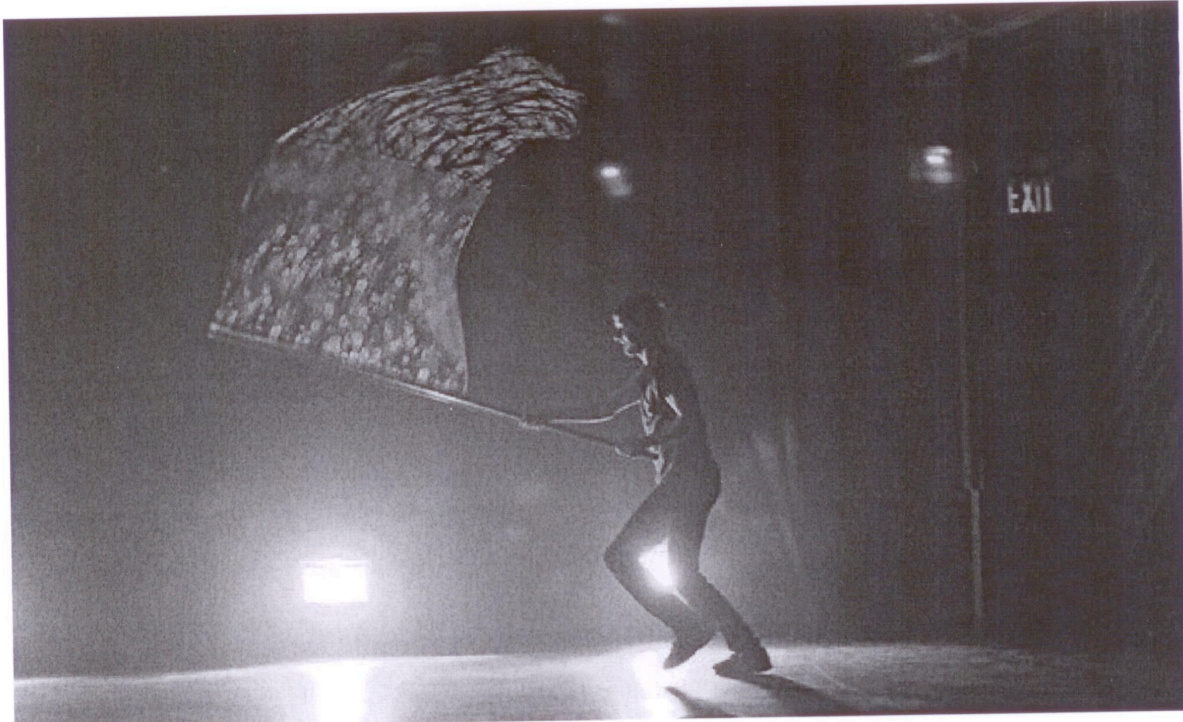


Theater Review | 'Alexis. A Greek Tragedy'
Back to the Barricades, Antigone



Sara Krulwich/The New York Times
Benno Steinegger in "Alexis. A Greek Tragedy," a work by the Italian troupe Motus that is part of the Under the Radar festival.
By **BEN BRANTLEY**
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The dialogues keep multiplying and echoing, contracting and expanding, blurring and zooming into focus. In the raw and resonant "Alexis. A Greek Tragedy," one of the opening works in the [Under the Radar festival](#) of experimental theater, conversation is hardly limited to the words exchanged by the actors on the stage of the Ellen Stewart Theater at La MaMa.

This invigorating portrait of youthful rebellion in contemporary Greece (and, by extension, around the world) by the Italian troupe [Motus](#) finds the present arguing with the past, and the past roaring back at it. Computer-generated visuals wrestle with the sort of primal, physical performance that is as old as theater itself. And art and the realities it is supposed to represent keep squaring off and wondering if they really have anything to say to one another.

The heat that rises from these debates may give you brain burn, but it's also thoroughly absorbing. So watch out. Toward the show's end you may wind up leaping to the stage to join an instant protest movement that illustrates the differences between the single heroic gesture and the same gesture repeated ad infinitum. Even if you don't know exactly why you're raising your fist and making like you're charging barricades, you'll feel the exhilaration of people caught up in something bigger than themselves.

Directed and designed by Enrico Casagrande and Daniela Nicolò, who together founded Motus two decades ago, "Alexis" is the company's fourth production to riff on the moral and political issues of "Antigone," Sophocles' eternal tragedy of resistance against power. (Their ["Too Late! antigone \(contest #2\)"](#) was seen at Under the Radar last year.) "Alexis" shares with its predecessors an earnest and ardent approach to analyzing scenes in "Antigone," as if the cast had never left the rehearsal studio.

But it ventures well beyond the sheltered precincts of a workshop. This four-actor production follows the show's creators on a journey through Greece in 2010, searching for the identity of Antigone and her latter-day descendants. The Motus team is also trying to assess the ripple effects of the death of Alexandros Grigoriopoulos (the Alexis of the title), a 15-year-old who was fatally shot by a policeman in 2008.

The student demonstrations and riots that followed his death were of a cataclysmic force that suggested the anger they embodied had been long aborning. (You'll find yourself thinking of the Occupy Wall Street movements in other countries well before this production makes the connection explicit.)

The Motus crew took a video camera on that trip, and there is footage of its pilgrimage through a countryside that looks much as Greece might have appeared in the days of Sophocles, and of urban posters and graffiti that fill the walls of the student quarter where Alexis was shot. There are also interviews with local artists and writers about the experience — and implications — of what happened in December 2008, and newsreel footage of the riots.

Such traditional components of reportorial investigation seem to melt and warp here, though. The projected images are made bigger and smaller, and slide from one wall to another and finally onto the audience itself. They are mixed with pictures we see taken, on the spot, of the actors both as themselves and as characters out of "Antigone." Voices seem to fracture and fragment, in electronic layers of shouts and whispers. No one is making a secret of how these effects are achieved. The performers call attention to how and what they're doing and why, as they consider matters like whether the actor playing the corpse of Polynices, Antigone's brother, should have his mouth open or closed. Dialogue from Sophocles' tragedy (or Brecht's adaptation of it), in which the tyrant Creon asserts his power over his subjects, morphs into conversation in which one performer, examining the scene they just played, bullies another. ("You need acting lessons," he says.)

In other words "Alexis" is shaped by artistic self-consciousness, an often annoying trait associated with young and defiant intellectuals. Here, though, such self-consciousness is energizing instead of paralyzing. The cast members — Silvia Calderoni (the super-kinetic actress playing Antigone), Vladimir Aleksic, Benno Steinegger and Alexia Sarantopoulou — charge the endless series of questions they ask with such visceral force that philosophy starts to feel like a contact sport.

Ms. Sarantopoulou, as the company's resident Athenian and a witness to the events of 2008, plays the role of skeptic. She is uneasy, she keeps saying, with this translation of complex, chaotic life into the patterns of art. And the show as a whole refuses to trust unconditionally in any one image or explanation it presents. Yet the flux, the clashes, the contradictions seem to assemble into a fair facsimile of life at its most intense, in crisis mode, charged with sorrow and anger and perhaps even hope. By the show's end four lone actors have become a revolutionary legion.

ALEXIS. A GREEK TRAGEDY

By Motus; directed by Enrico Casagrande and Daniela Nicolò, in collaboration with Michalis Traitsis and Giordina Pilozi; assistant director, Nicolas Lehnebach; video editing, Mr. Casagrande; sound by Andrea Comandini; sets and lighting by Mr. Casagrande and Ms. Nicolò; technical director, Valeria Foti. In Italian, with English supertitles. Presented by La MaMa and the Public Theater's Under the Radar festival, Mark Russell, festival director. At La MaMa, 66 and 74A East Fourth Street, East Village; (212) 475-7710; lamama.org. Through Jan. 14. Running time: 1 hour 10 minutes.

WITH: Silvia Calderoni, Vladimir Aleksic, Benno Steinegger and Alexia Sarantopoulou.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: January 7, 2012

Schedule information on Friday with a theater review of a work in the Under the Radar festival, "Alexis. A Greek Tragedy" at La MaMa in the East Village misstated the telephone number for La MaMa. It is (212) 475-7710.