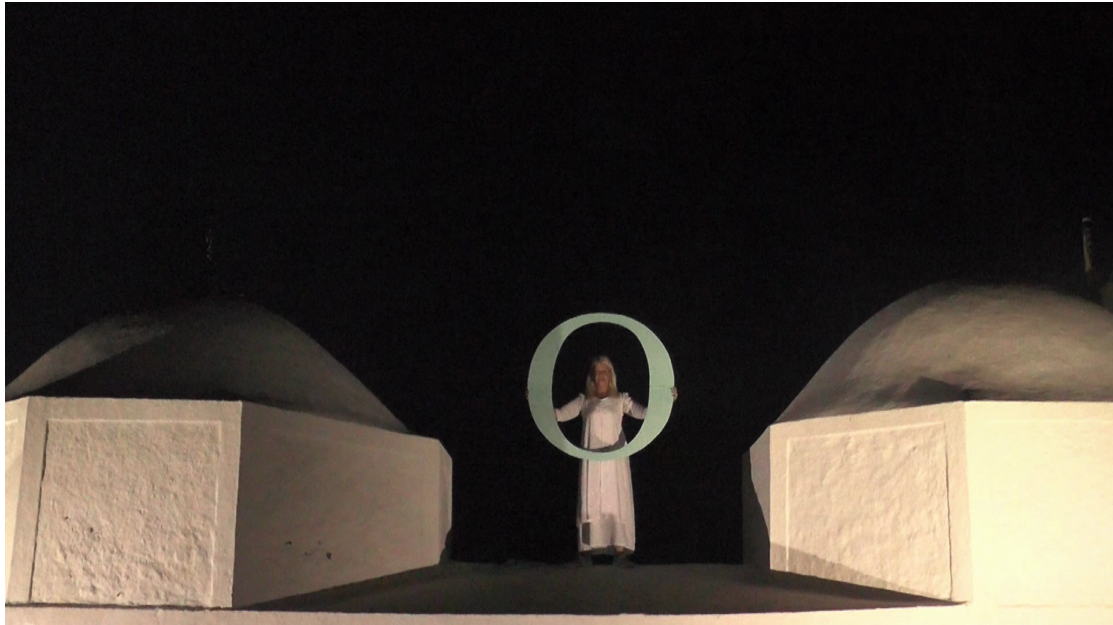


STAGING THE ALPHABET

text, performance and the feminine



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**A report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
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Dear dad, if you can see me, I hope you are proud of me...

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Introduction

Initially, the title for my doctorate came from a workshop I presented at the 4th International Conference on Typography & Visual Communication called 'Dance Typography' and my research on the use of type in fine art. My involvement in the doctorate programme supported my transformation from a graphic and typographic designer and calligrapher into a committed artist and researcher in the broader area of text in fine arts. This has necessitated an examination of not only the visual and the semiological but the psychological aspects of symbolism of letters.

In my native country, Greece, there is a tradition of great symbolic significance attached to letters and numbers. Using type for almost all my communicative designs, I felt the need to create a new artistic language which experiments with all the possible definitions of the letter-symbol. One of the most important characteristics of the symbol is that it constitutes the compositional expression of a respected science, the memory of which has faded from people's minds though it is still evident that it exists and will continue to exist, whether in an explicit or implicit form.

Focusing on the alphabet, all cultural traditions have a symbolic interpretation that sometimes is multiple, depending on the shape and the sound of the letter. While experimenting and exploring my personal relationship with letters and words in the physical public space by using a medium (video) which can also be seen in the digital public space, and after discussion with my supervisors, I decided that the title 'Staging the alphabet / text, performance and the feminine' was the most suitable for my doctorate.

I was inspired by contemporary women artists such as Sophie Calle, Fiona Banner, Gillian Wearing, Paulina Olowska, Mira Schor, Mira Schendel and Mona Hatoum, and the way they have used letter forms and text in their art works. The work of Ewa Partum, Marina Abramovic and Tino Sehgal expanded the limits of what I previously knew as performance art.

The films of Maya Deren, Martha Rosler and Chantal Akerman enriched my perception of the female gaze through female subjectivity and fueled a progression from formal considerations to a greater psychological and emotional content.

The report is divided into a number of sections starting with this introduction and the autobiographical context which briefly outlines the twenty-four years of my professional practice prior to the programme. 'Creative practice and theory' is the main body of the report and encompasses my creative practice during the three full-time years of the programme and the reflective contextual, critical and theoretical analysis of most of my projects.

In discussion with my supervisors, I have decided to be more analytical of key works reflecting on various aspects of research, influences and professional outcomes that have surrounded them. The majority of the works are short films of my performances in which I use myself as a model continuously moving between object and subject and my strategy has been to use the elements of language as embodiment of meaning. Most of them have a pedagogic and a joyful character and draw a parallel between the visual hierarchy and the structure of language.

In my conclusion, I have written down the outcomes of my commitment to the three year full-time doctorate programme and how this educational experience has deepened and enriched the context of my creative practice.

Autobiographical context

I was born in Athens in 1963. Through my art, I create imprints of my life experiences through letters, words or even phrases in video performative works, live performances, installations and calligraphies. My upbringing, with a mother who was an interior decorator and a father who was a chemist but wrote books on philosophy, influenced my interests and obviously my personality. My previous educational and creative practice led me to my passion for contemporary art and therefore I decided to undertake a professional doctorate in fine art.

My doctoral research explores the use of text and language: visually, semiologically, as well as psychologically through female subjectivity. It leads me to address issues that constitute the core of my experimentation and discourse on a creative as well as a theoretical level and orientation, such as the body-letter relationship, the use of letters and words through female subjectivity, the reconstruction of the spoken and written words to create new artistic languages, the use of the older, non-svelte body as a radical and rare female subject, the transition between object and subject for myself as artist and model, the use of elements of language as embodiment of meaning and finally the ongoing research on the letters of the Greek and Latin alphabet.

Previous education and creative practice

1981-1984 Vakalo College of Art and Design, Greece, BA in Graphic Design

1984-1986 London College of Printing, HND (BTEC) in Typography

1986-1988 London College of Printing, BA (Hons) in Graphic Design

Feb. 2000 MA in Graphic Arts, through submission to NARIC, Greece

BA creative practice and theory

I have two bachelor's degrees - one from Vakalo College of Art and Design in Athens, Greece, and the other from the London College of Communication in London. At Vakalo, the title of my final thesis was 'Dress in Ancient Egypt', a study of the dress code of Egypt between the 3rd and the 13th dynasties, in terms of clothing, hairstyle, make up, shoes, patterns and colours, jewellery and accessories in relation to social roles and status. A major essay was on 'Theatre in Minoan Crete'. I was interested in the structure of Minoan Crete's theatre in relation to contemporary theatre in Greece.

The creative practical aspect of the course consisted of various projects on photography, painting, book layout, logos, corporate identity as well as press advertisements, which were developed to greater depth in the third year.

At the London College of Printing, the theoretical part of my studies consisted of one thesis and one essay. The thesis was on typography, involving a historical analysis of the evolution of Greek printing. It included research into the Greek phototypesetting market and a critique of the way Greek typefaces were adapted from the equivalent Roman typefaces. The essay was a study and presentation of the work of Alexis Kyritsopoulos, a well-established Greek illustrator of children's books whose use of type employed a fresh and illustrative approach.

In my practical work, I concentrated more on the different printing techniques and materials using the 3D and printing workrooms. We had direct access to silk screen, lithography, etching, and full-colour printing methods. For each project, I chose a different technique. For example, for a brief to design a 'trophy' for the sex symbol of the year, I created a huge wooden screw with a silky, peach-coloured wing nut, representing male and female parts of the human body.

Fig 1.
Papanikolopoulou, M.,
Trophy,
1987,
wood, rubber, silk,
60 cm x 50 cm,
design for the sex
symbol
of the year



One major project - which was selected for the Design Show at the Royal Festival Hall in May 1986 - was on Bauhaus typography. I created a piece of 3D publicity for a Bauhaus exhibition, portraying the evolution of typography during the Bauhaus period.

In my final year, as I was interested in the theatre of the absurd, I designed the covers of three books on the plays of Samuel Beckett - *Waiting for Godot*, *Happy Days* and *Ends and Odds* - as well as a poster for the theatrical performance of *Waiting for Godot*, showing at the West End. I designed and etched in copper myself all the letters I used. The poster was a collage of the photographed copperplates covered in colour before the printing process.

Artistic oeuvre submitted to NARIC, Greece and recognised as equivalent to an MA in Graphic Arts

- 1986, *The London Institute Class of '86 Exhibition*, Royal Festival Hall,
Three Dimensional Publicity for Bauhaus exhibition
- 1995, *Giorgio de Chirico and Greek Myth*, Basil and Elise Goulandris
Foundation, Museum of Contemporary Art, Andros, Greece,
Exhibition Signage and Printed Materials
- 1996, *Auguste Rodin-Camille Claudel*, Basil and Elise Goulandris Foundation,
Museum of Contemporary Art, Andros, Greece
Exhibition Signage and Printed Materials
- 1996, *Campus College, Faculty Exhibition*, Athens, *Magdalena's alphabet*
children's popup book
- 1996, *Argos Festival*: Municipal Neoclassical Market, Argos, Greece,
participated in N Kanagini's installation as a *live statue*
- 1997, *Pireos Street – Metamorphoses of a Landscape* VIS factory building,
Athens άνοδος [anodos] installation and performance
- 1997, *Lines of Sight: History of Photography*, Basil and Elise Goulandris
Foundation, Museum of Contemporary Art, Andros, Greece
- 1998, *Glancing at the Century*, Basil and Elise Goulandris Foundation,
Museum of Contemporary Art, Andros, Greece
- 1999, *Classics of Modern Art*, Basil and Elise Goulandris Foundation,
Museum of Contemporary Art, Andros, Greece
- 2000, *Henry Moore: In the Light of Greece*, Basil and Elise Goulandris
Foundation, Museum of Contemporary Art, Andros, Greece
- 2000, Design of books and book covers for well-known publishing houses such
as *Hellenic Letters*, *Themelio* and others
- 2000, Design and production of theatre programmes for well-known theatres
in Athens such as *Amfi-theatro*

After I finished my BA (Hons), I started working as a professional designer in London for De facto and Brian Whitehead design groups. I designed covers

for the music industry (Editions EG), logos for the London Contemporary Dance Theatre, as well as corporate identities for various clients. Then I returned to Athens, where I worked as an art director at international advertising agencies (BBDO, Y&R) for four years, after which I established my own design studio. I worked for various clients, including commercial companies, educational organisations, theatre companies, restaurants, foundations and museums. I illustrated books and designed book covers, corporate identities and booklets for theatre performances, printed material for conferences, and paintings for the interior design needs of restaurants.



Fig 2.
Papanikolopoulou, M.,
***Radish*,**
1999,
ink on watercolour paper
0.90 cm x 2.00 m
painting for Astron Resto

One of the most interesting collaborations was with the Basil and Elise Goulandris Foundation Museum of Contemporary Art in Andros, Greece. For 15 years, I created and produced all the signage and printed materials (corporate identity, invitations, stationary, labels, panels, etc.), for exhibitions including Miro, Picasso, De Chirico, Rodin, Masson, Braque and Toulouse-Lautrec. I had the opportunity to study the paintings of many great artists of the 20th century. The paintings belonged to museums and private collections from all over the world.



Fig 3. Papanikolopoulou, M., *Signage for the Georges Braque exhibition*, 2003, Basil and Elise Goulandris Foundation, Museum of Contemporary Art, Andros, Greece

It was during this time that my focus shifted from design to fine art. I was intrigued by its transformative power. I had the opportunity to listen to talks, analysis and criticism on art and art movements. I was invited to take part in various group exhibitions, art festivals and conferences, both as an artist and a performer.

My first participatory performance took place at the Argos Festival, Greece, in 1996, for N. Kanagini's installation. I performed as a live moving statue with a

voice heard over a loudspeaker saying: '*Cleanliness-Purification-The fruit has been thoroughly washed. Have some.*' I invited people to taste the fruit, which was placed in seven large bowl-shaped sculptural forms. I accepted the invitation because I was interested in communicating and interacting with a live audience. The framework of a taste symposium watched from a purification point of view sounded very different and exciting. How the audience members interact, exchange energies with the performer and participate in the realisation of the piece or a framework is one of my main interests.



Fig 4.
Papanikolopoulou, M.,
Cleanliness-Purification.
The fruit has been thoroughly
washed. Have some,
1996,
4 hours performance
at the Argos Festival

I was then invited by Iris Kritikou, a well established art curator, to take part in various group exhibitions and festivals as an artist or a performer.

Pireos Street – Metamorphoses of a Landscape, at the VIS factory building in Athens in 1997, was a major art exhibition. I took part with an installation

called *Ascension*, with a half-hour solo performance. It was my personal artistic mark on the changing face of Pireos Street as it underwent a transition from an industrial area to an art and cultural centre while preserving its historical importance. The Athens School of Fine Arts, museums, galleries, theatres and numerous artists established their spaces around that area. My installation, intended to symbolise this transition, featured a pile of books and magazines which was constructed all the way up to the ceiling, and cut-out letters of the alphabet were scattered all around the pile. The audience was handed transparent envelopes with letters, with one cut-out letter each inside, while there was an interaction with the letter sounds taking place at the same time.



Fig 5. Papanikolopoulou, M., *Ascension* (άνοδος), 1997, installation and performance, Group Exhibition *Pireos Street, Metamorphoses of a Landscape* at VIS factory building, Athens, Greece

Another construction I made was *Magdalena's alphabet*, a children's pop-up alphabet book which was exhibited at the Campus College Faculty Exhibition held in Athens in 1996.

All the above design and artistic work was evaluated through submission for a Master's in Graphic Arts, by the NARIC organisation of Greece.

Relevant Post-MA Practice

Over time, I came to realise that professional work in the design field was too narrowly focused to be my purpose in life. I took the financial risk to close my own design studio and continued with teaching. In 1998, I was appointed a full-time professor of Graphic Design, typography and Visual Communication at the Technological Educational Institute of Athens, Greece.

I also present workshops on 'Dance Typography' (Cyprus, USA, Greece). 'Dance Typography' is a combined experimental work whose aim is to connect the art of writing with the rest of our body, and to bring us into a different relationship with type and typography as well as text. Through various improvisational exercises, that consist of breathing, moving, speaking and sound-making, the participants create their own dialogue with the typographical elements. My goal is to combine dance, movement and typography to help stimulate the minds and bodies of developing graphic design students as well as anyone who wants to further explore the origins of their creativity. I believe creativity to be rooted in physical action. Script was originally an extension of the body in action. The above work matured after many years of studying classical-modern and jazz dance (from the age of 14). I took part in many movement seminars in the USA and the UK, and workshops on internal movement, improvisation, movement awareness, body contact, Alexander technique, body-mind centering, meditative movement and others.

I continued to take part in group exhibitions. In 2008, a major retrospective exhibition of the Vakalo School of Art and Design took place at the Benaki Museum in Athens in observance of its 50 years of important intellectual contribution to the arts and design world. Thirty-three graduates, now top designers in Greece, were invited to participate in this event celebrating Vakalo's role in helping them mould their artistic and professional image. I was very honoured to participate with a selected variety of design work, as well as my first word painting named *Eutuxía (Happiness)*. In 2009, the 1st Athens Fringe Festival, took place at Technopolis in Athens. I took part with a 'building wrap' and performance. I wrapped up the chimney of the old gas factory with a printed version of my painting *Love Poppies*.

In the same year, I participated in the Fistiki Fest, a newly established festival on the island where I live. The island of Aegina is known worldwide for the variety of pistachios it produces. There is also an extensive artist community on the island. Many famous Greek painters, sculptors, writers, poets and visual artists lived there, including Engonopoulos, Moralis, Kapralos, Kazantzakis and others. Many young artists from Athens have moved to this island over the last two decades in order to work and raise their families in a more peaceful and natural environment. The Festival includes the Artists Route, where artists exhibit their works at various locations around town, such as the traditional fish market, Markelos Tower, the Archaeological Museum and a number of shops, creating a route through the small side streets that enables the wanderer to get to know more of the island.

In 2009, I presented an open-air installation titled *...τα αιγίνης* (ta aeginis- 'about Aegina') at Ethnegerias Square, with mixed media featuring an open and a closed pistachio (1 m x 2 m each), as a commentary metaphor on local people's attitudes in comparison to those of Athenian inhabitants. I was interested in the difference between provincial attitudes and the capital city's life style.

In 2010, I presented calligraphies of the letter F (φ), the first letter of the word pistachio (*φιστίκι – fistiki*) in Greek, at Iliantina jewellery shop and at Markellos

Tower, a historical site. I expanded the calligraphies on a wine jar, a platter, a plate and paper napkins. In 2011, I organised and exhibited the results from the work of six young children (6-12 years old) in a workshop I gave on landscape art.

In 2010, I was invited by Iris Kritikou, a well-known art curator and art historian to participate in *En-Grafi*, a joint exhibition at the Hellenic American Union. The curators invited Greek artists who are working with text and writing to present their work. The *Gift Silver Poem* by Odysseas Elytis (Elytis, *The light tree and the fourteenth beauty*, 1971, p. 205) tree captures the essence of the exhibition:

I know that all of this is worthless and that the language
I speak has no alphabet
For even the sun and the waves are a syllabic script
which we can only decipher in times of sorrow and exile...

I contributed images based on two Chinese calligraphies, *Double Happiness* and *Wisdom*. I am fascinated by the strength and the beauty of Chinese iconographic letters. I continued participating in joint exhibitions, the last one in 2011 at the Genesis Gallery in Athens, where I exhibited two more of my word paintings *Άμμος* (*amos-sand*) and *Νερό* (*nero-water*).



Fig 6. Papanikolopoulou, M., *water, (νερό)* 2001, watercolour on paper, 41 cm x 32 cm

Fig 7. Papanikolopoulou, M., *light, (φως)* 2001, watercolour on paper, 29 cm x 32 cm

I reached a point where I felt ready for my first solo exhibition. But first, I had to prepare myself. I needed a teaching break. I asked for a sabbatical and although the economic situation in my country is difficult, I got it. I felt I was lacking in research on how other artists approached the same subject matter, and I also needed to concentrate on one area. I wanted to enrich my academic career, to learn, to travel, to see more exhibitions and meet other artists. All of the above reasons, the fact that one of my BA degrees was from an English college (LCP) and that London is a capital full of artistic life led me to apply for a Doctorate in Fine Art in the same city.

Professional Practice During the Doctorate

Solo exhibitions

- 2014 6th *Fistiki Fest*, Historic and Folklore Museum of Aegina, Greece,
Video installation titled *mother and daughter* shown in the outdoor
area of the museum
- 2014 Vryssaki Arts and Entertainment Centre, Athens, Greece,
Video installation and 20-minute live performance titled *The Y and
other letters*

Group exhibitions

- 2014 Second year final show, (*Professional Doctorate in Fine Arts*) AVA
gallery, UEL, London, Video installation titled *dream* shown in a small,
dark room
- 2014 Directional Forces, Artoll, Germany
Installation inside one of the rooms of the old asylum in Artoll
- 2014 Directional Forces, Artoll-Belgrade, Ozone Gallery, Belgrade,
Video installation: two monitors projecting two different variations of the
dream piece
- 2013 *Directional Forces*, Artoll, Germany,
Installation titled *EM ME* including a hanging construction with old
personal photos and letters together with the projection of the *EM ME*
video
- 2013 First year final show (*Professional Doctorate in Fine Arts show*) AVA
gallery UEL, London, Looped video installation titled *M*
- 2012 Interim show, (*Professional Doctorate in Fine Arts*) AVA gallery, UEL,
London, Two video installations titled *mother and daughter* and *the A,
M and W study*

Residencies

2014 Directional Forces, Artoll, Germany

2013 Directional Forces, Artoll, Germany

Teaching

2014 End of sabbatical, return to the Technical Educational Institute of Athens, Faculty of Fine Arts and Design, teaching Graphic Design (Basic Principles of Graphic Design Language and Designing an Art Book - Multimedia)

Reflection on exhibitions

Taking part in group exhibitions broadened my experience and enhanced my observation of how an art piece works within varied environments. Because my work requires the use of different media than I have used in the past, by exhibiting internationally and more frequently, I improved my ability to choose the most effective way to present my work.

Exhibiting video art requires a knowledge of technology as well as a suitable space. For that reason, it is difficult to find exhibition space that includes all the equipment needed. So I decided to create a basic professional collection of technical items (portable projector, stand, tripod, etc.) in order to maintain the flexibility to install my video art projects in any environment specifically chosen for each particular video or film. For example, for the *mother and daughter* piece, I had to design a small portable shelter in order to avoid rain.

Apart from the environmental phenomena, another parameter which I had to

address was ownership rights. Does public space belong to anyone? Are you allowed to touch a piece of public art? Before you touch it, do you have to ask for permission from the government, the museum, the gallery, or the artist who created it?

In all the above group exhibitions, I interacted with other artists who provided me with a solid grounding for open discussion and critical reflection. Also, talking or listening to the viewer, as well as speaking about my own work to the public helped me to articulate but also understand how an art piece has its own life outside its creator's intentions. It helped me to observe my own reaction to the public space including historical monuments, statues and people.

Reflection on art residency

Participating in an art residency was an experience of a great value for me. Sharing and exchanging ideas and beliefs about art with other artists, but more importantly academics who are working teachers and artists with great experience and recognition, while also being in the ideal environment to create work any time I wanted (without any family responsibilities), has been one of the most enjoyable and interesting parts of the doctoral programme so far. Sharing everyday life with other creative people from different cultural backgrounds can always be an event that includes the potential for genesis of a new current or an art movement.

More specifically, the Artoll residency programme, which is housed in an old asylum, stimulated a lot of ideas and provided the seed for further artistic exploration. My work *dream* was born there. Many of my artist colleagues made site-specific pieces. It was very interesting to see how other artists approached the site and the residency.

Teaching

Finally, going back to teaching after a two-year sabbatical period finds me richer and more capable of restructuring the subjects I teach. For example, when teaching 'Designing a literary book', I can apply and introduce all the transformational material and knowledge I gained from my doctoral research.

Creative practice and theory

The majority of the creative results I have achieved during the doctoral programme have been video works in which I perform in a variety of ways. The interaction between my physical presence and the letter-object has been central to this.

Being an artist as well as an art educator in the field of graphic design and typography and having used type for many years has put me in a position to question the deeper significance of these symbols - the symbols we use to communicate in the written form, the letters.

A personal experience that has influenced my work goes back to my adolescence. It was when my father hit me with his belt until my legs bled because I would not 'draw' the letter 'k' as a 'k' but as a calligraphic 'u' (Latin calligraphic 'u' sometimes appears as a lower case 'k' in Greek handwriting). This abusive act left a serious mark on my psychological self and led me to investigate the area of calligraphic practices in connection with psychosomatic therapy methods, which later on in the doctoral programme became an interest in psychoanalytical and feminist theories.

I have been involved in art since I was very young: making paintings that portray words, visiting art exhibitions and museums and living in a home that was full of paintings by other artists. During my collaboration with the Museum of Contemporary Art in Andros, Greece, I came across the book *Marina Abramovic + The future of performance art* by Paula Orrell in which Abramovic describes an exercise where one is asked to write one's first name over an extended period of time without lifting the pen up. By doing the exercise myself and taking time to concentrate on each letter individually, I realised how strong they are as symbols, what knowledge they contain, and how one can project one's life onto them.

Staging the alphabet and exploring my personal relationship with letters as symbols, as words, as shapes, as colours of my personal palette, demonstrate the strategies I use for my investigation. By positioning myself on a landscape stage and exposing my female presence, I create a platform for my improvisational performances. Here I should mention that most of my works involve risk because of the use of public space (I have never asked for permission in order to film) and that I have had to develop an understanding of the film technique in order to explore, record and present my performances.

My ambition is to create a film about the complete alphabet that will join all my individual performances based on each particular letter of the Greek alphabet. Although at the beginning of the programme I did not see myself in relation to feminism, by reading or studying the works of other female artists suggested to me by my supervisors, I realised how important it was for me to understand and articulate the role of my female presence in my films.

In her writings on feminist art, Jayne Wark has argued that it is not necessarily the presence of a feminist intention behind art that is important, but rather the political implications of the art and whether or not these implications engage in a feminist discourse. Artists who use "performance to bring an awareness of feminist concerns to the practice of art making, [...] explicitly propose the idea that art could be a form of political science." (Henman, 2015: essay 8)

Recently I visited the iset (Contemporary Greek Art Institute) in Athens which held the exhibition 'Greek Women in Visual Arts 1960-1980. Their contribution to the Greek avant-garde.' It was such a compact historical, cultural and ideological journey that it helped me to redefine and reposition myself as a woman artist within contemporary Greek society. I realised the importance of my role as a female artist and the strength of my artistic language. I followed up how the issue of female identity has been transformed through the stereotypical social requirements. I gained a deep realisation of all the variations of not how I would like to be but how I should be in a society that has bestowed upon women the role of the fair sex. I became aware of the

difficulties of live performance as an art form and the possible reasons why Greek women artists did not choose it as their main form of practice. The negativity and the suspiciousness with which the public sees action art and performance reflects on how the public conceptualises the world and life. The social hierarchy in Greece is unspecific and leads to a quest for high social standing through art, a fact which performance and action art cannot guarantee. This fact makes artists choose 'safer' forms of art that would be advertised and supported by critics and the art world more easily. Performance and public art becomes marginalised. Performance is associated more with theatre rather than an art form.

This exhibition also helped me to reconnect with what has been previously done by other women artists of the same origin. Once again, I realised that in art, like in education and all other creative areas, the role of gender is so central that it sets out the conditions under which women work and go about their art, and that in many cases, women artists never cease to face stereotypical perceptions regarding the reception and treatment of their work. Although we live in the so-called post-feminist era, inequality and the struggle of the human race to free itself from abuse, exploitation, oppression and alienation still prevail.

I will now discuss my works (mainly videos) made throughout the doctoral programme and reflect on my thought process when making these short films. As I outlined at the beginning, letters are the tools for setting up my practice. Looking back at the three years of work, I have used different approaches including performance in the outdoor space capturing my interaction with a letter or with a local landmark and society, indoor performance placing letters onto or outside my body and live performances that create an interaction with the public through letters or words.

Here I should mention that I had only used the medium of video for filming family gatherings and celebrations. When I started the programme, it was suggested to me by my supervisors to use it as a medium that would record my performances. I am very thankful for their suggestion because this choice

has opened up a wide range of opportunities for me to express and communicate my creative ideas. Julia Knight describes exactly what fascinates me about video.

As a result, it could act as a mirror in which the artist could enter into a dialogue with the self she encountered every day, and the potential selves she was seeking to uncover. It was possible to commit personal testaments to tape in any environment, however intimate, and in complete privacy. (2001, p. 260)

In her work, *Pull* (1995), Mona Hatoum examined issues of present-ness and presence through an exploration of the boundaries of performance and video. The way Hatoum uses performance and how she has addressed the male gaze in her work is of particular interest to me. She says: "Performance is very attractive to me because I saw it as a revolutionary medium, set apart from the gallery system and the art establishment." (Potkin, 2001: 76)

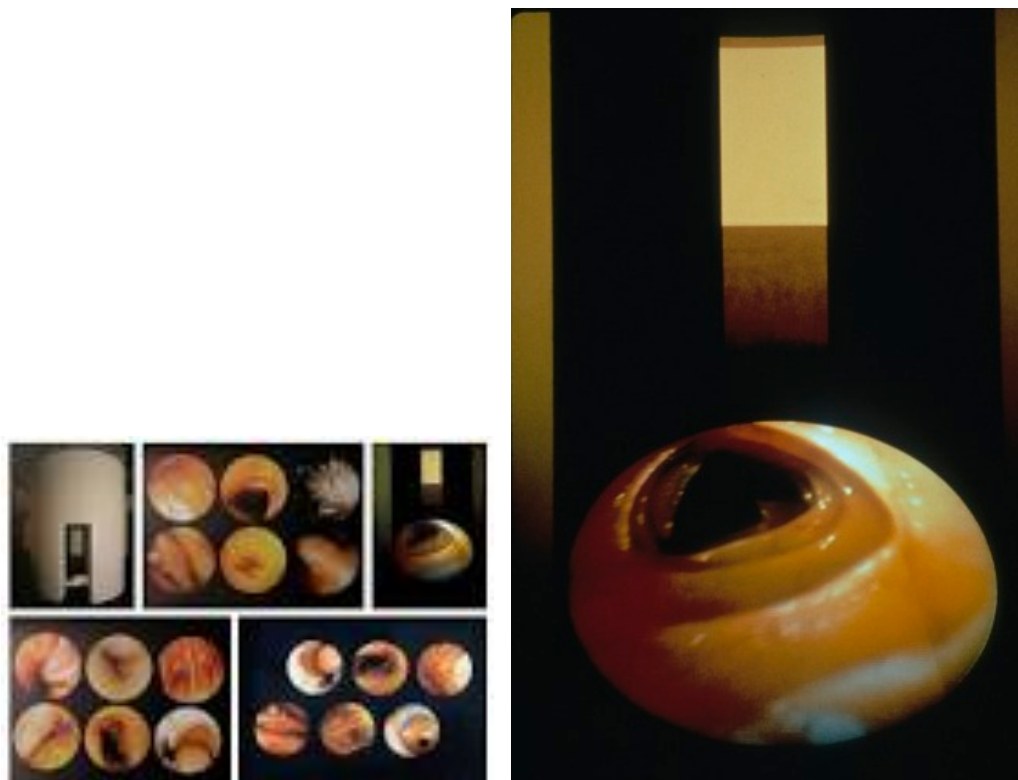


Fig 7. Hartoum, M., *Corps Étranger*, 1994. Video

First year's work

The use of writing and language in contemporary art has always been one of my main interests. In my work, I choose to experiment with areas of text and performance through female subjectivity. I explore the potency of symbols of script, and the projected world on to letters and words. How can a female presence create meaning by exclusively using letters and her body? I experiment with how this may be achieved through my reaction to the environment, or the environment's reaction to my presence. Movement, dance, letters, painted or constructed words and their sounds are the materials of my work, which is presented through video or live performances. I create playful or dramatic interactions with the alphabet in environments other than those we are accustomed to. Placing myself in the rural landscape but also in the urban environment, I build new relationships with letters, words and text.

Painting and calligraphy, which I previously used, result from bodily actions, but do not illustrate the body or the theatricality of communication. I choose to embody the physical female presence, as bodily movement has its own language which can enforce, or at times contradict, the energy of the letters and the meaning of the words.

The main focus of my work is on communicating by using letters and words, movement and sometimes sound. Being born and having lived in the city for almost thirty-five years, I experienced the evolution of signs and advertisements and how they eventually dominated the urban environment. This bombardment, together with television and new technologies, has created a certain immunity and numbness in the way we see letters and words, but also in the way we communicate with each other.

Having moved closer to nature (Aegina, a Greek island near Athens), for the last fifteen years I have been re-examining my relationship with the alphabet. Through my work, I try to give life back to letters and words. By placing the

actual letters-objects in nature, away from their natural environment (city signs, books, etc.), I try to build new relationships with them and my surroundings.

In the first year's work, I chose the letters 'A', 'M' and 'W', which is the visual inversion of M. Through various experiments with improvisation using my body and my female presence, I created short performances in order to stimulate the spectators' sensitivity and understanding of the subtleties of language. Influenced by Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of the regimes of signs, I tried to change the univocal correlation of signifier and the signified and open up the characteristics of a specific organisation and disposition of sign (English- Greek language). I was interested in the language differences and similarities, but the Greek alphabet was my basic visual reference.

Speech, meaning, and the enunciation of the characters that are part of the alphabet happen through the sound that is produced via pronunciation. Sound manifests only through inhalation and exhalation. This is achieved with the cooperation of the body. The deeper we breathe in, the stronger the sound becomes. Sounds are internal and external. The internal voice is the voice of silence. It is the voice we hear during inhalation, exhalation and thought. External sounds aim to actualise projects. The word becomes something that unites the thought with the object of thought.



Fig 8. Papanikolopoulou, M., *the A study*, 2012, stills of the video of the performance at the Temple of Aphaia

The Ancient Greeks knew the sacred words that existed and still exist for the purpose of creating a work. They knew the right way of pronouncing and transmitting them in a certain direction. We find examples in Homer's *Iliad*. Ancient Greek theatre also uses words in a repetitive way through the chorus, which gives us very interesting examples of the inner use of words.

The chorus performed using several techniques, including singing, dancing, narrating and acting. There is evidence that there were strong rhythmic components to their speaking. They often communicated in song form, but sometimes spoke their lines in unison. The lines of choral odes provide evidence that they were sung. Normal syllabic structure has long sounds that are twice the length of short sounds. However, some lyrics in Greek odes

have long syllables that are equal to three, four and five shorter syllables. Spoken words cannot do that, suggesting that this was a danced and sung rhythm.

Plays of the ancient Greek theatre always included a chorus that offered a variety of background and summary information to help the audience follow the performance. They commented on themes, demonstrated how the audience might react to the drama. In many of these plays, the chorus expressed to the audience what the main characters could not say, such as their hidden fears or secrets. The chorus often provided other characters with the insight they needed.

In my work, I sometimes explore the sound based on the idea of the chorus to satirise or add an extra comment or even to be sarcastic about my own interaction with the symbol.

Being Greek and living in an area of great archaeological importance, I find it also very inspiring to place letters in the natural world, in nature. According to Galileo, the world is the alphabet. It is the combinational system that is able to be aware of the full complexity of the universe. In the *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems-the second day*, he describes the transformational stage from nature to the alphabet.

I have a little book which is considerably shorter than Aristotle and Ovid, which contains all sciences, and which with just a little study can allow others to form a perfect idea of it. This book is the alphabet, and there is no doubt that the person who knows how to put together and juxtapose this or that vowel with those or other consonants, will get the most accurate responses to all doubts and he will derive lessons pertaining to all the sciences and the arts. In exactly the same way the painter can choose from different primary colours set separately on his palette and by juxtaposing a little of one colour with a little of another can depict men, plants, buildings, birds, fishes; in short, he can represent all visible objects even though there are no eyes, feathers, scales, leaves or

stones on the palette. In fact, it is essential that none of the things to be represented, or even any part of them, should actually be there amongst the colours, if one wants to use them to depict all manner of things, because if there were on the palette, say, feathers, these could only be used to depict birds or plumage. quoted in Calvino (1995, p.100)

For the first year's midterm show, I showed a 30-minute film with the most representative results of the filmic drafts of the performances on the letter 'A', 'M' and 'W' and a separate looped video of the *mother and daughter* piece.

The natural landscape of Aegina Island and the different locations of archaeological, cultural, artistic and architectural importance are used as inspiration and visual reference for my practice. For example, for the letter 'A', which is the beginning - the starting power, I placed a constructed wooden 3D letter 'A' at the Temple of Aphaia. According to mythology, Aphaia was the daughter of Zeus and Kharme. She was loved by Minos and, to escape his attentions, she jumped into the sea and emerged in Aegina, where she became 'invisible' (Aphaia) in a grove. I thought the temple was the best place to communicate the energy of the letter 'A'. Influenced by the famous photographs taken by Nelly's [Elli Sougioultzoglou-Seraidari (Greek: Έλλη Σουγιουλτζόγλου-Σεραϊδάρη) b.1899 - d.1998 (better known as Nelly's] called *The Acropolis Nudes*, I paid homage to the letter 'A' at the Temple of Aphaia.

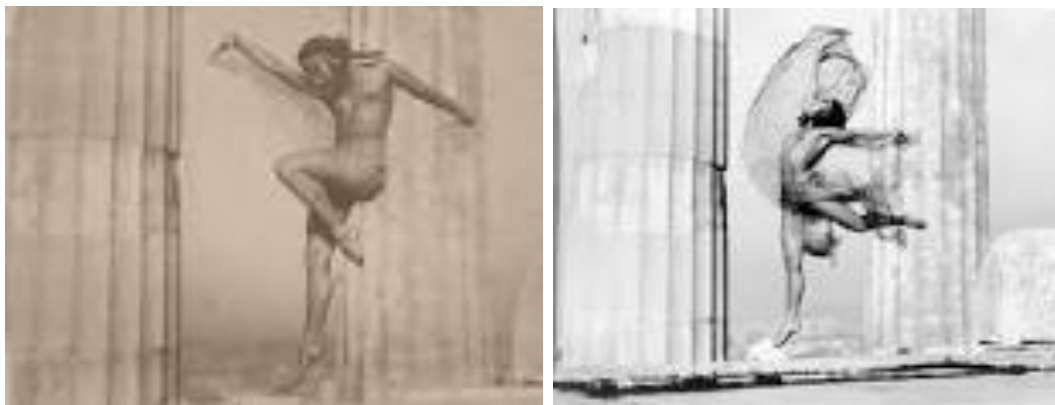


Fig 9. and Fig 10. fighttp://www.groopio.com/el/projects/display/143/the-great-photographer-nellys-at-the-long-room

For the letter 'M', from which the words 'womb' (*mitra*) and 'tomb' (*mnima*) are created, I tried to reflect the movement of the calligraphic writing in an improvised choreographed piece. Nikos Kazantzakis describes the letter 'M' in his famous novel *Askitiki (The Saviours of God Spiritual Exercises)*: "I once set out from a dark point, the Womb, and now I proceed to another dark point, the Tomb. A power hurls me out of the dark pit 'M'." (Kazantzakis, 1927: p.599-631)



Fig 11.
Papanikolopoulou, M.,
the M study
2012,
stills of the video
of the performance outside
Kazantzakis' house

I placed a wooden cut-out 'M' outside the house where he lived and wrote most of the book.

While performing with the letter 'M', it becomes very windy so the letter 'M' turned upside down becomes 'W', the wind. I perform the letter 'W' and so on. By interacting with the elements of nature, they become part of the medium.



Fig 12. and Fig 13. Papanikolopoulou, M., *the W study*, 2012, digital prints of the video

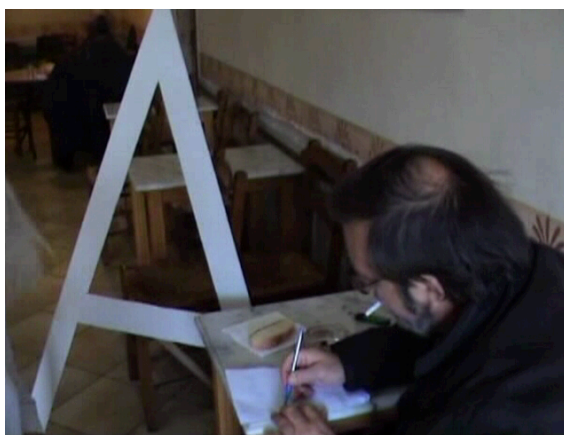


Fig 14. left, Papanikolopoulou, M., *the A study*, 2012, digital prints of the video
Fig 15. right Papanikolopoulou, M., *the M study*, 2012, digital prints of the video

Mother and Daughter



Fig 16. Papanikolopoulou, M., *mother and daughter 1*, 2012, stills of the video of the performance *mother and daughter*

The letter 'M' is also the mother. Renting a house next to the Christos Kapralos Museum, one cannot avoid seeing the imposing statue of *The Mother* made by this Greek sculptor and placed exactly opposite his house, which was later converted into a museum exhibiting his famous works and his studio. It was the artist's wife who insisted on putting the statue there. A three-metre high bronze statue stands on its own in the outdoor space before the Saronic Gulf. A mother stands there, holding her left cheek, with her gaze resting on the paved surface in front of her. She is a traditional middle-aged woman from Agrinio, in the Peloponnese, wearing traditional everyday clothing, and symbolising the Greek mother, a woman who toils with devotion to her family.

My core concern in my research is to stage the alphabet. The letter 'M' is the womb (*mitra*) and the tomb (*mnima*), but it is also the mother. That is how my work led me to the *Mother and Daughter* piece.

As a mother myself looking at the statue, I empathise with her, as she could be anybody's mother, my mother. I want to hug her, touch her, feel her. I want to make her forget the painful past, to free her from her burdens, but she cannot hear. I want to tell her that she has the right to leave, too. That was the genesis of this piece.

I expressed what I felt by observing a piece of public art – in this case a statue. It was a private moment which could also be made public because I filmed myself on video. I filmed about fifty different short videos of my performances. Initially, I included a self-made letter 'M'. After the feedback from the Work in progress seminar, I tried a new mother piece leaving out the actual letter. My main concern was to embody the physical female presence as bodily movement and sound, interacting with the famous statue of *The Mother*.

From a theoretical point of view, my work at this point staged the viewer's reaction to a piece of public art or a monument or an archaeological site - in this case, the *Mother* statue. By filming my spontaneous reaction to the

statue, I gave myself the opportunity to express adoration for the mother role, to empathise with her but also to capture and to comment on Greek chorus by using a verbal exaggeration. Another aim was to connect the past with the present moment and give soul to the frozen statue.

The mother was worshipped as a symbol of fertility even in the earliest human communities and has been a favourite subject for all art genres since antiquity. The multiplicity and diversity of art pieces throughout history reflect the complex symbolic character of the mother figure. For Greek society in particular, the figure of the mother enjoys a central position, as it epitomises the notions of continuity, security, sacrifice, giving and unconditional love.

In Melanie Klein's theory of artistic creation, the mother- or rather, the mother's body – functions as a 'beautiful land' to be explored. The creative writer, like the explorer, the scientist, and the artist in general, is impelled by the desire to rediscover the mother of the early days, whom [he] has actually lost. "Feelings of love and gratitude arise directly and spontaneously in the baby in response to the love and care of his mother," Klein writes. (Davey, 2001: 117)

The medium I used was the video because I wanted: to record my comment on the piece of public art; to imprint my statement about the mother-daughter relationship; and to express my adoration for such a strong symbol as the mother. As Christos Kapralos, the creator of the statue, writes:

The worship of what you want to express allows the emergence of the elements that will express it. That comes first. After you finish, you will see the merits and shortcomings of your work. Of course, when you delve into the work, you must possess the knowledge; you must have learned the art. But at the time of creation, you are emotionally immersed in your work. The feeling leads you to highlight the elements you need in the work you are creating.

(Kapralos, 1960-1980, *Sculptures made out of cooper*)

Initially I named the piece *Mother*, but after the feedback from the Work in progress seminar, I realised the piece should be called *Mother and daughter*. It belongs to the body of works in which the letter is excluded, although the letter M is obviously implied.

Another theoretical influence were the writings of philosopher Roman Krznaric. He says that, "The real monuments of a city are its people," and also that, "Empathy is the art of stepping imaginatively into the shoes of another person, understanding their feelings and perspectives, and using that understanding to guide your actions." (Krznaric, 2014: x) Empathy for me was always the way to understand the world around me - my mother, my father, my friends; but more importantly, it was my personal key to understanding art and other artists' work.

Another important work of the first year was my performance at the entrance of St Nektarios church in Aegina. Influenced by Gillian Wearing's video, *Dancing in Peckham*, I dressed up in my wedding dress. Although I was filming myself with the camera, I was not performing. I did not have to perform. I was creating a space for expressing my sensuality free from any patriarchal order. Although in the past I have felt the gazes of admiration and desire from men or envy from other women, I gave myself the luxury of self-expression and surrender. I was there for myself alone. It was an utterly spiritual act and led me to change the title of the video from 'Antidote 1' to *Dancing with God or Song of Myself*, influenced by Walt Whitman's poetry.

I believe in the flesh and the appetites,
Seeing, hearing, feeling, are miracles, and each part and tag of me
is a miracle.
Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am
touch'd from,
The scent of these arm-pits, aroma finer than prayer,
This head more than churches, bibles, and all the creeds.

(Walt Whitman, Song of Myself, *Leaves of Grass*, 1891-1892)



Fig 17. Papanikolopoulou, M., *dancing with God*, 2013, stills of the video of the performance at the temple of St. Nektarios

Helen Potkin writes:

Certain tendencies within video art may be seen as performative, even theatrical. In Gillian Wearing's video *Dancing in Peckham* (1994), it is the artist herself who is seen performing for the camera, staging herself as both subject and object, complicating and confusing boundaries of

space and spectatorship. Performativity may be seen as operating in the contemporary context – through the staging of self not only within practice but also through those forms in which the artist herself is mediated: the photograph and interview. (Potkin, 2001: 84)

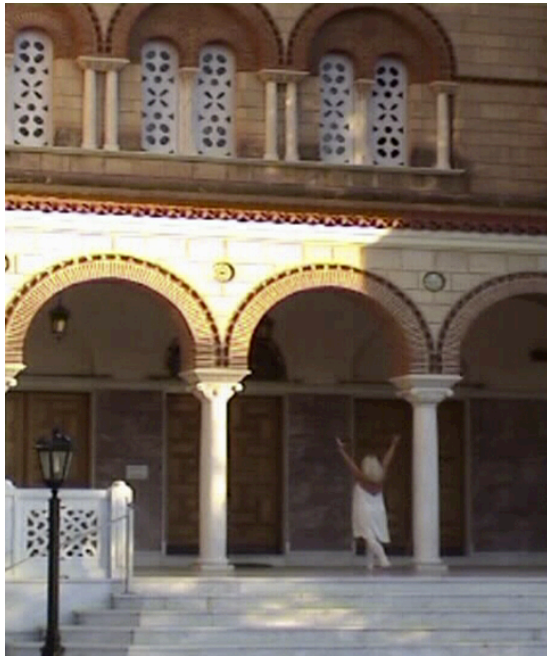


Fig 18. Papanikolopoulou, M., *Song of Myself*, 2013, photograph deriving from video of the live performance at the temple of St. Nektarios



Fig 19. Wearing, G., *Dancing in Peckham* 1994, photograph from video southlondongallery.org

She also writes: “ works that display intense emotion which may be acted or real, and implicate the viewer in a similar way to live performance.”

All my performances are real, and through them I discover myself. With my art, I create a protected space. I only re-enact to improve my video results. After a full year of practicing and giving live performances, I realised that the more authentic I am in my performances, the more authentic and convincing is the outcome for the audience.

For the final show of the first year, I presented a looped version of the *fluxus M* video of a site-specific indoor performance exploring space and confinement inside Moyland Castle, which today is a museum housing a significant body of Joseph Beuys’s work. Fluxus was developed as an ‘anti-

art', 'anti-commercial' aesthetic movement under the leadership of George Maciunas. A number of avant-garde performances, often spilling out into the street, took place during the 1960s. Artists such as Joseph Beuys, Yoko Ono and Nam June Paik took part in Fluxus events.

I made the video exactly where various Fluxus art objects - mainly boxes - were exhibited inside the museum. I placed myself behind a small red M box with white dots which I used as a reference to the word ME and I approached the box with slow movements. It was an attempt at a silent self-portrait.



Fig 20. Papanikolopoulou, M., *fluxus M*, 2013, stills of the video made inside Beuys Museum, Germany

I also screened the EM-ME video of the performance on communication, made during the 2013 Artoll residency, in a German restaurant at Bedburg-Hau. I referred to a question which was addressed to me with an ironic tone. It is not the language we speak; it is how we speak it. "Words are acts," said Wittgenstein. In commenting on the question, I ended the video with the phrase "but then communication is..." and left the answer up to the viewer. The above two works were performances made in an indoor space in another country (Germany). I bought the letter-objects I used at the Beuys Museum

shop. It was interesting for me to interact with letters of a smaller scale instead of the big ones I used back in my native landscape. A new challenge was presented to me on how to create work outside my cultural heritage and the place where I live.



Fig 21. Papanikolopoulou, M., *EM – ME*, 2013, performance, photographs deriving from video made during my Artoll residency

The Y, U, V and ω performances

After the *mother and daughter* piece, a local landmark led me to broaden the cultural context of my work. The idea of a living statue occurred to me after reading the phrase I have already mentioned, "The real monuments of the city are its people," said the young philosopher Roman Krznaric. It is not the statues that give character to a city but the unexpected things. Interacting with outdoor monuments did not include the real people of the island. In addition, at some point it felt like a slower process for communicating messages. Live performance was a genre that had attracted me a great deal in the past because of its immediacy and boldness. I thought of creating a piece that would involve the local community.



Fig 22. Papanikolopoulou, M., [*U*] *the uncountable noun*, 2013, stills of the 'Y' and the 'V' videos of the live performance in a little back street on Aegina Island, Greece.

We are all born into societies which have expectations of our genders so we learn to conform to those roles. In my Y, U, V and ω video work, I performed an ultra-female behaviour which provokes a response. Using parody, I illustrated these sexualised stereotypes of femininity. I was trying to subvert the cultural object of misogyny. *Ode*, the ceremonious lyric poem on an

occasion of dignity in which personal emotion and universal themes are united, becomes *Parody* – the Greek word *parodiā* (para+ode) - a visual satirical poem, of the male gaze.

Being the artist, I was taking control of the words or symbols, hoisting them or taking them onto my body, as, for example, Mona Hatoum does in *Corps Étranger*, taking what she considers the male/medical gaze into herself in the form of a camera inside her body.

There have been many women artists whose creative processes move towards a certain point, towards protesting against the patriarchal structures. For example, Ewa Partum, one of the artists I am researching, made a strong statement about being a female artist, basing her art and its vocabulary on her specific experience as a woman, and connecting her artistic gestures with political statements and a visible presence in the public sphere. In 1974, she staged a performance called *Change* in Lodz, in which a make-up artist worked on half of her naked body in order to transform it into an old woman's body in front of the audience. At the conclusion of the performance, Partum announced that she herself was a work of art, making her body an element of the feminist discourse. She also announced that she would perform naked until female artists got equal rights in the art field. She was already far beyond the body-art practice of her time.



Fig 23. Partum, E., *Change* in Lodge, 1974, performance

In my work, the everyday life of the Greek island where I live sometimes becomes my canvas. Being aware of the cultural norms and the gender arena of a Mediterranean island, I choose not to conform, but instead to perform an act. By breaking through the boundaries of what is likely to be expected, I exercise live performance.

In small societies, sexist rules that govern society reveal themselves more easily. Being interested in sexuality and the way it manifests itself, distorted by the media or the male gaze, I decided to perform in a provocative manner.



Fig 24.
Papanikolopoulou, M.,
[U] the uncountable
***noun*, 2013, stills of the**
video of the live
performance in a little
back street on Aegina
Island, Greece.

I choose not to be naked. I do not want to be easily characterised as a crazy artist or offer a spectacle that would miss the point. I want my voice to be heard, or at least make people think, wake them up from their everyday existence. On top of my summer clothes, I hung letter-objects like jewellery, the length of which reached my mons Venus.

I used the letters in order to create a new vision of a woman in space. I walked up and down a little back street in Aegina wearing a different letter each time. The performance lasted from five o'clock in the morning till noon. The long duration of the piece allowed me to be present amongst the people who were passing by and to experience the idea of waiting. Waiting to be chosen. Being so vulnerable and exposing yourself in a shameless way, it is like revealing yourself to the passers-by, like a prostitute who has to walk up and down dressed provocatively waiting for the next client. By giving the piece long duration, people had the opportunity to return to the little back street in order to process what they had just seen. They were a few who would come back several times while others would call their friends to come and see or even some who would notice nothing different.

Influenced by the way Roland Barthes analyses the pleasure of text in his homonymous book- "the text you write must prove to me *that it desires me*" – I applied the idea to the letters. Letters are the ingredients of writing. They also have to be desirable. Whether they create words or not, they have to be alive. Therefore, my body becomes the page of a book on which the letter, the word, the label, the sign is written.

Someone familiar with Freud's theory of penis envy could easily interpret my act of hanging a letter-object in front of my mons Venus as a subconscious response of penis envy. Being aware of this possible reading, I hope the viewer will quickly realise my satirical intention.

The devaluation of women's sexuality has to do with women's subordination in their social situations. The formation of femininity needs to be investigated as a dynamic process that takes place in the family under certain social circumstances.

The reactions of the people passing by were documented in the four videos (*U*, *Y*, *V* and ω) of the performances (one for each letter). An application of how the social reacted to the individual and vice versa. An extensive discussion about the above 'provocative' work of mine took place in the work in progress seminar. I was challenged to elucidate what my exact intentions in

each performance are, a fact which has strengthened my point of view.



Fig 25.
Papanikolopoulou, M.,
ω, 2013, stills of the video of the
live performance in a little back
street on Aegina Island, Greece.

When I decided to make the performance, I was aware that I was converting myself into an object of sexual desire. I was also becoming an agent of art in public space. The materials I used were the ready-made 'U', 'V' and 'Y' letter-objects from the Latin alphabet covered with cotton fabric in various colours that would represent the female parts of the human body. I also used a white 'ω', a lower case letter from the Greek alphabet, for the second part of my performance.

It is important to be aware of the four main areas that are bound with public art, as Iwona Blazwick, the Director of Whitechapel Galleries, said in her talk about public space at the invitation of the NEON organisation at the Athens Benaki Museum. The four important issues that have to be examined when we talk about and make public art are: ownership, public behaviour, environmental phenomena and invisibility

I recently submitted and had accepted a proposal to exhibit the *[U] the uncountable noun* piece at an art venue in Athens at Vryssaki Arts Center.



Fig 26. Papanikolopoulou, M., ω , 2013, stills of the video of the live performance in a little back street on Aegina Island, Greece.

Word Works

Words have a magical power. They can bring either the greatest happiness or deepest despair; they can transfer knowledge from teacher to student; words enable the orator to sway his audience and dictate its decisions. Words are capable of arousing the strongest emotions and prompting all men's actions. Freud said. (Coenn, 2014: 5)

In Lacan's first theory of the Symbolic, words are not, as Freud thought, opposed to things; "words create the world of things". (Lacan, 1977: 65)

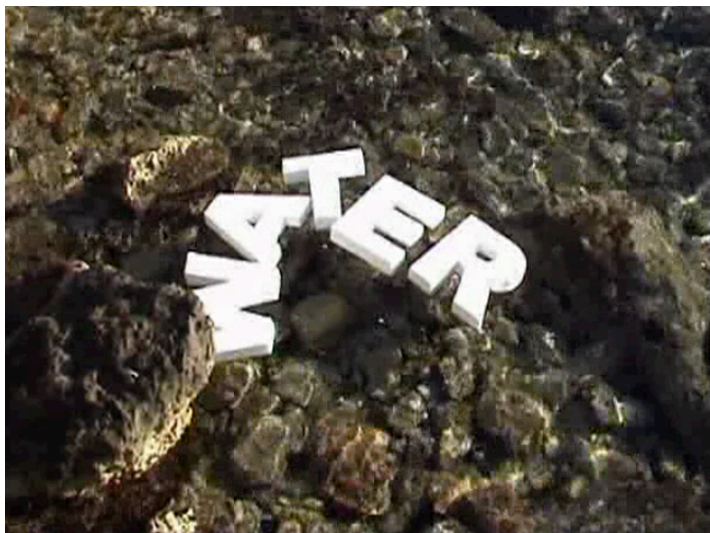


Fig 27.
Papanikolpoulou, M.,
***the 'W' study*, 2012,**
stills of the video

My fascination with words comes from eastern calligraphy and philosophies. As I have already mentioned my previous work was to paint words. The way these words were transferred to the paper was influenced by Chinese calligraphy. In calligraphy, the brush becomes an extension of the body and is directly connected with the heart and mind. In my view, poetry and painting had become one and my concern was and still is to transfer the deeper meaning and the energy of the word into the painting-visual piece.

I examine the semiotics of each word I use, its symbolism and its root and the way it can be transformed into a visual piece. Painting and calligraphy result from bodily actions, but do not reflect the body or the theatricality of communication. In my word videos, I choose to embody the physical female

presence, as bodily movement has its own language which can reinforce, or at times contradict, the energy of the letters and the meaning of the words.

Words had to be seen against the backdrop of a body that was also saying something, in another mode, about itself and its needs and desires. That this speaking body was, for the early Freud, most often a woman's, was decisive for aligning woman with the major discourse of the unconscious, and for feminist adoption or rejection of this equation. (Wright, 1992: 211)

My first work involving a single word was made for the first year's midterm show and it was called *water*. Water is the main element of life and of the island where I live. It is also a very powerful element in its own right. To watch the word performing in its natural environment fascinates me. If, according to Lacan's theory, a word functions to block an identificatory sense of a thing once it is named, by putting the word in its actual element I try to give it a chance to recover from the limitation of the Symbolic. I observe the movement of the word in a pool of water in comparison with sea water - what can physically happen to the word in the movement of the sea. It is as if my body had been replaced by the actual word which had its own life.

In the second year, I worked with the word *dream*, but this time I filmed my bodily interaction with the word.

The *Dream* piece

Influenced by Marina Abramovic's work called the *Dream House*, the place where people will come to dream the dreams as she describes them in her Dream Book, I tried to recreate a dreaming atmosphere, a dream room.



Fig 28. Papanikolopoulou, M., '*Dream*', 2014, stills of the video made during my Artoll residency

In my first *Dream* installation, which was created and exhibited inside one of the rooms of an old asylum (which has been converted into an art residency space), I hung the letter objects of the word 'd-r-e-a-m' in order for the viewer to create free associations with the realm of the unconscious. I was referring to the dream as the only place of freedom for the patient confined in an asylum or a prisoner in a prison cell. The dream can also be a therapeutic tool helping to free him from his trauma.



Fig 29. Papanikolopoulou, M., 'dream', and 'Dream' 2014, photograph from the Directional Forces Artoll Ozone Gallery Belgrade group exhibition.

Cristopher Bollas explains in the chapter 'The Psychoanalyst's Use of Free Association' from his book *Being a Character: Psychoanalysis and self experience*:

When the patient tells a dream, the analyst is 'given' images to see in his mind's eye. He is also given something of a story and is a kind of a reader.

The dream report may convey the dreamer's affects, some of which will be felt by the analyst. Any dream report always evokes the analyst's curiosity, as he is now also partly a detective sifting through the clues provided by the manifest contents. He contracts a linguist part of himself to decipher word presentations, just as he delegates a part of himself to be the historian, collecting the dream into many reconstructed contexts.

(Bollas, 1992: 110)

In my piece, I become the analysand and the viewer becomes the analyst. We contract a relationship in which we will allow all the free associations to come up and to be examined. The free movement of the letters in my piece invites the viewer to see or create his own words which could be the anagrams of the word 'dream', words such as: *madre* (Spanish for mother), *mare* (Italian for sea), *ream*, *dear*, *dram*, *read*, *dare*, *dame*, *derm*, *mead* even REM (rapid eye

movement) which is directly associated with the word 'dream'. The anagrams became my creative ground for developing different ways of exhibiting but also evolving my work.

The first development of the work led me to create a video piece which filmed my interaction with letters in the space. Interested in the body-letter relationship, I placed myself in a sleeping or a daydreaming position. I then recorded the way the hanging letters moved along with my slow body movement and the sounds they produced. At the final second-year show, I tried to combine the projection of the video with the dream installation by placing the letters of the word 'dream' in front of the light source in order to achieve a three-dimensional effect. The idea was not completely resolved because of several imperfections in the way it was presented. I needed more time to work in the actual room. For that reason, I have decided to experiment more with the shadow-light effect in various spaces in order to gain more experience which will be useful next time I install the piece.

Lost and Found

A third work which was made in the second year of the doctorate involved a full phrase consisting of three words: *lost and found*. This time I was taking control of the letters, hoisting them or taking them onto my body. I chose the phrase *lost and found* and I painted it on my fingernails. With this phrase, I was referring to lost femininity. Written on the fleshy part of my finger tips, the viewer could slowly read the revealed written phrase *lust and found*.

The idea was based on a 'love letter' sent to me by an artist friend J.B. and an ex-teacher who I was dating at the time. We used to exchange love letters, but the love letters were something more than ordinary letters - they were art pieces. They were produced in order to excite, to seduce, and to amuse each other. He was my BA teacher who taught me how to transform an idea into a piece of art. He taught me how to convert my everyday life into a creative and exciting process. I had refused to go out with him while I was a student. For ethical reasons, we had to wait two full years until we could start dating. One of his art pieces was a pair of my black gloves which I had forgotten in his car and which he later sent to me by post transformed into an art piece. He had hung white price tags on each finger tied with white ribbon and on one side, he had written the phrase 'lost and found' and on the other 'lust and found'.



Fig 30.
Bradac, J.,
Lost and found,
1988, photograph
of my gloves
transformed into
an art piece.

My *lost and found* video piece was made twenty-five years later and it was sent to J.B. as a valentine card. When I was making it, I was referring to lost lust. The work was made after attending an open discussion with well-established contemporary women artists such as Sonia Boyce, Kerry Campbell, Rose Gibbs, Sarah Maple, Hannah Perry and Hannah Sawtell, 'A fine Art Degree, Will I ever practice?', which inspired a discussion to explore whether gender disparity in galleries is a product of an entrenched gender imbalance within the art world, and what female graduates can do to combat this inequality.

Listening to other women artists' issues prevalent in the art world, I found similarities with my country's status quo and I realised how hard it is for a woman of my age to survive only from her art. I also wondered if this entire struggle left any space for the feminine side, the erotic side, the seductive side of all the above female artists.

For the beginning of the film, I chose the funk/soul hip-hop music of Gramatik, and specifically the song 'In This Whole World' from the album *Street Bangerz Vol. 3*, a slow rhythmical tune that would bring out the sensual side. After the first close-up of the finger, and as the image in the frame becomes completely blurred, the music changes to something reminiscent of an action film. This helped me enhance the concept that I am actively exploring the meaning in the fingers. The close-up filming together with the magnifying mirror in my bathroom produced whale-like nimble fingers with their fingerprints which revealed the age of the woman looking through the camera in front of the mirror. She was sensing that there is still lust and desire in her body. In the video, these qualities become obvious by the sensual dance of the fingers and the written letters painted on them. Lust is a situation where one's whole body and mind are obsessed with the object of desire therefore I chose to hoist the painted letters onto my body.

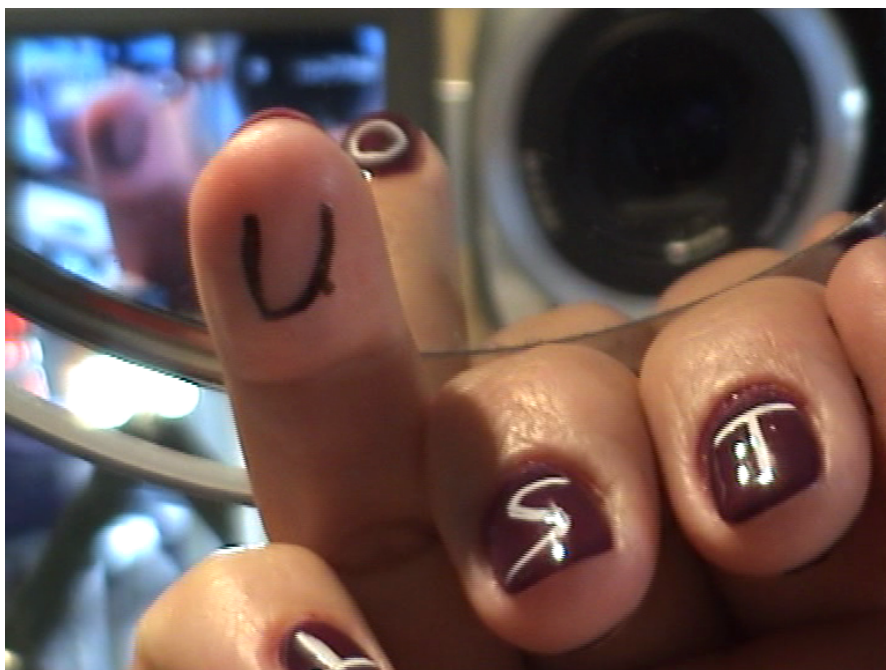


Fig 31. Papanikolopoulou, M., *lost & found*, 2014, stills of the video



Fig 32. Papanikolopoulou, M., *lost & found*, 2014, stills of the video



Fig 33. Papanikolopoulou, M., *lost & found*, 2014, stills of the video

The Thita piece

In the Greek alphabet, the letter 'Θ' is the eighth letter. According to the Pythagorean mathematic scale, it equals the number 9 and symbolises the stepwise function (mathematical term) and the completion. The letter 'Θ' originates from the Phoenician letter *teth* which meant 'wheel'. In English, it is usually associated with the letter combination 'th'.

My first 'lower case θ' piece was a short 2.25-minute video created inside Moyland Castle, which today is a museum housing a significant body of Joseph Beuys's work. The piece was produced during the 2013 Artoll residency in Germany. I responded to an illusionary 'θ' space, which I recognised as such inside the castle-museum. I was standing in the corridor which led to the room where various Fluxus art objects -mainly boxes- were on exhibit. I was inspired by the work of Joseph Beuys, the German performance artist representative of the Fluxus movement. The corridor itself adds to the space the feeling of a closed capsule, a fluxus box. Its shape reminded me of the lower case letter thita (θ). Connecting the shape of the space with a fluxus box and the letter θ, I created the homonymous piece. By walking up and down, I alluded to the origins of the letter 'θ', which as I mentioned before meant 'wheel'. It belongs to the body of my work that has been produced in an indoor environment.

The letter 'Θ' is an important letter in the Greek alphabet. The expression of aspiration in the phonological system of the Ancient Greek language was very significant, so much so that it determined the naming of all closed consonants in Greek and created two new letters – 'Φ' (ph) and 'Χ' (kh) – to express the other two aspirated consonants with one letter. The aspiration of 'θ' in the pronunciation can be found in ancient Greek words that have passed into other languages as loan words, such as *theatre*, *ethnic*, *therapy*, *theory*, *theology*, *thermometer*, *athletic*, *atheism* etc. in English. For this reason, I decided to broaden my work with the exploration of this particular letter by

working with it outdoors back in Greece, the country where this symbol came from.

Here I should mention that the Greek alphabet was derived from the earlier Phoenician alphabet, and was the first alphabetic script to have distinct letters for vowels as well as consonants. As such, it became the ancestor of numerous other European and Middle Eastern alphabets, including Latin and Cyrillic. Apart from its use in writing the Greek language, both in its ancient and its modern forms, the Greek alphabet today also serves as a source of technical symbols and labels in many domains of mathematics, science and other fields. This symbolic structure of our (Greek) language has been passed on to us in such a way that it appears as a reference in much of our everyday speech and not only in academic or linguistic environments.

Yet only the updated forms of Ancient Greek diagnostics (semiotics) and the medieval trivium (logic, rhetoric and grammar) have proved of significance for both feminism and psychoanalysis, by treating those aspects of language that link the two most profoundly.

(Wright, 1992:210)

The origin of this piece, as for much of my work, was a personal experience/relationship with Professor Margaret Jean Talbot, who was at the time approaching the end of her life.

At first, I thought the capital letter Ω , which is the last letter of the Greek alphabet, would have been suitable for the piece but later on I decided to use the letter Θ for its symbolic meaning, which according to Juan-Eduardo Cirlot (Eduardo Cirlot, 1992: 173) indicates the general movement in the upper and lower World. "In all cultural traditions, letters possess symbolic character, which sometimes is double, depending on the shape and the sound of the letter," he writes.

Pythagoras says that the third level of decoding Greek language is the vibration which is created when we pronounce a letter or a syllable and the

relationship between letters, words and musical tones. In the vibratory nature of letters, Θ symbolises the wisdom of knowing when to be silent. (DION, 1987: 57)

Inspired by the shape of the letter, I constructed a capital letter 'Θ' one metre in diameter in celestial blue. The immediate associations that come to a Greek-speaker's mind are the words God-*theos*, death-*thanatos* and holy-*theikos*. One finds that these words express intangible, sacred and celestial meanings; for this reason, I chose the celestial blue colour which represents something of a light, ethereal substance.



Fig 34. Papanikolopoulou, M., Θ, 2014, stills of the video made in Aegina Island

I then decided to perform an act on the roof of a typical Cycladic-style church with a double dome. The top of the church would be an ideal setting for a piece concerning life and death. The spherical shape of the dome in connection with the circle of the 'Θ', as well as the subconscious word chain I previously mentioned in relation to the church building, led me to choose this particular public space. I made a small performance by exhibiting the actual letter in a slow choreographed piece.

I was influenced by Paulina Olowka's participation in the *Ecstatic Alphabets / Heaps of Language* exhibition in 2012 at the MOMA in New York that brought together historical and contemporary works of art that treated language not merely as a system of communication governed by grammatical rules and assigned meanings, but as a material that was manipulated with creative freedom, like paint, clay, or any other artistic medium. The first section of that exhibition was a historical overview of 20th century art that experimented with the graphic, sonic, and kinetic possibilities of letters and words. Olowka's performance *Alphabets 2005/2014*, also shown at the Tate Modern, represented a radical updating of the possibilities inherent in the relationship between art and language. The letter, the word and the phrase, which were seen and experienced, were not necessarily read.



Fig 35. Olowka, P., *Alphabets*, 2005/2014, Museum of Modern Art, New York

In juxtaposing Olowska's piece with my work, I am not trying to find bodily postures that are read as the alphabet but to reveal each particular letter's story as a combination of the personal and the cultural. My experimentation explores the kinetic possibilities of letters, but not from a conscious – logical position. I film myself in a naturally staged situation which I carefully choose in order to improvise. Having in mind that I am holding a symbol, a letter that as an object means nothing and yet carries a lot of meaning and energy because of its use over thousands of years (since the genesis of language), I place myself in a situation of absurdity. I feel like I am paying homage to this symbol which, if it were missing from the alphabet, the whole view of the world would be incomplete or just different. Driven by its actual form, I start my improvisation.

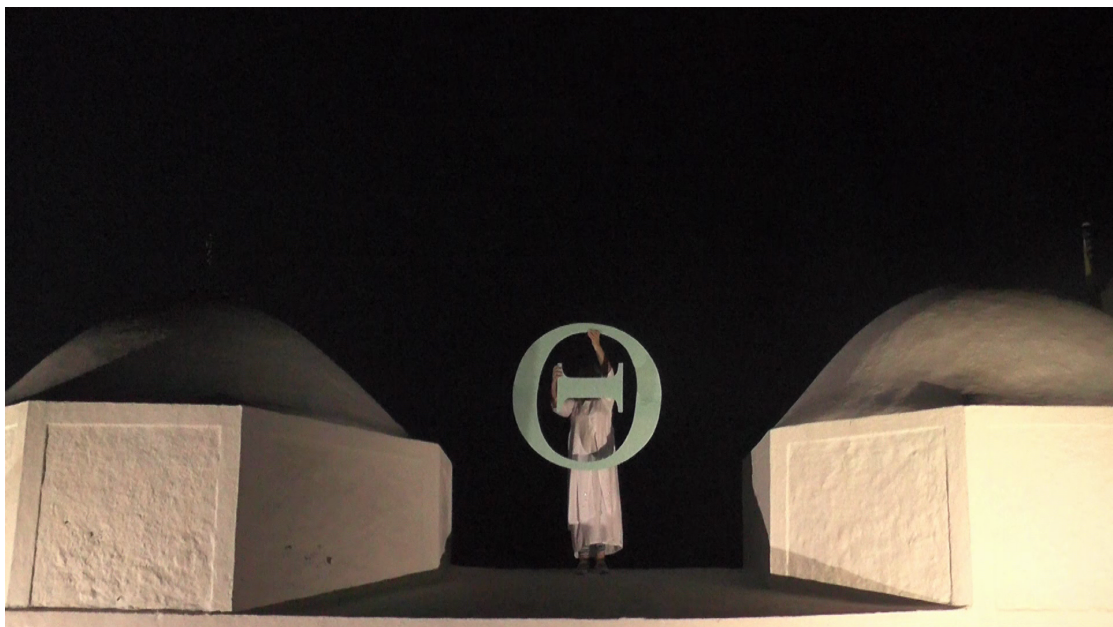


Fig 36. Papanikolopoulou, M., Θ, 2014, stills of the video made in Aegina Island

I choose improvisation because it is the most liberating way for a personal kinesiological code to emerge. With improvisation we are travellers. I never know where we are going to end up and which path we will follow. Action and discovery take place at the same time. Through my personal choices and risk-taking, I design experiential landscapes. Each video I make reveals my movement-body-letter relationship, which in this case is with the letter Θ. After

the material is created, I edit the video to give it structure, make corrections and sometimes give more meaning to the piece.

Symbols never have only one interpretation. They are never stagnant. They continuously grow; they progress dynamically depending on the environment in which they exist and the meanings that the performer gives them.

Lacan follows Saussure in contending that a natural language is not a nomenclature, or a catalogue of 'words' corresponding to 'things'. A language is, rather, a system of signs that are meaningful only to the extent that they differ from each other. This is true at the most basic level of the phoneme: 'box' and 'fox' are meaningful only because of the sound difference between /b/ and /f/. The sign itself is said to be a combination of a signifier (for example a word) and a signified (its meaning), and its relationship with the extra-linguistic object or referent is arbitrary. Lacan says that by privileging the signifier, which is said to slide along chains of association, there would be no final meaning, or end to the sliding were it not for the existence of so-called 'privileged' signifiers that establish at least some stability of meaning. The major privileged signifiers are the 'name of the father', and the phallus or symbol of both paternal authority and sexual difference.



Fig 37. Papanikolopoulou, M., Ø, 2014, stills of the video made in Aegina Island

Lacan continues:

Language and its structure exist prior to the moment at which each subject at a certain point in his mental development makes his entry into it. Thus the subject, too, if he can appear to be the slave of language is all the more so of a discourse in the universal moment in which his place is already inscribed at birth, if only by virtue of his proper name.

(Lacan, 739)

“The root of a 'name' in Avesta and Sanskrit is 'nama', in Greek it is 'onoma' and in Latin it is 'nomen', all of which have the same root which means 'one's reputation' (Etymonline Dictionary). According to Webster online dictionary (2008), “

A name is a label to things, people, places, brand names and even ideas or concepts, originally in order to distinguish one another...

It is also called a proper noun.” In considering the definition, “what makes each word distinct is its difference from the other word.

(Saussure 1983: 653). So the functions of a name are determined by making a distinction between people. In fact, nominalisation is one of language's functions, as Saussure (1983: 653) pointed out: “The system of linguistic units depends on the idea of Difference; one unit has Value within the system because it is not some other unit within the system.” (Sadeghi, 2009: 293)

Lacan's theories have helped me build my artistic language. During the actual time I am acting and in order to articulate it correctly, I am performing an act and I am totally focused on the present moment, improvising and following my drive, rather than thinking carefully about my act. I feel like the messenger ancient god Prometheus, who brings knowledge into the world. His name means 'prudent', or 'provident'. It is formed from the Greek preposition 'πρo' - *pro* in English - and the verb 'μαθαίνω' /mathe'no/, *to learn*.

I perform what the universe or my inner self tells me to. Dressed in a white dress, which helps reveal the mythological significance, I act with very slow movements in order to give time to myself and to the viewer to get involved on a deeper level. Performing an act rather than acting gives the viewer the alienation needed in order not to fall into the myth, such as for example into a

river as in ancient Greek theatre and the Aristotelian catharsis, but to become more of a Brechtian spectator, able to stay alert in order to think, comment or even participate in the process. The secret lies in the process. Instead of assuming the correlation signifier/signified, we must pay attention to the reference of significations to one another.

Standing on stage without a plot would be like Brecht's theory on dissociation.

His aesthetics provide tools for transforming works of art with various ideological underpinnings into dialectical activities. If reading is the trope that Brecht adopts as the model for the spectators' actions, having no play but only improvisation gives the spectator the freedom of thought that a critically engaged reading gives. It does that because it is full of footnotes and turning back upon the text, something which Brecht calls 'complex seeing'. (Carney, 2005: 89)

In the body of the work where I use single letters, one could say there is no explicit story though there is a development. This can create unease in the viewer. After the feedback from the Work-in-progress seminar, I was asked to reshoot and therefore to re-enact the piece. This time, all the decisions would have to be made beforehand. I would have to reshoot several small videos in order to test the framing, the lighting and the time significance of the actual video. This is a big challenge because issues of public space and ownership come into the whole process. It is forbidden to climb onto the top of a roof of a church, especially if you are acting 'something' of a mystical nature. In a place like Aegina, where very conservative and religious people live, no policeman would understand what you were doing on top of a church roof, even if you were an artist. For that reason, the videographer did not agree to reshoot the piece because he did not want to take the risk of being part of a forbidden action. So once more, I would have to film myself and perform at the same time. In my work, the antithesis between the body as a symbol of the feminine and the letter, which represents the patriarchal structure, brought new questions on how and whether these two systems blend.

In this particular piece, I chose the female figure to be the presenter, the educator, the narrator of the letter. By choosing to wear a white dress rather than tight trousers or a rather provocative look, like I did with the *U*, *V*, *Y* and ω pieces, I intend to draw the gaze away from the 'fetishistic scopophilia' and the erotic ways of looking at a female subject. As Laura Mulvey explains:

The message of fetishism concerns not woman, but the narcissistic wound she represents for man. Women are constantly confronted with their own image in one form or the other, but what they see bears little relation on relevance to their own unconscious fantasies, their own hidden fears and desires....The time has come for us to take over the show and exhibit our own fears and desires. (Mulvey, 1989: 13)

Technical progress

Recently, I visited Bob Wilson's exhibition at the Bernier/Eliades Gallery in Athens. The theme was *Video portraits of Lady Gaga*. It was the first time I had seen a solo exhibition by such an important personality on the contemporary art scene. The interesting thing for me was that it was an exclusively video art show.

The clarity and honesty of Lady Gaga's presence; an approach that goes beyond mere theatricality and performance; and the video portraits ultimately chosen for the show and the way they were positioned in the gallery space were for me a condensed seminar on precisely my area of interest, making me aware of the progress I have made through the three-year doctorate programme. I realised that I could follow and understand most of the decision-making in relation to the theme but also the shooting and editing of Wilson's videos.

By watching his interview on the above solo exhibition, conducted for Greek TV by Greece Katerina's Zaharopoulou, a well known art critic and artist, I proved to myself that I could follow all his technical concerns about lighting, and how he used editing as an advanced painting technique in order to get the desirable outcome for his video portraits. I also realised how lucky I was to have the internationally known film director John Smith as my supervisor.

Once again, I realised that video art is an expensive medium if one is to present it in a professional manner. As I previously mentioned, one needs to closely monitor the digital evolution as well as the new editing programmes and facilities.

My videos were filmed with a simple Sony high-quality video camera in the outdoor environment. For my *Thita* piece, I used a high-definition Sony model which gave me better resolution on the final product. Since I filmed myself by myself, I had to use a stable tripod to overcome windy circumstances. For the

editing I did myself, I used the iMovie application, but most of the editing was done by a professional (Anestis Kornezos) in Corel VideoStudio Pro according to my my instructions.

Time and motion in relation to filming in the outdoor environment included some ambient sound and stability 'accidents' which helped me to reveal the freshness and joyful aspects of the work. The selection of the above use of the 'accident' in the editing gave the desirable outcome.

For my longest piece, *Thita* (10 minute video), I made a clearer plan and gave more attention to detail and control of the shooting. One parameter I had to be aware of was how to perform my act in the most natural way possible on the roof of the church. For that reason, I choreographed the piece and made a few video rehearsals in the garden of my house before the final shooting. This way I gained more complexity and depth as well as control of the framing and activity before the final filming.

Another area I experimented with was the sound. I tried several sound versions, some with natural hot summer night sounds and some with a chorus-like quality created for an ancient Greek tragedy. I realised that the sound should play a more complementary rather than a protagonist role in my *Thita* film.

In conclusion, I would like to say that the digital image has progressed so much since Bill Viola's first exhibition, but in my work right now I am putting the emphasis on how to communicate a new language where body and letter will become a part of the same story. Viola himself said that he would never forget A.K. Coomaraswamy's words about being an artist:

"We must remember that all artistic operations were originally rites and the purpose of the rite was to sacrifice the old and to bring into being a new and more perfect human being." (Coomaraswamy, 1877-1947: 8)

Education, Language and the Body

(Academia, Lemma and Hearth)

According to analytic philosopher (linguistic philosopher) Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), the limits of thought are the limits of language.

The same meaning had earlier been expressed by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), the founder of modern linguistics, with the metaphorical phrase: "thought and language are two sides of the same coin." The truth of this scientific revelation was never disputed. Indeed, humanity's entire cognitive system, its perceptual and communicative ability, is based on a linguistic code: on the ability to construct a system of correspondence between the signifier and the signified; in other words, words (symbols) that refer to 'something' of a concrete or abstract nature (e.g. tree, freedom). The more extensive the linguistic code (vocabulary), the greater and easier the human expressive, representational and ultimately communicative capacity. Or, to be even more precise, aesthetically more complete. It goes without saying that the use of a linguistic code requires following certain rules (grammatical and syntactical), since language as a phenomenon establishes a structure with logical cohesion, sequence and an interpretable evolutionary course. According to the great linguist Noam Chomsky (b. 1928), all national languages can be traced back to a common 'deep structure', corresponding to the instinctive, natural human logic. Chomsky's claim regarding 'deep structure' leads to the certain conclusion that theories on superior and inferior languages are erroneous. In any case, those presented as inferior languages are 'inferior' as a result of historical circumstances and not of a primary, spontaneous and inviolable cause.

Humans acquire language gradually, starting from the moment of birth. The first auditory impressions of language are experienced in the family setting (linguistic link), which are critical for the subsequent formation and development of their linguistic course. And certainly the foundation of human linguistic cultivation is established in this environment (elementary vocabulary

and rudimentary expression). Further development of linguistic cultivation however, takes place mainly through education.

As a lecturer of graphic design at the Technological Institute of Athens, my creative ideas and my thoughts often involve questions about education and the way knowledge is transmitted through language and the body. What is the perfect system for transmitting knowledge? Can body be excluded from the learning process? How can you transmit knowledge without using your body? Judith Butler suggests that within phenomenology, "The body is understood to be an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities, a complicated process of appropriation which any phenomenological theory of constitution needs to describe." (Butler, 1990: 403)

Merleau-Ponty renders experience of immediate and direct relevance to philosophy and the production of knowledge. He locates experience midway between mind and body. Not only does he link experience to the privileged locus of consciousness; he also demonstrates that experience is always necessarily embodied, corporeally constructed, located in and as the subject's incarnation. "Experience can only be understood between mind and body - or across them – in their lived conjunction." (Merleau-Ponty, 2002: 95)

In my works *lemma* and *hearth*, I take the role of a child who acquires language through various pedagogical practices that involve the use of the body (playing with letters as a metaphor of experimenting with the subject matter) and travelling (gaining knowledge by being exposed to different cultures and pedagogical methods).

The book *Inventing the Modern Self and John Dewey: Modernities and the Travelling of Pragmatism in Education* led me to consider the field of ideas, authority relations, and institutions through which modern schools are constructed, and the multiple principles of pedagogical practices in governing who the child is and should be.

David Kolb's learning styles and experimental learning theory and Malcolm Knowles's ideas on informal adult education fed my interest on educational methods. I felt free to express my personal thoughts on travelling and education by using my body while I was speaking. I interacted with a large pile of multi-coloured, cut out letters. While I was saying my text, I was picking up letters which were sometimes relevant to my sentences.



Fig 38. Papanikolopoulou, M., *Lemma*, 2013, stills of the video made in Aegina Island

The *lemma* video was an entry for the 2013 Student Travel Video Contest. In the above 5-minute video, I used the 3D cut out letters to communicate the idea of travelling and how important it is for one's studies. The video was taken on the island of Aegina in the bright sunlight. The idea I was proposing to the contest was to travel anywhere in the world and make small improvisational films, as well as give workshops on 'Dance typography', a workshop combining language and movement that I developed myself.

It was the first time I decided to speak while I performed for my video. Although sound and speech are not in my particular area of interest, for the *lemma* video I wanted to express myself freely with body and speech. While I was making the video, I was aware that the possible reactions could be very intense, since I was going to talk in such a simple language (non-academic) about such an important subject. I would also screen the video at the WIP seminar with viewers, lecturers and professors of the doctoral programme. And indeed it was an intense experience. To stand in front of people as a child with total freedom of movement and speak with a naïve, spontaneous-like quality in a non-native language about a theme to which the viewer is sensitive, is not an easy task. Once again, I realised the strength of the medium of performance art and the exposition involved in it. Amelia Jones has recently countered such privileging of the live event, "while the experience of viewing a photograph and reading a text is clearly different from that of sitting in a small room watching an artist perform, neither has a privileged relationship to historical 'truth'." (Jones,1997: 11-18)



Fig 39. Papanikolopoulou, M., *Hearth*, 2013, digital prints of the video made at Marathonas B beach in Aegina



Fig 40. Papanikolopoulou, M., *Hearth*, 2013, stills of the video made at Marathonas beach A on Aegina Island

In the *Hearth* video, I decided not to speak but to use only my body interacting with the same made-up letters. In the video titled *Hearth (Εστία-Estia)*, I attempted to satirise this formalism with the letters surrounding me appearing like the hearth of an ancient altar next to the beach (another negation of formalism is the removal of the *Hearth* from an interior space to an exterior space).

With my work *Academia* (10 minute video), I was also attempting to satirise another aspect of education: the fierce competition that takes place in all institutions. At the beginning of the programme, I was asked to make a performance based on Tracey Emin's textual work as a way to objectify my interest. I would be taking on Emin's subjectivity by being objective about it and about my own subjectivity.

In my video, we see an expensive and elaborately designed wooden chair in an outdoor open space and myself wrapping it with toilet paper and then

writing on top of it "This is an academic chair". Influenced by Emin's most famous works that came out of sewing letters onto her grandmother's armchair in *There's A Lot of Money in Chairs* (1994), I borrowed her text as a comment on the way the academic environment works. I was even being satirical about my choice to study abroad which meant I would have to spend a lot of money.



Fig 41. Emin, T., *There's a Lot of Money in Chairs*, 1994



Fig 42. Papanikolopoulou M., *Academia*, 2012, stills of the video, made in Aegina

The taste of language

Everything we taste is actually a combination of four tastes: sour, bitter, sweet and salty. The taste buds in different areas of the tongue detect these tastes. Bitterness is detected at the back; sour flavours at the side edges; sweet tastes at the tip; and saltiness just next to the area where sweet is detected. The sensors located in these areas and corresponding to each taste sensation transfer the information to the brain, just like spoken information (language) does. The brain can recognise when a flavour is sweet, salty, bitter or sour and the body responds accordingly. Speech information (language) is exactly the same. The brain receives it as positive, negative, annoying, entertaining, and so on.

Usually, bitter flavours are not agreeable, while sweet ones are generally appealing to humans. Moreover, the tongue also detects texture. It can discern whether something in the mouth is hot or cold, sharp, hard or soft, smooth or rough. In this way, it can warn us about dangerous substances in our food. Similarly, we are able to filter and codify the information we receive through our communicating speech.

Aside from these functions, the tongue is the main organ involved in shaping speech. The different movements made by the mouth help to shape the various sounds.

With my work *the taste of language*, I explore the sensual side of language but also the 'miscommunication' side of it. The idea was that I would film three different self-staged speechless 'monologues' in the same space with the same set-up and edit them together. I had to be aware of time and movement so the viewer could feel that the performances were happening at the same time.

In the first piece, I face the audience and after I have a 'shower' with children's colourful plastic letters, I spit out the ones left or put them back in my mouth. In the second performance, I use no letters but try to communicate only with

my facial expressions and my body language. In the third piece, I am in the same position facing the viewer while eating the actual letter forms with which I have just had a shower. In this performance, I am interested in communication-miscommunication. I created this piece in order to show the various ways we as humans use verbal or non-verbal language. Understood or not, we still believe we communicate. The letter forms represent the way we do it.



fig 43. Papanikolopoulou, M., *'the taste of language'*, 2014, photograph deriving from video of the performance made during my Artoll residency

Since my works explore the use of text and language - both visually and semiologically - I experiment with the relationship between the body and letter by using letters as an object. I explore the movement as a dance and how text and words can create a visually poetic language. I use the letters made of different materials to stage them as an interactive object. I am trying to achieve a new level of communication.

I am influenced by novelist Nobelist Herta Müller, who says:

Language is a tool. It cannot do anything by itself. It is me that has to tame it and put words here and there. Language is important but not independent. What is language? It is what we ourselves make...It depends on how we use it.... Therefore, letters and words are tied to the speaker and the listener. They have the strength to do everything, even to kill... (Chrisostomidis, 2013: 21)

Live performances

I am interested in the performance because it has the privilege of being a live experience. Sometimes it becomes a part of everyday life. It can be an interactive event that has the power to transform. By choosing performance as a practice and video as the documentation of it, I am given the opportunity to build direct relationships with my environment, objects or people, including myself.

My first performance at UEL was for the autumn Work in progress seminar on the first year. I decided to present myself and the work I was doing at that moment with a live performance rather than a predictable Power Point presentation. I made nine calligraphies which represented each letter of my name.

Each calligraphy was placed on a chair and I stoop up on another one which was positioned behind the nine letters which read as the word 'Μ Α Γ Δ Α Λ Η Ν Η'. 'Μαγδαληνή' (Magdalini) is my name. I was revealing a self-portrait by exploring the connection between the movement, the sound and the letter-symbol. As Lacan writes: “

Symbols ... envelop the life of man in a network so total that they join together, before he comes into the world, those who are going to engender him 'by flesh and blood'; so total that they bring to his birth the shape of his destiny; so total that they give the words that will make him faithful or renegade, the law of the acts that follow him right to the very place where he is not yet and even beyond his death; and so total that through them his end finds its meaning in the last judgement, where the Word absolves his being or condemns it. (Lacan, 2011: 67)

Thinking is actualised with words, words with actions and movements, in signs and letters. “Thought and language are two sides of the same coin”, expressed as a metaphorical phrase by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). The letters of my artistic language are the symbols of the written language -

the actual letters of the alphabet.

I gave small pieces of paper to the spectators - colleagues and asked them to write down a word chain associated with any letter of my name. That is how the performance-presentation ended. The interaction was my way to get various reflections of what I presented. If every letter in our name reveals another aspect of our personality, in this way I would get various reflections of my personality.

The second live performance was in the UEL library. I invited my fellow students, my supervisors and my external examiners to the library. I was wearing a long blond wig which was decorated with the letters of the alphabet in all colours and sizes.



Fig 44. Papanikolopoulou, M., *library awards*, 2013, 10 minute live performance at the UEL library, photograph

As a librarian, I rewarded the researchers with one letter each. The choice of the letter was made intuitively by looking at each person's personality

individually. Inspired by the idea of the name-concept, this time I chose letters instead. I stuck letter stickers on everybody's coat and from the letters, I made words for each one of the viewers individually.

My most recent live performance was at a solo show at the Vryssaki Art Centre in Athens. In a small black room, I had a looped projection of my 'Y' video. At the same time, I gave a live performance called "The Y and other letters".



Fig 45. Papanikolopoulou, M., *The Y and other letters*, 2014, 20 minute live performance at the Vryssaki Arts Center, Athens, Greece, photograph

"The Y and other letters is a performance that comments on sexualised stereotypes of femininity; it sees the letter Y as a meeting point of three paths, and attempts to illustrate the dilemma of choice as well as the moment of decision making." (Papanikolopoulou, 2014)

The letter Y, in the cultural tradition of the North and the northernmost populations, represents the cosmic human with his arms in adoration and according to Julius Evola symbolises the Resurrection. (Cirlot, 1992: 170). It is also the Chinese symbol of the binary division that consists of the active or

masculine principle (Yang) and of the passive or feminine principle (Yin). The vertical axis of the centre of Yang-Yin is the 'unchanged midst', i.e. the 'mystic centre' where there is no rotation, no turmoil, no movement, and no pain. Letters are symbols. Eduardo Cirlot begins the introduction of his dictionary with two quotes: "The world is a symbolic object," by Salustio, and "For me, the most important work of my life is to symbolise my inner world," by Hebbel. This quote captures my creative process, especially when I make live performances. (Cirlot, 1995: 7)

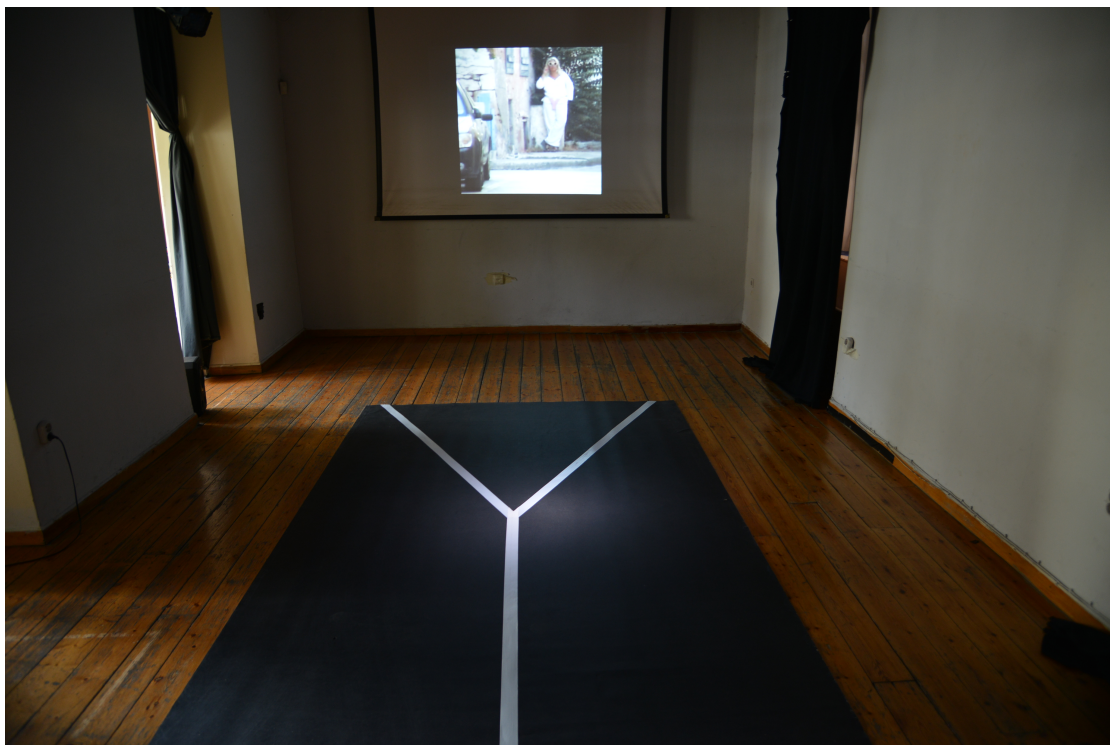


Fig 46. Papanikolopoulou, M., *The Y and other letters*, 2014, 20 minute live performance at the Vryssaki Arts Center, Athens, Greece, photograph

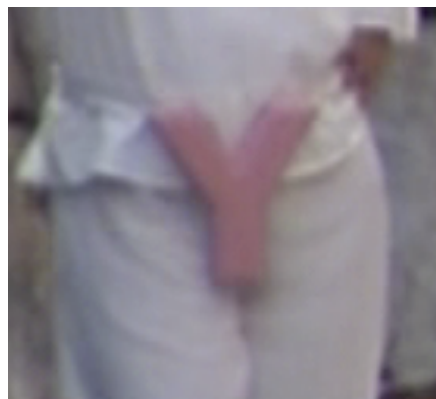
In all cultural traditions, letters possess a symbolic character, which is sometimes double, depending on the shape and the sound of the letter. In my country, there is a tradition of great symbolic significance attached to letters and numbers. The pre-Socratic mathematician and philosopher Pythagoras "transformed the study of geometry into a liberal education, examining the principles of the science from the beginning and probing the theorems in an immaterial and intellectual manner: he it was who discovered the theory of the irrational and the construction of the cosmic figures," wrote Proclus about

Pythagoras. For me, the letter Y, apart from symbolising the mystical centre, is a symbol that also represents the source of life.

In the area of education, it is also the trivium. In medieval universities, the trivium consisted of three subjects of study: the grammar, the logic and the rhetoric. The word trivium comes from Latin and means 'the three roads' that shape the foundation of medieval classical education. For all the above reasons and associations, Y was the best symbol to choose as a backdrop of my live performance.



**Fig 47. Magritte, R., *La Représentation* (Representation), 1937
Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, Gohr Siegfried
2009:20**



**Fig 48. Papanikolopoulou, M., *Y*, 2013, full day live performance in
Aegina,
Greece, detail from snapshot of the documentation video**

In Rene Magritte's painting, *La Représentation* (1937), we see clearly the lower part of the female body and observe the lines and the shapes that are formed. One can very clearly distinguish how the shape Y is moulded from the lower part of the female body. In my performance, I place myself on top or inside the external female sexual organ, the Y, in order to find answers to my personal dilemma. I enter the small black room which I mentioned earlier, I walk with slow careful movements on top of the white letter-symbol Y made from adhesive tape, stuck to the black floor.

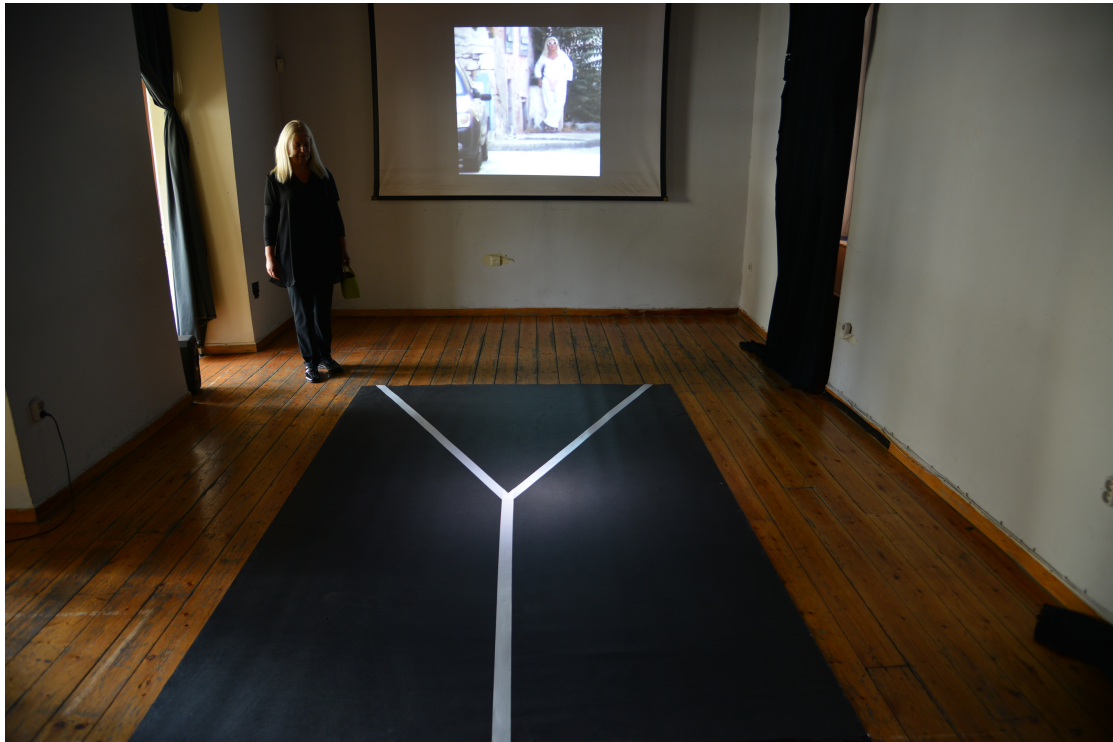


Fig 49. Papanikolopoulou, M., *The Y and other letters*, 2014, 20 minute live performance at the Vryssaki Arts Center, Athens, Greece, photograph

I entered the room all dressed in black, holding a small green girlish handbag. I walked up and down on top of the letter until I reached the centre of the Y. This is the place where the three paths meet: the spiritual, the physical and the ethereal. Three in one, the crossroads. I sat down in the meditation position and started randomly picking out letters from my little handbag that would show me the answer to the question, "Which path shall I choose?" I spread the letters out in a circle, the circle of life.

Two different answers came to my mind and mouth while the performance was progressing. The first was that the path is 'only one' for each individual. It is the path that he creates throughout his life. The second was that the Y is the answer. Y is the place where one can find balance between his masculine and his feminine energy, the place where one came from, as Gustave Courbet's painting *The origins of the world* (later renamed *Source of life*) in 1866 suggests.



Fig 50. Papanikolopoulou, M., *The Y and other letters*, 2014, 20 minute live performance at the Vryssaki Arts Center, Athens, Greece, photograph

Conclusion

Up to now, I believed that the most precious gift I have ever given myself was one month of ascetic isolation. Putting myself through the experience of a three-year full-time doctorate programme has been a gift of equal value. The way I have chosen to study (98 round-trip flights from Athens to London) has made my journey more difficult. The theories I explored, the artists I examined, the artistic practice I developed, the people I have met, including all my supervisors, teachers and colleagues from UEL and people from my travels, led me to reconceptualise my personal beliefs, behaviours, thoughts and attitudes towards art and life.

After discussing and finally choosing the works for the Viva show with the help of my supervisors, reading over my final report and taking a retrospective look at my three-year doctorate journey, I come to the conclusion that it has been such an intense experience that it will continue to be a great source of energy and a theoretical and creative reference for many years. I will need time to process, digest and comprehend all the knowledge I have gained. For me, one of the most important aspects of this programme has been the opportunity to explore and instil value to the different facets of my personality.

Looking back at my work and specifically at the three pieces I have chosen for the final show, I can now see more clearly the strengths and the weaknesses of my practice. The continuous movement between object and subject for myself as artist and agent of my performances gave me the opportunity to become a spectator of my own work and more importantly my personality. Through this process, I often became very vulnerable and emotional, which worked in a revealing and therapeutic way. I realised that the medium of performance demands great courage, strength and daring as well as a strong character.

The transference of commitment from my subject to the object gave a specific strength and independence to my 'objects'. The contrast between the

movement of the organic humanistic side and the two-dimensional rigid, constructed symbol-letter makes for an intense result. In some of my works, tension is created by the disembodiment of the letter; in others the replacement of the body parts with a part of the symbol show how body and letter can merge and create a new meaning.

Initially, I asked my husband to film my performances. Soon I realised I could not be in control of the filming nor could I act in a very natural manner. With the encouragement of my director of studies, I decided to film myself by myself. That way I had to confront and face all the problems of shooting. The same thing happened with editing. By now, I have also learned how the editing process works and its importance to the final result of the video. I have also experienced the strength of time, duration and motion. Slow motion reveals the structure of motion. Together with the repetition and the element of sound, one can create powerful results.

Through my work *Lost and found*, I became aware that the use of the older, non-svelte body (my body) is a radical and rare female subject, contradicting the ways in which the male fetishist gaze puts rules and limitations on how the female subject should be seen: how this contradiction can perhaps become a strong statement. For example, in the work *The taste of language*, I am not afraid to completely rumple myself in order to use the elements of language as embodiment of meaning.

From the work *Thita*, I also discovered that the tension between the forceful embodiment through my own physicality and the disembodiment of the single letter 'Θ' creates an absurd and almost surreal atmosphere which makes viewers wonder and feel uncomfortable, and I hope avoids the easily arrived-at conclusion that the letter does not add up to a signifying word.

During the doctorate programme, I realised that the understanding of cultural codes and their meaning is essential for successful communication in foreign

markets. In addition, correct articulation is the actual key for supporting and understanding one's work.

Through the reading that I have been encouraged to undertake and the feedback from the work in progress seminars I broadened my awareness of the possible readings of an art work. The writing of Roland Barthes was of particular relevance to me. His analysis of the image and the practical aspect of semiology in non-verbal sign systems served as the theoretical background for my personal exploration of 'signs'. Lacan's theory of the signifier outlined in his major essay, 'The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious', helped me to understand the relation between the influence of language and sexual differentiation. His theory of the 'symbolic order' as identified with the father and the body as identified with the mother improved my awareness of the female presence in my videos.

Over the course of these three years, I developed my skills in applying appropriate research methodologies, tools and techniques to my art practice. I expanded my critical analysis and evaluation of the results. I developed the confidence to be more creative and innovative, and my understanding of 'research integrity' in regard to rigour, ethics, transparency and acknowledging the contribution of others, grew. I am now provided with richer, wider and deeper layers of knowledge that I will be able to consolidate in the new life and work unfolding before me.

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Appendix of chronological list of my works



Fig 1. *ΜΑΓΔΑΛΗΝΗ*, 2012, 20 min live performance, UEL seminar room



Fig 2. *ΜΑΓΔΑΛΗΝΗ*, 2012, 20 min live performance, UEL seminar room



Fig 3. *the 'A' study*, 2012, 3 min performance, Temple of Aphaia, Aegina island, Greece



Fig 4. *the A study*, 2012, 8 min performance, St..Minas monastery, Aegina island



Fig 5. *the A study*, 2012, 10 min performance at the garden of my house, Aegina island, Greece



Fig 6. *the A study*, 2012, 20 min performance, το καφενέιον café, Aegina

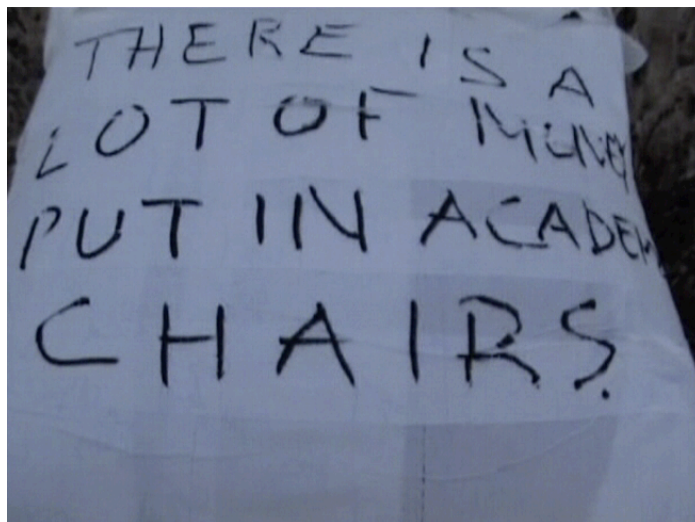


Fig 7. *Academia*, 2012, 10 min video, archeological space, Aegina island, Greece



Fig 8. *the M study*, 2012, 15 min performance, N. Kazantsakis house, Aegina island, Greece

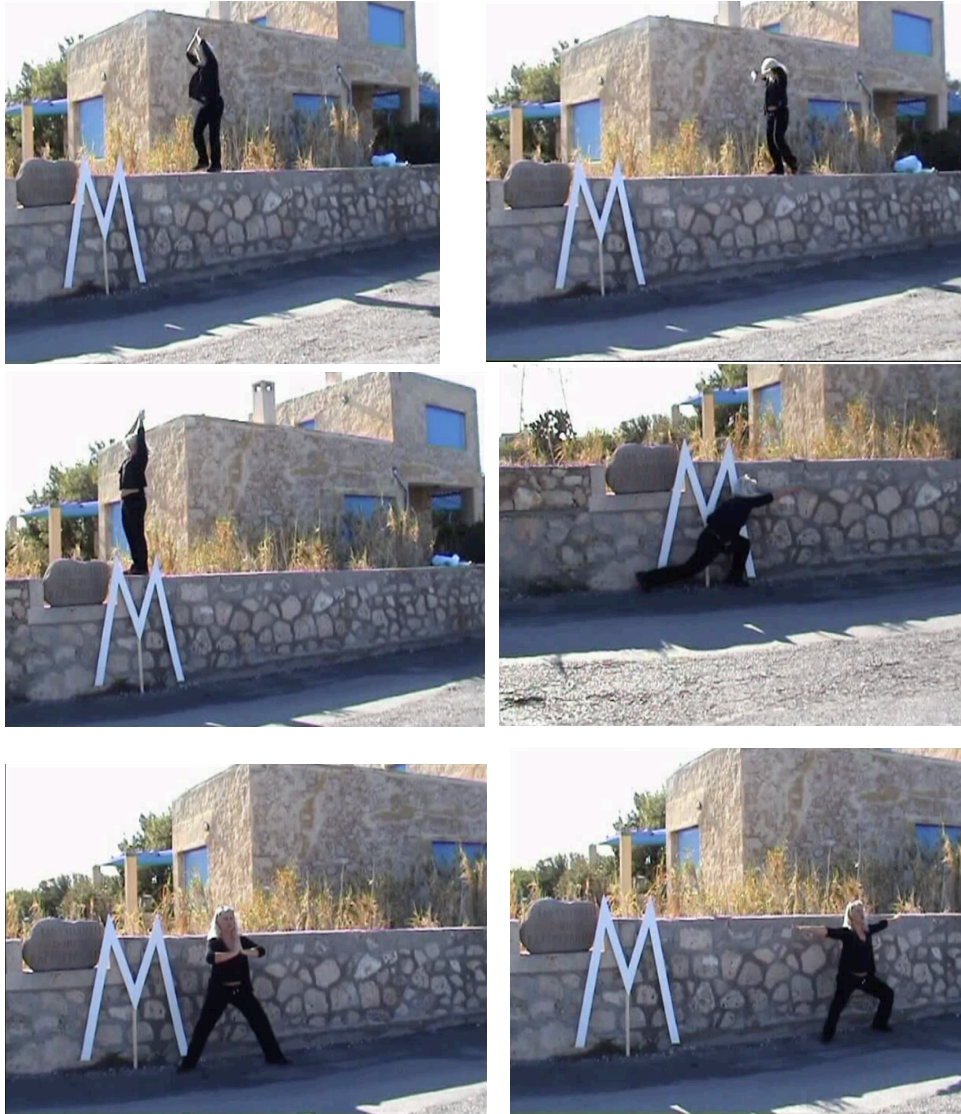


Fig 9. *the M study*, 2012, stills deriving from the video of thr live performance outside N. Kazantzakis house at Aegina island



Fig 10. *the M study*, 2012, 30 min, live performance, Aegina fishmarket



Fig 11. *the M study*, 2012, 30 min, live performance, Aegina fishmarket



Fig 12. *mother and daughter*, 2012, 10 min video, AVA gallery, UEL, London



Fig 13. *the w study*, 2012, 8 min performance, dolphin beach, Aegina island



Fig 14. *water*, 2012, 5 min video, small bay near Kapralos museum, Aegina island

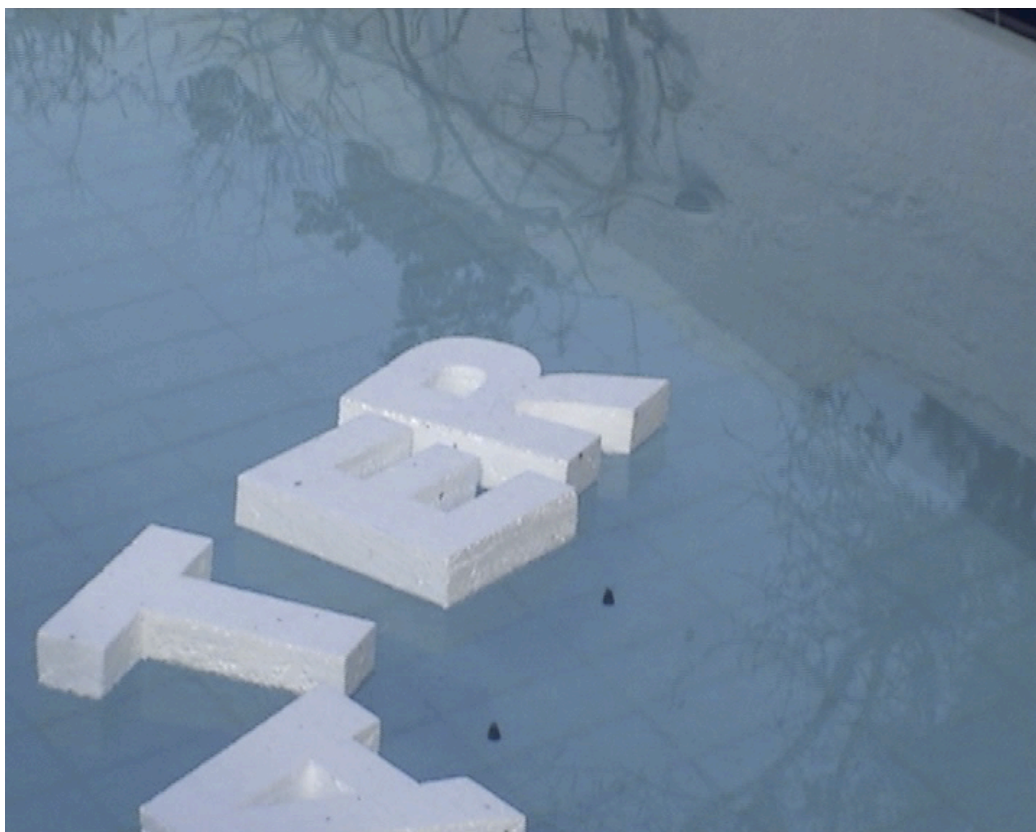


Fig 15. *water*, 2012, 5 min video, private pool, Aegina island



Fig 16. *R*, 2012, 10 min video, small bay near Kapralos museum, Aegina island



Fig 17. *pathway*, 2013, 10 min performance, St. Nektarios church, Aegina island



Fig 18. *Song of myself*, 2013, St. Nektarios church, Aegina island, Greece



Fig 19. *library awards, 2013, 10min live performance, UEL library*



Fig 20. *library awards, 2013, 10 min live performance, UEL library*



Fig 21. *fluxus M*, 2013, 5.15 min video, Artoll residency, Germany



Fig 22. *EM-ME*, 2013, 5.01 min video, Artoll residency, Germany



Fig 23. *EM-ME*, 2013, installation, Artoll residency, Germany



Fig 24. 25. θ , 2013, 2.25 min video of the live performance, Moyland Castle



Fig 26. *M*, 2013, 5.15 min video installation, AVA gallery, UEL



Fig 27. [U] the uncountable noun, 2013, 12 hours live performance, little back street of Aegina town, Greece



**Fig 28. ω , 2013, three hour live performance,
little back street of Aegina town, Greece**

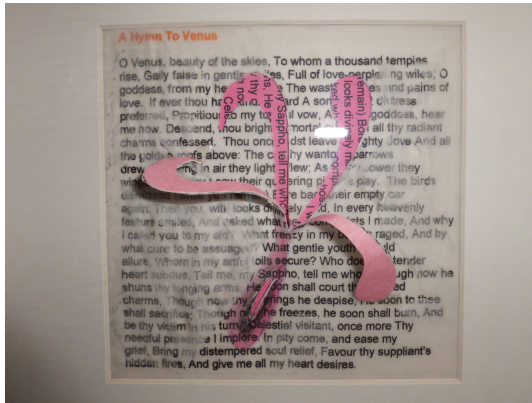


Fig 29. 30. 31. γυναίκα woman, 2013, 7 x (20 x 20) cm, studio works,
 UEL seminar room



Fig 32. *MAGDALENA*, 2013, 20 min live performance, Artina Hotel, Pylos, Greece



Fig 33. *rock*, 2013, 3.50 min live performance, private house, Pylos, Greece



Fig 34. *lemma*, 2013, 4.39 min video for 2013 student travel video contest, seminar room, UEL



Fig 35. *hearth*, 2013, 2.13 min live performance, Marathonas B beach, Aegina Island



Fig 36. *lost & found 1*, 2014, 5 min video made at my home, Aegina

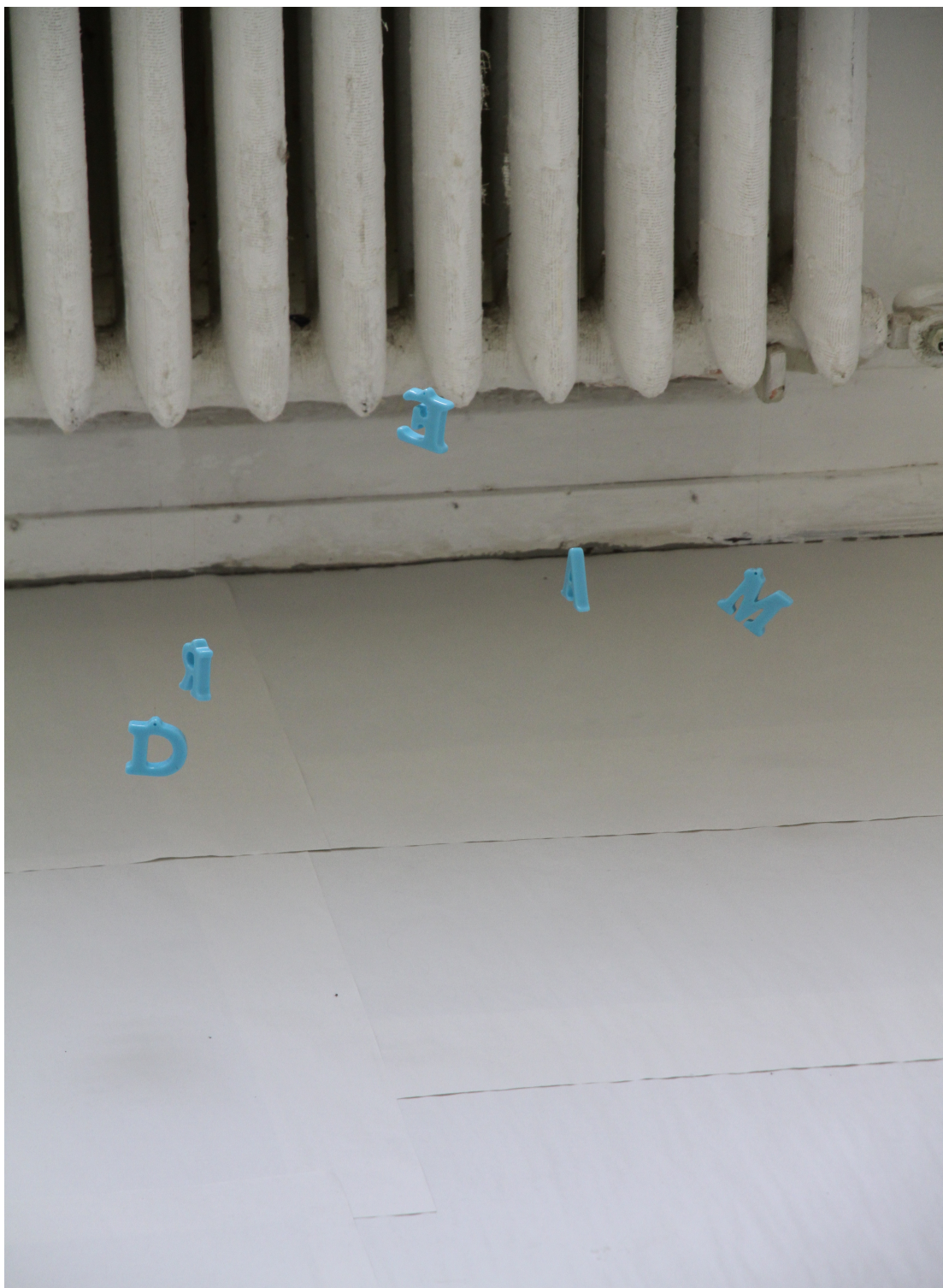


Fig 37, *dream*, 2014, installation, Artoll residency



Fig 38. asylum cell, 2014, installation, Artoll residency



Fig 39. *the taste of language*, 2014, 2.65 min video, Artoll residency

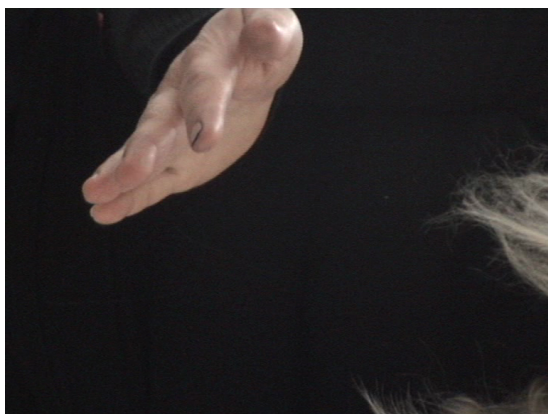


Fig 40. 41. 42. *manipulating language*, 2014, 5 min video made during Artoll residency, photographs deriving from video



Fig 43. *X, Ψ* , 2014, 6.5 min performance, Artoll residency, stills deriving from video



Fig 44..45. *Dream and dream*, 2014, Ozone Gallery Belgrade



Fig 46. *dream room*, 2014, installation, AVA gallery, UEL



Fig 47. *dream room*, 2014, installation, AVA gallery, UEL



Fig 48. *lost and found*, 2014, 1.5 min video, seminar room, UEL

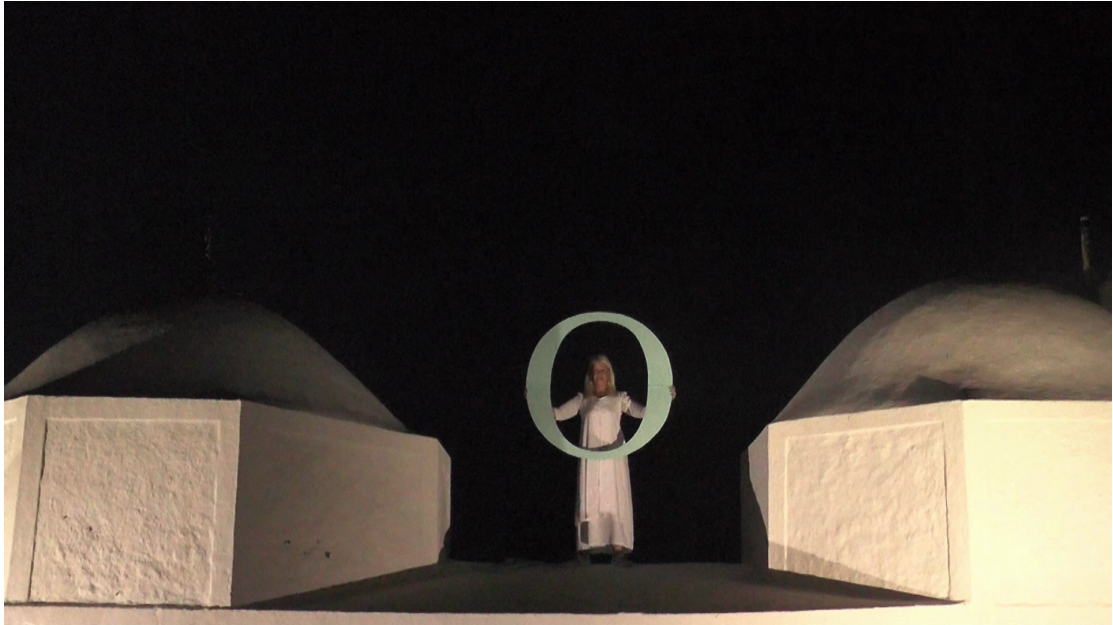


Fig 49. Ø, 2014, 2 min video, seminar room, UEL



Fig 50. (top) and Fig 51. (bottom), *mother and daughter*, 2014, Historical and Folklore museum of Aegina



Fig 52. 53. 54. *thita*, 2014, 9.34 min video, seminar room, UEL

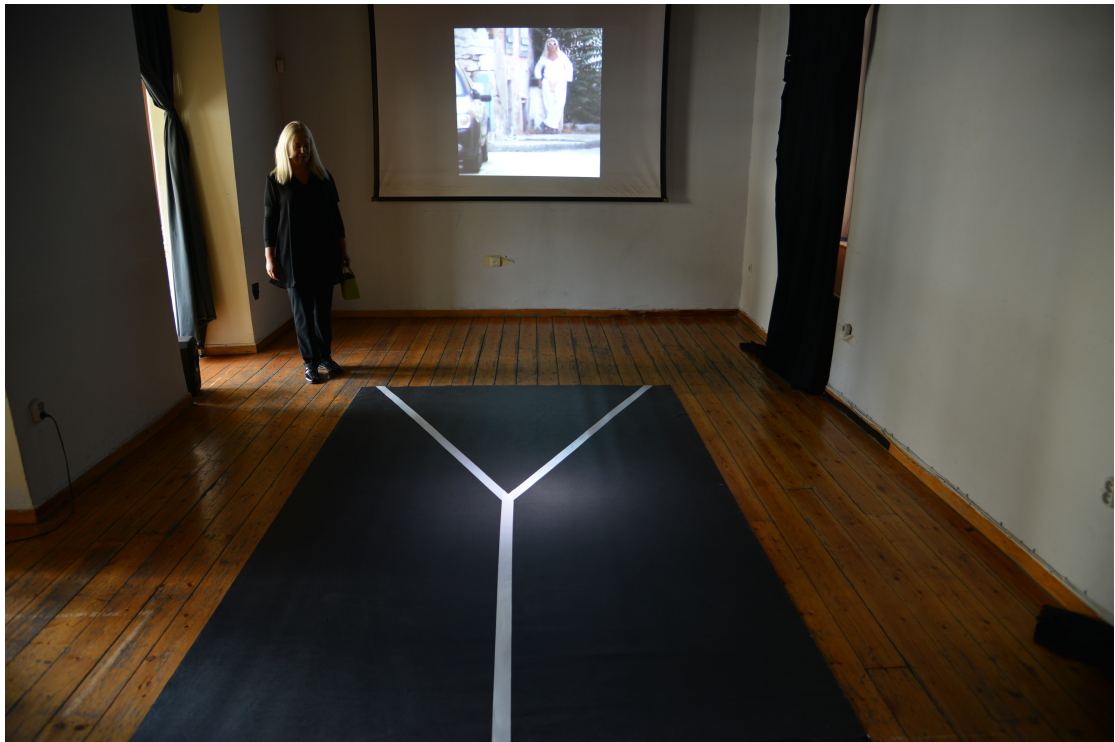


Fig 55. 56. *the Y and other letters*, 2014, 20 min live performance, Vryssaki Arts Center, Athens, Greece



Fig 57. *the Y and other letters*, 2014, solo show, 10 min looped video and 20 min live performance at Vryssaki Arts Center in Athens



Fig 58.
2014,
the Y and other letters,
20 min live performance
Vryssaki Arts Center in Athens



Fig 59.
2014,
the Y and other letters,
20 min live performance
Vryssaki Arts Center in Athens



Fig 60. (top) Fig 61. (bottom), *thita*, 2015, 9.36 min video, AVA gallery, UEL



Fig 62. Fig 63. *the taste of language*, 2015, 2.65 min video, AVA gallery, UEL



Fig 64. Fig 65. *lost and found*, 2015, 2.50 min video, AVA gallery, UEL



Fig 66. *lost and found*, 2015, 2.50 min video, AVA gallery, UEL



Fig 67. *letter anthology*, 2015, 25 min looped video, AVA gallery, (final show) UEL



Fig 68. *letter anthology*, 2015, 5 min looped video, AVA gallery, (final show) UEL



Fig 69. *letter anthology*, 2015, 5 min looped video, AVA gallery, (final show) UEL