

**Master of Philosophy Title Page**

**Karolos Koun, the Hellenic Art Theatre and the practice via Stanislavsky's influence:  
a research towards a contemporary interpretation of ancient Hellenic drama.**

Submitted by **George Chouliaras** to the University of Exeter  
as a thesis for the degree of

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## Abstract

The objective of this MPhil in Performance Practice Research was to investigate Karolos Koun and the Hellenic Art Theatre via Stanislavsky's work and influence, in order to reveal potential relationships through practice-based labour. This was done with a view to developing a contemporary actor-training approach for modern staging of ancient Hellenic drama. This research explores through fieldwork interviews, existing scholarship and practical investigation Karolos Koun's approach to the actor, acting and actor training, in relation to Stanislavsky and contemporary Hellenic theatre practice. I have drawn on my own apprenticeship as a student and my professional experience as an actor, teacher, director and researcher. Based on these areas, my intention was to investigate and reveal the Koun – Stanislavsky relationship (connections, influences, similarities, differences, material and tools usage), both theoretically and practically, supported by interviews I conducted about Koun and the Art Theatre practices he evolved, with people involved with Koun and the Art Theatre from different periods. Discoveries in the research-as-practice workshops about Koun's use of Stanislavsky allows us a deeper understanding of contemporary Hellenic actor training and practice, and may assist future practitioners and researchers to consider for their working scope. The research also revealed the significance and influence of Koun for contemporary Hellenic theatre and the value of this research in understanding a Hellenic tradition of actor-training.

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## Table of Contents

Master of Philosophy Title Page .....	1
Acknowledgments.....	2
Abstract.....	3
Table of Contents.....	4
<b><u>Introduction</u></b> .....	5
Premise .....	
Research Pathways.....	
A ‘Kounian Inheritor’ .....	7
Methodology.....	11
Historical Frame and Artistic Perspectives .....	20
Karolos Koun’s Theatre Practice .....	26
The Actor and Actor Training.....	31
Koun and Stanislavsky: tracing the heritage.....	35
Introduction Epilogue .....	44
<b><u>Chapter 1: The Koun-Stanislavsky relationship and Project Reflection</u></b> .....	45
Premise .....	
Koun and Stanislavsky.....	46
The Project Reflection.....	61
Intro .....	
Practice Reflection: The Actor and the Role-Text .....	65
With Dan .....	74
With Sally .....	85
Conclusion.....	95
<b><u>Chapter 2: Karolos Koun and the Art Theatre – Influential Key Points</u></b> .....	99
Premise .....	
Hellenekoteta.....	101
Folk Expressionism.....	115
The Practice Tradition.....	126
The Ancient Hellenic Drama Approach.....	135
Conclusion.....	143
Epilogue.....	150
<u>Appendices</u> .....	153
Interviews Appendix .....	154
Interview Questions for Karolos Koun and the Art Theatre.....	
Interviews Appendices.....	156
Project Exercises Appendix.....	165
<u>Bibliography</u> .....	167

**\*This research contains A/V material.**

## Introduction

‘Κάνουμε θέατρο για την ψυχή μας (We are doing theatre for our psyche...)’

(Karolos Koun, 1908 -1987)

### Premise

### Research Pathways

“Paezo me taen pseche mou: Hellenic:<sup>1</sup> *Παίζω με την ψυχή μου*” which means: “I play (act) with my soul (*psyche*)”. I have been experiencing this statement from the very first moment I remember myself in the Hellenic drama school, during my BA studies (2000-2003) where as a student I was trying to understand and feel my teachers’ guidance and help to ‘act with or from my psyche’. The Hellenic (Greek) term for the word soul is ψυχή (*psyche*)<sup>2</sup> and is also used in other languages with different implications and interpretations. As a Greek actor (since 2003), a director and researcher (since 2009) and a drama teacher (since 2013), I have been interested to explore my relationship of this ‘dictum’ and its role, function and influence in my actor training and stage acting.

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<sup>1</sup> Hellenic, is another word/term for Greek with similar meaning but different routes: Ελλάς ή Ελλάδα (Hellas/Hellada or Greece) – Έλληνας (Hellenas or Greek) – Ελληνικό (Hellenic or Greek). As a term, it is actually the only one that is used to name my country and the people; Greek is a term that is used mostly because it is easier to pronounce and politically the term Hellenic stands better to identify myself as such. Although, I will be using as well the term ‘Greek’ in terms of understanding and communication through my written work. Finally, I am keen on using the term Hellenic, as I wish the people from other countries to become more familiar with and learn to use it more.

<sup>2</sup> In Hellas, when we speak about Psyche, we mean this vital energy that includes our passions, sentiments, feelings, emotional world, inner strength, will, as well many other similar notions, meanings and elements that are related to the human existence from a variety of aspects: physical, psychophysical, psychological, conscious and subconscious. Interestingly, in my culture when we need to emphasize about it in terms of physical language, we touch our chest in the middle, almost where the human heart is and a few centimeters over the solar plexus to give emphasis. The term psyche also refers to instinct, impulse and intuition in terms of a sentimental and emotional elaboration of an inner vital energy which has as strong point of reference one’s feelings. In that respect, all of the aforementioned notions and energy stream from that place.

In Hellenic theatre practice, the coiner of this dictum on the actor's psyche would be Karolos Koun, and was a phrase particularly popularised through his published writings, *We Do Theatre for our Psyche* (1987). Koun and his way of working with actors in rehearsal and through the actor training school he established linked to the Hellenic Art Theatre (H.A.T.), has been a formidable force in Hellenic theatre culture and his influence is felt very widely in all aspects of Hellenic theatre to this day. His influence has formed my practice and my training with teachers who learned and worked with Koun, thus the beginning point for my investigation is to explore how and in what ways Koun has influenced my own actor training and professional practice. As I have broadened and developed my experience, I have come to recognise that I also received a great deal of Stanislavsky's influence, through the 'Kounian' lens. The main part to my investigation then, is to explore and prove the relationship, if any, between Koun's practice and Stanislavsky's.

Since Koun's practices have been a fundamental influence on my acting formation and my actor training, I have chosen to explore these ideas through my own material practice as a teacher-director and examine Stanislavsky's relationship with Koun in a practice-based environment, by reflecting on my own training background and the cultural heritage that it embodies. I have undertaken this project using a research-as-practice approach to be able to investigate more deeply my theoretical and practical knowledge of Hellenic actor training and theatre practice, as well as explore ways in which this self-reflexive process may offer me further flexibility and guide me through my future artistic choices.

For this purpose I have focused on theatre material from the ancient Hellenic drama as practice research workshops, because it links directly to the question of the Hellenic tradition and it was the area that Koun worked with and directed extensively and one that I am particularly interested in as a practitioner.

### **A Kounian ‘inheritor’**

In Hellas (Greece), actor training most often takes the form of an apprenticeship developed through teachers-mentors. However, their work is usually not representative of a specific actor training model or practitioner (e.g. Method Acting), but rather draws on their experiential background linked to their own diverse training and their experience of roles and production. Thus working with particular teachers does not carry the implication that they are carriers of a specific actor training model, systematised structure of knowledge, or an exclusive commitment to one particular practitioner. This process produces a particular phenomenon of ‘guruness’<sup>3</sup> in Hellenic theatre (both in drama schools and the industry) which has a significant impact to the actor; the implication of this mode of training is that there is frequently a lack of particular knowledge of specific practices and practitioners, leading the artists towards a recognisable mode of work which derives through an instinctive, impulsive and intuitive function, which I analysed previously is represented as the actor’s ‘psyche’.

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<sup>3</sup> The use of the term ‘guruness’ here, reflects metaphorically as an actor training apprenticeship approach. Also, I am not offering this as something odd or strange that does not happen elsewhere, rather trying to make a point of a dominant training pattern which is also a norm in Hellas and is not a result of a particular theatre practice working frame, system, model or practitioner. Consequently, my comment is not presented as a problem, but rather as a reality which serves my reader’s perception towards a better understanding of my practice-based work later with Koun and his influence from Stanislavsky, which formed significantly (also amongst other influences which will not be discussed at this point) my own training and evolvment.

I myself am a living example of this kind of training; a student that spent most of his time in the drama school with two teachers-mentors: the first was Βασίλης Ρίτσος<sup>4</sup> (Vasilis Ritsos) with whom I did most of my theatre practice apprenticeship and I consider as my first and most influential theatrical mentor. He was a practitioner who worked through instinct, impulse and intuition and was eager to re-elaborate the text according to his own interest which was supported by verbal and spontaneous improvisations. Also, there were constant explorations with regards to the text and its meanings in terms of tone, breathing pattern, instant inspiration, orthophonic sound and passion for the speech delivery. My second theatrical mentor is Giannis Mortzos<sup>5</sup>, one of the closest people to Karolos Koun and the Hellenic Art Theatre, a former student of Koun, actor, director and teacher. Mortzos worked with the same tools, although energy, impulsivity and spontaneity were framed as priorities in his working pattern; also the individual as a carrier of particular experiential and cultural material. Ritsos was mostly interested to the continuous and spontaneous reaction to the text and its meaning, while Mortzos was working in favour of the emotional and sentimental engagement, applying his work with clear references to Stanislavsky, without though using any of his exercises at work. Both of my teachers invited and challenged me all the time to work with my 'psyche' through endless improvisation work, following and responding to my impulses, instinct and imagination, based on my spontaneity, availability and readiness, without permitting restrictions of over thinking and self-consciousness.

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<sup>4</sup> (-2010): Greek Director, Teacher, Actor and Dancer, an important figure in drama schools theatre education and practice during the second half of the Twentieth Century in Hellas.

<sup>5</sup> Greek Actor, Teacher and Director, one of the most important figures of the Hellenic Art Theatre.



Gradually, I began to identify in my apprenticeship and experience this 'Hellenic' acting approach and mode of theatrical expression (never named as such, but implicit in my ethnic, cultural and background of experience), and I acquired an understanding of my working 'toolbox'. Also, as far as my personal development is concerned, my MFA in Theatre Practice as well the present MPhil Research in Performance Practice at the University of Exeter opened my theatre practice horizons further and allowed me to elaborate the aforementioned material from a variety of perspectives.

To return to my discussion and connect my acting approach about 'psyche' and my actor training with Mortzos and the H.A.T., it is essential to underline that Koun himself did not lay down any formal methodology or systematized structure of exercises in his training or directorial work. The practical investigation was therefore essential to decode Koun's work and his tools in acting and actor training and examine through practice his relationship with Stanislavsky, in order to consider how I might orientate my future work in theatre practice in relation to this heritage with the purpose of developing an artistic realization of my own. Thus, my interest started to grow into the tools that Koun was using and how could they be integrated into a recognisable working approach. In this inquiry I have a particular field of interest, which is ancient Hellenic drama; its ethnic, cultural and international impact has influenced me much and I have been involved with this area as a student, a professional actor, a director, a teacher and now a researcher. Karolos Koun was fascinated by ancient Hellenic drama and I am interested to examine it through his work, artistic views, pedagogy and actor-training with the H.A.T.

To summarize, my research questions involve gaining a deeper understanding of contemporary practical approaches to ancient Hellenic drama influenced by Karolos Koun and the Art Theatre, and the relationships that developed with Stanislavsky's work. Within this working frame I am seeking to recognise the creative mix of material and elements that have influenced a contemporary acting approach in relation to ancient Hellenic culture, history and tradition. I am interested to trace some of the ways in which my Hellenic sensibilities as an actor have been formed and I wish to explore the links and transferred knowledge that have been preserved and used from the past to the future.

## Methodology

The first phase of the research explores Karolos Koun and the Art Theatre who have probably been the most important shapers of theatre in Hellas during the twentieth century, including approaches to modernism, ancient Hellenic drama and its interpretation, contemporary Hellenic playwriting, and revolutionary acting, actor training, teaching and directing. In order to further my theoretical understanding and to inform my practice based work, I began my research with the small number of scholarly sources that exist on Koun, as well as conducting further investigations based on theatre practitioners who have worked with or related themselves to Koun and the H.A.T. Moreover, I coupled this with my experience as a student, a professional actor, director, teacher and researcher linked to Koun and the H.A.T. from various angles.

Key scholarly sources include Patricia Kokkori's article *Karolos Koun's Greek Version of Theatrical Modernism* (1989), which is probably the most analytical resource on Koun's practice and artistic background, and reflects on Koun's acting, teaching, and directing. Theodoros Grammatas deals with Koun in his articles *The Hellenic Theatre in the 20th Century: Cultural Pro-types and Originality* (2002) and *For Drama and Theatre* (2006), where he offers valuable analysis about acting and actor training and reflects on approaches to ancient Hellenic drama, where some of this work discusses Koun. Michael Magyar has offered additional comparative analyses and perspectives about Koun in his published PhD *Karolos Koun and the Art Theatre* (2004), which is the first PhD research solely about Koun and the Hellenic Art Theatre, however from a theoretical point of interest.

Another academic source that has helped me to analyse Koun's concept of the Hellenic spirit and its intercultural character is Tsatsoulis<sup>6</sup>, who compares Koun's work with other directors. Two more offerings present very interesting and significant collections from a considerable number of people (academics, critics, actors, directors, journalists) involved with Koun and the Art Theatre, *Karolos Koun* (2009) a book from the journal *Eleftherotypia* and *Karolos Koun* (2010) from M.I.E.T. from which I used further historical and personal reflections as well as information on Koun's acting, teaching and directing. Finally, there are two books which are reflections of Koun himself: *Karolos Koun: Conversations* (1987) and *We Do Theatre for our Psyche* (1987). In the first, Koun is interviewed by the author and journalist about the sum of his work in all areas and the second is the so-called 'gospel' of the Hellenic Art Theatre and probably the most famous theatre book in Greece, where most of what Koun has said and declared about his work is gathered and presented as various texts with him as the only speaker. However, there is very little scholarly analysis and academic material about Karolos Koun and the Art Theatre with a particular focus on acting and actor training. In that respect, I concentrated my creative thinking towards practice based work, investigating the existing scholarship in order to reach a clearer understanding of Koun's practice, and then to return to theoretical reflection of the process of my work. Patricia Kokkori describes the problematic nature of research into Koun's theatre practice:

since there is no available video footage to represent the theatrical realization of his work. [...] We are further hampered because of the absence of material for specific performances in the shape of mise-en-scenes like Stanislavsky's, or Brecht's model

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<sup>6</sup> See bibliography reference

books, or even some theoretical texts.[...] There is a lack of thorough criticisms for the performances that talk about the directorial aspect and not the text.

(Ekkelema, 1989: 34)

The lack of material that would provide more detailed knowledge about Koun's work derives in part from the actuality of his work which was developed through a workshop and elaboration process as an open investigation into theatre practice. Moreover, Koun did not leave behind written texts upon which to base a proper analysis of his own work and Kokkori suggests that this was a deliberate act, in that 'he avoided systematically leaving behind written material.' (1989: 34) Hence, in setting out to examine Koun's practical work in terms of actor training, it became clear that research through practical experimentation and explorations would be the most useful way to understand the nature of acting and actor training deriving from the Kounian tradition in the Hellenic context. This thesis is not setting out to provide the much needed scholarly reconsideration of the sources for a history of Koun's work, but to draw on these traces to inform my work, in order to allow me to extend my own viewpoint as a contemporary theatre practitioner and researcher. With this in mind, in methodological terms I needed to follow some principles and structure so as to frame my practice as research (PaR) exploration and assist the transdisciplinary nature of my research. Baz Kershaw *et al's* advice about research through practice offered me a structured plan to adapt to my own needs within the practice as the beginning point of interest:

To narrow my case study focus I rule in five aspects of theatre and performance that together may be the minimal constituents of PaR i.e. take one of them away and it disappears or becomes something else. They are: Starting Points, Aesthetics, Locations, Transmission and Key Issues.

(2011: 64)

My starting point was my own training background and experience. The aesthetic focus was the Kounian tradition that seems to infuse that experience, and that draws on that particularly Hellenic sense of acting from Koun that “*Παίζω με την ψυχή μου*” (I act with my psyche). The cultural location of this training seems to me to be particularly Greek, but I have come to recognise elements of Stanislavsky’s influence in that work and this is a key component of the research, to assess that possible interface between Koun and Stanislavsky. The process of transmission and training are key routes by which I wish to explore these questions, and to examine my future teaching, directing and actor training for others. My practical project then was developed around two key questions: What was the relationship between actor training from the Kounian tradition and the Stanislavsky approach, and what does the Kounian tradition, or blended tradition, offer us in acting today with ancient Hellenic drama? I tried to establish a laboratory environment which would work to reveal some of the personal and psychophysical embodied knowledge, as Lynette Hunter suggests, this

depends on past experience being re-membered through the body placed in particular socio-geographical locations [...] no longer interpreting work and “making theoretical statements,” but providing the ground for others to think theoretically.

(2009: 230-231)

The nature of my research into Koun’s work explored this principle and his actor training experimentation was itself informed by notions of everyday experience, folk or popular expressions, cultural-ethnic location and tradition in relation to the actor’s individuality. Moreover, cultural background (ethnic, traditional, religious, political, class references) was linked with an actorly understanding and reflection of the socio-geographical influence of Koun.

I drew on my experience as a student and actor, since I have had the chance to experience Koun's work from two different perspectives: first as a drama school apprentice with one of his closest students and partners, and second as a professional actor in the industry where I worked with many people involved with Koun and the H.A.T. Thus this background may offer me the capacity to draw on specific examples and moments, and reflect theoretically and practically, in order to support my research. I interpreted the instruction to 'act with my psyche' drawn from this reflection on my own training, as being built from the basic elements of a) impulsivity, b) spontaneity, c) instinctive activity, d) intuitive behaviour and e) imagination. These underpinned the workshops and were elaborated through improvisations and open experimental processes that engaged body and voice with psychophysical and psychological reality of the role and the text, drawing on training from Koun and Stanislavsky. This in turn, was further investigated in relation to the aforementioned elements of the actor, taking into consideration one's cultural background (meaning the blend of personal experiences, ethnic location, character, tradition lore, education, social class, individual characteristics and more). Finally, my performance background will be discussed, where I reflect on particular examples from the drama school and my class experience with Mortzos and from a specific ancient Hellenic drama performance (*Aristophanes' The Knights*) I participated in as a chorus member in 2007. In this performance, a significant Art Theatre figure, Giorgos Armenis,<sup>7</sup> was the director and protagonist. Since I am seeking to trace Koun and the Art Theatre's practice (also via my work with his inheritors), a significant part of my research was to conduct some interviews.

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<sup>7</sup> Actor, Director and Teacher, one of the most recognizable figures of the Art Theatre

These were with distinguished former students, actors, directors and teachers who are carriers of this practical knowledge of Koun's work. All of these people were acknowledged professional collaborators, inheritors or greatly involved with Koun and the Art Theatre and most are actors, directors and teachers in Hellenic theatre industry, who provided anecdotes, interesting and significant research material which enhanced the very small amount of academic resources in the area of the actor, acting and actor training. These interviews were done to gather as much information and material I could with regards to Koun's personality and artistic views in theatre practice work, in terms of the actor, acting and actor training via teaching and directing. It is also important to realise that since Koun's work was characterized by a complete absence of any sort of system, methodology or actor training model, and a lack of theoretical writing from him, these interviews gave me the chance to gain a clearer understanding of the nature of Koun's practice based work from a variety of perspectives and across different periods of his course with the Art Theatre. Each interviewee was chosen for their individual experience with Koun and the Art Theatre and their ability to provide specific information by offering different inputs for my practice based research. **Giannis Mortzos and Giorgos Armenis** are historically two of the most important partners of Koun and the Art Theatre and were closer than anyone to Koun.<sup>8</sup> Both are actors, directors, drama teachers, playwrights and Art Theatre alumnus, Mortzos in 1963 and Armenis in 1971. Mortzos, to whom I previously referred to, was one of my two theatrical mentors during my undergraduate drama studies, with whom I worked for three years and my apprenticeship with him was influential towards this research.

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<sup>8</sup> Along with Chatzimarkos, Lazanis, Kougioumtzis. Mortzos and Armenis are the only ones still alive.



Consequently, the actor-teacher/director relationship is fundamental in my research and Mortzos was the perfect choice to discuss further and test in my practice. It is worth mentioning that Mortzos spent twenty-one years as a student, actor, teacher and director with Koun in the Art Theatre and from all my interviewees he is the one who lived and experienced Koun's work more than anyone else. Armenis was like Mortzos one of the closest to Koun and soon after his death, Armenis left the Art Theatre company and started a new drama school, based more or less on the same principles of Karolos Koun. I worked with him in an ancient Hellenic drama production for Aristophanes' comedy *The Knights*. I was an actor and member of the chorus and this was my closest experience to the Art Theatre performance practice and acting style in Hellenic theatre industry. Furthermore, my co-operation with Armenis intrigued me to discuss the matter of approaching ancient drama texts and roles, where he has done considerable work, especially with Aristophanes and comedy. Thus I can inform my research with material reflected from my own experiential background in terms of Koun's working frame and scope, by using examples from our common work in this performance. Both of these men have significant experience in acting, teaching and directing, and are extremely resourceful and important from all possible aspects. Having already interviewed two of the older and most distinguished male members of the Art Theatre, I sought to gather some information from significant women who worked with Koun and were close to him as students. **Maya Lymberopoulou** is a well-known actress, director, writer and Art Theatre alumna in 1959. My interview with her offered me an interesting insight to Koun's practical and theoretical background scope.

Also, offered particular information about Koun's actor training approach to ancient drama as she has worked in many different performances with the Art Theatre. **Reni Pittaki** is one of the most famous female actresses and Art Theatre alumna in 1966. Her perspective on acting and actor training can be very serviceable as she has spent half of her theatre career with Karolos Koun and the Art Theatre, having performed in a very large number of productions and was one of the closest to Koun's inner circle.<sup>9</sup> Finally, **Eva Kotamanidou** (actress and Art Theatre alumna 1964), with whom I had the chance to work in a production with Mikis Theodorakis in 2004. Her experience background was very useful as she has had an exceptional career in theatre and cinema and is the oldest of all my interviewees.

In need of moving towards another later period of Koun and the Art Theatre, I chose to meet with **Petros Filippidis** (actor, director, drama teacher and Art Theatre alumna 1986) as he is one of the most important contemporary theatre practitioners in Hellas and is also a frequent ancient Hellenic drama actor and director. Filippidis helped me see things about Koun in a more simple way and his contribution was very resourceful in terms of acting tools and Koun's personality and labour with the actor. Another member of a more recent generation was **Kostis Kapelonis** (actor, director, drama teacher, author, playwright, light designer and Art Theatre alumna 1981) whom I interviewed as a present member of the Art Theatre and was enlightening for the way the Art Theatre and Karolos Koun were working in ancient Hellenic drama performances and generally. In particular, we discussed the chorus function, as he worked in many of them and has extensive and appropriate experience.

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<sup>9</sup> It needs to be mentioned that Koun's inner circle was constituted almost exclusively by men. Lymberopoulou and Pittaki came close to it more than any other female students, though still not entirely in the core of it.

The last interviewees were two people who were never students in the Art Theatre, although I considered that their contribution to my research would be unique, each one for different reasons. **Lydia Koniordou** (actress and director) is considered to be the most important female interpreter of ancient drama, especially tragedy for the last two decades and one of the top ever. After her drama school studies with the National Theatre, Koun included her for many years in his productions, especially in ancient drama choruses and her knowledge was very resourceful. Also, her intellectual and practical background, allowed me to expand my discussion to further areas of Koun's work and extract significant theoretical info about my research. Also I interviewed **Giannis Mpezos**, actor, director and one of the best and most famous actors in Hellas the last twenty years who is quite involved with ancient Hellenic comedy. Mpezos is the only one who has never worked with Koun and had nothing to do with the Art Theatre. It is exactly for this reason I considered it important to have an aspect about Koun and the Art Theatre from an important theatre practitioner who has experienced its influence in his work without being a member. Before closing, I need to mention that my interviews have been used in all areas of my research. After presenting my methodology, I need to discuss Koun and the Art Theatre's history and artistic perspectives in order to establish an understanding of the time and historical frame in which Koun developed his work.

## Historical Frame and artistic perspectives

This section aims to provide a historical account of Koun along with his general artistic perspectives from 1930 until 1987. Alongside analysis of available scholarly and other sources, I will discuss how Koun started his work in Hellenic theatre and some parameters for the reasons and aims he had, in order to move to the foundation of his theatre organisation. Koun appeared in Hellenic theatre during the early 1930s, a period which was characterised by a cultural movement to support Hellenic culture and tradition via (re)discovering, (re)establishing and (re)approaching a national heritage and identity termed 'Hellenekoteta' (Greekness). This meant a renaissance of interest in everything that might be considered 'Hellenic' in arts from antiquity onwards. This concentration on the traditions which formed the Hellenic nation, ethos and society were diversely drawn from the past across Ancient Hellas, Roman & Byzantine Empire and many other periods, and were inflected by those international influences that had been adopted and adapted in Hellas. This Hellenic spirit involved cultural, philosophical, ethnic, political, artistic, religious, social and traditional characteristics, and the search to define this 'Hellenekoteta' was an ideological activity, as Antonis Gletzouris in *Directorial Art in Hellas: emertion and consolidation of directorial art in Neo-Hellenic theatre* writes:

It was a concurrent effort of self-definition and hetero-definition of the ideology of Hellenism [...] If someone wanted to approach contemporary theatre reality, he should have already cultivated the tools of historical memory. As far as the directorial art is concerned, the research of a 'Hellenic' attitude was shifted towards the past of Hellenic theatre, considering that this way a new self-awareness would emerge.

(2011: 424)

Gletzouris explains the importance of Hellenekoteta as an ideological trend and social convention of the time, as well noting the influential nature of this movement and the impact it had in theatre practice, helping us understand that there was a turn towards a rising hope for Hellenic theatre, which would be (re)generated by its own historical background:

From the beginning of the 1930's the Greek directors' questioning started to promote the institution of Hellenism, through Hellenic nature and race. Concurrently, they aimed for the expression of all these ideological concerns, not only through repertoire but rather through the elements of performance themselves.

(2011: 431)

This was the context at the beginning of 1930s in which Koun took his very first steps in Hellenic theatre. After his first studies abroad, he travelled to Hellas and worked as an English teacher in the Athens American College:

In 1927 I went to Paris for a year and studied Aesthetics in Sorbonne. I first came to Hellas in 1929, at the age of 21 and worked as an English teacher to the American College, today's Athens College, where I had my first theatre experiences.

(*Karolos Koun*, 2009: 12)

There he was motivated by his amateur theatre laboratory with his students to research the interpretation of ancient Hellenic drama, Hellenic plays and Hellenic theatre in general. Later, there was the first attempt towards a new theatre association before the creation of the Art Theatre, named the Folk Scene, which managed to survive only for a couple of years. Although his primary work there stood as a constructive guide for his future orientations, by constituting his first organised effort and ideological foundation towards his views of a pioneer theatre practice:

[...] Koun founded along with Giannis Tsarouhis and Dionysis Devaris the semi-professional Folk Scene (1934-36), seeking the terms of his scenic praxis through the combination of modern with tradition: with the primitive expressive dynamic of the folk(s)–actors, the turn to the eastern traditions and the negation of the mimetic character of art [...] through the passion of the folk (popular) expression as a living continuity of the byzantine tradition [...]

(2010: 117)

After the Folk Scene experience and under the German fascist occupation of Greece, in 1942, Koun managed to re-establish his own company as the Theatro Technis, the Art Theatre. Koun explains:

The need for such a new theatre, a theatre of ensemble was already mature inside me many years earlier, since the time that the Folk Scene had been established. The occupation period, was emotionally a rich time. You were taking and you were giving a lot. There were dangers all over us, desolations, violence and terrorism. That's why as human beings we had the feelings of faith, trust, fraternity, effusion and sacrifice. We were wildly hungry, our condition was terrifying. But there was faith that you cannot find nowadays.

(Art Theatre, 2011: n.p.)

Considering Koun's description of this devastating period, it is clear that the horrors suffered under German occupation had an impact on Koun and his stamina with regards to the construction and artistic development of his working frame and group. In his manifesto, *The Social Position and the Aesthetic Line of the Art Theatre* (1943), his antithesis to the theatrical reality and practice conventions of his time is clear: 'Our theatre would have no reason of existence if it was not different from the other ones [...] the basis of every new creation is a negation' (1987: 11).

I believe that with the term 'negation', Koun referred to the rejection of a theatre which demanded specific forms and stylized behaviour that was not an image and reflection of contemporary society. In *Karolos Koun* (2010), Deo Kagellari quotes Koun from *The Social Position and Aesthetic Line of the Art Theatre* (1943):

...today, two trends prevail. From the one side, the tradition of a romantic academism, with the classical bombast, the artificial and mannerist diction of crescendo and diminuendo and other intellectual moulds that do not respond to any human reality, to any vital truth, to any necessity of contemporary theatre, and from the other the 'boulevard' theatre with the well-known 'cliché' ways of performance, inclination and smile.

(2010: 70)

Koun was not only crafting a particular style that rejected mannered cliché for a more street scale or ordinary theatre, but was, as Grammatas suggests, in search of an audience that goes to the theatre to enjoy the scenic action, be part of it energetically, and seek contact, aesthetic and spiritual satisfaction:

(He) rejects the classical literary, the academism and the intellectual approach in theatre that ignores or lowers its aesthetic mission and its social character in favour of an intellectual access to the text, but as well the "boulevard" theatre [...] (He) aspires to the spectator's activation and the evolution of his critical consciousness. This will be realized with the actor's necessary intermediation who is called to shape the role scenically.

(2002: 274)

Grammatas here links the idea of a personal and artistic negation-rejection in Koun's work and marks the necessity of an audience that opens itself towards innovative orientations.

Grammatas also places the actor as the vehicle, the means, and the essential carrier of all the things that need to be communicated, and not the director. Thus the actor is challenged to carry Koun's artistic viewpoints through his own material and experiential background linked to tradition, culture, national and ethnic heritage and other similar fields in terms of social, political and historical lens. So he aimed to lead acting towards a more truthful expression that would find its first and quite important approach in Stanislavsky's work as we will see later in further detail. Ioannidou identifies Koun's rejection of the practice of the National Theatre in the area of ancient drama modern interpretation:

Karolos Koun's (1908–87) approach to ancient drama stood in sharp opposition to the monumental stagings by the National Theatre. In particular, Koun took issue with the School of the Austrian director Max Reinhardt, which, in his view, had been reproduced by the established performance practices in Greece. By contrast, his own takes on Greek drama first with *Laiki Skeni* (Popular Stage) and later with *Theatro Technis* pursued the innate Greekness of the ancient plays.'

(2010, 44: 385)

Koun's ideas about what might be considered as Hellenic tradition and ethnic cultural material was a search for routes and roots. Koun, from a speech he delivered in 1957 in Herodion Odeon in Athens, during an International Theatre Conference says about ancient drama:

Us Greeks, as direct inheritors of the ancient Hellenic theatre, have great offered advantages for its interpretation, while at the same time we have to deal with very serious dangers. Dangers because it requires great attention and knowledge of Hellas in order not to be carried in directorial findings, legitimate for anybody foreign, non-suitable though for Hellenic reality. Great advantages on the other hand, because we were fortunate to live in the same place where our ancestors lived. This, allows us to



derive from the same sources as they did and make good use of all the things that Hellenic tradition created since then. As much as many centuries have passed, as much as we admit the vitiations that our tribe has suffered through the passing of time, we cannot ignore that we live under the same sky, that it's the same sun that lights above us, that it's the same ground that feeds us. The same are the geological and weather conditions that affect and shape our everyday life and thought.

(Koun: 1987, 33<sup>10</sup>)

Koun clearly places the individual as a receptive vessel of constant changes through which we might trace a genealogy of theatrical forms and a nation that can be identified by its own roots and can be transformed and affected through its own routes; within the land and the natural environment's effect on people's activities and everyday life, consequently resonating in theatre practice. Thus he places the actor in direct connection with heritage, culture and history, permitting this interaction to become a creative factor on theatre practice. Hence, each person's relationship to his land is closely related to his identity, behaviour and activities, reflecting to his national and personal characteristics, contributing to a pool of information that an actor carries about his own roots and routes, both consciously and subconsciously. Despite a disrupted period of closure and political difficulties during the late 1940s, Koun worked hard towards creating an acting school of his own, and from the early 1950's, Koun and the Art Theatre entered the longest and most fertile period until 1987. The Art Theatre continues to exist and work, but without Koun's authoritative and artistic figure things are quite different. This background allows us to understand the significance of Koun and the Art Theatre and contextualizes this enquiry into Koun's theatre practice, the role of the actor and his interest in a Hellenic theatrical renaissance.

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<sup>10</sup> (My translation)

## Karolos Koun's Theatre Practice

Patricia Kokkori suggests a broader context to Koun's visualization of a new theatre approach in 1930s when a nation was searching to re-establish its identity and questioning matters of Hellenic material and resources.

There are three main coordinates which constitute the basic principles of the Art Theatre's aesthetic line: a) **the social realism**, [...] urbanism [...] local reality [...] individual's margination, b) **the psychological drama with the tragic element**, the existential problem of the individual [...] Namely, the individual's collision with the mass, c) **the presence of the naturalistic element**, that is the urban folk element which specifies a Hellenic autochthony (Greekness) which has been expressed in a way that was characterized as expressionistic [...]

(1989: 37)

Kokkori clearly suggests that Koun's 'aesthetic line' was deeply influenced by the existing sociological and artistic circumstances and implies the psychological and realistic elements in his work (pointing us notionally to Stanislavsky in her use of the phrase naturalistic), within a search for 'Hellenekoteta' via channels of an autochthonic expression. As far as the point of urbanism is concerned, Koun worked during a period that saw a massive wave of domestic migration from the villages and rural life to the big cities which started to transform, and produced an interesting mosaic of different dialects of the Greek language, several traditions from different places, different customs, habits, social conventions, political and even philosophical aspects which were adapted within a constantly changing environment and nation.

The majority of the people had no relationship at all with the notion of a 'bourgeoisie', which invited the ideas of 'fake melodrama, mannerism and romanticism' that Koun rejected. This situation prompted Koun to explore the individual in relation to society and the different aspects of Hellenic cultural elements and various traditions, developing a mode of performance he called 'folk expressionism'. As Koun describes it:

I started taking as basis the Hellenic Folk reality, with all its rich, primitive and **instinctive** (*my emphasis*) element [...] its beauty, naïve, primordial and mainly plastic type, externalized in abundant lines. The movements, the body postures, the chat, everything was full of meaning, they were coming from a real psychic condition and need, if not of course intellectual, without mannerism, without restrictions, without prohibitions of good attitude that usually narcotize every plasticity in other social classes.

(2004: 23)

In this Koun was drawn to specific material in terms of ancient drama, both tragedy and comedy, where 'the main guide to re-discover ancient drama was what was around us, the shapes, the sounds, the forms.' (Art Theatre, 2011) We might consider the ancient and contemporary dramatic texts which are written in the same language (Hellenic), using recognizable everyday expressions (traditions, conventions, speech, customs, verbal and physical gesture and all available forms of communication). Koun aimed to reveal and maintain a connection to popular traditions and promote their folk and cultural characteristics, as well derive material from the available Hellenic historical context in order to elaborate his performance style. As Reni Pittaki, who acted for him, explains: 'He was like an imprisoned bourgeois child in a house who was longing to 'commune' with the folksiness, he desired it, and he fell in love with it...' (January 2013)

Koun had no intention of “preserving” ancient drama as a cultural achievement or an outdated Greek museum piece and did not aim to recreate some idea of an authentic past. Grammatas explains:

That’s why he suggests the insertion of elements from the everyday life of the Greeks, and enrichment of the ones of the Hellenic antiquity, with Neo-Hellenic cultural elements. The Attic pottery is combined with the folk painting and the mythological figures with contemporary historical individuals.

(2002: 277)

His vision then was based upon the elaboration of contemporary meanings that emerged from everyday life, customised knowledge and heritage, which were (re) generated through the actor-teacher/director working environment in relation to the text and the role. At a second level, Koun’s search for this ‘folk expressionism’ led to his choice of predominantly male working-class actors, where he viewed each one as carrying particularly expressive acting tools. Considering Grammatas’ and Koun’s points linked to my personal experience, this expression allows one to open, learn, share and explore further instinctively and impulsively, creating images in singing, dancing, speaking, moving, gesturing that might convey something ‘genuine’. The more based in instinct and impulse drawn from this folk basis, he felt, the more the actor could serve his quest of exploring something ‘authentic’, ‘pure’ or ‘genuine’ as theatrical expression, discovering ‘dimensions of everyday habits in roles that until then seemed to be completely unrealistic’ as Grammatas suggests (2006: 106). Here presumably the term ‘habits’ touches a more collective sense that encapsulates national traditions and ethnic characteristics that have been conveyed, developed, formed and transformed through genealogy.

Grammatas refers to Koun's wider and broader conception of such a habitual and instinctive-impulsive behaviour that emerges from a specific knowledge background, which in turn is transferred consciously or subconsciously from the actor on stage where it is worked and developed through the actor-director relationship. Koun then helps us understand that his instinctive, impulsive and intuitive inner approaches as processes were important, and thus experimentation and improvisation were an integral part of his directorial scope. Yet Koun also noted before the influence of intercultural elements that have also been assimilated in Hellenic tradition, attributing to the notion of Hellenekoteta that may include other traditions, morals and habitudes.

So paradoxically, his directorial visualisations given in the search for the notion of Hellenekoteta through folk expressionism, were implying the use of other types and forms that were not entirely indigenous but were simultaneously considered 'very' Hellenic as adopted and adapted ethnic material. An excellent example of how this might work lies in one of Koun's most well-known performances, Aristophanes' *The Birds* in 1959, which produced violent reactions when he used a Christian Orthodox priest to chant during the performance. In this case, the liturgy was being treated as an element of 'tradition' rather than a religious activity. Here Koun was searching for the shared tradition in ritualised expression that might resonate with his audiences and would offer a fertile ground of (re) considering facts from our everyday life (in this case religion), via an anti-conservative and pioneer approach.

Magyar suggests that Koun's early life was influenced by diverse cultural inputs, including a 'rich mix of eastern, byzantine and European characteristics' and that this led him to treat the ancient drama as 'a creation of a place and a culture which eternally stood between east and west.'(2004: 14-15) As Koun speaks about ancient drama and comments on his approach:

Hellenic theatre is a crossroad between East and West. It is very much influenced ritually from the Asian. This ritual is something we do not quite know. We suspect it. So in the matter of interpretation, **instinctively**(my emphasis) I sensed the need to give a ritual that derived from something primitive but as well for Hellenic tradition and our contemporary life.

(1987: 101)

Koun considers Hellas as a cultural crossroad where ethnic traditions are filtered through an ideology of a Hellenic theatre that recognizes itself through a constantly changing historical framed process. Koun's directorial style evolved through ancient Hellenic material, indigenous material which has been transmitted and transformed respectively through time, international material seen through a Hellenic filter, and adapted as well adopted material from other cultural backgrounds. Offering a process like this, Koun succeeded in finding a common ground where all of the aforementioned would reveal a sense of the term 'Hellenic Spirit' which became a basic part and tool of his working trajectory.

## The actor and actor training

The actor in Koun's world and theatrical praxis was placed into the centre of the creative process, as the most important part of his vision for a collective theatre and the driving force towards a deeper and more fertile communication with the audience. So, I would like to discuss some parameters that characterised and influenced Koun's relationship with the actor, acting and actor training. It is important to mention that Koun was interested in the actor's personal material and Eva Kotamanidou surprised me when I interviewed her about the experience she had with Koun with regards to the choice of his actors and actresses:

**George Chouliaras:** Koun was not though a 'folk' man...he was from a posh family...

**Eva Kotamanidou:** No, he was not... (My note: a 'folk guy')

**Both:** ...but he loved the 'folk' element!

**E.K.:** And all his favourite actors were all very ordinary folk people...

**G.C.:** Exactly...

**E.K.:** Chatzimarkos, Lazanis, Mimis, Armenis, they were all quite folk guys...he liked this...on the contrary, his women were all educated...all of them were bourgeois!

(Pause)

**G.C.:** What you just said is very interesting...I had never thought of that...

**E.K.:** There was not a single one from the women we have been talking about during the 50's and 60's that was from the lower classes... I never met anyone such...and then me, Maia, Reni and many others...

**G.C.:** Now that you say it, I think a little bit of it that you all had some sort of a 'class'...

**E.K.:** Yes, from universities...me i.e. I had studied French Literature...

(January 2013)

Interestingly Kotamanidou's point about Koun's non-folk character and personality, is aligned with Pitaki's one earlier about Koun's 'bourgeois individualism' and his love for folksiness.

Also, Kotamanidou's offer in the area of human resources choices and criteria for Koun's male actors and female actresses is unique, as this particular issue was something completely unknown, since as we already saw his work was predominantly based on folk types of male actors.<sup>11</sup> Apparently Koun had found a very personal and instinctive way to wed his acting vision by bringing on stage people who were coming from different areas of the Hellenic society puzzle (different classes, education and backgrounds), opening that way the actors' possibilities to engage with things that might seem unfamiliar when working with their partners in rehearsal, and create a fertile field of exchanging information from one aspect to the other.

In that sense, Koun's interest in the actor's material as individual led towards a broader and deeper reflection of Hellenic society which assisted his directorial scope and allowed him to develop text-role explorations adapted to contemporary reality. This was reflected via the actor's capacity and the material that was conveyed as tradition, culture and identity, through the prism of their personal experiences. With this in hand, Koun was able to alter every time his working terms and adapt his artistic viewpoints accordingly. His beliefs then about a theatre that is based on the actor and the material one carries seem to find their manifestation within his directorial work and Mimis Kougioumtzis discusses it:

**I don't know, he had no directorial line** (my emphasis). This somehow sounds strange but I believe it is like this because Koun never gave the impression that he directed.

Koun was teaching [...] the rehearsals that Koun was doing were an acting class, not

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<sup>11</sup> Koun could distinguish the folk elements perhaps in a more prominent way in male performers, thus this choice is justified as serving his directorial and acting vision. Or Koun might had gender-issues, which although is probably an area of further and different exploration that I chose not to discuss it, since it is not attached to the core of my interests and this research orientation about Koun. My comment only clarifies Koun's choices and does not exclude women's offer to the Art Theatre.



‘direction’ [...] the acting needs determined Koun’s ‘directorial line’ for the play. There was no premeditated direction.

(1990: 23)

Kougioumtzis discusses Koun’s absolute relationship with his actors, to the extent that his directorial line derived almost exclusively from this connection, as the primary factor that shaped his work. Kostis Kapelonis in our interview reinforced Kokkori’s and Kougioumtzis’s views, discussing Koun’s directorial process through his relationship with the actor:

His directorial concept depended a lot on the play and he never had pre-constructed things in mind [...] He permitted many liberties but he also gave very powerful directions [...] during the rehearsal time, he had a ‘destroyed logic’...

(January 2013)

Rather than predetermining his directorial approach, Koun most likely used the actor as the motivating force and stimulus for his direction, thus Kougioumtzis implies acting elaboration leads to directorial choices through questioning and experimentation. As far as Koun’s evolution, explorations and differentiations in his directorial work through time, Maya Lymberopoulou offers a very interesting account of Koun’s artistic trajectory:

**M. Lymberopoulou:** Koun in terms of a ‘directorial method’ invented himself three times and this was done according to the repertoire [...] He would not choose a play for what he wanted to do with it, rather what does the play do to us [...] He was the representative kind of director who was serving the writer [...] so the first era may be titled as the ‘blues’ period when he followed his own Stanislavskian version[...] the second was after Ionesco, the ‘rock’ period...

**G. Chouliaras:** So in theatrical terms psychological theatre first and then...

**M. L.:** [...] a theatre whose rhythms were staccato, the situations were not deriving from a chain reaction of the role’s course, a non-psychological approach at this phase

[...] the third period was with Aristophanes, body and speech where he accepted fully the term of Folk Expressionism in order for his work to be distinguishable...

(January 2013)

Lymberopoulou offers here a map of Koun's activity which presents his constant evolving spirit and changeable artistic orientations. Similarly, we see Koun's ease in altering direction and adapting according to the changing time in which he was working, guided by the offered dramaturgy and cultural trends. However, actors and acting remained the most important elements throughout Koun's directorial and teaching course. Consequently, I believe that Koun urged his actors to search for a wider range of expressive capacities and to be open to derive from a variety of material, tools and reservoirs. This would assist Koun to engage with their personal matter, which in turn would link to their partners' on stage towards an actorly creativity in order to create new directorial options and responsibilities. Koun speaks about it:

The profession though of the labourer of theatre, as a pneumatic liturgy, has an additional responsibility. The labourer will interpret and transmit the speech, the message, the truth of the poet, the superior pneumatic liturgist. He (*my note*: the actor) will come in immediate touch with the people, will touch them and will help them see and feel whatever nice and true. He will help us throw away whatever washy, non-important and poor, and turn to whatever will make us worthy and fair. And this additional responsibility that weights every honest theatre labourer is the most basic feature of the profession. Without this responsibility, the profession is inexistent.

(1987: 43)

Beginning and end then, the actor had the heaviest responsibility: roles, directorial line, text meanings, teamwork; the actor was completely devoted to his 'mission' and had to be open and receptive to everything and bring this material in the rehearsal without reservations.

## Koun and Stanislavsky: Tracing the Heritage

For all Koun's interest in the Hellenic spirit and tradition, he also acknowledged this culture had survived in relation to a number of international influences; a very significant influence I have surmised from my own experience of a Kounian tradition of actor training, is drawn from Stanislavsky. In my interview with Armenis, I asked him to comment on this:

Koun's influence from Stanislavsky was realism: Situation, truth, sentiment; he grafted those in the Hellenic territory [...] Koun broke the "comme il faut" code [...] As for Hellas: he didn't know her.

(January 2013)

This last comment caught my attention; I think this is exactly the reason that Koun investigated a more popular Hellenic expression and ethnic material so much, as an attempt to break the established modes of theatre. If we extend this to include a consideration of acting, we realize that breaking the acting rules and established behaviour includes Koun's quest for a more truthful actorly expression as he possibly visualised it. In Stanislavsky he found a useful means to achieve this. During my interview with Giannis Mpezos, he was quite clear about it:

**G.Chouliaras:** So, what is the relationship between Koun and Stanislavsky?

**G. Mpezos:** The common ground between Koun and Stanislavsky is the creation of a collaborative theatre as a team and the inner analysis of the roles (what, where, when, why).

(January 2013)

Koun then used Stanislavsky's actor training and adapted it to form the particular profile of a 'Stanislavskian' approach for the Greek actor with direct references to modern society.

This elaboration of the psychological reality of the tragic heroes in relation to the existential condition of the contemporary individual was conveyed by his actors and through his own expressionistic style. Grammatas outlines that Koun drew on Stanislavsky particularly for work on tragedy:

Here, Stanislavsky comes to offer an appropriate background, on which Koun grounds his actors' acting. The controlled sentiment, the moderate emotion, the avoidance of weight and exaggeration to the movements and the utilization of the phonetics and the rest of the bodily qualifications of the actor, comprise some of the authoritative principles which compose the acting code towards the attribution of ancient drama, according to the opinion of the founder of the Art Theatre.

(2006: 106)

As it appears then in the case of tragedy, Koun's use of Stanislavsky is related to the use of some tools and working material of the actor and acting in terms of a psychological-psychophysical approach with emphasis to inner emotional process. In order to open properly the discussion about Koun's relationship and influence from Stanislavsky, what needs to be indicated is how Stanislavsky's work reached Koun and what kind of access Koun had to Stanislavsky, as well how much. The academic Konstantinos Kyriakos offers through his article *The young director Mr. Karolos Koun (1939 – 1942)* a very significant informative part from one of Koun's interviews with Eleni Varopoulou about Stanislavsky:

My reference was Stanislavsky. I had not seen a performance directed from Stanislavsky himself. I was influenced though from a 'Stanislavskian' American performance I had seen in England: the *Golden Boy* by Clifford Odets [...] I also met Russian theatre and Stanislavsky through France. And when I was in France, I watched many performances from Gaston Baty and Pitoeff [...]

(In Kyriakos, 2012: 21)

As mentioned, after Koun left Konstantinoupolis he went for studies abroad and had not yet involved himself with theater practice (not even at an amateur level), hence we may assume that both trips in France and England were the very first contacts with Stanislavsky and became his primary inspirations and influences. Lykourgos Kallergis, another early partner and actor of Koun's, speaks of Stanislavsky's influence to Koun during the preparations of a performance (*The Cherry Orchard*) in 1939, only three years before the official opening of the Art Theatre and three years after 'Folk Scene' terminated its operation:

We started rehearsals, and in January 1939 this performance was done. Koun then was starting to be informed about the Stanislavsky system [...] he (Koun: *my note*) was very well constituted and followed the international developments. He did *The Cherry Orchard* using as a basis the Stanislavsky System[...] We were fully concentrated to the role, we were becoming one with it, meaning we were incarnating the character and did not just interpret it. There was a concurrence of us, an extension of ourselves to the character.

(1990: 9)

Despite the fact that Koun never explicitly admitted to using exercises from Stanislavsky in terms of an actor training method, we can distinguish that his rehearsal and working process were coming out of a study that Koun was doing about on Stanislavsky's working patterns. Although here Kallergis does not explain the way the information was received, we keep his witnessing as a participant-actor of the process that Koun was following, which leads us to the conclusion that Koun was efficiently informed about Stanislavsky's work, aims and processes. The academic Eleni Varopoulou in *M.I.E.T.'S offering Karolos Koun*, comments: 'It is not clear that all this theatrical fermentation had an impact in Hellas, Hellenic press or elsewhere.

There are though indications that Karolos Koun was informed about these innovations' (2010: 222). In that respect though, it would be wise to assume that during this stage, Koun was accepting all of the available influences he could possibly reach and acquire,<sup>12</sup> developing this way his own interpretation of Stanislavsky's work. Kallergis speaks with specific information about the role approach, although not for the material of the approach in terms of rehearsal process. Other sources for Koun though, were a few partial translations. Giorgos Sevastikoglou one of Koun's early partners, offers in the Journal *Lexis* an interesting insight to the reception of information of that time as he speaks about Koun and the availability of material:

He found them for me, and I translated from English proceedings, from rehearsals or notes from Stanislavsky, Vakhtangov, Meyerhold, and Tairov. We did not manage to study many of them (especially the theoretic) – the Art Theatre performances had begun.

(1987: 134)

The Art Theatre was founded in 1942, thus Sevastikoglou reflects on the beginning of that period when Koun elaborates on Stanislavsky's teachings and work with his own company, partners and students, based on the assumption that this was happening without full, straight or easy access to Stanislavsky. As we also see, this was done within a period where Koun was already working on his productions, hence this reveals that Koun's work at that point was in the middle of developments and changes and accepted influences towards the establishment of the Art Theatre and its artistic orientation.

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<sup>12</sup> Koun most probably did not have an immediate and full information about Stanislavsky and all the range of his system and practical work, although seems that he had efficient access to use and deploy his artistic vision.

An important parameter is to consider the fact that the first translations from Stanislavsky's famous books<sup>13</sup> were not translated in Hellenic until 1959 when they were released for the first time. So these translated manuscripts and texts that Sevastikoglou refers to must have been a real treasure of knowledge and influence for Koun to inform himself about Stanislavsky's work, Vakhtangov and the other related practitioners' work and process-progress in theatre practice. Another interesting clue though which represents Koun's access to Stanislavsky, is the naming of his association, as Art Theatre. Koun explains that

When we founded the Art Theatre in 1942 during the fascist occupation (*my note: the German*), we were full of the Stanislavsky method. We did our best to learn as much as possible from his School. We were studying his books, analysing his method. [...] We were influenced directly from there. That is why we took our name from the Moscow 'Art Theatre'.

(1987: 92)

Koun witnesses his access to Stanislavsky and makes clear through his declaration about the name loan that his association would study and elaborate on the tracks of the Moscow Art Theatre and Stanislavsky. To conclude on this, Koun accessed Stanislavsky through various channels: primarily, his own performance watching outside Hellas and later via a sufficient number of short writing and notes that came from Stanislavsky and Vakhtangov as well related practitioners translated from English, enough to assist his theatre practice at that point. Only after 1959, when Stanislavsky's books were translated Koun could have a much more complete picture of the System.

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<sup>13</sup> An Actor Prepares, Building a Character, Preparing a Role

About the books, my teacher Giannis Mortzos commented relatively that: 'Stanislavsky's books were for us **the gospel** (*his emphasis*)...they also were our main theoretical study during the three years of the Art Theatre drama school.'(January 2013) After 1959 as well, Koun started to include more practical approaches and expressed interest for more organic forms of performance, without though forgetting Stanislavsky's major influence whose work was the corner stone for the Art Theatre until nowadays and Koun's practice until his death in 1987. Yet in some ways Koun was very different to Stanislavsky and this has to be investigated in terms of Koun's elaborative material. Grammatas here discusses the relation between actor and teacher/director:

Koun was paying attention to the collective work [...] under his instructions. Questioning and experimentation on the possible versions and interpretations of the text, that set free the actor's imagination, release his expressive means and allow the director to compose the distributed conquests of his actors, into a final shape that brings his own seal. This effect is a product of a collective creation, which becomes firmed up, even during the performance, passing from the stage of the improvisation to the realization of the primal vision and the director's conception.

(2002: 337)

Here Grammatas offers a much stronger understanding of a work that was applied on specific axis of continuous practice based elaboration, and all through the actor's contribution to a sense of collaboration, one that invites imagination and improvisation functions to flourish. Consequently his collaborative works with the actor(s) was an integral part of the ongoing process of directing, thus we may assume the versatile and changeable nature of Koun's directorial decisions according to the given material and work.



This theatre practice background is essential and applies as well to my own experience as an actor: that fundamental element that elaborates the actor's core and gradually expands towards collaborators without forgetting his individuality and personality, but that can at the same time eliminate his ego in favour of the collective spirit and team work. Grammatas discussed the actor's work and role and exemplifies the role of instinct and impulse in Koun's work as well linked to Stanislavsky:

In the actor's preparation for his role, [Koun] **does not follow an organized teaching method with a pre-determined technique** (*my emphasis*). Of course (he) is based in known principles and actor training models just like Stanislavsky's,<sup>14</sup> but he assimilates and inseminates them creatively through his own aesthetic and artistic desires.

(Grammatas, 2002: 276)

Grammatas once again comments the absence of a method as well Stanislavsky's use from Koun in terms of his own visionary and interpretation. Personally, I have experienced this sense of absence of an organised model and the same time an assimilation of elements from Stanislavsky's background. This was through my apprenticeship and professional career, where my reference was mainly the tools and notions I felt using, meaning spontaneity, instinct and impulsivity via continuous labour on the text and imagination-improvisation, constant role building which drew on my 'psyche' (soul) material. Kokkori also makes an interesting point that the actor training and rehearsal aspect of Koun and Stanislavsky shared a relationship and with regards to it, for Koun, the sense of truth on stage (how would things be if an action was true)

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<sup>14</sup> Grammatas intentionally uses Stanislavsky's system here as an influence, since it stood as the dominant and major one through the Art Theatre practice. Although, the phrase may be interpreted as well in a different way, meaning that Koun's openness allowed many influences to interfere into his work, 'just like Stanislavsky's one'.

emerged from a notion of intuition, and clearly echoes elements in Stanislavsky, such as the famous “magic if”. Kokkori brings both practitioners into conversation in her writing in relation to it:

Stanislavsky: “Every person is configuring the external image of a hero, with elements that are taken from himself, from others, from real life or the imaginative sphere, according to his intuition, with the self-observation or the other people’s observation... as far as when he does this external search, not to lose his inner self”<sup>15</sup>.

Koun: “I believe that the artist ought to examine carefully the eternal reality, study it, be practiced fully and technically on how he will reproduce it better, but never forget that the final aim is not this, namely to copy just the nature’s creation, but what is the meaning that he gives to it, the human, led by his poetic and philosophic perception of his life, his mind, his blood, his psyche (soul)”<sup>16</sup>.

(1989: 38)

Both practitioners ground the naturalistic sense via observation of the outer world and external stimuli which are laboured via the actor’s individuality as a unit, as well as part of a society.

This artistic frame fits interestingly in my research, as I aim to examine the actor’s perception both ways, working into ‘Stanislavskian’ - ‘Kounian’ environments. Nevertheless, the difference which makes my quest extremely hard but quite interesting is that on the one hand there is a whole actor training system as an organized effort that can be of use any time, and on the other hand the complete absence of such information. My interest lies upon decoding and mapping areas of Koun’s actor training practice in order to understand his approach with the actors since this is the core of his work.

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<sup>15</sup> Stanislavsky, K.(1960) “Creating a role” translated by A. Nikas, Athens: Gonis

<sup>16</sup> Koun, K.(1987) “We do theatre for our psyche” 9<sup>th</sup> Edition, Athens: Kastaniotis

Interestingly, in all the interviews I conducted, all without exception confirmed that Koun did not imitate Stanislavsky and did not make any use of Stanislavsky's actual exercises; there were absolutely no exercises in the modelling or systematic sense we assume or know today thus my intention is not to model it as a system (since this most probably is not even possible considering the given information about Koun), but rather to elaborate the common ground between Koun and Stanislavsky, through the tools that Koun used, proving this way the practical link with Stanislavsky and create the primary circumstances for an early acting approach. For me, this process is open in terms of psychophysical, psychological, physical and behavioural patterns; through my practice-based project reflection that follows I investigate the major points of reference between Koun and Stanislavsky. In terms of Koun's personal vision of work and practical process with regards to the actor as he perceives him, he says:

Actor is one who apprentices his whole life. Actor is one who evolves continuously. The teacher is creator of stimulation of spiritual curiosity. There is in us a working system of our own. The actor's ascription is connected with the team's one.

(1987: 91)

Evidently Koun didn't see his actors as puppets; rather he was interested to support their progress within a receptive environment of adaptation via new needs and orientations. This was linked integrally according to the purpose and the meaning each of the plays conveyed, but most importantly was based on Koun's reception of the play's meaning and what it might reveal in relation to contemporary society. Thus the actor was blossoming into this framework and was able to engage further personally with a role to produce a result which in turn would be a role proposal to be worked along with Koun via the presented and elaborated material.

## Introduction Epilogue

So Koun built his creative and artistic queries on the foundations of: a) Stanislavsky's work adapted to the Hellenic theatrical status, b) his own expression (-istic) scope (his famous so-called 'folk expressionism'), and c) the notion of Hellenekoteta (Greekness) or Hellenic Spirit in his work which were filtered and elaborated via acting and the actor as main core of his practice. Koun remained on this path until his death in 1987, innovating and open to new influences that might contribute creatively to his artistic vision. As an inheritor of Koun, I embrace the elaborative, improvisatory and experimental workshop approach that I myself experienced in my training and professional practice. Hence in my practice project, my aim was to explore experiment and discover Koun's tools in terms of his relationship and influence from Stanislavsky, as well sense Koun's artistic orientations through particular notions in acting like folk expressionism and Hellenekoteta which in my case were introduced differently, since my actors were not Greek. Thus, I familiarized the actors with the Hellenic elements and conditions of the ancient texts in relation to contemporary Hellas, as well in relation to their own tradition and culture. The linking thread with Koun and Stanislavsky was through impulsivity and instinctual labour, with references to the actors' heritage and background and I am exploring the actor as an individual (personality and character within a social structure), the actor as a role-constructor (real life, role and text) and the actor/ coach-director relationship. With this in mind, I am seeking to recognise a mix of Hellenic and international cultural elements that may support the idea of modern interpretation of ancient drama by decoding Koun's psychological and psychophysical work.

## The Koun/Stanslavski Relationship and Project Reflection

### Premise

In the following pages, I am going to present a written reflection of my practice based research on the relationship between Karolos Koun and Stanislavsky elaborated in my practical project. The research question here is to explore the relationship, similarities, and differences between particular aspects of the work of Karolos Koun and Konstantin Stanislavsky, specifically in the area of their work with the actor and actor training. I am interested to reveal what sort of material from Stanislavsky Koun made use of, and the extent to which was assimilated into Koun's work. A particular focus is on the actor/director elaboration where the director acts also as a teacher, coach and mentor as I reflect on my own work with Koun's and Stanislavsky's, informed by my professional experiences and knowledge. With all of the aforementioned in hand, I will attempt to schematize a potential approach towards an understanding of a 'Kounian' way of working that can help me develop my own role as actor trainer and director. This chapter begins with a discussion of Koun's and Stanislavsky's interest in acting elements of spontaneity, instinct, impulse, improvisation and imagination.<sup>17</sup> I then reflect on my project and the work that has been done with the actors, via my own personal experience as a professional theatre practitioner, presenting the range of experimentation and discoveries that took place within a theatre practice environment through moments-examples from the project. Finally I offer the reader some conclusion from the discoveries on the specific areas of investigation.

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<sup>17</sup> I chose these specific tools and material driven from my own experience with 'Kounian' training and professional performance making.

## Koun and Stanislavsky

To begin with, it is significant to examine the basics of Koun and Stanislavsky's working philosophy and common tools which will introduce us the working material, environment and the aesthetics of each one of them. As we have seen, the notion of a system or a schematized model that draws from set exercises is something that did not exist at all in the Hellenic Art Theatre. One of the closest to Koun, Giorgos Lazanis explains:

Koun does not follow a definite 'method' of actor training/teaching. There are many such methods and Koun never liked the set solutions. The pre-determined technique for Koun is a trap which will constrain the **instinct,<sup>18</sup> the emotion/sentiment, and even the actor's fantasy/imagination** (*my emphasis*). He believes that the technique that the actor will use in one role and will try to apply to another will eventually trap him/her.

(1972: 283)

Lazanis presents Koun linking the instinctive behaviour and function with a working environment where specified actor training norms were not welcome or required in the working trajectory of a rehearsal on a play. We might also note that the actor's instinctive and impulsive elaboration is discussed by Lazanis as a fundamental precondition to reach profound emotional, sentimental and imaginative material. Interestingly, despite much reference to the Stanislavsky system, Bella Merlin in *Beyond Stanislavsky* notes the necessity to feel that one's work within Stanislavsky's system remains an open matter to evolve further and be elaborated according to the specific demands and interests of the immediate moment:

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<sup>18</sup> Driven from my own experiential background both as a student and a professional, I may suggest that the terms instinct-impulse-intuition in the Art Theatre are identical and are used towards same interpretations and meanings at work.

[...] **there is no definite explanation of Stanislavsky's system** (*my emphasis*): even Stanislavsky didn't have one, his theories were still in state of on-going development when he died. **Understanding the 'system' is now dependent on contemporary practitioners' lore** (*my emphasis*). Since society is in a state of continuous development, so too is theatre, and so must any 'system' be for getting inside representations of human behaviour. In other words, the changing nature of lore is legitimate, as it prevents method becoming museum.

(2001: 6)

Merlin's contribution in Stanislavsky's area may be considered as extremely important; her suggestion finds common ground with the statement that Lazanis offers about Koun and his relationship with the actor when at work. Although we should note that while both Lazanis and Merlin draw attention to open elaboration and continuous development, Merlin places this working scope in the working frame of Stanislavsky's system and goes beyond it, while Lazanis emphasises Koun's rejection of any kind of system. In both cases about 'contemporary practitioner's lore', the actor's craft is seen as a process of continuous search and development, open to new directions that might emerge at work. The paradox about Koun is that he indeed accepted influences from Stanislavsky, though not in terms of his systematized methodology, rather in a form of materialized knowledge and philosophy of work that potentially helps the actor in rehearsal through Koun's personal interpretation. Koun himself in Pelichos' *Karolos Koun: Conversations*, highlights his relationship with Stanislavsky:

**G. Pelichos:** Which of the great masters-teachers and researchers-practitioners of theatre have stood as your guides to your effort so far?

**Karolos Koun:** Many and no one. From times to times I was gleaning, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously, elements from theories and achievements

that stimulated me. I believe in Stanislavski who suggested to the next generation to derive from his thoughts and experiences whatever moves their work forwards and decline whatever stands as an obstacle to their development.

(1987: 61)

Koun establishes the link between himself and Stanislavsky by admitting his influence, not in the sense of a 'faithful student', but rather as a practitioner who supports his own claim in relation to another practitioner's work. Koun helps us distinguish a common ground between himself and Stanislavsky from a theatre practice orientation: from the one side he includes Stanislavsky and elements of his practice, while from the other Koun remarks the necessity of moving further without restrictions and addictions to specific systems and actor training models. Seemingly, he supports Stanislavsky's claim about his system:

The System is a guide. Open and read. The System is a handbook, not a philosophy. The moment when the System begins to become a philosophy is its end. Examine the System at home, but forget about it when on stage. You can't play the System. There is no System. There is only nature. My lifelong concern has been how to get ever closer to the so-called 'System', that is to get ever closer to the nature of creativity.

(In Hodge: 2000: 371)

Stanislavsky's parallelism of 'the so-called System' with the nature of creativity reveals his visualisation about its use as a starting point and assists the artist understand that its variable framework. Interestingly, Stanislavsky does not allow the reader think that the so-called system is constituted by rules, but rather implies its use as a suggestion towards discovering the best possible channel of one's own creativity. Focusing specifically on the tools and working material employed by Koun, Grammatas discusses the actor's work and role in relation to Stanislavsky's influence:



He believes in the actor's **instinct and imagination and bases his work on the impulsivity and the improvisation** (*my emphasis*). He sets as a basic plan for the actor, to reach the accomplishment of the final aim of his role, the acting completion, by exploiting the inner, subjective capabilities and the common experiences and stimuli of the outer world.

(2002: 276)

Grammatas here highlights that impulsivity, instinctive behaviour and imagination were integral parts of Koun's practice with the actor supported through the tool of improvisation, as an open field of investigation rather than expressed in specific structures or exercises. From 'inside Koun's rehearsal space', Mortzos explained during our interview:

Stanislavsky's method was adapted for Hellenic facts and reality [...] Koun was Koun. He was a good 'student and researcher' of Stanislavski but he was feeling that he still had a lot of way to walk. **The rehearsal was Koun; there was no Stanislavski at work and teaching** (*my emphasis*).<sup>19</sup> There was no exercise and no particular structure in rehearsal. The first thing that Koun was looking for was **full concentration**(*emphasized by Mortzos*), you had to be absolutely concentrated and delivered at work, leave everything back/out [...] **Koun = Spontaneity, Instinct, Imagination, Passion**(*my emphasis*). He was very impulsive and was working a lot with the actor's impulses and instincts. It was necessary to feel that you are passionate and he was working a lot with each actor's particularities and individuality. The role had to be conquered through the actor's qualifications and skill and the first thing he would approach would be the search for 'truth'.

(January 2012)

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<sup>19</sup> Mortzos clarifies the interesting paradox in Koun's work in terms of the influences he accepted, assimilated, adapted and adopted. In this case (with Stanislavsky), Mortzos explains that the produced work was not predominantly Stanislavsky driven, rather was transferred as a 'Kounian' style with various influences. Also I would suggest from personal experience with Mortzos that he refers to the working norm without system (Stanislavsky).

There is a focus on the actor's individualism, personal characteristics and background in relation to external-internal stimuli, as a fertile combination towards reaching the role's emotional state. Drawing from my own experience with many of Koun's students,<sup>20</sup> Koun's own personal instinct and impulsivity at work as a teaching and training element in his relationship with the actor, was the key towards role and text approaches (acting) and the major contribution to the resultant performance. A representative example derives from my third year studentship in the drama school (2002-2003), when amongst many other scenes and plays I worked with Mortzos on Fernando Arrabal's '*Fando and Lis*', where I recall that he was prompting us to work without any acting notes and corrections at all. The only thing Mortzos did was to speak to us about the characters prompted by our work delivery in a passionate, almost a manic way, and let us respond to his comments in practice, i.e. 'he is violent, he is stupid, he is ignorant, he is physically strong'. This helped me to build my role instinctively through the imagery I was offered and which intrigued my imagination to shape my behaviour. Mortzos was working a lot with my impulses and responses and was returning it to me in many forms.<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, I had realised that there was an invisible relationship between me and my teacher which had been created through this give-take-return process where my material elaboration grew on a shared ground of my teacher's perception, instinctively, imaginatively and impulsively. These simple characterisations and the passionate atmosphere of creativity were motivating forces towards the role-text interpretation.

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<sup>20</sup> Actors, Directors, Teachers in the Drama School and the professional Industry; I am as well a carrier of his working method as a student, actor, director, teacher and researcher.

<sup>21</sup> Here it was returned to me as a characterization, which I should embrace, elaborate and develop for my role.

Also the continuously produced internal and external stimuli were affecting my individuality, emotional world and responsiveness, which were in turn creating new options through my awareness. Kapelonis in our interview discusses this interchange between Koun and actor and provides some rehearsal insight:

[Koun] was always very concentrated on the actor at rehearsal. Koun kept pace with the actor continuously. When Koun was drawing out a scream, a vocalism, an explosion, this was something that the actor had given to him.

(January 2013)

So Koun's reservoir was primarily the actor's offer towards a constructive exchange which would create the circumstances of creativity, triggered and filtered by inner and outer stimulations within an environment that was inviting instinctive and impulsive activity. In a very similar way Stanislavsky expressed particular interest in the aforementioned tools and areas of practice. Joseph Roach linked these tools to impulse, stimuli and spontaneity:

The Stanislavski [sic] System is a means of manipulating levels of consciousness to achieve certain specific effects on the body, especially the illusion of spontaneity. [...] Stanislavski [sic] believed that in life the process of adaptation is continuous. He believed that an inner "dialogue" runs within us without interruption –a stream of consciousness sustained and constantly redirected by subconscious impulses and sensory stimuli. [...] This is the life that the actor attempts to emulate by "living the role".

(In Blair: 2008, 33-34)

Within my research framework, these particular points appear to be clear links between Koun's specific training material and practical notions of work that resemble to Stanislavsky's

environment that valued the actor's openness and responsiveness to the use of impulse, stimuli and a state of spontaneity. So if I recall my class with Mortzos and discuss it in relation to Roach's point about Stanislavsky, I would say that I experienced this 'inner dialogue' via 'subconscious impulses and sensory stimuli' that triggered my instinct, intuition, imagination and spontaneity to discover my role. A common tool and practice between Stanislavsky and Koun was the development of improvisation. Koun's working environment demanded high levels of discipline, concentration, the actor's openness and availability to exchange material with the teacher/mentor. Mortzos identifies impulse and instinct as integral parts of the Art Theatre actor and my experiential background confirms that. Interestingly, we distinguish Stanislavsky's consideration about the role of impulse in his work:

Thus inner impulses – the urge to action and the inner actions themselves – acquire an exceptional meaning in our work. They are our motive power in moments of creation, and only that creativeness which is predicated on inner action is scenic. By "scenic" in the theatre we mean action in the spiritual sense of the world.

(In Drain: 1995, 253)

So Stanislavsky as well Koun were considering impulse and instinct as basic elements of creativity towards the scenic action. For Koun, the actor's openness and concentration were conditions for impulsivity, instinct and imagination, and likewise according to John Gillett, Stanislavsky was interested to cultivate the actor's concentration and availability, as a primary stage of his work, which would create the circumstances for the actor to elaborate via intuition, impulse and imagination here described as ease and focus in public solitude:

This ease and focus helps enable actors to arrive at the inner creative state Stanislavski calls 'I am': where you act in the moment intuitively and imaginatively, spontaneously and unselfconsciously.

(2007: 49)

Apparently, ease and focus as presented in Stanislavsky's framework, apply similarly in Koun's one as Mortzos says that 'you had to be absolutely concentrated and delivered at work'. In view of this, Mortzos and Gillett discuss of the same state of the actor, (concentration and full delivery/availability – ease and focus) towards working on impulse, intuition, imagination and spontaneity. Hence it may be said that in terms of the actor's primary state and approach to the working a role or a text, Koun shares a common ground with Stanislavsky. With this in mind, I introduced my actors some exercises from Stanislavsky which are particularly devoted to the elaboration of concentration and availability/openness, using them as a beginning point of psychophysical and plain physical engagement starting as a warm up and advancing to a level of spontaneity where the actor could act impulsively and imaginatively in relation to her/his own body and inner state towards improvisations. Such exercises from Stanislavsky's environment amongst others were for instance the Circles of Attention:

Lie on the floor or sit in a comfortable position, and close your eyes [...] Focus your ATTENTION on the smallest possible circle –i.e. yourself and BREATHING [...] Gradually expand your attention to incorporate the room you're in [...] Expand the CIRCLE OF ATTENTION to include the rest of the building [...] Now make the circle even larger and hear the sounds in the immediate neighbourhood [...] Expand the CIRCLE OF ATTENTION even further until the sounds of the whole town are in your awareness [...] Little by little, reduce the circles. Come back [...]

(2007: 280)

This exercise engaged with a range of areas of interest: concentration, sensory awareness, visualization and imagination, inner and physical awareness through a sense of public solitude.<sup>22</sup> It becomes apparent as well that the notion of imagination was indeed a very important area of practice for both practitioners; Grammatas and Mortzos mention imagination as integral and fundamental part of Koun's work (Mortzos even equalizes Koun with it while Grammatas presents it as one of the basic tools). We might compare this to Stanislavsky's opinion about the importance of imagination:

The actor must feel the challenge physically as well intellectually, because the imagination... can reflexively affect our physical nature and make it act...not a step should be taken on the stage without the cooperation of your imagination.

(2007: 125)

Stanislavsky here outlines imagination's significance and discusses its role in the effect of the actor's psycho-physicality, presenting it as a motivating force which may lead the action. One related exercise I used in my workshop from Stanislavsky was the *Imagination Exercise* which I found useful for the actors to engage with, since as it appears for both Koun and Stanislavsky, it offers the fertile ground for the actor to act impulsively and intuitively while accessing his imagination through his role visualization and towards the accomplishment of his aims. This of course is discussed in terms of the actor's availability and concentration which was equally fundamental for both practitioners. Carnicke quotes Stanislavsky's view in terms of the exercise material which was explored from various perspectives like the following that suggests the actor to:

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<sup>22</sup> Gillett explains it as 'the state of being alone in your attention but in the presence of an audience' (2007: 48)

Close your eyes and imagine that you are a tree. Define your species [...], how old you are [...] and conjure a vision of where you grow. Then pick a particular moment from your life and create it imaginatively [...] What could you feel? See? Hear?

(in Hodge: 2000: 21)

Koun's actress Nelli Aggelidou<sup>23</sup> offers in the Journal *Lexis* a very good articulation of Koun's working perspective and relationship with the actor in terms of the materiality of the rehearsal, discussing amongst other instinct and imagination:

Koun was permanently innovative, prodromic and authentic. He was the first who altered the terms of work in our theatre<sup>24</sup>, introducing Stanislavsky's method ingrained to the special Hellenic characteristics. [...] Substantially, he was teaching according to each actor's capacities separately. [...] Despite Koun appreciated the instinctive actors, given the fact that **he was starting as well from instinct** (*my emphasis*), I am sure that he knew that he could not rely entirely on it. **He was asking for spirituality, research, suffering** (*my emphasis*) [...] He demanded to offer ourselves, **our imagination** (*my emphasis*) and jump into a state of Dionysian Bachea in relation to the role and **not serve it with our brain, but our psyche (soul)** (*my emphasis*) [...] Koun never hesitated to change something in the rehearsal that he had found correct the previous day. Every rehearsal resembled a progress of his direction.

(1987: 119-120)

Aggelidou, like Mortzos previously, offers a very good insight in Koun's rehearsal room; her perspective reinforces the importance of Koun's instinctive approach in every single moment of his work thus we can assert that Koun's approach centred on instinct and impulse in rehearsal, via his contact with the actor's character, personality and artistic choices. Also, as assimilated notions from Stanislavsky adapted to the Hellenic theatre and its conventions.

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<sup>23</sup> She was an actress and Koun's student who worked with him in a great number of productions.

<sup>24</sup> Meaning the Hellenic Theatre

Aggelidou's description of Koun's approach focuses on the actor's openness and links that potentially connect instinct and imagination, using images from real or fantastic experiences where the actor is invited to respond instinctively and develop his creativity in this process. With regards to the role of creativity, Cole notes that Vakhtangov identifies Stanislavsky's view of "artisticity", a term that applies in the actor's true creative state:

True creativeness can be realized only when an inner impulse to work is present. Everything created in art is of value insofar as it is brought out by an inner need; by the sincere will to create. This constant readiness towards creative work, this will to work, Stanislavski calls "artisticity". In order to develop within one self this ability, the actor must learn to seek something new at each and every rehearsal and not to reiterate what was discovered at previous rehearsals. The backlog of material acquired at the previous rehearsals will come to life by itself.

(1955: 123)

Vakhtangov in the same spirit explains Stanislavsky's notion of 'artisticity' and discusses his openness to new directions, functions and aims at work, a fact that connects the two practitioners' working scopes. Impulse is linked to readiness for both Koun and Stanislavsky. Mpezos explained in our interview:

Impulse is the primary source material. It is irrational not to use impulse (*my note*: in theatre practice). Koun was based thoroughly in impulses, on the material which is born in the exact moment [...] necessary precondition for this though, was that the actor is interesting (*my note*: that he is talented).<sup>25</sup>

(January 2013)

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<sup>25</sup> Mpezos speaks of the obvious, meaning the actor's various capabilities and natural inclination to theatre practice named as talent, although considering the way this was testified I may say that he also insinuated actors who were offering easily their personal material to Koun and were functioning with his working perspectives, ideas, personality and character.



I recall my own experiences as a student in the drama school and an actor in professional industry (speaking especially and particularly of productions where I was working with people from Koun's environment) where I was always challenged to approach a role by using my instinct and imagination. An example about this is from 2001 as a first year drama school student, when Mortzos gave me a monologue to learn and study and exactly the next day called me on stage to work in front of everyone. The amount of time to respond to such a task was the least, although I already knew the lines and the only thing I did was to deliver the text instinctively and imaginatively on the character and the circumstances of his life as I personally sensed. When I finished, Mortzos said just a few words: 'that's exactly the role George.' This was then the beginning point and trigger for me to search further as Mortzos had placed trust on my instinct and intuition about the role and the text, a fact that created aspirations for further work and discoveries. The lesson for me had started and this literally moved my inner self towards new orientations of my task, rejecting his comment of accomplishment. In other words, this state I was while at work with my role, can be defined as the one that Koun and Stanislavsky present as 'artisticity and spirituality' of the actor, as previously discussed. In relation to it, Stanislavsky discusses the environment of reaching this spiritual activity:

So let us learn once and for all that the word "action" is not the same as "miming", it is not anything the actor is pretending to present, not something external, but rather something internal, nonphysical, a *spiritual activity*. It derives from an unbroken succession of independent processes; and each of these in turn is compounded of desires or **impulses** aimed at the accomplishment of some objective.

(In Drain: 1995, 253)

Stanislavsky discusses it through defining the nature of action and its connection to impulses and considering my experience in relation to Stanislavsky's comment, it becomes apparent that Koun and Stanislavsky share common principles which are practiced in such manner towards the actor's training and self-awareness in relation to a task and objective. Kokkori discusses the philosophy of acting in the Art Theatre, and attempts to schematize the basic characteristics of Koun's practical working:

[...] I would say that for Koun the imaginative interpretation of the text precedes on the actor's preparation process. Although, it is not a separate praxis, but is interlinked with the technique which relies upon the actor's **intuition, imagination and concentration and is placed within a frame of collective improvisation** (*my emphasis*) [...] Koun was describing with generalizations or metaphorically his sensation [...] as a spectator. **Probably he was reaching the result every time driven from his intuition** (*my emphasis*).

(1989: 35-36)

Kokkori outlines more than anything else the use of an intuitive channel that operates through Koun's personal relationship with his actors, within a rehearsal environment which develops through particular requirements, linked to imagination and concentration at work. Importantly collective improvisation is discussed, which comes to include a creative and free environment for the actors' personal and collective elaboration. This collective improvisation was key to Stanislavsky's framework, as Freed discusses:

Stanislavsky was a master of improvisation. These improvisations were based not on actual material of the play, but primarily, on constructions drawn from inference and reference contained within the actual scenes of the work.

(Freed: 1964, 33)

Stanislavsky offered a range of choices in terms of exercises on improvisation, and this links clearly to a search for Koun's use of improvisation although not controlled in formal exercises. Stanislavsky's system offers many variants on improvisation and I and my actors took advantage of exercises like *Silent Improvisations & Improvisations using Words* in terms of elaboration on the actor's communication and imagination, which were used with and without text motivation, although always with specific conditions:

A sits in a park bench, wanting to meet B, but C has just sat down on the same bench to read a paper. A wants C to leave [...] An Art Exhibit. Several visitors and one Art dealer.  
(2009: 13)

Koun was basically driven by the actor's spontaneity and impulsivity, and was interested to reveal and work with the actor's emotions and sentiments, inside a process that was characterised by improvisation and continuous role building through active and vivid imagination. Consequently Koun made use of notions, tools and material like instinct, impulse, intuition, spontaneity imagination, improvisation which are common in Stanislavsky as well, towards in reaching the inner world of the actor in terms of emotional engagement. As Kapelonis asserts:

Koun was searching for inwardness, emotional state and inner truth everywhere [...] he would never show something if he was not full of emotions [...] it was a work of instinct and there was intention to reveal impulses [...] what is interesting in art and theatre, is to 'bring up' things from subconscious.

(January 2013)

It is these areas of shared interest between Koun and Stanislavski that I investigated in a practical workshop environment with a view towards deepening my understanding of the nature of Kounian work that brought together Stanislavski and Koun. In order to facilitate my work, I conducted a number of workshops with selected exercises which involve the aforementioned material, as is presented and discussed in terms of a Koun-Stanislavsky common ground. In the next section follows an informative intro of the workshop material and structure and the project reflection which is investigated within specific acting areas frameworks and fields.

## The Project Reflection

### Intro

Driven from my own experiential background, interviews, primary sources investigation and academic sources about Koun and Stanislavsky in the previous section, I created a series of workshops where I made use of Stanislavsky's material which I considered that is relevant to Koun. This was done in order to acquire an understanding of the interrelations to Koun's approach and work, and experience in terms of practice Koun's use of Stanislavsky's material towards revealing the two practitioners' relationship. Hence, I elaborated on specific exercises, different versions of them and material as was discussed previously, towards discovering the practical common ground between Koun and Stanislavsky with main purpose to identify Koun's work in there and prove their actual practical connection and application deployment.

The Stanislavsky exercises-material I chose<sup>26</sup> were the basis that I considered as appropriate to investigate and invite the aforementioned tools and material that link to Koun's practice: improvisation through the elaboration of the actors' concentration and focus channelled and elaborated by instinct, impulse, intuition, spontaneity, imagination and emotional memory, towards triggering the actors' emotional world. As well, personal investigation of the individual (cultural background, personal characteristics and relevant aspects that define a person in that respect) which would assist the actor-role development towards a 'truthful' acting based on the actor's inner self work with a teacher/director.

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<sup>26</sup> See relevant Appendix for Project Exercises

This framework was approached through open experimentation and exploratory work and within this condition I have elaborated and shared with my actors my knowledge of Koun's use of this material and his approach in relation to Stanislavsky's. It is very important to mention here that this work has been done through my own eyes, understanding, adaptive ability and capacity to interpret the two practitioners' work. On that basis, the environment reflects the effects of my own experience with rehearsal techniques and actor training modes drawn from Stanislavsky where Koun may be identified as practice-based material. Equally it has been very influenced by the actors I worked with: their individuality and whatever comes through them: perceptiveness, capabilities, openness and talent in terms of their relationship and application to theatre practice, which were of major importance in Koun's environment. Since it is not possible to include the whole project and reflect on every single exercise and moment, I narrowed down the material considerably and I reflect on particular moments which are representative of my inquiries on the relationship between Koun and Stanislavsky, concentrating to specific working instances where the actors made use of common ground notions, material and tools. The workshop investigation and elaboration took place in a variety of areas: <sup>27</sup>psychophysical warm up, exploratory improvisations, actions, building ensemble work, inner self work and text/role based work. With these in mind, I narrowed down significantly to a choice of specific material/exercises like *the Inner Motive Forces Exercise*, *the Process of Active Analysis*, *Cognitive Analysis and Improvisations*, applied to Work with the Actor and Text/Role Based work.

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<sup>27</sup> See Appendix for Project Exercises

Thus I am going to reflect on these particular examples-study cases of practice, upon each one I provide a representative analytical review of the work, where the actors' elaboration is reflected with particular pieces or/and material of work. So the aforementioned were done in order for each actor to be able to obtain a deeper understanding of themselves at work in terms of their individuality and personal response to the working material and their creative availability. Here we engaged with a wide range of Stanislavsky's areas and exercises; from relaxation, psycho-physicality, imagination, sensory and self awareness to actions-interactions, exploratory improvisations and more which were investigated through the prism of emotional memory, spontaneous reactions and impulsivity/instinct to personal and text elements. This was fundamental in order to acquire better and deeper knowledge of the actors' personal material, availability and openness as facilitator, since it functioned as a building field for teamwork and meeting between each other.

From this particular area I chose the *Inner Motive Forces Exercise*, the *(Process of) Active Analysis*, the *Affective Cognition* (also called *Cognitive Analysis* as aforementioned) and *Improvisation Versions*. These were studied with two actors, a male and a female. With Dan McNeil we worked on the roles of Philoktetes from Sophocles' homonymous tragedy and the *Magistrate* from Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, and with Sally Naylor on the roles of *Cassandra* from the *Trojan Women* as well with *Praxagora* from *Lysistrata*. Our labour was concerning actor-role and role-text work with monologues, in order to approach particular role/character building-constructing processes through the use of each one's individualities in relation to the role and its development with me as a teacher/director.

This work was assisted through a variety of Improvisations as are suggested from Stanislavsky and were practiced towards discovering the way that they were identified, elaborated and assimilated by Koun. Thus the Improvisation work would be practiced via different viewpoints each time, focusing as well on particular elements that might offer us the chance of identifying Koun in there. Before I continue, I need to make clear that the use of Stanislavsky's material took place only in relation to Koun and his use of Stanislavsky in practice, thus this work does not try to add further on Stanislavsky, rather on Koun and the way Stanislavsky's practice assists in acquiring understanding of the actual material Koun used.



## Practice Reflection

### The Actor and the Role-Text Work

This work has been devoted to the actors' work with me on a particular role I chose for them, where the point was to move ourselves through our so-far connection, gained experience and extracted knowledge in terms of our self-awareness and communication work, towards exploring a character, (actor-role connection) through the actor's individualities, personality and experiences background. Koun, as we have already seen and will discuss in relevance to Stanislavsky's framework shortly once again, was particularly interested to bring to light the actor (person)-role (text) development. Thus my choice to elaborate on a role aimed towards this manifestation, and despite the fact that we worked with both actors on the same exercises' base, the tools and approach differentiated from one actor to the other.<sup>28</sup>

These facts and elements were quite essential in Koun's work in terms of relevance to Stanislavsky, thus were taken under serious consideration in the developing relationship of the actor with her/his role. This for all of us was a challenge as at this point we had all developed a sense of understanding of Stanislavsky's structured but also potentially versatile environment, while simultaneously we developed our familiarity with Koun's open and exploratory approach. This was serving the sense of a non-stop developing actor who works in-between himself and the role, following a constantly changing line of events that were elaborated through the channels of instinct and imagination and were fed mainly from action into improvisation structures, included in the exercise frames and vice-versa.

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<sup>28</sup> In that respect, Stanislavsky offered the working base and framework, while I explored Koun within the offered material with special regards to the actors' individuality, background, personality, character and cultural characteristics.

An interesting aspect on Koun's sense of the developing actor is given by Grammatas:

[Koun] believes in the evolutionary course of the actor towards the conquest of the role, through the process of the rehearsal and research which every time is adapted to the ethos (*my note*: meaning character type(s), since in ancient Hellenic the word 'ethos' means 'character') and the genre of the play and the writer, into whose demands the actor is invited to fit and serve with the best possible way. This role quest is being done through the dynamic of the specific actor and not through stereotypical models of directorial preparation on the performance (Lazanis 1972).

(2002: 276)

As Grammatas outlines, Koun deliberately brings the actor in front of the role and demands from him the development of elements that create personal parallels and possible common ground between the actor's nature, ethos and experiences in relation to the role. Also, an interesting comment is offered on the dynamics and capacities of each actor in the process and avoiding any sort of stereotypical directorial guidelines and formulas. Thus we may easily assume that Koun might have been following, at any given time, different paths that would be explored according to each actor's characteristics, experiences, personality, capabilities and talent. The aim then here was the combinational use of a) offering the actor the chance to create a link with the role from his very own individuality and experiences that might reflect on the role's course in the play, and b) develop the aforementioned by using specific exercises from Stanislavsky which are investigated towards discovering Koun's practice as working material within an exploration of both practitioners. Thus the identification and co-relation of this material was a quite significant task.

Interestingly, we read this kind of individuality in relation to the role and character in Stanislavsky's work, as Knebel reveals:

Actors must [...] work from their own individualities. That means, analyzing oneself as a human being/actor in the given circumstances of the play. But precisely because these circumstances are not at all those that formed the actor's personality in life [...] the actor learns what he must discard, what in himself he must overcome, which of his own personal traits can serve as "building material" for the construction of the character.

(in Carnicke, 2009: 203)

The degree of similarity here between Koun and Stanislavski becomes quite apparent and serves our purpose towards the discovery of this dualistic relationship, although in Koun's case there was clearly the rejection of a systematized approach to this 'double'. With these in mind and maintaining the sense of work through instinct/impulse and imagination, with both actors we approached their personal 'dynamics' and 'individualism' as are described from Grammatas and Knebel. In both tragedy and comedy,<sup>29</sup> we investigated what kind of person each role might have been and what might be the inner motive force that was moving them towards their actions. Questions we asked were: what was the key towards the role and how this would define him as a person-role? In what way would each actor construct and build the actor-role relationship? What would be the dual understanding of their situation be? And from where did the best reflection of the character begin within their acting awareness? Exercises from Stanislavsky provided me with two different pathways towards answering our practice-as-research aforementioned questions:

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<sup>29</sup> It was intentional to choose one tragedy and one comedy for each one of my actors in order to see their adaptation with the given exercises and material.

first the character exploration, and second, as a basis from which to relate this to experience with Koun, drawn from my background and knowledge. So to remind once again my reader and discuss in more detail, the exercises we used to work the monologues were *the Inner Motive Forces, the Active Analysis, the Process of Affective Cognition and Improvisations*, approaching the role through the identification of the actors' inner centres of activity and structure as a step by step process within the active analysis and affective cognition framework<sup>30</sup> through a range of improvisations. The *Inner Motive Forces Exercise* is described by Benedetti:

Inner Motive Forces, or Centres [...] Thought (or Mental-centre) Head, Feeling (or Emotion-Centre) Torso, Action (or Will-Centre) Pelvis/Arms/Legs [...] Using this Matrix: one body-part leads the movement in an exploration of a single centre[...] Combinations of body parts lead the movement in an exploration of the 'dialogue' between centres.  
(1998: 59)

Practicing this exercise many times with different conditions,<sup>31</sup> we concentrated on the roles in terms of status, emotional state and psycho physicality, using as a starting point the physical exploration and experimentation of the characters. So our beginning point was based on the specific aforementioned tools from Stanislavsky, however the approach was performed through a freer concept of work, without strict limitations and restrictions that might be related to the exercises as they were first introduced, in order to have a perception of Koun in our work during the process and progress.

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<sup>30</sup> As mentioned before as well, these exercises were used as a basis and from there we explored further.

<sup>31</sup> Without roles or through free improvisations in the space to identify the working pattern and acquire a primary level of understanding in order to be able later to support it in text/role based work.

This way, we would maintain a sense of both practitioners' lore and working scope, establishing specific facts which would assist our understanding and openness of our exploratory practice. Such facts are the vivid sensations, sentiments and emotions through a liberated body in a 'disciplined readiness'<sup>32</sup> connected always with the primary task of investigating the actor's inner centres and their functional dynamic within the actor-role relationship via the choices that the variety of improvisations provided. Thus, by exploring the motive forces/centres in terms of action and with regards to the role and text, we invited the conditions of availability to the generated impulses and imagination, and the actors' instincts towards the creation of the role. As Bella Merlin points out:

All three INNER MOTIVE FORCES interconnect in a very rapid-response level, but each of us can probably answer the question: Are we fundamentally thoughtful? Emotional? Or Action driven? I often find I flit between the three.

(2007: 165)

This statement reassured me that I was on the right path in searching for a sort of consciousness that is interlinked with the actors' inner apparatus and permits its reflection from their centres in relation to the identification of very personal characteristics in their centre-provoked impulses that lead to actions. This process created the circumstances and environment in which the actors could express more freely and become more open and receptive to my observations and stimuli that were in turn spontaneous activities and ongoing responses to impulsive and instinctive moments they were displaying in the process.

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<sup>32</sup> Meaning to be ready to move towards any direction (psychophysical, psychological and physical) from instinct and impulse, using the details and information provided for the role, always in conjunction with the actor and his personal characteristics. Also, to keep high levels of concentration to the inner motivations and the centers which were functioning through our experimentations and explorations.

I discussed with the actors how they might parallel events from their life with the ones of the heroes; this would be investigated and channelled through imaginative, psychological, psychophysical or physically-initiated impulses as an exploratory structure of events that offer links with the roles. This was performed as a structured improvisation which was based on the *(Process of) Active Analysis Exercise* and was developed from the text/role elaboration through actions and improvisations which were investigated with sounds, words, sentences from the text or from the actor related to the text. As Alison Hodge summarises the process from Stanislavsky:

Carefully read and assess the facts of the scene on which you are working. Determine the event, the inciting and resisting actions that create its dynamics, and notice the style, language, images and rhythms [...] Immediately play the scene using your own words; incorporate any facts that you remember. You may also use silent etudes to test your understanding of action, counteraction and event) [...] Re-read the scene and compare it with what happened in your improvisation. Did you retain the scene's basic dynamics and sequence? What images, styles, rhythms were you able to retain, and which did you forget? Did the event occur? [...] Repeat the improvisation again, and again check your work against the text. Continue this repetition until you come as close as you can to the scene without actually memorising it. Each time, add something specific from the scene, using images, phrases, lines as written. Now memorise the scene for performance.

(2000: 29)

This pattern was not always performed with the precision and turns of actions as are described here, but rather was adapted according to the work needs and was considered as a starting point from Stanislavsky in order to explore Koun within the offered material.

This meant that the actors would start an improvised structure of actions to link to the role's life and simultaneously their own, within an experimental and exploratory sense of work which would be followed each time through differentiations and variations according to the emerging material and our needs. So another fundamental component of the work was the application of improvisation and as Carnicke explains, Stanislavsky offers approaches to improvisations like *Improvisations on silent moments* and *Improvisations with words*:

Stanislavsky teaches actors to refine non-verbal communication by improvising situations that involve naturally silent moments [...] The actors incorporate words as elements of communication only after a firm grounding in non-verbal means.

Stanislavsky asks actors to improvise familiar situations using their own words.

(in Hodge, 2000: 22-23)

So in terms of the project development we worked on a range of improvisations<sup>33</sup> to understand the nature and aims of each one separately, in order then to use them in the actor-role development. The point was to find ourselves in an environment which would invite the improvisation work, and would stimulate-motivate the actors to act by approaching the material instinctively, always aware and responsive to their sentiments and emotional activity. This took place after we came to the text and the role and had discussed in some detail the questions the actors had about ancient drama, the heroes, and the stories that were behind the play. Another work that was done then in terms of discovering further details of the role within an improvisational sense was through the process of *Affective Cognition (also called cognitive analysis)*:

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<sup>33</sup> See as well relevant Exercises Appendix

Analyse all details in a play to illuminate the lives of the characters [...] Research the history and social world of the play [...] Visualize your character going through a typical day, walking through the house, eating, working, sleeping, socialising. Incorporate all the details discovered in your analysis of the play and your research.

(2000: 24)

This material was useful both in terms of triggering the actors' imagination to understand the defining information and characteristics of the role, as well to create links with the role's life. For the aforementioned exercises, it was essential to search on the text as a first phase of the work by reading at the table, trying to decode the meanings and notions of the roles/texts and then working on stage. The first approach was to see how they were engaging with it, how was the text motivating them, and what discoveries we could make towards unlocking the role. From that we would built a process through the improvisations to establish and elaborate further on actor/role connections. This work was an opportunity for me as a facilitator to discuss everything with the actor: from the role and text details, to the actor's perception and links to the role and the play, exchanging this way constructive ideas and material. Maya Lymberopoulou in our interview asserted:

[Koun] did not imitate<sup>34</sup> Stanislavsky [...] he was working a lot with his intuition [...] you were reading the role, he was waiting to see what this thing would cause to you, and then he was taking it from you and recreated it [...] he was experimenting, yes, but as well he was 'stealing' and was returning it to the actor bigger, better [...] the relationship Koun-Actor was absolute!

(January 2013)

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<sup>34</sup> Lymberopoulou's comment here refers to the use of the system as a working pattern and not to the influential material on specific areas. In every case of my interviews, everyone admitted that despite his influence from Stanislavsky he did not imitate him.



Lymberopoulou outlines in emphasis the strong bond that Koun had with his actors and offers a view on the process of this connection which was defining most of the work in the Hellenic Art Theatre. I may assert that from my experience with Art Theatre practitioners, this was the most important working element and was the basis for the rest to emerge and come up. So I also followed this path of work, in order to create the circumstances of a development which would function as a process of work, in this case though with particular concentration to Stanislavsky's framework. Below I reflect on the process with each actor separately on specific examples-moments, where I consider that the relationship between Koun and Stanislavsky became apparent.

### With Dan

A very important functioning example of his process was the connection between Philoktetes' wound on his foot<sup>35</sup> and an injury that Dan suffered some years ago as a teenager playing football; a quite serious one that left a permanent problem and would not allow him play to such a high level again. So we included this element as a parallel realistic fact and common ground experience, focusing on the details of suffering and loneliness as a psychological trigger and clue. Dan offered the chance to commit to it and through this as reference point to work on the role via his own perception of his body, in relation to the role using reflective sounds and moving patterns linked to the text **[DVD 1: 1\_M2U01233]**. This moment allowed us understand Dan's stiff and static physicality, an area we concentrated to improve. From that point over we made further discoveries in a more liberated way, as I asked him to develop his working structure focusing on both himself and the role simultaneously, and try to combine and express it psychophysically in a more energetic sense. As we were advancing, I invited Dan to reflect on his own (psychological and psychophysical) response of his injury more and express with impulsive sounds his pain in terms of acquiring a tragic sense and element, while later he would parallelize it and bring it close to Philoktetes and his terrible wound to his leg, with every possible result on his body, voice and movement, engaging with his inner emotional state and physicality **[DVD 1: 2\_M2U01234]**. This way we would be able to have a sense of Dan-Philoktetes as a 'double' and build further as Christos Siafkos discusses this in Koun's work:

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<sup>35</sup> To assist my reader Philoktetes was a hero of the Homer's Heliada, who was left to an island during the trip to Troy because of a terrible wound he had. The homonymous play from Sophocles negotiates with his story.

I speak about the ability of a twin face to be created with the natural limits of the actor and the mythical boundaries of the tragic hero. Let's say: Chatzimarkos-Dareios, Lazanis-Oedipus, Kougioumtzis-Dionysus. Koun does not sacrifice completely his actors to the huge roles of ancient drama.

(2008: 36)

Indeed the result was not only encouraging, but also created aspirations for more to be brought to light, since Dan instinctively linked the role with the notion of his physical and emotional memory, providing this way a depiction of the actor-role relationship. The connection to Stanislavsky and Koun in terms of the use of emotional memory and senses was quite apparent, since Dan responded to the emotional stimuli that was created to him with his injury and allowed this depiction be assimilated imaginatively to Philoktetes' wound. This took place in a much more open sense, without specific guidelines, except the basis that was offered from the exercise, evolved through its own improvisational logic and through the actor's elaboration on the role.

Dan's openness, availability and will to produce work by engaging with his own body in relation to Philoktetes' one, offered us the chance to establish a sense of both imagery and motion, towards a combinational psycho-physical approach from Stanislavski and Koun, which would be informed and moved from the hero's psychological state in relation to Dan's real experience and remembrance of his injury. After a few attempts, we had a full image of an actor who conquers his role through non-stop movement and sounds, challenging himself more and more psychologically and psychophysically through moans, screams and strong expressions that were constantly changing his body and were 'carrying' him all around the stage, in terms of a development of an improvisation without words.

Armenis in our interview offers a very interesting and representative moment from Koun's teaching on ancient drama, particularly from a tragedy role where Koun teaches through improvisation without words towards the role development:

There was no exercises frame! [...] A very characteristic thing is that he never spoke<sup>36</sup> a line...how we were supposed to say it. He was screaming (my note: Armenis mimes Koun screaming and making sounds with no meaning) to transfer to you a condition. Once we were doing Oedipus and he wanted to show to a fellow actor how he could act the bearer of (horrible) news: he came in and out striking his hands to walls, his head was in blood, fell down, almost mouth foamed... and he didn't say anything. We all stood still, we shuddered, I cried and we clapped like crazy because he 'gave' us a human depiction of a man who witnessed horror [...] he improvised with psyche and truth [...] the only thing the actor had to do, was to apply this with the lines...

(January 2013)

With Dan we worked similarly, approaching the role with sounds, moans and movements, triggered from the hero's condition in relation to Dan's psycho-physicality. In our presentation,<sup>37</sup> Dan had already established a strong connection with his inner self image during and after his accident and the role's suffering from his wound as a connecting point. Also, it is evident that he had found that his inner motive force was stemming from the area which is between the pelvis (action) and the chest (emotion). This created an interesting link with the space through his moving body, and an image pattern for the role using spontaneous moves and sounds.

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<sup>36</sup> Armenis means that Koun would not repeat the line for the actor to imitate, rather would offer a condition that the line implies, so that the actor would grab and move further.

<sup>37</sup> There were a couple of presentations (not performances) only to my supervisor Jane Milling in order to witness the process and the outcomes of the work, as stages of progression and identification of discoveries through live elaboration of exercises and material, discussion and feedback.

This emerging approach revealed Dan's image of a down to earth and practical personality, his strong and stiff body which depicted the struggles of a fighter through the challenges he was facing in his everyday life to go to work, to provide for his family, to be a student, to educate himself and do things he loved [DVD 1: 3\_M2U00641]. Evidently, I was having on stage a live process with a successful outcome, using Stanislavsky's exercises and Koun's materiality. This advanced gradually within a constructive environment of building his role without pushing and through continuous moving patterns work, exploring the role's tragic sense through sounds and physicality, as a depiction-expression of the hero's story without text. This advanced my own perception of their work as 'explorative labour' which contained methodological aspects of Stanislavsky's constructive process, combined with Koun's sense of the developing actor through that actor's own material without a fixed methodological orientation<sup>38</sup> via combinational improvisations. In that respect the following moment [DVD 1: 4\_M2U00641] was an improvisation development which included both Dan's personal experiences and Philoktetes' ones, towards creating an imagery which would bring this 'double' closer, within a journey through the monologue based at the beginning on sounds and words and later with the use of the actual text. The outcome revealed that Koun's role building was based into a mixing sense of Stanislavsky's aforementioned exercises whose material was channelled each time according to the actor's availability and labour with specific elements of his experiential and personal background.

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<sup>38</sup> My comment on this does not insinuate in any case that Stanislavsky did not draw from the personal. The comment is offered mainly in terms of the methodology and pre-set solutions that Stanislavsky was able to offer via his exercises, while Koun did not work this way as is proved.

The process also evolved via the mentor/teacher – student relationship within the side coaching process which as was developed triggered psychophysically and psychologically the actor's individuality and inner material to be more productive and responsive to the process. A similar experience I had which connects to the aforementioned example with Dan in terms of emotional memory, stimuli and senses with regards to the use of imagination towards the role, is from a piece I was working with Mortzos in the drama school, where my task was to interpret a homeless and very poor person. Back in 2002 as a second year drama school student, my programme was extremely heavy as I was moving in-between work in a hotel, theatre for education and schools as well my drama school studies. There was a specific time gap between theatre and drama school, I was finding shelter in the old school building where there was no heat and no place to sleep; except for a desk which was killing my back.

Every day then, I was experiencing a psychological, psychophysical and physical exhaustion which I adapted very fast to the 'fatigue' that the role demanded. My teacher was informed of my condition and in order to assist me with my task (since the role had to be 'artistically' tired and exhausted and not 'literally') asked me to remain to the state I was without effort to 'act'. Although he intrigued me and my partner with various conditions about the role, as prompts: 'you feel that someone is hunting you...you are not feeling welcome in this place even if someone says otherwise...you have a bad feeling about it...' My physicality altered all the time while simultaneously I kept myself in a state of readiness, physical and emotional, linked to my current life experience and attached to the role development and existence, in terms of building my role through sensing this 'double' role growing.

Working this way, I discovered that my role was engaging mostly with my chest and my upper torso, generating emotional impulses which I followed as I was moving on stage and delivering my lines. As I recall it now and through my study with Stanislavsky, my work back then was an altered version of the *Inner Motive Forces Exercise*, where I had to identify and respond to the centre(s) that guided me through my everyday life experiences and sustained my strength to continue; the same was applied towards my role development, since my breath was heavy and I moaned from the everyday physical pains I experienced, as well from the amount of psychological and psychophysical exhaustion I was under.<sup>39</sup>

This drove me to 'listen' to myself and respond to my body as it adapted through my sounds and breath, guiding me this way to establish breathing and moving patterns for the role, like Dan did in his own way and case. This process assisted me to interpret my emotional state as it occurred within my inner-self and translated to my physical body and behaviour. Through this representative example with Mortzos and taking into account Armenis and his comment, as well my work with Dan and his link with the role development via his centres and his physical injury, I may assume that Koun engaged in a similar way with Stanislavsky's working material. Nevertheless, he made use of it extensively in his own way and interpretation, without including and following Stanislavsky's exercises frames and structures by the letter. Probably, a significant factor that determined his work was his interest to the actor's human existence not only in a general sense, but especially as far as acting was concerned at that particular moment it was generated, each time as a unique case in theatre practice.

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<sup>39</sup> My parallelism is offered in a comparative sense as well with Dan's role and circumstances, as to make a clearer point.

With this thinking, Koun was mainly driven from his interaction with the actor's individualism and discusses this aspect:

The core of the Art never ceases to be, as always, the human and his existence within the universe, especially in the environment and time he moves. The artist's expression never ceases to be political and existential.

(1987: 122)

The same principle of exploring the political and existential nature of the artist was applied in comedy although here the folk element and the satire of the characters were offering a different development which was not linked immediately or at all to emotional memory, though could be approached with the rest of the tools and clearly in relation to Koun's notions of Folk expressionism and Hellenekoteta. In Dan's comedy monologue (*The Magistrate*), we followed a different path since we used the text and tried to link it to the role physically, as a natural response which would allow us to identify the part of the body which would help us develop the role in terms of the inner motive forces. Koun used to ask the actors to sit and read the text for him, and he could listen to it for hours in order to get inspired towards his directorial visualization from the actual material as it was offered vividly from the actors' engagement and material. After a long period where the actors would interpret the text and roles without standing up from the chair, the moment of physical interpretation would be quite revealing.<sup>40</sup> In a similar sense, I worked with Dan in order to identify his centre motivation which in my eyes from outside became apparent relatively fast: it was obvious that the text resonated and made him respond and sense it from his waist and pelvis, down to the feet.

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<sup>40</sup> Interviews with Kapelonis, Lymberopoulou, Kotamanidou (January 2013)



Mostly though it was generated in the pelvic area from where he was instinctively elaborating with the text and stood as a bridge of creativity between himself and the role [DVD 1: 5\_M2U00132]. So became at once apparent that the engagement with the text created a strong energy to Dan's pelvis impulsively, without me giving specific instructions about it. This is an interesting observation for Dan's physical response in relation with the text, since from my experience in Hellas with ancient comedy, I was performing by bending slightly my knees and sensing my pelvis area as a generating force towards moving, speaking and gesturing. Hence Dan simply responded to his own interpretation of the story, building his relationship with the role via his physicality which was gradually developed as he was speaking the text lines. So the text became itself a stimulation that guided him through the whole process and supported his role imagery in relation to his body.

In relevance I recall an example from my experiential background where during our rehearsal process with *The Knights*, we were advised by Armenis to concentrate to our pelvis area during the chorus parts and move ourselves from there as a motivating force towards depicting imaginatively funny horse poses: 'Work with your lower body and your connection to the earth, feel your feet, your pelvis area and let it move you around impulsively. This will trigger your imagination towards sensing the silliness of this moving pattern.' (2007) Analysing it now further, Armenis via our choreographer's work asked as to do exactly the same thing that I asked Dan, although without an exercise frame or logic, rather through impulsive improvisations and spontaneous reactions to our concentration of our physicality with special regards to the pelvic area as a generator of impulses and movements on stage.

Considering this then in terms of Stanislavsky's influence, one may discuss of the functionality of an 'Inner Motive Force'. In addition, I recall hours of rehearsal where we as chorus were free to improvise sounds and poses during the action, towards assimilating a sense of a 'participant human horse' and work with moving patterns which were creating a combination image of our individuality in relation to our role. This physical approach was indeed a 'Kounian' characteristic for comedy and allowed us explore the 'fun and dirtiness' to certain degrees of expression and performance.

This work advanced further and Dan discovered his centre as he worked with more focus on the text [DVD 1: 6\_M2U00427], letting go of his self-consciousness and delivering himself to the process as a means towards imaginative and impulsive work which was characterised from his own visualization of the role in a brave, grotesque and funny sense. Interestingly, we figured out that there was no emotional engagement and the whole work was depicted via the physical awareness in the pelvis area, a fact that allowed Dan to approach his role more actively via his physical body dynamics and allow the element of insinuated 'dirtiness' in the text alter his voice and facial expressions. Interestingly, Dan was raising his peripheral and actorly awareness whenever I approached and coached him or reacted to his produced work, presenting a stronger engagement with the whole process, similar as I experienced with my teacher and same as Koun's students witnessed. Clearly, his acting process was far more enhanced from my prompting and this is an element with which I am quite familiar, since the teacher or director transforms for the actor to an external stimulation who allows the actor to become more aware of his senses and responsiveness to the text.

I will close my reflection in Dan's process by offering a very interesting observation: Dan's simplicity and ordinary everyday behaviour was clearly an effect of his working-class background and his shaped personality through a particular ethnic and folk-popular cultural and social background. Koun was an adorer of this kind of folk element, as he was a seeker of an expressive code and a simple communication pattern which would have its roots to the everyday folk social reality. Walking in Koun's shoes as a project leader, I found myself trying to connect as much as possible with Dan's material and accept, elaborate, return and apply everything that was generously offered to me by him in the working environment through his 'English eyes', via a folk concept of his country, culture and class. Indeed, I identified through a Stanislavsky exercise the range of material that could emerge and discovered from a teacher's point of view of what importance was it for Koun to be in touch with his students/actors. This was reflected through the allowance of information flow about each one's character, personality, experiences and living background since this would create the circumstances for a deeper communication and a more free sense of expression at work, removing all kinds of blocks that might appear (self-consciousness, religion, political status, class and other). Dan from his point of view, was quite interested to be part of this process, because indeed he was not 'highly trained' (although a mature student), and without much or versatile range of psycho-physical expressivity, coming from a working class background and not immersed in traditional 'theatre-going' culture prior to his involvement in the department. On the other hand, he was always available and keen to explore and expose himself, presenting a depiction of a theatre worker/labourer who devotes himself to the teacher and the work to be done.

Thus, he functioned in some ways like the performers that Koun was attracted to,<sup>41</sup> and brought both a limited physical range but also a much larger repertoire of lived experience in the studio, via a more naive working style that carries material which had never been somehow 'artistically cultivated' until that moment, offering a wide range of possibilities at work between the teacher and the actor. As far as I am concerned, it was not necessarily within my intentions to work with a particular class or specific group of people with special characteristics, although this fact (of having two representative types of actors like Koun had mostly) in my project came up by chance and offered me the ability to distinguish and compare the similarities and differences between the people I was working with and in relation to me as their coach and teacher.

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<sup>41</sup> By commenting on this, I do not support the idea that every male student was like this. I discuss it in terms of the majority of cases; though if one looks Koun's inner circle as I refer previously with specific names, they are all more or less representative examples.

### With Sally

At work with Sally we relied on the same principles and exercises frame as are previously mentioned, although her approach offered a different level of engagement with the role and the development processes. Sally was a very different individual from Dan and I may assert that this was a great assistance to my criteria development and understanding of the actor at work.<sup>42</sup> She carried an intellectualism and a finesse which were depicting a sensitive presence, familiar with the one that Koun's women had in the Art Theatre,<sup>43</sup> as well a different cultural background. This controversy between my actors was as I already mentioned not pre-determined but came up by chance, although in my case with Koun it fitted perfectly.

Working with this fact, I realized fast that Sally's intellectuality was not a trap, rather a tool of inventions towards her imaginative role/text elaboration. In fact, from the primary stages of the work (when we first started to engage with the role), Sally expressed a tendency to work with her focus, a tool that was linking the text interpretation with her visualization-imagination skills in terms of the imagery of the piece, as a starting point of her creative and building process. Sally's imaginative skills were offered for further explorations to the role demands, thus her capacity to engage with the role's conditions was remarkable and assisted the process much. Apart from that, Sally's physicality allowed her to be flexible and move with comfort and style, a fact that assisted and eased her physical engagement with the work.

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<sup>42</sup> As is already discussed, Koun was significantly driven from the actors' individuality and life background, thus I comment on it as an important point of attention in terms of my work with the actor as a facilitator.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted earlier, Kotamanidou offers a very interesting comment of the great difference between Koun's choice of men (lower working class, no theatre background, often without basic education) and women (usually for a higher social class, very well educated, with artistic background).

Koun relied upon imagination a lot and considered it a tool of engaging with the actor's emotional world as is previously discussed from Grammatas, Kokkori and Aggelidou with regards to the actor's creative process. Merlin in *The Complete Stanislavski Toolkit* refers to Stanislavsky's consideration of the tool of Imagination:

As Stanislavski puts it, IMAGINATION stirs up our affective memory, calling up from its secret depths, beyond the reach of consciousness, elements of already experienced emotions and re-grouping them to correspond with the images which arise in us... That is why a creative imagination is a fundamental, absolutely necessary gift for an actor.

(2007: 124)

Stanislavsky used Imagination in order to trigger the actor's senses and feelings either from a lived experience, or from a visualization of improvisation moments. Sally's natural response to the text revealed that her head (intellectual centre) was her dominant inner motive force, a fact that allowed her to visualize on stage her role's environment [DVD 2: 7\_M2U00142]. This condition though did not restrict the rest of her body to respond; and while both Dan and Sally were engaging with their emotional state in terms of their inner motive force centre as we had discussed and agreed, the starting point and trigger was different: Dan was mainly driven from the pelvis-action centre and engaged with his physicality (weight, muscles, stiffness) while Sally did so from the head-intellectual centre by being resourceful in terms of images; thus the process was differentiating much, since the offered material of work was altering as extension of each actor's individual interpretation of the working pattern. So Sally's engagement with the text revealed her easiness to adapt to the role's demands and assisted her role-building development by identifying her adaptability to the images she generated.

In Koun's case, the sense of a stable working pattern was totally absent hence I assume that the metaphorical notion of 'working pattern' in his environment was the actor's individual interpretation of the role and the text via the offered material which was generated instantly.<sup>44</sup> This though was dependent and related to Koun's perception and response to it at that particular moment. Koun reveals to Pelichos:

**I work experientially and I get stimulated by seeing and listening** (*my emphasis*). Only the live body, the voice, the speech and the movement prod and guide me. Except for a general instinctive conception of rhythms and colours,<sup>45</sup> **every detail is revealed during the work** (*my emphasis*).<sup>46</sup> Never through a premeditative plan. I believe a lot in our strength and our internal knowledge. To the things we do not even know that we know neither the ones we suspect consciously.

(1987: 63)

Koun obviously helps us understand a few fundamental parts of his work including a senses-centred theatre practice approach that derives from his experience with the actor through energetic exchange and relationship from channels of basic physical tools (sight, voice, body, speech, movement etc.). This approach has no determined framework, rather is channelled every time via specific tools (i.e. improvisation) and material (instant impulses, instinctive responsiveness) which are used according to the offered material between the actor and the director.

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<sup>44</sup> A material though which was dependent to one's own individual background.

<sup>45</sup> Koun here refers to the directorial aspect of his work and the performance aesthetics.

<sup>46</sup> My comment does not claim any sort of uniqueness about Koun on this matter, since there might be many teachers and directors who probably work this way. My point though, is offered as a permanent working approach/pattern for Koun and a differentiation to Stanislavsky's organized sense of work. To clarify on this as well, I am not saying that Stanislavsky was not influenced or motivated by his students' labor, rather making a point that Stanislavsky did what he did through his system development, while Koun stood on the opposite side of this non-systematized logic.

Koun places the actor in the centre of his world and reveals a significant anthropocentric ideology<sup>47</sup> for theatre practice which stands as an inspiration for him. In comparison to Koun's views about the aforementioned, Rhonda Blair quotes Stanislavsky's aspect on these (1961: 209):

With the help of nature –our subconscious, instinct, intuition, habits and so forth– we evoke a series of physical actions interlaced with one another. Through them we try to understand the inner reasons that give rise to them, individual moments of experienced emotions, the logic and consistency of feelings [...] this awareness is not intellectual but emotional in origin, because we comprehend with our own feelings some part of the psychology of our role.

(In Blair 2008: 27-28)

Stanislavsky here presents his view that a subconscious approach relies upon the inner state of the actor who is invited to become aware of what happens within this process, that invites free role/text elaboration where instinct, intuition and impulse are dominant characteristics. This helped me construct a working frame which created the circumstances to link the actor with the role, drawing on specific details from the actor's life, compared, elaborated and connected to the role's ones. As a result, I managed to have a balance between Koun's concept of work with the actor (with me in the role of the teacher/facilitator) in terms of a productive relationship from where the role emerges and a basis from Stanislavsky that guided me through the specific use of exercises and material, applied to a certain extent and degree, depending each time from the actor's response to the work.

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<sup>47</sup> As we have already seen previously Koun's thought of the actor (political and existential).



Having acquired a primary level of Sally's inner apparatus function towards the role (use of focus, imagination, inner motive force), we tried to discover the imagery of her relationship with the role, considering that this would reveal the material and moments upon which we could base our building process and define the role's interpretation as inspiring and motivating forces, within an active psychophysical and psychological framework. For the person-role 'double' acting investigation and elaboration, Siafkos discusses for Koun:

He tries to find the best possible analogy between Pittaki and Antigone, Aggelidou and Agave or Paheze and Hecuba. He cares to prove the minimum and the maximum of relationship that could be developed between a familiar natural visage and an unfamiliar theatrical visualization.

(2008: 36)

In order to find this analogy and connection between actor and role, we concentrated on real moments from the individual's life and imaginative moments from the role's one which are involved with the element of tragedy. This was done in order to discover the emotional links that emerge in terms of each role's connections to their tragic condition (i.e. fear, loss, pain, suffering, terror). As working material I had asked her to connect Cassandra's role with real life conditions that evolved the notions and meanings of tragic sense. In this case, the work with the text was driven and informed from Sally's spiritual and religious background, which had to do with her confession of the eternal fear of the afterlife through a religious-Christian scope [DVD 2: 8\_M2U01237]. Through feedback, Sally explained that this is for her something terrifying she has been living with and still makes her wake up at night.

So from that view, Sally's key to her inner engagement with Cassandra, was her strong spiritual and religious bond with Jesus Christ, the same way as was between Cassandra and Apollo in the text. Furthermore, her religious and spiritual background were fundamental towards the motivation of her emotional inner apparatus, a fact that was highly noticed in her performance and which I sensed from outside as a source of psycho-physical alterations: continuous moving patterns driven from the lines emerging feeling, change of levels in terms of physicality according to her instant emotional interpretation, breathing control, facial expressions, speed, rhythm, voice alterations, images **[DVD 2: 9\_M2U01237]**. This happened by exploring Stanislavsky where the exercise is a means to an end and there is a clear intention, while simultaneously with the preservation of the task, there was a clear orientation of exploratory and experimenting work identical to Koun's like continuous improvisations on the text/role with impulsivity, moving patterns like free/imaginative choreographies that emerge from the spontaneous physical reactions to particular moments, change of postures depending on the text, pauses, moving levels, new gestures. An interesting example-moment of identifying Koun's work along with Stanislavsky's environment, was at the presentation when Sally offered a full image of the work that was done (considering the aforementioned exercises and material we worked) through an combinational improvisation development (with silence, sounds, letters, words, sentences and imaginative text which were coming from her continuous exploratory work in-between the role and her individuality), offering parallel conditions and situations from both her life and the role's one as connecting and building elements **[DVD 2: 10\_M2U00641]**.

Sally offered an aspect of the working structure we practiced towards the role by improvising at the beginning the monologue only with sounds and from there worked imaginatively towards depicting Cassandra's life with her own words and expression, in relation to the depiction of moments of her own life. Stanislavsky expresses particular interest about the role's life and challenges the actor to make discoveries as with the Affective Cognition process where:

[...] actors work individually by visualising distinct moments from their characters' lives, thus imaginatively empathising with them (Visualizations trigger emotional, hence 'affective' responses)

(2000: 23)

In that respect, I witnessed her instinctive and imaginative adaptation of some kind of 'choreography' and kinesiology where Sally felt 'being moved' and not just performing a move consciously and also noticed that the whole process was experienced as impulsive-instinctive, since her body was 'surrendered' to moving sequences which were generating emotions to her as well to me from 'outside the stage but inside her process'. On top of that, her free improvisational labour, especially with text in her own words, assisted her to 'map' her actions and response to both her own experiential background and her role's one. John Gillett quotes Stanislavsky who discusses the actor's meeting with the character via my aforementioned witness of Sally's process:

Being swept away by the play and by one's part – that is the best way to come close to it, to understand and really know it [an actor must adjust himself to the role, not the role to himself

(2007:172)

Sally's performance at that point introduced this exact principle and I sensed it as an excellent opportunity to understand and feel the importance of balance between one's own self, specific task functionality, the constructive use of personal experience and resourceful use of impulsive responses to one's organic and inner physicality which draws upon real or fantastic visions. These were channelled both psychophysically and psychologically and could reveal something different from the primary concern of the exercises combination we were applying in our working process, without 'cancelling' or 'rejecting' the cause of their particular practice, thus we were on a stage where we maintained a sense of identification of both practitioners at work. From a personal viewpoint, I engaged with the working material intuitively and participated actively by 'returning' each time 'refined' the produced material to Sally, finding myself totally influenced by the imagery and the stimulations I was offered and accepted out of the continuous building process. With regards to it, I sensed the importance of letting the actor get carried away from her emotional state and passion at work within a collective work environment which relied on my link with the actor. Koun's aspect about the essence of collective improvisational work, as academically discussed from Kokkori:

For Koun collective work means: free temperament during the rehearsal which encourages questioning, experimentation, which liberates the actor's imagination and allows the creative director to synthesize the actors' distributed conquests and control the final result.

(1989: 36)

This scholarly point asserts that Koun functions as a teacher & director, who invites the actors to work in favour of a 'free temperament rehearsal', since he was up to establish the perfect

circumstances for the actor to be stimulated to respond via a synthesis of impulse and imagination in terms of new or existing material exploration. This meant that the sensation of feeling myself get carried away from the actors' creative procedure, allowed me to connect with my actor training experiential background when I felt through in similar cases but from different places<sup>48</sup> the links with my teachers and revealed a moment of what Koun named 'spiritual activity' at work, seeing more clearly the meaning of working with the actor's material linked to me. Moreover, another interesting part of the process according to the actors was that the more they were 'being moved' and being carried away from the role, the text and the development process inwardly and outwardly into a dual stimulation of their psycho physicality, the better they were engaging with their emotional state and imagination. Stanislavsky's approach accords in a specific way with Koun as Daniel Meyer-Dinkgrafe in *Approaches to Acting: Past and Present*, suggests:

The very best that can happen is to have the actor completely carried away by the *play* [*my italics*]. Then regardless of his own will he lives the part, not noticing how he feels, not thinking about what he does, and it all moves of its own accord, subconsciously and intuitively.

(2005: 39)

From that aspect, Koun and Stanislavsky share the same path of creativity since both were interested in a deeper level of work which involves intuition and subconscious as revelation links to the role and the play. Both practitioners' work then, invited the actor's liberated interpretation of the role in favour of an intuitive and subconscious approach of the play.

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<sup>48</sup> Here as a coach/facilitator, back then as a student/actor.

In the project, there is an example where Sally elaborated on her comic monologue (*Praxagora* from *Lysistrata*) and made use of her own understanding of the role and the play through an improvisation that was performed within a structure informed from all the material we had engaged so far and the role's life and course as a basis to the monologue that follows [DVD 2: 11\_ M2U00641]. Sally, created an interesting improvisational chain of events between her life and the hero's imaginative one, and from there developed a connection with the text which was supported from her instant discoveries and impulsive interpretations of these moments. This created a basis for her to act the monologue to another level where the aforementioned creative mix had offered a new 'person-role' with clear references to both her real life improvisations and the role's ones. During the monologue, I distinguished that Sally's performance was liberated and her lines delivery were from outside I sensed her limb between all three inner motive forces. Considering this, it may be said that both Koun and Stanislavsky were fans of imaginative performance which enriches the actor's capacity to interpret moments from the role's life, with loans from the actor's real life as a continuous development and contact with the text and the different working routes it may offer. On account of this, I suppose that each one had a different way of discovering this material delivery, though the tools that were applied in order for this to occur were more or less the same, even if were introduced to a different environment and working structure.

## Conclusion

The end of this project was illuminating about specific facts that defined Koun's work and his relationship with Stanislavsky in certain areas (actors, acting and actor training) and as a practice-based research revealed some interesting facts about Koun and Stanislavsky which I present as outcomes. Through the investigation of the available resources, my interview material and my practice which is informed from my theatre practice background, it was clear that Koun was indeed influenced by Stanislavsky, although did not imitate him. This influence was discovered through the exercises that were chosen from Stanislavsky and were compared with Koun's practice, revealing the significant fact that Koun was familiar with this material and used it, but not with a particular structure and order, nor introduced it as a specific working frame-exercise.

This did not occur in terms of practicing Stanislavsky's or any other methodology or system-based approach, rather was investigated through Koun's visualization of the actor's inner process as a fundamental element of his inspiration, theatre orientation and directorial material, as well as a constructive tool towards the revelation of 'scenic truth' on stage. This happened by engaging with the material at work without necessarily naming the material (i.e. *inner motive forces, the process of active analysis, cognitive analysis and improvisations*), without placing it into particular working frames or exercises. So we may say that Koun did not apply any exercises from Stanislavsky as literally mentioned in the system in his practice, although he made use of notions, tools and material from them in his own way and

interpretation of Stanislavsky's study, which extended to a certain degree and functioned as an inspiration in order to pursue a more 'truthful acting'. In that respect, the most important and fundamental difference between the two practitioners is the absence of a system based actor training approach in Koun's work, in contrast to Stanislavsky's approach to find models and structures towards helping the actor. Thus Koun was interested in working within an open and versatile environment free of structured guidance and systematized manners which was replaced by on his own idiosyncratic approach in relation each time with the actor/individual as motivating force. However, both were working in favour of a continuous development for the actor and used a lot of common notions and material, with regards to the psychophysical and psychological function of the actor.

Although it needs to be noticed that, Koun was filtering them through his very personal relationship with the actor during their work, while Stanislavski was working on them within his model-based practical frame. This is not to say that Stanislavsky did not have any personal relationships with his actors, rather it implies that for Stanislavsky the system was always an actor-training guide, while for Koun the only thing that existed as a guide or working pattern (if this term may be applied to Koun instead of a systematised approach) was his intuitive and instinctive elaboration and interpretation of the actor/teacher relationship. Despite then both practitioners were interested in the actor as a unit and personality, Stanislavsky offered a channel for the actor's material within an exercise frame at least as a starting point, while Koun's approach in relation to it can be characterised as non-organised, non-specified, dependant only on Koun's instinctive response to the actor-director elaboration and outcomes.



Also both practitioners were working towards a 'truthful' result on stage, by means of using triggers towards the actors' emotional world and sentiments as expressive material to be investigated physically, psychophysically and psychologically. One of the things that emerged then was that both practitioners were relying on a sense of artistic form that the role needs to have, in order to be expressed as a result of an inner investigation towards a result that would be 'truthful' on stage, under the condition of emotional engagement. Both Koun and Stanislavsky were interested in elaborating on the actor's inner-emotional state through specific aspects like concentration, impulse, instinct, intuition, emotional memory, personal experiences and imagination, but for Koun this would be conditioned via his own instinctive, intuitive and impulsive personality and character, in relation to the actor's material and similar notions functionality to accomplish what he asked. Koun also weighed his work within his influence of the Folk Expressionism and Hellenekoteta, a fact which depicts his practice as more attached to his ethnic background and less international than Stanislavsky's has been considered. Another interesting aspect is about the use of the tool of improvisation, where I need to make clear that as far as my investigation has proven, improvisation was for Stanislavsky a tool, while for Koun, it was the tool. Everything in Koun's rehearsal was filtered into an improvisation environment; Stanislavsky was indeed a big fan of the improvisation, although he was not relying entirely on it and this is obvious through his exercises and working model. Discussing improvisation, I found out that the use of impulse, instinct and intuition are notions that both practitioners used at work with the actor. Seemingly, for Koun this was a serious reason for not following a pre-determined method in teaching, directing or acting.

Also for improvisation, it becomes clear that Koun was not working on specific pre-determined versions, rather was responding exclusively to his own relationship with the actor. Although, the material is identical, hence, the influence is obvious. I need to inform my reader that all these are facts about Koun and his practice through his whole life course. More particularly though they were in full application until the late 50's, when he turns away from the psychological work with the actor and Stanislavsky's influence on it, and moves towards more organic, biological and physical trends and artistic orientations which are not relevant and important in terms of my own research topic and are not of the present time to discuss. Nevertheless, I need to notice that despite the fact he turned towards other material and practices, Stanislavsky was always present in Koun's and the Art Theatre's work, as a useful guide, basis and influence in his open investigations and stood as the main column of his art. The aforementioned exercises then from Stanislavsky may have triggered Koun's interest towards his actor-role work and actor-teacher/director relationship as a productive source in his theatre practice which led him towards further orientations later.

## **Karolos Koun and the Art Theatre - Influential Key Points**

### **Premise**

This final chapter focuses on particular key points of Karolos Koun and the Art Theatre, in terms of the influence and impact they had and still have in Hellenic Theatre Practice. In this chapter, my aim is to offer a critical, reflective and analytical insight on Koun's legacy following my practice based work. As Karolos Koun and the Art Theatre have offered significant innovations and contributions to Hellas and Hellenic theatre, I will keep the number limited to a few key points linked to the dynamic development of the Art Theatre work and the effect Koun has nowadays as practical heritage and as an influence on contemporary thinking.

With this material in mind, discussion and analysis about the impact and influence of Karolos Koun and the Art Theatre practice will be offered in the following areas: firstly, the theoretical and practical research and use of the terms "Hellenekoteta" (Greekness), and then the concept and use of Koun's 'Folk Expressionism' in 20<sup>th</sup> century Hellas and Hellenic theatre practice, analysing its relationship to Greek traditional backgrounds, and how has this influenced Hellenic theatre practice. Thirdly, the Art Theatre Practice tradition in the areas of Acting, Teaching and Directing will be discussed with further reference to their use as a legacy in drama schools and the professional industry (acting, directing, and playwriting). Finally, I will consider the approach to ancient Hellenic drama, how this has been constantly re-formed in the years since Koun's practice and what the particular impact of Koun's work on ancient Hellenic drama has been.

As far as each one of these areas permits from the limited academic material and sources, all of the aforementioned will be informed from my experience as a student in the drama school where I was trained with practitioners related to Koun and the Art Theatre. Secondly, my analysis will be informed from my experience as a professional actor in the Hellenic theatre industry where I also had the chance to work with people whose work is linked to Koun and the Art Theatre. As a professional performer I have been involved in a number of cases with many actors and directors whose reference was the Art Theatre and Koun's teachings. Finally, I will draw a significant amount of information from a number of interviews I conducted with some of Koun's most important students who later carried further Koun's work as actors, teachers and directors.

## Hellenekoteta

In order to acquire a deeper understanding of the notion of Hellenekoteta in Koun's work, it is important to remind my reader historically of the fact that Koun belonged to a generation of people in Hellas who were fascinated and related their work with the terms Hellenic (Greek) and Hellenekoteta (Greekness).<sup>49</sup> As discussed earlier, Koun amongst other artists of his time was interested in exploring and discovering what 'Hellenic' is and what may be considered as such in terms of cultural, historical, ethnic and traditional background, as they were shaped through centuries into Hellenic nation and people. Historically, this period of Koun's beginning of work was the mid-war period, and Hellas was still suffering wounds from all the recent wars which affected the people's lives within a period that extends from the Hellenic revolution in 1821 and reaches Koun's arrival and work in Hellas.

Considering this historical trajectory, the Hellenic nation was trying to 'recreate' itself from its own historical background, ethnic and national consciousnesses, tradition and culture, in order to (re)establish its identity and reset a new trajectory as a nation and state, politically, socially and artistically. Linked to this movement, Koun started his theatre practice and tried to create a modern version of the essence of the term 'Hellenekoteta' via the aforementioned channels. Koun sought for a cultural and national identity as a contemporary Greek, based on his own tradition through international influences accepted and assimilated via various cultural backgrounds which were adapted, assimilated and absorbed from Hellas and the Greeks in everyday life.

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<sup>49</sup> As it has already been discussed in the Introduction chapter, during this period the search and elaboration both theoretical and practical of Hellenekoteta, was a trend with very strong impact in many areas: theatre, literature, painting and other significant fields.

It is essential then to explore and discover how he elaborated as artist and practitioner within the aforementioned ideological frame and how he offered a lot of innovative elements in contemporary performance. The academic Dimitris Tsatsoulis talks in his article about the factors that shaped Koun's directorial spirit and choices of Koun's personal, aesthetic and artistic quest for:

a Hellenic interpretation, bounded to our roots and the reduction to the 'folk' element as it is displayed in the genuine forms of life in the rustic countryside or the islands, our traditional country songs and even older times, on the Byzantine angiographies and the ancient vessels. The geopolitical consideration and the historical continuation which is preserved in the people's remainders from which Koun will draw the human resources of his association, is obvious in his directorial perception.

(2005: 367-368)

In the aforementioned lines, we should identify not only the obvious which is the so-called 'Hellenic interpretation' related to the notion of 'Hellenekoteta' and is closely linked to ideas of 'folk' experience, but also notice that this comment touches the transformative facts of a geopolitical and historical trajectory which have offered a number of changes through time in people's perception of what can be identified as 'traditional' and 'Hellenic'. Koun then, according to Tsatsoulis, elaborated and presented his directorial and teaching approach as a vehicle to unite the available elements at our disposal. For Koun, this approach might be elaborated and developed on stage in relation to what the contemporary spectator would feel was familiar and intimate, recognizing in it his own realization of folk traditions (as well as the essence of tradition in general) and Hellenekoteta.

Hence it may be said that this combinational research has had a tremendous impact on both practitioners and spectators, in terms of their own motivation and questioning on this subject. Offering a process like this that suggests a directorial and personal theatre practice evolving from antiquity until nowadays, Koun succeeded in finding a common ground where all of the aforementioned would reveal a sense of a 'Hellenic Spirit'<sup>50</sup> somehow recognisable to everyone. As a result, this course could be considered deeply Hellenic and at the same time, interestingly international and intercultural as a result of the variety of influences the Hellenic nation has accepted for centuries. So Koun was interested in negotiating the meaning of the term 'national identity' (in this case speaking of the term 'Hellenekoteta'), with regards to the sum of information which was suggested and absorbed in Hellenic society.

Interestingly Koun attempted to assimilate his international influences within the mesh of social and ethnic traditions and culture, in order to draw from it and inform his working trajectory and aesthetics. A very good example is the use of the Hellenic folk theatre of shadows figures,<sup>51</sup> known as *Karangiozis* as its use became a fundamental element towards Koun's construction of the aesthetic of an ancient comedy performance, where he worked with his actors towards the realization-reproduction of the basic characteristics of these figures integrated into the playing of Aristophanes' heroes. Koun was using, especially in Aristophanes, various elements from the theatre of shadows figures to enrich his actors on the representation of their roles: similar body postures, vocal particularities and gestures amongst other elements.

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<sup>50</sup> The word 'spirit' here is used not in terms of a religious sense, rather as a general essence of a pneumatic inner function and cultural embracement.

<sup>51</sup> Koun for example made a broad use of *Karangiozis* in the performance of the *Acharnians*, in 1976.

About the theatre of shadows and Karangiozis, Grigoris Kazantzis offers particular information:

Karangiozis is a complex art form which utilizes multiple expressive means: theatre, music, plastic arts, poetic speech [...] All these arts interfere and interact with each other in order to synthesize a harmonic sum and serve each time different functionalities (entertainment, communication, satire, political and social memory). In Hellenic culture history, Karangiozis is a very important chapter, since from the one side constitutes a piece of the socio-political values while on the other is a rich verbal art which transmits from one generation to the other.

(2010: 6)

Kazantzis then proves why Koun was interested in this form of theatre; its synthetic framework in relation to the purposes it could serve, allowed Koun to use it within his research of Hellenekoteta and Folk Expressionism. And if we examine further the actor's connection to the plastic figures, Kazantzis explains through a synopsis of the figures' character analysis:

Their description follows silently or unconsciously their adaptation, their assimilation to psycheless<sup>52</sup> objects, from paper or plastic for their time (1960) which were considered as dominant means of expression of the folk-popular ideology.

(2010: 48)

So Koun visualised this adaptation and assimilation of a material that was linked to Hellenic folk reality, thus through this form offered the actor the chance to see his role through one of the figures and search for common characteristics and viewpoints, as grotesque and funny folk elements adopted through real actors on actual stage. The use of theatre of shadows is met in the eastern traditions and its use by Koun proves his belief of the Eastern influences in Hellenic theatre. Magyar quotes Koun's declaration:

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<sup>52</sup> Non living entities, without psyche.



Our purpose is to create a scene with Hellenic tradition. With this we do not wish to say that we can avoid every foreign influence. We will examine though to work with material from our land [...] from Karangiozis who despite the fact it remained unrecognised, is a very rich source from other representative arts –dances, folk painting, songs, music- and from our land’s poetry. Along with these, we will be guided by the habits and the types<sup>53</sup> which can still be found in Hellas as symbols of the life and the psyche of our places. And with these symbols, which many were held from antiquity until nowadays, we will approach ancient tragedy.

(2004: 29)

So a loan from a folk eastern tradition was adopted, adapted and presented from a ‘Hellenic’ scope which stood (and still survives) as integral part of the national folk traditions. This became an ideological and artistic platform on which he would elaborate with his directorial lens, which was applied to the actor’s cultural perception and awareness of folk customs and experiences in his everyday life; these elements would respectively function as a collective tank from where the work would be informed and developed. Speaking of this then, we understand that folk elements and material like this could stand as points of reference for one’s personal identity. Koun of course, was a representative example of a man who was constantly keen on shifting and changing all the time, considering the fact that he was a researcher of whatever new or unknown might suggest evolution and opening of other artistic and theatre practice horizons. Eric Hobsbawn in *Nations and nationalism since 1780: programme, myth, reality* comments: [...] ‘national identification and what it is believed to imply, can change and shift in time, even in the course of quite short periods’ (1992: 11).

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<sup>53</sup> My note: Meaning human types, personas.

Indeed, Koun considered innovations important and resourceful, since this material was accepting and embracing constant alterations which were linked both to the individual's identity and theatre. Thus this material, with its particularities and shifting nature should be used and recognised within the Hellenic culture framework as an integral element of a tradition which was able to be transformed and reproduced easily from one time period to another. Mostly though, this was because Koun was a practice researcher whose working spirit was restless and very open to experimentations towards new discoveries and reinventions of his own work:

Koun's relationship with theatrical pioneering was constant and ardent. There is no doubt that Koun was revealing a 'manic' interest for anything new had to offer the theatre of his time.

(Ioannidis, 2007: 86)

And since Ioannidis speaks of Koun's relation with new elements and trends in theatre practice and how keen he was to study in an open-minded and passionate way, I believe that this 'new' that Koun was seeing, was always deriving from other references which are relevant with the past (roots) linked to a present and a future (routes) towards discovering and interpreting new working pathways. Jatinder Verma, British Asian playwright and director, discussed the idea of a theatre dependent upon roots:

It depends how you are spelling the word...I prefer to think of it as r-o-u-t-e-s. Roots lead backwards. Routes are more progressive, leading you to make connections with others. I'm not interested in the particular village in India where my grandfather came from. My identity is located on the road.

(In Pitches, 2007: 47)

As Verma suggests, routes offer a far more open perspective to one's search and awareness thus I believe that Koun's personality and practice which were expressed constantly through the tendency to engage with new elements and influences, are clearly linked to this working aspect. Koun was interested in the individual's roots and obviously was taking these special characteristics on board in order to create new routes to his practice through the actor. Koun speaks similarly about it:

Every nation can create and attribute only when it places itself rooted in its own tradition. We are going to give something that might seem poor as an external image, because we see the internal richness of the plays, and the way that this richness could be able to be expressed in a better way, with simple means and touch our soul, which has lost its genuine orientation by foreign imitations. Theatre is an art with self-existence, that is judged according to the laws of art, and not from how much it successfully imitates life or not.

(in Magyar, 2011: 26)

Koun here discussed the necessity of touching one's own roots and national tradition as the basis of a creative process which is informed from the people's individualism and identity in relation with historical changes that became part of a 'tradition route through various roots'. Identity then was a primary concern in terms of the actor,<sup>54</sup> and his extant writings suggest he shared Verma's point of interest in practice, as well Hobsbawn's scope. From that angle then, Koun is placed as a researcher of both 'roots and routes'.

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<sup>54</sup> The actor (meaning the living material) was the motivating force and core of theatre and according to Koun he had to have in general a personal awareness of who he is, where he comes from, what is he doing and how does he work on these elements in order to be communicated and shared with the audience, his fellow workers and of course and most importantly Koun himself.

If we consider the indisputable fact that he influenced more or less the sum of Hellenic theatre, we may say for sure that his particular impact was that he caused many of his contemporary practitioners to reconsider and research through their work on matters of national identity and tradition, which are both included in the use of the term 'Hellenekoteta'. I consider quite interesting to discuss here a very interesting quotation from one of my interviews which offered a lot in this area of research from a contemporary and historical point of interest and made clearer Koun's offer to Hellenic theatre. I interviewed one of the top female ancient drama interpreters, directors and practice based researchers in the area of Hellenic theatre and plays, especially ancient Hellenic drama. Lydia Koniordou's argument on Hellenekoteta highlights the impact that Koun's work has had in Hellenic theatre through the use of the term 'Hellenic spirit':

**L.Koniordou:** He did not mean it with an ethnic, folklore title[...] He meant the Hellenic spirit that can be found in shapes of folk tradition, the Hellenic spirit of the writers, it is a much deeper thing...Koun was not at all preoccupied to have 'Hellenekoteta'. Not at all...This term is wrong...Koun was international. Simply he derived through whatever was around him, through the land...that is exactly what he was saying, that we are not closer to ancient drama because we are better, but because we step on the same land, because the same sun shines over our heads [...] over, through the shapes...the shapes just imprint the spirit, they do not precede...

**G. Chouliaras:** Definitely...tradition here then played a great part in Koun's work...

**L.K.:** Yes, but he did not imitate tradition in an external way [...] he was using only things that the actors themselves were carrying them from their own experiences and his collaborators were bringing them to him as pieces of life, as truth not like a Hellenic-to-

be 'decoration'...That is why I say that the term Hellenekoteta is not an accomplished one for Koun. Not at all...

**G.C.:** Right...I have to say that you are the first one who says this to me and the truth is that this term is continuously referred in relation to Koun [...]

**L.K.:** But Koun from one side was Hellenic and from the other was pan-European....he had an intensive expressionism that only in Germany<sup>55</sup> could be met [...] Koun was stepping in two columns: one was the international and mainly European contemporary theatre and from the other, the spirit that is alive within the shapes of Hellenic tradition, not only the folk one, but as well with a more artistic [...] **Hellenic spirit is 'downloading' in various forms, from antiquity until nowadays, that is what Koun did, he was seeing this continuity and was using without complexities whatever he wanted from wherever he wanted** (*my emphasis*).

(January 2013)

I think that related to my research, Koniordou makes an excellent point that might be an important key of perception: speaking of Koun's elaboration on that particular matter, she rejects the term Hellenekoteta under a prism of a national (-istic) and ethnic (-istic) narrow and strict political approach and offers a viewpoint which presents Hellenic spirit and its configuration as a result of both Hellenic and international elements on which Koun was interested and inspired. However, the most important part in the sense of the term is the content and the context as offered by Koniordou in relation to what can be characterized as Hellenic Spirit (in Hellenic is used the word pneuma)<sup>56</sup> carrying the conversation to a different level, one probably much closer to what Koun might mean with the term 'Hellenekoteta'.

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<sup>55</sup> Koniordou's comment of expressionism in Germany is most probably a point about the quality and depth of the work and not expressionism per se as a linking point with Koun.

<sup>56</sup>The word in everyday life in Hellenic language is used as a superior extend of the human existence that is part of one's culture, tradition, education and philosophical characteristics. Much less, but sometimes might be of use in a religious sense; here it is not used as such.

With it, Koniordou allows further thinking and elaboration of the spiritual man (particularly here refers to the Hellenic individual and group), who have been maintaining their spiritual existence and condition through the building of cultural achievements, which have been reinforcing, informing or (re)creating through time traditions and new traditional attributes. Hence, according to Koniordou and through my eyes as modern practitioner, Koun's impact in contemporary practice is suggested and reproduced through this phenomenon of using a certain cultural and traditional background, influenced by other incoming influences within a historical time frame.

This has created an articulation of a 'spirituality' that exists in Hellenic society as a heritage and survives as something that has a popular essence and strength through genealogy and lineage. In turn, this spirituality becomes a recognisable point of reference and gradually transforms to tradition, enriching or changing the people's cultural background as well present perception of it. Thus, the Hellenic spirit has a national and ethnic character, but not with the narrow political<sup>57</sup> sense of the term, rather applies to a deeper (inter)cultural and (inter)national reality, one that Koun was attempting to mix with the plays he was interested in presenting (both Hellenic and international, particularly ancient Hellenic drama and always through the use of 'Folk Expressionism').<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Meaning the ideology of particular political parties or groups of people.

<sup>58</sup> A fundamental notion in Koun's work as was named by him that is relevant to Hellenekoteta and Hellenic spirit and concerns an expression that comes out of the everyday common facts and reality of the ordinary individual and the popular elements that the majority of people carry and use daily. This is always seen through local and ethnic traditions, cultural background and the individual's personality. The matter of Folk Expressionism is analyzed further in the next section

As a result, what he brought to the stage was Hellenic and at the same time had a 'universal' sense which may apply to the notions and meanings that the texts may offer. In that respect and to conclude on that point, Koun has influenced deeply the contemporary approach by offering a fertile ground of practical enquiries with regards to each one's perception of himself as an artist linked to his own tradition, and with views to the social frame where he acts, establishing himself as a continuity of a tradition which is constantly informed from ethnic or international elements, open towards elaboration in theatre practice. Having this in mind, Koun's work opened the road towards the constructive and artistic use of elements from a variety of customs and traditions which are variably linked to Hellenic history and culture; also towards further experimentation which allowed contemporary theatre practice in Hellas to pay much more attention to forgotten elements as well created an open-minded trend with regards to the use of such material. It may be said then that Koun became the base of experimentation and modernism.<sup>59</sup> Personally, I witnessed this mix of Hellenic and multi-cultural (or even international) material in Aristophanes' comedy the *Knights* in 2007 as a chorus member, where we were working on musical motifs which were constituted by a very interesting mix. The musical principles came from traditional folk Hellenic music which is expressed mostly through an instrument which is called *klarino* and is very representative of the music culture of most of the rural and domestic areas of Hellas.

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<sup>59</sup> The academic Patricia Kokkori places Koun amongst the European modernists by saying that: 'With the first aim Koun sets meaning the activation of the audience, He is met with the majority of the European modernists, older and newer (Zak Kopeau, Luis Zuve, George Pitoef, Artaud, Brecht, Brook, Grotowski)'. (1989: 35)

Klarino is broadly considered as the most famous music instrument in Hellas with regards to the tradition of 'Demotic Songs' as they are called. Phoebos Anogeiannakes discusses about klarino:

Klarino, even if it comes from the West, as a folk musical instrument enters to Hellas from Turkey around the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century [...] From the mid-war season it takes the first place between 'melodic' instruments, is recognised as an 'ethnic'<sup>60</sup> organ and leads the organic music towards a new, bright period, through the elaboration of old melodies to the hands of worthy masters.

(2008: 4)

Interestingly we distinguish the reference to an instrument which is considered as time passed as the National (Ethnic) organ. This development came up through the assimilation and adaptation of national and international motives and sounds. Zervoulas reveals:

Klarino was literally transformed in the hands of practical organ players, confirming once again the privilege of Hellenic tradition to assimilate and evolve the foreign influences.

(2010: 12)

These motives and sounds were mixed with ones of electric guitar, which were clearly developed through the musician's 'Rock' influences, who orchestrated the musical parts and chorals of the performance. This combination of two different recognisable music styles introduced an innovative and interesting approach of the musical environment of ancient drama, producing a result which was definitely post-modern and suggested a multi-cultural sense.

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<sup>60</sup> Meaning National.



This was defined by the sound perception of the klarino as 'traditional and Hellenic', and the electric guitar which was a representative instrument of Rock music which was not introduced as such. In that respect, this musical approach was developed on a multi-cultured basis, implying indirect international elements which are assimilated into Hellenic performance and expression. Another example that applies the mix of Hellenic and international elements in Koun and the Art Theatre's work, was the recall of a rehearsal moment that Eva Kotamanidou shared with me in our interview:

In Aristophanes' *The Frogs*, Koun wanted the chorus to perform their dance as a ritual, but at the same time he wanted it to be very wild [...] there was a moment then when I improvised with all my body the way the Indians<sup>61</sup> were dancing around the fire...Koun said at once: 'that's it !that's it!'. He was letting the actor give, he was taking it, and was moving further.

(January 2012)

Kotamanidou through this example which is a foreign imagery applied into an improvisation of an ancient Hellenic comedy, makes clear that Koun was not restricted in specific boundaries of his viewpoint of Hellenekoteta and her personal experience asserts that Koun was open-minded in his use of the actor's material and imagery, either as derived from known element or those considered to be 'Hellenic', or those that came from another cultural background and ritual that might have had some sort of relevance through the visualization of his practice based improvisations.

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<sup>61</sup> Kotamanidou here refers to the Native Americans.

Thus we may consider that the material that Koun had in his disposal to use, did not have to be solely 'Hellenic', rather could be such that it served the idea of the play or in its use channelled elements of Hellenic culture and traditions (so considered as Hellenic and international at the same time under this prism), via the actor's creativity and personal material use.<sup>62</sup> For Koun Hellenekoteta needed a channel to be expressed via acting, and this was the notion of Folk expressionism as follows.

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<sup>62</sup> This imagery applies to the realization of an image which served Koun's directorial scope of the chorus ritual via a wild dance as Kotamanidou suggested; although Koun did not ask particularly the depiction of an 'Indian', Kotamanidou explains it as such as a recognizable figure.

## Folk Expressionism

I am going to continue my analysis of Koun's areas of impact and influence in contemporary Hellenic theatre practice with the area of Folk Expressionism which stands beside Koun's search on 'Hellenekoteta' or even better 'Hellenic spirit' since I assume that Koniordou's thought about it seems more accurate and interesting. Hence, I intend to inform my reader about its substance and use, and how this stood as a beacon for future generations to open themselves towards innovative practices; and consequently Hellenic theatre practice to various orientations filtered significantly through their own vision and artistic perspective.

As it is apparent in my references so far about the term 'folk expressionism', this notion is quite tricky in terms of its understanding and at this point of my research, my intention is to throw further light about its meaning, use and impact since I esteem that this particular philosophy of practical investigations stood as a fundamental element in Koun's work in all areas of his practice. Also, because of its peculiar nature and importance, I intend to create links with the rest of the areas analysed in this chapter (e.g. its relationship in Koun's work with Stanislavsky) and other acting and actor training areas related to the Art Theatre course as possible influences. Giannis Mpezos<sup>63</sup> offers the simplest and best possible explanation about the meaning of Folk Expressionism:

**G.Chouliaras:** So, what is the use and teaching of the Stanislavski system in Koun's work for you as an actor and viewer of his performances?

**G. Mpezos:** As far as the Stanislavski system is concerned, it is related with acting. This is one aspect. The other aspect of general involvement with theatre and the plays totally,

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<sup>63</sup> Giannis Mpezos is a top actor in Hellenic theatre at this point and the only one whom I interviewed and was not Koun's student in the Art Theatre.

the influences were... Koun was naming it –especially in ancient drama and particularly in Aristophanes as **‘Folk Expressionism’, meaning an expressionistic feeling, thus what I feel inside me and I express, the deeper feeling I have and not what I see from outside and stimulates me, but all this through a folksiness** (*my emphasis*). The paradox is that Koun was not at all a folk person, but rather a bourgeois.[...] you can see that in his work he elaborated a lot with the folk figure of Karangiozis, with all the folk figures, with the traditional as well folk popular songs, with all these rhythms and dances.

**G.C:** I see... so I noticed that you spoke mostly about Koun’s ego, the folk reality that existed around us and much less to Stanislavski as an influence linked to acting...

**G.M.:** Stanislavski has only to do with the way the actor confronts his role, it has nothing to do with the way that Koun was doing theatre overall... that’s why I clarified it before, the role approach is this ‘Russian school’, the so-called method one, but how he faces theatre and performance –especially in ancient drama, the influence is plain Hellenic.

(January 2013)

Mpezos discusses folk expressionism by referencing to Karangiozis figures, traditional and folk songs, rhythms and dances, as adopted and recognizable material that Koun used and adopted in his work, filtered via each one’s personal interpretation and identity. So the configuration of folk expressionism was carrying for each one an alternative and versatile meaning, depending on personality, identity, and experiential background (culture, religion, traditions) and everything that could form one’s individuality. Such an example related to Hellenic music, dances and rhythm that carries a particular tradition where the chorus engaged with a very popular musical stringed instrument in Hellas named bouzouki, was Koun’s *The Birds*. There, the chorus danced a neo-Hellenic popular folk dance which is named *Chasapikos* and is a very popular folk-traditional dance in Hellas.

Bouzouki is a very folk stringed music instrument which is integrally connected to Folk Greek music, known as 'Laiki Mousiki'. Skannelos by linking bouzouki to Greek Folk Music (Laiki Mousiki) explains that:

It is very hard to offer a definition for Laiki Mousiki, because this definition would be incomplete. Although generally one could say that Laiki Mousiki is a cultural feeling through which people express themselves [...] which is created and streamed by the people, for the people.

(2007: 96)

In this case then, Koun attempted to support the choral expression and parts of the text as were delivered from antiquity, through a neo-Hellenic tradition and culture, as a guide and a way to express his visualization of Hellenekoteta; also a vehicle to establish a better understanding and communication of folk expressionism with the audience by using Chasapikos dance and rhythm via a particular instrument which is connected to very folk musical expressions, as Laiki Mousiki may introduce and engage with people's emotional and inner world, as well the actors' interpretations. Also Mpezos offered through our interview a quite revealing and fundamental element in Koun's work and established the high importance of the actor as the beginning and the end in the Art Theatre's working trajectory and philosophy, by defining folk expressionism as a tank of elements which are constituted from our personal experiences and background and are formed from a variety of elements: our birthplace, our religion, our political scopes, our 'class' (meaning in terms of a sociological and anthropocentric interest and not financial one, although more or less this was relevant to a certain extent), our family, our taste and choices, our general personal beliefs, ethos and character.

In that sense, the actor needs to allow himself derive from it and make his proposal from his own point of view which is informed by particular traditions and cultural backgrounds, intending to do two things: one is to create a role who will be a product of his own personality and second to preserve a common ground with the rest who will do the same. Of course, for Koun a basic precondition was for the actor to engage with his emotional responses to inner and outer stimuli in order to reach this level of communication. So for the actor the sense of embracement and elaboration of local and ethnic traditions as well as cultural characteristics that define him as an individual, are of great importance in terms of the formation of a 'folk expressionism'. This material was the one that Koun was searching for, in order for the actor to reveal and then work together on it, always in relation to the role's and the play's demands and their own personal and artistic viewpoints.

Although, I need to make one point clear: when Mpezos speaks of using the material that is available in us and not the material that is external, he does not mean that one must be closed on his own self-consciousness and be negative to the outer world and stimuli. On the contrary, he speaks in favour of an actor who mainly uses his own materiality through his soul, and as he feels and conveys it through, then borrows and elaborates with other elements. Koun's work with Stanislavsky was apparently reinforcing the actor to dive into his inner self and subconscious material and discover what is in there psychologically and psycho-physically and express it through his connection to the role as a person, as well through his imagination. Apparently, we see that here we have a clear link between Hellenekoteta, Folk Expressionism and Stanislavsky, which for Koun may be used as well in other areas apart from acting.

Also places this framework into a Hellenic background that is supported and informed from the aforementioned fields. This structure has been a novelty in Hellenic theatre practice and a daring deed that created an overthrow to the established situation which was almost ignorant of Stanislavsky. Stanislavsky himself as I investigated in my project, celebrated personal experiences and the actor's existential frame in relation with his role, and if we consider Stanislavsky's philosophy in terms of the individual and his psychological status, we may assume that as far as acting is concerned, Hellenekoteta and Folk expressionism stood as vehicles for the adaptation of Koun's Stanislavsky version in Hellas. Koun himself in his manifesto about the theatre he wanted to create discussed the core and roots of the Folk Expressionism:

[...] a Hellenic expressionism, with Hellenic elements, but taken from life and reality around us, and more auxiliary from our tradition. Of course, in order for a genuine expressionistic theatre to be done, in order to train actors, I addressed to the folk class where there were still rich remainders in expressions, movements, sentiments and psychical world. Meaning I started by taking as basis the Hellenic folk reality with all its rich, primitive and source material. [...] I thought that I should grab myself from a more genuine expression of living; the most intense that would stand before me. [...] The movements, the postures, the talking, everything had a meaning; they were coming from a real psychical condition and need, if not spiritual, without mannerism, without restrictions, without forbiddance of good behaviour which usually narcotize every plasticity in other classes.

(1987: 21-22)

If we accept that there is no clear definition for Koun's term of Folk Expressionism, we may also accept the fact that Koun is quite clear about the ingredients that constitute this notion.

His approach to the aforementioned elements stood as a unique phenomenon in Hellenic theatre practice and constituted the bases for a theatre that is anthropocentric: the core of the work is the actor and his own material searching the individual as a unit within a historical and traditional background. This deep search allowed future practitioners to take these facts into account far more seriously, in order to apply them in their work in more or less a similar ways, independent of the artistic orientations each one might have. Patricia Kokkori as well offers her own very interesting spectrum on the combinational nature of Folk Expressionism and Hellenekoteta:

According to him (Koun) the emphasis he gives to Hellenekoteta in his early work, is linked with the fictionalization of the folk element, fact that is connected with the broader cultural detections in Hellenic territory during the decade of 1930. [...] the Hellenic reality in the urban centres (meaning with naturalistic elements)

(1989: 36-37)

Continuing, Kokkori concludes it was one of the three basic aesthetic lines<sup>64</sup> of the Art Theatre: 'The presence of the naturalistic element, meaning the urban folk element which defines a Hellenic nationality (Hellenekoteta) which had been expressed with a way which was characterised as Expressionistic [...]' (ibid.) Interestingly, we see that all of the aforementioned opinions (Mpezos, Koun and Kokkori) are speaking about the same material but from a perspective that allows us think that an attempt to restrict the notion of Folk Expressionism into a terminology would fail as Lymberopoulou specifically says about it that 'it is impossible to restrict Koun's work in definitions and terminologies' (January 2012).

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<sup>64</sup> See relatively the whole quotation in the Introduction or Kokkori, P. (1989) 'Karolos Koun's Greek Version of Theatrical Modernism', *Ekkeklema*, vol 21, Summer, pp.34-39.





I need to mark at this point that eventually, this sound (pou-pou-pou) improvisation became the basic motto of the chorus for this performance of *The Birds* and characterised the whole 'entrance and attack' at the beginning of the play, as well as used broadly in Koun's direction in relation with the musical and singing parts. Hence, becomes obvious that Koun's work was able to be informed and derive from an endless everyday variety: speech, movement, singing, dancing, personal experiences and more. In this case, the use of Hellenic language through a verbal convention<sup>66</sup> became the vehicle towards an acting expression and a whole directorial concept of work with the chorus. Both LyMBERopoulou and Mpezos discuss folk expressionism via a quite personal view of a 'folksiness' which reveals its open and alternative interpretation like Koun did, since he was interested in the person's inner world and profound material, while on the other hand presents as basic parameters the expression codes that define his everyday life.

As a result, he tried to link it with a lineage that is constituted by traditions, cultural and national characteristics which in turn have formed the individual within a time frame. This is delivered through the simplest actions and way of living, in a cultural mosaic as the large urban centres provide and transform the individual according to the experiences. Kokkori from her interesting point of view explains that Hellenekoteta and Folk Expressionism are two notions that met under the prism of a naturalistic expression; with this in mind, we can link easily Stanislavsky's use from Koun in acting, since Koun's major interest lay with the actor as

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<sup>66</sup> Considering this from a personal point of view as a folk element and expression, I recall my grandmother calling her chickens to eat in the village exactly the same way, only using at the end of the word 'pou' the letter l, making it 'poul' which is an abbreviation of the Hellenic word 'pouli', which means bird.

individual through a naturalistic expression which was reinforced by the folk elements that were defining his special characteristics (birthplace, customs, education, class, cultural background, political existence). Personally, I witnessed a very interesting example of such a case which was introduced through a parody improvisation (amongst a large number of many other off-text ones) which derived from material which refers to two political parties in Hellenic political scene of 2007. In Aristophanes' *The Knights* the two protagonists and according to the plot political rivals, were 'throwing threats' to each other as they were delivered from Aristophanes' text. So there was a scene where the political debate was transformed to a 'boxing match' and there was a verbal improvisation which stood as a reference to a political party's campaign motto which was the phrase 'punch to the system'.

The other actor answered accordingly with the name of another political party which is nowadays the Hellenic government: 'I will cut your hands syriza'.<sup>67</sup> And while both actors indeed used this material as means of parody within the play, the second was also making a political statement which was clearly coming out of his personal political beliefs<sup>68</sup> as well was suggesting a 'proper' improvised answer which fitted to the play's meanings and political allegories. The interesting aspect of this example is that this was developed from performance to performance as a result of endless improvisation moments which were the result of spontaneous and impulsive reactions on stage.

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<sup>67</sup> The word ΣΥΡΙΖΑ in Hellenic means 'from the route' and stands also as the name of the political party which is the actual government now in Hellas (ΣΥ.ΠΙ.ΖΑ.). Easily one may understand the similitude and improvisation use from the political scenery.

<sup>68</sup> Today this actor is a member of the House of Parliament with this political party.

Consequently Koun and the Art Theatre reformed the rules of work in Hellenic theatre in terms of the high importance of actor training with one's own material (actor) in relation to the social environment, as well the self-identity and particularities that define this individual within a social frame linked to a historical, ethnic, national, cultural and traditional and as we saw in this case political background and reality. This way, theatre would open its doors further and the people involved with it -both practitioners and audience- would create an artistic and social bond and come closer towards a common cause. Kokkori speaks of Koun's place about it:

[...] the first aim of the Art Theatre is the creation of a new theatrical tradition which will address to people with demands of theatrical approaches that are co-ordinated with the speculations of their time [...] to demanding spectators and 'co-operators to the creation of a civilizing (cultural) effort'.

(1989: 35)

So if we accept that Kokkori speaks of the importance of the audience as Koun had visualised the connection between the artists and the people, then we may say that the result of it would be the availability of material and its constant exchange via the channel of folksiness and popularity from areas and customs which were recognisable and applied to everyday life. As Mpezos earlier claimed, this personal expression, meaning 'what I feel and express it as I sense it', becomes the beginning point to discover a variety of routes and interpretations of the so-called 'folk expressionism'. Koun's search on it then, did not establish a term per se to be defined theoretically and precisely with a sole meaning, neither restricted or imposed his 'personal' truth he would only see.

I believe from my research on Koun and his work that Koun's beliefs and personality were such that were not permitting definitive terms and conditions (like Lymberopoulou said previously), rather were provoking a way of thinking that may find fertile ground to be developed through his words: 'I believed that the Art is not the faithful imagery of life, but life itself as the artist senses it with his inner eye through his filtered emotions. I believe the same now.' (Magyar, 2003: 48). With this in mind, I suppose that what he named folk expressionism, was constituted by two elements: first, a well-known or less known material which comes out of traditional, ethnic, political, religious and social characteristics and second, all these through the eyes of each individual separately through his own experiences, character and personality. In that case, his success was to manage to develop a common ground for the few (the Art Theatre) in order to investigate and work with the variety of this material, which had a great impact for the many (the audience) which was gradually becoming a part of this elaboration.

## The Practice Tradition

With regards to the matter of practice, Koun's work in the Art Theatre with his students was the beginning point and basis of establishing an acting, teaching and directing tradition, due to Koun's search for a different way of on stage expression which was reinforced mainly from his research on Stanislavsky and interest on various international influences from practitioners, writers and directors,<sup>69</sup> as well his personal aesthetic of a theatre that would be able to communicate with everyone (meaning a more social and folk contact, not a theater that refers only to the higher classes).

With this in mind, it is a fact that contemporary Hellenic theatre is full of Karolos Koun's students who have been carrying and transferring forward the Art Theatre tradition, obviously shaped through their own perspectives as actors and directors in theatres, as well as teachers in drama schools. It is important to mention that there are cases of this 'Art Theatre tradition' which were developed under particular circumstances and each one of them for different reasons in or out of the Art Theater after Koun died in 1987. So, I am going to discuss this heritage and the way it has been shared and transmitted through different people and perspectives related to the Art Theatre and Karolos Koun (among others speaking mainly of students, actors, directors, teachers, drama schools), and in which way this survives today by using my personal student experience as a student of one of Koun's closest students.

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<sup>69</sup> 'From 1937, for twenty years, I occupied myself with the new classic theatre, with contemporary Greek writers, but basically with modern theatre. And in 1941 was founded the Art Theatre. I turned primarily to the constructors of contemporary theatre and later again to Epic theatre, Brecht, to pioneer theatre and theatre of the Absurd, Pinter, Becket, Ionesco. Contemporary theatre contributed to open new horizons to the ancient theatre interpretation.'(1987: 112)

To begin with a proper historical frame then, before Koun died in 1987 he defined in his will as his inheritors and continuers of the Art Theatre three of his closest students: Giorgos Lazanis, Mimis Kougioumtzis and Giorgos Armenis. Almost immediately after Koun died, Armenis left and worked outside the Art Theatre and later created his own theatre and drama school, while the first two took over the company and shared the two available spaces the Art Theatre had. The Art Theatre drama school continued to work under the guidance of the inheritors and other Art Theatre members who were teaching there, as well were performing in several productions. Thus, it appears that this was a phenomenon which was happening for the first time and it contributed significantly in contemporary Hellenic theatre practice: Koun was a uniting point of reference and as a consequence of his death other members stayed to continue Koun's work with his inheritors, while others (the bigger number) gradually left and worked elsewhere (free professional industry, drama schools etc.).

So, despite the fact that the Art Theatre was losing in time its integrity and cohesion somehow with the loss of good members, the broader world of theatre invited them to share their knowledge from their work with the Art Theatre as actors, teachers, directors; since the Art Theatre reputation was high and all the members were considered to be very well trained actors and important artists, there would be many chances for most of them. Hence the Art Theatre tradition and working model did not only sustain itself within the Art Theatre and its audience, but was also conveyed in most of the drama schools, to a large number of theatres in the free professional industry and there were many chances for Koun's students to direct plays outside the Art Theatre environment.

In terms of my involvement with the Art Theatre practice as a student, my work and experiences started during my studies in the drama school. There, I came in touch with the Art Theatre practical framework and investigated and worked much with this theoretical and practical background by apprenticing with a teacher, actor and director who was carrying Koun's teachings and practice based scope, straight from the core of the Art Theatre, Giannis Mortzos, who had spent 21 years with Koun and had been one of his closest students, partners and friends. It is important at this point then to reflect in a more personal basis and share details of my training which stood as revelation for me and my acting learning process and elaborative trajectory; and respectively assist my reader to understand further the importance of the strong connection between teaching-acting-directing in terms of Koun's work and how this has been developed and inspired generations of practitioners.

Recalling my classes and labor with Giannis Mortzos, I will always remember a number of fundamental elements and conditions which would be representative and absolutely necessary if one wanted to work: first, it was the matter of self-delivery; if one was not completely determined and decisive to let himself be available at work and open his inner-self to the teacher, most probably he would never be able to work in this class. Armenis during our interview comments that 'if you were not functioning with him, you could not work with Koun [...] he was always asking from the actor to take initiative' (January 2013). I remember myself being extremely attentive, as well always very considerate to be well prepared to rehearse my scene and available always to grab my chance when I would be asked to present my work.



This way, I kept myself in a state of readiness and concentration, which was another essential thing, asked and was clearly interrelated with the love and passion one was carrying for theatre. At any possible moment one should be ready to jump into his role without further thinking (as Filippidis<sup>70</sup> has mentioned in our interview about ‘absolute passion, absolute depth’). What was demanded was total devotion to the text, the role and the working environment which was primarily defined from the actor’s relationship with his teacher, meaning the actor to prove his hard labor to the extent he was able and responsible and with this in hand ‘intrigue’ and ‘invite’ the teacher to elaborate deeper together into a co-operative ‘sharing’ procedure.

Amongst other examples, I recall my rehearsal process on a scene where Mortzos, provoked from our work with my partner as we were improvising<sup>71</sup> with the text, jumped on the stage and started to shout, bite, hit and scream, almost like dancing around and on us, inspired from our work and trying to return to us the material he had seen, but transformed via his own imagery of our acting labor. This almost primitive but very genuine impulsive and spontaneous expression was a trigger for us to work harder and deeper, with much more enthusiasm and passion, as well made us feel more comfortable with each other, our teacher and the environment where we were rehearsing. In that respect, our relationship as actor-teacher started to develop.

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<sup>70</sup> Petros Filippidis is one of the most famous and important actors in Hellas at this point and Koun’s student during the 80’s. This part is already quoted in my reflection of my practice based project.

<sup>71</sup> Improvisation was a tool used from the very beginning of the work, even with the book in hand and standing up. This uncomfortable situation was causing an insecurity, which on turn was helping the actor to become more intimate and release himself on stage, without becoming self-conscious.

As it advanced, I sensed the need to become more impulsive and express myself far more instinctively, a fact that I discovered in time that was an integral part of the process of an Art Theatre actor. This example reveals that one should be passionate, energetic and alert with his tasks in terms of self-deliverance and availability to the teacher-actor proceeding relationship; at some point in our interview, Mortzos explained:

Koun was intriguing, was poking the actor a lot [...] he was working with the actor's particularities and demanded fantasy (imagination) and passion. It was essential for him to feel that you are passionate! The role should be reached through the labor of the actor's capabilities.

(January 2013)

Another significant factor was the actor's awareness of his mission for a greater cause, meaning a level of self-awareness which offers discipline and respect at work, as well a sense of a 'mission' and a 'fair debt' towards the audience. In other words, one should be aware of how small one is in front of his art and offer himself for both his personal as well the common spiritual evolution, like speaking of acting as an absolute means to reach the partner's and the audience's psychological channels. Indeed, I was sensing that I had a mission to accomplish, one that is never reached but the actor always needs to preserve this higher aim through art before an audience. Lazanis in *Theatro Technis 1942-1972* reveals Koun's beliefs about the actor and the importance of acting:

Koun, all three times he started his effort for theatre, begun basically from the search and creation of actors [...] the only thing that remains invariable in Koun, is his faith that the actor is the creator-executor, receiver-transmitter and operator simultaneously.

He needed to be the centre where everything converged and filtered through him and returned to the audience.

(1972: 282)

Lazanis makes perfectly clear with his point of Koun's vision about a theatre whose basic column and foundation would be the actor and outlines Koun's great impact in the actor's training, as well responsibility and ethical involvement with his art. This combination of capabilities and coherent elements which are dependent on each other, appear to be an establishment for an 'Art Theatre actor'. Eugene Ionesco, who was a personal friend of Koun and had the chance to see many of his plays performed in the Art Theatre, speaks and enlightens our perception about the Art Theatre actors and their labor:

The actors, chosen and directed by Koun, are not puppets, they do not permit the fibers that move them to be seen, neither their rules of the craftsmanship [...] they know how to preserve their spontaneity and they have a freshness which is incorrupt from the 'professionalism routine', enriched though through their experience. Koun's actors whose aim is not the atomic success but the widening and the release of the play's power, appear to have an ascetic quality and a spiritual clarity [...]

(1972: 252)

In an attempt to decode further Ionesco's and Lazanis' commentary, we may say that they acknowledge the actor's labor, personality and presence in conjunction to Koun's special achievement to manage to derive and cultivate theatrically their material. Nevertheless, Ionesco makes a quite important observation: the actor follows Koun's teachings and directorial scopes as the catalyst of the act and the text, which are filtered through the actor's personal material as a fundamental element of Koun's work.

The aim then was to proceed from there and maintain a balance between himself (actor-role and actor-director labor), the director (actor director relationship and directorial perspectives) and the writer (role-text). In that respect, it appears that despite the absence of rational thinking and logic in Koun's work (Lymberopoulou, January 2012), which was mostly guided by impulsivity, instinct, spontaneity and imagination, there was a remarkable balance and strict attention to the writer's text and the meanings it conveyed. Thus, Koun's vision and influence was the preservation of the balance between the actor as fundamental element of the act and separate personality who was invited to perform within a working frame that would treat equally and attentively all of the involved elements of the performance (director, text etc.). Koun's impact then on that matter is that he delivered actors and directors, who are invited by this openness and were interested in involving their acting and directing framework beyond narrowed personal perspectives but were willing to exchange and elaborate on their own material with their partners at work in a sharing and creative environment, towards a greater cause. Koun in *We do theatre for our psyche* said the historical phrase:

We do not do theatre just for theatre. We do not do theatre to live. We do theatre to enrich ourselves, the audience that is watching us and all together to assist each other in order to create a broad, psychically rich and pure culture in our land. Each one of us alone is helpless. Each one of you, the closest to our effort, is helpless. Together we might manage to do something.

(1987: 12)

This phrase stands as a gospel in Hellenic theatre practice and is considered to be the most famous and recognizable, as well representative of the Greek actor who in general considers

more or less that he needs to use his inner psychical, psychophysical and spiritual material in order to achieve a result of 'truth' on stage. Personally I belong to this category of actors who will answer to someone if asked about any method I use to approach my role: 'I act with my psyche (soul)'. This declaration is indeed profound but at the same time generic about its meaning and translation, does not reject any other forms or methods of work, rather highlights that the beginning point of my theatrical act is my psyche(soul) and the material I carry.

In one of my interviews with Giannis Mpezos, I commented that he was the only one from I had chosen to interview about Koun from outside the Art Theatre lineage, and I received an interesting response: 'It doesn't matter, one way or another, everyone is Koun's student' (January 2013).

With this comment Mpezos revealed the large impact that Koun had on the Hellenic theatre and society and opened the conversation nicely about Koun as a case that cannot be compared until nowadays; since he delivered generations of artists (mainly former students who are now actors, directors, teachers, writers and generally theatre practitioners who have been continuing his work more or less on the same tracks) and preserved a sense of Art Theatre genealogy and practice through a handed down tradition which still(and probably more than ever) invites new trends to affect it. Concluding, I would say that Koun through his practice, meaning teaching-acting-directing with his emphasis on the actor, offered the most in Hellenic theatre: first, he made the actor the centre of the theatrical act, where everything would function not according to the produced and elaborated material in terms of stage acting.

Secondly, he liberated the actor towards a variety of interpretations, via improvisation and experimentation, and thus triggered the actor to come closer to notions like impulse, instinct, personal experiences, imagination. Koun's actor broke his conservative barriers and worked freer and openly, without social restrictions, conservative fears and questioning about his profession and his stage presence<sup>72</sup>, first as a human being and then as an actor and artist, both psychologically, physically and psychophysically. Thirdly, Koun as a personality and teacher influenced every actor who was working with him as well as the ones that did not, to involve themselves with a lot of new and old theatrical material, and see it with an innovative and exploratory viewpoint: practitioners, actor training models, writers and others, widening their artistic horizons and helping them to train and initiate next generations and audiences to act and contact theatre's higher purposes.

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<sup>72</sup> This paragraph does not imply that all these are somehow 'Hellenic', but rather points out Koun's significant contribution to Hellenic theatre via principles that may be considered as well as universal; since until his appearance in Hellenic theatre most of the aforementioned were not practiced at all and were not even known as training notions and tools.

## The Ancient Hellenic Drama Approach

Amongst other equally important personalities and artists<sup>73</sup> who lived and worked in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Hellas on ancient Hellenic drama and its interpretation, Koun managed to approach it from a quite different perspective, one that was considered pioneering, innovative and modern, in comparison with performances from the National Theatre, whose influence was mostly from German classicism. Koun suggested a different approach and in time liberated the practitioners to investigate other working paths and negotiate with the roles and the plays in a way which was far closer to contemporary reality and everyday characters. Discussing then Koun's innovative and radical approach with ancient Hellenic drama and his offer that survives until nowadays and still develops further, I believe that Eleftheria Ioannidou is quite revealing:

His staging of both tragedy and comedy abounded in visual and musical elements drawn from the Byzantine, oriental, and folk traditions, which he considered to be deep-seated in Greek life. Furthermore, Koun viewed ancient drama as a vibrant part of contemporary Greek culture which can be accessed through enduring and familiar elements within the landscape. His productions offered elaborations of his early concept of "Greek folk expressionism" which he linked to the sense of "the unfeigned plasticity as it is manifested in life, in mountains, in flumes, in trees, in animals, in birds and in humans." After *Theatro Technis* was accepted into the Epidaurus Festival, this sensual connection with Greek of antiquity is subjected to the impact of the ancient monument. Koun's later views on ancient drama did not evade Greek exclusive claims over Greek drama or references to the "sacredness that the space [Epidaurus] itself has."<sup>74</sup>

(2010, 44: 385)

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<sup>73</sup> Amongst others Aggelos Sikelianos, Fotos Politis, Dimitris Rondiris. Also later Alexis Solomos, Kostas Tsianos, Spyros Enangellatos and Theo Terzopoulos.

<sup>74</sup> Koun, *Κάνουμε θέατρο για την ψυχή μας*, 156 (originally in *Καθημερινή*, 9 September 1984) See also 33–34.

Ioannidou links interestingly here the notions of Hellenekoteta and folk expressionism just like Kokkori did previously, speaking particularly of ancient drama, where she justifies Koun's aspect of its approach through people, every day images and the landscape as common points of reference with antiquity and vibrant material which possibly inspired as well the ancient Greek poets to write their plays. In that sense Koun tried to reveal and maintain a connection to traditions that were popular, and to promote the folk and everyday common characteristics, as well as derive material from the entire available Hellenic historical context from antiquity when Greece experienced some sort of intercultural exchange with other countries, nations and races. Just like Koniordou earlier spoke about Koun's simultaneous Hellenic and international character at work, Dimitris Tsatsoulis speaks about Koun and the connection between Hellenic and intercultural:

(Koun) admits it is possible that the ritual elements of tragedy exist in Asian theatre, as well later refers to the African.<sup>75</sup> Koun then creates the circumstances for an intercultural theatre, while at the same time the meaning of Hellenekoteta (Greekness) which is defining of the Hellenic national identity, opens up channels towards the East but defines its uniqueness in contradiction with the West [...] 'I will not hesitate to go to the African, the Asian and any other ritual, because these are the ones that remain nowadays'<sup>76</sup> [...] Koun foresaw the crossing of the borders as strengthening of this Hellenekoteta.

(2005: 368, 369, 372)

We understand then that the notion of Hellenekoteta for Koun, was in essence an idea based on a Hellenic lineage and heritage which was saved, survived and was downloaded from two

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p. 101, 104, 105

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p. 105



different perspectives, meaning Hellenic and International material; which schematizes Koun's personal view of Hellenism and Hellenic spirit, containing both viewpoints. Keeping in mind the mix of Hellenekoteta and Folk Expressionism as is analysed so far this way I had a very strong experience drawn from Karolos Koun and the Art Theatre heritage and stage craft in *The Knights*, which intrigued me a lot to move to the present research. Indeed, the text and the play were approached through specific Art Theatre perspectives: the chorus was developed psychophysically and kinetically through three different channels.

First were the choreography and the matter of movement on stage as well dancing and singing within the choral parts which, meaning a sequence of specific steps and singing would be the basic form and style of the chorus. This was gradually structured through the collaboration between the chorus actors, the choreographer and the singing teacher. Second, was the melding of this form with dancing and moving, e.g. the postures and gestures which are drawn from Hellenic traditional folk and rock dances and sounds, as well as Hellenic rural festivals and celebrations well known to each one of us as integral parts of our cultural background. This way, we had the chance to mix the Hellenic traditional elements with the international sounds of rock music and develop a kinesiology through constant moving and improvisation. Finally, the third stage was the match of this work with the actors and the scenes, where there was a lot of space available for the chorus members to participate spontaneously and impulsively, although through a measured discipline. So, the chorus was improvising a lot with sounds and kinetic activities; this way we had the chance to 'comment' or 'answer' in a comedic way to the text which was about the political situation in ancient Hellas.

The meaning was remaining the same, although the continuous improvisations both from the actors and the chorus were bringing the text in 'today's reality and politics'. Thus, there was a tendency from comedy moments and sarcasm on stage with present time references, as it was fundamental to maintain the meaning of the play in line. Nevertheless, all this was respectively informed through each one's experiences to present a different type and personality on stage, but at the same time aligned with everyone else with special regards to serve Aristophanes' text.<sup>77</sup> I personally experienced the elaboration of this balance, when the choreographer was teaching us the steps of each choral part in order to have a common rhythm, movement and singing, but at the same time was trying to maintain a sense of freer interpretation of each one of us on stage which would allow us to be more responsive to the main roles' acting. The director on the same track was inviting us to be spontaneous and imaginative in performance, without cancelling our moving pattern and common expression as a chorus.

Conclusively, I experienced deeply the search during the rehearsal stage for an expression which derives from a variety of ethnic, national and local traditions as well known facts and problematic structures of the Hellenic society mainly in terms of politics and corruption. Of course, in order for this to become apparent and usable as a working philosophy, I recall that before the actual beginning of the rehearsals, the translator of the play had raised a discussion about the political situation in ancient Hellas and the circumstances under which Aristophanes wrote this play; this lecture led to a further on stage discussion which created a constructive comparison about politics and corruption between antiquity and nowadays.

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<sup>77</sup> Each member created an individual character that was derived either internally or externally, while the important part was to keep a common line sense towards the text interpretation and the collective work.

The outcome allowed the actors and the chorus work towards a parody of contemporary figures which resemble Aristophanes' characters and situations. Consequently, the notion of 'folk expressionism' was apparent through each one's experience background as an individual, as well through a collective knowledge of contemporary reality, informed through cultural and traditional influences, working with one's own personal material which would be deposited and developed through a common channel. As I mentioned before about the working process in this case (I refer to the three channels which were relatively analysed), the chorus worked primarily and for a quite long time on its own in order to achieve a psychophysical 'meeting' with each other and construct the basis of the work, on which the actors would later incorporate their labour with the characters.

This was somehow tricky at the beginning and caused some confusion about the chorus function in relation to the characters and their course within the play, in terms of their individual relationship with the chorus as a whole and each one of us separately. On the other hand, it created the circumstances for a large number of improvisations to take place from both sides and provoked impulsivity and spontaneity to dominate the common rehearsal on later stages of the work. The rehearsal was just one component of the Art Theatre actors' and Koun, who were very close to each other creating a 'communion' and a 'family bond' which was absorbing a lot of their personal time and life, while on the other hand this was considered to be a part of their studentship and work.<sup>78</sup> Maya Lymberopoulou revealed characteristically her experience of this in our interview:

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<sup>78</sup> This is lost in contemporary work in the Art Theatre.

We were acting 12 times a week, double performances [...] 5-6 plays [...] his rehearsals were lasting maximum 6 weeks but were extremely intensive. 10.00 – 15.00 rehearsals. 15.00 – 17.00 drama school class. From 17:00 until 00.00 double performances. Until you prepare yourself and eat something after the performance the time would be 02:00. Then, the next role for the other day that you should study and rehearse 02.00 – 05.00. And you were sleeping from 05.00 – 09.00 in order to wake up and be on time to next day's rehearsal. These were Koun's rhythms. Frenzied.

(January 2012)

Lymberopoulou offers an insight in the Art Theatre working environment and rhythms, as well use of the human resources and we can understand that everyone was included and was treated -more or less and independent of his talent- somehow equally from Koun. Indeed, this description from inside is far different from mine, despite the fact that the working philosophy and elaboration were more or less the same. So, the team and group spirit was strongly developed and despite the fact there were some students who were more talented than the others, Koun cared for something different: 'She/he is good but not devoted' (ibid). The important part for the actor then was to have devotion at work and offer himself for the greater good, irrelevant of his role, talent and place in the Art Theater. Especially in ancient drama, Koun established for good in Hellenic theatre the aspect that the Chorus is the main role and not the individuals:

Primal factor in ancient drama will always be the Chorus. Notionally and verbally, vocally and musically, motionally and plastically, the chorus modulates the play's climate, lights the heroes and projects the poet's message with its passion.

(1987: 117)

Koun with his vision of a vibrant chorus who is the adjuster of the dramatic act and is based upon the actor, opened the way to contemporary practitioners to see the chorus function from a different perspective and influenced significantly the trend of modernism and innovative approaches in ancient drama. Based on this, if I was to mark some differences as a student and professional actor from my experience background, I would focus on the following:

Firstly, it would be the absence of the Art Theatre everyday life and bond. The endless hours Koun was spending with his students, the commitment to a common cause and artistic viewpoint and the connection that was created because of that. This is something that I suppose did not experience to the same degree with Koun's students as they did with him as well because of the different working conditions. Also, I believe that the amount of personal working time I had, must have been significantly different from Koun, meaning far much more focus and concentration. On the other hand, I saw it as a chance to develop my own material, probably with less restrictions and more imagination. Nevertheless, I definitely experienced Koun's great(est) impact on ancient drama performance and practice which is clearly seen as a reflection of his philosophy and his innovative approach:

We search, we work, letting ourselves be influenced both from the tradition of our land, as well from the contemporary socio-politic reality and the expressive means the theatre has today, in order to project their poetry, not as static speech, rather as modern theatre. This is the only way it is possible for the ancient poets to exist and help mankind. **The ancient theatre as we see and sense it today, for the individual who lives today, this is our regard** (*my emphasis*).

(1987: 118)

Consequently Koun not only changed the terms of confronting an ancient drama text and performance approach, but rather created a lot of interesting and important questions with his search and suggestions, using the 'old' in order to discover the 'new' and vice-versa (traditions, customs, nationality, ethnic elements, historical events and changes, religion, societies in the midst of time, geography, politics amongst others). As Mpezos neatly commented about ancient drama:

What we must do with ancient drama –since we cannot do what was done in antiquity because we do not have sufficient information, is that we need to 'betray' it in the best possible way!

(January 2013)

Koun and the Art Theatre justify this aspect, since the elaborative point was the meaning of the text and the messages, which would be approached through a gentle mix of the past with the future, through all of the available areas as they are mentioned before, a fact that constituted a change which not only survives until nowadays, but still involves through the eyes of various practitioners, including of course his own students. It is natural that there are distinguishable differences between Koun and his students (even the closest ones to him) as well everyone who tried to make use of this philosophy of work. Hence, this handed down tradition may be recognised as a 'Kounian' or Art Theatre practice, while at the same time may be considered one of the many working branches Koun's legacy created. I guess that this is probably what Koun would like to see, like Stanislavski. A polyphony that leads to evolution and a belief to a greater cause that keeps its members united.

## Conclusion

### **Karolos Koun as a pioneer actor, teacher, director and personality and the Art Theatre as a unique theatre association and phenomenon in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Hellas.**

In the previous sections I presented, discussed and analysed particular influential areas and impact that Karolos Koun and the Art Theatre had and have in Hellenic theatre. Here, I offer a sum of this contribution and innovative course in general which had great impact and influence in contemporary Hellenic theatre practice. So, when we refer to Karolos Koun as an individual in contemporary theatre practice in Hellas, it may be said that we probably discuss the most representative theatrical personality in 20th century Greek theatre and perhaps the most influential of all practitioners, teachers and directors. In addition, and speaking from my personal experience as a professional actor and from all my contacts with practitioners in Hellenic theatre practice, I may assert that the Art Theatre is catholically considered to be one of the most innovative and pioneer theatre organizations in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Hellenic theatre practice.

Its creation constituted one of the most obvious incisions in the history of Hellenic theatre and determined to a very high percentage the developments that modulated the image of theatre practice until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

(Mavromoustakos 2005: 37)

Amongst other achievements, Koun and the Art Theatre introduced Stanislavsky to Greek theatre, assimilated and interpreted through Koun's aesthetics and philosophy of work as well through his personal artistic spectrum in terms of acting.

This assimilation gradually changed the actor's training and works with the role, as well the text confrontation and action in performance.<sup>79</sup> Stanislavsky was introduced to Hellenic theatre from Koun, even in his own particular way as we examined in the previous chapter. Koun also introduced to Hellenic audiences through the Art Theatre a large number of contemporary international practitioners, writers and plays (i.e. Theatre of the Absurd, Brecht, American theatre and writers amongst many others) which were completely unknown to Hellenic theatre overall prior to his innovation. Finally, Koun's work negotiated with ancient Hellenic drama (both tragedy and comedy) from a completely different point of view using Hellenic tradition related to influences that were assimilated to Hellas and the Greeks socially, historically and culturally. Koun also worked closely with Greek writers and presented a large number of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Hellenic plays which were developed while the Art Theatre was flourishing. Nikeforos Papandreou asserts:

Our debts to the Art Theatre are many. Karolos Koun renovated the scenic language and our relationship with theatricality, introduced in Hellas some of the greatest 20<sup>th</sup> Century dramaturges, trained many generations of actors, created a fanatic audience for theatre. Another debt to the Art Theatre is the one related with its neo-Hellenic repertoire. Koun was able to discover with his infallible instinct the talent of important writers at their beginning. He was instinctively sure of their capabilities, was discussing their plans, he was motivating them.

(2009: 76)

Especially after 1954, when he established the Art Theatre, Koun is considered to be the most representative example of modernism (as we have already discussed from Kokkori's point of

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<sup>79</sup> As we saw in the Project reflection (1<sup>st</sup> chapter).



view) and the one who has reinvented and changed the terms of acting, teaching, directing and performance in Greece. Moreover, it was the only independent theatre association which united so many different artists (actors, directors, writers, musicians etc.) and enhanced the careers of most of the people who were involved; also was considered to be the most successful and important non-state theatrical association in 20<sup>th</sup> century Hellenic theatre practice, a sole case of such a long-term theatre company, guided by one man from its foundation until Koun's death in 1987, without having a state support for a quite long period. Having these clues in mind it was to create a space of communion between artists and achieved to bring audiences much closer to the theatrical act, and make them feel actively a member of this movement and not just a conventional spectator of a performance as they used to be. The academic Nikos Chourmouziadis comments on particular new characteristics the Art Theatre introduced derived from his own witness as a spectator:

[...] a peculiar theatre, which was operating in a basement without the conventional scene and stage curtain, and mainly, without any distance between the interpreters and the audience, who were watching from seats placed in a circular way –this is how the term 'circular theatre' slipped into our theatrical dictionary.

(2009: 108)

This personal witness provides evidence of the innovation that had taken place in Hellenic theatre from Koun, as far as the space and audience are concerned and connected to the theatrical act and the actors. We see then that the audience was intentionally placed closer to the actors in order to become more 'active' within the act and establish a closer relationship with the interpreters which would allow both to come closer artistically and physically.

This would eliminate the idea of the actor who is interpreting his role on the Italian type stage and would be something unreachable for the spectator to engage in any possible way. Platon Mavromoustakos also throws further light on this matter:

The stage arrangement of the new roof of the Art Theatre with the central stage and the audience placement amphitheatrically to its three sides, as well the feeling which is caused by the descent of the audience in this underground space which probably refers to the freshly preserved memory of the descent to the war shelters, animates the interest of an audience constituted by intellectuals, students [...]

(2005: 80-81)

Apart from the common ground both Chourmouziadis and Mavromoustakos share by commenting on the space and its general impact as an innovative element of performance and modernism, we may distinguish another important statement from Mavromoustakos. He develops his comment through a political perspective, one of collective memory and history with his reference to the war shelters (writing as he was in the recent aftermath of World War II and the devastation the Hellenic people and Hellas, in general, suffered from fascist German occupation), compared to the stairs that were leading underground, to the basement, where the stage was placed. Perhaps, then it was functioning as a place of 'salvation' in both cases, where everyone was coming closer to everybody, increasing his chances to be 'saved' and share hope into a common tank of experiences and knowledge. Keeping this perspective in mind, we may assume that Koun's offering about this matter in Hellenic theatre practice, is the fact that he 'eliminated gently' the wall which was standing between the audience and the actor.

This was done by creating the circumstances for a modern and unconventional theatre which would offer a different experience for both sides and would carry everyone and everything involved with the theatrical act to a higher level of communication, a new way of 'sharing'. However, this sort of communication would not be only 'theatrical' and 'artistic', but rather would embrace people from an anthropocentric lens, socially and culturally. Characteristically Koun enlightens us:

Art has a social mission. Its purpose is not to serve political<sup>80</sup> purposes where it is pledged within narrow boundaries and misses its destination; rather, it is to help the redemption, the elevation of mankind's ethical and spiritual sentience. Art [...] is a mean of serving man [...] always makes him a seeker of truth and good. Theatre, -as in all arts and even more it, because it comes in closer contact with the man, needs to help him towards his rise, his ethical elevation.

(1987: 69)

As it is apparent, Koun was interested in a theatre that stands as a social, cultural and political point of reference and this was something that eventually was achieved. In order for this to be done, he 'invited' the audience to share his work as a friend, an equal, a fellow citizen and not from the place of an exceptional eccentric artist, who tries to change the world behind the barriers of his own ideas and 'brilliant mind', sat on a throne, far away from the crowd. Thus, he approached the audience in an ordinary way where everything would be delivered and communicated clearly.

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<sup>80</sup> When Koun refers to the term 'political' in a negative sense, he discusses about the parties in politics and the ideas that may be carried through them. This needs to be noticed as Koun was always away from such characterizations, although his theatre was deeply political in the sense of the man as a political and ethical creature.

So, we may realise the reason that the whole setting (from the descent to the basement, the underground space, the circular three-sided theatre without stage curtain, the actor's distance with the audience to the play and the direction) was far more informal and comprehensive, compared to the majority of theatres who were having the Italian scene and the 'heavy' decoration. These facts were permitting the audience to feel much more comfortable and the actors become more creative and vocal through a new and a different atmosphere, in a more liberated way far from the conventionality of a 'formal' theatre.

Concluding on this subject, Koun reformed the terms of space and actor-audience communication, by opening the artistic perspective of the directors and the theatre practitioners towards involving themselves with a completely different performance perspective. This scope clearly provoked an exploratory and creative process of variable thinking and work which may be said that it was considered as the beginning of a new artistic and personal experimentation. Also, I believe it is important to quote Patricia Kokkori's aspect of Koun's contribution and reasoning of reputation:

It has been repeatedly pointed out from various researchers, critics, directors and writers that the Art Theatre constitutes the most important legacy of contemporary neo-Hellenic theatre. Art Theatre though, means Karolos Koun, his directions and his choices. The reasons that the Art Theatre acquires this status are obvious: a) it introduced to the Hellenic audience selective pioneer texts of the global dramaturgy which were ignored by the state and commercial theatres, b) It is clear that the openness the foreign texts created, as well as their appropriation from the Art Theatre audience, were due to Koun's personal interpretations of them, c) this way, he created a

line of prototypes for new expressive ways which were followed by many Greek writers, many of which were presented for first time by him.

(1989: 34)

Again, we see the importance of the texts Koun introduced to Hellenic theatre and the fact that Koun's interpretations of them, created an audience which felt the dynamic of a novelty that invites a familiar sense of a theatre that involves everyone. As a result as Kokkori explains, this phenomenon created the circumstances for Greek writers to respond and create plays which somehow would be written to be presented for first time from Koun and the Art Theatre.

Kokkori mentions then his great contribution and impact to Hellenic theatre practice from the triangle writer-audience-Art Theatre. What is finally quite remarkable in Kokkori's commentary, is the concurrence she created between Koun and the Art Theatre as a 'double' that is motivated and supported by his personality, choices, artistic visionary and directorial views. If we assume that Koun himself stood as the fundamental element of the Art Theatre course, influence and impact, we may understand his greatness as a person and teacher who did not work in favour of an egotistic plan or a vain glory, rather a vision of a theatre which would act and exist with its view to the people and not theatre per se.

## Epilogue

Reaching the end of my conclusion, I think it is important to close by offering my reader some present and future perspective about my personal investigations and interest that comes out of my practical and theoretical elaboration, as well as discoveries in my research field. I need to make clear that I consider myself one of the many inheritors of Koun and the Art Theatre's work, belonging to a specific category of practitioners which is defined from a number of different parameters like: my apprenticeship for the full period in my drama school with one of Koun's closest partners, who delivered to me to a certain extent the spirit, philosophy and way of work, and also secondly, my work in the professional industry with many of Koun's students (actors, directors, theatre practitioners) as well as out of my own interest, study and influence from Koun's work and the Art Theatre as major point of reference in Hellenic theatre. Finally, this research which will stand as a guide for me towards other explorative and experimental paths in acting, actor training, teaching and directing. Consequently, my intention is to use all of this knowledge I have acquired, the material I have been working with, and the discoveries that have been made and apply them to my work as an actor, director and teacher. Particularly, I would like to continue my practice-based work with regards to the use of Stanislavsky from Koun<sup>81</sup> and create a working frame which will offer a range of improvisation and experimentation which will be versatile and changeable, in order to serve my work with the actors, the play, my directorial views and the circumstances under which I am going to be

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<sup>81</sup> Meaning that Koun never abandoned Stanislavsky and was ready to use his work as a guide to work with the actors, except ancient Hellenic comedy where he became more interested in working more organically and physically. Also, it is important not to forget that he was more interested in Stanislavsky and psychological theatre during the first period of his work's work, until the 1950's.

working through various training forms.<sup>82</sup> In my case then in terms of my future work, I am interested in improving my knowledge in Koun's work with the psychological part of the work and attempt to work with my actors and students in similar projects (in terms of rehearsal and/or teaching process) as the one I conveyed for my research, using other exercises as well as points of reference towards finding out new practical pathways.

It is though important to mention that as a practitioner I am very interested in various forms of theatre; psychological, psychophysical and physical, as indeed Koun was to a certain extent through a very personal scope without system and models. Hence, my personal interests on physical theatre and the actor's psycho-physicality in terms of a more 'organic' performance have led me to study Polish theatre traditions as is the lineage of Grotowski-Gardzienice-Song of the Goat. I am going to try then to include this kind of physical rigorous, kinetic and somatic work (through which I had the chance to involve myself quite much through various seminars, as well studied, elaborated and taught them as a Graduate Teaching Associate at the University of Exeter), with Koun's use of folk expressionism and the notion of Hellenekoteta mostly in ancient Hellenic comedy, as well as in ancient tragedy and other plays. Also, I am interested in examining, comparing and mixing the forms of this physical and organic expression Koun would prefer to include in his work with the ones that the aforementioned Polish theatre traditions and practices suggest.

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<sup>82</sup> I use the term 'training forms' instead of the word 'exercises' since I believe that Koun's work was found somewhere there if we would like somehow to attempt to define his working style on this matter. Also, this term makes me feel more comfortable as a practitioner in terms of my own investigations and experimentations at work, since I do not wish as well to be restricted in particular methodologies and systems, rather use a variety of material as a springboard and a basis towards my aims.

This way, firstly I will be able to investigate further my improvement and training as an actor, secondly my directorial perspectives as a director about the way I am interested in approaching actors and plays in practice, and finally my training scopes as a teacher in order to assist my students to have as much complete training as possible and have the chance to work both collectively and individually. Clearly then Koun will be useful from every perspective as a basis for my future work, and from there I will seek to investigate various forms of work which are related to his<sup>83</sup>, as well as extending these into areas I am interested in relating to.

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<sup>83</sup> For example the use of mask for Koun both in tragedy and comedy was a way to 'push' the actors psycho-physicality and creativity to express himself through his physical, somatic and kinetic capabilities and experiment as well improvise with his body far more, element that Koun was embracing a lot mainly in comedy.



# APPENDICES

## Interviews Appendix

### Interview Questions for Karolos Koun and the Art Theatre

1. Can you please reflect on Stanislavsky's influence in Koun's work in terms of actor training as well on the use of Stanislavsky's teaching and method in his own working frame? Moreover, can you recall any examples of exercises during the teaching or rehearsal process related to Stanislavsky's method?
2. Can you please outline some key concepts of Koun's work in relation to impulse and mention any related exercises or training material? Was this linked to Stanislavsky and his use from Koun? Was it a personal choice or probably derived from both practitioners?
3. What were the "new elements" that Karolos Koun and the Art Theatre introduced to Hellenic and international theatre? What were the "revolutionary differences" that came up in contemporary theatre practice and more specific in ancient Hellenic drama? Does this come along with Koun's instinctive working frame as well Stanislavsky (or even other practitioners and actor training methods)?
4. The terms "Hellenekoteta (Greekness)" and "Folk Expressionism" are broadly used in Karolos Koun's work, especially when we refer to ancient Hellenic drama. Can you please talk to me about these particular notions and the way Koun made use of them in ancient drama rehearsals and performances? Also, do you think that they can be used for the international actor, and if yes, how?
5. The Art Theatre and Karolos Koun are often referred as a laboratory and exploratory theatre, especially during the second period (1954-1987). Then Stanislavsky still remained the artistic basis, but there were other directions that led towards more organic and physical theatre practices i.e. like Grotowski's approach. What do you think was Koun's relationship with this kind of work and what are the similarities to Grotowski's work and the Polish theatre tradition in general?

6. According to Koun and the way the Art Theatre functions, the actor is the centre of the produced work. How would you describe Koun's directing approach and his work particularly with the actors? Was he following a specific method or another more free and personal way?
7. If Karolos Koun was alive today, what do you believe would be the way that the Art Theatre would work and towards which artistic and spiritual direction?
8. Please describe Karolos Koun's directorial approach. Were there any specific patterns and methodologies that were followed, or every new production was a new research? Also, if both happened, what was Koun's way of working, in order to maintain balance and discipline towards the produced result?
9. Please mention and describe some of the most significant exercises that Koun was using in his practical work in actor training and directing, either influenced from other practitioners or in his own way.
10. Please talk to us about Karolos Koun and the Art Theatre from a personal perspective. Are there any particular moments or experiences that are according to your own experience, representative of Koun and the Art Theatre?

## Interview Appendix

### Reni Pittaki

**George Chouliaras:** As far as his relationship with the actor is concerned... Koun himself was saying that the actor is the Alpha and Omega of theatrical art, as well as in his own work. How would you describe his work with the actor in terms of teaching, rehearsal process and directorial perspectives...? [...]

**Reni Pittaki:** It was relevant with the relationship that Koun had with the actor.

**G.C.:** So, we are talking about the personal relationship...

**R.P.:** Yes! [...] He wasn't fair.... (Laughs) If he liked you, ok. He would follow you, was taking from you, was giving to you...

**G.C.:** So, the idiosyncrasy has a great gravity here...

**R.P.:** Yees!!! Absolutely!!! Idiosyncrasy and the give-take relationship!

[...]

**G.C.:** I suppose that there was no particular method or way for every new performance to be followed. Every new work was another research field, am I right?

**R.P.:** This is important: What we are is how we see. Of course, he was searching...In that spirit he was great to imagine and receive...as we discuss for the Persians chorus: it started from 'taking a step like we were into the sea' and Nikos Haralambous did it very well and from there he said yes...

**G.C.:** He grabbed from a point an actor suggested...

**R.P.:** Yes, there was this element of give-take...

**G.C.:** So he could grab himself from anything!

**R.P.:** Chatzidakis once said that 'the moderate artists are bad imitators. The great artists are great thieves!'

## Interview Appendix

### Giannis Mortzos

**George Chouliaras:** Hellenekoteta and Tradition; especially with ancient drama Koun did something really great there and...would you like to talk to me about these notions? What exactly was it for the actor, what was really happening?

**Giannis Mortzos:** Since you are Greek, you perform in Greek with Greek language and Greek tradition mainly; Koun would never give you the sense that you have to become 'American', or 'English', or 'Russian' depending on the plays you had in front of you... Koun believes a lot for the actor that his generation, his lineage, his route wherever he comes from was a significant element. There were many time when he said for the Greek that 'the space where he lives, is the space where he creates'. So, the Greek himself needs to be aware of that space and to be able to have the tradition that he brings from his own home, his village, anywhere...to have the tradition embodied on the things that we call 'his personal elaborations'. In acting, he considered that tradition was fundamental. Where you come from, what you know, what are the influences from your house, your school... Many times he was using things like: 'Tell me now, in the army, what you did?' Because in the army we are supposed to be oppressed. None goes to the army and says 'how nice is here' (Laughs)

**G.C.:** (Laughs)

**G.M.:** So he said: 'Tell me, in the army, how did you feel when you were imprisoned and you were not allowed to get out for 3-4-5- days?' There you realized things you had never thought before! What you might say was that I had this and didn't get out but for Koun the gist was elsewhere: what are the emotions that oppression generates?

**G.C.:** I see...

**G.M.:** Then he would take this element and would bring it up in current time...

**G.C.:** So, presentation of the situation and what this generates to you as a consequence clearly emotionally!

**G.M.:** Exactly!

## Interview Appendix

### Giannis Mpezos

**George Chouliaras:** Hellenekoteta and Tradition. How exactly have you been experiencing it as an actor within ancient Hellenic drama?

**Giannis Mpezos:** Look, if this doesn't come along...I mean that...there is now...what is tradition? If we take these texts by the letters which are written 2.5000 years ago, one should re-establish the same audience! (Laughs). In order to see the quality of watching, the way the whole thing was performed, the plays were staged with the daylight etch. It is completely different. Also, we do not have much to know about the way these performances were done –at least I do not know, meaning how exactly was it done? This is an issue! A hard one. And especially the matter of the chorus use. How exactly was it used, what it really meant and what does it mean now? You must have observed many times that during an ancient drama performance the audience gets bored with the chorus parts because –they are as well musically constructed in such way that become very hard to be understood, they speak of things which refer to their era...all these need either trimming, or transport up to date. As you are very well aware, Aristophanes –with the exception of two plays- uses the parabasis when the action stops and the chorus reveals its own real face and addresses to the audience for a matter of its time...

**G. C.:** Of their current time...

**G.M.:** Exactly. Nowadays these...seem somehow strange, since for many years now we have entered the asterism of psychological theatre and we do not have such kind of 'ritual' if I may say it like that. Ancient drama is a theatre of ritual. And apart from that, is also political theatre; deeply political theatre, both Aristophanes as well the rest of the plays. Hence, you cannot distinguish one from another. They are connected with Athenian Democracy... I may say that actually they vitalized if not gave birth to Athenian democracy and theatre and theatrical agons started during Tyranny!

**G.C.:** That's quite remarkable...!

**G.M.:** Yes, but it became really great during the Athenian democracy, the one of Perikles.

## Interview Appendix

### Giorgos Armenis

**George Chouliaras:** what is [...] your aesthesis about the Koun-Stanislavsky relationship...what can we say about it?

**Giorgos Armenis:** We must not be unfair...before Koun there were some great personalities and minds who tried to do some things, but were found within an era where there was the domestic immigration when we all came down from our villages to the urban centres where the theatres were; since the other cities had no theatres, they had though another 'blessing', the so-called *bouloukia*<sup>84</sup> which were performing 3-4 different plays that they had in their small chests; and depending on the audience's mood, as well as the season they had money(i.e. harvest time or grapes collection), they were performing. This way, Hellenic society was reformed. In Athens, where was the National Theatre and 5-6 more, all of the countryside had moved (urbanism). Hence, the language was violated. It was a huge mishmash, in clothing, in many things. Rondiris, who came from Germany that time, tried to fix the matter of language so that the Hellenic language would not be lost. We were all speaking like **(my note: he makes a number of sounds and shouts of vowels and consonants to give emphasis to his example of a destroyed language)**, there was no logos, only barkings! Many of us did not have the chance of accessing universities, only sometimes if one wanted to become a teacher, who was necessary for the state. So, there was an effort to build the language. But they stopped to the beautification, to the correct vocalization. Then, Koun came and he didn't like it. He had influences from Stanislavsky, which was about **realism (his emphasis)**. A new realism which was leaving behind the '*Vekio*'<sup>85</sup> acting **(my note: he speaks as such saying a few random words to explain his point)** where there was indeed a correct vocalization but on the other hand they were communicating speech from the neck and up; only with voice, the body was absent. What Koun tried to do at the beginning with his first students **(my note: he names a few)** were improvisations in relation to body and sound. This is what Stanislavsky wanted as well: the situation, the truth, the colour, the emotion. Koun enriched all this in the Hellenic space.

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<sup>84</sup> Touring theatre companies around the country: the word *bouloukia*, means formations of groups of people who were moving as one. In theatre terms then, this applies to groups of artists (theatre practitioners) who were doing it and were touring all over the Hellenic countryside.

<sup>85</sup> *Vekio* is a commonly used expression in Hellenic theatre practice(the routes of the word are Italian and its translation is 'old' which refers to a specific acting maniere, meaning the very clean articulation and vocalization of speech, grand movements and depth in the voice to emphasize on sentimental conditions as well other similar ways.

## Interview Appendix

### Kostis Kapelonis

**Kostis Kapelonis:** Koun created indeed a school, but the actual school was the potential of continuous changes! He never reached a point of formulating a research...he was searching theatre, could find things, put them into a performance; he never stopped there, to say 'I found it'. He could; with 'The Birds' and the great success he had -speaking from 1959 when he first did them performance with the scandal then, he worked on it again, remade it, corrected and changed things, until its exceptional final shape in 1965 when he took the first prize in the 'Nations Festival', Koun could remain there and say that's it. This is Aristophanes. He would never do the *Acharnians* though later in that case. He wouldn't have moved forward. For example, this is something that Solomos had done with the National Theatre. Exceptional performances! But what did Solomos do? He made a research, reached a neo-classicism pattern -which was very nice, but never took another step forward; to destroy it and do the worst or the best. Koun was moving ahead. Either the performance or the writer were successful he would never remain there.

**G.C.:** So, this was the revolutionary difference, this was the method...

**K.K.:** This was the method, yes, that I destroy whatever I reached i.e. the perfect [...] because there are new things happening in society! He was saying that things change, we change, because society changes. The era changes, the priorities change. Just like my sight. If there is a dictatorship I cannot see people the same way, I need to see them otherwise, change spectrum [...]

[...] there were things that were occupying him in a very reversal way. For example, I was a student during dictatorship in Greece -while there was a trend for thinkers to do things against this political status in such way that it would not be censored, Koun did in the middle of this political situation a non-political play which I considered as a political act! I saw it reversed! So, it was like saying to us that 'they do not let me do this, so I am doing this. But when you will be seeing it, you will be thinking what I wanted to do and say!

**Both:** (Laughs and random short word commentaries)



## Interview Appendix

### Lydia Koniordou

**George Chouliaras:** What is Koun's relationship with impulses and instinct generally?

**Lydia Koniordou:** Koun was full of enthusiasm when one actor was 'generating' on stage. Meaning that he expressed unpredictable things through his deeper psychic condition; this was a magic moment when it happened, Koun wanted it very much...he created the work circumstances for this to happen. I mean the element of energy within the space in order to enter a more ecstatic situation –especially in ancient drama, Koun created that through his directorial work with the actors, through the energy and vibration he released within his own space and helped the actor to jump into the empty space if they were feeling ready for it, because that's exactly what we are discussing about: you jumped in the empty space, hoping that you will not harm yourself.

**G.C.:** I see...

**L.K.:** If you had the courage to do that, then something might be revealed to you. Koun was a creator; he pushed his actor to jump into the empty space! And the ones who were doing it acquired wings and were taking off and you could see that Koun adored them; it was for him a great joy and enthusiasm when an actor was creating, generating things at that moment. And everyone could understand when this happened; it was like a mystery this revealing moment. We were all sitting around and stared at the actor who was generating things at that point which he had no idea where they were coming from.

**G.C.:** I understand...

**L.K.:** And you could see as well that Koun was Koun could change a whole directorial part of his work and support it on the material that the actor generated in such a unique moment! There were so many actors who were generating this way, Armenis, Pittaki, Sandorinaïou, Lymberopoulou...[...] Armenis for example...I always remember his...rut! Here is another word, the rut, what Lorca says as *Duende*, this godly inspired material we all have and others let it be expressed, others don't. This material can be defined as well as impulse, or instinct... [...] There is a rut, a heat, a verve that runs through Hellenic spirit and exists in our culture.

## Interview Appendix

### Maya Lymberopoulou

**Maya Lymberopoulou:** We can say that Koun was a director who would never formulate an aspect or a line. He was always representational. An example: It is very easy for a director to see by while correcting the actors that: 'you don't convince me that you love him, you are not in love. You lie. Or you are wrong here, I want panic. To say the word 'panic'. What more simple to do? But he wouldn't do it. When I first performed in 1959, it was in *Suddenly Last Summer*, where there was a scene where I had a hard time; I was still a student as well and there was this scene where I had to explode in Panic because of the environment oppression and say one phrase: I couldn't say it; and could not understand as well what exactly he was correcting about it, about Panic. There was a moment then when he got up from his chair and as in my role I was sat down and told me: 'You are seated on the chair. Your feet are paralyzed and the carpet is on fire. What will you do? This was in order to tell me about 'Panic'. He did not determine the things; he did not describe them [...]

[...] I can refer to another characteristic example as well, which might be of interest, since you are at a non-Hellenic University. When *The Persians* were performed at the London Aldwych theatre, after some time an invitation arrived from the 'two Peters': Peter Hall and Peter Brook, in order for Koun to direct *Romeo and Juliette* in Stratford. The letter they sent, was saying: 'We think of a *Romeo and Juliette* which will be based onto the prologue's phrase: The ill star crossed lovers. And we thought that the most appropriate for this line into *Romeo and Juliette*, would be a Greek who knows to use the fate.

**G.C.:** Very interesting...

**M.L.:** Yes and their aspect was very interesting as well –since they were two of the most important figures, especially Brook [...] this way the invitation came. And it was the only time that Koun accepted to work outside Greece, despite the fact that he had loads of invitations to work abroad and have an international European career; this meant nothing to him.

## Interview Appendix

### Petros Fillipides

**Petros Filippides:** His great legacy then, was what he left in ancient drama [...] Koun blended the deeper humanistic, earthly element with the divine one. I mean that although this exists within the writers' work, Koun managed to bring it up to realization, so within every character, even within the chorus the divine material just appeared. A god appeared. Of course a smaller god from these ones...but since he believed to human a lot as a director, individual and artist, I think that his great discovery was the anthropocentric performance!

**George Chouliaras:** I see...

**P.F.:** To be honest, these are things that I have never said to myself as well...these are things that are born generated in the subconscious and from there you define your course...

**G.C.:** Then I am really happy to be able to hear them! (Laughs)

**P.F.:** I also hear them from myself for first time! (Laughs)

You know, with the opportunity of this conversation, I am also trying to articulate what exactly he did...

**G.C.:** Allow me then at this point to give you a good pass and ask this: Was Koun a person of impulse, of instinct?

**P.F.:** Look...he had an unbelievable technique, but since he was an experiential practitioner –he never went to a drama school, he never studied something like that...but there was no reason for him to study it, as he invented it! You see...

**G.C.:** Precisely.

**P.F.:** Everyone studied under Koun's 'school', we all still study under Koun's 'school'... I can tell you about many actors, but let me bring you a very close example to me of one of my beloved: Giannis Mpezos. You know, there were actors from other schools which were relative to Koun's school because of what they had and were as individuals and artists!

## Interviews Appendix

### Eva Kotamanidou

**George Chouliaras:** Would you like to tell me about something that you worked through the Stanislavsky method with Karolos Koun though...

**Eva Kotamanidou:** He assigned us with improvisations...so, we knew who the character of this person is... playing the role in your own words...

**G.C.:** Say in your own words what he/she says...

**E.K.:** Say in your own words what he/she feels!

**G.C.:** What he/she feels...?

**E.K.:** Yes, as you will not say the writer's lines and move, act according to this character. At this point you release yourself because you speak your own story as well because you are the one who lives then, but through the situations of this other person...you could approach it this way much easier[...]

**G.C.:** Say the things that the role feels in your own words...

**E.K.:** Yes! Enter his/her situation. What would you do? It is not the role, but you approach him/her this way. And then, when you move to the writer's lines, you have already found the situation more or less.

**G.C.:** I see...

**E.K.:** Or for example, we were performing a lot of improvisation work at the drama school. The improvisation work was a very special class. We were working as well with non-living objects, say trees...we were working on animals –cats, horses, tigers, whatever each one of us might imagine.

**G.C.:** I understand.

**E.K.:** Primarily this improvisation work energized your whole being, physically and emotionally, while from the other opened your imagination quite a lot.

## Project Exercises Appendix

This appendix is explanatory and informative of Stanislavsky's exercises I considered relevant to Koun and used in my project workshops. Despite the fact that all of the listed exercises were used, for my project reflection I chose to discuss and reflect only a few which I found as the most suitable and representative towards identifying Koun's use of Stanislavsky in his practice and Stanislavsky's material in Koun's practice as influence, towards proving their relationship with special regards to Koun and the Hellenic Art Theatre practice. This material choice is the outcome of my theoretical and practical investigation in Koun and Stanislavsky academic sources and my experiential background as a student and professional theatre practitioner; also, it has been assisted from extracted material from my interviews with Koun's inheritors as well primary and secondary sources about Koun and the Hellenic Art Theatre. All areas were researched in terms of finding all the available terms of relationship and connection between Koun and Stanislavsky in order to assist my practical labor. To remind my reader, all the exercises that follow are placed in specific actor training categories and were investigated within a series of workshops with two actors-students of the University of Exeter Drama Department, Dan McNeil and Sally Naylor. The whole project has been recorded with an A/V Camera and the material of the exercises I reflected is offered through DVD attachment in this research book. The specific resources I drawn these exercises are:

Benedetti, J. (1998) *'Stanislavski & the Actor'*, London: Methuen

Carnicke, S.M. (2009) *'Stanislavski in Focus'*, London: Routledge

Hodge, A. (1990) *'Twentieth Century Actor Training'*, London: Routledge

Merlin, B. (2001) *'Beyond Stanislavski'*, London: Routledge

Merlin, B. (2007) *'The Complete Stanislavski Toolkit'*, London: Routledge

The following list of exercises demonstrates that the material was grouped and investigated according to particular areas of actor training in order to facilitate my work and choices:

**Psychophysical Warm Up**

- Relaxation (Chakras)
- Psychophysical concentration through senses (Sensory awareness)
- Circles of Attention (Concentration)
- Wave motions/Isolations (Physicality)
- Imagination Exercise (Visualization)

**Exploratory Improvisations**

- The Object Exercise
- Free Improvisations
  - \*Regarding how the brain shuts and the psycho-physical integration of body/**imagination/emotions/spirit** takes over (with & without music)
- Improvisations on Silent moments
- Improvisations using words

**Actions**

- Exercises on Actions
- Active Analysis Exercise
- Interaction/Acts of Communication
- Psychologically Simple and Complex Actions (Including Physical/Organic Actions)

**Building Ensemble Work**

- Sound Contacts
- Animal Exercises

**Inner Self Work**

- Inner Motive Forces Exercises (Tempo Rhythm work included)
- Heroic Tension Exercises
- Emotional Memory Exercises (Senses)

**Text/Role based Work**

- The process of Active Analysis(Text/Role based exercise)

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