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‘Travelling to the Light, Aiming at the Infinite’: The *Odyssey* of Mikis Theodorakis

There are many elements in common between Mikis Theodorakis¹ and Homer, from their birth on the same island, Chios, to their being claimed by many cities. The most important is that Theodorakis, the most famous modern Greek composer active during the last eighty years, managed to elevate poetry to a continuing narrative of national Greek myth. The objective of the present study is to explore Theodorakis’ refiguration of the idea of Homeric *nostos* in his most recent song-cycle entitled *Odyssey* with poetry by Kostas Kartelias. The work was set to music in 2006 and was recorded as a CD by Legend Recordings in 2007 with Maria Farandouri as a soloist and orchestration by Irina Velentinova.² The official press conference to launch the CD took place on 20 March 2007 at the Pallas Theatre in Athens, in the presence of the composer.³

I shall start by pointing out the significance of the photograph used on the cover of the CD, in which the composer is depicted at the age of twelve, at the

1 I am grateful to Mikis Theodorakis for his reading of my text and for his suggestions, which led, I hope, to a better overall structure. Many thanks to Theodorakis’ assistant Rena Parmenidou; to the poet Kostas Kartelias for his invitation to attend the performance of *Canto General* at the Herodeion on 12 July 2012; to the painter Nikolas Klironomos for his collaboration and his permission to publish one of his paintings of Theodorakis; to the company Legend Recordings for permission to reproduce the cover of the *Odyssey*; to Maria Hatzara for the information from the archive of Maria Farandouri; and to Alexandra Sgouropoulou from the Orchestra “Mikis Theodorakis”. I warmly thank Professor Gail Holst-Warhaft for her support and her permission to use extracts from her translation of the *Odyssey* of Kartelias and also the painter Jannis Psychopedis for his permission to publish a photograph of his painting *Lower Limbs – History Lesson* (Figure 3). Finally, I am obliged to Dr Ioanna Karamanou and Dr Thanasis Efstathiou for their invitation to participate in the Homeric Receptions Conference in Corfu (7–9 November 2011) in a session entitled ‘Refiguring Homer in Film and Music’.

2 The premiere of the *Odyssey* took place on 20 June 2007 at Kyme, Euboea, at an event in honour of the poet Kostas Kartelias; see <http://www.cuma.gr/content/blogcategory/68/145/20/160/>. It was preceded by the live performance of two songs (‘Beautiful Helen’ and ‘The Song of the Sirens’) during a concert by Maria Farandouri in Munich on 25 September 2006, at a time when the CD had not yet come out; on 30 January 2008, a substantial part of the work was presented at the Megaron Mousikis (Concert Hall) in Athens with Maria Farandouri and the Berliner Instrumentalisten as part of a tribute to Mikis Theodorakis.

3 For the entire press conference, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v= QYnEgOJlzm4> (Part 1 to Part 6b).



Figure 1. The cover of the *Odyssey*, Legend Recordings 2007. Photograph of Mikis Theodorakis at the age of twelve in 1937. Published by permission of Legend Recordings.

time when he lived in Patras with his family (Figure 1).⁴ In his autobiography Theodorakis described his two-year stay in the Achaean capital (1937–38) as ‘carefree years’⁵ and states that the main event of that period, which determined his later course, was his enrolment in the Odeion of Patras and his decision to involve himself in music.⁶ The publication of the childhood photograph becomes an important element adding to the autobiographical significance of the *Odyssey*, as a means of mythologizing the personal history of the composer. Theodo-

⁴ The picture dates from 1937 and is part of a family photograph in which, apart from the young Mikis, appear his father, Georgios Theodorakis, his mother, Aspasia, and his younger brother, Yannis; see Theodorakis 1993, 10.

⁵ Theodorakis 1986, 75.

⁶ Theodorakis 1986, 78; see also the painting *Patras* of Klironomos in Figure 2 following.

rakis is here portrayed as the central figure of the myth, as another Odysseus who wishes to return to his own Ithaca. On this basis, I shall attempt to show that the setting of the *Odyssey* to music represents the completion of the composer's personal *nostos*. Then:

*Odyssey could mean the long journey of Mikis Theodorakis in the Sea of Music, which he started when he wrote his first song in Patras in 1937 at the age of 12, continuing until the most recent stop, in April 2006 at the age of 81, when he composed the 14 songs of this Odyssey.*⁷

At the same time, Theodorakis' *Odyssey* provides an incentive to explore the reception of the Odyssean *nostos* in popular discourse,⁸ by posing the question of how ancient symbols feed collective memory (on the archetypal Odyssean *nostos* and its reworkings, see also Jacob in this volume). Theodorakis himself, at the age of eighty one, when he composed his *Odyssey*, gave his own answer by realizing the failure of social and cultural values to re-build a better world for the advocacy of which he has spent most of his life. His *Odyssey* leads to a heterotopian environment, a lonely performing *topos*, which cannot exist anywhere else but at 'the depths of our being'. As such, Theodorakis highlights the end of a whole era —mainly of the 20th century— which was characterized by the dramatic endeavours of the Greek people for territorial stability, the establishment of democracy and political independence.⁹ The new age is that of crushing people by isolation, hard working conditions, lack of free time, cheap cultural prototypes for consumption and lack of spirituality:

*We are living the end of utopia, which was, as now, our capacity to live together with the 'other'. The awareness of such a great tragedy is that which desiccates us all the more. Consequently, salvation is found at least in the emotional return to the depths of our 'being', in case we find the water we lack and slake our thirst.*¹⁰

Towards this direction, I shall demonstrate that Theodorakis' *nostos* is not static; it rather signifies the setting for a new orientation. Self-knowing becomes the first step of an inner-outer process which reaches the linking of man, primarily,

7 From the leaflet included with the CD of the *Odyssey*, Legend Recordings 2007.

8 On the features of Homeric *nostos* and its reception, see Taplin 1977, 124–125; Haubold 2000, 105–106, 192–193; Zajko 2004, 322. On the persistence of this motif throughout ancient as well as Modern Greek literature, see Alexopoulou 2009, esp. ch. 2 and Appendix; Alexopoulou 2006, 1–9.

9 On the appropriation of classical models for socio-political purposes, see the examples discussed in Hardwick 2003, 99–107; van Steen 2011, esp. 1–63; Hardwick 2013, 18–23.

10 From the leaflet included with the CD of the *Odyssey*, Legend Recordings 2007.

with himself and, secondarily, with his external cosmic environment. This type of *return* already developed by the poet Angelos Sikelianos (1884–1951) presents a *new mythology* of facing the world through the deliverance of poetry:

*Returning is at the core of Sikelianos' poetry, from the opening words of his first major poem ('Alaphroiskiotos'), to the great works of his maturity [...] Return is associated by Sikelianos with rebirth and rejuvenation; the poetic process is a form of resurrection, and ancient myth and texts are given a new lease of life through their reworking in new poems.*¹¹

In the course of elucidating Theodorakis' perception of *nostos*, it will be worth comparing it with the contemporary paintings of Jannis Psychopedis included in his exhibition *Nostos*, which was held in Athens in 2008. I shall argue that Psychopedis' view is totally different; it rather seems to highlight the gap between *then and now* in order to reveal the contradictory relationship of the ancient past and the present. His view, bare, critical but also nostalgic, aspires to portray social degradation, and his *nostos* suggests that 'the idea-value-principle exists minus its ultimate receiver'.¹² The symbols of antiquity, statues and myths, typical elements of morality and humanistic development, are 'trapped' in a way that signals a non-*return* direction in the future:

*The Greece of today, the wounded environment, the neglected values, the debased—to a large extent— cultural heritage of Greece, the forgotten tradition, sybaritism, the imitation of unworthy models. In the end, as well as at the very beginning, it is Greece, from which we have turned away our gaze.*¹³

a. The *nostos* of childhood

The depiction of the young Theodorakis on the cover of the CD (Figure 1) is noteworthy to the extent that it determines the external time of his life journey and the features of his personal *nostos*. The fourteen songs of the *Odyssey* are identified, as much emotionally as expressively, with the deepest and purest facets of the composer's soul.¹⁴ The *Odyssey* then concerns a return to the first starting-

¹¹ Ekdawi, 2002, 115.

¹² Takis Mavrotas in Psychopedis 2008, 25.

¹³ *op.cit.*, 24–25.

¹⁴ The titles of the songs are: 1. 'Beside the Sea', 2. 'The Song of the Companions', 3. 'Shipwreck', 4. 'The Song of the Sirens', 5. 'In the Underworld', 6. 'On Calypso's Isle', 7. 'Beautiful Helen', 8. 'Circe', 9. 'Like a Beast', 10. 'The Love God', 11. 'Sea Witch', 12. 'To Nausica', 13. 'Pe-

point of life and to the settings to music of that period. Theodorakis himself has acknowledged that his artistic nature ‘was the creation’¹⁵ of his youthful period, and, most importantly, he has recognized the *Odyssey* songs as a recollection of the musical enquiries of his childhood (1937–43).¹⁶ Morphologically, the style here follows the composer’s turn in the 1980s towards utmost lyricism and melody with harmony without populist elements.¹⁷ It is music with even greater spirituality. The piano, the violin, the cello, the percussion, the mandolin, the saxophone, the guitar and the clarinet are the main instruments, while the absence of the bouzouki can be explained as a conscious return to childhood sounds.¹⁸ Theodorakis enthral us with the density of the motifs and the overall strength of the composition, so that the *Odyssey* comes to denote another stage in the evolution of the so-called *popular art song*, which emerged in the 1960s with the *Epitaphios* of Yannis Ritsos.¹⁹

In the case of Theodorakis, the journey of life constitutes a crooked line through a large number of places in which the composer lived during his childhood: Chios (1925), Mytilene (1925–28), Syros and Athens (1929), Ioannina (1930–32), Argostoli (1933–36), Patras (1937–38), Pyrgos (1938–39) and Tripolis (1939–43).²⁰ The young Theodorakis followed his family moves, because of his father, who, serving as a high civil servant, had undertaken several unwelcome moves because of his pro-Venizelos views.²¹ The year 1943, one year before the liberation of the country from the Germans, constitutes a new page in Mikis’ life, as he settles in Athens and begins his systematic involvement in music.

nelope’s Song’, 14. ‘Without Identity’. For a wider approach to the song-cycle, see Koutoulas 1998, 426.

15 Theodorakis 2002, 62.

16 Theodorakis at the press conference on the *Odyssey*, 20 March 2007, Pallas Theatre, Athens (Part 2); see above, n. 3.

17 Theodorakis’ gradual move towards lyricism is initiated in 1978 with his setting to music poetry of Tasos Livaditis entitled *The Lyrics*, followed more firmly with his setting to music poetry of Dionysis Karatzas and more specifically: *The Faces of the Sun* (1987), *Like an Ancient Wind* (1987), *Beatrice in Zero Street* (set to music in 1986, recorded in 1994), and *The More Lyrical* (1996). For the significance of melody in the music of Theodorakis overall, see Lazaridou-Elmaloglou 2004, Part 1, 64–65.

18 Theodorakis used the bouzouki and elements of *rembetika* for the first time in the *Epitaphios* of Yannis Ritsos in 1960; see Mouyis 2010, 30 ff.

19 On the *Epitaphios*, see Mouyis 2010, 28–43, especially 31; see also Beaton 1999, 223–26.

20 Theodorakis 1986, 16; see also Giannaris 1973, 3–26.

21 Theodorakis 1986, 50, 70, 82.

The constant displacements of Theodorakis' family during the period 1925–43 made this period significant for moulding the composer's personality. As has already been noticed:

Perhaps there might be, sometime in the future, seriously focused studies to show what he himself (i.e. Theodorakis) implies, that there is a relationship of his initial wanderings with other subsequent creative wanderings and pursuits.²²

Going through Theodorakis' autobiography of his first eighteen years, one understands quite easily that in his case the geographical wandering leads to another version of the *persona* of Odysseus. Theodorakis bears the stigma of the 'self-imprisoned'²³ and self-exiled, as the severance from his many homes carries the meaning of exclusion from the world of those who live without travelling. With the features of the outsider (ξένος), the young Mikis felt barely accepted in each new city that he moved to:

I was always the outsider. In Ioannina, an Athenian; in Argostoli, an Epirote; in Patras, a Cephalonian and so on.²⁴

Because, in contrast to the child who lives permanently in the village or the town and has a steady reference point – even though low and inadequate –, the child who is uprooted constantly does not manage to absorb anything.²⁵

Theodorakis' diverse experiences in the Greek provinces constituted a source of inspiration for the painter Nikolas Klironomos, who created a series of ten impressive paintings naming them after the towns where the composer lived (see Figure 2). The paintings of Klironomos were presented first in 2007 in an exhibition of the painter in Athens entitled *His childhood years ... a journey*.²⁶ In 2008 the works were exhibited at the 'Mikis Theodorakis Museum' in Zatonou, Arcadia, as part of the celebrations of the 40th anniversary of Theodorakis' exile in Zatonou, and in December 2010 they were lent to the Evgenidou Foundation during the celebration of the 85th birthday of the composer. Klironomos' work, a kind of 'wall newspaper' of photographs, sketches, newspaper clippings, manuscripts and musical notes, exploits elements of the composer's autobiography by defin-

²² Kouyoumoutzakis 2007, 44.

²³ Theodorakis 1986, 97.

²⁴ Theodorakis 1986, 34. All extracts from Theodorakis are translated by the author.

²⁵ *op. cit.*, 64.

²⁶ The exhibition took place in the Gallery 'Ekfrasi-Yianna Grammatopoulou'; see Klironomos 2007 (Catalogue); Hermann 2008, 80, 82–83, 261.

ing his private space, the bedrooms of his childhood which, acting as a colourful fantasy ‘shell’, protected him from the ‘hostile’ outside world.

The prerequisite for the perpetuation of the figure of Odysseus, though, is not the journey but his capacity to return. In its core, *nostos* is schismatic, as the breakup of the primordial image of the *cosmos* —through alternations of places, traits and people— causes fateful divisions as much with the external environment as with the self. The basic question about the *Odyssey* of Mikis Theodorakis is, then, under which presuppositions does his *nostos* become possible.

b. The reconstruction of the lost prototype

In setting the *Odyssey* to music Theodorakis claims his spiritual locality in Patras at the age of twelve years old. The reconnection with childhood sixty-nine years later (1937–2006) attains the significance of the highest challenge, as long as the signs of familiarity which unite him with the starting-point and erase the losses of the journey must be recognized.²⁷ Overcoming the inertia of nostalgia, the attainment of *nostos* in the *Odyssey* manages to bridge the distance between the present and the past.²⁸ The transparency of feelings and the deferential congruence of music with the poetic word are two distinct elements which fascinate us, so that we can say that the ‘true’ Ithaca is reached by the person who has built himself on the mythology of childhood and who never lost faith in the aesthetic world throughout his life. In Theodorakis’ *Odyssey*, I would say that what occurs is what Odysseus Elytis writes in *Ev λευκώ* (*Carte Blanche*):

*The way to speak about the past, without becoming suspected of nostalgia, has not yet been found. Nevertheless, it is one thing to load time and to carry it together with your wrinkles and another to circulate within it, backwards-forwards, with the easiness that only poetry allows you.*²⁹

The poetry of Kartelias, with its expressive austerity and emotional innocence, becomes the vehicle for Theodorakis’ reconnection with his youthful inspiration. In other words, poetry creates the premises for the performing of *nostos*. Besides,

²⁷ For his arduous process of composition especially after the age of seventy, see the press conference on the *Odyssey* (Part 1); see above, n. 3.

²⁸ An opposite example could be the ‘Return of the Emigrant’ by Giorgos Seferis (*Deck Diary A*, 1938), who upon returning to his homeland feels the greatest loss of the past, because he cannot harmonize the signs of the present in his memory.

²⁹ Elytis 2006⁶, 300–01.

Theodorakis started as a songwriter with the members of his own family as his audience:

It is not well-known that I started as a songwriter. Besides, this was the only thing that we could do in the provinces. We did not have a piano, we did not have school orchestras, we only sang. So, at the age of twelve (this is the reason for this photograph, it is exactly in Patras when I was twelve) I compose my first song.³⁰

The composer's first song is entitled 'The Boat' and was written in 1937.³¹ The connection to the *Odyssey* is an emotional, stylistic and semiological association, as in this most recent song-cycle the return to the harbour and the deliverance from the early memories are achieved. It is worth referring to Klironomos' painting entitled *Patras* (Figure 2), in which the young Mikis' room is depicted



Figure 2. Nikolas Klironomos, *Patras*, work VII, mixed techniques on canvas, paper and cardboard, 100 x 180 cm, 2005–2006. Published by permission of Nikolas Klironomos.

with his first violin on the left side of his desk and his first handwritten score of the aforementioned song hanging on the wall above the lamp.³²

³⁰ Theodorakis, press conference on the *Odyssey* (Part 2; see above, n. 3); Theodorakis 1986, 81.

³¹ Theodorakis 1993.

³² Klironomos 2007, 35.

Setting the *Odyssey* to music evokes the preparatory phase of the composer between 1937 and 1943,³³ when he started to set to music poems of the leading Greek poets found in school text-books. Dimitris Karvounis, who conducted the choral teaching of forty youthful songs of Theodorakis, points out that in these songs ‘there is a finished compositional proposal with a morphological balance, an aesthetic and perfectly artistic result’.³⁴

The exceptional value of the first songs is that they constitute the ‘core of the musical self’³⁵ of Theodorakis, representing also his psychological need to express himself during the lonely years of family travels. In sum, the *Odyssey* encapsulates an analogous need of Theodorakis to recognize his childhood dream for reasons which, as we shall see, are not far distant from those of his youth. In this manner, the ring-composition of the Homeric journey is displayed, in that the start becomes the end and the end forms a new beginning.

c. The anti-journey of utopia

The poet Kostas Kartelias is another version of the wandering Odysseus, who leaves his birthplace in Athens during his childhood and establishes himself with his father in Euboea:

*I would say that loneliness characterizes my childhood. The loneliness of few words. My siblings and cousins, whom I loved and used to talk to, had left for Athens to study. Conversations and life in the village were very poor. Imagination was insufficient and dangerous in daily life. I wanted to leave.*³⁶

And here, the return to Ithaca is reconstructed on an inner field, which reveals the harmony of the individual with himself after a struggle and the liberation from external circumstances. The writing of Kartelias breathes warmth and unpretentious familiarity and manages to approach man as a suffering sensuous being.

In the poem ‘Beside the Sea’³⁷ Ithaca becomes synonymous with the very centre of existence, ‘the depths of my soul’, which takes on perspective and ‘horizon’ through the fulfillment of feelings. The Cavafy-like didacticism does not apply:

³³ Cf. Theodorakis, <http://int.mikis-theodorakis.net/index.php/article/archive/8/>; Koutoulas 1998, 406–07.

³⁴ Karvounis 2005, 124; cf. Theodorakis 1993.

³⁵ Theodorakis 1993, 8; cf. Theodorakis 2005, *First Songs*, Intuition (CD).

³⁶ <http://www.cuma.gr/content/view/248/145/>; see also Kartelias 2007.

³⁷ Cf. translation by Holst-Warhaft 2012.

*Laistrygonians, Cyclops,
angry Poseidon—don't be afraid of them.*³⁸

Odysseus, speaking in the first person, admits that the only way to find solace escaping 'the fury of Poseidon' and 'the anger of the winds', is through love. The 'fire in my breast', as he writes, is 'a sign of return to an Ithaca that I must return to/ on my life's long journey'.

In 'The Song of the Companions' the intrinsic human powers engender a type of poetic *nostos* towards an Ithaca perceived as 'the open sea', challenging us to 'journey into danger'. 'Greetings, sacred danger', Sikelianos writes similarly in 'The Song of the Argonauts', while subsequently:

*Silent virgin peace, in which journey you will immerse us
now that our effort blossomed wings!*³⁹

In these circumstances, *eros* is a powerful impetus of a route which leads against any prevailing restraint and manipulation. As a result of this process, the poetic *nostos* manages to raise life to a more genuine, non-materialistic level, in which imagination and perceptible understanding play a primary role. The following excerpt is from the 'The Song of the Companions':

*The world always
finds new rulers
and we lonely poets
will remain.*

Being consistent with this outlook, Theodorakis records how solitude (as a result of the constant childhood moves) set him on the road to music as a kind of defence against external circumstances:

*My pathological absorption in and pursuit of music, which happened [...] in 1938–39, at Pyrgos in Elis, had as its basis a psychological motivation, a personal answer of my own – a kind of escape but also of liberation – from the imaginary walls which I had raised around me, refusing even to stroll in the community of people.*⁴⁰

The progress towards the poetic *nostos* is the anti-journey within the journey and the self-conscious placing against all conventionalism of life. It concerns also the

38 Keeley/ Sherrard 1995, 15 ('Ithaka' by C. Cavafy).

39 Sikelianos 2003⁴, 65; extract translated by Hara Thliveri.

40 Theodorakis 1986, 65–66.

dynamics towards utopia, the search for the ideal, the metaphysical passage to freedom, which surpasses adversities. Theodorakis writes:

*I was pleased when in 1947 and 1948 they ‘travelled’ us on their say-so, so as to send us into exile. On the beach my parents were wailing, and even though I was bound with handcuffs, I was trying with difficulty to hide the wave of joy flaring up within me, because soon we would set sail, aiming at piercing the horizon – the journey!*⁴¹

This liberating vision was the fundamental ideological motivation for Theodorakis all his life, during his youth, as well as later through his personal stance in political and social struggles. He himself admits that:

*Facing problems –social and national– became, at least on my part, in one way dream-like, ideological and not at all realistic.*⁴²

d. Return to the *first self*

In 1943, in a period of spiritual searching during his stay in Tripolis, Theodorakis moulds his theory of Universal Harmony,⁴³ which conveys his existential striving for the detection of the bonds of man with the *cosmos* and the ‘pursuit of the Ideal’:

*that is, of the significant centre, which is found very deep within us and at the same time far away, because it is the law of the Cosmos, of the Beginning and the End.*⁴⁴

Theodorakis’ conception of Universal Harmony, which is extended to the ability of art to reproduce the notional links within the cosmic environment,⁴⁵ reflects, in my opinion, a mental kinship with the views of Angelos Sikelianos, who already in ‘The Visionary’ (‘Alaphroiskiotos’, 1909) bases the theory of the return to the *first self*:

⁴¹ Theodorakis 1986, 20; cf. Theodorakis 2002, 89–90: ‘a journey to the light, aiming at the infinite’, which inspired the title of this article.

⁴² Theodorakis 2002, 133.

⁴³ For an overview of Universal Harmony, see Theodorakis 1986, 98 ff.; Theodorakis 2007, 77–102; Lazaridou-Elmaloglou 2004 (Part I) 57 ff.; Mouyis 2010, 80–94.

⁴⁴ Theodorakis 1986, 98.

⁴⁵ Theodorakis 1986, 141; cf. Mouyis 2010, 83: ‘Art was the only power that could create within us a microcosm in perfect parallel with the *Cosmos*. It could transfer the Laws that define Universal Harmony inside us’.

*At this outset my entire Being is situated from the beginning, biologically unbreakable, as the principal core of a clear experience of the cosmic consciousness of life.*⁴⁶

Sikelianos and Theodorakis reinforce the nostalgia for the attainment of the one intrinsic centre, which constitutes the sole umbilical bond of man with the universe. They both regard the youthful years as enabling the individual to become a receiver of cosmic pulse through poetics and senses. In the 'Hymn of the Great Nostos' of Sikelianos, the *first self* is the biological unity revealing the indisputable bond of man with the universe:

*And as the armed Eros descends before me
the depths of heaven,
without my seeking it, I leap and dance in turn
with my mind's armour!*⁴⁷

For the young Theodorakis the linking of man with the *cosmos* occurs through music, as music transfers to man the *Law of the Universe*, which happens also to be the *Law of Total Creation*.⁴⁸ The composer highlights the influence of Palamas, who 'believed that rhythm in poetry —the rhythmic stride— symbolizes the rhythm that governs the Universe'.⁴⁹ In another, more metaphysical, manner, Sikelianos considers that:

*The oral Poetic World [...] represents [...] the fundamental tone of the deep biological and psychological Unity of the Universe and of man with the Universe and man.*⁵⁰

Here I argue that the aforementioned views of Sikelianos and Theodorakis demonstrate the greatest capacity of the poetic *nostos* to attain hyper-realistic perception within the bounds of human life. They both consider the period of youth to bring out the strongest spiritual powers of man. As Theodorakis says:

*Perhaps the composer at that time, between the ages of 12 and 16, is more genuine. He speaks more with himself, with the Universe, with his inspiration.*⁵¹

⁴⁶ Sikelianos 1999⁵, 23.

⁴⁷ Sikelianos 2003⁴, 104; extract translated by Hara Thliveri.

⁴⁸ Theodorakis 1986, 140–41; see also Theodorakis 2002, 146.

⁴⁹ Theodorakis 1986, 140–41.

⁵⁰ Sikelianos 1981, 148.

⁵¹ See Koutoulas 1998, 408.

Consequently, the return of Theodorakis through his *Odyssey* to his *first self*, as fulfilment of his poetic *nostos*, renders the power of man to capture the catholic essence of life, the essence, that is, which joins the spiritual experience with the apparent world. In ‘The Visionary’ of Sikelianos, the young Odysseus is met sleeping on some seashore of his homeland after his return.⁵² In this way, through the hypnosis of the mind and the awakening of the senses, the poet lays the ground for the opening of his poetic inspiration.⁵³

The metaphysics of the senses likewise play a role in the poetry of Kartelias. In ‘The Song of the Sirens’,⁵⁴ ‘the wind blows a song that seems endless’, and the sound of the sea is fragmented into ‘a thousand voices’. Within a boundless sea setting, there is ‘no mast to be tied to and no rope’. The ties with the material world are halted and the dilemma of Odysseus is not how to avoid ‘so much music’, but which of all to choose. The Sirens, in contrast to the fearsome Homeric monsters we know, represent the enchanting call of the art leading beyond the borders of the world of experience:

*When the ocean starts singing,
there's so much music to bear,
a thousand voices, so you don't know
how to choose and there's no mast to be tied to
and no rope.
I'll soar on my wings
that I'll spread
over the strange islands of paradise.*

The conception of this moving boat refers to a kind of ritual mystery-process in which the artist (as a mediator himself between the earth and the universe) liberates his inspiration by soaring *on his wings*. The repetition at the end ‘untie your hair, so I can see you’ shows that this transforming — more or less erotic — power of art towards freedom is the only path to the salvation of man, offering people an escape from ‘the endless desert’:

*Untie your hair, so I can see you, know you
in the blind alleys of the world,
in the endless desert of the world.
Untie your hair, so I can come and speak to you.*

52 Sikelianos 1999⁵, 85 (‘Return’) translated in Keeley/Sherrard 1980, 11; Anagnostopoulos 1995, 121–31; Ekdawi 2002, 115–19, esp. 118.

53 The return of Odysseus to Lefkada implies a sense of autochthony in view of the origin of Sikelianos; cf. Ricks 1989, 63.

54 Holst-Warhaft 2012.

Elsewhere, Theodorakis refers to a ‘mysterious calling, an erotic expectation’:

*For me this heart’s longing, this leap of the heart, which I felt each time I crossed the sea by boat is exactly the same that I feel each time I decide to write a piece. A mysterious calling, an erotic expectation of the elusive.*⁵⁵

e. The parameter of national awareness

According to Theodorakis, the poem ‘In the Underworld’ has ‘historical, social and ultimately autobiographical content’, and for this reason he chose to sing it himself.⁵⁶ The beloved dead, the dead fellow-combatants, themselves also spectres of an invisible world, are the shades which Odysseus meets in Hades. To keep *nostos* alive, one must endure remembering. In this way, with the feelings brightly burning, he can maintain his lyrical humidity, so as not to be alienated by ‘society’s filth’. Oblivion kills the living, the dead and makes nations disappear.

Born in 1925, of Cretan descent,⁵⁷ Mikis Theodorakis belongs to a generation which was scarred by the experiences of the Second World War, the Occupation, the National Resistance against the Germans (1941–44) and the Civil War (1946–49). Maintaining throughout his life the patriotic ideals of the National Liberation Front (EAM),⁵⁸ Theodorakis reaches manhood in a period in which Greece claims association with the achievements of 1821 and distances itself from the national defeat of the Asia Minor Catastrophe (1922). Theodorakis, then, brings back the topography of the *Odyssey* from the shores of Asia Minor,⁵⁹ and his birthplace in Chios, to the Eptanisa and the so-called ‘Old Greece’. From his first hearing ‘the practised choirs or the bands’⁶⁰ in Argostoli and his first setting to music of poems of Solomos, Valaoritis, Palamas and Drosinis in Patras, Pyrgos and Tripolis, Theodorakis reunites the scattered elements of Hellenism and lays the foundation for the reunification of the national body; in other words, he lays the foundation for the completeness and recollection of national *nostos*.

55 Lazaridou-Elmaloglou 2004, Addendum II, 33.

56 Theodorakis, press conference on the *Odyssey* (Part 2; see above, n. 3).

57 For a recent overview of the biography of Theodorakis, see Mouyis 2010, 14–20.

58 Hamilakis 2007, 207–10.

59 The composer’s parents and mother’s family were victims of the Asia Minor Catastrophe of 1922. Cf. the antiheroic prototype of Odysseus in Seferis; Ricks 1989, 119–34.

60 Theodorakis 1986, 66: ‘From Argostoli, when I heard the practised choirs or the bands, that is, melody with harmony, which in the end produced the Greek Art Song, I felt an inexplicable attraction’.

But, what are the popular connotations of *nostos* today, in the second decade of the 21st century? Is there a common *topos* of return and how does *nostos* nurture national imagination?⁶¹ The received cultural acquisitions show but a museum character, unless they inspire fruitfully the present. As befits the circumstances of personal awakening, on a collective level a nation owes it to itself to resist the declining memory of its past and to recognize its own familiar traces through the course of time. In this way, the emancipation of the literary prototypes — such as the Homeric ones — aligns the present with the past and brings out the *contemporary mythical heroes*.⁶²

In 2008, a year after the premiere of the *Odyssey* of Theodorakis, a dynamic contribution was made by the exhibition of the painter Jannis Psychopedis entitled *Nostos* at the Museum of Cycladic Art in Athens. In the exhibition a critical approach to modern Greek physiognomy was imprinted, by contemplating the interrelation of the present with the recent historic past:

*Nostos, the homeward journey of Odysseus from Troy, exhibits Psychopedis' intellectual bravado and obsession with constantly balancing on a tightrope, with his eyes turning to the timeless forms of the art of the ancient Greek civilization or immersing himself in the contemplation of contemporary reality.*⁶³

In their conception, the *Odyssey* of Theodorakis and the *Nostos* of Psychopedis represent two different receptions: the reception of the first, as said, looks forward to utopia, while that of the latter is dominated by a realistic, critical mood insisting on the memories of a mutilated past which seeks confirmation. In the *Fragmented Memory*⁶⁴ the cutting of the ancient statue stresses the weakness of our epoch to reformulate archetypal forms, being also suggestive of the misleading effect of memory within time. Additionally, in the *Lower Limbs—History Lesson* (Figure 3)⁶⁵ one understands that the greater the distance in time, the greater the alienation, the harder the dialogue of the extremes and the familiarity of the allusions among themselves. To conclude, the *nostos* of Psychopedis is unfulfilled; it involves a nightmarish dialectical discourse with the present, which, unfortunately, does not ensure a further promising co-existence.

The last song of the *Odyssey* entitled 'Without Identity' adds new elements, which are brought together in the realism of Psychopedis and in the fluid atmos-

⁶¹ For national imagination as the 'nostalgia for the whole', see Hamilakis 2007, 282, 290–93.

⁶² Theodorakis 2002, 318.

⁶³ Takis Mavrotas in Psychopedis 2008, 24.

⁶⁴ Psychopedis 2008, 140 (Plate).

⁶⁵ Psychopedis 2008, 91 (Plate).



Figure 3. Jannis Psychopedis, *Lower Limbs—History Lesson*, 40 x 52 x 50 cm., 1996. Reproduced by permission of Jannis Psychopedis.

phere of the time. In contrast with the previous thirteen poems, Odysseus is here portrayed as a wanderer within a faceless urban environment. Nothing recalls the excitement of travelling and the natural setting of ‘The Song of the Companions’ or ‘The Song of the Sirens’. Odysseus introduces himself as ‘Nobody’, an unknown person who exists ‘in the crowd in a city I do not know’. In Theodorakis’ eyes, the modern era marks an equivalent period of isolation. Alienation is a new circumstance of globalization and the devaluation of national ideals. Thirty-seven years after he set to music the ‘Spiritual March’ (‘Pnevmatiko Emvatirio’) of Sikelianos during his exile in Zatouna, the ‘accomplished’ Greece seems to have lost its heirs. It is a period of degradation, which becomes apparent, as the composer observes, in the division between the popular and art elements recurring in these days after the great advances of the decades after 1960.⁶⁶ He also confesses:

*I stopped feeling the presence of others around me. Sometimes I have the impression that I am alone, banished in a waste land [...] So, whom do I write about? About those who don't see and about those who don't listen to me?*⁶⁷

f. A personal performing *topos*

The *Odyssey* of Mikis Theodorakis prescribes the *nostos* to a personal performing *topos*. As ‘a journey into danger’, the Homeric return must end with the target of self-realization, i.e. the state of affirmation which leads to the bonds with childhood. For this attainment, forgetfulness must be overcome; however difficult the circumstances, Odysseus cannot exist as *Nobody*, ‘without identity and name among people’. The meeting-point of Kartelias and Theodorakis is poetry, where poetry is regarded as the disposition of elevating life to a more self-knowing level. Theodorakis asserts:

*The ‘person’, that is ourselves, must ultimately live the idea that Ithaca does not exist and that he must be grasped by his own pathos and his own sentiments, in order to stay on the surface of the rough sea which is life.*⁶⁸

At the end of this journey, Ithaca is not poor; it makes up for the empirical losses of memory. Music comes to socialize the person, and the poet-composer seeks ‘to come and speak to you’. The hieratic, fervent voice of Maria Farandouri anchors the lyri-

⁶⁶ Cf. Theodorakis’ views on the predominant music scene: Theodorakis 2002, 81, 83, 85–86, 154, 294–95.

⁶⁷ Theodorakis 2002, 118.

⁶⁸ From the leaflet included with the CD of the *Odyssey*, Legend Recordings 2007.

cism which never wavers. The melody, albeit nostalgic, does not expose us to melancholy. There is a progressive climax towards an emotional profusion and a cyclical retrieval of feelings. Ultimately, the music of the *Odyssey* is liberating. It is not the memory-trauma, but the memory-idea through the art-music. The latter unites the perceptive dimension with the ostensible world. Theodorakis' *Odyssey* is transformed into a musical *iconotopia*. The composer performs what he sees when he sits on a 'fantastic hammock'⁶⁹ at the edge of the universe. There are no Homeric monsters, but only the immersion in the world of music and the senses. The search of 'the depths of my soul' becomes the prospect of man rejoining with his outward environment in a dramatic attempt to amplify human limits. And in this way, the human course is tamed within the bounds of *cosmos*.

Overcoming fortune is the destiny of heroes. Each one who manages to keep the measure of himself and not to fall into the over- or under-estimation of time is also an Odysseus. The journey of Theodorakis-Odysseus is the placement of man in the universe. For this journey there is an axiom to learn, that the childhood home is not just a place, but 'those who love us'.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Theodorakis 2002, 88.

⁷⁰ Theodorakis 1986, 136: 'My homeland was my house. My parents. Those who loved us'.