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Three works by Maria Theodoraki—each exploring the act of their own making, activating the territory between the visible and the hidden away, the communicated and the unspoken.

Can a line have a shape?

A drawing of a line is growing longer every day until it reaches the length of 2.600 metres, representing the distance between the artist's home and an exhibition space. Carefully measured, all its corners and angles preserved, the line is then lifted off the pages and re-drawn. But not all can be replicated and preserved.

Can endurance and effort be measured?

Another artist, film-maker John Smith, is captured repeating a series of words in Greek. He persists for as long as the tape runs. Attempting to voice the foreign sounds as close to the native's pronunciation as possible, in a slow, repetitive, tiresome process. The footage seems untouched, yet an absence is felt.

The presence of an absence.

A corner filled with volume.

A blue pyramid stands free in the middle of the space.

PALAGKAS, temporary:

199 Richmond Road
Hackney, E8 3NJ

1–22 July

Wednesday to Sunday
12–6 pm

Preview: June 30

Saturday, 6–9 pm

Maria Theodoraki was born in Greece in 1977 and has lived in England since 2005. Her work most often takes the form of films, installations, photographs or drawings. Solo and group shows include *Reel Around The Fountain* at JT Gallery, London (2011), *This Is To Be Looked At* at Banner Repeater, London (2011), *Drawing Room* at Omikron Gallery, Nicosia, Cyprus (2011), *Light Writing* at Sheffield Institute of Arts Gallery, Sheffield (2011), *Seeing In The Dark* at CIRCA Projects, Sunderland (2011), *Rules of Engagement* at Angus Hughes Gallery, London (2011), *American Mountains* at Auto Italia, London (2010) and *Greek Artists' Books: Contemporary Artworks and Editions* in Art-Athina 2010, Athens, Greece (2010). Her films were also screened in festivals including VIDEOEX International Experimental Film & Video Festival, Zürich, Switzerland (2012) and *Moving Silence* in Goethe Institut, Athens, Greece (2012).

Maria Theodoraki wants to thank Angus Braithwaite, Julia Crabtree, William Evans, Zuzana Flaskova, Tim Mitchell and Boo Wallin for their valuable help and support.

the line is an ongoing project originating from Maria Theodoraki's work *here* (2008) first presented by orbits.com

Texts by: Matt Packer, Gemma Sharpe and Venia Vergou

Typography & layout: Boo Wallin

the line

Gemma Sharpe

Maria Theodoraki's arduous though dedicated process of drawing the exact distance between two places into small notebooks could be described as a minimalist cartography that reconsiders both visual and topographical representations of populated space. Drawn page-by-page over a series of notebooks with archival ink, Maria's distinct, twisted and mathematical line will (eventually) account for a distance of 2.600 metres. The place of Maria's document—a network of streets in East London that link her home to a local gallery—is split, parsed and divided into a linear document that is dictated by limited rules. Recording a particular place by stripping any literal, topographical, aesthetic and demographic detail from it, Maria is utilising the language of absence within this work, which still remains in progress.¹

The representations excluded from Maria's line are not only the character of her streets, but also the labour of her production—the thousands of hours of drawing, counting, measuring and noting the slow progress of this tiny traversal, literally, from one place to another. In dislodging a place from a distance by documenting only the latter, Maria ushers our attention towards the formal and active elements of her work. She gently pushes our attention away from the place of her documentation and presses us to instead observe abstract documentations and threaded compositions. Along with this, we are requested to also recall an image of patient labour.

A map is a documentation and also a finishing point. Maria's line is a documentation and also a finishing point. She copies this line occasionally, and on demand. Using pages from the same form of notebook that 'the line' occupies, she will redraw the pages that her

¹ The 2.600 metre line that Maria Theodoraki is presently drawing into numerous notebooks, was begun on the 20th of September in 2010. By late May, the line was 977m 31cm 5mm long.

patrons most enjoy and upon reproduction, separate these copies from their books for independent display. The copies that she makes do not diverge from the line, they simply reproduce it, (for each page, only once). While Maria's line gives birth to more artworks, there can, however, be only one line.

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There are cities in the world that do not have maps. Though satellites, cartographers and colonials have drawn some, such contributions to the global atlas cannot be read at the places of their documentation and are customarily neglected. Residents cannot locate their homes on a map, or pass from one street to another upon its advice. They express a cartographic illiteracy borne of a long rejection of such pictorial guides. Either the cartographers once reserved their power by secreting their maps into locked drawers and onto bureaucratic pin-boards, or the topographically-assessed population reached a consensus that such documents were an imposition, unemployable, or simply another problem to solve. Even now in these cities, the mapped populations are unable to judge how each line, curve, patch of land or slip of water cartographically relates to another in the place in which they live. Traversal in these cities without maps becomes dialogic, historical and narrative. Directions rely on particularly apparent potholes, especially gaudy government buildings, or the homes of such people that everyone will inexplicably know. For these cartographic virgins, the city is not understood from above—flattened into a plane that only a god would fully see—but from the ground. To its inhabitants, the city is a network of distances: distances between important things, around certain things, and through things, (but never over them). The city is learned. The city is lateral.

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Maria: What do you think about the line?

Dearest, Your line reminds me of these cities without maps. Cities where distance is measured not by highly-titled men with power, armour and machines, but in little increments and by personal measures. In these cities measurement is bound to time, experience, and persistence. One's sense of place, proximity and distance in these cities must be learned and integrated into deep memory or one cannot survive. The risk of getting deeply lost compels one's daily effort to remember each junction and change in direction, and to log it for another time. One's mental cartography operates from the ground, and not from the sky. In these cities thought is dedicated to the linear span between the place here, the place to next apprehend, and an end of the line.

Your copies (those pages lifted out of the original notebooks by reproduction), are like repetitive journeys in such cities—journeys memorised by concentration and by individual choices. Selected from your books by the patrons of your 'line', these incremental reproductions are spatially owned by those patrons. You offer your patrons some laboured little distances, extracted from the line for a distracted preservation and cartographic apprehension of their own.

Gemma Sharpe (UK), is currently living in Karachi, where she is a lecturer in Art History at the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture and a coordinator for Vasl Artists' Collective—a platform for international artists' exchange and residency programmes. She has completed an MFA in Art Writing from Goldsmiths and has worked for the ICA, Afterall, Gasworks and the Triangle Network. She has published widely in Europe and South Asia and she is currently editing a book on *Symphony of a Missing Room*, a work by performance duo Lundahl and Seidl.

in place

Matt Packer

The only light there is comes from the computer screen. That, and a yellow candle that burns in an old-fashioned candle-holder at odds with everything else on the desk; the kind of candle-holder often seen used by cartoon butlers and pyjama-wearing, ghost-fearing inquisitors that venture nervously into basements and other semi-legitimate spaces, searching for spooks, edges, and bearings. I can't remember who gave me this ridiculous object, or whether it's even mine to begin with. I certainly didn't buy it myself, and nor am I from the kind of family that passes on antiquities from one generation to the next. It's worth nothing in any case, I'm sure. This text is written in the dark.

This text is also written in the dark in the sense that it attends to an artwork that, at the time of writing, has not yet been made. It is an artwork that will undoubtedly come, pulled forward by a deadline that this text shares: a deadline that I imagine like the sharp point of a toxic-coloured pictogram wedge. That point will be arrived at soon, but until it does, this text proceeds with nothing to see, no image to occupy and everything left open to contradict the capacities and duties of representing the artwork properly, drawing its outline and plenishing it with essential details and rhetorical turns. It is therefore tempting to linger in the vaguer territories of description, atmospheric evocation, and preamble, for just a little while longer. Any assertion too strong or too convincing is the haunting of this text. The proof will come later (as it always does) on the occasion of the exhibition, where there and then, it will become the reader's privilege to call things into account and declare all the imbalances and wrong suggestions, sentiments and saliences that may or may not be expressed here. I admit that some of the plans of the artwork were described in a phonecall, so the sense of proceeding blindly into darkness is not quite exact, not totally blind or

totally black. The sense of working into a corner is perhaps more appropriate, but not without its own injustices and an unwieldy crux of metaphors to follow.

It was described to me that the artwork will be a cast of one corner of the exhibition space, produced with a clay-like material, that, like all casting materials, needs to be at once mutable enough to be defined by the hard and impermeable perimeter of its opposite object (a section of two walls and floor in this case), and yet also possible of becoming fired solid and self-supporting. Through the process of casting, and perhaps also in terms of how the artwork is 'cornered' in its response to this text, the artwork works into a corner and works out of it in an act of simultaneous self-imposition and counter-maneuvre. This dynamic is further suggested by the artist's intention of presenting the cast at a short remove from the corner in the exhibition space that defines it, inverted on the floor-space like a pyramid. Here, the traditional space of shame, zero options, disobedient schoolchildren, potted plants and standing lamps, comes to approximate the more noble, autocratic structure of a pyramid built on its own foundations.

In that same phonecall, it was explained to me that the size of the cast will be determined by volume, and more specifically the volume of the artist's own body. This calculation of the artist's volume has its own story, involving a vitrine that was once used to display both Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917–64) and Sherrie Levine's *Fountain Bouddha* (1996), exhibited as part of the *Corporeal* exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery, London. Bought by the artist a year after the exhibition finished, complete with labels detailing the artist, title, date and materials of both works, the vitrine is both a memory of a particular

exhibition and a more open testimony to twentieth century artistic developments and the ensuing shifts of authorship and conceptual autonomy that both these works famously play out. This empty vitrine was once exhibited by the artist in its own right, but was more recently re-purposed to serve as a water-filled container in which the artist could be fully immersed, thereby making it possible with a little physics equation to ascertain the volume of the artist's body in cubic metres. (The vitrine eventually became a fountain of its own accord, when a small hole was drilled in the vitrine casing in order to slowly release the water). That same calculated volume is the volume of the present and immediate artwork that this text can't help but fulfill: the inverted object there on the exhibition floor, at a short remove from one corner of the exhibition space.

The object is the embodiment of the artist in the most literal sense, yet all reflection is refracted and nothing speaks back. The object is an embodiment of the artist occupied with other things, occupied with the terms of being occupied and shapeshifted by art historical specters and remote, blind writers. It is an object imposed by invisible forces, conjured with ghosts that appear at every corner and at every turn.

Matt Packer is a curator and writer, currently employed as Curator of Exhibitions & Projects at the Lewis Glucksman Gallery, University College Cork, Ireland, where has curated numerous exhibitions, including *Getting Even: oppositions & dialogues in contemporary art* (co-produced with Kunstverein Hanover, 2008), *Grin & Bear It: cruel humour in art & life* (2009), *School Days* (2010), and *Motion Capture* (2012). Independent curatorial projects include *FWA: Freeing Welsh Architecture* at Treignac Projet, France (2012), *A Neutral, Flexible Structure* at Hordaland Kunstsenter, Bergen (2012), *When Flanders Failed* at Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin (2011) and *Ice Trade* at ChelseaSpace, London (2007). His writings have been featured in magazines such as *Source*, *CIRCA*, *Journal of Utopian Studies*, *Photography & Culture*, and publications by Institute of Social Hyprocisy, FormContent, among others.

I hope it won't take long because I am very busy today and have very little time to spare. I am only doing this because you gave me raki, honey and olive oil.

Venia Vergou

An encounter with Maria Theodoraki's work entails an intriguing range of contrasting characteristics: fragility/determination, Greekness/universality, stillness/perpetual motion, hands-on approach/acute precision. An argument based mostly on her works *at sea* (2007), *690 days apart* (2009), and *the reading* (2011). In the video *I hope that this won't take long because I am very busy today and have very little time to spare. I am only doing this because you gave me raki, honey and olive oil* (2011), those characteristics are evident once again. The production process of this video composes a narrative equally valuable to the viewer as the video itself. Or rather, the narrative *is* part of the specific work. Besides, the association between the meaning of the work of art and the process of its creation, is a concern that permeates the entire body of Theodoraki's work. Here, the narrative acquires even greater significance due to the involvement of such an acclaimed artist as John Smith.

An established male British artist—whose narrating voice is a significant element in his work—is asked by an emerging female Greek artist to repeat a sentence of his choice in Greek on camera in a single shot. Their meeting on camera is the result of an unorthodox exchange. Theodoraki did not know Smith personally. She only saw him once before the recording when she asked of him to be the one to choose the sentence. At first, Smith was rather reluctant to find a sentence of his choice and proposed, instead, to open a book at random and pick up something from there. Yet, in the end he came up with the two sentences that form the title of the work. John Smith is finally on camera and the incessant shifting of power relations continues. The aim is for him to pronounce the two sentences as close to a native speaker as possible and the task will be completed once the MiniDV tape reaches its end (eventually 62 minutes and 32 seconds). His guide to this strenuous attempt

is Maria Theodoraki herself, who keeps directing his voice to the correct pronunciation of the words all the way through. Nevertheless, her role as Smith's prompter is obliterated in the finished work, since Theodoraki chooses to omit her voice by a painstaking process of sound editing that reached 1952 points.

As the title indicates, time is crucial. Both in terms of Smith's availability and of Theodoraki's initial intention for the final duration of the video. Temporality is also decisive regarding the social context at the period of the video's recordings. It was made in summer 2011 when the imminent threat of the exclusion of Greece from the European Community, due to its excessive debts to the IMF, was in the media's headlights as it would affect the course of the rest of the European economies. The instability that Greece was undergoing at the time (and still is), can also be read between the lines of the statement that Smith eventually chose for the title: *'You offer me hand-made goods from your Mediterranean home country and I offer you my time and my attention (under my conditions)'*. An exchange manifesting associations indicative of Greeks' economic dependence on Europe.

John Smith offers himself. With Maria Theodoraki framing him opposite her with no camera movement (as if the parroting of the foreign language is a moment of interrogation), Smith, the artist with the emblematic British name, becomes the object of observation for her (and the viewer). He becomes the medium for producing art. He becomes the signifier when the language he imitates is the signified. And as his enthusiasm and willingness effaces after a while, Theodoraki's frame reverberates with any possible (contradictory) thoughts he may have (*'I've had enough of this ...'*, *'this is fun ...'*, *'no, no, learning languages*

is not something that the English do ...', *'why did I get myself into this?'*). I assume that one of the reasons he got himself into this, is because he detected in the project preoccupations similar to the ones he had in one of his first videos, *Associations* (1975), where we hear his voice-over reading, 'Language, the critics say, should not be thought of as a consequence of built up associations. Rather, word associations should be thought of as a consequence of linguistic competence. Word associations have characteristically different effects depending on the rule the player has followed' *

* Extract from *Word Associations and Linguistic Theory* by Herbert H Clark.

Venia Vergou is a free lance film critic based in Athens. During the last eleven years her articles have been published in various prestigious Greek magazines, newspapers and websites, but also in *Sight & Sound* magazine (BFI). She has written a script for a feature film (*Choriner Strasse*) and she is co-founder of the production company Athens Filmmakers' Co-Operative, currently producing *Wild Duck*. She studied Communication and Mass Media at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and Film Studies and European Cinema (MA) at the University of the West of England, Bristol, U.K.

