

## Archival Bodies

A project by **Haris Pellapaisiotis** with contributions from **Yael Navaro** and **Susan Kozel**

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*Archival Bodies* [2017-2022] is an assembly of writings and images from a triad collaboration between Haris Pellapaisiotis, Yael Navaro, and Susan Kozel. It materialized out of the larger, ongoing art project *Walking Narratives and Affective Mapping*, where Pellapaisiotis experiments with ways of exploring the city of Nicosia as a relational space that engenders individual narrative connections that somehow speak to the unsettling relationship between place and self. Working from a perspective that attributes archival intelligence to the body and tangible qualities to affect,<sup>1</sup> the city is explored as a performative embodied space where sensations, feelings, and thoughts are shared as actual entities that may stimulate new narrative conceptions of Nicosia.

### Introduction

In 2016, I invited Navaro to lead me on a walk anywhere in Nicosia that held some personal resonance for her. Navaro chose to retrace a walking path that for her became an almost daily routine, following her divorce, as she journeyed from one set of solicitors in the north of Nicosia to another in the south in the process of gaining custody of her daughter. Our walking journey took us from Küçhük Kaimakli (north of Nicosia), where she took up temporary residence whilst waiting for the court's decision, past the statue of Atatürk, to the Supreme Court (KKTC Yüksek Mahkeme) and across the Ledra Palace checkpoint, after which we stopped at the Catholic Church of the Holy Cross -where she would sometimes enter and sit to observe home workers in prayer, or even pray herself- before we would eventually arrive outside the Family Court building (south of Nicosia). Our crossing of the Buffer Zone was not "politically" motivated in the way political discourses of the division tend to always be privileged and prioritized over other forms of narratives. It was nonetheless indicative of the tension of how everyday life narratives cannot be so easily disentangled from the politics of a divided city. The path we followed is indeed reflective of what Navaro refers to as an

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1. Affectivity is perceived not as a reference to some emotional state of being, but rather as a recognition of the experience of something going on at the time of its experience that results from being situated within an extensive interconnected network of actual entities, material or not, that produce sensations. This is achieved by opening the body to relational resonances with other bodies, human and non-human that can form new narrative directions that resist dominant norms and representational values of how the story should be told.

“affective geography” that is structured on the “phantasmagorical” consciousness of what it feels to be (dis)located in surroundings that are both familiar and alienating at the same time.

Susan Kozel's contribution to the project happened serendipitously. Not long after my walk with Navaro, I was invited to participate in a day-long workshop entitled, *Affect, Interface, Event*, which was held in Copenhagen and was led by Kozel. Returning this gesture, I invited Kozel to visit Nicosia, when during her short stay in the capital I arranged for her to meet with Navaro. Moved by her meeting with Navaro, Kozel suggested contributing to the *Walking Narratives* project with a choreographed video which emulated Navaro's gesticulations. Her contribution occurred organically and shifted the emphasis from a dual collaboration between Navaro and myself to demonstrating how in practice, openness to an affective sensibility of working may unfold in unexpected directions that allow for creative growth and a different way of telling the story. Moreover, Kozel's involvement reflected our shared approach to archiving, seen as a living body of knowledge that is affiliated with somatic awareness, aesthetic speculation, imagination, and art, in equal measures.

The textual contributions that follow offer insights into each contributor's own take on their involvement with the project.

### **Haris Pellapaisiotis**

Two women locked in each other's company, talking and laughing in their language, make their way to the bus waiting to take them to visit their village. I am walking in the opposite direction to meet with anthropologist Yael Navaro. The border is porous – bodies cross casually and with ease. Even so, the body involuntarily composes itself into a parody of its carefree stride as it approaches the first guardhouse with its weather-faded posters seeking sympathy for war injustices. In the interspace between one policed post and the other, this body finds something of its natural stride before the other side comes into view, forcing its presence on the landscape with bold coloured symbols and nationalist declarations of an independent state. The body is literally and metaphorically caught between these two narratives when it enters the Nicosia Buffer Zone.

On this side of the border, a young, pale and expressionless face stares back at me and tells me that I cannot cross –and all because I did not sign out on my return visit three years ago. Now, an impregnable border within a border, unseen and unnegotiable, and more real than its physical equivalent, stops my crossing. The best I could do is apologise. I acknowledge the mistake that was made but surely the issue could be resolved. Of course, I understand that administratively the records show that I am still on his side of the border, but here I am, and I cannot be here and there at the same time; is it not enough that I am standing here, in person? Evidently not, a deposition is needed that I reside on my side of the divide, then, physically and administratively I would be one again –but this will take weeks.

Having left her car, Yael is now standing beside me, asking for an explanation in Turkish –moving halfway into the guardhouse talking to this man's superior, who, on hearing her voice, turns to look at the female Turkish speaker.

Yael's persistence pays off –provided that I could present a household bill with my address, I could cross over with her. My problem is that when I do find the necessary document, it's in Greek. I explain this to the older policeman who, with a trace of a smile, replies “εν’ εντάξει” (“it’s ok” spoken in Greek) and waves us on.

When Yael (a Turkish National) settled in Cyprus with her Turkish Cypriot husband -he a poet and a vociferous advocate for unification between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, she a scholar of stature from the U.K.- they thought themselves above the political squabbles of the division. Crossing back and forth the border and having like-minded Greek Cypriot friends made them feel that they were transgressing the entrenched thinking that maintains this separation; the Buffer Zone became their portal to a new Cyprus. In reality, as Yael explains during our walk, it was the other way around; notions of exclusion and division had incipiently seeped into ordinary life, and analogies between the invisible boundaries of marriage and those drawn by states and the military soon became apparent. With the divorce, her husband opportunistically exploited the division to restrict her movement with their daughter, who attended a private school on the south side of the divide.

### **Yael Navaro**

With my separation from my husband, I started to walk Nicosia differently. Being 'off' the zones of marriage, re-positions one's orientation towards the city. I was re-spatialized, 'displaced,' yet re-emplaced. This, in a city which has undergone multiple historical disorientations, and displacements within itself, has been quite a unique experience.

There is a way in which one walks when married. You walk within the 'zone,' even when not at 'home.' Time and space and how you straddle it is an extension of this 'marital home.' 'Where have you been?' 'When are you coming back?' The agreed route is repetitive. It is controlled. It is a subtly imposed and unspoken norm. An unspoken yet imposing bordering of life. And likewise of the mind. Marriage confines one's imagination and manages one's relations with others. It is a censorship mechanism, a mode of 'governmentality.'

And so, there were routes I walked through when within my marriage, and others I did not (unless they were for anthropological research purposes). The route from home to school, and quickly back, and there were curfew hours, times when I was never out, or so it appears looking at it from the other side.

As soon as I was separated, moving house, I was re-orientated. The same city appeared different. I started walking different paths, using hours of the day I did not previously use much, the early morning, the late night. My phone wouldn't ring if I wandered off the time-space zone. There was no longer really a 'zone.' This was a new phenomenology. It wasn't just that my body was positioned anew vis-à-vis the city, people, the world. With it, in unison, my imagination was freed. I encountered new people, mutually said hello. Conversations took new turns. New friends emerged, new faces in my life, new people who would have never entered had I chosen to remain within the habitat of 'marriage.' Even this half-dead city started to blossom through the serendipity that walking outside 'the norm' made possible. Every day could harbour a surprise. I was walking with a mischievous smile. Good morning!

Marriage has invisible boundaries, physical-material ones as in 'the house,' and intangible ones like those in the imagination and the organization of space and time. In fact, one could conceive of marriage like a mini-state! As I found out, the legal process of divorce is meant to protect the sanctity of this state-within-a-state. Borders control the movement of children with their mothers, check in, check out. Or the legal systems of nation-states support the order of marriage. For why else would it be so difficult to get out of?

Walking outside the tangible and intangible borders of marriage, beyond its 'walls,' allows other encounters. In Nicosia, for me, these were also outside the normativity of both Turkish-Cypriot and Greek-Cypriot middle-class societies, their whereabouts, their hangouts, aesthetics, expectations, and modes of sociality. So, I found myself walking on a Sunday morning, when my daughter was with her father, on the outskirts of the Venetian walls of Nicosia, at a time when only migrant domestic workers from Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and Vietnam walk the streets. Sri Lankan women made community in the municipal gardens of Nicosia, near Ledra Palace, on Sundays, trimming each other's hair, tidying eyebrows, selling their own food and produce, chatting, sitting in the shade of trees, and celebrating festivals. An entire community of Catholic Filipinas would meet every Sunday at the Latin church by Paphos Gate to pray, chant, and hymn in their own congregation for Jesus. Right next door, a special altar had been designed for the Virgin Mary, under a makeshift cave, by Sri Lankan migrants at the Nicosia seat of the Vatican. One day, Vietnamese ladies celebrated their women's day with a song competition at the municipal gardens. All were dressed up for the occasion. The way through from Paphos Gate into old town Nicosia by the Maronite church and the St. Joseph school was spotted with rented rooms turned into Evangelical churches for migrant communities who would come to congregate on Sundays. I hung out in these spaces outside the 'Sunday brunch' normativity of married Cypriot middle-class life. There was a freedom entailed in the possibility of being out at a time dedicated to the married indoors, a lens made possible through separation.

My paths crossed in these time-spaces with those of migrants, outside the contours of society's primary organizing institution. One turns into a home,

spaces outdoors when one's sense of home has been challenged. So did the migrant workers, the women from Sri Lanka who sat in the grounds of the municipal gardens with their friends every Sunday. I also lingered in the streets of the old town, south the border of my marriage, turning the uncanny into homely in unlikely spaces. One domesticates a city by lingering in its spaces in unexpected ways, at odd times. I noticed that those who walk the city at these other times, outside the time-space of marriage, greeted one another hello, unbeknownst to one another, as if this discovery of the early morning breeze and its caress of one's face was a tightly held secret.

The transformation was existential. My entire being had undergone change, once in a new time-space horizon. I moved differently within myself, in my body. My expressions, my smile felt different to my face. Even my arms, legs, my limbs stretched more, as if there was more space for them within which to be. I walked life in a new way, striding through anew, through back streets, each time discovering another crevice of Nicosia, beyond the mainstream, and far from the main streets.

The migrant women met each other in the churches on Sundays, their only day off work and beyond the gaze of their employers. They sang rhythmically together, with arms raised high, chests enlarged. To Mother Mary, to Jesus, to their own God. I sat in the churches by their side. Listening to the music they made and riding along the transcendence they created in unison.

And outside the confines of the married home, it was friendship that grew. As one cares for one's plants, with water and sunlight, I nourished my friendships. Without a husband with whom to negotiate one's relations with others, my friendships reached depths previously unknown. Conversations lengthened. They were no longer cut, controlled, or self-censored. This re-bordering of life had allowed a new imagination to emerge. Observations of middle-class married life from the outside in, inside out. Humour reaching new platitudes.

I marked this dysfunctional city, with a border running through its under-belly, with new sites of memory. If its sites of marriage invoked affects of tension, imminent emotional danger, or unease, I walked through them post-marriage and re-inscribed them with mischief. If the paths of my married itinerary reminded me of jarring incidents or disturbance, I cut across them diagonally and drove through. This city which felt my innermost pain, transformed through separation into a town of jouissance. I discovered a new town aesthetic, another urban clock I had not previously perceived. I started noticing details that my eyes would not register before. Date trees bent in the evening breeze if you watched them carefully. Some women attended the Faneromeni church and bent backwards to plead with God. Women came out of church after the Saturday morning prayer holding each other's arms...

## Susan Kozel

My second re-enactment for Pellapaisiotis' *Affective Mapping* project is a re-enactment based on affective doubling: it reveals how affect can be set in motion as an artistic strategy, but sometimes it overtakes us. Hijacks us. This is what happened with me when I met with Yael Navaro, an anthropologist and also one of the contributing artists.

Yael took me on a walk through her Nicosia –in particular the abandoned dwellings proximate to the dividing wall. Oddly, the intensity of the abandoned buildings did not create affective pressure points or density for me; her gestures did.

I absorbed Yael's gestures. Not intentionally, this just happened over the course of a conversation in a café about her life in Nicosia. Her life is one of divisions and borders, navigating a divided city on a daily basis, attempting to repair a divided life. Her description was raw not merely because of traumatic events, but due to her gestural vocabulary that maintained a vital and persistent counterpoint to her words: her arms, torso and legs were active, even while sitting, as she described her life and sketched her potential contribution to Pellapaisiotis' project. I noticed diagonal slashing gestures (across the heart, from shoulder to hip, arm out with a bodily torque) and a particularly striking gesture to exemplify dismemberment (arm up, dislocated from leg). The slashing intensity made its way to my hastily scrawled notes.

By setting in motion some of the affective potential offered by Yael's gestures, I was struck by the ethical tensions latent to re-enacting another's movements: ethics in relation to her, but to myself too. Re-enacting: but these are not my gestures. My heart hurts. This affect is shared but it is not mine. I have a choice to hold it or to perform it. Performance is transmutation as well as surrogacy. How not to get stuck reliving the pain of others.

As I began to experiment with performing my recollection of Yael's gestures, the process integrated Yael's body and my body in a way that went beyond re-enactment. Affective doubling made sense for me because it accounted for both the philosophical and the performative dimensions of the way I could hold gestures that were not my own, along with their affective charge. It explained how I could be aware of performing the gestures of another, but acknowledge that my heart hurts with the affective residue. I understood on a physical and phenomenological level what Massumi meant when he said, "affective doubling gives the body's movements a kind of depth that stays with it across all its transitions" (Massumi 1995, 4) –in this case the transitions spanned bodies. I did not want to get stuck reliving the pain of another, but I wanted to give this archival 'material' the care and attention it deserved without simply appropriating it. In the short clip below, of my re-enacting Yael's gestures, Jeannette Ginslov enters into the doubling of affect with her video editing, the affective exchange travelled further across bodies and media.

These three discrete voices offer an interwoven narrative that finds its purpose by seizing the quality of what it means to be a living body moving through the facticity of one's own physical, socio-spatial, and sentient environment. Each contributor demonstrates in their own way how, in practice, what is sensed by the body is abstracted into its potential as an activity in the mind and given a new form. Affection doubles into conscious reflection, which gains an outward tangible dynamic that has the potential to continue transforming into new forms of expression that are designed to retain the element of continuous transformation. *Archival Bodies* thus connects walking in the city to narration and offers a way of working that seeks to extend the archive beyond collecting evidence of facts or preserving memory to thinking of how the living present is memorized and translated from experience into form. This is achieved by responding aesthetically to phenomena encountered at the juncture, between narrative construction, somatic awareness, and lived spaces; for this reason archiving and narrative construction are perceived as natural dimensions of living. The significance of narrativising the city from this perspective is that it offers a choice other than conceiving Nicosia as something to be observed from a distance and to be understood conceptually in terms of signification and representation. Rather, *Archival Bodies* approaches the city as a relational space where the unpredictability of human encounters, and the sharing of sensations, feelings, and thoughts, are configured and translated into narrative assemblages that are relevant and answerable to their environment but do not necessarily belong to a single storyteller.