

Theatre in the Dark

Shadow, Gloom and Blackout in Contemporary Theatre

Edited by Adam Alston and Martin Welton

Series Editors

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Under the Starry Night: Darkness, Community and Theatricality in Iannis Xenakis's *Mycenae Polytopon*¹

Marina Kotzamani

This chapter considers how darkness can inspire the exploration of community in performance, focusing on Iannis Xenakis's *Mycenae Polytopon*. This was an extraordinary land artwork that took place at night in early September 1978, forming the last of a set of multimedia installations, the *Polytope*, that the internationally acclaimed composer and architect had presented in the 1960s and 1970s in various cities worldwide, including Montreal, Cluny in France and Persepolis in Iran. Primarily set at Mycenae, the *Mycenae Polytopon* encompassed an enormous open-air area in the region of Argolis in Greece and spanned one hundred square kilometres (Papaioannou 1979: 215). The citadel of Mycenae, the neighbouring archaeological sites of Argos and Tiryns, as well as the planes and mountains of Argolis, all became the venue for a multimedia performance connecting ancient Greece to the technological era. The *Mycenae Polytopon* combined live performance with an impressive array of light and sound elements emerging from eighteen sources in the space, including anti-aircraft searchlights, film screens, electric lanterns, lighted pyres and fire, recitations in ancient and modern Greek, choral singing, percussion, orchestral performance, sirens, goat bells and computer-generated music (Lacouture 1981: 291). The programme included performances of some of Xenakis's best-known works, including *Psappha*, *Persephassa* and the *Oresteia* (in the 1967 uniquely choral version), as well as the premiere of *Mycenae Alpha*,

which was composed by using a computer that employed drawing as input, as opposed to musical notation (Touloumi 2012: 117–18; Levy 2012; Xenakis 1987).

Apart from professional performers, the event relied on the significant contribution of numerous amateurs in its preparatory phase, as well as in performance. These came from Argos and the villages neighbouring Mycenae, and included choir singers, children with handheld lanterns and assistants who put customized bells and lights on performing goats. Soldiers were also employed for numerous tasks, from carrying pyres in procession to operating the searchlights. Wide grass-roots participation was combined with support from the second post-junta government of Constantinos Karamanlis, and the event was sponsored by an impressive array of state institutions, including the Ministries of Tourism, Defense and Culture, and the National Theatre (Xenakis 1978: 2). The *Mycenae Polytopon* was performed on four consecutive nights (2–5 September 1978) before a mass audience totalling, according to Xenakis, about 30,000 people consisting of locals, Athenians, tourists, state officials and professional critics (Parlas 1978: 8).

As Xenakis has explained, his employment of multimedia forms part of a unified conception of art, integrating the senses of hearing and vision through technology (Xenakis 2006: 197–202; see also Harley 1998; Renault d'Allonnes 1975; Sterken 2002, 2007; Fayers 2011). Employing film as a model, Xenakis aspires to design in space, immaterially, with light. Aural properties such as rhythm, density and duration become important to this proto-virtual form, in which architecture is approached as an art of time rather than as an art of space. Paying particular attention to the placement of sound in space, the artist highlights the material properties of sound. On this conception, sound segments can define space in the same way as Euclidean geometry, allowing for a concrete, *visual* perception of sound. At the same time, this approach has a strong performative character. Indeed, the mobility of light and sound in the *Polytope* works can be regarded as a form of performance, dramatizing the juxtaposition between the material and the immaterial, or presence and absence, in what Xenakis referred to as

'visual theatrics' (Xenakis 1985: 7). This is what leads me to argue that darkness, whether in a metaphorical or a literal sense, is important to this composite, visual and aural form of art, stimulating audiences to explore transcendental forms of perception. Darkness supplies an ideal context for exploring what one can only 'see' with the mind's eye, the unknown, or even the ineffable.

I will be approaching the *Mycenae Polytopton* as an event, rather than as a spectacle or a show, integrally related to its happening in the dark, the space in which it was set, as well as the people who participated in it (both performers and audiences). Particular attention will be paid to the work's potential to engage subtly 'synaesthetic' perceptual experiences in the audience through its employment of light and sound in elliptical or proto-virtual ways. Ultimately, I argue that the *Mycenae Polytopton* is a work about darkness and about ourselves, posing self-reflexive questions about how we perceive that have epistemological, aesthetic, but also social and political underpinnings relating to community. Dwelling on the work's rich liminality, I present the *Mycenae Polytopton*

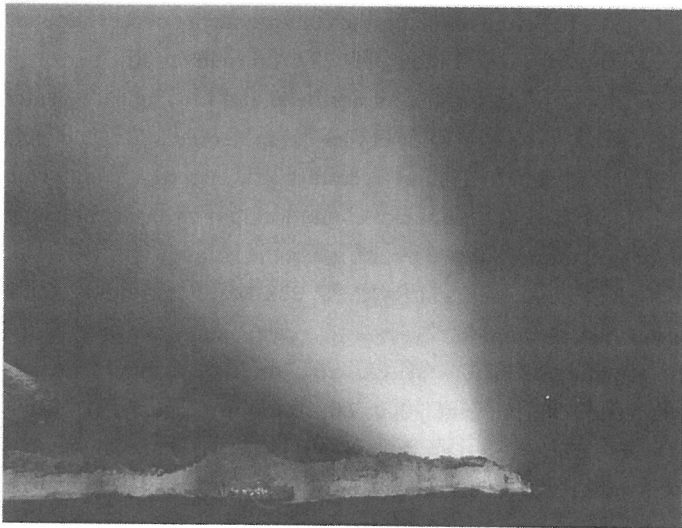


Figure 9.1 Iannis Xenakis, *Mycenae Polytopton*, 1978. Photograph by Babis Konstantatos, courtesy of Eugenia Alexaki Archive.

as a popular work of communicative import, engaging collective historical knowledge and fostering sharing between participants.

Xenakis and darkness

Research on this singular work is still at the initial phases and we lack a comprehensive evaluation of its reception. My discussion draws on unexplored reception material on the *Mycenae Polytoxon*, as well as on interviews I conducted with project participants. Moreover, I make use of Xenakis's own writings and draw on my own experiences of having seen the performance as an adolescent. Reflecting on it gives me a chance to revisit a sense of wonder that I felt back then. Being able to draw on my memory is important, as the enormous scale of the performance, the multiple transmission sources used and the constant mobility of light and sound made the event unrecordable in any straightforwardly descriptive way, even in film.

Scholarly research that the *Mycenae Polytoxon* has attracted recently contextualizes the event in relation to cultural life in Greece following the fall of the junta of 1967 (Touloumi 2012). Alternatively, the performance has been placed in the context of aesthetic and ideological research on Xenakis's work (see Levy 2012; Fayers 2011; Sterken 2002, 2007; Harley 2002). Drawing on first-hand accounts, the *Mycenae Polytoxon* has been characterized as a popular celebration, but without showing how popular elements are shaped by and affect the nature of the performance itself (Kanach 2006: 323; Harley 1998: 62). More commonly, the work is approached as a modernist example of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total theatre – with qualifiers – synthesizing multiple arts and media (see Alexaki 2015: 50; Alexaki 2009: 60; Touloumi 2012: 107, 120, 123, 125; Fayers 2011: 5; Sterken 2002: 269). However, none of the existing accounts make use, in an integral way, of reception material, although most make references to the perceiver, inviting consideration of the conditions under which one perceives.

The most helpful material in interpreting the performance comes from art rather than scholarship. This is a documentary by the acclaimed Greek filmmaker Costas Ferris, who followed Xenakis and his team around in situ for about a week before the opening (Ferris 1978). Focusing on an illuminating interview with Xenakis, the film makes a strong case that the Mycenae *Polytopon* should be viewed not as an abstract spectacle of light and sound, but as a popular ceremony inspired by the site's history. Xenakis adopts a popular and at the same time a performative approach to history. The artist appeals to and engages the senses rather than the understanding, as stimulated by the identity of the archaeological site. This reflects the cultures of the people who have been using the space since antiquity. Historical knowledge becomes associated with memory, and intimately relates to how the collective past is perceived and remembered in the present, through performance. Indeed, Xenakis refers to the *Polytopon* in Ferris's film as a memorial service in honour of the Mycenaean civilization that thrived at Argolis. Evidently, this sense-based, ceremonial approach to history has a strong artistic quality. Xenakis ends his note in the *Polytopon* programme on the optimistic remark that the performance will interweave art and history (Xenakis 1978: 11). The project's focus on perception and on memory also implies that Xenakis departs drastically from traditional readings of history as a grand narrative. His own view of history is selective and fragmentary rather than monolithic, inviting diversity and polyphony (Kotzamani 2016: 164–5; Levy 2012: 183–4).²

Ferris's documentary highlights the *Mycenae Polytopon* as an anthropocentric rather than as an abstract work, supporting research approaching Xenakis as a socially conscious artist (Fayers 2011; Solomos 2001). The goal of relating Greeks to their history through ceremony at the ancient site, and the central concern to include volunteers in the project, are all anthropocentric features, encouraging the building of relations between people, alongside a community spirit. These goals also invite attention to initiation or process, which forms an integral part of the work. Finally, the film highlights the importance

of space as one of the *Mycenae Polytopon*'s major structural elements. Space is also approached in anthropocentric terms as a cultural locus in which even the appreciation of the natural landscape is necessarily mediated through history. Xenakis's fragmentary conception of history, as well as his emphasis on the role of the body and of ceremony in making participants aware of its importance, is reflected, as I show, in the aesthetics of the performance. Clearly, within the framework I have outlined, light and sound do not define the performance; rather, they are means of achieving its anthropocentric goals.

Although Ferris's documentary is extremely useful in supplying major analytical tools, it leaves out elements that are also going to be relevant to my interpretation. A remarkable feature of the performance was the participation of Xenakis in an all-inclusive role as director/performer and audience member, orchestrating 'on stage' communities in the making. The film also does not touch on the role of the audience in the *Mycenae Polytopon*. Moreover, it supplies no information on the functions of darkness in contextualizing this ambitious work, to which I now turn in what remains of this section.

Although Xenakis does not explain in the film why he chose to set the *Mycenae Polytopon* in the dark, he does make relevant remarks in the production's programme. On a trip to Mycenae as a student, he saw in the ruins of the citadel both the death of a civilization and potential for future creation (Xenakis 1978: 10–11). In either case, whether pointing to past or future cultures, the ruins point to darkness as something formless or non-apparent. In this sense the Mycenaean ruins inspire wonder and designate the starting point of an exploration into the unknown. Their incomplete character evokes Xenakis's fragmentary view of history outlined earlier, which is as relevant to the past as to the present. A ruin belongs to the world of the living, highlighting the present as a major reference point in any historical exploration. Moreover, a ruin underscores that the relics we see in the present moment are integrally related to darkness or what we do not see, whether in our past or in our future. In this respect a ruin is emblematic of liminality, stimulating transcendental perception

of the unknown, and transformation. Set in this context, a historical exploration of culture has a strong existential and self-referential quality, as the present is always its point of departure. Besides historical inquiry, a ruin's incompleteness also readily evokes theatre through its focus on the present and on acting, so as to achieve completion. This form of theatre, which partly unfolds in the mind's eye, can nevertheless be shaped into a social art, since the past is part of our collective heritage. Indeed, as I show later, the interplay between here and beyond in the *Mycenae Polytopon* does have theatrical potential.

Richly evocative of darkness, history and theatre, the archaeological ruins might well have inspired Xenakis's theatrical exploration in a nocturnal setting at Mycenae. The artist was aware of the potential of employing darkness as an aesthetic medium in performance: as visual theatrics, the *Polytope* aimed at achieving transcendence. Their uncanny materiality was also highlighted by the name Xenakis had initially been using for this art form: 'void sculpture' or 'audiovisual event for the void' (Touloumi 2012: 105–6, endnote 5). In a context discussing his *Diatope*, a performance work strongly related to the *Polytope*, Xenakis described how he 'wanted to deal with the abysses that surround us and among which we live. The most formidable are those of our destiny, of life and death, visible and invisible universes. The signs that convey these abysses to us are also made of the lights and sounds that provoke the two principal senses that we possess' (Xenakis, Brown and Rahn 1987: 32). Just like ruins then, lights and sounds function as signs, indexing darkness and inviting liminality and transformation. Indeed, reversing the situation in conventional theatre, I show that in the *Mycenae Polytopon*, darkness, as opposed to light, is what the audience is exposed to. Vision does not serve to objectify a focal point. Rather, combined with other senses such as hearing or touch, vision becomes a tool of penetrating into or exploring the unknown.

Vision in this context outlines a form of theatre in the dark where synaesthesia, affect and liminality are central. As I explained earlier, Xenakis's unified conception of sight and hearing and the interplay between presence and absence invite exploration in the dark. Reflecting

on the *Polytope* performances in retrospect, four years after the Mycenae work, Xenakis mentioned that his primary inspiration for these works came from nature's 'luminous phenomena', such as lightning, volcanoes or the clouds, as opposed to 'play with light', such as that which occurs in film or theatre. He elucidates what he means by this theatre of nature, referring in affective terms to 'the vertigo which creates the abyss of a starry night when diving our head in it, forgetting the earth where our feet rest' (Xenakis 2006: 292). The luminous phenomenon of a starry night might focus our attention on qualities associated with both sight and hearing, such as forms, movements, intensities and expanses. The perception of functions like 'luminous music for the eyes' generate poignant synaesthetic experiences where what we see and what we hear form part of a unitary conception (*ibid.*). Perception then occurs in a liminal context, pointing towards transcendence or transformation from one state, where we sense the material world, into another, where we appreciate it as an enigma and are confronted by what may emerge from the unknown. Indeed, Xenakis has referred to transformation as a central aim of his work. 'The power of music', he writes, 'is such that it transports you from one state to another. Like alcohol. Like love. If I wanted to learn how to compose music, maybe it was to acquire this power. The power of Dionysus' (Xenakis, Brown and Rahn 1987: 18).

In conclusion, Mycenae presented an ideal venue for Xenakis to set a transcendental performance. Functioning in a manner similar to ruins, light and sound highlighted ellipsis, pointing beyond themselves for completion. The performance at night at Mycenae unveiled the great theatrical potential of the ruins by making the audience palpably aware of fragments in their knowledge, whether of history, of nature or of the self, and stimulating transcendental and synaesthetic perception. The *Mycenae Polytopon* manifested a form of theatre in which acting, liminality and transformation have a central place, along with a questioning attitude on the part of participants, who, coming together into communities, assume, as I show later, a dynamic role in performance.

Darkness, questioning and transcendence

The *Mycenae Polytopeon* clearly exemplifies the composer's use of light and sound as means of exploring darkness. Xenakis's apparatus inspired curiosity about what was 'out there', plunging audiences into the unknown and encouraging them to explore it. The setting of the performance in the open air confronted audiences with the immensity of the dark space as an abyss in which even the glaring of searchlights and the blaring of loudspeakers appeared feeble. Contrary to what some researchers have concluded, the performance was not overloaded with effects (see Touloumi 2012: 108; Sterken 2002: 269); rather, it had the minimalist, elliptical quality of ruins, in which effects served as signals or incomplete fragments, offsetting darkness and stimulating transcendental perception beyond what could be seen or heard. The employment of a great number of sources of light and sound and especially the constant mobility of effects absolutely precluded focusing on the effects themselves. At times the light of the projectors had a hazy quality, blending into the night, so that it was not possible to define the contours of light and darkness, as when watching a constellation. This created effects of displacement, annihilating the material world as perceived by the senses and confronting audiences with the unknown and other worlds that might emerge out of it. The hazy rays were projected up in the sky, giving a sense of 'material space' up above, or they would dart below the space where audiences were seated, creating the disorientating impression of a sky fallen on the earth. Indeed, Xenakis has mentioned that he had the ambition with the *Polytope* to bring down the stars and make them move (Matossian 2005).

Essential to achieving transcendence was the stimulating of a questioning mood among audiences about the space where the performance was set. Light and sound made the audience aware of the incomplete character of the ruins, inspiring curiosity about how these figured in compositions in the past or about how they might form part of novel syntheses. At times inquisitive eyes would follow the travelling

rays of the searchlights piercing darkness like questions addressed to the abyss, soon to be devoured by the abyss. No matter how far the rays would reach, they were still miniscule in relation to the vastness of the dark open-air space, evoking rich associations with both the potential and the limitations of questioning or finding answers. Watching the performance at night the audience could not pick out the exact location of the archaeological site, its shape or its relation to its surroundings. At best, the citadel and the surrounding mountains would figure as dark volumes.³ Submerged in darkness, the Mycenae space and its surroundings emerged as an enigma, especially as the use of light allowed audiences to appreciate different ways of posing questions. For example, tiny luminous segments would appear on the looming surface of the citadel, as if opening miniscule windows from which to survey the haunting presence-absence of these ruins, both in a metaphorical and in a literal sense. Ferris's camera has spotted travelling rays, which would occasionally travel on the citadel's wall, exposing in narrow strips of light the ordering of its cyclopean stones. The camera leads the viewer to appreciate structure in the most luminous segment, a more blurry version of it in the strip's shadows, and finally nothing at all as the light would move out of the segment, leaving lasting impressions of the juxtaposing of order and chaos, and of the Mycenaean ruins' dynamism. The focus on the interplay between the appearance and disappearance of historical traces in the ruins evoked a kind of liminal encounter with the past for audiences, drawing attention to their being betwixt and between an elusive history and the present. The performance's exploratory character was also taken up by sound. Most of the sound apparatus had been placed in the area directly in front of the citadel and in the valley below the space where the audience was placed, which is a natural resonator (see map in Alexaki 2015: 52). The acclaimed musician Sylvio Gualda has written that the performance of *Psappha*, a percussion piece, at Mycenae led him to realize that the work should end in a questioning rather than a concluding tone. 'Sound', he has noted, 'should evoke silence and not abolish it. ... The rhythmic violence and rigor should lead us, through retentive control,

to infinity. The final bang, so unexpected, should arrive like a question mark, not like a period' (Gualda 2010: 164). As performed in the valley, *Psappha* and *Persephassa*, another percussion work incorporating silences, would resonate with primordial energy during stasis, giving the impression that the earth responded to the dynamic beating of the drums as invocations. Indeed, the performance's questioning attitude fostered a sense of communication with the space and its history. The elliptical quality of luminous and auditory signs in the dark stimulated the audiences' cultural and collective knowledge, encouraging them to form transcendental visions of communities.

A central highlight of the performance was the recitations by Sakkas and Tournaki, which readily evoked cultures past and present. Indeed, Sakkas mentions that he recited ancient Greek in Linear B, which Xenakis had taught him how to pronounce. The composer had great concern for the accuracy of the pronunciation and had incorporated into his version the latest results of linguistic research (Sakkas 2010:

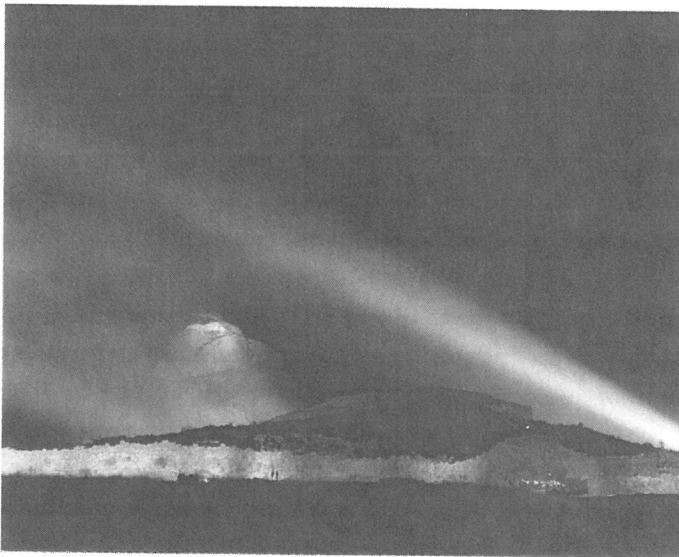


Figure 9.2 Iannis Xenakis, *Mycenae Polytopon*, 1978. Photograph by Babis Konstantatos, courtesy of Eugenia Alexaki Archive.

319–20). On a relevant note, insofar as language is a marker of communication and community, Tournaki and choir members have remarked on Xenakis's preference for uncultivated voices, which allowed audiences to appreciate the recitations as speech (see Tournaki 2015; Argyropoulou 2015; see also Christine Prost qtd. in Harley 1998: 62; Fajond 1981: 286–7). Still, they had a powerful hieratic quality, which distanced the text from the individual speakers, alluding with more immediacy to the communities using the languages heard.

The voices of Sakkas and Tournaki gave a powerful visual impression of two solid columns of sound slowly ascending up from the dark valley and exuding terrestrial energy. It was as if they were generated from the world of the dead, evoking rich sensual experiences of how the textual fragments related to their spatial context, stimulating not only sight and hearing, but also touch. The recitations engendered synaesthetic perception, allowing audiences to apprehend historical knowledge in transcendental ways and highlighting a community's metaphysical core. At the same time, the voices of the actors gave life and a presence to these communities in an embodied and hence physical way, while also effectively theatricalizing the natural qualities of the landscape. I remember comparing the virtual verticality of the sound columns to the volume of Mount Zara, across the valley; lit from below with searchlights, the mountain figured as a luminous curvy surface, whose grainy texture matched the dry, unadorned character of the recitations. I had a sense of being able to feel out the mountain, as well as the voices reciting. I could clearly differentiate between the effects of Sakkas's and Tournaki's voices on the landscape of dark outlines, or on the body of the night itself. Sakkas's baritone voice had a velvety texture, shrouding, caressing or enveloping darkness. Although at a higher register, Tournaki was reciting at a low key as well, but the female voice was distinctly harsh. With its monotonous rhythm, it appeared to hammer into darkness or into the rough surfaces of the stony citadel and landscape. Still, the fragmentary and immaterial quality of what was perceived precluded identification of voices, languages and communities with the

surroundings in a deterministic or monolithic way; instead, the work evoked multiple cultures which had been at Mycenae, conflating the senses, nature and civilization, past and present, along with the people and the space (see also Levy 2012: 183–4). What remained of past glories was a set of ruins in the present, nodding towards tragedy and fostering, in spite of and because of it, the coming together of people in performance.

A performance in the making

Beside transcendence, the *Mycenae Polytopon* also focused, in a concrete way, on the live moment of performance, drawing attention to the process of its becoming and forging bonds between Xenakis, the performers and audiences. Sitting in the last row of a wooden platform constructed in situ for the audience, Xenakis directed the entire work through a walkie-talkie, following a plan in front of him outlining the entire design of light, movement and sound. He took on the functions of author-composer, director, as well as performer, evoking the strong traditions of popular theatre in the past, but also experimental forms of contemporary theatre. Audiences sitting close to him on the platform were able to hear and see him (see Gill 1981: 297–8; Lacouture 1981: 281; Christidis 1978: 4). They would probably see him dimly, from the indirect illumination that the light source he was using to read the map would cast on his face and body. His indistinct presence allowed him to be considered not only as part of the event, but also as part of the audience, pointing towards, as I show later, a unitary conception of performers and audiences, where the audience formed part of the event. Regarding his role as director-performer, the critic of the *Financial Times* observed that on one or two occasions there were brief interruptions in the work, as Xenakis, distracted from his coordinating role, would get lost in contemplation of the stars (Gill 1981: 298). Besides commenting on directing as performance, the remark also

highlights the fallible, anthropocentric nature of the work. Indeed, the reviewer marvels at how 'pieces of the gigantic puzzle' came together perfectly, although there was only one rehearsal.

The reference to the *Polytopon* as a puzzle has affinities to Xenakis's reference to it as a stitched together rhapsody, drawing attention not only to its fragmentary structure and to fallibility, but also to the performative, non-representational character of the spectacle. Tournaki was surprised when Xenakis instructed her, during her performance, to raise her voice a quarter of a note up, as if it were an instrument (Tournaki 2015). Indeed, Xenakis's communication with performers during the work would go well beyond cueing. As reported by Minas Christidis – a theatre critic, at that time, of the major Greek daily *Kathimerini* – the composer would give instructions to the children drawing Mycenaean designs on the mountain ridges to walk in close formation and to turn on the lights after completing the movement, or he would praise the soldiers' procession with lighted pyres and tell them to mark the movements for the following day's performance (Christidis 1978: 4). In integral ways, then, the work came together in performance before an audience each night. Indeed, a local journalist who saw all four performances of the *Mycenae Polytopon* remarked on noticeable differences between them in an interview with Xenakis (Pitsakis 1978: 2). The composer responded that the Mycenae landscape was a perpetual source of inspiration for him, drawing attention to the work as an event of a unique, non-representational character, but also to the process of performance making.

The *Mycenae Polytopon*'s unfinished, performative quality points towards a contemporary conception of a director as a coordinator of performers, rather than as the omniscient, autocratic figure of modernism, aiming at total theatre and ideal representations. Admittedly, performers had no sense of what the entire work was like, had a partial view of other performers and depended entirely on Xenakis's instructions as to when and even how to perform. Still, this did not mean that they had the passive role of followers. Indeed, Christidis presents the *Mycenae Polytopon* almost as a collective work,

remarking that collaboration between Xenakis and the performers crucially depended on the building of trust between them, not least to help the performers explore how to be in the space (Christidis 1978: 4). Although it would be an exaggeration to term the *Polytopon* a collective work, volunteers, as is also corroborated by the local press, had a major role in making the performance happen, particularly at the preparatory phases, which focused on the performers' developing a relationship to the space and to each other (Dorovinis 1978a; 'O Xenakis stin pole mas' 1978). Perhaps the preparatory work functioned as a form of initiation, which was vital to the strong community spirit in performance and to the collective commemoration of Greek history that Xenakis aspired to, with its ritualist and transcendent elements. Fajond, a member of the mixed choirs of the University of Provence, emphasizes a sense of 'sacred ancient terror' that the space inspired in him (Fajond 1981: 287). Moreover, he mentions that everybody in his group felt as performers a 'heavy responsibility' before an audience of epic dimensions. Such a heightened sense of duty on the part of the performers evokes theatre as a vocation, rather than as a profession.

Argyropoulou, a member of the volunteer Argos Lyceum Club of Greek Women choir, remembers that her group had to walk a long way, carrying torch lights in the dusk so as to be able to see and navigate their way to their appointed space in performance. Standing in front of the citadel, on a narrow strip of land before a ravine, they could not help but 'respect' the space and felt extremely alert and concentrated during the performance. In retrospect, about forty years later, Argyropoulou refers to her volunteer participation as 'an act of love' (Argyropoulou 2015), and Tournaki remembers it in heightened terms, appropriate to its ceremonial character, 'as a gift which life gave me' (Tournaki 2015). Still, Xenakis thought that the work might have been more poignant had his production team and volunteers had the time to get to know each other better (Parlas 1978: 8). Indeed, the artist cared for participants beyond the confines of the work. He gave each of the members of the female chorus of volunteers a guide book to the archaeological sites at Argolis, as well as a record of his own work,

presenting them with a physical trace of their bonding and encouraging them to continue the exploration of space that the *Mycenae Polytopon* initiated (Argyropoulou 2015).

Apparently, then, the most remarkable aspect of the *Mycenae Polytopon* for participants was the experience of participation itself, stretching beyond the performance to its preparation and its lasting impression in memory. Clearly, if the *Mycenae Polytopon* depends on or is even defined by bonding and relations of trust between participants, this is a work about the coming together of a community rather than a spectacle of light and sound. Indeed, a strong sense of community is what gives any memorial service conviction. In the absence of this bonding, Xenakis's total design of the memorial service would have appeared arbitrary. The *Mycenae Polytopon* was an experiment in the coming together of a community, employing the past as its connecting matter.

Besides Xenakis's presence as performer-director, setting the performance in the dark was also vital to its engendering a sense of community. Since audiences, for the most part, were not able to see the people singing or holding lights, it became evident that what holds a community together is not synchronized movements or actions, but the sharing of culture, uniquely associated with a particular space. Consider, for example, the children's composing of Mycenaean designs on the mountains using handheld electric lanterns. Through their performance, museum artefacts became part of living culture and were reconnected in the contemporary period to the concerted human effort which went into making them. The composition also integrally connected the artefacts to the Mycenaean space, as their designs had been traced in the ground by volunteers. In performance, children had been instructed to walk on these ground marks and to turn the torchlights on once they had formed the design (Xyndaropoulou 2015). Knowledge of performance logistics, however, is irrelevant to appreciating the poignancy of these light-based compositions. What gave them expressive power was their communal embodiment of the Mycenaean designs, signalling through lighting the existence of past communities and allowing me to appreciate the performers as a

community of our own time. The central point of reference holding this contemporary community together was the past.

Audiences

Another important aspect of the *Mycenae Polytopon* was the engagement of the audience, which attracted great attention (see, for example, Fajond 1981: 287, 289; Christidis 1978: 4; Parlas 1978: 8; Psychramis 1980; Dorovinis 1978a; 'Poikiles skepseis kai ektimiseis' 1978; 'To Polytopo tou Yanni Xenaki stis Mykenes. Anepanalepte giorte fotos kai kinesis' 1978). The engagement of audiences had similar qualities to that of the performers, as it contributed to the ceremonial, ritual quality of the work which 'was not a production in the traditional sense', but aspired to mark life rather than theatre (Christidis 1978: 4; see also Fajond 1981: 289). In this respect, achieving audience participation was important to the success of the work. As already discussed, audiences had an active role in relating the cultural fragments presented in performance to past communities. Also, audiences sitting on the platform would not only witness the bonding between Xenakis and the performers, but would also empathize with it, as the composer was also a fellow audience member. Indeed, the *Mycenae Polytopon* inspired great curiosity not only about past cultures or the making of the performance, but also about other audience members, who became in this sense performers, or part of the work. Darkness had a key role to play in incorporating audiences into the work, as it enveloped performers, audiences and the Mycenae landscape in a unitary, liminal space. As Christidis suggests, the audience 'were present and they participated, digested into the night' (1978: 4). In the absence of a point outside, as in traditional theatre, from which to look out into, audiences had freedom to choose their viewpoints, which might be directed not only towards the luminous and auditory signs, the night and the space, but also towards other audience members. The difficulty of picking them out in the dark created fertile ground for questioning: Who is there? What does she

see? How does what she sees relate to what I see? Beyond epistemology, this curiosity, which privileged self-reflective perception, had great potential to stimulate communal bonding.

Incorporating audiences into the performance was one of the distinctive marks of the *Mycenae Polytopton*. Its success, however, should not be entirely attributed to darkness, but also to the audience's involvement with the *Mycenae Polytopton* beyond the contours of the performance. In addition to their cultural knowledge about Mycenae, or Xenakis, many audience members, just like the volunteer performers, had had the experience of participating in the preparation of the work, or had friends and relatives who had participated on a scale from local to national state involvement. Others had heard or read about this effort. Audience members, then, had already developed a charged, emotive relation to the performance well before it began, which fostered a participatory spirit. This was obvious even to a foreign critic who presented the *Polytopton* as a popular work, focusing on audiences and connecting the preparatory phase to the performance: 'The Polytopton was a national project and a project of the entire region [around Mycenae] ... an immense crowd of people would go up the plane, a rural crowd ... extremely engaged from the collective work which had happened during the preparation of the performance. Alert in their places, they waited to see what they had worked for' ('Yiannis Xenakis: to oikoumeniko orama tou kosmou' 1978). Just like the performers, although at a smaller scale, audiences had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the space, in situ, in the long walk they took at dusk from the parking to the ridge across from Mount Zara and the citadel, where they would choose where to stand or sit. Psychramis's film of the *Mycenae Polytopton* almost presents this activity as a ritual; the long line of cars and of people slowly moving on the tree-lined road leading to the archaeological space looks like a procession. The film also shows audiences on the ridge, exploring where to sit. Dusk makes the rays of the sun visible, as they become ever darker, enveloping the people in a haze and almost visibly uniting them (Psychramis 1980).

Audiences as performers would also engage in more dynamic actions. Choir member Robert Fajond observed that 'an immense crowd ... essentially a popular audience' violated the fencing of the archaeological site and sat at one of the major centres of the action, the valley (Fajond 1981: 289). In this way they became performers, theatricalizing their appropriation of Mycenae and responding to Xenakis's aspirations to bond local people to the space. This form of appropriation is qualitatively similar to the assisting of the volunteers in the preparation of the work. Both activities have elements of initiation and allow for appreciation of the *Mycenae Polytopton* as popular work.

On a relevant note, what is also striking in the work's reception are the frequent references to affect, highlighting, in yet another way, the ritualistic quality of the *Mycenae Polytopton*, as well as the open-endedness of its interpretation. For example, the critic of the *Monde* notes that the performance evoked archetypal emotions of 'Dionysian disorder'; as a director of the work, Xenakis was, in ritualist terms, 'a master of a great ceremony ... a gigantic hymn to the dark forces of Mycenaean Greece' (Lacouture 1981: 292). In a similar spirit, Michel Tabachnik, the conductor of the mixed choirs of the University of Provence at the performance, has noted that Xenakis's work links the audience to 'eternal emotions or forces', which have affinities to the heightened emotions of tragedy (Tabachnik 2010: 350–1; see also citation in 'Yiannis Xenakis: To oikoumeniko orama tou kosmou' 1978). His music has the potential to sublimate or transform existence. A letter to a newspaper by a reader who had been in the audience also highlights the production's rich affective quality, as well as its potential for sharing and self-reflective perception. The writer mentions that the raggedness of the landscape combined with the intensity of light and sound created a sense of awe in him. Analysing its affect, he reasons that it was not manipulative, as it was not forced on him by the work, which had an open-ended quality. What prompted the self-analysis was a comment he had heard during the performance by another audience member, who functioned as a performer in exclaiming, 'This is fascism!'

Only fascism aims at impressing and at inspiring fear' ('Poikiles skepseis kai ektimeseis' 1978).

Clearly, audience engagement in the *Mycenae Polytopton* unveiled in yet another way the great communicative import of this work. Xenakis's assumption of the dual role of director-performer and audience member was emblematic of a performance where darkness eliminated boundaries between spectating and acting. The night invited the fleshing out of the audience's roles in new ways, allowing for great freedom in how they could act. Whether dynamically occupying space, watching other audiences or being overcome by affect, audiences, just like the performers, became part of a theatricalized space for acting. This conception supported the performance's emphasis on the building of community spirit. Unifying the space for acting and the space for spectating under the night sky transparently revealed, in a literal and metaphysical sense, that there is no outside point of observation; darkness obliterated distinctions between theatre and life.

Conclusion

To sum up, the *Mycenae Polytopton* constituted an event rather than an art product, shifting focus away from what a work means, or mimesis, to the perceiver and to sign usage, highlighting different ways of communicating and of coming together. Apart from putting into play multiple perceptions or perspectives, it was also insistently self-reflexive. Above all, Xenakis's work emphasized an approach to theatre as presence/present, an unmediated experience of the real and of sharing. Parting ways with representation, this form of theatre aims at making participants aware, through performance, of what is 'out there' at the present moment of perception. Alertness to space as well as to partners, whether performers or audiences, is essential to this conception of performance.

Darkness was essential to creating a theatricalized context in which Xenakis's work could be appreciated as an event, linking together

the people and the space. In this context different ways of coming together into a community could be explored through theatre, from the community of participating volunteers to audiences, linking themselves to cultures of the past, to each other, as well as to Xenakis and the performers. All present at the *Mycenae Polytopon* fleshed out the event as it unfolded. Light and sound were their guiding signs, pointing away from spectacle to the night and what it could generate.

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