

EDN

European
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ATELIER

Processes of Healing: Becoming Well Again

Report by Monica Gillette



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The EDN Atelier '**Processes of Healing: Becoming Well Again**', hosted by [Dance Gate Lefkosia](#) in collaboration with [Dance House Lefkosia](#) and leading up to the [On Bodies Dance and Performance Festival](#) took place from May 16 to 17, 2024 in Nicosia, Cyprus.

The Atelier offered theoretical and performative presentations, curated walks, physical practices, discussions and an invitation to a Hammam as pathways to feel into both the grief and healing processes circulating on an island that has lived through multiple colonial histories and 50 years of division between a Greek South and Turkish North. The two-day gathering provided philosophical and artistic approaches from local artists engaging art as a pathway for healing, both for society and artists themselves.

Participating and contributing to the reflective and immersive discourse were over 55 local and international attendees, including dance artists, architects, writers, researchers, artistic and executive directors, production managers, students, historians and curators.

Guest speakers included alternative therapist **Dr. Klitos Tsiolis**, urbanist and architect **Socrates Stratis**, performance artist and founder of Dance Gate Lefkosia and Echo Arts **Arianna Economou**, Zambian-Cypriot artist and researcher **Gervaise Alexis Savvias**, social anthropology researcher **Nihal Soğancı**, art historian **Dr. Gabriel Koureas**, artistic director of Dance House Lefkosia **Petros Konnaris**, interdisciplinary performance artist and co-founder of the inclusive theatre group *Koullou/Makka* **Nayia T. Karakosta**, performer and artistic director of the Center of Performing Arts MITOS **Elena Agathokleous**, researcher, artist and educator **Dr. Erica Charalambous** and curator and art theorist **Evagoras Vanezis**. Additionally, curated walks and physical practices were led by performers and practitioners **Belinda Papavasiliou**, **Anna Tzakou**, **Machi D. Lindahl** and **Melissa Garcia Carro** as well as a performance by **Lia Haraki**.

The design of the two-day program was inspired by the three stages of trauma recovery: 1) securing safety and selfcare, 2) processing: remembering and grieving, 3) reconnection and meaning. The welcoming, attentive, yet expansive and thought-provoking space the Atelier proposed was an integral part of its curation process.

Part One: Securing Safety and Selfcare

Healing the Self

To bring us into the topic of self-care and wellbeing, **Dr. Klitos Tsiolis**, a Gestalt psychotherapist trained in Quantum Touch, Reiki and Pranic Healing, offered a series of short embodied practices throughout his hour-long presentation regarding values, virtues and attainments relating to wellbeing and self-care. He described the basis for wellbeing as interconnected layers of physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions. He underscored that to be well means different things to different people, but that there are some essential aspects that can be agreed upon, such as basic needs of shelter, economic and sexual health and healthy relationships where one can freely express themselves. From his perspective, dancers have the tools and capacity to consciously work towards self-confidence through practices of grounding and presence. He also described how the body can be an expression of emotions through its shape and posture, which means through the body, one can also consciously create wellbeing through intentional movement in various positions and forms while in relation to the environment.

He also highlighted how in the days we are currently living in, it is more important than before to be in a good state of being so one can act and not only react. He encouraged wellbeing to be embraced as a practice that includes listening and trusting intuitions within the capacity to see a larger world view and to formulate a spiritual commitment in life through identifying one's sense of purpose. He further offered guidance towards the senses, opening up sensations connected to listening, smelling, tasting and touching as a counterpoint to the desire to control what can not, or should not, be controlled. He asked us to listen internally to where there is stagnation, grief and retreat and to accept that part of ourselves, rather than trying to change, because only through the acceptance will it actually shift and change.

Healing the city - artistic practice and research as acts towards the healing of public space

[Socrates Stratis](#), professor at the Department of Architecture at the University of Cyprus, spoke on how architecture and urban design can address long-standing social and political conflicts in Cyprus. Within [his presentation](#) he described a “frozen conflict” existing for 50 years on the island and how space and design could offer agency in addressing spatial and environmental injustices. In his research, he looks at the entanglement between bodily experience and territories. He engages the students he collaborates with in creative disorientations to challenge the education they arrive with, which typically trains young Cypriots to see those living on the other side of the border as enemies. He activates storytelling of the island's landscape to freshly envision

environmental justice. By way of example, he described an aspect of the project [Entangled Milieus](#), which dealt with the Karkotis River spanning both territories of the island, including the UN-controlled ceasefire zone. The project's interests were to make visible the entangled existence the various zones have with one another, via food and land consumption, water flow and the extraction from a former mine, to try to mobilise imaginations for a shared future.

[Arianna Economou](#), performing artist and founder of Dance Gate Lefkosia and [Echo Arts](#), discussed her work in using dance to facilitate healing on personal and community levels. She highlighted two significant projects co-created with Dorinda Hulton of Theater Alibi, among others. The first of those projects was [One Square Foot](#) (2003-2008), which explores the past, present, and future in relation to a single square foot of land, activated through remembering, acknowledging and becoming present, so that an artistic response to trauma can be generated. Within this project, Arianna described the piece [Seeds](#) (2003), which allowed her to use an artistic framework to deal with the shock and trauma of losing her father in an accident. Arianna also presented the [Antigone Project](#) (2011), which provided artists with opportunities to foster healing and understanding between individuals from different cultures and belief systems within the conflict zone.

[Gervaise Alexis Savvias](#), a Zambian-Cypriot artist-researcher and writer, framed our experience of the divided city of Nicosia as a contested space constantly needing reconceptualization. In response to the question of how to heal a city, Gervaise laid out important pillars in their work: to view history as non-linear and circular, rather than fixed and static; to challenge the state-drawn cartography that defines and divides by embracing the concept of a liminal space and how that can open the potential for reimagination; to engage in critical confabulation, a term coined by scholar Saidiyah, which encourages the space of possibility inside the gaps of historical narratives. Gervaise also introduced their work '[fissile material](#)', an artistic and theoretical research project drawing upon the past to inform a collective retelling of Cyprus' history. Gervaise further stated how the work values the importance of "speaking nearby" rather than "speaking about", which according to Trinh T. Minh-Ha is choosing to not objectify, but rather to be able to come close to a subject without seizing or claiming it.

Social anthropology PhD candidate [Nihal Soğancı](#) spoke of arts-based methodologies to activate memories, foster engagement, to decolonize and to mourn. She shared projects from the [Buffer Fringe Performing Arts Festival](#), produced by [Home for Cooperation](#), which focuses on the relationship between arts and peacebuilding activities. She shared aspects of her work exploring displacement through collaging and participatory art installations and highlighted how liminal reimaginings and artistic expression can help one access and move through melancholy and nostalgia.

Part Two: Processing, Remembering and Grieving

Art historian [Dr. Gabriel Koureas'](#) presentation, *Sensing and Performing Trauma in Wounded Cyprus through Contemporary Art Practices*, began with images from the battered, deserted and walled-off buffer zone between the divided parts of Nicosia, arguing that art embedded in the context of Nicosia demands all our participation and active senses. He followed those images with archival films from 1917, showing contorted and twisted shell-shocked soldiers from the First World War, demonstrating how the body is central to trauma and its somatic nature. He continued with images from the Museum of Struggle (located on the Greek side of Nicosia) and Museum of Barbarism, (located on the Türkish side of Nicosia), introducing the term dark tourism, defined as travel to places historically associated with death and tragedy.

Moving away from documentary forms exposing traumatic archival material, he shared the work of [Maria Loizidou](#), a seminal artist on the topic of [Trauma](#). Dr. Koureas made a distinction between bad memories and trauma as being dependent on the ability to narrate – events that are traumatic can not be retold, explaining why many holocaust survivors took nearly 40 years to begin to retell what happened to them. At first traumatic events can only be remembered somatically, speaking to the impact and importance of artistic practices and trauma cultures as doing the work of therapy. By way of example, he shared photos from his own childhood that showed the collection of large shiny empty artillery shells that his mother collected and displayed around the house, sometimes with flower arrangements inside. For her, it was an enunciation and articulation of the wound from war.

Following the multiple theoretical and philosophical presentations about projects and research in the locality, we were invited to step outdoors and engage in a walking score through Nicosia itself. The score was created by [Belinda Papavasiliou](#) and titled “Synchronicity is a great city to live in - a score for healing.” The score guided us to move as a group in close proximity to the wall dividing the city. Periodically we were invited to pause as a practice of receiving, seeing and listening and to allow for spontaneous compositions to emerge. The rhythm of the group was calm, perceptive and slow, allowing for details to be taken in and felt.

The walk brought the group to [Lia Haraki's](#) performance [Body Unmuted](#), a journey through a two-storey gallery space. Throughout were stations with instructions for how to place the body while listening through headphones to a series of audio files recorded by Lia as they happened. The recordings were fragments capturing laughs, cries, confessions and conversations. The various recordings gradually revealed her cancer diagnosis, giving a new framing to the body's vocal expressions caught in the recordings. The path led to a room with Lia herself, where one felt easily welcomed. Collected in the room were artefacts from her cancer treatment, ranging from medicines to journals and other materials from her artistic practice. In the small room, Lia performed impromptu songs on her electric guitar, incorporating words from the audience. The

intimate setting fostered connection, spontaneity, and vulnerability as healing responses to confronting illness.

[Anna Tzakou's](#) workshop, "Encounters without Division," ran parallel to the show and was based on Contemplative Dance Practice (CDP), a method developed by Barbara Dilley in the 1970s. The three-hour session moved through an accumulation of mindfulness practices, including sitting meditation, movement improvisation and composition, with awareness shifting between the self, the group and the space. Anna guided us to move with aesthetic delight and curiosity for understanding and insight. We were invited to be aware of loss and discovery and encouraged to not be goal-oriented in how we moved. One of the thoughts behind the practice is that healing can come through the loss of time, space and agenda as well as the opportunity to experience fresh perspective and new thoughts for understanding. It was also a practice to be with a narrative or to co-exist with a space that has trauma, without being carried away by it.

Part Three: Reconnection

To take time for reconnection and self-care, we were invited to either attend a Hammam or to participate in Chi-gung practice by Machi D. Lindahl.

Afterwards followed an informal discussion titled “Self-care in the Arts” with impulses from the artistic director of Dance House Lefkosia [Petros Konnaris](#), interdisciplinary performance artist [Naya T. Karakosta](#), performer and artistic director of the Center of Performing Arts [MITOS Elena Agathokleous](#). Naya defined care as an attempt to create safer spaces so people are allowed to be vulnerable, grounded and free to choose within given situations. For Petros care is about communication and how being in a conversation that is reciprocal in nature generates care. For Elena care is oriented around being a single mother while also creating work and leading an organisation. Her motherhood and relationship to her children define the care in her work life.

The discussion expanded to include attendees, travelling through exchanges about working conditions, knowledge sharing, the language needed to invite people to co-create safer spaces, as well as how to care for older artists in the field. Two texts were quoted throughout the discussion: Donna Haraway’s [When Species Meet](#), which argues for the position of “becoming *with*” rather than human exceptionalism, echoing the notion of “speaking nearby” from Gervais Alexis Savvias’ presentation the day before and underscoring the need for relational and interconnected awareness for all to feel well. When the conversation turned towards how artists can take care of themselves when dealing with a lack of institutional or state support, Bojana Kunst’s text [Beyond the time of the right care: A letter to the performance artist](#), was quoted as a caution for the trappings that can come when romanticising what artists can do and to not overlook the political dynamics related to care.

Following the discussion we were again invited to walk through the city as a group, guided by an audio score heard individually through headphones by choreographer [Melissa Garcia Carro](#). Throughout the walk, we were directed both inward and outward as we passed close to the border wall with the North. We eventually arrived at [Eleftheria Square](#), taking refuge from the sun and heat under Zaha Hadid’s terraced designs while Melissa performed a solo dance with others spontaneously joining.

Upon returning, [Dr. Erica Charalambous](#) and [Evagoras Vanezis](#) presented the newly published book titled [Poetics of Dance Encounters](#). The publication shares the outcomes of a research program organised by Dance House Lefkosia, built on a series of encounters with dance and performing artists in Cyprus. The aim of the research was to explore and capture how dance and performance practices began and grew on the island and to allow for the act of remembering to foster greater connection within the community. The methodology to build up the archive practised care and wellbeing through how artists were contacted, listened to and made visible.

In addition to various artistic practices, discussions revealing critical economic and political issues were also transcribed for the publication.

To close out the atelier, Petros Konnaris invited us to finish the sentence [“I remember...”](#) with individual reflections on what one remembered from the two-day event. Responses wove together descriptions of new input and discoveries with somatic awareness and mental snapshots of moving through the city, revealing the multi-dimensional processing that was triggered during the two days.



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