

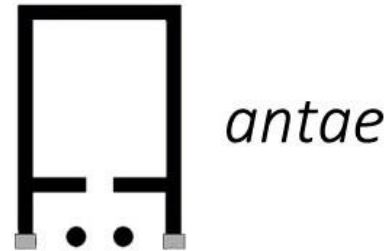
## Again, Plato's Garden, Again: a response

Aaron Aquilina

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*antae* (ISSN 2523-2126) is an international refereed postgraduate journal aimed at exploring current issues and debates within English Studies, with a particular interest in literature, criticism and their various contemporary interfaces. Set up in 2013 by postgraduate students in the Department of English at the University of Malta, it welcomes submissions situated across the interdisciplinary spaces provided by diverse forms and expressions within narrative, poetry, theatre, literary theory, cultural criticism, media studies, digital cultures, philosophy and language studies. Creative writing and book reviews are also encouraged submissions.

## Again, Plato’s Garden, Again: a response

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### Again

It seems an odd decision to assess and spend some time discussing, of all things, *antaе*’s eleventh issue. At first glance, “11” seems not an important number in the slightest; after all, it has neither the commemorative nuances that, say, the number “25” does, and nor does it have the rounded finality of a number like “10”. While the eleventh issue, however, recedes further into the past through this very publication, the act of thinking once again about Malta in a special issue dedicated to ideas of “Placing, Spacing, Displacing” does not, at least, seem entirely out of place.

Speaking of places: apart from the fact that I am here writing in my name and not as *antaе*’s general editor (however tremulous that distinction might be, and we are all aware, furthermore, of the fragility of names), this discussion would not have been well positioned as, for instance, the Editorial of the eleventh issue itself. An editorial preceding an issue very often speaks not only in the name but with the voice of all those published in it, whereas here I speak with my own. Voices, after all, are much more particular than names. Moreover, ever since *antaе*’s first issue back in January 2014, where the journal’s aims and ideas were set out, subsequent editorials have followed a fairly consistent format, this based on a brief exegesis of the issue’s general theme—posed more in interrogative rather than demonstrative tones—and a summation of the articles contained within, with commentary on the links and overlaps between essays that are overt in special issues and more subtle in the general ones.<sup>1</sup> Despite the temptation to subvert consistency, any rumination needs must take place at some remove from its object. To put this in words aligned with the present theme, critique is perhaps best located in a space connected to but ultimately removed from the place of the critiqued; critique, as that which displaces, is always itself already displaced.

The eleventh issue is a unique one in its own right, a fruition of the Editorial Board’s decision, in light of *antaе*’s roots and the then-upcoming Valletta 2018, to entirely decline international submissions in favour of local ones. The double-issue questions both *antaе*’s audience as well as *antaе* itself. And it emerges, in retrospect and through the very fact that it is a *double* issue, that a critique of “11” reveals it to be the perfect number for any re-evaluative purpose. As in schoolyard riddles, two-digit numbers can always be taken apart: “11” becomes simply a “1” following a “1”, a doubled “one”; the first time, for the second time; the first time, again. This is what *antaе* is, on(c)e more, on(c)e again. But what is it? Again, as I have done five years ago, I have to ask this of *antaе* now.

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<sup>1</sup> An exception to this format was the second Editorial, further outlining thoughts on the notion of interdisciplinarity, which were felt not made clear or elaborate enough in the first. See James Farrugia and Jeffrey Micallef’s ‘Editorial’, *antaе*, 1(2), (2014), 65-71 (pp. 68-70).

Let me start with the mere facts. This journal was the first peer-reviewed postgraduate journal affiliated with the University of Malta, publishing academic essays, interviews, book and conference reviews, and creative writing. It is open-access, charging neither contributors nor readers. The first three volumes show increasing trust placed in *antae*: from 211 pages of content, to 232, to 324, and had the fourth and most recent volume contained the usual three issues instead of two, this trajectory would have likely continued. The journal is rooted in literature, but, through meditating Derrida's oft-quoted '*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*', it finds literature to be something interdisciplinary, or even beyond disciplines, at "core".<sup>2</sup> The contributors—who have likewise challenged hegemonic views of the act of reading—comprise Master's and PhD students, as well as academics, independent thinkers and artists from across four continents and almost forty universities. By way of example, let me list these in order of appearance so far, including those in this issue: Malta, York, St Andrews, Cardiff, Coventry, Edinburgh, Ghent, Brunel, King's College, Leeds Trinity, Stony Brook, Vienna, Aveiro, Goldsmiths, Bristol, Murray State, New York City, Birmingham, Albany, Calabria, Calcutta, Central Connecticut, Oveido, Visva-Bharati, UCL, Ohio State, La Trobe, Nottingham, Lancaster, Aalto, Oregon State, Malmö, LMU Munich, Uppsala, Nova Gorica, Goethe University Frankfurt/Main, and Carthage.

Though I have omitted repeated entries from the above list, it is still clearly the case that submissions from Malta—that original and originary place, from where the first contributions emerged, and where (and for which) the idea of *antae* itself was born—were quickly outnumbered by international ones. For this growth, the journal has several people to thank: the Department of English at the University of Malta, for their guidance and training; the Advisory and Assisting Editorial Board; Jeremy Scalpello, who generously helps *antae* maintain its online platform; organisations such as the Institute of Utopian Studies (the founding members of which guest-edited issue 4.1); as well as, of course, all the contributors past and present.

And yet this growth seems to testify to something troubling. The university that engendered this project has let itself be buried under the second, third, fourth, and so on. As issues rolled by, submissions by Maltese scholars almost completely disappeared. Important questions beg to be asked. Has there been added, with *antae*'s maturity, increased trepidation to the process of submitting to a local journal? Is there instilled more acutely the feeling of the "not good enough"? Harsher (and even less optimistic) questions can also be posed. Of *antae*: has the journal in some way alienated its Maltese audience? Of others: can this lack of submissions in any way be read as evidence for the absence of critical thought on the Maltese Islands? Have the early issues already and all too quickly addressed the local demand for having a voice? If critical thinking indeed happens here, where are some of its most obvious products—critical writing, and art that is either critically-informed or which in turn challenges critical thought?

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<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak (Baltimore, MD, and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 158.

These latter questions are why it was decided that *antae* would halt international submissions, for that issue, and dedicate it to Malta and the Arts. It was time to bring to light what were sure to be engaging and pressing discussions; a return, so to speak, to *antae*'s first ambitions. The journal, in fact, was originally imagined as addressing the evident need for a professional publication space. As astutely noted by Ivan Callus back in 2011, 'Malta lacks professionally edited and refereed literary magazines for general circulation which could serve as outlets for critical ideas, for the publication of new fiction and poetry, and for incisive review of the most recent work in the arts'.<sup>3</sup> With *antae* now in its fifth year of publication—professionally edited, internationally refereed, free, and online for the purposes of instant and general circulation—there is attested another difficulty; or, rather, a difficulty that could only be brought to light with the emergence of *antae*: would such a 'literary magazine', once established, receive any submissions with requisite regularity, at least from its local sphere? Does a need for literary criticism, cultural critique and dialogue, in Malta, equate to its ubiquitous desire?

For instance, it was expected that more departments (specifically, ones from the Humanities) would have contributed to an issue about Malta, the country which houses them (geographically, politically, economically). As is, only three departments were involved: the Departments of Art and Art History, English, and Sociology. This statement by no means places the blame on any particular departmental ethos (it is not my intent to carry a discussion based on myopic and misrepresentative ascriptions of alleged shortcomings), but perhaps serves as an introductory example for what this journal sees as a much wider mode of thinking, one that finds familiarity in insularity rather than echo chambers and claustrophobia.

It is a shame that one can only imagine other contributions that would have rounded out the eleventh issue: possible book reviews for recently published works by Maltese authors which can serve as guidance, education, or inspiration for upcoming local writers; possible reviews of conferences such as 'New Dimensions in Translations in Malta' (21<sup>st</sup> October, 2016) or 'What am I? The Subject in Maltese Contemporary Literature' (3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2016), which can serve as evaluative guidelines towards the betterment of future conferences; possible commentary on spaces and initiatives such as *Spazju Kreattiv*, BLITZ, or *Lovin Malta*; possible critical takes on Maltese cultural events, sports, theatre productions, and relatively recent traditions (such as Inizjamed's Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival, *Notte Bianca*, *Żejt iż-Żejtun*, the Malta Jazz Festival, Earth Garden, and the like). In all these, there is much to be read that is going unread: and so where is "readership" in the Maltese Islands—that act of reading not only literature, but also of what is *de hors*? Ultimately, how does Maltese thought traverse the line—whether real or constructed—between *inside* and *outside*?

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<sup>3</sup> Ivan Callus, 'Incongruity and Scale: The Challenge of Discernment in Maltese Literature', *Transcript*, 2011. <<https://www.lit-across-frontiers.org/transcript/incongruity-and-scale-the-challenge-of-discernment-in-maltese-literature-by-ivan-callus/>>. [Accessed 19 January 2018]. The article was, at least in part, written in reaction to the debate around a controversial short story (Alex Vella Gera, 'Li Tkisser Sewwi', *Ir-Realta*, October 2009). While *antae* was originally conceived as, primarily, a creative writing magazine, it debuted as an academic journal instead, more focused more on 'critical ideas' but nonetheless strongly encouraging creative writing submissions.

This, however, does not directly translate into what many allege to be an absence of Maltese critical thought, and this line of thought is in fact something the eleventh issue challenges directly. It is not individual thinkers that are here being critiqued (or their supposed absenteeism), but their context, one that brings with it political and social forces that require both dialogue and patient engagement. It is not unrelated or accidental that political debates in Malta are so often farcical and shallow, and why a certain kind of politics continues to thrive while another form of politics remains impossible. This response, therefore, is an attempt to critically engage with the idea of “Malta and the arts”, prompted by the fact that putting together the eleventh issue—as a solely local issue—proved much more laborious work than collating an international one (such as the ones previous or this very issue). This fear or hesitation in front of the *pas*—the space that opens up in front of oneself—where critical thought hesitates to tread *outside* one’s department, critical circle, comfort zone, or even island, is precisely what needs to be addressed.

If a critical work implies an ethical engagement with and commitment to the work it critiques, what might make hesitant, then, the spirit of dialogue, the spirit of collaboration and inclusivity, or that of generosity? Despite *antae* not receiving the contributions imagined above, however, it is important to note that such seminal discourse does indeed take place. Vital locally focused publications often see print with the likes of PIN and other local publishing houses, and are rightly celebrated by events like the Malta Book Festival (organised by the National Book Council: this includes both local and foreign authors, discussions, and a conference). Aside from the many cultural events organised by *Moviment Graffiti*, *L-Għaqda tal-Malti*, *Kinemastik*, and *Spazju Kreattiv* (formerly St James Cavalier), there are many other productive endeavours regularly set up by Inizjamed—such as ‘*iii għal ikel*’ (6<sup>th</sup> October, 2017), an evening of food and poetry that forms part of a regular open mic series—or by the British Council, such as the ‘Art of Peace Exhibition’ (together with the Artraker Foundation, 3<sup>rd</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> March, 2017), an exhibit of international art in Valletta. Joint collaborations frequently set up events such as the recent ‘Anthony Burgess in Malta: Music, Literature, Film’ (11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> October, 2017), and the Storm Petrel Foundation last year held an exhibition (March 2017) centred around Oscar Wilde based on the work of a local collector—including items such as key to the cell he was jailed in.<sup>4</sup> There are also interesting ventures such as *Lehen il-Malti* (published by *L-Għaqda tal-Malti*), *Il-Pont* (edited by Patrick Sammut), or the budding ‘Isles of the Left’ online platform. I must also here mention one of the foremost spaces for Maltese criticism: *Il-Malti*, published annually by *L-Akkademja tal-Malti*.<sup>5</sup>

“Academy” is, in itself, a difficult word with difficult connotations—and we shall return to it shortly—but the image of the ivory tower is quick to come to mind, even if this is not necessarily the case. One recalls the grossly generalising terms of Mario Philip Azzopardi,

<sup>4</sup> Such collaborations are numerous. See, for instance, a list of such events on *Newspoint*. <<http://www.um.edu.mt/newspoint/events/umevents>>. [Accessed 9 January 2018].

<sup>5</sup> *Il-Pont* is an online, freely accessible magazine published quarterly as from October 2012: see <<https://issuu.com/patrickj.sammut>>. See also <<http://www.islesoftheleft.org>>, as well as *L-Akkademja tal-Malti*: <<https://akkademjatalmalti.org/>> and <<https://akkademjatalmalti.org/ir-rivista-il-malti/>>. [All accessed 23 January 2018].

Valletta 2018's Artistic Director of Events: 'I firmly believe that one of our problems is the academic attitude towards the arts. Academia has absolutely no idea of what goes on in the trenches of production. Academia sits back very comfortably; they are Monday night armchair critics'.<sup>6</sup> Playing the devil's advocate, the argument can indeed be made that most if not all of the above-listed events and publications—while persistent in their engagement with the arts—make their gestures within what can be considered the safe *inside*. The audience of these events, almost invariably, is the choir one always preaches to: *Il-Malti*, for instance, is only available to subscribed members; *antaë*, while open-access and international, is perhaps similar in that the registers it features are exclusionary in different ways. Furthermore, these are often interpreted solely in the ways in which they define and add to pre-determined notions of "Malteseness". In all this, there may be read a self-referential insularity that constructs its own boundaries, with critical works often simply becoming an extension of the original work—an exercise in promotional exposition—rather than extending criticism of such work beyond the audience receiving it. This self-perpetuated island-ness is what one finds across the board, again and again. Except when one finds its opposite.

On the other side, in fact, as antonym to "island", one finds the completely alien, imposed and invasive, what comes out of the blue (and perhaps, in this case, it would be apposite to say: "what comes out of the Mediterranean"). There seems to be no middle-ground, no awareness of troubled borderlines except the event of their complete erasure. One such example is the aforementioned Valletta 2018 foundation, directly related to the European Capitals of Culture programme and frequently referred to as "V18". This is an undertaking which can be characterised as one produced more for the consumption of the "overseas" than the local, a showcasing of the endemic which undermines all talk of supposed authenticity or national pride,<sup>7</sup> or the apparent need to display ourselves, as Mario Philip Azzopardi puts it, as 'culturally independent', proclaiming: "Europe we're here".<sup>8</sup> Though this shall be further discussed, one immediate irony in this is that, in trying to make Malta all the more international, it only makes it more insular; the more one tries to identify a (marketable, bankable) national identity to be presented to other cultures, the more difficult it is to keep open what one closes. Counter-intuitively, projects such as V18 only serve to make Malta smaller.

One must remember, through Malta's coloured history, that the identity of the "endemic" has always been a deeply problematic thought. Let me quote, once again, what Jeffrey Micallef and I have written in the eleventh issue's Editorial, engaging the problems of space and place:

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<sup>6</sup> Ramona Depares, "Everything is seen through a political filter - I'm sick of it"—Valletta 2018's Mario Philip Azzopardi hits back at critics', *Times of Malta*, (January 2018). <<https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20180128/arts-entertainment/interview-arts-academics-monday-night-armchair-critics.669051>>. [Accessed 28 January 2018].

<sup>7</sup> The ideas of authenticity and national pride were invoked by Maltese prime minister Joseph Muscat. See Helena Grech, "This Maltese festa will be marked by authenticity," says PM at V18 launch ceremony', *Malta Independent*, (January 2018). <<http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2018-01-20/local-news/Live-Valletta-officially-becomes-a-European-capital-of-culture-6736183848>>; and Tia Reljic, 'Muscat: V18 turnout is sign of national pride', *Malta Today*, (January 2018). <[http://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/83852/muscat\\_v18\\_turnout\\_is\\_sign\\_of\\_national\\_pride#.WmtuLk5I\\_IV](http://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/national/83852/muscat_v18_turnout_is_sign_of_national_pride#.WmtuLk5I_IV)>. [Both accessed 26 January 2018].

<sup>8</sup> Depares, 'Valletta 2018's Mario Philip Azzopardi hits back at critics'.



The island's very geography is difficult to outline—what is Malta, for instance, now missing the Azure Window, or before that losing a sizeable area of Filfla which 'the Royal Navy [had] used [...] for gunnery practice'?<sup>9</sup> Such questions, superficial as they might seem, are not at all disparate from the conceptual topography at hand here, as perhaps evidenced by the different legislatures that divide the islands' surrounding sea (Malta's territorial sea, contiguous zone, and exclusive fishing zone all measure different nautical miles; how far outwards does Malta extend?).<sup>10</sup> On land, these problems are not provided safe harbour. Not only are governmental and private jurisdictions, for example, continually being challenged or redrawn (the controversial pushback to and re-erection of fences on Manoel Island may come to mind here), but we ourselves are repeatedly made to question our origins and identity, our globalism and our borders, measuring our "Maltese-ness" by a list of national characteristics that at times seems both too rigid and simultaneously grossly unfounded or incomplete.

George Orwell's comments on English characteristics are thus also applicable here: 'National characteristics are not easy to pin down, and when pinned down they often turn out to be trivialities or seem to have no connexion with one another'.<sup>11</sup> One might also hear, just as pertinently, Jules Verne, who writes:

Does the isle of Malta, situated about sixty-two miles from Sicily, belong to Europe or to Africa, from which it is separated by one hundred and sixty miles? This is a question which has much exercised geographers; but, in any case, [...], it now belongs to England—and it would take some trouble to get it away from her. [...]. Assuredly there are English at Malta [...] [but t]he Maltese are Africans.<sup>12</sup>

A collective inheritance of historic accidents has acted to mould together a society that has historically formed—even due to precise geographic constraints that are easily identifiable—as "Maltese". The manner in which certain historic incidents are foregrounded more than others, however, is a process that is not as easily labelled "endemic". Verne's other characterisations of the Maltese, for instance, might not strike us as being fully credible: his physical descriptions, or his claims that the 'Maltese have the mercantile instinct. Everywhere they are found doing a trade. Hard-working, thrifty, economic, industrious, sober, but violent, vindictive and jealous'.<sup>13</sup> Instead, this collective unconscious—and here one might see the benefits of re-reading Carl Jung—has molded (and been molded by) our thought to the extent where the historic legacy of the British Empire, to mention one example, has been diminished in favour of the heritage left by Knights of St John.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Dennis Angelo Castillo, *The Maltese Cross: A Strategic History of Malta* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), p. 137. Prompted by the title of this book, one realises that none of the eight points of the Maltese Cross symbolises Malta.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, the document on Malta on 'Exploring the potential of maritime spatial planning in the Mediterranean Sea', *European Commission—Maritime Affairs*, (1 February 2011). <[https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/documentation/studies/study\\_msp\\_med\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/documentation/studies/study_msp_med_en)>. [Accessed 9 January 2018].

<sup>11</sup> George Orwell, 'Part I – England Your England', in *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius*, 1941. <[http://orwell.ru/library/essays/lion/english/e\\_eye](http://orwell.ru/library/essays/lion/english/e_eye)>. [Accessed on the 3 January 2018].

<sup>12</sup> Jules Verne, 'Chapter VII: Malta', *Mathias Sandorf*, trans. by W.G. Hanna (New York, NY: Seaside Library, 1885). <[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Mathias\\_Sandorf/Page\\_22](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Mathias_Sandorf/Page_22)>. [Accessed 3 January 2018].

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> See Carl Jung, 'The Concept of the Collective Unconscious', in *The Portable Jung*, ed. by Joseph Campbell (New York, NY: Penguin, 1976), pp. 59-69.

The reason for this is a diffused (general, rather than scholarly) perception of the British hindering the country's political development at every turn, whilst in turn viewing the rule of the Knights as largely benevolent. This goes a long way in helping us understand why, for instance, the Presidential Palace in Valletta (formerly The Grandmaster's Palace) has been allocated ten million euros for its restoration, whilst St Paul's Anglican Pro-Cathedral, whose bell-tower has become an intrinsic part of Valletta's skyline and is in real danger of collapse, has only raised half a million euros out of the estimated three million euros desperately needed to save it.<sup>15</sup> There is a myriad more examples of this (such as how we recall the details of the Great Siege, or frequently gloss over the Arab Period).

Another post-colonial legacy has been the entrenchment of two major political parties in Malta since the country's independence (this is, of course, not solely a local problem). It is hard to overestimate the importance politics has on the country as a whole. V18's work is thus to be understood both because of, and in spite of, local party politics, and this is why one may ask, quite reasonably, whether art in Malta is only respected as long as it has some perceived beneficial social or economic function, tied to the metrics of politics, "good" in so far as it is "useful" to us.

Just six months before the inauguration of the city as the European Capital City of Culture, in fact, a series of high-profile dismissals from the foundation drew even the attention of the European Commission.<sup>16</sup> This is not to mention how two of the four major historic venues that are currently being fully restored—as listed under the 'Infrastructure' section of the V18's official website—are of direct interest to the private sector, and are in fact being jointly managed by both government and private companies, with a view for the latter to take over the running of these sites in the near future for the purposes of profit.<sup>17</sup> There is also scant consideration for the well-being of Valletta's residents through V18's multitude of events. Long-term residents are bearing the brunt of decades of under-investment in their communities, and a spiralling cost of living that, coupled with skyrocketing property prices, is forcing them to consider other options, whilst keeping a broad swathe of prospective buyers firmly out. The damage that is being wrought on the city's social and architectural fabric are just as pressing, and includes excessively-loud bar music and intrusive additions to buildings that in cases extends to additions of whole storeys above historic palaces.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See '€10m. restoration work announced at Presidential Palace in Valletta', *TVM*, (June 2017). <<https://www.tvn.com.mt/en/news/e10m-restoration-work-announced-presidential-palace-valletta/>>; and Philip Leone Ganado, 'Valletta Pro-Cathedral needs €3 million for vital restoration work', *Times of Malta*, (February 2017). <<https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20170203/local/iconic-valletta-cathedral-needs-3-million-for-vital-restoration-work.638427>>. [Both accessed 16 January 2018].

<sup>16</sup> See Philip Leone Ganado, 'European Commission seeks V18 explanation on high-profile dismissals', *The Times of Malta*, (July 2017). <<https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20170704/local/commission-seeks-v18-explanation-on-high-profile-dismissals.652342>>. [Accessed 3 January 2018].

<sup>17</sup> See Valletta 2018: European Capital of Culture, 'Infrastructure'. <<http://valletta2018.org/infrastructure-projects/>>. [Accessed 3 January 2018].

<sup>18</sup> See Ivan Martin, 'PA stops work on Anglu Xuereb's Valletta Hotel', *The Times of Malta*, (December 2016). <<https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20161210/local/pa-stops-work-on-anglu-xuerebs-valletta-hotel.633361>>. [Accessed 3 January 2018].



It is also paradoxical that tourism has been at once the main benefactor and the cause of historic sites being torn down. Valletta has been spared the over-development and pulling down of its historic sites because it was tourism that demanded these places be kept intact. On this, Jim Crace, former writer in residence at the University of Malta, makes a trenchant point in conversation with *antae*:

I wonder whether Malta has benefitted from tourism, except financially. I wonder whether tourism really is just one of the many invasions you've already suffered. [...]. I get the sense that even though you finally got independence in Malta, the tune is being called not by the almost-half-a-million Maltese, but by the 1.2 million tourists. I feel that their heavy hand is on everything in Malta, and that's to be regretted'.<sup>19</sup>

Inversely, many of the historic palaces are being converted wholesale into “boutique hotels”, ruining their architectural integrity in the process; the upstairs *sala nobile* of such palaces, for example, are being callously portioned into several sections to accommodate a larger number of beds. One way of reading this, perhaps, would be with Guy Debord, who writes of how the authentic has been replaced by spectacle and representation, where many aspects of social life have been commodified beyond recognition.<sup>20</sup>

All these socio-politico-economic aspects briefly discussed above, in one way or another, affect V18's treatment of the arts in Malta. As pointed out in an open letter to the V18's board of governors—signed by 70 artists, cultural workers and academics—the dismissals mentioned earlier ‘have contributed to a climate of insecurity among many participants as to whether their engagement is still valued’. The situation was summed up as follows:

The top-down approach of the Foundation's administration silences key stakeholders in culture and other groups by speaking in the name of a ‘general public’, effectively discouraging qualities like dialogue, openness and critical thinking that are vital requirements in the arts, cultural management and arts education. The fact that government institutions like Valletta 2018 Foundation tend to dominate the local cultural scene and are led by political appointees makes the situation even more problematic. Moreover, the Foundation's access to substantial funds for culture combined with its contractual demands—often including a clause that forbids criticism of the Foundation's decisions—unfortunately helps to nurture a sense of political quietism that is absolutely detrimental to the cultural scene.<sup>21</sup>

The “cultural dialogue” and “critical thinking” mentioned both in the above quotation and near the beginning of this response, then, might not be non-existent, but rather actively discouraged, silenced, made redundant or defeated. It might not be the hesitation to take the *pas*, but the constrictions of forced apathy and ‘quietism’: what can be done when one's words either fail to cross the shore or are drowned by the incoming sea? When one's place is constantly displaced? Furthermore, as it shall be argued in the following section, it is not only

<sup>19</sup> The *antae* Editorial Board, “‘You want to mess with people's heads’: An Interview with Jim Crace”, *antae*, 2(1), (2015), 5-14, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> See Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Red and Black, 1983), §42, pp. 41-2.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Open Letter to the Board of Governors, Valletta 2018 Foundation’, 19 July 2017.

<<https://0d2d5d19eb0c0d8cc8c6-a655c0f6dcd98e765a68760c407565ae.ssl.cf3.rackcdn.com/3b1bef8ac11c36fdd2e2999024cd9551cf71a551.pdf>> . [Accessed 3 January 2018].

V18's execution that is troubling to the Maltese academic and artistic world, but its very conception: that is, the impulse to locate the local, to characterise and define Malta and its arts in a way that, as all definitions are, is tyrannical.

Might *antae*, in its international context and simultaneous local base, be a site or space for critical operation from both the inside and the outside, allowing art and thought to circulate without being tied down to any one place?

## Plato's Garden

But what is *antae*? Again and again, one has to ask.

Leading from an amateurish cover-image depicting *antae* (in their literal meaning, as Grecian columns) covered with the text “text” (*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*), the first Editorial not only remarks not only on the temporality of *antae* (as chronologically anterior to, “ante”) but, most pertinently here, on their position in relation to the Greek temple. ‘Inside and outside the classical Greek temple: *antae* belong to both but also, by necessity, to neither’; their very spatiality perturbs notions of inside and outside, ‘disrupt[ing] closure and problematis[ing] notions of duality as leading to some form of classical unity’.<sup>22</sup> At the limits of the temple, *antae* effectively place the temple in between them, *in antis*.

Thinking about Malta always seems to be a simultaneous question of space and in-betweenness. Where is Malta? Not only do we struggle to find it on maps or globes—these so often flooding the Mediterranean over the islands, the sea coming in from the outside, submerging Malta and rendering it invisible—but we also struggle to locate it as we stand on it ourselves. This is the myopia that plagues endeavours such as V18: perceiving Malta to be a unity that needs to be collided with other unities for the sake of mondialism, the “international” and the “overseas”, rather than understanding Malta to be inter-, *in antis*, already within itself, between outside and inside, with no fortified borders, nothing to keep the sea from flooding in, and hence not coherent, with no kind of classical unity at all.

Such claims need further exploration, and the winning entry of the 2017 Chelsea Flower Show, I feel, is a prime exemplification of the above in it being an attempt at adopting or even exporting “Malta” and the characteristically “Maltese”. James Basson’s Malta-inspired display in the show (as represented on the cover of the eleventh issue) evoked strong reactions—from being lauded as ‘faultless’ by the judges to being compared to ‘the Berlin Holocaust Memorial’.<sup>23</sup> Designed to show the interaction between humans and nature in Malta, the result is an intentionally stark display of limestone blocks, as one generally finds in Maltese quarries, against a backdrop of flora typically found in Malta. A series of unique

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<sup>22</sup> See Aaron Aquilina and Irene Scicluna, ‘Editorial’, *antae*, 1(1), (2014), 1-3.

<sup>23</sup> Kevin Rawlinson, ‘Chelsea flower show: “abandoned Maltese quarry” wins top prize’, *The Guardian*, (May 2017). <<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/may/23/chelsea-flower-show-james-basson-abandoned-maltese-quarry-wins-top-prize>>. [Accessed 3 January 2018]. The comments section is interesting to look at, calling it ‘utter crap’ and ‘an overgrown, abandoned cemetery’ while also engaging thoughts on Britishness. For a link to the watercolour image used as the cover, see issue 11, flyleaf.

microclimates occupy defined zones of the display, and two imposing monolithic pillars of Maltese limestone form the centrepiece of the garden—echoing not only antae and the temple *in antis*, but also how “the garden”, similarly to our Grecian columns, is both *inside* and *outside*, a part of and apart from one’s domicile. The Royal Horticultural Society commented that the significance of this installation lay in the fact that ‘Malta is tackling a number of ecological challenges such as water scarcity, the need to recycle and composting, and the garden aimed to bring this story to life’.<sup>24</sup>

Discussing his design beforehand, Basson stressed its ecological message. After a research trip to the Maltese quarry that the garden is intended to evoke, he told the *Daily Telegraph* that his garden installation is “not supposed to be pretty. It is stark and monumentally brutal”.<sup>25</sup> One recalls, in tandem, one of the V18’s first events: an *infiorata* in one of the Capital’s main squares, where a large carpet of potted flowers was laid out in such a manner as to form a design when viewed from above. The idea of this was reportedly to ‘raise environmental awareness’; however, NGO Friends of the Earth Malta, amongst others, pointed out the ‘environmentally contradictory’ nature of the *fiorata*, which used flowers that are not native to the country.<sup>26</sup>

The contrast between the Chelsea Flower Show installation and the Valletta *infiorata* is extremely rich, and invites open comparison: there were no Maltese indigenous flowers in this overseas installation, either, although this time there were none at all. Both installations purportedly aimed to raise awareness on the interplay between human and nature, but while the former made use of a novel idea that required a topology clearly identified with Malta in an event held in Chelsea, the latter was anything but indigenous in either conception or execution.

The limestone blocks used in the Flower Show are apt signifiers of the relatively “safe” route of ascribing and conceptualising “Malteseness” and projecting it on a geographic byproduct of natural occurrence that is typically—but not essentially—“Maltese”. The very process of ascribing, and inscribing, a national identity is by no means a finite process, not least in the smallest—and youngest—European Union postcolonial member. It is only by appreciating some of the forces created and necessitated in themselves, by geographic, historic, and political factors, that one may start to understand the current state of affairs—of particular interest here, the state of the relation between Malta and the arts.

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<sup>24</sup> ‘The M&G Garden’, *Royal Horticultural Society*, (May 2017). <<https://www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-chelsea-flower-show/News/2017/M-G-Garden>>. [Accessed 3 January 2018].

<sup>25</sup> Stephen Lacey, “It’s not supposed to be pretty”: an in-depth look at RHS Chelsea’s Best Show Garden’, *The Telegraph* (May 2017). <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/gardening/chelsea-flower-show/not-supposed-pretty-chelsea-flower-show-garden-modelled-maltese/>>. [Accessed 3 January 2018].

<sup>26</sup> See Kristina Chetcuti, ‘V-18 Chief’s plants dream comes true’, *Times of Malta* (April 2014). <<https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20140429/local/V-18-chief-s-plants-dream-comes-true.516883>>. See also ‘V18 infiorata “environmentally contradictory” says Friends of the Earth’ (April 2014). <[http://www.maltatoday.com.mt/arts/valletta\\_2018/38545/v18\\_infiorata\\_environmentally\\_contradictory\\_says\\_friends\\_of\\_the\\_earth#.Wdv5k1tSzIV](http://www.maltatoday.com.mt/arts/valletta_2018/38545/v18_infiorata_environmentally_contradictory_says_friends_of_the_earth#.Wdv5k1tSzIV)>. [Both accessed 3 January 2018].

Earlier on, we halted on the word “academy”. The word comes from the Greek *Akadèmeia*, ‘the grove belonging to Akádèmos, a Greek hero of the Trojan War’, popularised due to it being ‘the name of a park near Athens and of a school held in a grove of the park where Plato taught’.<sup>27</sup> The groves of Academe recall us, then, to the tensions of city walls, borderlines and boundaries: the Trojan War, after all, seems to implore one to keep in mind the dangers of transporting what is *outside* hastily *inside*, specifically that which masquerades as something belonging to the endemic while being, in truth, completely invasive. Rather than elaborate on this connection, suggesting that events such as V18 are merely international politics under the Trojan guise of local art and culture, we might perhaps focus on the latter use of the grove: that of open and accessible thought in the form of Platonic dialogue, a potential resistance in the face of our hesitation in front of the space *de hors*.

This journal might embody such dialogue, one versed from the inside to outside and back again. It is important to stress what I mean by here likening a space such as *antae* to the Platonic public garden. I do not here mean the sense of cultivation that a garden sometimes encapsulates, where pride is taken at watching life (and literature, and art, and interdisciplinarity) grow by one’s own (active, shaping) hands. Not *cultivation*, but *curation*: as in a museum (open to the public, free admission, open even on Sundays), *antae* is a space of curation for academic papers, creative writing, conference and book reviews, interviews, thoughts, and dialogue. Understanding *antae* in this way is a potential method of keeping the quarry from (under)mining the garden.

But this, ultimately, rings too saccharine, and might be an overplaying of the journal’s role in Malta, as if it were the only means of curation and as if curation were the sole *raison d’être* for academic journals. How, then, can the grove or the garden allow us to understand *antae*’s space?

Speaking of Plato and gardens, one cannot forget that Derrida himself once tried to be a gardener. He was to design a garden installation at Parc de la Villette, in Paris (the consonance here between Valletta and Villette is mere coincidence, surely) under the direction of Bernard Tschumi and in collaboration with Peter Eisenman, the architect behind the Berlin Holocaust Memorial to which Basson’s garden has already been likened. ‘Tasked with the production of a “garden,” Derrida and Eisenman took their inspiration from the platonic concept of the *khôra*’, writes Brandon Wocke, noting also, with tangible disappointment, how the project ultimately failed to be realised because of budgetary reasons.<sup>28</sup>

The garden failed to take root, and this not only because the *khôra* is the amorphous space of ‘existence of the most extreme abstraction [...] prior to all social or political determination’,

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<sup>27</sup> “Academy”, in *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*, ed. by Robert K. Barnhart (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1988), p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Brandon Wocke, ‘Derrida at Villette: (An)aesthetic of Space’, in *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 83(3), (2014), 739-55, p. 739. See Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman, *Chora L Works*, ed. by Jeffrey Kipnis and Leeser Thomas (New York, NY: Monacelli Press, 1997).

and hence impossible to realise.<sup>29</sup> Originally an idea presented in *Timaeus* and which Derrida reads beyond Plato, *khôra* is both “place” and the placeless-ness from which the very possibility for place arises, how and where place *takes place*.<sup>30</sup> Understanding publication spaces such as *antae* through the space of the *khôra* may seem an ill-fitting and reductive transposition, but it is not through definitions of *khôra* that I proceed but through our very inability to provide them. If place (as world) can only come about through placeless-ness—that is, the unidentifiable (non-)place of the possibility of place—then Malta, as place, must only come from the nothingness that is not-Malta. To clarify: defining Malta—and subsequently its art—as *this* and not *that* which is *here* and not *there* would be to restrict its possibilities and potential configurations as either affirmed or disaffirmed through art. If the *khôra* is, because of its lack of participation in the locating of the local, ‘the very place of an infinite resistance, of an infinitely impassable persistence’, then claims that “in Malta there is no critical thought”—or, inversely, endeavours like V18 which serve to not only locate but define and sell such critical capacity—only serve to undermine Malta’s constant self-creation and emergence out of its possibilities.<sup>31</sup> Art and critical thought, then, must not follow ‘social and political determination’, as one can observe happens with projects such as V18, but come before any such determinations. Whether it is through *antae* or any other medium, it is important that these determinative and prescriptive gestures are resisted through an infinite persistence of art and thought as that which escapes both dismissal and marketable celebration (‘You have this attitude that everything in art has to inform the people’, Mario Philip Azzopardi tells us. ‘Calm down, let’s give them their money’s worth’).<sup>32</sup> Against such ideas, the garden must not be cultivated, but must be allowed to cultivate itself.

As such, even the previous claim that a locally-based academic journal must not cultivate (lest it replicate tyrannical boundary-setting) but only curate is itself a questionable claim—and one can rather quickly spot the too-pious resonance between the “curative” and the “cure”. This would be, furthermore, to locate *antae* and projects like it as being outside the garden, in the vigilant and benign role of overseer. It is not. What must be maintained, instead, is a space, *de hors*, for Malta to emerge outside itself from within itself, displacing itself and finding itself always already displaced. One must not label Malta as Malta, whether by the hands of those that fail to recognise the potential of critical thought or whether, more overtly, one puts up a large, glowing sign—VALLETTA 2018—to mark the garden proper. (The garden here referred to specifically is *Ġnien l-Għarusa tal-Mosta*).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of “Religion” at the Limits of Reason Alone’, trans. by Samuel Weber, in Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion*, ed. by Gil Anidjar (New York, NY, and London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 40-101, p. 55.

<sup>30</sup> See Plato, ‘Timaeus’, in *Gorgias and Timaeus*, ed. by Tom Crawford, trans. by B. Jowett (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003), pp. 188-249, especially pp. 213-4.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Faith and Knowledge’, p. 59.

<sup>32</sup> Depares, ‘Valletta 2018’s Mario Philip Azzopardi hits back at critics’.

<sup>33</sup> The placement of the sign was described, in positive tones, as a ‘surprise’. See <https://www.facebook.com/Valletta2018/photos/pcb.1482264175192502/1482263828525870/?type=3&theater>. [Accessed 16 January 2018].



## Again

Let me examine what I have said, once more, once again; and with this, too, what has been voiced by the contributions of the eleventh issue.<sup>34</sup>

The editing boards of *antae* dedicated an issue to discussions around Malta and its relation to the Arts, an active decision following decreasing local submissions alongside a wish to keep the Maltese context in clear view. However, putting together this local issue was more challenging than collating previous international submissions, and an inquiry as to why seemed apt. The islands might harbour within them no critical thought whatsoever, as one hears so often claimed in conversation at a certain insular brand of events, or it might be the case that those that do try and engage often find their engagement has been delineated and defined for them, trapped in echo chambers or hindered by massive slabs of stone—Maltese limestone; endemic stone; two (political) pillars—barring them from freely roaming and cultivating their own garden. It seems much more likely to be the latter case.

In these terms, *antae*'s role, as an academic journal, may be seen—at its best—as that of curation, the interdisciplinary intermediary between waves of the outside and the stone inside; this only if, however, one keeps in mind that neither the *outside* nor *inside* are self-coherent, self-contained, or classically unified within themselves, but always *in antis*. There is nothing to curate but the self-sustainable act of curation itself. Thinking along these lines, it might be appropriate to phrase this discussion in terms of emigration and immigration—the latter frequently being a thought-provoking concept, though very often for much the wrong reasons—and understanding that critical dialogue has no native speakers. Any conception of “academy”, therefore, must never envision itself barricaded (whether the walls were constructed by one's own hands—as fortification—or by others'—as prisons), but rather public, as in a garden or a grove, one with no endemic flowers at all. Revisiting Jean Paulhan on this point might be apt, specifically his musings on a sign at the entrance of the Tarbes public garden, which states: ‘It is forbidden to enter the park carrying flowers’.<sup>35</sup> The sign was placed in an effort to stop people picking flowers from inside the garden, which was prohibited, who would then tell the gardeners that the flowers were brought with them from the outside. A territorial ascription of the endemic to fertile areas, like Malta's arts scene, would only render it completely arid—or, worse still, pillaged.

At this point, one cannot say “in spite of all this” and move on to the critical thought that is nonetheless persistently at work here in Malta, as evidenced by the creative and academic pieces of the eleventh issue. In spite of all this, there remain deep-seated problems of self-perception and self-location that must be overcome, an insularity and imposition actively and infinitely resisted, a garden that must be kept open to the public. There is no “in spite of all this”; but there are—and one must not overlook this fact—those who continue to plant the seeds of art and thought.

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. *antae*, Vol. 4 No. 2-3, for all contributions discussed below.

<sup>35</sup> Jean Paulhan, *The Flowers of Tarbes, or, Terror in Literature*, trans. by Michael Syrotinski (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006), p. 9.



In the words of Adrian Abela, with whom the first interview of the eleventh issue is conducted, 'the Maltese general public has not been given an education in the arts, and now we are trying to make up for lost time'. He acknowledges, however, that 'it is difficult to maintain a team of people [referring to V18 committees] who are fully-knowledgeable about what should be done to realise the nation's full potential'. Abela can himself be considered "displaced", being a Maltese artist currently residing in Los Angeles, and one may read his critique of the Maltese art scene, a critique of and from the space of displacement, in light of the dual obstacles of the willed insularity and misplaced political priorities discussed above, the direct consequences of which are unable to be remedied through quick and hasty definitions of either the islands or their art—indeed, this would be the very action of limiting such potential. One must remember that critique is not treason.<sup>36</sup>

Similarly to Abela, Alfred Sant suggests that Maltese literature (if there is such a thing, and this is a crucial question in and of itself which might rest on the present exploration of whether there is or is not such a thing as "Malta") is to be read 'alongside writings from the outside', and that this, in itself, can help us explore the dynamic between such concepts as *inside* and *outside* in terms of human interactions which, Sant points out, '[w]e have been very negligent in trying to understand'. The Maltese, whoever they are, have continually encountered outsiders—Sant characterises these "outsiders" in their multiplicity, as 'soldiers, tourists, slaves, construction workers, knights, accountants, e-gaming specialists, settlers, or whatever else'—but there is also the outsider that is tyrannical thought. From these two initial interviews, "Malteseness" is from the outset of the issue continually put into question; the islands' shores are, and always have been, porous.

The nine poems by Joseph Buttigieg and Gioele Galea (translated into English by myself and Abigail Ardelle Zammit respectively) not only testify to literature's potential on the islands but stimulate further thought, such as the question of whether there is such a thing as a Maltese voice (as posed in the eleventh issue's Editorial). We are returned to the uniqueness of "voice", and this might not be as synonymous as it first seems with the idea of Maltese literature. The question is either answered or made more problematic through the fact that the poems have been written in Maltese and then subsequently translated, though it would be erroneous to assume that these translations' sole aim was to widen the poets' audience. Walter Benjamin's theory of translation—one that explores the very notion of translatability in terms of literary afterlife (*Überleben*, *Fortleben*, or *Nachleben*)—accounts for how translations 'are more than just transmissions of subject matter [...]. The life of the originals attains [...] its ever-renewed latest and most abundant flowering'.<sup>37</sup> Once more, once again, we are back to the problematics of displacement, blooming, and the endemic. The creative pieces of Amber Duidenvoorden and Victoria-Melita Zammit traverse this same dislocating

<sup>36</sup> See Teodor Reljic, 'It's bizarre how some people in funding bodies perceive critique as an affront', *Malta Today* (November 2017).

<[http://www.maltatoday.com.mt/arts/valletta\\_2018/82138/its\\_bizarre\\_how\\_some\\_people\\_in\\_funding\\_bodies\\_perceive\\_critique\\_as\\_an\\_affront#.WmUECq5l\\_IX](http://www.maltatoday.com.mt/arts/valletta_2018/82138/its_bizarre_how_some_people_in_funding_bodies_perceive_critique_as_an_affront#.WmUECq5l_IX)>. [Accessed 21 January 2018].

<sup>37</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. by Harry Zohn, ed. by Hannah Arendt (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), pp. 69-82, p. 71. See also Mathelinda Nabugodi, 'Answering the Question: "What is Life"', *antae*, 3(2), (2016), 149-166.

space, as made most overt in the latter, whereby Valletta is made other though not only time and the supernatural but also through its own historic potential. Language, again, is in question here: what to make of two Maltese authors, this time writing in English? As well as: what to make of Strada Stretta, now commodified, where one dines not only as a customer but also as an audience member of a past-turned-spectacle? Elizabeth Karen Steed's excerpt—from *Malta: The Beautiful Hour*, now published with Miranda—turns the question around once more: what of the outsider, writing in her language, about Malta's own artistic language?

The first three of the eleventh issue's five academic essays, while each critically informed, remain consciously wary of jargon that, at times, both murders for the sake of dissection and constructs the ivory tower of the "academy" shallowly perceived.<sup>38</sup> It is in the interest of breaking open the insularity discussed above that these papers analyse, with astuteness, a contemporary Maltese band, the local stand-up comedy scene, and the works of a Maltese artist; in particular, they testify to the strong and encouragingly productive possibilities of a critical engagement with local contemporary artists, a critique that blooms with its own individual life. This is dialogue coming from Malta about Malta: endemic, but, through being in conversation with itself, doubled rather than turned monologic, and which extends and challenges the artistic processes at work rather than turning them back upon themselves.

Some aspects of the papers bear repeating, once again. Krista Rutter Bonello Giappone's paper, through recurrent comparison to the UK (such as the British tradition of the panto), looks at 'Malta's stand-up scene [which] is taking root in fits and starts'. Despite the interesting note that 'there is a significant lack of stand-up in the Maltese language', she identifies the ways in which the local scene has 'outliv[ed] colonialism to develop [its] own local flavour and peculiarity, and holding an enduring appeal that has long gone beyond the English "expat" community'. Christine Caruana's paper reads the art of Jesmond Vassallo, a painter, sculptor, and lithographer—about which, she writes, '[i]t is fair to say that there is no established tradition of lithography in Malta'. Dealing with his work processes, artistic technique, and influences (both Maltese and not), she brings to light Vassallo's thoughts on figurative art and the human body, engaging with his paintings of Mosta and the arduous constraints of Vassallo's lithography, revealing how the artistic 'tradition he is interested in is border-free'. Both of these papers understand Malta as being, first and foremost, *in antis*.

Nikki Petroni and Valerie Visanich's entries, which close the issue, both work along the more traditional register of academic writing—this time strongly making the case that academic terminology, even with its murderous and admittedly insular edges, can carry with it a certain insight that is potentially lost were it to be expressed otherwise. Petroni's article looks at Maltese twentieth-century art in relation to the modernist project as defined and determined by the Western canon; against this canon of exclusion, points out that 'Maltese modern art needs to be studied and historicised on its own particular terms and resolutely placed within the global spectrum'. It would not be seeing the bigger picture, however, to blame solely the

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<sup>38</sup> In reference to William Wordsworth, 'The Tables Turned—An Evening Scene on the Same Subject', in *The Poems of William Wordsworth*, vol. II, ed. by Nowell Charles Smith (London: Methuen and Co.: 1908), p. 328, line 28.

*outside* for the exclusion of the *inside*. Petroni, in fact, goes on to undertake a critique of Maltese art history as a whole, with its conventional, uncontested standards and dominant readings positing a conception of linear temporality, 'consider[ing] history as a propagator of national identity that fits the suitable past into the desired ideological self-image' (and this recalls our previous mention of Jung's collective unconscious; 'marginalisation', Petroni writes, 'suppresses memory'). Through the writings of Giuseppe Schembri Bonaci, Vincenzo Bonello (and his views of the "barbaric British"), and George Kubler on time, she examines the creation of Malta—and Maltese identity—through the myth-making potential of historicised art alongside our concept of scale. Ultimately, it might be said, as Petroni points out, that 'Malta's marginal or peripheral position is sustained by a self-imposed insularity'.

Similarly, Visanich's paper—which focuses on the "peripheral" state of Malta as defined by the BJCEM (Biennale of Young Artists from Europe and the Mediterranean)—makes the point that it would be 'naïve to consider [our] small geographical size and so-called peripheral location as the main feature contributing to [our] similarities and presumed differences' with other "peripheral" states. With BJCEM, which affirms the 'shortage of cultural professionals in "peripheral" cultural and artistic systems' such as Malta, the paper outlines the matrices of in/dependence, national identity, and institutional artistic presence, and locates local artists' need to train and work abroad, their problematic job stability (as most Maltese artists are given only indefinite contracts), and their need to 'cultivate connections', borrowing the phrase from Godfrey Baldacchino.

I find myself, once more, once again, thinking on cultivation: flowering plants crossbred between the endemic and the international, belonging neither to indigenous insularity nor to invasive species, cultures, or politics. We must allow ourselves the act of gardening as a demonstration of persistence and resistance against the (under)mining proclivities of those that seek to define Malta or its art.

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