. Katerina Illiopolou’s poem “The Song of Eurydice” is resonant with the paradox: “Don’t leave anything untouched/Whatever thing you touch will never become your own/Every touching all the more foreign/The more foreign all the more gripping/And ready to touch you back.” That moment of reception could be, too, one of *pathesi* marking or contaminating what was there before.

“There is no eros without crisis,” C said. I want to say the reverse is as true, there is no crisis without eros; Orpheus looked back. As did Lot’s wife. Once touched we belong to something else, something more than what kept us bounded to the once-familiar, the now foreign, something as true of rape, when the touch is a violation; *Timaeus*’ “*triton genos*” or “third kind” is the nature of *chōra* where the possibilities of what cannot yet be named are at play, what Derrida describes

as “this alternation between the logic of exclusion and that of participation”(89). George Papandreou spoke of trying “to imagine a Europe without borders,” but then he removed himself from his *chōra* – teaching in Boston, New York, speaking in Edinburgh – he too, trying to remain apart from the ruin, this *chōra* that cannot be without what marks it; there is no eros in Papandreou’s imaginings, nothing touching.

It is spring and the wafts of lemon and orange blossoms fill the air, the tiny, fallen petals scatter over pavements like rice flakes. I think of wedding rice in the devastation. The perfumed scents mingle with the acrid humidity, a lingering stench and strange blessing in

“The Country of My Days and Many Nights”

My dreams have tastes. It was tuna or salmon  
on the plate but no one ate it. Someone labeled a bottle

of homemade wine to give me. Vassilikoula who is 90  
was walking with determination and health.

We listen to the slow toll of Good Friday’s bells,  
pace ourselves like the heavy tolling. There was rice

in a cinnamon sauce for dinner, a shred of meat.  
*Malakes! You are the refugees of Europe* large and in red,

airbrushed off an Athens wall. I was sad to see it gone.  
I have hardly slept, but last night the dream was rich.

He kissed me nevertheless, whoever he was.  
He was also caressing another woman’s brown hair,

she was not old, and he was fingering her tresses absently.  
Elina says, “Tomorrow is a complete unknown.”

I have driven to her house to ask what she thinks of my haircut.  
I think it is too short, she thinks it is perfect, and decides

to cut hers too. I leave 20 euros so she can,  
these desires, without apparent hierarchies.

Elina understands, she almost lost her life with a man  
she was making love to in a car. The scar across her forehead

still gives her headaches in damp weather  
and when it is cold she needs to wear a hat. Tonight there is

a beautiful movement to the gathering bicycles  
in the streets, like chamomile they move in unexpected waves,

like chamomile they appear suddenly as spring.  
My daughter calls to say in her nightmare I am

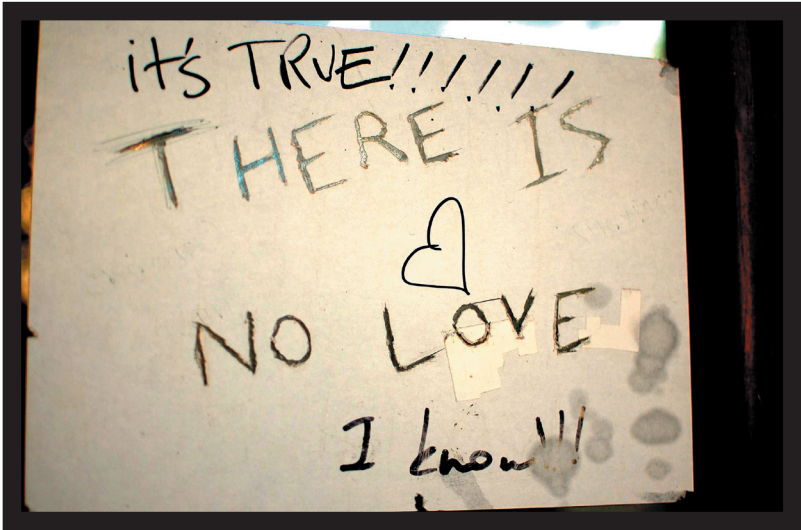
“in glitter, in a too-short skirt, and overweight.”  
I had “lost it” she says. “Are you afraid I might lose it?”

I laugh. She is more reluctant with her laugh, but I hear it.  
“Cyprus...” I start, but she doesn’t want to hear the news today.

Anything that speaks of “here” is hard to hear.

Here the markings slow us down, polyvalent, and continuous, the *logos* of *chōra* invites “nothing other than the sum or the process of what has just been inscribed ‘on’ her, on the subject of her, on her subject, right up against her subject” (Derrida 114), as “she,” touched, generates more exchange. There was this on the window of a closed shop in Pangrati. I had walked by it, and then retraced my steps to look at the writing more closely.





There are at least three voices here: “THERE IS NO LOVE” in silver, “it’s TRUE!!!!!!” above, and at the bottom of the page or sheet, watermarked, is “I know!!!” But in the middle of “THERE IS NO LOVE,” splitting it, is a heart that adds enigma: Does it belong to one of these three writers? Is it a fourth voice? Does it suggest, resting in the middle of THERE IS NO LOVE, that the heart right after THERE IS in fact is (“What is tomorrow...?”) undermining NO LOVE?

In *Against Forgetting*, an anthology of the poetry of witness of the twentieth century, Carolyn Forché speaks of the reductiveness of any separation of the personal from the political: “If we give up the dimension of the personal, we risk relinquishing one of the most powerful sites of resistance.” The need for a “third term,” one that partakes of both the political and personal, is the space of “the social” (31), a term also used by Hannah Arendt. An idea implied by Plato’s *chōra*, a space of liminality, a *triton genos*? The social, then, the space of the collective when the collective in fact occupies it, is also a space of subversion because it rejects static *logos* as it is the space of ongoing conversation. In antiquity this

was the space of the agora, or marketplace, today increasingly occupied, if not colonized, by the markets. Voices continue to converse in that space of the collective, hoping to trouble it, to WAKE UP (a recurring stencil around Athens) the country of our days and many nights.

I saw more writing some days later, this time on the wall next to the shop window in Pangrati:



“Hope” with a heart. The heart again an enigma – is it the same person who had drawn it between (to split?) THERE IS NO LOVE? It was hard to tell, though it was, the heart at a slant in both spaces, the heart of a crisis? “It is the purpose of the *Timaeus* to bring the ideal *polis* to life as an actual city, one that has a place,” explains Rickert. “Further, the choric city will be one that not only has a place, but one where *eros* is present” (258).

“There is no eros without crisis,” no country in my days and many nights where eros does not enter:

Natasha is back from a 24-hour shift at the hospital but has no desire to cook, tired

she says, “the shifts are unpaid. We do them

for the country” and I am amazed the bruised

darkness of her eyes still smile.

He is in my sleep again, my skirt crumpled.

– a video within a dream, and I am watching it.

He offers me some part of his cheese pie, touches the dough

with his finger to show me it is fresh, I am

leaning against someone who massages my shoulder,

after he has left I realize they were his hands.

Night is when I see the door, the door

is familiar though not the apartment.

It comes off its hinges, the tongue of the lock, loose,

the door, I say to someone, is the first thing

I have to replace, though the window

is flimsy too, its screen like skin.

I run into him. We were supposed to meet but he’s been

with a young woman in the library, I think.

I’m unsurprised, though he is.

I’ve been preparing for this – a black cat crosses my path.

Under the almond tree Aristeia is teaching us to breathe

in the season of bees and purple days, to breathe

without dreams, the scented orange

of our sadnesses, “breathe” Aristeia repeats –

“recognize your feelings, then let them go.”

\*

“No wonder she...” and I don’t remember the rest.  
Any sentence that begins with “no wonder” is suspect.

And the penis, too, in the dream, and my refusal  
of it, though he asked “isn’t it gorgeous?” And it was, as I admired it

but walked away – into a contagion of air,  
in bird-scream and lemon fragrances in the cold feel

of the sheets, woken in mid-night. Me with a bracelet  
in my pocket I had forgotten to pay for.

Estranged in the body’s dark, in threaded light  
and bird-scream, I mouth words,

tastes and scents on my fingertips  
inside a contagion of branches bathed red

where ants are no longer bereft, and I listen to Eri  
chewing over the phone, until they came,

the days of want, and Eri was showing me her clothes,  
Eri who gave me a job, asks if I want a pair of pants

with pads sewn into the feet like socks.

\*

What can one expect Elina insists of a man in a wheelchair  
who hates people, a woman who never lived

in the free world before the fall of the Berlin wall.  
But C is proud to be Cypriot as the people in Cyprus offer

to give up pensions. For days, and nights too,  
talk went on in the Cypriot parliament

until Germany's Chancellor, and the man in the wheelchair  
and the woman who looks more and more like a man

with her mane of white hair, broke that body too.  
In my dream the woman who keeps reappearing is unforgiving,

stern as the woman with the white mane of hair  
– is it my mother? I forget to return phone calls, don't eat

or drink the white wine of funerals  
and fragile afternoons. Then the bus came,

coming at me as someone removed the fences,  
folding them like paper, pulling them apart like Lego parts.

Where were we? someone asked, Greece?  
Turn off the water heater – warm water

now a luxury. The peacocks' calls are screams  
in this night of resurrection, firecrackers, and gunshots.

My daughter phones, worried, someone  
shot someone outside her Brooklyn apartment.

Someone says, "Use the side door."  
I want her to be safe. I am in a country

trying to save itself – "our country?"  
My daughter asks me to keep a light on,

"something faint" she says, like the flickerings  
on the soles of a child's tennis shoes.

These streets, this city, the homeless begging in cafés  
are not part of my dream as I try to eat without guilt,

as someone smiles, toothless, grateful for coins.

Was it him who touched me with his fingers, lifted my body

over his, as he tried to enter me, as I held  
the perfection of his shape. I was foraging.

There was no food, people were drunk, I saw meat  
on a plate in a tavern where the man eating was French,

I shocked him and myself as I pulled at a piece  
that would not separate. I said quickly I wanted it

for the cats, while he watched with irony. I was in  
my hunger, a memory of cumin and chamomile.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Krugman's June 5, 2013 Op-Ed in *The New York Times*, "Greek Regrets," speaks directly to the June 2013 International Monetary Fund report <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2013/cr13156.pdf> that candidly admits to failings in its dealings with the Greek debt.

<sup>2</sup> In January 2013 Olivier Blanchard admitted to the IMF's "misjudgement" of the Greek economic bailout measures. Reported in *The Washington Post*: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2013/01/03/an-amazing-mea-culpa-from-the-imfs-chief-economist-on-austerity/> In the IMF's "third bailout report" in June, its "notable failures" are detailed: <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2013/cr13154.pdf>

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