

University Seminar 703: Modern Greek

March 5, 2014

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Tatjana Aleksic

Performing the Real of History

Patricia Felisa Barbeito

Flaying Alive: The Body As Site Of Resistance In Elias Maglinis's *The Interrogation*

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Attendees: Erato Basea (Columbia), Suzy Vuljevic (Columbia), Katerina Stefatos (Columbia), Dimitris Papadopoulos (independent), Aleksandar Boskovic (Columbia), Karen Van Dyck (Columbia), Chloe Haralambous (Columbia), Kostis Karpozilos (Columbia), Yeorgos Angerinos, Christos Tsiamis

Summary of Presentations:

Patricia Felisa Barbeito

In her presentation, Barbeito reads Ilias Maglinis's text *The Interrogation* as a "resistant novel," one that in its emphasis on the legacy of torture under the Greek military dictatorship on the one hand resists the "government policies of 'enforced amnesia' that have prevailed since the regime's fall" but also one that, on the other hand, "resists the narrative imperative to document, to expose and make visible this hidden history." "This fundamental tension between erasure and disclosure, annihilation and resurrection," Barbeito argues, "structures the novel in a way that repeatedly calls our attention to the limits of representation, especially in relation to personal and historical traumas."

Barbeito is particularly interested in Maglinis's use of the body, or the image of skin, "as the site that puts in motion this resistance." Drawing on psychoanalytic theories of the body and trauma, Barbeito argues that Maglinis's novel "provides a corrective to Cathy Carruth's formulation of physical trauma as a 'simple and healable event' that is superseded by the more fully resonant and haunting 'wound of the mind'." The skin, in *The Interrogation*, Barbeito contends, "is the site of an enfolding or interimplication of embodiment, psychic life and culture that draws on Didier Anzieu's work on the foundational nature of the skin ego as well as theories of body art and performance to complicate accepted relationships between body and language." The novel can thus be read as a performative space.

Offering a close reading of a number of passages in the novel, Barbeito discusses the "dilemma surrounding how we articulate the traumatized body." Posing the question about the relationship between body and narrative, Barbeito asks, "do we chose to

read/interpret and interact with the body as figure? As surface? As both? Or, to put it another way, do we choose to privilege it as the vessel of transcendent agency and individual identity naturalized by the great literary genres of the western tradition? Or as a type of fleshly connective matter that exists in the spaces among different constructs and narratives of identity”? Pointing to the work of the performance artist Marina Abramovic, Barbeito suggests that it is precisely the concept of “the skin as connective matter that is always in flux that lies at the heart of what can be defined and theorized as the space of performance.”

While the two key passages of the novel Barbeito discusses in her presentation “repeatedly implicate us in the violations they describe,” thus disturbing us because a sense of agony is relayed to the reader “in a way that points to and underscores the limits of understanding, these scenes simultaneously also “function in opposition to the ways in which representations of the violated body often perform yet another violation: the objectification of that body, its rendering as a consumable object.” Throughout the novel, Barbeito argues, its protagonist Kostis “resists narratives that would turn his pain into a spectacle”: a refusal that “is also clearly tied to a refusal of the logic of various state, ideological, and even therapeutic agendas.”

Barbeito places emphasis on the dialogic structure of the novel that manifests itself in the relationship between Kostis and his daughter. *The Interrogation*, she argues, “answers this question – how does one become worthy of one’s own and, by extension, others’ pain – and resists what can be initially understood as the father’s solipsism, by re-performing/re-staging trauma as a form of dialogue – a form of dialogue that is constantly butting up against its own limits.” Through Kostis engagement with his daughter’s own performance practice, skin is shown to be “longing for skin for an affirming tactility and touch” – this is the novel’s “counterinvestment,” as Barbeito calls it, in the body “even while pointing to its disciplining”: “the violated body is reframed as a source of connection.”

Ultimately, Barbeito conclude, in Maglinis’s novel “the traumas of rape and violation only ever appear ‘aslant,’” relationally, through the disjunctions of translation. They become a means of feeling out the contours of intersecting systems of oppression while at the same time marking their irreducibility and difference.” The passages she discusses in her presentation, therefore, “can be said to reframe violence as a potential gateway to the recognition of Otherness.” Structured by “a polarization of generational, gendered, and national vs. international perspectives,” Maglinis’s novel is “shaped by the challenges of communicating historical trauma to an audience that is both removed but shaped by it.” In the end, the “body of the novel itself becomes the very connective tissue that enables us to both understand and feel another’s pain.”

Tatjana Aleksic

For Aleksic, whose presentation draws on material from her recently published book *The Sacrificed Body: Balkan Community Building and the Fear of Freedom*, Maglinis’s novel *The Interrogation* “reflects on the idea of the body as the ultimate witness of history, but also on how victims/witnesses of history relate to their trauma, and whether an open

dialogue about the past could help diminish the influence of traumatic repetition of history on individual and collective psychologies.”

Aleksic begins her discussion with a reading of the work of the performance artist Marina Abramovic, whose work, in Aleksic’s account, graphically demonstrates “the circumscription of the body by history.” In Maglinis’s novel, Kostis’s daughter Marina – “to a degree modeled on Marina Abramovic, whom she worships as her artistic ideal” – “embarks on a mission to liberate her father from his nightmarish past of a victim of the military junta” through her own performance practices. In this attempt, however, Marina’s performances, according to Aleksic, “do not exhibit much focus on political issues.” Indeed, unlike Abramovic, the Marina of the novel “fails to acknowledge the source of the coercive social discourse behind her anguish, and backfires against the family as the sole target, rather than a mere agent of social compulsion.” Marina “shamelessly denudes her family legacy, and slashes her body open in protest at her father’s silence and passivity in the face of his traumatic past.”

Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, and the work of Renata Salecl in particular, Aleksic explains the meaning of such acts of self-mutilation: What constitutes, to her, “these acts of willing body mutilation, regardless of whether the subject targets this or that particular agent of social compulsion, or whether the act is performed in public or in private, is the apparent disappearance for the performing subject of the totality of the authority of the big Other, ‘the total disbelief in the power of the symbolic order.’” The body, according to Aleksic, “is open and bleeding in an attempt at a direct and *unmediated* communication with the big Other.” “Body slashing, bleeding, and other painful interventions, therefore, are not actions celebrating one’s liberation and freedom from authority, but quite the contrary, an anguished statement about the yearning to gain access to the sacred, or to re-establish it and its authority over the individual’s shattered universe.”

The Marina of the novel, Aleksic argues, performs “in reaction to an absence of authoritative influence in her family,” and especially to Kostis, who is “metaphorically rid of his phallic power by the torture he was subjected to.” Marina’s performances thus do more than question his patriarchal authority – “they interrogate his masculine performance as well.”

The rape of male bodies, Aleksic explains, “interests us here mostly as perpetrated with the goal of directly humiliating the enemy, of ‘degrading’ him to the ‘mere female.’” Aleksic engages with this question within the context of the Greek post-junta trials, in which evidence of sexual violation was not allowed in court: “The victims were barred from telling of their ordeal not only by the shameful nature of the act committed on their bodies, but also by the system itself which refused to add this ignominy to the already long list of abuses.”

Aleksic then invokes the work of Elaine Scarry, according to whom, “through torture and other means of brutalizing the body the violator (entity or individual) creates the *fiction of authority*.” This, Aleksic argues, “is the same kind of fictional authority against which the ‘performing’ body of the artist protests in acts of self-mutilation.” Torture, she concludes, could then be interpreted “as the mechanism of violent transgression against the body that uncovers for the tortured the very falsity of the Lacanian *Real* that is unrepresentable in the symbolic order ‘except by its effects.’”

Highlighting the important role that the creation of a narrative plays in many psychoanalytic theories on healing – narrative as “sharing one’s story in a supportive environment” – Aleksic points out a certain contradiction: namely, that language is also “the very ingredient of the structure that causes harm and inflicts trauma on the human body” in the first place. “How can then a survivor of trauma be expected to reflect on their suffering through the very medium that informs this trauma?” This precisely, for Aleksic, is at the bottom of Kostis’s refusal to discuss his experiences. “He fiercely defends his right not to confess to his daughter and thus demonstrates disbelief in the existence of the big Other.” Both Marina and Kostis, ultimately, realize that this big Other “is a Void, that there is nothing behind its screen save an empty seat of authority that never was and that needs to constantly be filled with meaning and reinvented from nothing.”

The end of the novel thus, Aleksic concludes, “brings a kind of reconciliation between father and daughter.” “For all the talk about the limitations of language and her body laceration, for all the blood and words they spill in the process, it is not the deliverance from history that Marina and Kostis seek but in fact they want a different history with a meaning.”

Summary of Discussion:

Q.

How did Anzieu provide a framework for discussing the novel in ways other than you had up to this point?

Q.

And I was curious how it worked with your Lacanian reading?

A (Barbeito).

I was reading that he was actually quite a critic of Lacan’s theories because he considered them to be overly language-based and visual – the mirror-stage dynamic, for example – and that did not account for the multi-sensory underpinnings of the ego. And in many ways the discussion of trauma – Caruth was an example – replicates that kind of valorization of the linguistic or that separation of the physical, the somatic from the linguistic, as when she says that physical trauma is something that is healable and it’s the psychic trauma that I am interested in. And I think Anzieu’s discussion was really helpful in honing in on what to me was a striking use of somatic experience in Maglinis. Obviously we have slightly different readings (indicating Aleksic). I think that the - overarching momentum in the novel is towards something much more positive.

Q.

It seemed to me that you were saying that the unwillingness to confess was about not wanting to give language a certain authority.

A (Aleksic).

Or disbelief in the authority of language. And also, a Lacanian definition that everything starts from language, that all the structures that limit us and repress us – that language is already embedded in them. And since psychoanalysis takes the talking cure as the only way to exteriorize body trauma that would otherwise be repressed into a psychological

trauma and recur in different and unknown forms. So how could a victim of trauma be expected to use the talking cure – thus language, which is already embedded in the repression that he or she suffered.

Q.

And then what you were saying, Patricia, was that the lack of confession had to do with the fact that on some level the performance wasn't about the language or not-language...?

A (B).

I don't think on that point we're saying anything that different, because his refusal is precisely not to anticipate, and the language that he feels is so very owned politically. I mean he goes through all the institutions he refused to participate in – masculinity too. He is definitely a character who by the end owns his distance from this model masculinity that is imposed on him. And that's what the final reconciliation with his daughter makes very clear: it posits the idea of a fleshly connection or shared skin as a way of transcending those narratives.

Q.

Whereas you are not saying that?

A (A).

Actually, I don't even think that we disagree very much. Patricia is taking a somatic approach much more. I am discussing something that is superstructure and understructure of it. But what we do disagree on is how Marina finally reflects on the whole thing, what happens to her. I remember asking Patricia a question about it two years ago – she held her ground, and I'm still holding my ground, so we still disagree on that – whether the final exhibition which Marina plans, and for the purposes of which she insists on adding new pain to Kostis by invoking all his remembrances of his suffering. I kind of agree with what Kostis thinks, that it is a profanation of his experience and cannot ever represent or show the pain that they really suffered, but also the revolutionary enthusiasm which they all shared and for which they suffered, because it is so oriented on the bodily, and he sees it as a prostitution, practically, of his memory and of his suffering. But Patricia basically claims a slightly different thing.

A (B).

Yes, I don't quite read it that way. I think it's the key scene, right after he leaves the exhibitions, when he has this flashback to the sweat on his back, and that internally triggers this journey back to his daughter. That exhibition is something that really riles him, but I think the exhibition in the text also triggers a sort of resolution to the novel.

Q.

I think you both touched on media-specificity, because performance communicates in a different way than a novel does, and the media-specificity of performance has been put into language in the novel, and that's maybe why the novel allows for these different interpretations, by using theories of the skinny girl or a Lacanian approach that totally deletes what Foucault says about subjectivity. I would like to hear more about the structure of the novel, the chapters you mentioned, that each refers to Serbian folksongs?

A (B).

No, not Serbian folksongs, they're actually pop songs, a lot of them. Maglinis had given me a CD of music that was supposed to accompany, and there are many references to

songs throughout. During one of the last installations there is a song that accompanies what Kostis calls a monster mix of sounds that he finds really jarring but again also becomes a commentary on the aesthetics of the book itself – this monster mix of genres and intertextual allusions, and there are some chapters that are all dialogue and some others that are lists of different artists and so and so, and it is a kind of commentary on the technique of the writing itself.

Q.

Does that help to expose the language of the body?

A (B).

I think at one point Marina talks about taking her body to the very limits, and I think there is a way the novel itself is trying to take itself to its own limits. The soundtrack that's alluded to is an obvious way of doing that.

A (A).

To mention the extratextual now: The novel is dedicated to Makis Faros, Maglinis' friend. He is also a performance artist, who might have been an influence for this strange music. Because the choice of music is really strange: There is no model that you can follow. Both Maglinis and Koutouris (?), who talks about the torture of the junta, refers to it, which means it must have been a very popular song at the time, about Tarzan and the Jungle, which was played during these sessions of rape and torture, almost as a Pawlowian experiment. So whenever they heard it, they knew they were going to be tortured or raped. I never heard it, I don't know the lyrics, but apparently it talks about escaping into the jungle, out of the jungle of history and into the real jungle with Tarzan. And for some it became almost a sensory experience for Kostis and all the others. As for Makis Faros, he also uses a lot of music and lights in his performances. I just saw some performance he recently did in Poland about concentration camps, and there are dogs that run around in concentration camp sites and very loud music, atonal actually, and strong lights. It's very multimedia, and history, all of that together. The meaning can be interpreted in various ways.

Q.

It's mediated with the different means.

Q.

From the positivistic side of the table, I was just wondering if Maglinis's work reflects a broader transformation within Greece, a double transformation. The first is the nation and history through the body, this idea. Back in September we had Eva Stefani (?) here and her documentary about the Acropolis and this idea of erasure and the female body and mastectomy and the Acropolis. There was a constant interplay between history and the body and the trauma. That's one kind of transformation that I imagine is quite new. The second is positioning the family as the reflection of the collective trauma of Greek society. We have all this production that in a way uses the family as a medium that discusses the family as the defining point of confrontation but at the same addresses the broader traumatic experience of the Greek nation and Greek history. The case here is the transformation from dictatorship to democracy and the way it concealed the exercise in forgetting. The second thing that came to mind is that in Greek we have this mysterious interplay in the word *martyras*, who both gives testimony and is a martyr, in the sense that he goes through hard times. So it uses this tradition where the martyr would write

memoirs in way that reflect his experience and that construct a dichotomy between the mind and the body where the enemy would manage to eradicate any bodily resistance but his spirit would remain heroic, resistant, or politically conscious. At the same time we have – not just in Maglinis, but also in other works, a discussion about the interplay of body and mind, how it's not just a trauma of the body – the overall experience of the individual.

A (A).

If I understand correctly your definition of the martyr, then in this case Maglinis destroys this, there is no untouched heroic spirit left, both the body and the spirit are ruined at the end.

Q.

Yes, that's the confrontation, I think, we've seen, within the Greek left between the dominant tradition that portrayed the martyr as giving testimony in the junta court, but after a point of educating the Greek society about what it really meant in the 40s or 70s, and now we have the appearance of those who remained silent, who were martyrs in the sense that they were going through a hard time but they were not testifying.

Q.

A few years ago we had a seminar on the work of Manolis Anagnostakis and there was a lot of theorization later in the papers that followed the seminar on the theory of his silence, the nature of that silence – it fits in that model, or a moment of resistance.

Resisting, in fact, cooptation of language, of political language, gendered language etc. etc. It's a very emblematic moment in considering that poet at his death.

This business with the family, and the scourge of Greek society inscribed on the family in recent years: There's certainly something to that. I don't know where it begins and where it ends and if it doesn't in fact go further back. I was just thinking about that and I'm a little foggy about the details in the book, but the scene with Marina's boyfriend where he begins to speak. The nature of his contact and his – I don't know if you want to call it opening up. It's an interesting scene in that she's asleep and he begins talking to this young man. I don't know if you want to say something and interpret the significance of this exchange, that it's someone not from the family, another male, a younger male.

A (B).

What's interesting about that scene is that, yes, there is a conversation but most of that conversation on his part is internal, he's not actually saying this, the young man triggers the thoughts about what he's been through. So there is kind of a refusal to pass on to this younger man despite the fact that this a very homosocial moment, classically set up in the corner over the body of the sleeping daughter in the other room. There's a refusal to pass on in that very staging of the homosocial moment his burdened history, so that in that refusal there's also a hope for that young man and that younger generation to escape maybe the burdens he had to deal with.

Q.

What kind of philosophy of history do you think is set up then?

A (B)

What Kostis seems to want to resist is a kind of narrativization of history in this very formalized way. I think it's not passing on that official narrative. Does he replace it with

anything, other than this idea of a kind of dialogism? That's where I read also his translation as something that's much more positive and creative than simply replicating another's words. It becomes an exercise of transformation.

A (A).

But what he remains with is the truth of his wounded and brutalized body. And when he overrides language, which can be lying – the words that are not his, either through translation or that somebody else has used it and abused it. Actually what he's left with is the ultimate truth, and that is the wounded body, the skin.

Q.

I was wondering how one would approach the novel if the protagonist was not a man who was sexually victimized [*tape inaudible*]...?

A (B).

Clearly, the gendering of his experience is really important. And also what makes it so taboo, in the context of the discussion of torture. Because in many ways having a woman be raped in these circumstances is a lot more routine, it's a known and more acceptable story. And there's this interesting scene in the book where Marina says to him, "You know dad, I've been fucked in the ass too, and it wasn't all that bad," and then she says, all those leftists and their masculinity, and uses this as a provocative ploy to get him to open up. It would be different, it would completely overwrite the impact and dynamics of the book.

Q.

I was just thinking again about the silence both of you touched upon. Because in memory studies it's usually referred to – this third generation that went through trauma – as mainly silent. So can we read this novel through the glasses of postmemory? Like, Spiegelman's "Maus" as a postmemory narrative, for example.

A (A).

The second generation, which is exactly what Marina is trying to do, except that she does try not to represent but to convey the trauma and the experience of her father, except that he completely disagrees with how she does it. Is there ever a proper way of conveying trauma in any idiom, after all, not just linguistic? Because she does everything but linguistically convey it. She does it with her own body, through photographs, through video installations, through red painted cardboard, abstract objects, installations, there is nothing verbal. The only verbal exchange is between the two of them and it fails, she's too provocative, too aggressive, and he's withdrawn. So she practically utilizes all the available media except linguistic but none of them apparently work according to him and can never express the trauma or heal him because in the end when he looks in the mirror that's the truth, that's what he sees.

Q.

But in what sense this is maybe successful is that all the noise she makes exposes his silence, and that's the ultimate success.

A (A).

Exposes it in making himself think about it aloud and in the presence of the young man. He confronts himself.

Q.

I read about a novelist a few years ago who in the middle of the Iraq War wrote a novel about Vietnam. So it was apparent that he was writing the book with something else in mind, through Vietnam criticizing something today. And now I'm curious – not having read the novel, but I heard the passages you read, where it says, screw your speeches and your celebrations and commemoration, this is my own pain, and the references to Pakistanis – and so I am thinking that it's very interesting that someone is writing about the junta 40 years later. At the time, the Left, Anagnostakis, chose to be silent in his way, whether this could be read as political criticism, bringing into the discussion also the current situation.

A (B).

Yes, absolutely. I think there are a couple of interesting things about that – others can probably talk about this better than I can. But there's been a dearth of books on the junta experience, and interestingly Kostis Kornetis has written a little bit about this and after the publication of *The Interrogation* it seemed to have opened not the floodgates but it opened up the way for a number of other books to come out that looked at this period. But certainly it seems that the role of the Left, which the daughter is very dismissive about, she really wants to separate herself from that and insists at the beginning that "I am not leftie"... And there are these other kind of social issues, these other forms of oppression that are very much gestured at and important. They're very tangential in the novel – you have the Pakistani, the African prostitute, I can't remember if there are other references.

Q.

So you do think that it's not just a commemoration of the issue of the junta but that there is something more contemporary?

A (B).

Yes.

Q.

Just one short example: There are so many books or movies about the Holocaust or World War I. I think that the issue of the junta is of course more local because it focuses more on Greece. Greeks somehow have forgotten the entire issue of the junta, and not only that: Today, there are actually people who romanticize the era, they say everything started from 1981, the whole crisis, which is not true. I remember as a kid there was a lot of corruption that nobody talks about today. So it's a good thing to learn about the past today, especially some issues like the issue of patriotism and ethnocentrism, they are important in our days to discuss because it has a negative impact today. Even though he book talks about the past it could be very uplifting in the way it talks about issues that affect our people today, not just in Greece but all over the world.

Q.

My question was more trying to understand the artistic intent.

A (B).

Yes, clearly, that dialogue between the junta and the present is very much set up between the father and the daughter and those generational differences and the dialogue between them.

A (A).

Generational differences, and also ideological differences. There are a lot of assertions that she makes about the impotence of the Left and the father's salon leftism. And I heard a lot of references and read a lot about the denigration of the role of the left – it goes through sarcasm, criticism, ridicule. But the novel can also be implying – and does – the re-strengthening of the right, criticism of the left but also the new power of the right that Golden Dawn has in Greece in the field.

Q.

My question to you Patricia, as the translator, now that we are talking about the Greekness of the novel – initially you were making it sound like very international, accessible, not very specific about the history – is what are the intertexts in the English language, what's the soundtrack, where are you inserting this translation so that it can have this reading? As critics, you're really putting it out there for a larger audience in a way that is very convincing. And since translation is a form of criticism, a hermeneutic, you've got your interpretation, you've got to do it materially, and you did it in your talk when you were talking about Blondie, you were giving us a soundtrack. So what happens in the translation, what did you want it to do, and who are you in conversation with?

A (B).

There are already so many intertexts that he was working with that in some ways it made it easy for me because his intertexts are all over, and they are accessible, like Marina Abramovic. I think that maybe one of the things I tried to do in the opening was to emphasize the kind of oral quality in my translation and to do it in a way that would resonate in English, obviously. The punctuation, that's something that's very difficult to transfer, and in the Greek one sentence can take up pages and pages and it somehow works and you can't do that in English. So this whole question of rhythm and breath was the main thing I had to think about and struggle with.

Q.

I was just thinking about your other work where you did a kind of dialect with Dimitriou, where you did a translation that used African-American? So what do you do with the "Grenghish" of Maglinis's reference to Tarzan, to make it legible and interesting? There's something missing here... I remember the question: it had to do with Marina and her speech in the novel

A (B).

I mean Marina in some ways is very easily translated because she is this kind of rebellious daughter and she is a very familiar figure not confined to Greek culture. And you know, the Grenghish: I don't think that's a main dynamic in the novel; rather there's a range of international cultural references --, like the the Viennese actionists -- so that also comes across without my necessarily having had to resort to a particular stylistic trick in my translation.

Q.

One of my impressions I remember from reading the book back then was actually being overwhelmed by the number of musical allusions and references, and actually feeling that that was a negative part. It might be a sign of my own cultural illiteracy on some level, but there was some kind of overkill to the whole thing, which was one of my abiding impressions of the book that I liked a great deal. I don't know if I was trying to discern

some kind of pattern to keep me going, but I don't know if that was my own insufficiency or simply his own joy at loading it with all these references.

The other point is that for all the kind of universalist credentials the book has, when it comes across the desk of an American publisher or press, they can't get past the history. It's hard to understand that really, they can't get past it, some kind of specificity.

A (B).

Or just the fact that it's a Greek novel.

Q.

Right, it's the odd familiarity, that's one of those big problems: there's a boutique multiculturalism going on, certainly in the publishing industry in America. It's oddly familiar and that's actually not – you can't do that, it's recognizable a little bit but that drags with it all the rest of it.

A (B).

And with this one in particular. The size was something: publishing houses have these very weird specifications. It has to be this long to be a novel, and if it's not we don't really know what to do with it – is it a short story? – and it's also experimental.

Q.

How long is it?

A (B).

It's about 100 pages.

Q.

So it's a novella.

A (B).

Yes.

Q.

I wanted to ask Tatiana who came across this novel as she was studying her more general interests in the sacrificial victim in a much broader Balkan context, how this fit in for you, this novel, how did it address certain things for you in a particular and different way that helped you think more generally about your topic?

A (A).

It fit in perfectly. I found out about it almost in the last minute. I even read it in Greek, which I am not really fluent in but I am struggling, before I received Patricia's work in progress, and only in the latest phase did I get the published translation. What it did for me was it communicated very well with another very famous author – even more famous than Maglinis is currently – from Serbia, David Albahari, a lot of whose work has been translated into English, and who constantly writes about the impossibility of language conveying just any kind of meaning. So I was working on one text by Albahari, which is translated as "Bait" into English, where his mother, the survivor of another historical trauma – being a Serb from Croatia and having to run from Croatia during World War II and then dying in front of television after seeing more Serbs being expelled from Croatia after '95. Then the son who tries to extract that confession from her and record it to a magnetophone, the old-fashioned device. But she refuses to collaborate, only agrees to talk into the machine after a long time of persuasion and after her very unlinguistic expressions and reactions to a lot of things have already been recorded on tape. So in that

refusal to discuss things that have happened to her, and later on, when she does discuss, unlike Kostis, who keeps thinking to himself in the presence of the young man, she does talk into the machine, although she is very shy of her son. She discusses what happened to her by always inferring "I." I did this, this happened to me, my children were killed etc. etc., my husband was taken to the concentration camp (because she married a Jew in Croatia) etc. So she basically creates her own history out of a global history or war history. Kostis does not do that, he actually keeps it to himself, he never expresses anything verbally. So that's how I wanted to put these two into communication, that's one way in which it worked. The other is that I already had used some performance because the subject of my book is community. And when we discuss performance artists who mutilate themselves, who tear through their skin, cut pieces and bits of it and do all kinds of horrendous things to their bodies in order to create a community among people and to raise their thinking about their unfreedoms and corruption that surrounds them and everything else, they are always there alone. Marina is alone on the stage, Maglinis's Marina is alone and even unrecognized by her father. Her intention apparently does not [*tape inaudible*]. Or Petr Pavlensky, whose photo was tweeted and sent around the globe. But did anything happen in Moscow last month? No. No community basically, the artist is alone trying to communicate a community of people who are equally affected by the things as they are, but nothing happens. And in one part of Maglinis's novel there is a Good Friday, and he goes to mass to church and is disgusted there looking at the crucifix and at Christ's mutilated and tortured body that is represented vividly there. He says this is what they worship, the brutality and the torture of it all. A very literal way of what the tortured body is, rather than what it stands for: why it is mutilated, why it is there, why it is sacrificed. So no community basically arises from the torture and the mutilation, and neither does it from the artist's self-mutilation. So that is how I tried to work with it, that's why Maglinis is there.

Q.

The novel's been translated into Serbian?

A (A).

Yes, in the course of my work, he actually told me that. They were working on that, but I haven't seen it yet.

Q.

Is Abramovic aware of this novel?

A (A).

She could be because she has my book. And it did communicate with her but I don't know how, she's always on one plane or another. She might be. And I think she collects diligently whatever is written about her. It's somewhere in her archives, I guess.

Q.

Did you make a contrast between the language and the body and whether at some point it becomes redundant?

A (B).

I think definitely the book makes that contrast. Again and again, the notations of language, a language that's divorced from the body or imposed forcibly on the body, and

then a language that derives from the body. So one of the scenes I read at the end – the father and the daughter – that plays it out.

Q.

So that's exactly what Marina Abramovic does?

A (B).

Well, performance art deploys the body as a communicative medium, and often the theorizations of performance art will point to the fact that you start with a somatic experience. Not only are you using the body, but the intent is also to create physical reactions... One of Marina Abramovic's performances literally required you to walk through a narrow passage between two bodies. So this eliciting of a physical experience, physical reaction as a foundation for whatever else comes after is why he uses performance as a trope to point to the use of the body as a source of meaning.

Q.

Not just because of the limitations of language?

A (B).

To focus on the interconnectedness. It's not one or the other. The somatic, psychic fusion or synergy.

Q.

There are interesting theories of the modern dance, for example the Swiss guy who invented eurythmics in the early 20th century. Their theory was that the letters, the transcript, the writing originates from the body language and that with our bodies, we start to communicate first. That's probably somewhere in the novel also, as an undercurrent.

Q.

It sounds very pessimistic. These artists are doing this, and they are trying, and then nothing's happening in terms of the community. I was just thinking about the way in which both the papers invoke the question of the father and the daughter, and then Kostis's question about the family and how things become performed on the family, which is certainly not something that happens just with Maglinis but is an incredible trope maybe in Balkan but certainly in Greek literature: Tachtsis, all the great dramas are worked out on the skin and the blood of the family. So I was wondering whether that was a way of moving from the individual artist. Where does family fit in in terms of the symbolic private vs. public?

A (A).

Actually, I was just going to mention that – in relation to your question previously – I know currently at least two scholars of Modern Greek who write about the Greek family and the current crisis, and this novel is also about family, as it is about every other form of community that fails eventually for whatever reason. But a lot of Greek films – *Dogtooth*, *Attenberg*, or *Miss Violence* most recently – are about the family, which fails its most fragile members, the children. But also what the family stands for, and how close it is to the point of being incestuous – frequently that is the trope that is also used, at least in *Dogtooth* and *Miss Violence*, and xenophobic, dangerous, closed. So everything is there. And I was thinking the other day, since Yugoslavia went through this horrific crisis and war and everything, how there was little to no reflection on the familial. It was always, others are doing this to us, there are foreign interventions, foreign forces that are

paid spies and paid influences destroying the country and the nation etc. While at least a few Greek filmmakers and a few stories I've read by Dimitriou are all about the family, which is rotten inside but also basically turns against any kind of outside influence and does not even let its members spread outside. So the Greeks seek the roots of the crisis internally, while in Serbia in the '90s and even in the 2000s actually it was all exteriorized rather than internalized. So that was kind of interesting to me.

Q.

At least in my estimate, the Greeks had that paranoia for the forty years after the junta until the crisis.