

Addition to portfolio of evidence for REF Submission: AM Walsh

Feedback from performance/ presentation 'It's a Beautiful Thing, the Destruction of Wor(l)ds'

1. Bob Brecher (CAPPE, University of Brighton, UK)
2. Dr Lawrence Davis (University College Cork, Ireland)
3. Michael Chronopoulos-Mantas (Aberystwyth, UK)
4. Dr Richard Gilman-Opalsky (University of Illinois, Springfield, USA)
5. Dr Ema Pires (Independent Scholar, Portugal)
6. Dr Louise LaChapelle (Montreal, Canada)
7. Peter Snowdon (Hasselt, Belgium)

**Conference Organiser: Prof Bob Brecher
(Brighton University 'Riot, Revolt, Revolution')**

It's a Beautiful Thing, the Destruction of Wor(l)ds

The performance contributed something quite special to CAPPE's interdisciplinary conference on 'Riot, Revolt, Revolution' (University of Brighton, 5-7 Sept. 2012): a performative analysis that, in engaging its audience, made them also participants. In doing so, it offered a means for people to reflect on the realities of Greek "structural adjustment" that neither conference conversation nor reading can achieve. In particular, it bridged the alleged gap between academic analysis and engagement by drawing people into a role that made it impossible for that gap to be maintained. As such, it was a superb contribution, one unique in my decades of attendance at academic conferences. In my view this approach – bringing theory and practice together in a way that transforms both -- is one that deserves the widest development and application.

We very much hope to be able to extend an invitation to the Ministry of Untold Stories to next year's conference.

Bob Brecher
Professor of Moral Philosophy
Director, Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics & Ethics
University of Brighton
UK

Visit <http://www.brighton.ac.uk/cappe>

**Conference Organiser, Panel Convenor: Dr Lawrence Davis
(Loughborough University, ASN: 'Making Connections')**

Department of Government
University College Cork
Cork
Ireland
Tel.: +353 21 490 3135
Email: l.davis@ucc.ie

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To whom it may concern:

At the invitation of a conference committee of which I was a member, Alywin Walsh and Myrto Tsilimpounidi presented a performance piece entitled 'It's a Beautiful Thing, the Destruction of Wor(l)ds' at the ASN 2.0 conference hosted by the Centre for the Study of International Governance at Loughborough University, U.K., from 4-6 September 2012. The performance was presented as part of the conference stream, 'Real Democracy and the Revolutions of our Time'. Consisting of five panels composed of either three or four participants, the primary aim of the conference stream was to reflect on the implications of the revolutions of our time for democratic and revolutionary theory and practice.

Walsh and Tsilimpounidi's presentation added an important and neglected dimension to a conference stream otherwise organised primarily as a series of traditional academic papers. In contrast to this more traditional form of presentation, 'It's a Beautiful Thing, the Destruction of Wor(l)ds' emphasised the 'everyday' dimension of contemporary European social upheavals by employing the media of photography, film, drama, creative and performance art, and narration to convey to the audience the 'feeling' of the Greek uprising. Our hosts wore costumes appropriate to the presentation, decorated the room with symbols of the uprising and its causes, enacted a courtroom drama scene, showed photographs and film footage of the Greek rebellion, invited audience participation, and – more generally – brought the subject matter of their presentation to life for the audience. This was particularly helpful in the context of the panel, which focused exclusively on the contemporary political situation in Greece.

The presentation was extremely well-received, and deservedly so. Walsh and Tsilimpounidi are to be congratulated for helping to make 'real' and concrete issues that would have otherwise remained abstract for most of the audience, who were not familiar with the particulars of the Greek crisis. The presentation raised a number of very important questions, including the role of nationalism in the conflict, the relationship between the Greek uprising and contemporary anti-austerity and anti-capitalist mobilisations elsewhere in Europe, and the role of the artist in social protest. This is a project with significant scope for further development, and one which merits continued support.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Laurence Davis
College Lecturer and Member of the Conference Organising Committee

Audience member/ Conference presenter: Michael Chronopoulos-Mantas (Loughborough University, ASN: 'Making Connections')

'Performance has the potential to be the single most powerful way to recover yet interrogates the meanings of lived experience. Research presented in dramatic form communicates findings viscerally, beyond or below the usual cognitive filtering mechanisms familiar to academic discourse'. -Denzin, Norman K. 1997. Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century. Thousand Oaks: Sage

In my past 25 years as theatre activist/performer, on two continents, I have

seldom experienced the above axiom as poignantly and effectively as when sitting in the audience of the practice by research based project 'It's a Beautiful Thing, the Destruction of Wor(l)ds' by Myrto Tsilimpounidi and Aylwyn Walsh. This performance/empirical data was part of a panel presentation during the three day ASN conference organized by Loughborough University September 3-5. The conference was a packed three days of panels and Roundtable discussions on topics ranging from Real Democracy and Revolution, to Social Technology, Embodiment and Practices of Freedom and several film screenings. I found 'It's a Beautiful Thing, the Destruction of Wor(l)ds' by Myrto Tsilimpounidi and Ally Walsh, contributed as the most moving and most profound of all the panels which I saw in that three day period. I was extremely impressed at how their focus on Applied Performance and Visual Practice could be such a vital factor to bring viscerally the neoliberal crisis of contemporary Greek society entailed as 'destructive' and a 'pseudo-creative' moments set in motion for a live audience as both schizoid-paranoid and creative moments in theatre/performance. Little did I expect to participate as an audience member by using the tear gas mask provided during the performance and reading from a placard which was recognized effectively by the performers as an illegal act. Tsilimpounidi and Walsh's performance still resonates with me and I understand more fully, as it affects my own work, the implications of their approach and the potential for future development of the work, ie. the questions of cultural resistance and gender theory: Experimental ethnographic fiction and text: New wave of thinking and articulating what it feels to be part of radical images of community and questioning those concepts of self involved in the production of social knowledge.
-Michael Mantas, Filmmaker, London, U.K.

**Audience member/ Conference presenter: Dr Richard Gilman-Opalsky
(Brighton University: 'Riot Revolt Revolution')**

On 6 September, 2012, I saw Ministry of Untold Stories perform 'It's a Beautiful Thing, the Destruction of Wor(l)ds' at an academic conference at University of Brighton, UK. Myrto Tsilimpounidi and Aylwyn Walsh constructed a beautiful upheaval of theater, scholarship, and activism, a performance that points the way forward for a form of activist scholarship, which must be taken seriously. The performance featured the reading of a text, beautifully written, theoretically rich, reflecting on the relationship of the Greek revolt to national identity, to the history of Greek philosophy, as well as to uprisings elsewhere that have erupted since 2008. The text was read from a balcony, the "audience" was part of the performance, and the seriousness of the commentary was interrupted with humor and props. It was irresistible, and left me longing for more performative presentation in the dull and hackneyed world of academic conferences.

Richard Gilman-Opalsky, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Political Philosophy
Department of Political Science
Public Affairs Center, Room # 362
University of Illinois, Springfield
Ph. - 217.206.8328
E-mail - rgilm3@uis.edu
Page - <http://www.uis.edu/politicalscience/faculty/gilman-opalsky.html>

**Audience member/ Conference presenter: Dr Ema Pires
(Brighton University: 'Riot Revolt Revolution')**

Notes on 'It's a beautiful thing, the destruction of wor(l)ds', performed by Myrto Tsilimpoinidi and Aylwyn Walsh, Ministry of Untold Stories, [within the Conference on Riot, Revolt, Revolution, at Sallis Benney Theathre, U.Brighton, on September 6th 2012, 3.45-5pm].

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The following notes have not been edited nor reviewed in their contents. I usually use verbatim writing practices, when describing events or spaces. I find them to be more intuitive in their raw form, and closer to perception. Please feel free to appropriate (or cut, or edit) these words.

i.

'It's a beautiful thing, the destruction of wor(l)ds' was a an artistic statement with glimpses of irony, sarcasm and poetry. The performance was a paradoxical moment too: it was at the same time an inspiring and a stomach-punch moment.

ii.

There were various 'languages' spoken at the Riots conference. The obvious ones were the linguistic ones (English being the dominant language), and the disciplinary languages (of philosophy, social sciences, arts). I felt that this performance, by Myrto and Allywyn, encapsulated all these multilayered languages into the text and the music of art, one highly condensed time-space frame.

I was pushed into the scenic space of many 'untold stories', and became a part of a movement of resistance to that wor(l)ds under destruction:

- I recall their balanced use of silences and the use of voice (with multiple tones), the interaction and participation with the rest of the audience in the room.
- The coming together in an empathic moment of sharing.
- The density, thickness of the text, and the facial expressions of the performers was something that still endures in my mind.

This was, in my opinion, the highlight moment of this conference, as it moved us beyond our own particular academic spaces, into a common, shared space, imagined and/or real. The moment of this was the reconstitution of an Agora. A kind of parlor facing the world around. And the world was sitting there, in fixed chairs, looking at you, and feeling the performers' voices coming inside our senses.

iii.

I wonder if we would have participated (even) more if another space had been chosen for the performance. I felt a bit strange to be seated in a fixed chair, when all the rest was so fluid and dense. If the performance happened in an open space (the garden, for instance), how different would it be? And the discussion that followed, would it be stopped as it was or would it be freely flowing into the sunset, unveiling and the hidden voices of untold futures?

Notes by Ema Pires, writing on the 26th of September 2012, from

Southern Portugal (at Monte da Pedra, a village where other 'untold stories', also resist to these unsettling times, and dream of imagined futures).

Audience member/ conference presenter: Dr Louise Lachapelle (Brighton University: 'Riot Revolt Revolution')

I recently attended the 7th annual International Interdisciplinary Conference of the CAPPE Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics and Ethics *Riot, Revolt, Revolution* (University do Brighton UK) where I presented a paper. I was also asked to intervene as a panel member in the roundtable discussion that followed the performance 'It's a Beautiful Thing, the Destruction of Wor(l)ds' by Myrto Tsilimpounidi and Aylwyn Walsh.

This artistic intervention was a significant contribution to the conference program. Not only was it quite effective in raising awareness amongst participants about the current socio-economic and political situation in Greece, but it was also a strong reminder of the role that art, performativity and symbolic language are playing on the streets in the context of diverse contemporary expressions of social protest against neo-liberalism around the world (demonstrations, uprisings, Occupy movement and so on).

Integrated in the program as the closing session of the second day of the conference, the performance 'It's a Beautiful Thing, the Destruction of Wor(l)ds' was staged in an auditorium. This scheduling and that spatial setting may not have allowed the participants of the conference to engage fully with the artists' experiential proposal. Nonetheless, it was meaningful that this piece would be presented in such a context where it stretched the boundaries of more traditional ways of producing and disseminating knowledge by activating the creative tensions and complementarities between different postures – that of the artist, the activist and the scholar. This concrete example of how art can act for social change – on the streets as well as within academia – brought forward reflections on the hegemonic uses of spaces, the sense of home, and alternative ways of being in the city and of occupying urban spaces. It also suggested to consider the creative potential of a "state of emergency", since it might also reveal itself to be a "state of emergence" calling for "daily performances of resistance".

Future development of the work might allow the artists to explore further the performativity (versus theatricality) of this art piece and the interactivity (intersubjectivity) with the audience / participants. This relational dimension of the performance might also lead to further considerations on the notion of "space", dwelling and coexistence as these are not only part of the content (or referentiality) of this art piece, they are also enacted by all who are involved during this performance, including the artists themselves. Finally, it seems that it would be interesting for the artists to situate this art work and scholarly intervention within a research-creation paradigm and consider the specificities of art based (or art produced) knowledge.

**Conference organiser/ presenter: Peter Snowdon (Universiteit Hasselt, Belgium)
(Loughborough, Sept 2012)**

Myrto Tsilimpounidi and Aylwyn Walsh's performance, 'It's a Beautiful Thing: the Destruction of Worlds', was, for me, one of the highlights of the stream Real Democracy and the Revolutions of Our Time which I co-organised at ASN2.0 (Loughborough, 3-5 September 2012). At a time when many researchers are engaged with the place of performance and subjectivity within their own practices, this complex yet immediately accessible dramatization of different ways of knowing challenged the audience to reflect on their own positionality, and simultaneously affirmed the value of the singular, the irreducible, and the affective. Offering no easy answers, Myrto and Aylwyn are developing new ways of approaching disruptive events and their roots in both collective and individual desire and oppression which remain true to the agency of all involved, and to all the conflicts and contradiction which that involves. Their work enriches both the academic study of revolt and revolution, and the live possibilities for radical social change.