Dimitris Dimitriadis speaks publicly for the very first time about his first theater piece, written in 1966: *The price of the Revolt on the Black Market*, at The J.F. Costopoulos Foundation.

The J.F. Costopoulos Foundation is kindly supporting the upcoming first presentation of *The price of the Revolt on the Black Market*, planned for October 2020, by the director Dimitris Bampilis in Perama, in the open air theater Mikis Theodorakis. Below is a summary of Dimitris Dimitriadis’ presentation.

To watch the presentation in Greek:
https://vimeo.com/396675173/ab943b99c2

**History and description of the play**

There is a history to all of this. I was a scholarship student in Brussels at the INSAS School, a very important school that has grown over time and still exists. At the time it dealt with theater, cinema, and television and we had to choose between these three. After the first year I chose theater. In the third year of our drama course, we had a great teacher, and in his drama lectures he asked us to choose a theme from a collection of excerpts from Shakespeare. For some reason, I cannot remember why, I picked the war. Shakespeare’s texts are full of war and I made a kind of collage with them – but something didn't satisfy me, something was missing. I thought that this “collage” should and could be part of a more general idea, a broader concept. From that arose the idea of a student theater sponsored by the state – the state that was a monarchy at the time and 1964 was a time characterized by Papandreou’s relentless struggle with political conflicts that resulted in the murder of Lambrakis in 1963 and later in the dictatorship.
So this first work of mine, that started as a student work, became quite political, although in general my work is not directly political. I was a student myself, and set up this imaginary student’s company, working in part with excerpts from Shakespeare about murder and political assassination.

Then I imagined that the Queen was scheduled to visit the theater and attend rehearsal to judge for herself the value of supporting the theater, and to decide whether the sponsorship was worth it. The Queen comes along to the theater with her son because her husband has already died (she is a widow and her son is the successor). They enter the theater and begin to watch rehearsals. The imaginary students’ company had already designated an actor to play the role of the queen, who had already committed the murder in the play. Watching her, the “real” queen disagrees with the way the actress interprets her role and says “what could be better than me playing this role since you have me here in the theater?”.

So the Queen, who initially came to evaluate the theater, actually enters the play and thereafter plays her own role. She thereby reveals that she herself is the moral instigator of the murder, of political crime. While this is happening in the theater, inside the theater, not just on the stage (the stage becomes the whole theater, the whole theater becomes the stage), there is, at the same time, and in parallel, the outside, where students’ demonstrations are taking place, leading to the death of a student (killed by the police). That is, the previous political crime is repeated and at a certain point all of this outside world enters the theater and the queen is confronted with a real corpse – “real” in the theatrical sense of course. Confronted by this scary existential, political, and moral impasse, she decides that to master the crowd, to unite it, and to get its favor back, there was no other way than to give it all. The queen and her son had come to the theater dressed in the most luxurious and formal way, like Queen Elizabeth on her throne – and she gives the audience everything she wears, she gives everything away, from her and from her son, and in the end they are both completely naked, stripped, but without convincing anyone. Gradually all the students leave with the support of the theater director. The theater remains completely empty with just the queen and her son, stripped and humiliated and the work ends with them leaving the stage.

*Politics and power*
So yes, there was a political starting point, but essentially the theater itself was a mechanism I was interested in, because what happens in this work is exactly what happens in *Hamlet* when set up in front of Claudius King and his mother, where the play reveals he is his father’s killer. That is, theater operates apocalyptically in relation to the reality, it acts as a mechanism of truth. So, the political dimension of my work generates a mechanism that I am very interested in, *which is theater itself*. *The price of the Revolt on the Black Market* is a play *about theater*, as much as Bertolt Brecht’s political theater, the theater of Jean Genet, Pirandello and others were at the time: their subject like mine, was the theater itself — the tragedy. But the most important author who dominated always this field and still does, is of course Shakespeare, with all his conspiracies, plots and crimes: Shakespeare is a timeless author. My own work could also have been written in different times and relate to different political situations, because the important situation – the tragic situation – I am dealing with in this play is *the issue of power*.

*The tragedy of power, the tragedy of family*

Power and family are intrinsically linked, as I later have developed in many of my plays. In the context of *The price of the Revolt on the Black Market*, the mother-son relationship between the queen and her son is revealed, love and conflict are intertwined, and at some point the relationship breaks up and they are left alone, the two of them, the king and the queen. And there is this whole scene where things get very personal among them, a scene that reveals that the son king is a tortured-minded, oppressed young man who wants to make his own personal revolution. This part of the play refers to the scene of Gertrude and Hamlet, when the son accuses the mother of being an accomplice in the crime.

These personal elements show that these two personas, the queen and the son-king, are not schematic, they are “real” human beings, which is particularly obvious by the end of the play, when the two of them are stripped of their title, their clothes, their position, everything, they just are two human beings, two people, a young man and a woman that nothing anymore protects. Not just power, but the loss of power is also an essential issue here.
Loss of power is one way to reveal the human being, l’être humain, l’être de l’homme. What I mean, is that somehow in this play I also reveal the naked human being, without knowing exactly what I was doing at the time. You have to remember that I was 22 years old, and I really was born as a playwright with this work, writing this play was like a pregnancy, this work came out as a newborn – for me it was a birth. The nakedness of the newborn is not without a link to the nakedness of these two human beings having lost all of their attributes.

Somehow the situation of these two people, at the end, left with nothing than themselves, reminds me, even if the comparison might seem exaggerated, to Creon, the model of the tragic hero who in the end is left only with corpses (and furthermore, he is the culprit of the suicides). He is a man who has nothing left. In Sophocle’s Antigone (that I translated from ancient Greek into modern Greek), he says: “take me away from here”. I am the “non-existent” – I am nothing. The comparison might seem extreme but the tragic is there. Another comparison could be made with Oedipus, à propos the blindness of people in power. They don’t want to see or they can’t see, their power blinds them. And in my play, the queen and the king/the son come “blind” to the theater, unsuspecting, they come to watch something light, they come for something institutional, a formal ceremony, such as an inauguration. But in the end they discover their own nakedness.

And the dogs...

There is an important allegory, in The price of the Revolt on the Black Market, about the dogs, the barking and the bone.

The queen indeed offers her son puppies in the play and at the same time teaches him how to play the dog himself. But her relationship with her son and the dogs is not just about her son: it is about everybody. There is a scene where she meets with her police chiefs, her ministers, her officials. She obliges them to show their obedience and discipline by falling on all fours and barking. The depreciation, the annihilation of the human component is realized through the animal kingdom, if I may say so. In other current political situations in countries I will not name, there are so-called leaders who constantly exceed the limits of arbitrariness and power and throw others into total humiliation, resignation, and expulsion: they
treat them as pets. In my play, they bark, which means that they have lost human speech. They have lost human language. Later in my writings – in I die as a country – I developed the concept of how the loss of language may lead to the death of a whole country. The absence of words indeed leaves an abyss of void.

The role of Patrice Chéreau

The price of the Revolt on the Black Market – I should recall I guess that I wrote this play in French – was first staged in 1968, in Aubervilliers, by French director Patrice Chéreau, who later became the absolute icon of French theater. How could this happen?

It happened through a chain of supports. At that time, in the 1960s, there was a very serious and famous theater festival in France, the Nancy Festival, which was led by Jack Lang, who later became Mitterrand’s minister of culture. Somehow the great playwright, theorist and critic Bernard Dort (who taught at the University of Vincennes and in Nanterre), liked my play and told Jack Lang and myself: “this work needs to be shown. I suggest a new young director who has already done great work: Patrice Chéreau.” So I sent the play to Patrice Chéreau and in the meantime, Jack Lang published the play in a Journal he was producing.

Patrice Chéreau later wrote me: “I got the job!” – i.e., I will direct your play. At the time he was the director of the theater of Sartrouville, a small town outside of Paris. It was 1968, and May ‘68 broke out. My play echoed with the student movement, and the students acting in it were like a prelude to the May 68 rebellion. The premiere took place on October 12, 1968, in the theater in Aubervilliers – where I recently went back with Dimitris Bampilis – then it toured all over France and continued to perform at Chéreau’s own theater in Sartrouville. It was very exciting that Chéreau used audio recordings from the May demonstrations in Paris, giving the play a different reality: the political background became suddenly local to France, far away from the Greek history that had initially inspired me.

The role of Dimitris Bampilis – and Perama
The director Dimitris Bampilis is about the age Patrice Chéreau was at the time, and Barbara Polla likes to compare him to Patrice Chéreau. His plan, as a member of the SHARING PERAMA (https://www.sharingperama.com/) team, is to show The price of the Revolt on the Black Market in the open air theater of Perama, the Mikis Theodorakis Theater. This theater, located with a beautiful view of the Saronic Bay, has not yet seen any similar play on its stage. There is an issue with an outdoor space for this play, because I have not written it for an outdoor presentation. But the project is a beautiful one and I fully agree with and stick to it. Also, the outdoor space will bring a completely new dimension to the play, which I will need to work out closely with Dimitris Bampilis; it will make it somehow closer to classical tragedy.

The shell of the theater, the stage, is naturally a space that is protective from the external reality, so that the invasion of the students and their demonstration in the theater brings a rupture in the protective shell, penetrated by the outside. In Perama, we will have an exposure of the absolute outside, the theater is close to the harbor, and we will see it and hear the noise of it. I believe the risk we take to show The price of the Revolt on the Black Market in such a situation is the best risk – the risk to bring the work closer to tragedy. Because at the time of classical Greek tragedies there were no closed theaters: the tragic was exposed to sunlight. This happened in the morning, almost at dawn, with the sun rising because those performances began early and continued until sunset. So we will have a time-space coincidence that will bring us close to ancient drama. For me, it is a very important and extremely rich, novel situation. To use this dimension of outer space will underline the tragic element of my play and pave the path to its tragic end.

**From French to Greek and back**

The history of The price of the Revolt on the Black Market would not be complete if I would not add that after “giving birth” to that play and at the same time being born myself as a playwright, I did not write another play for a decade. During all that time I dedicated my time to translation, which is an essential activity for all writers: translation from French to Greek, and from ancient Greek to modern Greek. I also then translated my own theater piece from French to Greek. But I did not only translate it, I rewrote
it, and as Barbara Polla noted very well, the current Greek version is quite different from the initial French version. It has become less political, and more tragic. It will be very interesting to have Michel Volkovitch, who translated many of my works from Greek to French, translate back to French the current Greek version, and to be able to compare very precisely the initial version, written in 1966, to the one we will play in Perama, 2020 or 2021. The two could then be published together, because while this play has never been seen in Greece, it is published in Greek; it has been played in France but not yet published in French. This project thus could fill both of these gaps.

And finally, as last words, I would like to insist on the fact one has to go beyond the descriptions, one has to read the work, one has to read it word by word, phrase by phrase, scene by scene. Only by reading it like that will what I have been explaining above take ground. And I would like to thank The J.F. Costopoulos Foundation and Barbara Polla for offering me this long awaited opportunity to discuss The price of the Revolt on the Black Market.

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