

# RECENT EXPERIENCES OF URBAN RITUAL PERFORMANCES, INSPIRED BY DIMITRIS PIKIONIS'S WALKWAYS IN ATHENS

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*Abstract:* Dimitris Pikionis (1887-1968), architect and teacher, started his career by proposing new architecture based on 'trans Hellenic forms' or transcendent continuing forms from antiquity to modern times. Pikionis's acquaintance with Giorgio de Chirico led to his new approach of 'Hellenism' (or Greekness) through vernacular art in conjunction with Modernism. For several decades after Greece liberation from Turks, several architects proposed bizarre plans for the area around and on the top of the Acropolis, such as the proposal of a palace of the first king, in which the Parthenon was reduced to a mere decorative feature of the palace gardens. Several other proposals until early 1950s proposed archaeological park areas. However the search of Greekness had remained elusive and ambiguous in all these proposals. Only Dimitris Pikionis captured what many authors, suggested as the close relationship between nature and culture; the temples adored the gods of the earth and the plants, such as the olive tree. Dimitris Pikionis names as 'homorhythmia' the rhythm that governs collective forms of life, of the topography of the earth and of art and architecture. His masterplan of re-landscaping the area surrounding the Sacred Rock of Acropolis lets nature envelope the ancient ruins by obeying nature principles. Pikionis was inspired by the painters of his time such as Cezanne, Paul Klee and Giorgio de Chirico, but attends forms rather than colours. Athens has now re-discovered the work of Dimitris Pikionis and his teaching to his students in strong rooted Classicism and culture in relation to nature. He directed and supervised his students and workers building new urban pathways by using marble and stone fragments spread around the hill of the Acropolis from ruined temples and houses from Classic to Byzantine eras. His paths are still followed by locals and visitors. Recently these paths were tested by the author, her colleagues and students of arts and architecture, participating in Dance Architecture Spatiality, an Erasmus research project. Students were inspired by the paths and surrounding areas and created an urban ritual performance with the guidance of a well-known choreographer; people present in that area during rehearsals and the main performance became spontaneous participants and enjoyed a different urban and cultural walk to the top of a hill opposite to the Acropolis, a celebration of Classicism through modern human behaviours. In his *Inhabiting Time*, Juhani Pallasmaa also refers to the "device of time in architecture" by affirming that Pikionis's pathways of natural and found man-made ancient stones "evoke a dense architectural narrative with a feeling of deep time; ... the layering of styles and the juxtaposition of different uses and activities – commonplace and ceremonial, utilitarian and symbolic – place us comfortably in the continuum of lives through centuries".

*Keywords:* Hellenism/Greekness; Homorhythmia; Landscape Architecture; Rituality in Urban Walks; Human behaviours; Device of Time in Architecture; Harmonious Spatiality; Harmonious Body Motion.

## 1. Dimitris Pikionis's metaphysical landscaping in front of the Sacred Rock of the Acropolis of Athens.

Dimitris Pikionis (1887–1968) was a professor of architecture at the School of Architecture in Athens. He is considered as one of the most emblematic personalities of Greek era between the two World Wars. During that particular period, Pikionis was able to combine Greek tradition with European Modernism. He was born in Piraeus where he attended local schools. He studied architecture in Munich and fine arts in Paris, and then, he returned to Greece, where he taught at the National Technical University of Athens. Amongst his architectural work, we find buildings and urban planning in Athens and elsewhere in Greece—including several schools and a playground in Filothei, Athens. Educated in both Eastern and Western traditions, Pikionis approached Greekness (Hellenism) in architecture and nature from a deeply emotional and respectful, point of view. For him, Greece has always been affected by the adverse and complicated currents that cross over an area located between three continents (Europe, Asia and Africa). He

believed in the unseen harmony of the world, a deep internal uniqueness he called ‘Nomos’ (=Law). This Law prescribes the necessary and useful that makes human work natural, factual and impartial<sup>1</sup>.

In 1933, in advance of the fourth International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM IV), Pikionis published a short document, in which he put in writing his own vision of modern architecture regarding specific cultural and climatic locality conditions in which architecture materialises; he does not agree with Modernism’s universalism, and especially with the use of grey concrete in modern buildings<sup>2</sup>. CIAM IV, during which the Charter of Athens was discussed, was launched on S.S. Patris a liner during its journey from Marseille to Athens. Then, the congress moved to the Polytechnic of Athens; it concluded with a conference and an exhibition dedicated to Modernist city planning. Pikionis’s idea of modern architecture is clearly expressed in his work by blending the new with Greek vernacular typologies; his work denotes the ancient, and sometimes mythical past, combined with nature. Pikionis’s notion of natural environment is that all cultural forms originate from Mother Nature, and in the long run, they are destined to return to nature again. Kenneth Frampton believes that Pikionis utterly renounces “... our habitual fixation on the freestanding technical and/or aesthetic object, not to mention our destructive, Promethean attitude towards nature<sup>3</sup>.”

“While Pikionis realized very little in his life time ... he nevertheless strove for an ontological architecture in which both subject and society would be mutually redeemed ... Pikionis’s architecture was an architecture of hope. While he was only too aware of the harshness that was enveloping his beloved Greece, he nonetheless maintained the vision of a Mediterranean “other,” a Baudelairean sense of *luxure, calme et volupté* shimmering in the light, after the demise of technology”<sup>4</sup>.

According to his philosophy and his relationship with Mother Earth, Pikionis affirms that a harmonic unity between light, air, and the geometry of a place, thus, his forms from nature exists:

“On wandering on this ground, kingdom of limestone and of clay, I saw the rock to transform into an architrave and the red clay to dye the walls of the imaginary temple ... The hair of Zeus like cliffs, and this polymorphous mountain, wandering on which I re-composed the harmony of its outlines, seemed to me like a Greek statue”<sup>5</sup>.

In his notes and texts, Pikionis affirms that he believed in “homorhythmia”; that means the rhythm which rules the forms of life, the geography of the earth, the local plants, and the arts, including architecture. Pikionis preferred to let nature wrap ancient ruins with its purest poetry and patterns of life. According to his ideas, ancient ruins obeying nature’s principles should also inspire new architecture. He believes that plants are part of an organic built environment, and the local fauna might be “an impression of the natural randomness”<sup>6</sup>. He sustained that a landscape architect or

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<sup>1</sup> Book: D. Pikionis, *Κείμενα (=Texts)*, Educational Foundation of National Bank, 1985.

<sup>2</sup> Excerpt from Dimitris Pikionis’s works’ exhibition catalogue at Benaki Museum in Athens; now available at <http://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/16225/dimitris-pikionis>, accessed on 30/07/2018.

<sup>3</sup> Edited book: Princeton Architectural Press, *Dimitris Pikionis, Architect 1887–1968: A Sentimental Topography*, Architectural Association, 1989; contribution by K. Frampton; same contribution by K. Frampton in a catalogue of an exhibition held at the Museum of Finnish Architecture, Nov. 24, 1993-Jan. 16, 1994 (Finnish text with English translation): A. Pikióni and H. Grönlund (ed.s), *Dimitris Pikionis, 1887-1968: Kreikkalainen Arkkitehti = a Greek Architect*, Suomen Rakennustaitteen Museo, 1993. An excerpt was also published recently at Benaki Museum catalogue <http://www.documenta14.de/en/notes-and-works/24119/dimitris-pikionis-1887-1968->, accessed on 30/07/2018.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Book: D. Pikionis, *Κείμενα (=Texts)*, Educational Foundation of National Bank, 1985.

<sup>6</sup> Book: D. Pikionis, *Κείμενα (=Texts)*, Educational Foundation of National Bank, 1985.

designer should proceed with modesty and discretion in order to respect both nature and ruins revealed by archaeologists.

Pikionis's landscaping project (1954-1958) for the Acropolis and Philopappos Hill (opposite the Sacred Rock of Acropolis) is considered his most important and unique architectural and urban design intervention. In 1954, Konstantinos Karamanlis, then Minister of Public Works commissioned to Pikionis a large and unique project of approximately 80,000 square meters: landscaping the Acropolis's impressive west side by connecting the Philopappos Hill to the Propylaea of the Sacred Rock. Pikionis was considered the right person of high moral standards for this task. In fact, he showed an amazing dedication and delivery for this vast project<sup>7</sup>.

Pikionis's landscaping shows a system of footpaths, exclusively paved with stones, a mix of ancient spolia and contemporary urban ruins. The new system of pathways followed and extended the existing ones on the hills. The landscaping is innovative and radical; that means architecture learned from its own circumstances. Working collectively with his students and local stonemasons, Pikionis practised a laborious technique of paving, using retrieved rubble from demolitions in fast developing Athens, in which older medieval narrow streets had created neighbourhoods, cramming empty spaces around the ancient monuments<sup>8</sup>. His landscape design remains the only urban-scale project ever to take place on these legendary hills; its views are still far-reaching up to Piraeus port (Fig. 1). Most of his early sketches and drawings for this project - now property of Benaki Museum in Athens - show his strong interest in reading and interpreting the cultural and natural palimpsest of these areas that link such important monuments to ordinary urban spaces<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Books: D. Philippides, *Μοντέρνα αρχιτεκτονική στην Ελλάδα (=Modern architecture in Greece)*, Melissa, 1984 & 2001.

<sup>8</sup> During the twentieth century, the Sacred Rock of the Acropolis has been subjected to two major innovative attempts of landscaping: once by the American School of Classical Studies (ASCS) at Athens (1954-1960) and once by Dimitris Pikionis (1954-1958). The ASCS attempted the restoration and reconstruction of the Attalos Stoa in the ancient Agora (Kerameikos) near Acropolis. The Agora landscaping, considered as a controversial project by several authors, was mainly created by plants to fill the gaps between ancient buildings. See article in newsletter: H. A. Thompson, R. E. Griswold and the *Landscaping of the Agora Excavations*, "Newsletter of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens", 1982, Fall Issue, pp. 7-8.

<sup>9</sup> Manolis Iliakis, architect and teacher at Vakilò School of Arts in Athens, Greece, affirms that most of the sketches, paintings and drawings of Dimitris Pikionis were donated by his family to the Archives of Modern Greek Architecture at Benaki Museum in Athens; an exhibition with the title "Dimitris Pikionis, 1887-1968" was inaugurated in 1911 and was open until 13/03/2011. We find photographs of the artefacts and drawings exhibited at <http://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/16225/dimitris-pikionis>, accessed on 30/07/2018. Manolis Iliakis has published several articles in: [www.greekarchitects.gr](http://www.greekarchitects.gr) web site, referring to Dimitris Pikionis's work and his latest influences to an international Erasmus research project with the title "Dance Architecture Spatiality" (2012-2014). Articles: M. Iliakis, *The composition tools of D. Pikionis for Philopappos Hill*, 2011, available at [www.yolkstudio.gr](http://www.yolkstudio.gr), accessed on 30/07/2018; M. Iliakis, *Now or never 2012*, "Greek Architects" (online), 23/02/2013, available at: [http://www.greekarchitects.gr/site\\_parts/articles/print.php?article=6958&language=en](http://www.greekarchitects.gr/site_parts/articles/print.php?article=6958&language=en), accessed on 30/07/2018.

Fig. 1 – The author, *View from Philopappos Hill towards Piraeus Port* (photo during DAS 2012).



Pikionis considered the Acropolis project as an aesthetic adventure or a journey in the historical past of Athens. One of the practical problems he had to resolve was access to the Acropolis and to Philopappos Hills. He only proposed walks, which are more convenient for pedestrians. His main aim was to protect the classical ruins and create a space between ancient, popular, and modern architecture<sup>10</sup>. According to Kenneth Frampton, Pikionis's landscaping represents a case of "progressive regionalism"<sup>11</sup>. He had to think thoroughly before considering a suitable plan of interventions; he was challenged by a site already planted. However, in the case of Philopappos Hill, this site had been covered by urban houses during the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

Pikionis maintained and incorporated ancient traces into new arrangements by connecting them with a system of footpaths; this method "... opened ongoing dialogues between the ancient, the popular, the Byzantine, and the neoclassical. Establishing this sort of historical continuum in Greek cities constitutes a fundamental desideratum in Greek society today; this is attested in the treatment of non-classical monuments close to the Sacred Rock"<sup>12</sup>.

## **2. Dimitris Pikionis's architectural and philosophical approach to urban space: the "spirit of the place" in time.**

The Sacred Rock of the Acropolis occupies an eye-catching place in the heart of the Athens. As a symbol both of democracy and of high cultural achievement, the Rock continues to influence the modern world's imagination. Several authors affirm that the eradication of the Rock's sacredness in Western representations is enlightening; Giorgio de Chirico noted, that the Sacred Rock often assumes the aura of a "stone vessel" that "sails away"<sup>13</sup>. The Rock encompasses a large part of Greek mythology, which is the foundation of Greek art; myths acquaint human thought with abstractions and express an understanding of the essential<sup>14</sup>. Argyro Loukaki suggests that: "...

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<sup>10</sup> Special book publication: A. Papageorgiou-Venetas, *Athens: The Ancient Heritage and the Historic Cityscape in a Modern Metropolis*, Issue 140 of The Archaeological Society at Athens Library, 1994.

<sup>11</sup> Book: K. Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, Thames and Hudson, 1992 and 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Article: A. Loukaki, *Whose Genius Loci?: Contrasting Interpretations of the "Sacred Rock of the Athenian Acropolis"*, "Annals of the Association of American Geographers", 1997, 87, 2, pp. 306-329.

<sup>13</sup> Article: G. de Chirico, *A Night on the Acropolis*, "Tefchos", 1989, Volume 2, pp. 24-25.

<sup>14</sup> Book: K. Dowden, *The Uses of Greek Mythology*, Routledge, 1992.

monumentality springs from the eternal need for people to create symbols for their activities ... and their social convictions”<sup>15</sup>.

“To intervene in the material conditions or symbolic understandings of a complex of monuments such as those that rest on and surround the Sacred Rock of the Acropolis is to intervene, therefore, in the self-understanding of a whole people. The reactivation of art and myth is considered by some as a reflection of a cultural childhood, ... as part of a process of achieving self-knowledge and development through mimesis ... for mimesis to be creative, it must be of a “higher level” ... or, as Plato argued, it must be attentive to the qualities of the original, correctness, as opposed to unreflective servitude to similarity”<sup>16</sup>.

However, Pikionis proceeded empirically, as we can see in his sketches for the site; he was also influenced by various historical and geographical styles, as well as numerous world heritages and myths. For example, Pikionis may have been inspired by Paul Klee’s 1929 paintings; this hypothesis makes allusion to archaeological traces clearly distinguished from more recent partitions in the land. However, in Pikionis’s landscaping, pathways and architecture seem a timeless and self-evident part of the setting. When the path comes closer to the most important ancient monuments, the forms obey to more austere geometrical patterns, whilst going up Philopappos Hill, Pikionis’s path resembles a work of modern art produced with concrete and carved stones. By varying the width of the stone work and the layout of the borders, he negotiates with the natural background<sup>17</sup>.

Pikionis was eventually influenced by the Cubists, primarily Picasso and Braque; he made a wide-ranging use of architectural collage, which was equally referring to the Spanish architect Antonio Gaudi and Byzantine architecture. He recycled architectural elements from neoclassical Athens. The material confidence of architectural elements, which were saturated with humanity provided Pikionis with unexpected suggestions, such as an escape from the “aridity of geometrical abstraction”<sup>18</sup>. He appreciates Cézanne and his powerful association to landscape in relation to architectural and natural elements, and borrows ideas from early Giorgio de Chirico and his cryptic urban space settings.

From Greek artists, humanists and philosophers of his time, such as Eleni Vakalò, painter, poet art critic and art historian, Pikionis learnt to deal with forms rather than colours; this is evident in the variety of tones of his structural elements, created by contrast and shadows upon surfaces of marble or stone, and even casting shadows from his St Demetrius portico structures and stone benches<sup>19</sup>. He cherishes tactile and often freely handpicked materials. Nevertheless, he does not use any sculptures in his project. His selected materials are arranged in two or three dimensions in order to form a variety of patterns and geometric shapes (Fig. 2).

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<sup>15</sup> Article: A. Loukaki, *Whose Genius Loci?: Contrasting Interpretations of the “Sacred Rock of the Athenian Acropolis”*, *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Article: Y. Ekonomaki-Brunner, *Dimitris Pikionis: The landscaping of a Site* (in Greek), “Tefchos”, 1991, Volume 5, pp. 74-82.

<sup>18</sup> Book: F. Iscan, *Collage*, Parramon, 1986.

<sup>19</sup> Book: E. Vakalò, *Η φουσιολογία της μεταπολεμικής τέχνης στην Ελλάδα. Τόμος Γ'. Ο μύθος της ελληνικότητας (= The character of post-war art in Greece. Volume 3. The myth of Greekness)*, Kedros, 1983.

Fig. 2 – The author, *Tactile experience with Pikionis’s materials*, Individual performance during DAS 2012.



Another important element in Pikionis’s landscaping is the lack of water surfaces or fountains; people and artefacts, including the Acropolis, are only mirrored in rainwater puddles. Regardless of any other historic period or foreign influences, Pikionis’s style is indisputably Greek. People’s appreciation of Byzantium directed him to use pergolas, terracotta decorations, stone benches, and loads of textures. However, in the space around St. Demetrius church, he introduces a sequence of semi-open spaces, which ignore neoclassicism; architectural forms are made of unfinished timber structures, all together of which may refer to either Japanese or Greek Byzantine monasteries’ courtyards, and his version of the hut, as the origin of the Doric style. The combination of natural and structural elements rise from the ground by respecting undivided arrangements of nature and architecture. Manolis Iliakis refers to the notes published by Dimitris Pikionis in 1958 in *Zygos* journal, in which Pikionis affirms that he is somehow close to Modernism. However, Modernism was converted into some kind of architecture to be closer to the people, or, as Kenneth Frampton puts it, to be recognised by both its Greekness and Anti-Greekness<sup>20</sup>.

Some authors think that Pikionis’s rearrangement of fragments could be the closest representation of the Cubists’ non-perspectival third dimension:

“... his succession of views with introvert, extrovert, and orientated visual horizons is cinematic in its effects ... Different views of the same object from sudden and unexpected angles emerge hierarchically, selectively, and in restricted number—the Acropolis being the main visual target. His vistas are systematically calculated in static and dynamic terms, as parts of the composition and of the dynamic movement of the visitor. He thus introduces a sense of the fourth dimension, of trajectories in time and space. In this way, he furthers the Cubists’ time space experiments”<sup>21</sup>.

Pikionis’s landscape seems timeless. Nonetheless, he manages to remain rational in a modern way; his approach to the past time increases its flow and continuity. Recently, Juhani Pallasmaa, David Harvey and others discuss on the importance of time as a dimension of the postmodern

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<sup>20</sup> Article: M. Iliakis, The composition tools of D. Pikionis for Philopappos Hill, 2011, available at [www.yolkstudio.gr](http://www.yolkstudio.gr), accessed on 30/07/2018; Article in edited book/collection: M. Iliakis, *Dimitris Pikionis’s Compositional Tools in Modification of Filopappou Hill and “Now or Never” Dance performance*, in F. Villemur (ed.), *Dance Architecture Spatiality*, éditions de l’espérou, pp. 23-34:29.

<sup>21</sup> Article: A. Loukaki, *Whose Genius Loci?: Contrasting Interpretations of the “Sacred Rock of the Athenian Acropolis”*, *op. cit.*

architecture today in comparison with previous architectural periods of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. They think that, from mid-twentieth century onwards, aesthetic of space has become the only primary issue for architects. The problem of time might have been a primary consideration during the first decades of the twentieth century<sup>22</sup>. However, Juhani Pallasmaa and Karen Frank argue about the humankind being able “to dwell in time” as much as in space:

“... architecture mediates equally our relationship with this mysterious dimension, giving it its human measure. We cannot live in chaos, but we cannot live outside of time either. Places and duration are integral components of the existential experience itself. We sense the world and ourselves through the horizon defined by our structures – material and mental, built and metaphysical – and this relationship gives the experience of being its very meaning”<sup>23</sup>.

In fact, it is in Pikionis’s landscaping that we discover his contemplation of the dialectic of space and place; he tries to understand “the spirit of the place” (or “genious loci”) of the most significant symbolic “Topos” (=place or locus) of Western civilization: the Sacred Rock of Acropolis. Architects and urban designers in particular have often invoked the idea of the spirit of the place as a privileged means for understanding the special qualities of place.

The complex nature and the unique qualities of “the spirit of the place” often command our perception of the rules that conceive new landscapes. The spirit of the place is often seen as the outcome of a physical historical process and the production of places as a multi-layered interaction between nature and culture, in which mythical, ethnic, aesthetic, and artistic considerations move in<sup>24</sup>. In Philopappos Hill landscaping, the architect expresses “the common and the universal”, while remaining conscious of the importance of history and society. This position intensifies the dynamic and continuous interface between both the local and the distant as well as the past and the present, thus, the fourth dimension: time.

In *Inhabiting time*, Juhani Pallasmaa and Karen Frank affirm:

“... the historicity of the edifice ... turns into the archaeology of time as the structure gradually reveals its layered architectural narrative ... profound works of architecture and art serve as bridges between eras, connecting the most ancient with the newest. A distinct slowness and silencing of experience is an essential ingredient of artistic greatness. ... Yet, we can also experience a similar dense and tactile temporal reality in the master works of modernity. These buildings do not merely communicate the dimension of ‘now-ness’; they invite us into a deep timeless space by activating the historical depth dimension. The view that modernity has turned its back on history and time seems a complete misinterpretation. Great works always enter into a dialogue with the past, making us sense time as an authoritative and calming presence and continuum, not a momentary or disappearing instant”<sup>25</sup>.

Pikionis’s landscaping is so engaging because of the way he understands urban reality as something extremely complex and at times contradictory by combining new urban myths with mythical spaces. His “spirit of the place” is the product of dynamic interaction between nature and culture, respect to the global character of ancient architecture, to modern urban and social needs, and

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<sup>22</sup> Book: D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Blackwell, 1992.

<sup>23</sup> Article: K. S. Frank and J. Pallasmaa, *Inhabiting Time*, “Architectural Design”, 2016, 86, 1, pp. 50-59.

<sup>24</sup> Book: E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, University of California Press, 1973; Article: C. Zumbusch, *The Life of Forms: Art and Nature in Walter Benjamin and Henri Focillon*, “Aisthesis: Pratiche, linguaggi e saperi dell'estetico”, 2015, 8, 2, pp. 117-132.

<sup>25</sup> Article: K. S. Frank and J. Pallasmaa, *Inhabiting Time*, *op. cit.*

finally to the modern Greek aesthetics<sup>26</sup>. Bodies and brains may travel in time to sense the spirit of a place just for few moments, as its beauty is timeless (Fig. 3). Harmony of the space instigates harmonious move and human behaviours at the highest level of satisfaction.

Fig. 3 – The author, *Body experience with new urban reality and ancient myths*, Individual performance during DAS 2012.



In *Inhabiting Time*, we find a photograph being included, which shows the detail of a trace of antiquity incorporated into Pikionis's pathway of man-made patterns by stone fragments. The caption reads:

“The pathways, compiled of fragments of natural and found man-made stones, evoke a dense architectural narrative with a feeling of deep time. The layering of styles and the juxtaposition of different uses and activities – commonplace and ceremonial, utilitarian and symbolic – place us comfortably in the continuum of lives through centuries”<sup>27</sup>.

By referring to the devices of time in architecture, Pallasmaa and Frank affirm that the most suitable ones for humanity should be new historical settings via layering of styles:

“Historical settings connect us directly with time and the past: the layering of styles and the juxtaposition of different uses and activities – commonplace and ceremonial, utilitarian and symbolic – place us comfortably in the continuum of lives through centuries. Signs and traces of age, use and wear strengthen this experience ... the architecture of our time creates settings for the eye that seem to originate in a single moment and give rise to an experience of flattened temporality. Vision places us in the present tense, whereas haptic experiences evoke a temporal continuum”<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Article: A. Loukaki, Whose *Genious Loci?*: *Contrasting Interpretations of the “Sacred Rock of the Athenian Acropolis”*, *op. cit.*

<sup>27</sup> Article: K. S. Frank and J. Pallasmaa, *Inhabiting Time*, *op. cit.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

### 3. Dance Architecture Spatiality: Contemporary Body and Mind Interaction with Pikionis's time settings - *Now or Never*

We understand that Pikionis's landscaping was the product of an intense dialogue with place and space on various levels—the artistic, the political, the economic, and the symbolic—in a context of wide popular loyalty to the Sacred Rock of Acropolis. Urban authenticity involves spatial devices and time as a fourth dimension. As Argyro Loukaki puts it: "... Pikionis's landscaping wisely and daringly highlights the various and only superficially contradictory aspects of a place. Better integrations of new forms seem partly tied to the launching of new spatial experiments in urban design, experiments that reflect and advance similar efforts in the arts, as artistic and aesthetic continua"<sup>29</sup>. In fact, Pikionis's work attempts to reintroduce a walk along pathlines, which become a "ritual"/habitual itinerary for the people of today, locals or visiting wanderers, occurring before them for several centuries (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4 – The author, *Now or Never*, a kinetic action as ritual (photo during DAS 2012).



As Manolis Iliakis affirms, the plotting of the pathways on Filopappou Hill was designed on site, following Pikionis's numerous visits to the grounds, therefore, his own personal ritual. The final plotting was made on the traces of ancient paths and chiselling on rocks. The path followed the concept of the ancient Panathenaic Way, which was not pre-designed. It was gradually developed along footpaths used over the centuries; its stopping and moving points were settled by political decisions of direct democracy<sup>30</sup>. However, Pikionis provided new links to us with the ideals of Peripatetic philosophers, who left their footprints on that landscape. His own and his collaborators' bodily experiences and behaviours managed to determine new harmonious spaces, mysteriously and unconsciously bonding with our city experiences of today<sup>31</sup>.

In July 2012, the author of this paper and Manolis Iliakis had the opportunity to cooperate into Dance Architecture Spatiality (DAS) – Athens 2012, an international research project/workshop, during which teaching staff and selected students carried out and shared a series of sessions. These

<sup>29</sup> Book: A. Loukaki, *Living Ruins, Value Conflicts - Heritage, Culture and Identity*, Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Article: M. Iliakis, *Dimitris Pikionis's Compositional Tools in Modification of Filopappou Hill and "Now or Never" Dance performance*, op. cit.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

inspired students to produce individual projects and the *Now or Never 2012* dance team performance, a kinetic action under the supervision of French choreographer Patrice Barthès and all participating teachers.

The *Now or Never 2012* dance performance, which was performed along the Pikionis's pathways on Philopappos Hill, was to delve deeper into his landscaping. The kinetic improvisations and exercises that Barthès choreographed for the students aimed at bringing to the surface certain conceptual relations that are not visible. The idea of the ritual procession was the unifying theme of the performance. The presentation commenced at the start of the footpath by St Demetrius church and drew to a close at the *Andiron* (a panoramic view piazza opposite to the Acropolis West side) (Fig. 5). "The reinterpretation of spatial meanings was expressed through each performer's personally choreographed movement in the final presentation and through the "poetic" selections in the use of the space"<sup>32</sup>.

Fig. 5 – The author, *Now or Never*, view of the Acropolis from Andiron (photo during DAS 2012).



The author of this paper had the opportunity to teach students in Dance Architecture Spatiality on *Harmonious Architecture and Kinetic Linear Energy*; she observed students' behaviours during their daily exercises and their final performance, and made connections between the physics of the natural environment and landscape architecture in relation to interactions with the human body<sup>33</sup>. Students' work inspired by teachers was presented in their individual projects.

For example, one student project developed the idea of a possible agreement between nature and a new integrated design, as an opaque and tactile interior in the form of a labyrinth evolving on the slopes of the hill; a space to experience adaptability of the human senses during adverse conditions of confinement<sup>34</sup>. Another project proposed a spatial model for young people with the

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<sup>32</sup> Article: M. Iliakis, *Dimitris Pikionis's Compositional Tools in Modification of Filopappou Hill and "Now or Never" Dance performance*, op. cit.

<sup>33</sup> Article in edited book/collection: E. Tracada, *Harmonious Architecture and Kinetic Linear Energy*, in F. Villemur (ed.), *Dance Architecture Spatiality*, éditions de l'espérou, pp. 127-137.

<sup>34</sup> Short article in edited book/collection: K. Sale, *Fusion: Environments and Organisms*, in F. Villemur (ed.), *Dance Architecture Spatiality*, éditions de l'espérou, pp. 142-145.

condition of autism; the student proposed the disappearance of the sense of sight for the benefit of touch along and across markings, inspired by Pikiionis's patterns<sup>35</sup>.

In conclusion: "Lines penetrating inside built an open spaces generate pathways of everlasting rituals. Once we discover them and get involved with their energy, we become part of them unconsciously"<sup>36</sup>, perhaps for ever.

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<sup>35</sup> Short article in edited book/collection: N. North, *Guided Navigation and its Application in Special Needs Schools*, in F. Villemur (ed.), *Dance Architecture Spatiality*, éditions de l'espérou, pp. 146-151.

<sup>36</sup> E. Tracada, *Harmonious Architecture and Kinetic Linear Energy*, op. cit.

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