

CHRISTODOULOS PANAYIOTOU, by November Paynter for Contemporary

(Special issue on Performance)

Christodoulos Panayiotou's works are all performance-based and collectively they span every level of what one could describe as a spectrum of the performative in art– from creating a space for activity such as dancing, to the directing of actors and events, to the recording and tracing of both the artist's and society's 'performances'. His practice is therefore difficult to sum up. To explore his works via a method of chronology or cross-referencing feels redundant, in favour of looking at it as a series of branches that stem out from a performative centre. Panayiotou adopts a similar process in his analysis of his own work, most specifically, at this moment in time, in relation to one of his more literal performance works *Slow Dance Marathon* (2005 -). *Slow Dance Marathon* was first realised in Thessaloniki in 2005 on a stage set up in a wooded enclave, at an outdoor mini-concert venue, in which a chain of people danced to well-known love songs. Each person would dance for one full hour, with alternate partners changing every 30 minutes and so on, and so forth, until a whole day and night had passed. The second rendition with the same title was organised for Tel Aviv. Here an additional 24 hours were added, making the marathon a two-day affair. As anticipated, the third in the series planned for Istanbul, will take place over three days. Unlike similar artist-initiated events, Panayiotou is more interested in the sociological interactions created by the situation than the psychological reasons why people agree to participate. He admits that his intention is open to interpretation, but for him it is about creating a relational space, and the way people act within that space produces an opportunity to decode and analyse a spectrum of 'amorous dialectics'.

The act of 'slow dancing' resurfaces in a number of Panayiotou's other works. He finds this form of dance radical in comparison to other social dances, in the sense that it boasts emotional familiarity and the generation of a radically intimate space while being totally accessible through its lack of codified moves. In *Forever is gonna start tonight* (2004), which like all of Panayiotou's works is part performance and part real life, the audience in the role of participants are invited to enter into a series of actions and dialogues with the three performers, one choice being to enter into a slow dance. As one-to-one relationships are formed the work unfolds like a soap opera, but one that is part script, part improvisation and part reality – the performers maintained their own identities and personalities while on stage. Within this work, the degree of literal performance rises and falls throughout its duration, as do the levels of intimacy between the audience and the performers. In a way this work simply restages aspects of life itself, which Panayiotou describes as a form of theatre, in order to interrogate certain forms of representation.

Another branch of his practice includes works like *Sunday* (2005) and *Alkadashlar* (2006) part of the work *Truly* (2005) for which Panayiotou won the Deste Prize in 2005, and most recently *Prologue: Quoting Absence* (2006). For these Panayiotou takes on a more directorial role, as the emotional impact of the works is less to do with the experiences of the protagonists, and has more to do with the appreciation of its audience who are confronted with it in the end result. For *Sunday*, 80 street cleaners were contracted to collect over two tonnes of confetti from the streets of Limassol following the city's grand carnival parade. The confetti was then taken to the Nicosia Municipal Arts Centre and piled to one side of the space, a sculptural remnant of a collective experience. To create the video *Alkadashlar* Panayiotou's orchestration stretched even further to commission fighter planes from the British base in Cyprus to draw the shape of a heart in the sky. The work was shown in Istanbul on a Lumacom screen atop the towering Marmara Hotel in Taksim Square to coincide with the visit of the Greek Foreign Minister following the mid-air collision between jousting Greek and Turkish fighter planes over the Aegean Sea. The symbolic timing of this screening, its location and monumental proportions emphasise clearly the way Panayiotou plays with the various roles of artist-director, performer and audience within his constructions. This is also clearly evident in *Prologue*:

Quoting *Absence*, a work commissioned by Modern Art Oxford that is a conversation on the theme of absence between four Oxford University scholars from the academic schools of Philosophy, Theology, Astrophysics and Arts. Played in an empty gallery as a form of 'reversed landscape', the desired intellectual conversation that comes about as the result of experiencing a work of art, is in this case, already there. As with *Slow Dance Marathon*, Panayiotou plans to develop this work in two further parts with a video and a performance epilogue, perhaps making this the new pivot for his practice.

November Paynter