

## Artist Response During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Athens: Insights into Urban Subversive Festivities

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### ABSTRACT

Through urban subversive festivities this paper explores artist responses during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Athens (Greece). The disruption caused by the global pandemic in public spaces has prompted a critical examination of its role in urban claims and the evolving role of subversive festivities in artistic movements. These festivities transcend geographical boundaries and form rhizomatic networks that reclaim public spaces for political engagement through creative expression. The article focuses on urban subversive festivities from a Critical Geography point of view, opening the field to gender and decolonial studies through qualitative research including narrative interviews and mapping in urban space. We draw upon the experiences of two collectives in Athens, highlighting the transformative potential inherent in urban subversive festivities. We also argue the potential of festivities to transcend boundaries, create collective bodies, and spread as rhizomes. Ultimately, urban subversive festivities emerge as dynamic agents of change, claiming territoriality and offering new ways to understand the intersection of festivity, subversion, and public space and can be a constitutive element of resistance.

**Keywords:** Greece, pandemic, activism, critical geography, urban subversive festivities

Sometime ago a song began to be whispered in the urban spaces of cities.

Shortly before the outbreak of the pandemic, during the 2019 Chilean marches, artists organized in an open orchestra in Santiago and protested through singing.

Then the pandemic silenced everything. This invisible threat emptied cities all at once. Sounds ceased to exist everywhere, people were confined to their homes, and public spaces became deserted.

However, the whispered song rhizomed in urban consciousness. A low voice refrain started to echo louder and louder.

Artists broke the silence of the pandemic. Timidly, they emerged onto the balconies of their homes, filling different neighborhoods of the world with music. Chilean artists organized online and continued the action of the squares, via the internet. Similar initiatives sprang up in various places. On March 8, 2020, ongoing femicides in Mexico sparked to social unrest, leading to a social movement accompanied by a new feminist anthem echoing through the streets of Mexican cities. Two years after Chilean protests, the anger of Parisian artists at the suspension of Culture due to the coronavirus, led an open orchestra

to generate the revolutionary pulse again, placing the state-banned festivities in the heart of Paris, in front of the occupied Odeon Theatre. Subversiveness rhizomed worldwide.

Greek artists heard the refrain too.

Outraged by the cessation of Culture and driven by the escalating challenges in the country's socio-political landscape, they created multiple new realities within the urban space of Athens. Sparks that ignited in Latin America and traveled to Europe, arrived in Greece, rhizomed, and have now created a new urban reality in the realm of urban and civic claims.

Can we hear it?

## INTRODUCTION

This research explores urban subversive festivities in Athens (Greece) during the pandemic, with a particular focus on two collectives that employ subversive festivities as their core organizing principles. The research discusses urban subversive festivities as collective actions that have festivity as a fundamental structure of existence, offering nuanced insights into their role within urban contexts and underscoring the new spatial dimensions these actions produce. By examining the existing literature, we find convergences between the characteristics created in subversive carnival (Bakhtin, 1984; Hardt and Negri, 2005), the approach of critical studies to performance and resistance, and the anti-patriarchal and decolonial perspective that aims to create new narratives that include us all. Moreover, the COVID-19 health crisis has led to new social circumstances that have prompted a reevaluation of the discourse surrounding subversiveness, resistance, and urban bottom-up festivities as the spatial prohibitions have rearranged public space dynamics.

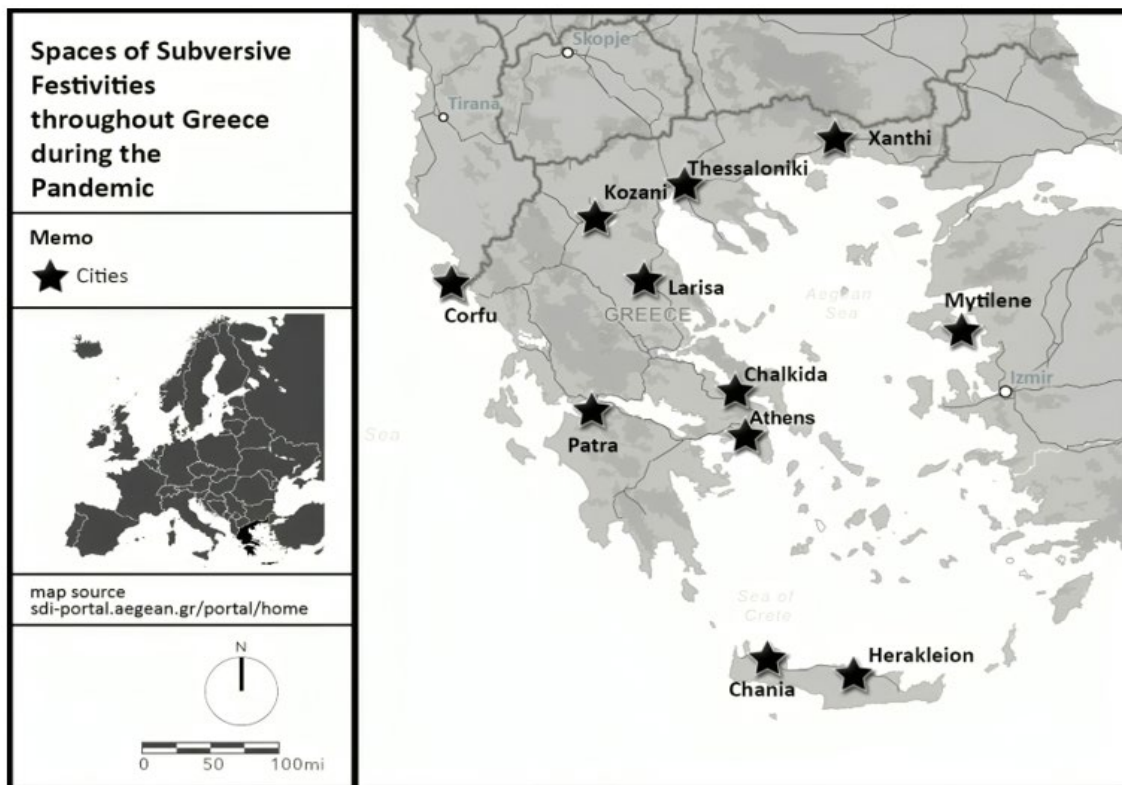
Recognizing that established top-down organized carnivals can reinforce existing social hierarchies, we argue that the subversiveness present in bottom-up organized carnivals actually challenges hierarchies and creates new spatialities in urban space. When these elements are incorporated into social struggles we get similar results to the Situationist International and Reclaim the Streets with their action: detournement of pre-existing aesthetic elements (Debord, 1992; I.S., 1958), and claiming of the right to the city for all (Lefebvre, 1967, 2014) with a critical look at dominant aesthetics (Damianakos, 2003; Thrift, 2004). Diverse struggles are rhizomatically enriched (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005) by the poetics of other struggles and include decolonial and feminist perspectives that focus on the importance of corporeality through the (collective) body, acting as body-territory (Gago, 2019; Lugones, 2008; Segato, 2014; Ysunza, 2020).

The aim of this study is to deploy decolonial and feminist perspectives to examine the importance of subversive festivities in urban contexts and the direct correlation with public space and its reclaiming. The key questions of this research are: To what extent do subversive festivities reconfigure the signification of public space? Are these actions mere artistic practices, or do they represent a broader phenomenon that creatively reclaims and redefines public spaces? How do they territorialize when faced with restrictions relating to the COVID-19 pandemic?

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in this research is grounded in Participatory Action Research (MacDonald, 2012; Whitehead and McNiff, 2006) integrating various modes of inquiry to articulate narratives and actions within the context of urban subversive festivities. This approach includes:

- (a) an extensive examination of literature relative to subversive festivities in the relevant territories, excluding discourses that consider creation and creativity as a product to be consumed,
- (b) a systematic engagement with and also recommendations from case studies,
- (c) systematic mapping and spatial analysis via archival research to spatially locate and contextualize these festivities, and
- (d) direct involvement in specific subversive festivities with multimodal documentation of daily experiences through field notes, diaries, and photographs, capturing observations of community practices. During the inventory of actions initial contacts were created, and were followed by a period of interviews, with documentation spanning from April 2020 to May 2021 and qualitative research conducted from February 2021 to February 2022.
- (e) Unstructured interviews lasting one to four hours, following an oral history (narrative) approach, that allows subjects to speak freely, providing rich qualitative data,



**Figure 1.** Spaces of Subversive Festivities throughout Greece from April 2020 to May 2021.

- (f) supplementary analysis of documents and archives including speeches, social media communication of actions, assemblies, and mobilizations identifying continuities and common patterns in narratives, and
- (g) and a re-engagement process with collectives and the research findings. The theoretical debate is continuously redefined through discussions with the collectives, and the research findings are compiled into a written text, reviewed and approved by the collectives.

This structured methodology ensures a comprehensive and participatory approach to understanding and documenting the narratives and actions surrounding subversive festivities. The research is aligned with the ethical protocols in academic research to ensure scientific work's integrity, transparency and accountability. To this end, interview excerpts are presented using pseudonyms to ensure participant anonymity. In addition, participants have received the transcripts and have authorised their publication.

During the participatory observation, 68 artistic interventions were recorded, from the protesting student movement on issues of free education and against police violence, to artistic bike rides for environmental issues, subversive ballets, musical protests for artist rights, to protest flashmobs and orchestras in solidarity to all artists. Extensive documentation of artistic protests and participatory research with selected Greek context spanned from April 2020 to May 2021, observing urban subversive festivities in Greece (Figure 1) primarily through social media, due to limited coverage by mainstream newspapers, with occasional mentions by smaller leftist newspapers. Collective actions, not prominently featured in official records, were identified through direct researcher engagement. The selection of case studies was considered crucial to emerge organically following the documentation of activities during the health crisis restrictions. The documentation revealed activities of official art unions (Karakioulafis, 2022; Tsioulakis, 2021), and student movements (Zacharaki, 2022).

The two case studies were chosen due to their invisibility in mainstream media and academic research, and their distinctiveness, where festivity is integral to their existence, not merely a resistance tool. In the case studies we applied adaptive methodologies in critical cultural research, emphasizing continuous feedback in field research (Lefebvre, 1991; Lugones, 2008). Notably, theoretical frameworks such as rhizomatic structures and body-territory concepts emerged organically through our interactions with the collectives, contrasting with the anti-patriarchal and decolonial issues that had been pre-established as central theses. Participatory Action Research was conducted from February 2021 to February 2022 on the case studies and the re-occupation of the Free Self-Managed Theatre *ΕΜΠΡΟΣ* [EMBROS]. Our methodology included 10 semi-structured interviews with a narrative approach, following a decolonial research methodology of "hermeneutics of orality" (Millán, 2014, p. 29) and oral histories (Intersticio Visual, 2019) complemented by informal discussions.

## FROM PERFORMATIVE SPACE TO CRITICAL, ANTICOLONIAL, ANTIPATRIARCHAL THINKING

The study of everyday life as resistance (de Certeau, 1984; Lefebvre, 2014) highlights how collective actions of marginalized groups create new realities, in our case through subversive festivities, that exploit the cracks in the system (de Certeau, 1984) and create new cracks in the existing system (Holloway, 2010) offering new spatialities. Social movements enable people to act differently, out of context, and produce new spaces of resistance and existence (Guerra, 2023). This process opposes the dominant habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) and through iterative and chronic activity has the potential to change it<sup>1</sup> (Guerra, 2023; Petropoulou, 2020; Wacquant, 2016).

The performative space created by new social movements has been a field of interest for researchers who have variously interpreted both the subversive space and the practices produced in these contexts. For example, the Situationist International emphasized the role of games, poetic-artistic creation, and popular festivities in shaping social reality, as articulated by Debord (1992), who advocated for play as a means of subverting dominant social orders. In the 1990s, the miners' struggles in the U.K. against neoliberal policies inspired the formation of Reclaim the Streets (RTS) in 1995 who used creative protest to challenge traditional civic boundaries and create a practice replicated worldwide (Credland et al., 2003). RTS initiated the International Day of Carnival Against Capital in 1996 (Ramírez Blanco, 2018). Their opposition to Margaret Thatcher's harsh neoliberal restructuring, which included public transport changes and the promotion of the car economy, found expression through spontaneous street parties and artistic interventions with carnival elements. Through these actions, urban spaces were reclaimed, creating shared cultures and communities of drift (Ferrell, 2012).

On performative space, Thrift (2004) posits that performance, encompassing expressive practices like music, street theatre, and walking, raises crucial questions contributing to the exploration of new, vibrant spaces. Lefebvre's perspective (1991) views the situation of revolution as a transformative festival with insurrectionary carnivalesque dimensions capable of reshaping urban spaces and society. Holloway (2010) identifies openness in the Paris Commune and May 1968 likening them to cracks in capitalism. Drawing parallels between multitude dynamics in demonstrations and carnivals, Hardt and Negri (2005) highlight the central role of carnival theory in shaping social movements. However, for social struggles and collectives to transform the signification of space into one that opposes dominant power structures—hence anticapitalist—it requires dismantling the deeply entrenched forms of power rooted in colonialism and patriarchy. Mignolo criticizes modernity and explains that the domination of the world is achieved through the coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) which dominates the imaginary (Mignolo, 2007). Similarly, deriving from gender studies, intersectionality, and a critical approach of Quijano's (2000) concept of coloniality of power, Lugones (2008) is concerned about “modern/colonial system of gender”. In the same direction, Segato introduces the idea of “high intensity modern/colonial patriarchy” (Segato, 2022, p. 85) and that “no patriarchy can be a revolution” (Segato, 2022, p. 37). Thus when the critical approach to performative space is enriched with decolonial and anti-patriarchal perspectives that challenge dominant power structures, new spatialities inherent to carnival are produced, where the political context defines the spatial subversion.

Furthermore, this paper posits that subversive festivities constitute a spatial phenomenon. We argue that this phenomenon engenders spatial subversions that propagate rhizomatically across diverse spaces, subsequently becoming territorialized within them. Rhizomatic thinking challenges hierarchical and linear structures, establishing connections between semiotic chains, power organizations, and circumstances in arts, sciences, and social struggles (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005). Operating through deterritorialization and reterritorialization, rhizomes extend beyond tangible public spaces. This means that urban subversive festivities can be spread as collective bodies, where diverse ideas, actions, and participants emerge in public spaces, forming a rhizomatic process of resistance and alternative narratives.

Corresponding perspectives suggest that the body resembles a territory, both substantively and symbolically, offering space for expression, resistance, and claims. Segato (2014) observes the emergence of new forms of war exploiting women and framing the “body as territory”. Gago (2019) similarly argues that the spatiality of the body creates a body-like battlefield. Through the Artifariti Festival, Ysunza (2020) explores the significance of “artivism” as a political practice and methodology, examining the relationship between the body and territoriality. Cultural practices enable the reclamation of space as new fertile areas previously “territorialized” for various reasons. Oteiza's (2019) analysis of the “El Violador en tú Camino” performance by the “Las Tesis” collective highlights

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<sup>1</sup> Habitus encompasses a social rather than natural aptitude, which varies according to time, place and distributions of power and is changeable. It tends to produce practices that reflect the social structures that created it, causing a lag between past influences and current conditions. “It is enduring but not static or eternal: dispositions are socially mounted and can be eroded, countered or even dismantled by exposure to novel external forces, as demonstrated by situations of migration and specialized training” (Wacquant, 2016, pp. 66–67) and perhaps the multiple subversive festivities.

the importance of resistance through artistic ingenuity. The objective is to examine subversive festivities with anti-colonial, anti-patriarchal, and often anti-capitalist characteristics, challenging and decolonizing the dominant imaginary.

## URBAN SUBVERSIVE FESTIVITIES: INTERSECTIONS OF FESTIVITY, POWER AND RESISTANCE

Bakhtin introduces the concept of a second public life during carnival, where laughter organizes a realm of inverted social institutions, leading to spontaneous restructuring. In Medieval carnivals, the collective body experiences a new existence in the festive square (Bakhtin, 1984) functioning as a grand theatrical creator, akin to the multitude of demonstrations (Hardt and Negri, 2005). Within the festive square, people develop an awareness of shared unity, acknowledging terrestrial mortality while subjecting it to ridicule and deconstruction through the symbolic dethronement of their appointed king reflecting the liminal character of social drama (Turner, 1969). Scott (1990) describes a revolutionary element in the carnival, asserting that cultural expressions of the powerless imply a critique of power and translate into ideological disobedience, what he terms the “infrapolitics of the powerless”. Similarly, inherent in the carnival reversal, the “tradition of rebellion” is identified as the need for resistance by “marginalized groups,” through various aspects of popular culture as exemplified by Greek rebetiko music (Damianakos, 2003). In urban contexts Stavrides discerns the concept of “threshold theatricality,” where the city becomes a stage on which heterogeneous groups of people hover between existing power relations and an alternative yet tangible future creating commons in the city (Stavrides, 2016). Common spaces, when understood as threshold spaces, reveal the transformative power of commoning to create new forms of communal life and sharing, as thresholds connect and separate spaces, facilitating both inclusion and the potential for emancipatory practices.

However, the common interpretation of carnivals as a subversion of social classes and power relations faces challenges. Decolonial perspectives, particularly from Brazil, highlight class and racist components in carnivals like Rio’s Sambadrome (Sheriff, 1999) and São Vicente in Cape Verde, where socioeconomic distinctions persist despite the notion of an egalitarian festival and the apparent reversal of hierarchy (de Queiroz, 1986, 1994; e Lorena, 2019). Risério (1995) emphasizes differentiating social reversal from a desire for social equality, particularly in white-black hierarchical relations. In these contexts, subversive musical groups such as Ilê Aiyê are of particular importance in Afro-carnival performances, as they represent the corporal politics of the re-existence of the Quilombos (autonomous afro-descendant communities) during the Bahia carnival (Afolabi, 2016; Petropoulou et al., 2021), a dynamic similarly observed in the Barranquilla carnival, influenced by the corporal politics of the Palenques in Colombia (Angarita and Cueto, 2013). Corporal politics encompass cultural reclamation, political expression, community solidarity, subversion of power structures regarding class and race, and intergenerational transmission. These examples demonstrate how carnival traditions in different regions are spaces of negotiation and assertion of identities for marginalized communities, in a context where social hierarchies are constantly reflected in the midst of carnivals.

On the other hand various social subversive manifestations such as the feminist movements in Mexico, the protesting orchestras in Chile, the revolts in Turkey, and Greece, have utilized festive events as a form of resistance. Researchers highlight that these movements continuously evolve their narratives through diverse methods like graffiti and carnival aesthetics, which blend the imaginary with the poetic and express subversion through creative means (Tulke, 2021; Tunali, 2018). Additionally, by using music in protests, these movements enhance their cultural capital and magnify the impact of their socio-political struggles, turning collective expressions into shared resistance (Fugellie, 2020; Ñancupil Troncoso, 2024). The artistic practices that Tunali (2018) refers to as Art of Resistance, manifested through carnival aesthetics in the Gezi Park protests contribute to a collective identity, dissolving the artist-activist divide, and adding artistic creativity within political resistance. In the notion of Performative Politics, Tulke (2021) identifies street art as a significant form of symbolic and material political action during the Greek economic crisis, which creates meaning and transforms public space.

Artistic subversive practices can be diverse: the detournement of public space to re-appropriate it (S.I.), the use of parties to take over the streets (R.T.S.), artistic interventions in spontaneous uprisings that appropriate public space, as in Gezi Park, protesting street art, collective bodies singing feminist hymns, huge orchestras playing Requiem in the struggling squares of Chile are only some manifestations. These examples are not just occasional tactics used by movements or collectives to strengthen their struggles; rather we argue that festivity, which is capable of including all of the above expressions, is a constitutive element of resistance itself. Artistic creativity and expression are integral to the dynamics that collectives can promote in public spaces, with subversive festivities offering a means to include various creative actions within these spaces. The focus of urban subversive festivities lies in the spatial phenomena produced by these festivities and the interconnected relationship between space and celebration, explored through subversive anti-patriarchal and decolonial approaches. We contend that urban

subversive festivities do more than co-exist with resistance as creative practices: they actively create conditions (collective body, metaxis, celebration, dance, song, etc.) that are essential to social struggles. Therefore, the term “subversive festivity” refers to collective actions produced by collectives that create spatial subversions through celebrations, exploiting existing cracks in the system (de Certeau, 1984) and creating new ones (Holloway, 2010), in a rhizomatic way (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005), and including different struggles such as in our case a feminist (Lugones, 2008) and decolonial (Mignolo, 2007) frame of existence.

## FESTIVITIES, RESISTANCE, AND THE PANDEMIC

The pandemic can be interpreted as a “manifestation of social vulnerability” (de Geobrujas and Mason-Deese, 2021, p. 171), bringing attention to previously overlooked issues. A global policy framework addressing the health crisis included increased social and physical control, restricted mobility, and enforced quarantine measures globally. Cultural event cancellations impacted artists, causing significant income loss and livelihood disruptions. Despite challenges, artists preserved creativity, finding alternative modes for events and performances during the pandemic while advocating for labor rights and demonstrating solidarity.

Undoubtedly, music played a significant role during the pandemic, with many musicians engaging in live-streaming concerts from their homes, fostering a sense of community (Fürnkranz, 2021). However, sponsored live-streaming events by established artists raise concerns about the potential exacerbation of social inequalities in artistic innovation (Pereira and Ricci, 2023). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we classified observed festivities into two categories. The first involves live streaming and On-Balcony concerts that seek to raise awareness around COVID-19 as a global threat. The global phenomenon of balcony singing, originating in Italy and adopted worldwide, has evolved into a form of acoustic resistance, expressing gratitude to healthcare workers (Taylor, 2020). “Musicking in balconies,” as discussed by Calvo and Bejarano (2020), represents communities seeking collective ways to navigate disasters, building social capital crucial for addressing future crises. Gupta’s comparative study of Italian and Indian balcony performances identifies them as a form of aural resistance against the pandemic, symbolizing life against the silence of death (Gupta, 2023). The on-balcony concerts are individual initiatives of musicians who play music from their balconies while being quarantined, transforming the private space of the balcony into a public space of solidarity and festivity. This spatial subversion is directly related to the spatial dimension of the pandemic and the restriction and control of public space. However, it is also an indication of the correlative power between festivity and resistance.

The second category, in which we focus on through the case studies, includes collective/organized resistance efforts where participants act in public spaces, targeting pandemic-related policies rather than the virus itself. They are the ones who resisted the political use of the pandemic, where governments tried to control social resistance under the pretext of the pandemic. In Chile, before the pandemic, music played a central role during the 2019 social upheavals, with political actions using songs during protest marches. Subsequently, Chilean artists organized a collective event at the Central Market of Santiago, utilizing public space for the rendition of Beethoven’s 9th Symphony (Fugellie, 2020). Fugellie suggests that musicians, through such practices, generate cultural capital, embedding it within shared actions, expectations, and attitudes, closely tied to Bourdieu’s (1977) concept of habitus. Additionally, the orchestra’s performance of revolutionary (and other) songs created a collective body visibly larger than the orchestra itself which resonated in the form of a subversive festivity, which a few months later was territorialized in a similar way (same musical performance, large symphony orchestra, square in front of a theatre) in front of the occupied Odeon Theatre in Paris.

Urban subversive festivities gained prominence during social upheavals in Mexico, with the feminist movement organizing a two-day strike in March 2020. The streets resonated with “*Canción sin Miedo*,” a global feminist anthem against feminicides. The strike introduced a new toolkit for creative performance, unveiling the interplay between intersectional oppression, decolonial practices, neoliberal economy, and Latin American feminism (Alonso et al., 2022). Although we do not assert a direct connection, we believe the emotional resonance of communal singing played a crucial role in invigorating the protesting women.

In France, government pandemic measures sparked an artistic movement, initially seen in trade union protests. Cultural defense demonstrations evolved into widespread theatre occupations, notably at the Odeon Theatre in Paris, symbolically occupied in support of culture by actors, students, and artists. Public space and urban subversive festivities played a crucial role, extending activities beyond the theatre’s confines. Huber emphasizes that the Odeon Theatre occupation was marked by an orchestrated drama of events, employing urban subversive festivities connected to May 1968 (Huber, 2022). A viral video featuring artists performing “*El Pueblo Unido*” in front of the Odeon Theatre on social media platforms further amplified this cultural phenomenon.

## THE ARTIVIST MOVEMENT IN ATHENS DURING THE PANDEMIC

Since 2011, Athens has been enduring a long-lasting political and economic crisis that has transformed into a new normality, reinforcing socio-spatial inequalities, including gender facets (Vaiou, 2014). The city center experiences touristification and securitization (Koutrolidou, 2016), extending to surrounding areas, while outlying districts face systematic abandonment. Austerity policies impact the reconstitution of civil society, leading to a new form of ‘elite pluralism’ dominated by third-sector multinationals’ power and influence (Chorianopoulos and Tselepi, 2020). Concurrently, a variety of “grassroots collaborative initiatives” have emerged, contributing to the creation of “new commons” in the city (Stavrides, 2016). Before the pandemic, the link between resistance and art was explored in Greece, particularly in Athens. Argyropoulou investigated improvisation as a cultural activist practice with subversive potential, focusing on the Mavili Collective’s occupation of the *ΕΜΠΙΠΟΣ* Theatre in central Athens (Argyropoulou, 2016). Dimitriou, in an interview with Tzirtzilaki, advocated the reactivation of *ΕΜΠΙΠΟΣ* theatre as a space of commons (Dimitriou, 2020). Zervou “introduces an approach called Selbst-Erzählung (self-narrative) that engages with the narratives of the precarious as a De Certeauian ‘tactic’” (Zervou, 2017). The precariousness of everyday life in Greece, characterized by ongoing crises, has engendered a new condition of artistic creation. This is manifested through the self-narration of precarious experiences in politically autonomous spaces such as EMPROS, which deliberately host political and politicized performances.

The COVID-19 pandemic incited an insurrectionary landscape, prompting demands from various groups. Government measures in Athens, encompassing strict restrictions and selective actions prioritizing economic over health concerns, coupled with heightened policing, repression of specific spaces, and securitization (Leontidou, 2020; Zacharaki, 2022), disproportionately impacted residents based on class, ethnicity, and gender, suppressing rights in the city (Apostolopoulou and Liadaki, 2021), reinforcing spatial phenomena normalized by recurrent crises over the past decade. During this period, new grassroots initiatives emerged as a “solidarity infrastructure” (Arampatzi et al., 2022) with commoning practices against the marginalization of refugees (Tsavdaroglou and Kaika, 2022), and “creative resistances” where the act of denial can ignite creativity and resistance, leading to transformation (Zafeiris, 2024). Artists responded to restrictions on performing arts with balcony performances, mutual support initiatives, and later, street performances in various cities. They organized public space interventions to assert their rights rather than create spectacles. Incidents of police brutality spurred the student movement to defy quarantine measures, leading to a convergence with artists who incorporated performances into their protests (Zacharaki, 2022). The #MeToo movement had a significant impact on the theatre industry (Fragkou, 2022) and applied and online theatre in Greece as a spontaneous response to the health crisis was also explored (Gkerlektsi and Dimaki-Zora, 2021). Regarding street musicians a rich diversity of performers from different cultural backgrounds led to a plethora of adaptive strategies to survive, especially during the COVID-19 crisis in central Athens as they adapted their performances, utilized social media, and formed networks with other artists and local businesses to enhance visibility and support (Chryssanthopoulou et al., 2022).

The cultural sector in Greece has encountered significant challenges due to the pandemic, revealing structural issues, notably the prevalent practice of undocumented employment. Policies developed to address the pandemic did not consider the unique characteristics of the cultural sector, revealing the invisibility of art workers to the state and causing discontent among the majority. In response, artists got organized in trade union mobilizations and self-organized initiatives such as Musicians in Crisis, #SupportArtWorkers, Open Orchestra, *Οιστρογόνες* [Oistrogones], reflecting diverse creative mobilizations (Zacharaki, 2022). Karakioulafis explored the trade union mobilization of art professionals through #SupportArtWorkers (Karakioulafis, 2021) and the impact of the health crisis on the employment conditions of artists in Greece (Karakioulafis, 2022). Similarly, Tsioulakis explored how music work is affected by recurring crises in the Greek landscape through #SupportArtWorkers and Musicians In Crisis (Tsioulakis, 2021).

## PERFORMING SUBVERSIVE FESTIVITIES IN ATHENS: RESULTS OF PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

The following empirical research examines two collectives that emerged in response to the aforementioned conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic and the analysis of a spatial subversion in which both collectives participated. However, their presence extends beyond mere resistance to the political and social conditions of the COVID-19 period. This was the impetus, demonstrating the importance of festivities in the public space.

### *Οιστρογόνες*

Our first case study is *Οιστρογόνες* [Oistrogones], a collective that exemplifies a radical reimagining of protest by intertwining festivity, corporeality, and carnivalesque elements (Bakhtin, 1984) into their demonstrations.



Figure 2. Oistrogones Collective performing in Athens.

Formed overnight in June 2020 by networks of participants who have actively engaged in other struggles in the past, they self-describe as an “artistic collective of individuals who discuss theory, show their thighs and sing” (Oistrogones, n.d.) (Figure 2). Their formation as a collective was directly related to the restrictive and controlling climate of the health crisis and the subsequent need to assert their freedom of expression in the public space through bodies that were marginalized during quarantine in the private space. These elements advocated the creation of a feminist collective, forming a body-territory collective (Segato, 2014).

The collective has strong carnival elements, which have a direct correlation with previous active participation in collective actions such as the creation and development of the self-managed Metaxourgeio Carnival in Athens, a tradition rooted in the Athens Squares movement since 2010. *Οιστρογόνες* incorporates rhizomatic practices into their current performances, utilizing their past experiences to territorialize in urban space (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005), and are inspired, amongst other things, by Balkan traditional songs, that express a tradition of rebellion (Damianakos, 2003), which they incorporate into their demonstrations. Additionally, their central thesis revolves around the power derived from collective celebration and threshold theatricality (Stavrides 2010). As Maria stated:

“If we gather 2000 ballerinas in front of the Parliament and protest by dancing ballet, who will be able to object? Who will dare to oppose such a beautiful spectacle?”

also emphasizing the potential that lies in urban subversive festivities and exists within carnival practices as cracks (Bakhtin 1984; Holloway 2010).

What distinguishes *Οιστρογόνες* from other protesting collectives is a unique method of protest that integrates the carnivalesque (Bakhtin, 1984) in the collective protesting body. During protests, they perform, singing songs with antipatriarchal and anticapitalistic lyrics that are collectively written through an assembly. The lyrics often criticize or satirize the subject matter they address. Through the direct dissemination of the action, such as distributing leaflets with the lyrics to the surrounding crowd, they invite people to join together and create a unified, celebratory, collective body. Sophia said:

“A protest needs emotion to be effective. You can’t resist when you’re on the march and you’re sad. That is why the festivity is needed. The festivity includes within it the collective methexis [participation]



and katharsis [purification]. I strongly believe that beauty will save the world. And festivity is beauty. The festivity also creates a huge collective body. And in the protest, the collective body is ready. It is very important in a movement to create such feelings and to experience the space through them. Let's all together taste the power of the collective, of this Being that is created in the festivity. This is Poesis, this is being human. This is how I resist. That is Being”.

Apart from the aforementioned urban theatricality (Turner 1969; Stavrides 2010), intense physicality and vibrant clothing are also integral parts of the performance. The protest/performance condenses the collective body as a body-territory (Gago, 2019; Segato, 2014; Ysunza, 2020) with intense corporality deliberately pursued. Underscoring the connection between festivities and corporality, Athena focuses on physical movements that emphasize the sexualized parts of women's bodies:

“We have liberated bodies; we are irreparably exposed. It's not just what we do, but also how we do it. We use our whole body. This creates awareness. Once you gain self-awareness, you are not afraid”.

While integrated into the collective body of a demonstration, *Οιστρογόνες* differentiate themselves through their ‘artistic ingenuity’ (Oteiza, 2019). The intentional choice of vibrant attire, enhanced by carnival accents such as flamboyant wigs and extravagant cosmetics, aims to make a statement and highlight the participants’ unrestricted freedom to dress as they please. Additionally, this aligns with the conscious existence of carnivalesque as a form of resistance at the core of the collective, as noted by Irini:

“There's no conceivable scenario where we'd wear black clothes and venture onto the streets with solemn expressions unless it's an intentional part of a performance aimed at satirizing something. What we crave are rhinestones, glitter, and colors, a general exaggeration. We yearn to create an impact, to make a lasting impression. The Communards in the Paris Commune made noise. A revolution demands vividness, voices raised in unison, songs that stir the soul, and above all, emotion. [emphasizes] A lot of emotion”.

The unique dress code defies traditional gender roles, emphasizing the rebellious and festive nature of the community as a whole, while also emphasizing the individual's right to self-determination and personal expression. By intentionally infusing carnival elements as a means of resistance, the collective body showcases its inherent subversive strength.

The *Οιστρογόνες* methods, rooted in feminist ideologies (Gago, 2019; Lugones, 2008; Segato, 2014; Ysunza, 2020), leverage the power of collective celebration and theatricality to create a subversive, empowering space for marginalized bodies. By drawing on historical and cultural traditions of rebellion, as well as their own experiences in community-driven festivities (Damianakos, 2003), *Οιστρογόνες* craft a unique mode of resistance that is both visually striking and emotionally resonant. Their vibrant attire, collective singing, and dance challenge conventional protest paradigms, transforming public spaces into arenas of liberated expression and communal joy that coexists with the rebelliousness and rage (Nancupil Troncoso, 2024; Oteiza, 2019). This embodiment of resistance through festivity not only disrupts normative societal structures but also fosters a sense of unity and collective agency, highlighting the transformative potential of joy and beauty merged with resistance in sociopolitical movements. Through their innovative approach, *Οιστρογόνες* articulate a powerful critique of patriarchal and capitalist systems, demonstrating that protest can be a dynamic, celebratory act of defiance and solidarity.

### Open Orchestra

The Open Orchestra (Open Orchestra, n.d.) originated from the #SupportArtWorkers movement (#SupportArtWorkers, n.d.), formed during the COVID-19 pandemic to advocate for the rights of art workers adversely affected by the crisis and excluded from relevant labor measures. Originally confined to public spaces, the collective gradually transformed into the Open Orchestra as its members recognized the necessity for a street orchestra in Athens. Describing themselves as a “spontaneous, self-organized, and participatory orchestra,” their performances occur in public spaces like squares, parks, and streets (Figure 3).

The Open Orchestra, an ensemble of professional and amateur musicians, performs in communal spaces, challenging societal detachment and seeking to positively transform their surroundings. They hold regular open rehearsals on Philopappou Hill and participate in protests, aligning with Athens' social movements. Unlike *Οιστρογόνες*, whose territoriality is linked to the gendered body, the Open Orchestra asserts its territoriality through urban spaces. Participants share a consensus on the critical importance of public spaces for collective engagement, as articulated by Zoe:

“We believe that public space exists to nurture and enhance coexistence, exchange, and creativity”.



**Figure 3.** Open Orchestra performing in Athens, and in Mytilene (right picture).

The intersection of subversion and art, particularly with artists who conceptualize their actions in spatial terms creates a potent combination that allows for multifaceted opportunities. Since its creation, the Open Orchestra has consciously obtained a decolonial and anti-patriarchal approach (Lugones, 2008; Mignolo, 2007; Segato, 2022). The orchestra functions as a collective body that includes people of diverse identities, ages, genders, nationalities, and musical education. This is especially significant in the Greek context, where the assimilation and free expression of people from various ethnopic backgrounds face significant challenges in urban space (Stavrvides, 2016). In Athens, migrants, often subjected to spatial pressures and exclusions over time, find a space for free expression and spatial assertion within the Open Orchestra. In these contexts, Aris and Dimitris mention:

“We realized that beyond the socio-political part of the orchestra, how important it is that people who have no place elsewhere, have a place, and an important place in fact, in the Open Orchestra. And perhaps this is one of the biggest achievements of the Orchestra”.

Their commitment to engaging with diverse spatial contexts reflects their dedication to interacting with varied communities in both Athens and its peripheries (Figure 4). These areas have either experienced touristification or securitization in the past years (Koutrolidou, 2016) or have been affected by austerity policies (Chorianopoulos and Tselepi, 2020). In response, various initiatives have emerged, with which the Open Orchestra has been spatially involved. By utilizing public spaces for subversive festivities, the ensemble can reach a broad audience and establish meaningful connections with them. A foundational emphasis on openness and inclusivity constitutes a foundational mission and methodology, aiming to effect social change through musical initiatives.

The entire Orchestra consistently convenes in public spaces, with weekly congregations on Filopappou Hill in Athens. In addition, the collective organizes monthly open rehearsals in various neighborhood squares through Athens and Attica, fostering active participation in the wider social movement. For participants, subversive festivity begins long before the event or demonstration, with Filopappou Hill being central to this process. Preparatory measures are undertaken to organize the performances, with Sunday rehearsals being crucial to the orchestra’s existence. As per Katerina’s analysis, we can identify the subversiveness of the festivities through various aspects:

“Rehearsal for us is a political act, whether the Sunday rehearsal or the rehearsal in some neighborhood. It is not our exclusive goal to participate in every protest that happens. And just the fact that we consciously choose to rehearse on Filopappou Hill, a hill that has been sold and is being bulldozed,

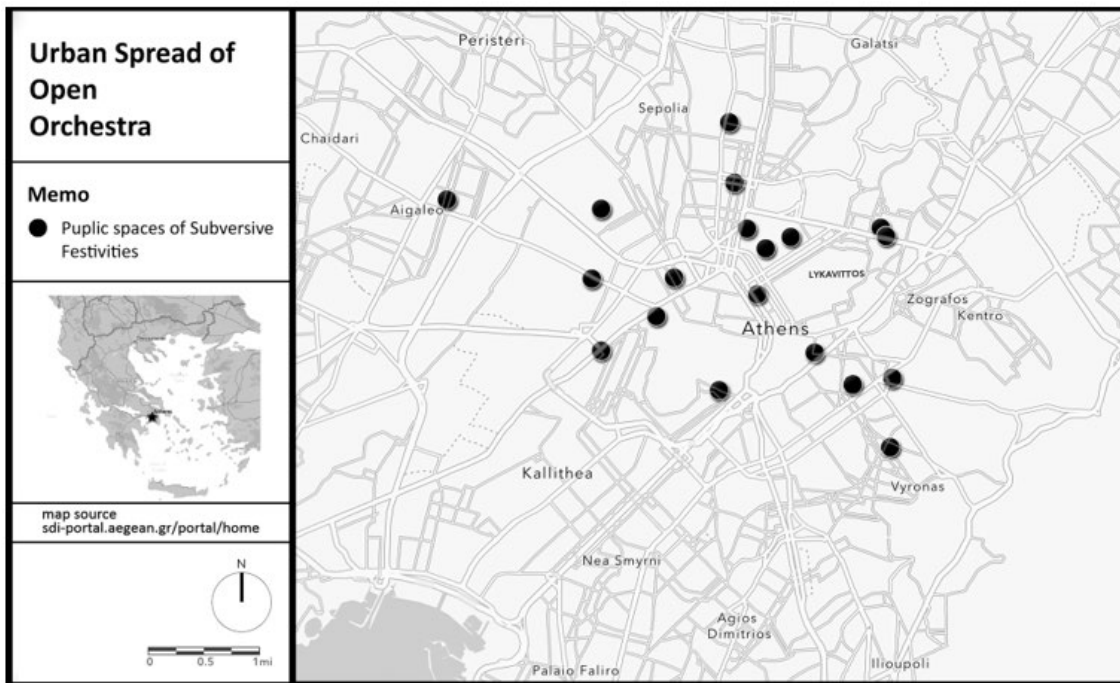


Figure 4. Urban spread of the actions of the Open Orchestra since 2021 in Athens.

where security guards come and tell us that we are not allowed to come in here with our instruments, this is a political act. It doesn't bother us that they don't want us there, but we have to deal with it. The Open Orchestra is there and will remain there".

For Ariadne, public space is crucial as such. While the Filopappou Hill serves as the established location for rehearsals, the Open Orchestra "goes wherever its presence is needed the most". For instance, the collective has performed in Roma neighborhoods in Athens, in various refugee and working-class districts, and even in refugee camps in Lesbos, creating uniquely subversive festivities tailored to each specific occasion. Consequently, through the collective body of the Open Orchestra, these subversive festivities are both deterritorialized and reterritorialized in various locations (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005). In her discourse, in essence, she associates the Open Orchestra's need to territorialize music in relation to public space:

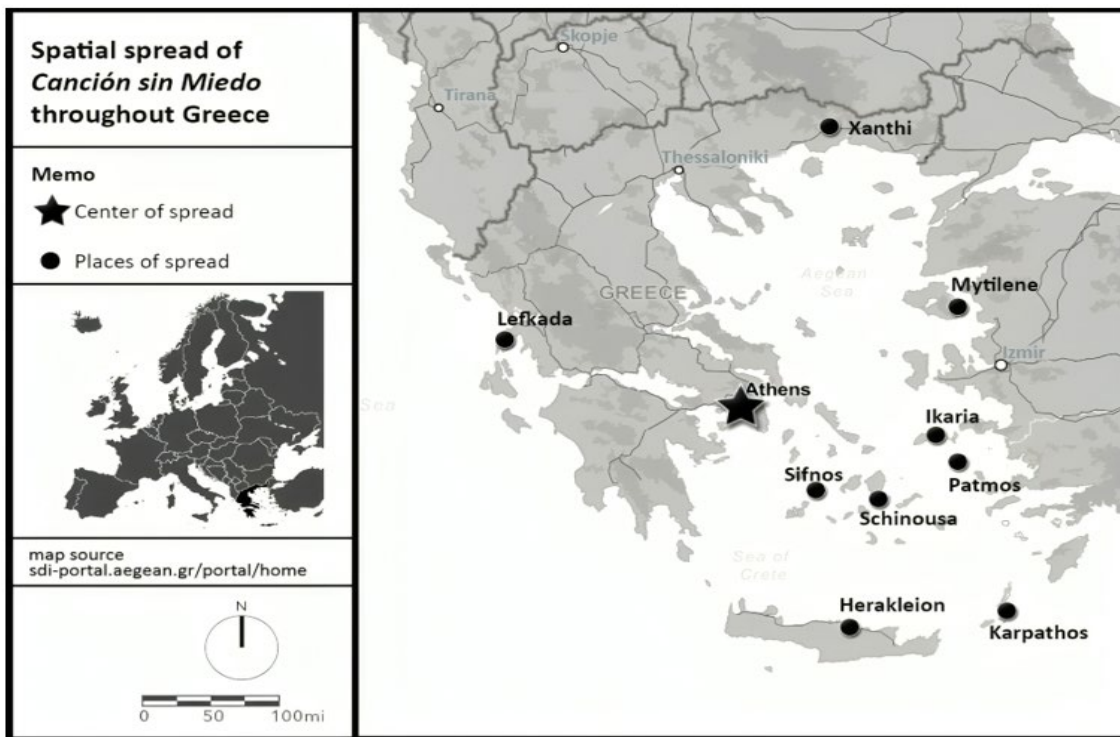
"Our music is intertwined with the urban landscape. We believe our music can meet and converse with the public space. Open rehearsals in the neighborhoods are an effort of partnership and mutual support with the "forces" of each neighborhood. We want to play music, to spatialize our music, and through space, we try to change the reality in which we live".

Beyond open rehearsals, the Open Orchestra engages politically by fully participating in demonstrations with both instrumentalists and choir members. Like *Οιστρογόνες*, they differ from traditional marching collectives, functioning as a large, vibrant, and resonant entity. Although lacking carnival elements, they use colorful attire and creative placards to "share beauty," as Maria states. In challenging situations with strict police control or confinement, festive elements become crucial. As Konstantinos recounts:

"We managed to approach Alexis' memorial precisely because we were the instruments, which has never happened before on the anniversary of his murder, and we all got together and sang. It was a unique moment, one that could not have happened under any other circumstances."<sup>2</sup>

During their inaugural performance in April 2021, stemming from the #SupportArtWorkers movement, the Open Orchestra protested with a collective rendition of "El Pueblo Unido". This event, marking the orchestra's formal establishment led participants to commit to sustaining the urban dynamism it created. The performance echoed a similar gathering outside the occupied Odeon Theatre in Paris and was inspired by events in Chile in October 2019. Nikos's account highlights the rhizomatic process by emphasizing the spontaneous and decentralized organization of the performance, which, in its lack of central planning, embodies the non-hierarchical and interconnected nature of rhizomes, illustrating the horizontal spread of ideas and actions across geographic

<sup>2</sup> This is a reference to memorial day of 15 year old Alexis Gregoropoulos who was murdered on 06/12/2008 by a police officer.



**Figure 5.** Spatial spread of “Canción sin Miedo” throughout Greece.

boundaries and the instinctive, origin-less response to global events that aligns with the rhizomatic principle of multiple, non-linear pathways of growth and connection:

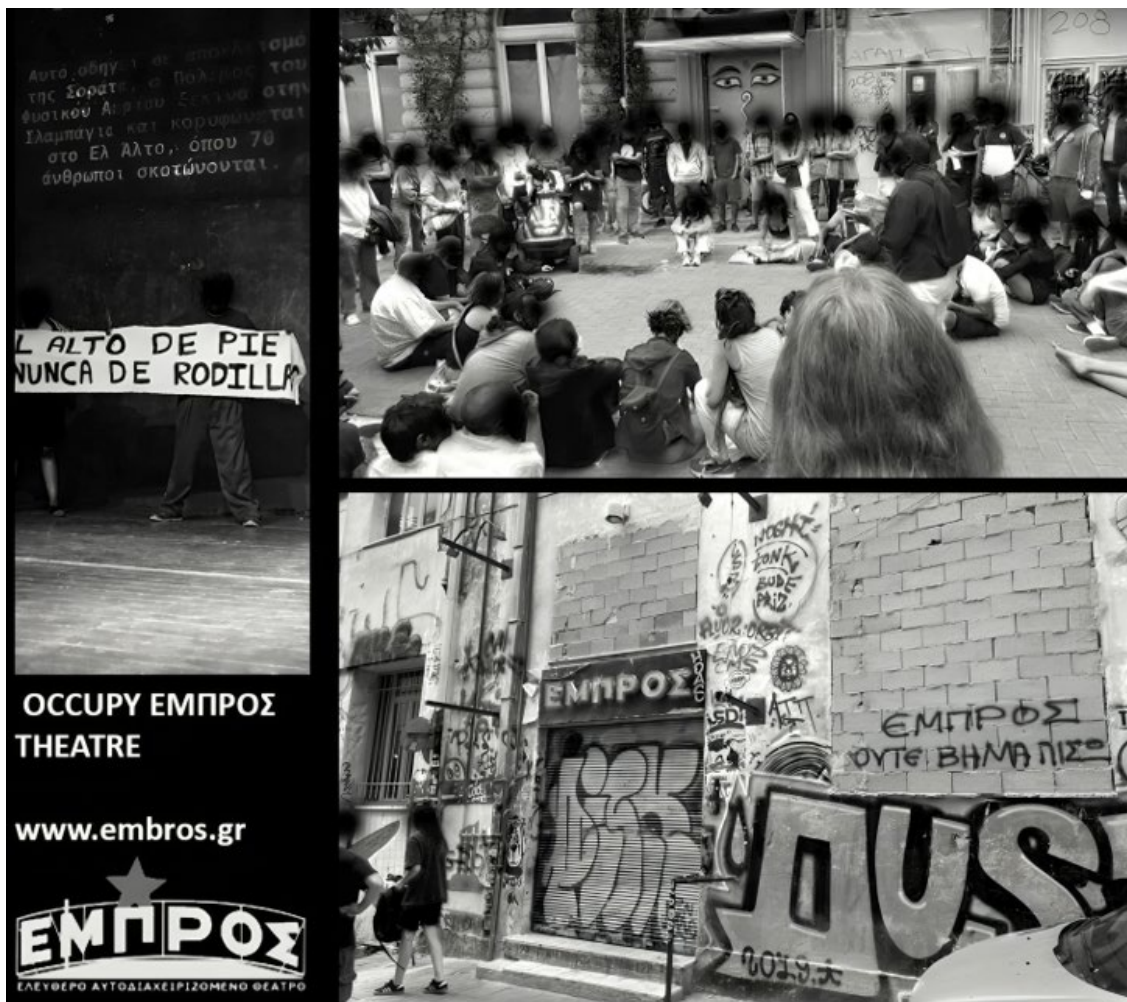
“Those days, while being quarantined in our homes, we saw French artists being so dynamic in their claims through this artistic outburst. It was so inspiring. (...) [In our case] I can’t even recall how everything was organized. It was so straightforward – we just had to get out to the streets. One thing is certain: there was a shared sentiment; we all felt the need to reunite, to stand together, to shout out our support for those in France and beyond, and to voice our solidarity with them and with our own (...) It was a reminder, that no matter what the distance is, there are things that unite us and we will continue to fight for them”.

Although not always directly influenced by other movements, the Open Orchestra’s frequent use of rhizomatic processes indicates a conscious effort to align with global social movements for change. This approach involves territorializing global collective experiences in Athens’ urban space, fostering ongoing dialogue with various movements worldwide. The group documents their actions through YouTube videos, particularly when engaging with or drawing inspiration from other collectives. By constantly adapting the cultural capital of other communities (Fugellie, 2020), it maintains a dialogue with them. For instance, the Open Orchestra expressed solidarity to Turkey hunger strikes of Grup Yorum who fought for freedom of expression against the Erdogan regime, through the song, “*Tencere Tava Havası*” by Kardeş Türküler, by singing from the steps of Herodion along with #SupportArtWorkers.

Another significant contribution was their performance “*Canción sin Miedo*” [“Tragoudame dichos fovo”] in Greek. Initially performed at the March 8, 2022 march in Athens the song gained momentum and spread to feminist collectives throughout the country, introducing new toolkits for creative performance (Alonso et al., 2022). This transformation altered the enactment of feminist marches, progressively incorporating the poetic expression of struggles (Figure 5) and subversive festivities into the broader social movement, thereby contributing to the generation of an agonistic cultural capital (Fugellie, 2020) that has the potential to change the habitus (Bourdieu, 1977; Petropoulou, 2020).

## FREE SELF-MANAGED THEATRE ΕΜΙΠΟΣ

In 2011 the abandoned building of the ΕΜΙΠΟΣ theatre, located in the Psyrri district of the municipality of Athens, was occupied by the Mavili Collective, a group of artists, as a “reactivation” of the space. After 2012, the ΕΜΙΠΟΣ theatre was re-occupied by an open assembly of activist artists and residents which manages the events held within. Their objective was not only to activate cultural spaces that had been abandoned but also to produce



**Figure 6.** *ΕΜΠΡΟΣ* theatre during its operation before the pandemic, the sealing of the facades by the police, and the civic assembly outside the theatre after the reoccupation (for the reoccupation see also: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NGfdnIwvZrc>).

a collective autonomous political narrative of the concept of theatre and a critique of the dominant culture through everyday actions (de Certeau, 1984). This challenged the entrenched cultural practices of Greece, particularly in the cultural space of Athens, and promoted artistic creation that emerged from shared collective concerns. Engaged in a wide range of activities [theatrical, musical, and other performances, solidarity actions, parties, collective classes, antifascist festivals, queer festivals, partnerships with artistic groups from all over the world, such as the ALBOR theatre from El Alto, Bolivia], the theatre's operations were continuous for a decade.

However, on 19 May 2021 the space was evacuated and sealed after a police operation, possibly in response to the intense artistic presence of the past few months in Athens. A few days later, following an assembly in defense of the theatre, people decided to reoccupy it. Not only did the reoccupation get carried out quietly, but on the contrary a huge collective body occupied the entire street, making it impossible to access the entrance where the occupation was taking place (Figure 6).

The result was a huge festive multitude dancing to the music of an orchestra, applauding the initiative and safeguarding the reopening of the theatre, which had been sealed off with concrete blocks. The “celebration of Art and Freedom,” as called, continued for several hours, while the audio and visual atmosphere remained dignified and triumphant. Both the Open Orchestra and *Οιστρογόνες* participated in the reoccupation, singing and celebrating collectively with the assembled multitude.

The reoccupation of *ΕΜΠΡΟΣ* was followed by almost three weeks of subversive festivities in front of the theatre, resembling the artistic practices that took place in Gezi Park (Tunali, 2018). Among other collectives and artists, the Open Orchestra and *Οιστρογόνες* participated in the creative week, while videos of the artistic actions, musical protests, and street life were constantly broadcast in social media, as Athens was in an interim situation due to quarantine. Although a new sealing of the theatre was attempted two days later, it was prevented through legal action against the Greek police for interfering with a designated monument without the necessary permission from the competent authority of the Ministry of Culture.

The Void Network group, one of the groups participating in *ΕΜΙΠΟΣ* and an international group of anarchist cultural activists and theorists<sup>3</sup>, argues that the targeting of the *ΕΜΙΠΟΣ* theatre is directly linked to the government's cultural policies, which they believe are closely aligned with the interests of large profit-driven institutions in the country. As declaration of Void Network (Void Network, 2021) says:

“*ΕΜΙΠΟΣ* is not only a space that hosts cultural activities and is managed by artistic groups; it is a form of reproduction of social space, which has self-organisation, mutual contribution, openness, inclusiveness and horizontality as essential determinants. For the rich kids who run the state and the salon bourgeois who write pamphlets in the bourgeois press, *ΕΜΙΠΟΣ* should function like Tecnópolis<sup>4</sup>. For us, Tecnópolis, and all the institutions of the city, should function like the *ΕΜΙΠΟΣ*”.

Part of the art movement that had been struggling in the previous months despite the limitations of the pandemic, was able to express itself in an extended space and time through the reoccupation of *ΕΜΙΠΟΣ*. Although there was no strict quarantine, Athens at that time was still living under COVID-19 conditions. The reality that was established in front of *ΕΜΙΠΟΣ* for those weeks was not at all a pandemic landscape. For Margarita from Oistrogones:

“After so many months of being locked up, what happened in *ΕΜΙΠΟΣ* was like a dream. We suddenly found ourselves all together again [referring to the collective body of resistance] and forgot everything. In that moment, all else was forgotten, and joy, methesis, laughter, dancing and singing prevailed. We managed to take back our space, our lives and our professional identity”.

The symbolic value of the *ΕΜΙΠΟΣ* theatre remains for the Open Orchestra:

“Art does not obey terror. (...) The thesis of the Open Orchestra is political, it supports *ΕΜΙΠΟΣ* and every *ΕΜΙΠΟΣ* and will be there to sing the people's slogans and encourage necessary uprisings. (...) Together. With music and whatever else we have left” [Nikos].

On the other hand, Fenia from *Οιστρογόνες* points out the importance of art and festivity through collective action, summarizing the struggle to defend *ΕΜΙΠΟΣ*:

“In the free self-managed theatre *ΕΜΙΠΟΣ*, resistance alongside art is transformed into wild joy born out of collective actions toward the common vision of freedom and solidarity. That is why thousands of people came out in support of *ΕΜΙΠΟΣ*. Art does not belong to large private institutions. Self-organization, solidarity, freedom, resistance now and always”.

## CLOSING REMARKS

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted traditional spatial arrangements, prompting a reevaluation of how urban spaces are utilized and engaged with. This is particularly evident in Greece's arts sector, where artists face financial insecurity. Yet, these challenges also prompted artists to mobilize, form collective bodies, and collaborate with other initiatives to advocate for their rights. Through this dialogue, new geographies are emerging in the public space, transforming the urban landscape with subversive and festive contexts. As Panagiotis summarizes:

“Public space is a free bazaar of ideas. Currently, both art and culture face threats due to the pandemic, and so does public space. For the first time since the dictatorship, a curfew is in effect, and all types of festivities have come to a halt. An unspoken battle is taking place on the street, which tends to become the last bastion of expression. The prohibition of gatherings carries significant risks, with theatres and cinemas shuttered, and art and artists being discredited. (...) It is a tombstone in art which is done because art educates and prompts citizens to ponder. And this is not convenient in this particular dark period. But festivities, I believe, will always find a way to resurface. Despite their prohibition, they persist in different places through alternative means. This is what I've witnessed in Athens – groups gathering on hillsides, playing music, singing, rehearsing, in parks, and in the groves. Festivity is now also in the city movements. Through festivity, we will endeavor to regain everything we lost.”

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<sup>3</sup> <https://voidnetwork.gr/about/>

<sup>4</sup> Tecnópolis of the Municipality of Athens is a cultural center located in the Gazi district in central Athens, which has been linked to the area's gentrification (Avdikos, 2014). In this context, Technopolis is contrasted with *ΕΜΙΠΟΣ*, as Tecnópolis is associated with the cultural capital generated through the funding of major national institutions.

In contrast to the individual-focused pandemic climate, *Οιστρογόνες* and the Open Orchestra have brought transformative endeavors to Athens' urban space. Amid a temporal condition in which the body was confined to quarantine—restricted to the private space of the home and unable to engage with public space—*Οιστρογόνες* succeeded in reclaiming public space through corporeality, the collective body, and, particularly, through using their bodies as territory (Gago, 2019; Lugones, 2008). Their subversive festivities facilitated meaningful dialogues, emphasizing collective action and shared experiences. Engaging in street performances and feminist protests addressing gender issues (Ñancupil Troncoso, 2024; Oteiza, 2019), *Οιστρογόνες* focus on challenging patriarchal norms. Their previous commitment to other collective actions territorializes (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005) a tradition of rebellion (Damianakos, 2003) that exists in the city's artistic networks and offers unique instances of resistance. Through performance, they highlight their bodies as a form of resistance, which is particularly striking in a city facing crises and pandemic restrictions that are disproportionately gendered (Apostolopoulou and Liodaki, 2021; Vaiou, 2014).

On the other hand, The Open Orchestra uses music as a form of protest, staging spontaneous performances in public spaces to foster community and solidarity. They harness the unifying power of music to claim space for self-expression, embracing diversity in gender, class, and nationality. These performances serve as acts of spatial subversion, emphasizing solidarity on migration (Arampatzi et al., 2022; Tsavdaroglou and Kaika, 2022) and incorporating a decolonial approach (Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2000). Additionally, they draw attention to spaces in Athens affected by socio-spatial segregation (Chorianopoulos and Tselepi, 2020; Koutrolidou, 2016; Leontidou, 2020) and contribute to the creation of a rhizomatic network (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005) across the country.

Both collectives have impacted Athens' urban landscape and contributed to urban subversive festivities in distinctive ways, as they pursue territoriality and shaping a new landscape of claims in Athens, demonstrating that public space constraints can be contested through urban subversive festivities within anti-systemic movements. In both cases, these collective bodies are influenced by the broader global anti-systemic movement or previous spatial practices, operating with rhizomatic processes. The network of territorialization and de-territorialization extending from Chile, Mexico and other locations to Athens (Figure 4) and back to the periphery (Figure 5) generates new forms of existence through urban subversive festivities, which influence everyday practices and offer an art of existence (Guerra, 2023); it remains to be studied whether these systemic practices (de Certeau, 1984), through the creation of liminal (Turner, 1969) and threshold conditions during festivities, contribute to the formation of new commons within the city (Stavrakas 2016) and have the potential to change habitus (Petropoulou, 2020; Wacquant, 2016).

However, the defence of *ΕΜΠΙΠΟΣ*, shows some first indications in this direction. The convened assemblies in public spaces, and the sustained artistic interventions, wherein the vibrancy of the street and festivity was consistently sustained (Tunali, 2018), all serve as evidence for the defense of artistic space based on their intrinsic content, particularly the grassroots origin of artistic expression. The fact that the multitude rallied to protect the theatre highlights the futility of any attempt to suppress artistic creation when it is created collectively. During these moments, calls for defense and the public's response also constituted a more extensive political critique of the government's handling of social spaces and squats, as well as the artistic community itself. *ΕΜΠΙΠΟΣ* managed to secure essential support through their struggles for continued existence. The tradition of rebellion within Athens has persisted and continually rejuvenated itself. The realm of culture and the performing arts has successfully combined theoretical constructs with practical applications, emphasizing the intricate interplay between artistic, social, and political dimensions. Moreover, it has undertaken to reinterpret, redefine, and reconfigure the role of art within the prevailing circumstances, notably amidst a pandemic emergency.

In a global scale, giant puppets accompanying the anti-globalization movement, the carnival dimensions of the protest in Gezi Square (Tulke, 2021), female crowds singing collectively in #NiUnaMenos (Ñancupil Troncoso, 2024), huge singing orchestras in Chile (Fugellie, 2020) and women performing the Las Tesis dance to demonstrate the role of power in sexual abuse (Oteiza, 2019) are a few instances of a novel mode of political, yet festive, resistance. These collective actions no longer represent an exception that engages creatively with resistance but rather a widespread movement that claims public space, spreads through subterranean networks, disseminates rhizomatically, and territorializes on a global scale (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005). This phenomenon suggests a transformation of space, the production of cultural capital, and the potential to alter habitus (Petropoulou, 2020; Wacquant, 2016). In the case studies of this article, we identify the imperative of territorialization of the collectivities under consideration, both through corporeality (Gago, 2019; Lugones, 2008; Segato, 2014; Ysunza, 2020) and through public space (Lefebvre, 1991). Furthermore, we demonstrate the importance of the particular context of the COVID-19 pandemic in the city of Athens, where governmental restrictions on public space acted as a catalyst for these spatial expressions of resistance.

In response to the research questions posed at the outset we argue that urban subversive festivities extend beyond mere artistic practices. Rather they are integral components of wider struggles, as they have the potential to transcend conventional limitations and reconfigure the significance of public space. Through rhizomatic

processes these festivities spread as collective bodies and create cracks within the urban space. Moreover, the critical, decolonial, and anti-patriarchal perspectives signify and define the outcome of the spatial subversion generated in subversive festivities. In the specific context of the pandemic, where spatial constraints confined individual bodies, the collective bodies formed through subversive festivities territorialized, expanded, and challenged spatial significations. Beyond the initial questions raised in the research, personal engagement with the collectives raised new concerns. The systematic action of the paradigms suggests the possibility of changing the habitus expressed in public space. When collectives, that consciously embrace an antipatriarchal and anticolonial perspective (Lugones, 2008), are formed around festivity and the inherent power it contains, such as the *Οιστρογόνες* and the Open Orchestra, they constitute a creative subversion, amplifying their impact. Just like the carnival multitude (Hardt and Negri, 2005) they have the potential to disrupt the whole city when they occur (Bakhtin 1984). The notion of subversive festivity invites the exploration of new modes of resistance: those of wild joy and fearless discourse.

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