

IMS-RASMB, *Series Musicologica Balcanica* 1.1, 2020.

e-ISSN: 2654-248X

## European Art Music as a Modality of the Greek Crisis: Identities, Practices, and Discourses

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26262/smb.v1i1.7761>

# European Art Music as a Modality of the Greek Crisis: Identities, Practices, and Discourses

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**Abstract:** European art music in Greece has been considered the imaginary musical ideotype that serves the creation of a distinctive cultural policy by retaining the role of “high art.” Greek organizations that deal with European art music have always had the opportunity to engage in the broader cultural arena and shape national, artistic, economic, local, and supra-local policies. Each one with their own diverse goals, trends, interests, and perspectives. For about 30 years, cultural and economic policy in Greece has been relatively stable. Nowadays, it has become evident that the field of European art music has significantly been transformed, since the social and economic crisis has led to radical changes, new directions and transformations of practices. In order to highlight some aspects of the political economy of European art music in Greece, I will provide specific examples that demonstrate, in brief, how the crisis affected Greek cultural organizations and the people associated with them, in terms of two perspectives: the economic-administrative and the cultural-artistic. Through both an ethnographic and a textual approach of a case study, I will critically examine various issues of identity, practice, and discourse that concern the multimodal relation between modern Greek and European music culture.

**Keywords:** European art music; Greek crisis; cultural politics; cultural organizations; music ensembles; the National Opera of Greece.

This article is based on data collected during the project “Western Art Music at the Time of Crisis: An Interdisciplinary Study of Contemporary Greek Culture and European Integration.”<sup>1</sup> The project was a comprehensive research on contemporary music life in Greece with emphasis on European art music and its interconnection with other spheres of Greek culture. It focused on the post-2000 period (covering the main phase of economic and sociocultural crisis in Greece, specifically from 2008 to 2014) and analyzed a wide range of musical ontologies and agents (musicians, music

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<sup>1</sup> The research was conducted during 2014–15 by the members of the Ethnomusicology and Cultural Anthropology Laboratory of the Department of Music Studies at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (Greece) under the supervision of Professor Pavlos Kavouras and has been co-funded by the European Social Fund and Greek National Resources. Another version of this article has been published in Greek in a special edition of the journal *Polyponia* (issue 26, spring 2015). All translations in English are mine, unless otherwise indicated in the text.

halls, performances, audiences, media, bodies of culture etc.) along with their interactions as well as discourses, employing both historical and ethnographic research methodologies. The study of European art music in contemporary Greece has been carried out focusing on three aspects of music life, i.e. education, institutions, and festivals. The second branch of this research scheme refers to particular performative and administrative bodies of European art music in Greece, namely cultural organizations dealing with music.

In the context of this specific study, the term “organization” includes various cultural entities (bodies, associations, unions, companies, groups, ensembles, and other collectivities), which have clear goals, limits, and behaviors based on bureaucratic structures and interpersonal relations.<sup>2</sup> These organizations develop new practices through participating in social, cultural, and economic changes and interact with each other, thus formulating novel musical networks in Greece. In order to highlight some aspects of the political economy of European art music in the country, I will briefly describe how the crisis affected several bodies of culture concerning the organizations themselves but also the people and the audiences associated with them. Two dimensions will be examined: their economic-administrative and cultural-artistic. I will also examine various issues of identity, practice and discourse that convey the multimodal relations between Modern Greek and European art music culture.

Epistemologically speaking, the second axis of the research was a critical study of cultural organizations in Greece, which was carried out through thick description, critical analysis, semiotic interpretation, as well as the presentation of a central case study. The concepts of “practice,” “performance,” and “network” were also emphasized within the historical and cultural framework of current social and financial crisis.<sup>3</sup> Considering the huge amount of information available, our research was limited to the urban areas of Athens and Thessaloniki, as there is a significant number of organizations in these cities. We have identified quite a few entities whose primary or secondary scope is European art music. At a general first level we listed over 60 well-known formal cultural organizations and attempted to dig out other informal entities (music bands and groups that have no legal status or systematic

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed presentation of the notion of “cultural organizations” in contemporary arts management studies with regard to their legal, instrumental, and open systems conceptions, see Jonathan Paquette and Eleonora Redaelli, *Arts Management and Cultural Policy Research* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 45–49.

<sup>3</sup> In this article, the terms “practice,” “performance,” and “network” derive from the existing anthropological literature, which is also applied in state-of-the-art ethnomusicological theory and fieldwork analysis. See, respectively, Sherry B. Ortner, “Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26, no. 1 (1984): 144–57; Victor W. Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1986), 72–98; and Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 128–33.

presence).<sup>4</sup> Most organizations were of a medium or small size, while the large ones were only a handful. Consequently, we proceeded with a more substantial investigation of the most significant and prominent institutions. These entities were mainly organizations active in the theatrical performance of European art music, founded on a complex administrative, operational, and managerial bureaucracy.

For the purposes of the research, we created three databases that were used as an archival source for our analysis. The first database contained specific descriptions of these musical ensembles and cultural organizations. The second includes key-persons related to particular entities or moving autonomously in the field of European art music. The third one was a corpus of texts (including interviews, questionnaires, surveys, fieldnotes, web reports, press articles, journals comments, reviews, papers, online articles, etc.) that referred to the main subject of the research and were collected in the course of the project. The study combined the methodologies of ethnographic fieldwork (incorporating in-depth, non-structured interviews and participatory observation) and discourse analysis, through which we critically explored diverse narrative representations of European art music during the Greek crisis. We have examined, for example, the ideological role and public image of its cultural actors, through a case study focusing on the profile of the National Opera of Greece from 2008 to 2014. All these resources helped construe and identify European art music as a “modality” of the Greek crisis.<sup>5</sup>

The research showed that formal cultural organizations in the country are mainly private non-profit companies supervised by the Greek Ministry of Culture. This practice, which is also observed in some foreign countries, applies to both large and small cultural organizations in Greece. Their legal status serves two main objectives: the possibility of limited monitoring and evaluation of their tasks at all levels,

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<sup>4</sup> Indicatively, I quote the most important of these organizations: the National Opera of Greece, the two major Greek state symphony orchestras (the Athens State Orchestra and the Thessaloniki State Symphony Orchestra), the Megaron Athens Concert Hall, the (Megaron) Thessaloniki Concert Hall, the Onassis House of Arts and Letters (also known as “the Onassis Stegi”), the Music Ensembles of the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (the National Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestra of Contemporary Music, and the Choir), the Third Program (a state-owned public radio station, strictly oriented towards Western classical music), the Music Ensembles of the Municipality of Athens (the Symphony Orchestra, the Philharmonic Orchestra, the Choir, and the Big Band), the Thessaloniki City Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestra of Colors, the Camerata Athens (also known as “Armonia Atenea – The Friends of Music Orchestra”), the Greek Composers’ Union, the Parnassos Literary Society, various European educational and cultural institutes (such as the Hellenic American Union, the Goethe Institute in Athens [Goethe-Institut Athen], and the French Institute of Greece [L’Institut Français de Grèce]) and many others.

<sup>5</sup> I make use of the word “modality” as a figurative expression originating in the actual terminology of music in order to metaphorically highlight the ambivalent and erratic status of European art music in modern Greek culture. Daniel Leech-Wilkinson reveals that “music’s modality [...] can apply to anything that changes over time or (if we wish) to little beyond itself.” See Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, “Musical Shape and Feeling,” in *Music and Shape*, eds. Daniel Leech-Wilkinson and Helen M. Prior (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 369.

combined with (practically unlimited) artistic freedom, and the systematic access to public and/or European funding, regardless of the nature and the characteristics of the organization (either public or private). Even in the case of purely private entities, institutes, and corporations, public state funding has always been their primary source of income that is constant, non-negotiable, and supposed to be taken for granted.<sup>6</sup> The main argument is that cultural products – especially those associated with European art music – are either not intended or unable to rapidly achieve countervailable economic benefits. Nevertheless, both the internal existence and the external manifestation (such as the structure, the function, the practices, and the activities) of these bodies are apparently not limited to their intellectual, entertaining, and educational goals; on the contrary, they also have straightforward, clear, and well-defined economic, social, and political dimensions.

While the most conventional trends in social sciences examine economy as a separate and distinct field of human life, political economy links up the socio-political system with the economic one. To put it another way, it highlights the interaction between the economic, the political, and the social reality, investigating the relations between power, authority, and production.<sup>7</sup> In particular, the political economy of culture in contemporary societies explores the networks of creation, dissemination, and reception of cultural goods; it scrutinizes the promotion and sales activities of consumer goods in relation to the artistic, aesthetic, and ideological preferences of individuals, groups, and organizations; finally, it focuses on the managerial and communicative framework of culture, with a specific perspective on the idea of “culture as commodity” – an approach which is quite unusual when referring to the concept of “European art music” in contrast to other popular music genres.<sup>8</sup>

With reference to the case of Greece, European art music has been considered the imaginary musical ideotype that serves – through a poetic (constructional) and rhetoric (legitimizing) way – the creation of a distinctive (state or private) cultural policy by retaining the role of “high art.” It is the (Western) musical “Other,” which –

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<sup>6</sup> [Dimitris Rigopoulos] Δημήτρης Ρηγόπουλος, [“How Much Private is Private Sector?”] “Πόσο Ιδιωτικά Είναι τα Ιδιωτικά;” [Daily] *Η Καθημερινή*, February 14, 2010, <http://www.kathimerini.gr/385193/article/politismos/arxeio-politismoy/poso-idiwtika-einai-ta-idiwtika>.

<sup>7</sup> As Danielle Fox states: “Art and political economy are usually regarded as separate subjects, pursued and practiced by people with very different interests. Yet, they are not as disparate as they seem. Indeed, art that appears to have no visible political content – even that which has been created by an artist without political intentions – can play a significant role in promoting political and economic interests.” See Danielle Fox, “Art,” in *Culture Works: The Political Economy of Culture*, ed. Richard Maxwell (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 22.

<sup>8</sup> Beginning with the Frankfurt School of critical theory and philosophy, the examination of music as an item for consumption is a commonplace in current sociological and anthropological study of arts. See, for example, Will Straw, “Music as Commodity and Material Culture,” *Repercussions* 7–8 (1999–2000): 147–71.

being “foreign” and “different” – can appear either competitively or compassionately as the “leader” of local music cultures. Thus, both in symbolic and in practical terms, Greek organizations that deal with European art music have always had the opportunity to engage in the broader cultural arena and shape national, artistic, economic, local, and supra-local policies; each organization with its own diverse goals, trends, interests, and perspectives. For about 30 years – starting with the accession of Greece to the European Economic Community – up to the last years before the crisis, cultural policy and economic state of affairs with reference to the Greek music scene had been relatively stable. They were characterized by: the commercialization and massification of music at all levels; the increase of cultural financing from both Greek and European funds; the selective governmental support to certain cultural institutions, ensembles, actions, and people; the separation and standardization of music genres; and the stabilization of music audiences.

It is important to underline that there were certain music activities that developed in Greece usually within the framework of wider cultural programs co-financed by the European Union (i.e. Kaleidoscope, Raphael, Cultural Capitals of Europe, Culture 2000, and Culture 2007). Besides that, the formation of cultural politics in Greece has always been the subject of diverse approaches, always related to the overall governmental plan. At times, there has also been widespread criticism of the state’s disregard for the extensive problems and serious funding deficiencies of cultural agents. The blurred and occasionally asymmetrical, ‘hybrid’ collaboration between the public sphere and the private initiatives in the field of artistic and cultural economics has long ago been established as an undeniable fact in Greece. However, the involvement of these two powers (the public and the private sectors) seems to be an option being promoted at a central level within the European Union. Nowadays, the new agenda of the multifaceted European program “Creative Europe,” that is expected to last till 2020 or beyond, moves towards this specific direction. It thus confirms the mutual interdependence between economy and culture, in conjunction with multiple ideological positions and political responses on this issue that underline culture’s close links with the neoliberal principles of entrepreneurship, competitiveness, development, innovation, and sustainability.<sup>9</sup>

It has become evident that the conditions in the field of European art music have recently been significantly transformed within the context of social and economic crisis in Greece. Badiou’s theory of the “event” could describe – and to some extent

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<sup>9</sup> The shift from state-driven policies to neoliberal ones within the field of art conforms to the recent employment of the label “creative industries” instead of the earlier term “cultural industries” which embodies a more critical look at the relationship between economy and culture. This scheme is systematically explained in David J. Hesmondhalgh, “Cultural and Creative Industries,” in *The Sage Handbook of Cultural Analysis*, eds. Tony Bennet and John Frow (London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2008), 553.

possibly interpret – the experience of a crisis.<sup>10</sup> Similar to the idea of the “event,” crisis is an unexpected, undefined, unpredictable, and, in any case, unavoidable phenomenon. It represents a sudden incident, a rupture with the current norms, and a series of unforeseen intrusions that are not subject to the classical laws of history. Bearing in mind that Badiou’s “event” is an emergent manifold state, a contingent multiplicity that is understood as a radical intervention in the existing state of affairs, and a motivation towards unconfirmed situations. Its actual existence results from a shock that disturbs and remodels the rules of the status quo. This transformation process challenges the routines, the dispositions, and the rules that define the idiosyncratic and systemic order of “habitus.” According to Bourdieu, “habitus” could be defined as the socialized tendencies that guide human thoughts and behaviors through the interaction between “structure” (the persistent culturally patterned engagements) and “agency” (the ability of individuals to choose and act autonomously).<sup>11</sup> On an epistemological basis, the study of crisis as an “event” could fairly shed light on the radical transformations of sociopolitical, economic, and cultural lifestyles.<sup>12</sup> As reflected in our study, the accumulated difficulties of the years before crisis, coupled with the serious financial, administrative, and sociopolitical problems that arose during this “event,” resulted in a crucial modification of artistic practices and networks – a redefinition of the previous “habitus” – in the field of modern Greek culture.

In the context of globalized, individualistic, and monetary-driven mechanisms of current social, political, and cultural reality, the major effects during a crisis take place at the domain of “actual” (non-theoretical) economics. Undoubtedly, culture and the arts – as influenced by and shaped into the above system – cannot avoid these consequences. The huge national budget reduction was a key characteristic of the Greek crisis. Traditionally, the sphere of culture (especially the branch of performing arts) is the first that would undergo critical cuts in difficult economic circumstances.<sup>13</sup> For example, government grants to some of the largest Greek cultural organizations (such as the Megaron Athens Concert Hall), were met with a 75% decrease compared to those of the pre-crisis era.<sup>14</sup> We must always bear in mind

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<sup>10</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), 171–261.

<sup>11</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 52–65.

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, Yannis Stavrakakis, “State and Event in the Greek Crisis: 2015 Revisited,” in *Badiou and the State*, ed. Dominik Finkelde (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2017), 85–106 and Yiannis Mylonas, “Crisis, Austerity and Opposition in Mainstream Media Discourses of Greece,” *Critical Discourse Studies* 11, no. 3 (2014): 305–21.

<sup>13</sup> Maria Moldoveanu and Valeriu Ioan-Franc, “The Impact of the Economic Crisis on Culture,” *Review of General Management* 14, no. 2 (2011): 15–35.

<sup>14</sup> An official report that includes all data regarding the state’s grants to cultural institutions and other non-governmental organizations and associations had been submitted as an annex in the proceedings

that this fiscal inconvenience had different effects and extensions for each of the artistic forms or cultural organizations. Another important factor was the reallocation of direct public funds, i.e. the redistribution of national subvention among the bodies of culture, which had obvious political and economic dimensions. There was also an analogous decline of sponsorship from the private sector.<sup>15</sup> Throughout our research, we tried to designate the overall problematic environment in Greek cultural economy, but we have also looked carefully into the diverse micro-practices in each music institution during the crisis. One of the focal problems was the limitation or shutdown of certain ensembles and organizations. Regarding human recourses, financial cuts were often accompanied by additional dismissals of the permanent artistic and the administrative staff as well as by the non-renewal of contracts with external partners that had been systematically cooperating with these organizations in the previous years; there was also a blockade of hiring new personnel. Finally, another major impact of the economic crisis was the large-scale salary haircuts and the long payment delays.<sup>16</sup>

During the Greek crisis, a considerable number of new, minor, and flexible music ensembles were created mainly by younger unemployed musicians or musicians who were trying to boost their income. The practices and actions of these groups

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of the Hellenic Parliament by former Greek Minister of Culture Mr. Konstantinos Tzavaras on December 3, 2012 [<http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/UserFiles/67715b2c-ec81-4f0c-ad6a-476a34d732bd/7853117.pdf>]. Apparently, this account takes into consideration only the organizations' regular financing from the Ministry of Culture, as there might have been other (either emergent or exceptional) allowances that do not appear in this document.

<sup>15</sup> For a critical review of cultural initiatives of the Greek private sector, see [Anna Karakatsouli] Άννα Καρακατσούλη, ["Cultural Politics and Private Initiative"] "Πολιτισμική Πολιτική και Ιδιωτική Πρωτοβουλία," [*Chronos: Online Magazine Originated from Greece*] *Χρόνος: Online Περιοδικό με Αφετηρία την Ελλάδα* 13, May 2014, <http://www.chronosmag.eu/index.php/sl-pls-pl-e-pl.html>.

<sup>16</sup> To get a glimpse, see the following press articles in online Greek magazines and newspapers: [Mirka Lambropoulou] Μίρκα Λαμπροπούλου, ["Musicians of the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation Talk to MusicCorner about the Violent Suspension of Music Ensembles"] "Μουσικοί της ΕΡΤ Μιλούν στο MusicCorner για τη Βίαιη Διάλυση των Μουσικών Συνόλων," *MusicCorner.gr*, November 29, 2013, <http://www.musiccorner.gr/μουσικοί-της-ερτ-μιλούν-στο-musiccorner-για-τη-βί-87841>; [Efi Agrafioti] Έφη Αγραφιιώτη, ["Orchestra of Colors: Chronicle of a Death Foretold?"] "Ορχήστρα των Χρωμάτων: Χρονικό Προαναγγελέντος Θανάτου," *Tar*, June 2011, <http://www.tar.gr/content/content.php?id=3667>; [Sophia Adamidou] Σοφία Αδαμίδου, ["Athens State Orchestra, a Victim of Antipopular Politics"] "Θύμα της Αντιλαϊκής Πολιτικής η Κρατική Ορχήστρα Αθηνών," [*The Radical*] *Ριζοσπάστης*, September 28, 2014, <http://www.rizospastis.gr/story.do?id=8124842>; [Yannis Albanis] Γιάννης Αλμπάνης, ["What Can you Say to Kedikoglou about the Third Program?"] "Τι να Πεις στον Κεδίκογλου για το Τρίτο Πρόγραμμα;" *Lifo*, June 18, 2013, <http://www.lifo.gr/team/readersdigest/39161>; [Dora Amarantidou] Δώρα Αμαραντίδου, ["The Musicians' Suspended Step"] "Το Μετέωρο Βήμα των Μουσικών," [*The Mouse*] *Το Ποντίκι*, March 10, 2011, <http://www.topontiki.gr/article/22731/meteoro-vima-ton-moysikon>; and [Irina Orfanidou] Ειρήνη Ορφανίδου, ["Camerata: The Transcendence and the Uncertain Future"] "Καμεράτα: Η Υπέρβαση και το Άδηλο Μέλλον," *TheTOC.gr*, June 1, 2014, <http://www.thetoc.gr/politismos/article/kamerata-i-uperbasi-kai-to-adilo-mellon>.



were basically grounded on either friendly or professional relations between their members who frequently performed for free.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, economic crisis affected the artistic planning and the public presence of cultural organizations. In this sense, the music program of cultural institutions was restrained in many occasions both thematically and quantitatively. This was mainly associated with their effort to control their financial expenses during the crisis as opposed to previous years. For example, there were few newly assigned productions and it was often preferred to reschedule or repeat some earlier ones, especially if they had been successful. We have also noted a drastic shift from pure, non-representational art music to interactive works, audio-visual shows, and the connection between music and the other arts – all based on visual stimuli and representational staging. One can also be aware of the expansion of the locations where the works of European art music were performed (launching multi-use art venues; performing outdoors or in other unconventional spaces; bringing audiences into closer contact with the natural and urban environment; integrating European art music in people's everyday lives; mixing music with other human activities, etc.). During their effort to maintain or increase their followers, music organizations and ensembles in Greece adopted differentiated approaches to music production and promotion imported from abroad. Some of them tried to "remain true" to the genres of music they traditionally presented in order to stabilize their audience base or attract more people. However, there were institutions that encouraged a mixture of music genres with the intention of pull in various types of listeners. These were all standard business techniques of audience development, acting as statistic "trial and error" typologies in the case of Greece.<sup>18</sup>

Cultural agents concerned with the performance of European art music in Greece had always been organized in various networks of individuals, groups and associations. The period under examination was quite obscure with regard to the structure and the development of these grids. On the one hand, the artistic networks shrunk as there was a limitation of possibilities for everybody to be occupied with European art music activities, while, on the other hand, all those involved (such as musicians, composers, singers, teachers, conductors, and producers) were trying to multiply their interconnections, broaden their horizons, and open up to original artistic and professional prospects. Thus, ambiguous dynamics were created, juggling between the sense of a continuous competition among artists and their eagerness for brand-new formations which could lead to some kind of solution. Even so, our study did not reveal any systematic movement out of the country, as there

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<sup>17</sup> One could pinpoint, among others, the *Academica Athens Orchestra*, the *Underground Youth Orchestra*, the *Orchestra Mobile*, and the *Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra of Athens*.

<sup>18</sup> This is a regular procedure that has been widely applied for years in music ensembles all over the world. See Njordur Sigurjonsson, "Orchestra Audience Development and the Aesthetics of 'Customer Comfort'," *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 40, no. 4 (2010): 266–78.

were already several Greek musicians working abroad before the crisis.<sup>19</sup> Cultural networking and professional relations in the field of European art music between Greece and Europe did not seem to have changed much due to the crisis. Moreover, in this context, not only the individuals but also both the informal communities and the authoritative organizations had to reconfigure their networks, moving towards novel agreements, improved negotiations, and innovative projects.

From an anthropological point of view, opera can be explored as a cultural practice, which is realized as a distinctive ritual with a specific habitus and particular performative features (such as place and time; structure and repertoire; actors and audiences, etc.). After its journey across the centuries, through various historical and artistic periods (sometimes disseminated either as 'serious' form of art or as popular entertainment; sometimes presented either as a concert with costumes or as a staged drama), opera is a contemporary performing event, a composite spectacle that is not limited to a musical or theatrical show. It is without a shred of doubt that nowadays opera shapes and diffuses into the public sphere a post-neoteric grand narrative: the myth of the publicity and the attractiveness of lyrical theater.<sup>20</sup> Thus, on the one hand, the spectacular and popular attributes of contemporary operatic performances are located in the genre's social and cultural origins, while, on the other hand, operas always had the power to orchestrate together traditional and modern social practices, dramatize current cultural reality, and transfer (through communicative enactments) the actions and the experiences of social and artistic changes. In the light of all the above considerations, opera could be handpicked as the perfect tool for approaching the relationship between European art music and the Greek crisis.

As a matter of fact, the tactic followed by the National Opera of Greece in the recent years, during the period of Myron Michaelides' artistic direction,<sup>21</sup> is perhaps the only Greek 'success story' that has systematically been portrayed in the Greek mass media and abroad.<sup>22</sup> That was a transitional era for the National Opera of Greece:

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<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, the interviews of two famous Greek lyric singers who demonstrate excellence outside the country: [Maria Tomara] Μαρία Τομαρά, ["Dimitris Plataniotis, from the National Opera of Greece to Covent Garden"] "Από την Εθνική Λυρική Σκηνή στο Covent Garden ο Δημήτρης Πλατανιάς," [Freedom Online] *Ελευθερία Online*, February 17, 2012, <https://www.eleftheriaonline.gr/local/politismos/synentefkseis-parousiaseis/item/16095-από-την-εθνική-λυρική-σκηνή-στο-covent-garden-ο-δημήτρης-πλατανιάς>; and [Katerina I. Anesti] Κατερίνα Ι. Ανέστη, ["Myrto Papathanassiou: Distinguished Greek Soprano at last at the Herodeion"] "Μυρτώ Παπαθανασίου: Η Μεγάλη Ελληνίδα Σοπράνο επιτέλους στο Ηρώδειο." *Popaganda*, June 11, 2014, <http://popaganda.gr/mirto-papathanasiou-megali-ellinida-soprano-epitelous-sto-irodio>.

<sup>20</sup> Vlado Kotnik, "Opera, Myth, Society: How Do they Correlate?" *Trames* 8, no. 3 (2004): 309–38.

<sup>21</sup> Myron Michaelides was appointed as artistic director and chief conductor of the National Opera of Greece in 2011, succeeding its Italian orchestra conductor Giovanni Pacor. Michaelides remained in this position until 2017.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Theodora Mavropoulos, ["The Useful Opera"] "Die nützliche Oper," [The Daily] *Der Tagesspiegel*, May 3, 2014, <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/schuldenkrise-griechenland-die-nuetzliche-oper/9836940.html>; Andrew Bomford, "Tragedy and Triumph in Greece," *Broadcasting*

starting from its “marginal position” at the beginning of the crisis (2010) and leading up to its “total renovation” and relocation to the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center, a few years later (2017).<sup>23</sup> If we perform a critical discourse analysis of the profile of the National Opera of Greece, we realize that this “success story” was consistent with the overall economic, social, political, and cultural management of the Greek crisis, as promoted by the governmental system and presented by the supportive media. Without being too analytical, I will now focus on the public presence of the National Opera of Greece, as well as the construction and the effect of its external image. Like most efforts to address the economic and social crisis, the National Opera of Greece adopted an operational logic with the “value for money” market principle in mind and a clear “cost-benefit” economic perspective. This strategy oscillated between: the opera as “serious high art” and the opera as “mass popular entertainment.”<sup>24</sup> It is obvious this situation was not limited to Greece alone but has been a common trend in opera houses and other cultural organizations and ensembles all around the world.

We can identify four trends in modern cultural production, which cover the two main economy sectors (the public state and the private market) and apply to the following practices: developing privileged cultural institutions and organizations; expanding bureaucracy and broadening the role of the administration; increasing cultural production; and enhancing transnational cultural flows.<sup>25</sup> In postmodern era and especially during the times of crisis, while the traditional habitus of cultural organizations breaks up, new practices appear, new networks of ideas and people

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*House*, October 13, 2013, <https://audioboom.com/posts/1657915-tragedy-and-triumph-in-greece>; [Nikos Andritsos] Νίκος Ανδρίτσος, [“National Opera of Greece, a Rare Success Story”] “Σπάνιο Success Story η Εθνική Λυρική Σκηνή,” [*Skai*] Σκάι, October 31, 2013, <http://www.skai.gr/news/culture/article/244952/ap-spanio-success-story-i-luriki-skini-athinon/default.aspx>; and [Tasos Zachos] Τάσος Ζάχος, [“The Real Success Story Is Built inside the New Cultural Center”] “Το Πραγματικό Success Story Χτίζεται στο Νέο Κέντρο Πολιτισμού,” *Fortune Greece*, November 3, 2013, <https://www.fortunegreece.com/article/spanio-success-story-tis-elladas>.

<sup>23</sup> During an interview in 2010, former Minister of Culture Mr. Pavlos Geroulanos had confirmed: “There is definitely an issue with the [National] Opera [of Greece] and the next days will have to be decided whether or not it will continue its operation. [...] [T]he Ministry [of Culture] is looking for ways to save it; but this is difficult as it has so far exceeded its budget that huge sacrifices are required to find the necessary funds.” See [Andreas Papageorgopoulos] Ανδρέας Παπαγεωργόπουλος, [“Bad News for the Opera as well, but Geroulanos Is really Impressive Abroad”] “Μαύρα τα Μαντάτα και για την Όπερα, αλλά έξω ο Γερουλάνος Εντυπωσιάζει,” [*Greek without Greece*] *Ελληνας χωρίς Ελλάδα*, April 6, 2010, <http://ellinas-xoris-ellada.blogspot.com/2010/04/http-ellinas-xoris-ellada.html>.

<sup>24</sup> On operas as popular shows and economic artefacts, see John Storey, “‘Expecting Rain’: Opera as Popular Culture?” in *High-Pop: Making Culture into Popular Entertainment*, ed. Jim Collins (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 32–55 and Rosanne Martorella, “The Relationship between Box Office and Repertoire: A Case Study of Opera,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1977): 354–66.

<sup>25</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Sociology of Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 206–33.

arise, and new arrangements of earlier cultural policies are formulated. In other words, a new habitus becomes established. As a distinguishing paradigm from the years under consideration, the National Opera of Greece had been one of the most favored cultural institutions in the country – based on its strong organizational and managerial structures fully funded by the state – that seemed to multiply its artistic production in an effort to get further involved in the international system of European art music.<sup>26</sup>

Several dimensions had been added to the static operatic reality of prior strategies and performances of the National Opera of Greece. The direct connection with private entrepreneurship, the integration of cultural marketing, the elaboration of educational and lifelong learning programs, the trend of open rehearsals, outdoor concerts, interactive and multimedia performances, the shift towards more popular repertoires, the emphasis on online activities through social networks, all aimed at the transformation of the audience and public perception regarding the image of the National Opera of Greece.<sup>27</sup> It should also be pointed out that, according to the communication plan of the organization, all these events were denoted as “outreach actions,” “multifaceted campaigns” or even “cultural attacks,” and not as “performances”, a term that was common enough but would perhaps refer to the older (“pre-crisis”) habitus of the Greek National Opera.<sup>28</sup> Finally, it is important to state that most Greek cultural organizations and music ensembles related to European art music had adopted – sometimes successfully, sometimes not – specific

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<sup>26</sup> Myron Michaelides proclaimed: “I think we have succeeded in justifying the [adjective] ‘national’ [for the National Opera of Greece]; however, as regards the ‘European’ [potential] we still have a long way to go. On the other hand, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center helps us a lot. A cosmogony is being prepared. We are already working upon a long-term planning to set off regular international collaborations and open up potentials for a sponsorship system. It is gonna be a persistent struggle to claim for money. [...] The great success in an organization is to envision with idealism. The longer you target, the more dynamic should be the near steps you make.” See [Yannis Svolos] Γιάννης Σβώλος, [“Myron Michaelides: The Great Success in an Organization Is to Envision with Idealism”] “Μύρων Μιχαηλίδης: Η Μεγάλη Επιτυχία σε έναν Οργανισμό Είναι να Οραματιζέσαι με Ιδεαλισμό,” *Lifo*, October 24, 2012, <http://www.lifo.gr/mag/features/3464>.

<sup>27</sup> Some of the most characteristic instances of unusual performances and presentations by the National Opera of Greece during the years of crisis were: on the Lyric Bus at the Syntagma Square; at the Athens Metro escalators; at a small theater in Peristeri (“The Suitcase Opera” project); inside public high schools in the Greek province; on a balcony at Aghia Sophia Square in Thessaloniki; at the atrium outside the Acropolis Museum; at the Pillars of Olympian Zeus; at the pedestrian pathway of Dionyssiou Areopaghitou Street; on a dock at the port of Piraeus; at the worksite of Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center at the Faliron Delta; inside a plane of the sponsoring company Aegean Airlines; and at the Varvakeios Meat Market of Athens.

<sup>28</sup> See [Yiorgos Charonitis] Γιώργος Χαρωνίτης, [“The 5-year Plan of the National Opera of Greece has Been Announced”] “Ανακοινώθηκε το Πενταετές Πλάνο της Λυρικής,” [*Athinorama*] *Αθηνόραμα*, December 13, 2013,

<https://www.athinorama.gr/music/article/anakoinothike-to-pentaetes-plano-tis-lyrikis-1001895.html>.

planning, management, promotion, publicity, and communication policies from the National Opera of Greece.

Neither the structures nor the activities of modern cultural organizations are limited to the creation of new cultural products, but they often resemble those of purely business and profit-making companies concerning their “branding” and their “imaging” (i.e. the construction of their brand name and external appearance). As has been shown by the research on the National Opera of Greece, this process had been one of its central objectives, wholly incorporated into its organizational, operational, and communicative practices. In addition to the above, it is clear that the transformation of the profile of the National Opera of Greece during the years of crisis did not only happen at a symbolic or imaginary level but was objectified, realized, and implemented in everyday cultural reality.<sup>29</sup> In particular, the wide publicity of the National Opera of Greece was accompanied by a switch to audio-visual experimentation, promotional design, and extended advertising. This new logic of the organization was compatible with the general shift to novel forms of online digital communication, which are usually fragmented and rely heavily on technological mediation. This way, the audience of the opera gets the illusion of participation in the virtual reality of an innovative, open lyric theater that was not intended only for the elite.<sup>30</sup>

However, contrary to the positive responses to the all-new and 'fresh' image of the National Opera of Greece, there had also been quite a lot of oppositions to this prodigious adaptation. Consider, for instance, the reactions of musicians to the director's mandate to perform in the open air, the journalists' criticism of aesthetically unconventional opera productions, the dissatisfaction of some spectators that went with the attempt to popularize the operatic genre, the young composers' disapproval of the suspension of the Experimental Opera Scene, the protests of the technical and administrative staff to the integration of their payroll

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<sup>29</sup> Myron Michaelides had also referred to “the attempt of the National Opera of Greece to meet new audiences in places that are unpredicted and completely different from conventional theaters, where opera ceases to exist as a set of lyrical images and becomes a social relationship between individuals.” See [Myron Michaelides] Μύρων Μιχαηλίδης, [“Art Activities of the National Opera of Greece as a Tool of Enhancing Social Cohesion”] “Οι Καλλιτεχνικές Δράσεις της Εθνικής Λυρικής Σκηνής ως Εργαλείο Αύξησης της Κοινωνικής Συνοχής,” in [*Managing Cultural Organizations at the Times of Crisis*] Διαχείριση Πολιτιστικών Οργανισμών σε Περίοδο Κρίσης, ed. [Dafni Voudouri] Δάφνη Βουδούρη (Athens: Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences), 57.

<sup>30</sup> Vassilis Louras, who was the head of the promotion and communication department of the National Opera of Greece for that period, affirmed that their propose considering the organization's audience development was “to expand its traditional audience to a larger one but also to invite (through various means) the general public to see what this is all about and, in particular, to put the lie to the cliché that opera is something for the few, the wealthy, and the elders.” See [Eleni Papandreou] Ελένη Παπανδρέου, [*The Role of Cultural Organizations in a Time of Crisis: The Case of the National Opera of Greece*] Ο Ρόλος των Πολιτιστικών Οργανισμών σε Περίοδο Κρίσης: Η Περίπτωση της Εθνικής Λυρικής Σκηνής, unpublished MA thesis (Chalcis: Hellenic Open University, 2015), 111.

into the narrow public sector, as well as the management's failure to renew earlier contracts.<sup>31</sup> The comments and the impressions of the general public – as documented in social media and online forums – on the innovations and the alterations that the National Opera of Greece adopted at that time tend to fluctuate considerably; they covered a wide range of critical attitudes (either positive or negative; either superficial or ironic) towards this new habitus.

One of the most significant changes that took place in the National Opera of Greece during this phase practically reflects the complete shift in the cooperation between the public and the private sector in present-day Greek cultural politics. The Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center inside the Stavros Niarchos Park established a new complex which now encompasses all the facilities of the two major Greek public bodies of culture: the National Library and the National Opera of Greece. The construction of this colossal center – expected to function as a cultural focal point on the southern side of the capital city of Athens in Faliron Delta – initiated during the economic crisis. The principle idea of this venue is the implementation of a postmodern ecological integration that frames together the human-built structures, the intangible cultural conceptions, and the natural environment at the fringes of the urban landscape near the coastal zone. It should also be mentioned that, over the last few years and within this specific perspective of coexistence, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation has become a valuable donor to a variety of projects of the National Opera of Greece.<sup>32</sup> Today, Myron Michaelides is no longer the artistic director of the

<sup>31</sup> See, among others, [Yannis Svolos] Γιάννης Σβώλος, ["The National Opera of Greece, 'The Barber of Seville': Speeding up in Reverse!"] "Εθνική Λυρική Σκηνή, 'Κουρέας της Σεβίλλης': Γκαζώνοντας με την Όπισθεν!" [*Press Freedom*] *Ελευθεροτυπία*, February 8, 2011, <http://www.enet.gr/?i=news.el.article&id=249241>; [Alkinoos Bounias] Αλκίνοος Μπουνιάς, ["The National Opera of Greece is Shutting Down"] "Κατέβασαν Ρολά στη Λυρική Σκηνή," *Espresso*, December 17, 2012, <https://www.espressonews.gr/περιεχόμενο/72108/κατέβασαν-ρολά-στη-λυρική-σκηνή>; and [Lena Ioannidou] Λένα Ιωαννίδου, ["Booing the Difference: We Watched 'Don Giovanni' at the Herodeion"] "Γιουχάροντας το Διαφορετικό: Είδαμε τον 'Ντον Τζοβάννι' στο Ηρώδειο," *Athens Voice*, June 12, 2014, [https://www.athensvoice.gr/culture/theater/70233\\_gioyharontas-diaforetiko](https://www.athensvoice.gr/culture/theater/70233_gioyharontas-diaforetiko).

<sup>32</sup> The overall project has not only received lots of positive reviews but was also heavily criticized by many columnists publishing – at a later date – mainly on left-wing websites and online newspapers. See, for example, [Dimitra Myrilla] Δήμητρα Μυρίλλα, ["The Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center: How much Donation is the 'Donation'?"] "Κέντρο Πολιτισμού Σταύρος Νιάρχος: Πόσο Δωρεά είναι η 'Δωρεά';" [*Day Runner*] *Ημεροδρόμος*, September 1, 2016, <https://www.imerodromos.gr/kentro-politismou-stayros-niarchos-dwrea>; [Babis Polychroniadis] Μπάμπης Πολυχρονιάδης, ["The Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center: Donation, VAT Refund, or Who will Be... more Millionaire?"] "Κέντρο Πολιτισμού Ίδρυμα Σταύρος Νιάρχος: Χορηγία, Επιστροφή ΦΠΑ ή Ποιος θα Γίνει... πιο Εκατομμυριούχος;" [*The Way of the Left*] *Δρόμος της Αριστεράς*, May 17, 2017, <https://edromos.gr/idryma-niarchos-xorhgia-epistrofh-fp-ekatommyriouxos>; and [Grigoris Tragganidas] Γρηγόρης Τραγγανίδας, ["The Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center: Half-truths of a Big Lie..."] "Κέντρο Πολιτισμού Ίδρυμα Σταύρος Νιάρχος: Οι 'μισές αλήθειες' ενός μεγάλου ψέματος..." [*The Magazine*] *Το Περιοδικό*, July 1, 2016, <http://www.toperiodiko.gr/κέντρο-πολιτισμού-ίδρυμα-σταύρος-νι>

organization, as the younger composer Giorgos Koumendakis, known for his successful involvement in the role of music director during the Athens 2004 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony, has taken his place. In line with the National Opera of Greece, all other European art music ensembles and cultural institutions in the country (as in the rest of the world) are still in the process of adjusting to the novel conditions of postmodern cultural politics, aiming for both their artistic and economic progress. As a matter of fact, it is what Jacques Attali has already explained when talking about the political economy of music: “[C]atastrophe is inscribed in order, just as crisis is inscribed in development. There is no order that does not contain disorder within itself, and undoubtedly there is no disorder incapable of creating order.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 34.

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