



*Archisearch talked with David Bergé, founder and director of kyklàda.press, and George Papam, human geographer, architect and co-editor of “Islands After Tourism” and “The Beach Machine” about kyklàda.press, bookmaking, the monocultures of tourism and whether we can imagine any alternative programs for the aegean coasts “beyond summer plunges and sunbathing”.*

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— interview by Tina Marinaki*

kyklàda.press, an Athens-based publishing project established in 2020, presents a diverse array of 10 compact books within its growing catalogue.

Born under the guidance of David Bergé, kyklàda.press is a writing experiment immersing itself with phenomena of the Aegean Archipelago. Each book is intertwined with the essence of life on the islands such as public health, tourism, extraction, healing infrastructures, beach topographies, vernacular architecture and the expression of lament and affection



***Tina Marinaki: When did you start kyklàda.press? What was the idea behind it? Could you tell us a few words about your multidisciplinary, collective approach?***

David Bergé: As an artist I am primarily known for my *Walk Pieces*, a time-based and participative format I developed in 2008 in which I have been taking small groups of people in silence through precise trajectories in urban centers. In looking for ways to extend and materialize this practice differently, I started experimenting with writing in early 2019. Writing about space in material and embodied ways, similar to my *Walk Pieces*, where I don't verbally explain space but walk through it, in silence, over a specific rhythm and set dramaturgy, interacting with what's happening in the city while we pass, presently and historically. I wanted this writing to be distributed in physical form, and I knew making books during and post-covid was going to be challenging given the amount of screentime we were facing and growing into during the first lockdown, as well as AI lingering around the corner. These elements would radically transform how people would deal with reading, books as objects, knowledge-based forms of writing, and content publishing. So I decided to make a compact object, light to ship and uncomplicated to take with you, a series with a recognizable cover design, where water, wind, and salt of the beach can become part of the reading experience by leaving their marks on our unlaminated covers.

I founded the imprint kyklàda.press in 2020 to distribute these books and find their way to readers.

*Each kyklàda book emerges from one central theme. Five to six contributors from different practices craft each book together, relaying knowledge from lived experiences on islands: archaeologies of moods, expressions of desire and grief, affection and pain, constructed landscapes, human geographies, and historical (dis)continuities.*

The book landscape has changed tremendously since 2020; today, you see many more small books on the market and a new sort of art space: the art book store. This space brings together many ideas and aesthetics, whereas in galleries and more conventional art spaces, the experience proposed is often centered around one aesthetic. Medium-sized books have taken the form of e-publishing, and artist monographs and architecture coffee tables have taken larger proportions than before 2020.

Together with performance artist Ant Hampton, I have in 2023 founded Time Based Editions, another imprint under the same umbrella, let's say *kyklàda's* queer sister: A series of books where you scan a QR-code on the back cover activating a soundtrack on your phone, in which an artist guides you through the book, mainly consisting of visual materials. While browsing the physical book, the soundtrack sets a time-based experience in place. The first book is out now, consisting of 77 minutes and 232 pages.

***TM: Your catalogue already counts 10 titles. How do you choose each topic?***

DB: Again, I listen to and respond to our time and place, just like with a *Walk Piece*. Sometimes, by precisely describing an event in the past, you let the reader make the connection to the present tense themselves. In 2020, we came out with "Public Health in Crisis," a book edited by Dimitra Kondylatou, speaking about islands and quarantine measurements centered around the lazaretti in Syros. A year later, we published "Architectures of Healing," looking into more holistic approaches to bodily and mental health; this book, with contributions by Antigone Samellas and Milica Ivić, published in 2021, explores architectures and elementary forms of care and healing, starting at the asklepieia, the ancient healing temples, trying to imagine what these places could be today. At that time, well into the second lockdown, people were craving other healing ideas. But we also did a book on *Extraction*, with Lydia Xynogala and Asli Özdoğuran, on how mineral evidence was historically produced, disseminated, and capitalized upon in the Aegean region. I often initiate and further develop the book in dialogue with the editors and contributing writers.

*Books get crafted together; it's an experiment where the unfolding of an initial idea is hard to foresee until it's there.*

***TM: Your approach focuses on the production of texts inspired by the Cycladic islands. How did your engagement with the cyclades begin? What makes these islands important to you?***

DB: The islands in the Aegean sea are to me an incredible convergence of human civilizations, extreme heterogenous and local ecosystems. What makes the island topography fascinating, is that more than half of it remains hidden inside the sea.

***TM: "The Beach Machine" frames the beach as a machine and talks about the iconic spatial typology of the beach. Could you briefly describe the aim of the book and the collection of texts?***

George Papam: If the greek hospitality sector is widely likened to an industry, then its main factory floor is the beach and the coastal space more generally. While this is not a contested framing, its impacts are less appreciated. The beach is more often understood as a leisurely space, thus neglecting its defining qualities as part of what Keller Easterling has called infrastructure space. Therefore, the book, which we co-edited with Phevos Kallitsis and David, approaches the beach as a spatial product, one that is configured logistically and is multiplied throughout the global sunbelt. It is this operational nature and its attributes that the contents attempt to shed light to: the spatial protocols, material maintenance, and engineered landscapes. From traces of moving sands in Lefkada island, to mirror postwar developments in Delos and Mykonos, and from historic and bodily explorations of the Athenian riviera, to rituals surrounding eco-certification schemes, the texts frame the beach as a machine with protocols of operation and metabolic needs that direct the capture of land and bodies while establishing forms of environmental control.

***TM: In your book "The beach machine" you mention "The beach as a contested space and the Blue Flag as a performative spatial inscription and a "protocol of a standardized human-centered experience of place".***

GP: Building upon the metaphor above, the factory space of the beach could only have its own standardization protocols. Well known in Greece, the so-called “Blue Flag” is a scheme that rewards the sustainable treatment of coasts. Unlike other certificates and standardization badges that often remain “mundane” background protocols, in Greece the Blue Flag is accompanied by yearly celebrations that sometimes take the form of elaborate performative rituals: the flag is carried, hoisted, and celebrated in quasi-religious and often televised processions. In my research I read these patterned performances as a cultural text to argue that the rich symbolic work of the Blue Flag is essentially a process of shaping environmental subjects while capturing the terrain and standardizing a type of *environmental experience*. *The Blue Flag provides a mechanism for managerial control of and governance over the bounded space of the beach.*

Crucially, however, the references to the environment are in practice decoupled from the biogeophysical materiality and are rather underpinned by understandings of the environment as a national-cultural landscape and a part of the hospitality services on offer. This does not mean that the symbolic work at play around the Flag is empty or disingenuous, but rather points to how the “environment” is functioning as a discursive narrative device more than a material one.

***TM: “The Cycladic Landscape is both rural and urban” you state on your website.***

DB: At [kyklada.press](http://kyklada.press) we believe that Islands are not exotic entities alone in the sea waters. Islands remain interconnected with the mainland and each other, from the top of the mountains to the hidden topographies of the sea bed: a myriad of creatures and non-organic matter which lives in constant symbiosis with water; tectonic plates, fossil fuel pipes, and data cables. If you look at the vegetation on the city hills of Athens, they’re quite a cycladic continuation.

GP: The peculiar urban nature of the Aegean archipelago has been discussed by geographers, sociologists, and architects/urbanists—an encompassing example being Greece’s participation in the 10th Venice Biennale of Architecture, with a catalog titled *The dispersed urbanity of the Aegean Archipelago*. This is an extended urbanization expressed spatially not so much in “cities,” but in operations, infrastructural intensities, and programmatic densities, that the islands in the global sunbelt are charged with seasonally. At the same time, especially with regards to the Cyclades, we should not forget that their postwar human and cultural geographies are co-constructed with those of Athens’s (from neighborhood clustering of islander communities in Athens to the workforce and capital flows between the two etc).



**TM: “Islands after tourism” addresses the discussion on overtourism that started to emerge, but insists on escaping the “monoculture of tourism” instead of the “recent efforts towards the restoration of a previous status quo that had developed unchecked” “within the cosmologies of tourism”. Could you tell us more?**

GP: In the past couple of years it has been encouraging to see the concerns on overtourism being discussed in mainstream media, and even more encouraging to see communities organizing their own forms of resistance. However, these efforts reveal a rather administrative concern over tourism and its impacts, and not so much a desire to fully escape its grip. Actually, in many instances of the popular discourse, the various forms of “sustainability talk” are intended to resolve frictions inherent in problems of environmental impacts, capital intensity, project scale, and geographic unevenness, while essentially preserving—if not altogether safeguarding—the current monocultures of tourism. Again, this is not meant to downplay the importance of the various forms of resistance in discourse and practice we saw in the previous summers, but rather to suggest, as the book does, that we also need some radical rethinking of what we want to do at the shores and the coasts.

*Perhaps, in order to be able to defend the public accessibility and environmental significance of our coasts, it’s first necessary to imagine alternative programs for them, beyond summer plunges and sunbathing.*

**TM: The role of tourism the architectures of tourism have stereotypically been thought of as a vehicle of modernization of Greece through the emergence of constructed tourism landscapes (hotels and resorts, organized beaches, archaeological sites and museums, public space designs and infrastructure facilities). How has tourism reshaped the Greek national identity?**

GP: Indeed, tourism has served as a vehicle of modernization for many island and coastal nations around the world. Greece is no exception and there is excellent scholarship giving comprehensive accounts of these stories, especially around the country’s postwar reconstruction efforts. One aspect that is less explored is how the identity of the hosts is reshaped by the ongoing environmental anxieties and “green turns” of the hospitality sector. In my research, which was ongoing in parallel to the preparation of the book, I found that various stakeholders in the hospitality industry increasingly position themselves as stewards and



guardians of the biogeophysical environment, seeing it as the critical infrastructure that makes their industry seductive in the first place. This implies a process in which the socio-technical mechanisms of the tourism industry are reoriented and conveniently reframed as practices of care for the landscapes that constitute the ‘infrastructures of the summer.’ The apparatus of this relatively novel and evolving relationship, one that involves not only hotels, operators, and tourists, but also municipalities, NGOs, civilian associations, research institutes, activists, awards, standards, and new technologies, is what I call the *stewardship-hospitality complex*. In Greece, a country where more than one fifth of the working population takes the role of the “host,” at least in some capacity, the management of the environmental experience on offer is tethered to the project of hospitality, in a sort of large-scale “coastal housekeeping.” Environmental stewardship becomes a function of the apparatus of tourism and thereby, both the subjects as “the hosts” and their territory are remade.



**TM: Do you think we have been “stuck with tourism”? Can an alternative future outside of the “monoculture of tourism” be imagined? What would an alternative program of the coastal front look like?**

GP: These are concerns we have been exploring in the context of a research fellowship at the Yale Environmental Humanities program, of which the book is a part. I would say that these questions are not there to be answered definitively, but to suggest certain frames of thinking. Received research has shown that many aspects of Greece’s coastal geographies have been heavily conditioned by tourism, in ways that create dependencies that are difficult to escape from. These influences may refer to socioeconomic factors, as for example happens in Messinia, where a very large scale hospitality organization employs a significant number of locals and alters the structure of territorial ownership (from smallholders to land consolidation), creating dependencies and subsequently shaping development priorities for the entire region. On top of that, I would argue, the stewardship-hospitality complex doubles down on these dependencies.

*The pairing of tourism and environmental management—as a pairing of necessity with funding and as a possible public-private partnership—ostensibly appears so ideal that it strengthens the staying power of the first, while making the second dependent on it.*

Articulating alternative programs is a more complex pursuit that any one book can address, and also needs to be a plural endeavor. For our part, let’s just say we bring together some

seeds with potential. In the *Beach Machine* book, Eleni Grapsa recalls past activities of sea shells collecting and fishing, while in the *Islands After Tourism* book, Angelos Varvaroussis draws on Gavdos to narrate a different way to inhabit the coastal landscape outside current land ownership models, and Yorgos Efharis is quoted to refer to a coast used as infrastructure for climate change mitigation. In my text, I try to think of what it would mean to put the hospitality machine in reverse. I am interested in hospitality as the apparatus that makes mobilities possible. An infrastructural inversion of this apparatus foregrounds a huge reserve with the capacity of hosting, independent of any particular flows. Putting this machine in reverse, after acknowledging its weaknesses, violence, and injustices, is not about stopping it: it is about showing that, at least in the context of the Eastern Mediterranean, it can accommodate mobilities from the East to the West, as well as it has for decades accommodated flows from the West to East. This may sound too specific a proposition, but in any case, what the book argues for is programs that pluralize the current monocultures of tourism, following an anti-anti-utopian habit of mind, one that needs to be bold as it will be absurd.

DB: That's what you'd have to buy the book for!

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About George Papam

*George Papam holds a Master of environmental studies from Yale University and previously studied applied geography at Harokopio University and architecture at NTUA in Athens. In 2019 he was a fellow at the Strelka Institute for Media, Architecture, and Design. His current research project focuses on the overlaps between environmental management and the hospitality industry, but he is interested more broadly in the study of infrastructures, geographic media, the urbanization of the countryside, and the social construction of environmental knowledge. For [kyklada.press](http://kyklada.press), George co-edited *The Beach Machine: Making and Operating the Mediterranean Coastline* (2022) and *Islands After Tourism, Escaping the Monocultures of Leisure* (2023). He is the editor of the upcoming *Stanley Tigerman: Drawing on the Ineffable*, to be published by Yale University Press in late 2024, and has contributed in journals and periodicals such as *Footprint*, *Šum*, *Log*, *Clog*, *Cartha*, and *Paprika*!.*

About David Bergé

*In the work of David Bergé, audiences experience a journey through hybrid and post-digital formats, including time-based installations, site-specific interventions, and text pieces, both spoken and printed. But Bergé is best known for his Walk Pieces, in which he guides small groups of people on a silent walk, exploring the sensation of the physical and climatic conditions of the built environment. Recent commissions and presentations include the Museum Of Contemporary Art Antwerp (M HKA), Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (SKD), MOMus Thessaloniki, and Amado Art Space in Seoul. He was invited as an artist in residency at Pivô in São Paulo, The Cape Cod Modern House Trust in Wellfleet, USA, and Beta-Local in San Juan, Puerto Rico. He published books with among others Spector Books, Jap Sam Books and MER. Paper Kunsthalle. In Athens, he founded PHOTOGRAPHIC EXPANDED PUBLISHING ATHENS as a platform for material and embodied forms of writing, which currently has two imprints: [kyklada.press](http://kyklada.press) and [Time Based Editions](http://Time Based Editions).*

[www.davidberge.info](http://www.davidberge.info)

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