# NEA ONEIRA

***Erica Scourti***

[You can listen to this work on Youtube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dpxed7SIFEo)

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## Introduction

Niamh Schmidtke  0:11

Hello, you're listening to Future Artefacts FM radio show hosted by Niamh Schmidtke. And Nina Davies.

Nina Davies  0:19

Earlier this year, several radio frequencies were discovered airing a collection of broadcasts. At first they sounded like regular news stories and interviews. They felt familiar, but also not quite belonging to our present. Slowly, the listeners came to believe that what they were listening to, did indeed belong to their world, just not their time. They were looking into the future through the mundane edges of radio recordings and public service announcements. While this material is still being meticulously studied by researchers in various universities and museums, your hosts have managed to gain access to this collection to air a selection of these broadcasts for you, our listeners.

Niamh Schmidtke  1:00

For full disclosure, we will not be sharing this collection with you, as this introduction is based on a fictional event. In this monthly broadcast, Future Artefacts FM, we will present speculative fiction pieces by artists and writers, followed by conversation with hosts Niamh Schmidtke and Nina Davies. The programme will focus on fictional works intended for broadcast, such as radio plays or fictional interviews, to carve out a better understanding of the now by exploring various interpretations of the future.

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Nina Davies  1:34

This programme is kindly supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England and the Elephant Trust.

## Artist Introduction

Nina Davies  1:35

Welcome back to future artefacts FM as per usual, I'm your host, Nina Davies,

Niamh Schmidtke  1:47

and Niamh Schmidtke. Today we have a really exciting guest with us someone that Nina and I are both really, really excited to invite once we have the prospect of getting funding for the show, Erica Scourti. She is an artist and writer born in Athens and based in Athens and London. She has performed, exhibited and presented talks internationally at spaces like Highline New York, Wellcome collection, Kunsthalle Wien, Hayward Gallery, Munich Kunstverein, ICA London and EMST Athens; she recently participated in the 7th Athens Biennale (2021). Her writing has been published in Spells: 21st Century Occult Poetry (Ignota Press, 2018) and Fiction as Method (2017, Sternberg) amongst others, and she was guest editor of the Happy Hypocrite- Silver Bandage journal (2019).  Welcome to the show, Erica.

Erica Scourti  2:43

Thank you. Thanks for having me, and for inviting me here.

Niamh Schmidtke  2:47

Before we start, is there anything else you want to tell us about your practice as it currently is, or about the work that we're going to listen to?

Erica Scourti  2:56

Well, we were just talking about what it's called. And I was just going to tell you what the translation was, which is, so it Nea Oneira, and that means new dreams. And there's a place in Athens called Neos Cosmos, which means new world and which is always kind of I mean, it's not that exciting as a place but I've always liked it as a name. So that's something to bear in mind when you're listening to it that it's kind of new dreams. And just in terms of my practice, I'm I'm really interested in how, like selfhood is constructed and filtered through and understood as like always entangled with collective experience. I often work with my own archives and kind of processing them in in different ways and cutting them together. Sometimes using found footage, as well and some of that comes up in in the piece we're gonna listen to

Nina Davies  3:47

Perfect well the pieces about 12 minutes long, so we'll see you back in 12 minutes.

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## Nea Oneira work​

Just below the crystal casing, you could see her eyes flitting this way and that, unable to focus on anything

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## Conversation

Nina Davies  16:09

Okay, welcome back. I hope you all enjoyed the work.

Niamh Schmidtke  16:12

Yeah, no, it was really great to listen to Nea Oneira. And to start. For me this work, it begins with an assemblage of audio of music recordings, Greek and English voices. Can you talk a bit about where the different fragments of audio come from? And perhaps what was your interest in them?

Erica Scourti  16:33

So yeah, most of the fragments I had actually collected a couple of years ago. And I was trying to make something that was to do with property, and then also using the sounds of like raves that I used to go to in areas which have now been totally gentrified, and built up. And I was kind of thinking about how that would relate to this idea of like branding a place and also authenticity and the kind of selling of dreams. And then having been back in Greece for a couple of years now. And now I'm kind of in between, I've been thinking a lot more about tourism, and how that also relies on the same kind of selling of an image and often repeat some of those like extractivist processes of kind of going into a place removing the good stuff and kind of selling it to people who can afford it often at the expense of the people who were there first, and, and so on. So, that's what the little snippets are taken from, London property development ads, so quite often from places where I've either lived or worked. So like barking, Stratford, Acton, and then tourist ads, but specifically the ones for Greece and for EOT, which is the Ethnikos Organismos Tourismou, so the Greek tourist board, which is quite a kind of classic thing, I think I was describing this to you before, it's something like most Greeks kind of grew up knowing about. So there's that. And then as I went on, I was also collecting little bits from some Greek movies. So there's a bit well, it's not actually a Greek movie, but it's about a Greek story. So there's a tiny bit from Zorba the Greek. And then there's other little bits of my own footage that I've just filmed, and I've been out and about in Athens. So like, I don't know, a truck going by and then taxis.

Nina Davies  18:16

are we actually haven't spoke about this before. But the music there's a there's a very kind of like 80s vibe to some of them, are like that sort of like swelling feels like this sort of like super Versace idea, which I kind of like link to ideas or stereotypes of like ancient Greece in the sort of like, I guess, in the way that the tourism industry would stereotype that

Erica Scourti  18:37

yeah, but I think it's also I mean, yeah, you kind of hit on something there, which is like, I'm really into this, or I'm not into it, but I'm interested in it. This very like generic music. So a lot of the stuff that it's used for things like property ads are royalty free, kind of like stock music, obviously, somebody has to write it. But it's not the same as using somebody's track, which you then have to pay royalties for. And there's, there's a similarity there with the music that is produced for the tourist ads, except those are much more. Yeah, they've got this kind of climaxing and kind of, you know, like heroic qualities, which some of the property ads do have because you've got the height. And sometimes it kind of cuts to these like towering images and the sound to go with it. There is a kind of parallel there, but also through the way that it's like very generic, it could almost be advertising anything.

Niamh Schmidtke  19:23

Or kind ofreminds me of when you walk inside, let's say, kind of a supermarket or even kind of if you're in a big development centre somewhere, and they're trying to make you at ease even though it's not really a space where you can relax.

Erica Scourti  19:38

Yeah, I mean, it's elevator music. Yeah, that's exactly what you're what you're describing. And this is kind of like a slightly amped up version of elevator music

Niamh Schmidtke  19:46

because it feels like the beginning that's kind of the string intro into the piece is quite calming. And then as it goes on, and the music builds and you have these kind of sections of rave music coming in and out and then there's this section that it almost sounds like the intro to Pirates of the Caribbean, like Hollywood drama or something, I'm not really sure, it pulls you in, in a way where it's like, almost trying to be gentle with you, and then kind of snapping you back into reality.

Erica Scourti  20:11

Yeah, that's what was kind of trying to do this like movement where it's like, yeah, there's kind of this narrative, there's kind of grand who wrote narrative keeps trying to kind of assert itself. And then some other part of life is kind of pushing back against it either like people shouting, or like somebody being at work, you know, like, a call centre for the taxi for 24 hour like radio taxi, or, you know, other sounds. And then the ,yeah, the kind of, I was trying to also blend in not so much the beats at some point, you hear it with the drum and bass, but more the kind of intro sections to it, which is this, like, often this kind of rumbling, almost like preparing for something. So trying to mix that in just to Yeah, to kind of temper this vision in some way.

Niamh Schmidtke  20:50

Yeah, I guess the tension of it. What, what is going to happen?

Erica Scourti  20:53

Yeah, exactly, which is what I find really interesting, like the kind of build up to the to the track, it's like, Oh, what's this going to be in anticipation?

Niamh Schmidtke  21:01

I guess that brings on to like, another question or another theme in the, in the piece that we spoke about before, but you've kind of touched on with these, kind of, different snippets of audio as well as, that kind of authenticity feels quite fluid, kind of we're unsure. In terms of what parts of audio are, I guess, maybe your own recordings, what's from advertisements? And kind of as well, as you describe the name of the piece is called a 'new dream' or 'new dreams'? Kind of why did you choose to sort of blur that line between, kind of reality in a way or kind of what's your interest in? Why something, why that reality might seem murky?

Erica Scourti  21:40

I guess for me, you know, reality isn't made up of just kind of what you have recorded or experienced yourself, you kind of can't separate it from all the stuff that you've read and listen to, and the stories that you've absorbed from others. And from growing up, and from TV and from music. So even from books like even languages kind of secondhand in, in some sense. And so to me, maybe that's the thing, like I don't necessarily see, like a line between that. And so mixing them together is kind of a way of making that clear that like, even if you look back on things, dreams, or memories, they're not kind of separate from all that other stuff, you know, they depend on, like, where you were what somebody said, what you heard, all of those become become kind of mixed together. And I guess that's also kind of partly how my interest in identity and selfhood is around those that idea of kind of always living in some way in quotation. But at the same time, you know, you are a real material body, it's not like we're just kind of a bunch of quotations. And that's it. Like, that's not true, either. So that's kind of another thing where it's like bringing in the personal it does ground it in a specific experience. But there's always this feeling like, it could be somebody else's dream as well.

Niamh Schmidtke  22:49

I think it gets especially creepy at the moment when there's so much directed advertising, in a way.

Erica Scourti  22:56

Absolutely.

Niamh Schmidtke  22:57

So it's trying to figure out okay, what was something that was actually my idea versus something that was some form of subliminal marketing that has been filtering into my feed, and maybe decide, oh, actually, for instance, I do really want to go to Greece this summer. Or actually, I do really want to move to Stratford, as opposed to it being, I guess, a conscious choice versus, kind of an unconscious marketing?

Erica Scourti  23:21

Will this is it? And like, can you even kind of separate? Can you even separate those? Because you did like, Yeah, I mean, I'm very interested in stuff around, like algorithmic profiling, and that kind of sense of like, the priming of the consumer, but of course, that is already based on your past choices. So it's this kind of weird, collaborative thing, actually. Because it's like, slightly, it's reading what what your past choices and, and opinions and like consumer directions, and, you know, and like what your demographic is, and almost like pre empting you to then desire these other things, but then it's also quite often, right, because it kind of, you know, it knows you, but it's also predicting, predicting stuff that you'll look at and be like, oh, yeah, you know, like you said, yeah, actually, maybe I do want to do that.

Nina Davies  24:01

It's like an attentive friend that's trying to sell you something.

Erica Scourti  24:04

Yeah, we just, I suppose some of the ads, I mean, I like collected them off YouTube, the ones for EOT especially some of them go back to like, I think one of them was from maybe 90 something and all kind of like 2004, which was when the Olympics were staged in Athens. And that is a kind of pre social, it's not pre internet, but it's pre social media moment when there's maybe like a more blanket type of advertising. And then some of the more recent ads were, there was one that was just absolutely cringe worthy. And that was maybe from three years ago, I guess, pre pandemic, and it was called the 'Greek-end'. And it was obviously kind of marketed to like the 'EasyJet generation', and it was like, "What's better than a weekend? A Greek end?" Just like, you know, horrendous but you could see that that was much more somebody had sat and be like, okay, so what is our consumer profile? Who do we want to target with this, whereas the ones from earlier, it's just like this blanket, and you've got this more kind of heroic and like generic music to match

Nina Davies  25:03

Going back to what you were saying with EOT has been like one of the biggest industries. Is it like just in Greece?

Erica Scourti  25:09

Yeah, it's not mean tourism is the industry out is like the board of the tourist board, right?

Nina Davies  25:15

When you've been living in Greece, because those ads aren't necessarily that way. That's what I really find about internet tourism ads is that it's not the people who live there that usually see them, it's the people that live elsewhere. Like, I was saying to you the other day, I'm now seeing ads for where I'm from, but growing up there, I would have never seen ads for it. And it's really strange.

Erica Scourti  25:34

Definitely. So there's something there about, again, like the selling of an image and of a vision of a dream, a fantasy, which Yeah, for the people who live there. Of course, that's nothing like the reality, though it overlaps in certain places. But yeah, as you say, like it's not meant for you. It's meant to present this image to somebody who doesn't also, who doesn't need to know about all the stuff that's shit or difficult about living there. Because most of the time, that's not what they're interested in. But at the same time, you know, and I think we spoke about this a little bit before, sometimes that is what they're interested in, in. And countries can, like Greece, to an extent can also market it that. You know, it's kind of grittiness, realness. And, you know, that also becomes a kind of a, like a selling point, like, you know, which other part of of Europe would you go to, and maybe get hit by a malatov cocktail when you're, you know, what you wouldn't, but it's frequent that there's like tear gas, and, you know, there's clashes with anarchists, and the police has a very repressive police presence in Athens. And you'd be like, Oh, this is something different, you know, certainly different than...

Nina Davies  26:32

Yeah well, there are quite a lot of people that do like, like people that want to live on the edge in a different way. Like maybe some people want to claim a cliff, but then there are some people that will travel to places where these things are happening. And I do sometimes wonder whether there's a little bit of thrill seeking, yeah, that's involved in it, I think they're probably going for very good reasons as well. But sometimes I do wonder whether there's a there's a bit of, I guess, enjoying the aesthetics of violence. They would never say that they enjoy the aesthetics of violence.

Erica Scourti  26:56

It might not even be conscious to Yeah, that's what it is. But that's also the case with let's say voluntourism, you know, and that's a really a tricky one, because, of course, there's a lot of good that is that is done through that. But it's interesting for many Greeks, or you know, those living in Athens, that there is a very big community of relatively wealthy, you know, Northern Europeans coming to Athens to work in these organisations and hanging out having a great time meeting people. And yes, also doing good, 'doing good'. I mean, that's, that's, you know, you could, you could discuss that, but that, that, that isn't that, that is an aspect of tourism, and, you know, should be seen as tourism, I guess it probably should be, even if they live in there for a year, you know,

Niamh Schmidtke  27:39

Yeah. Well, I guess it brings up the question of, like, ethical tourism, and even kind of you see it like, obviously, in Athens in particular, it's been pretty bad. But across a lot of cities around the world, kind of rise of Airbnb culture, you know, causing rents to skyrocket so much that people who've grown up in the city all their lives, can't afford to stay there anymore. So, yeah, it's kind of, I guess it's like voluntourism, or even this idea of like, selling a dream of a place and being like, 'Oh, actually, maybe I will move there?', It's like, how do you balance that with kind of, like, differing economic statuses, perhaps? Or

Erica Scourti  28:15

Absolutely? Yeah, I mean, and that's definitely something I've become very aware of with going back to Greece. And, you know, I think now, like, when I was first there, I mean, going back to Greece, I've been going back to Greece consistently, but it's different to actually live there. And I was, in the beginning, guilty of doing that they were, you know, one of my friends would say, oh, you know, the studio costs this amount of money, and I go, Oh, that's so cheap. You know, after a while, they're like, stop saying that, you know, because it's not,

Niamh Schmidtke  28:40

yeah,

Erica Scourti  28:40

and that kind of thing. And now I realise it's really cringe to say that it's like, yeah, of course, it's, of course, it's cheap, coming on a British wage.

Niamh Schmidtke  28:47

Yeah, completely

Erica Scourti  28:48

Yeah. And I'm not even on a very high British wage. But you know, I think What's tricky about this is that at the same time, you know, because sometimes people have said, Oh, you know, I don't, I don't want to be like a tourist like that, and like, kind of damage, but at the same time, you know, the country, the country needs it, in some ways. And this is what's really tricky. Yeah. Also, I think, you know, it also maybe comes in terms of, you know, influences in the art world, you know, that it's good from the point of view of like, it's nice to have different people coming through, and actually, that's one of the things that is nice about the art scene in Athens is that you do meet people from lots of different places who are coming to stay for six months or a year or, you know, that kind of like, you'll meet people from lots and lots of different countries, which I feel maybe is a little bit less than London, because it's the barriers to entry are so high.

Nina Davies  29:32

In the work, there's sound bits that are referencing Greece, but then also referencing the gentrification of, of London. We spoke about it before, but like the sort of search for authenticity, and you know, we were talking before about Hackney Wick and how much Hackney Wick has changed and it's not just Hackney Wick. There's like Peckham there's so many places in London that are doing this, but that sort of search for this authentic artist, kind of lifestyle. And we spoke a bit about you know, it Even like we romanticise like the 'good old days' as well, and it's that part of it like us romanticising it, is kind of part of that that machine.

Erica Scourti  30:07

Yeah. And I guess yeah, there's this, this kind of thing of like, oh, how it used to be. And you know, like I remember Hackney Wick. Yeah, how it was back then or before that was this? And before that, was that.

Nina Davies  30:07

Part of the myth?

Erica Scourti  30:11

Yeah, it's part of the method. Yeah, I guess part of the myth is this thing of being the first to kind of discover it. And obviously, that's got a lot of problematic colonial undertones as well, with this idea of like going to the undiscovered land, which is like, actually, what do you mean undiscovered? There's, people live here.

Nina Davies  30:39

Yeah, people don't want to know people have been living there for like, for centuries, and so on.

Erica Scourti  30:43

So you know, it's part of this kind of logic, which still persists in the western imaginary of like, oh, to go to go to the untrodden beach, you know, yeah, unbeaten, you know, to get off the beaten track and like to go to the like, to find the place where somebody else hasn't been there before. And like, what's that about, you know? It is also about kind of maybe trying to claim as a sense of, like, uniqueness or like, an experience that, that isn't just somebody else's, you know, going back to this kind of what I was saying, to begin with, like, this kind of desire to, or maybe to have an experience, which isn't just the same as everybody else's experience isn't just the same as the story that everybody else has just put on Instagram, and that everybody, you know, everybody could experience by going to Greece. It's, wanting something that's a little bit beyond that. And I think it's like that, the search for that little beyond is, you know, it's also a big part of consumerism is like this, the thing that is going to actually take you to that other place, but obviously nothing does, and, and hence you keep kind of trying to get there. And you know, maybe that that that other place doesn't actually exist, but it functions as a fantasy, which, like, keeps a lot of things going.

Niamh Schmidtke  31:53

Yeah, well, it's making me think about just that, it's something that you can't quite describe, so you're never going to quite find it really. And that's, that's the idea. It's like, come to Greece find find the, you know, authentic to taverna. Yeah. But what What if every single tourist who's coming to Greece that summer is looking for that? Yeah, you know, odds, odds are, you're not going to be anywhere where you're not going to hear languages that are, not going hear English, for example. Yeah. You know, it's sort of what it's kind of relying on that basis of how much it's unknown. And that's what makes it so mysterious and so desirable as well.

Nina Davies  32:34

You know, I also, well, I mean, you've so we've actually heard, like two versions of this work. So I kind of wanted to, even though it's not present in the work that you've just listened to, as the listener. And I wanted to maybe just kind of talk about that a bit. Because, yeah, you. You have a sort of like tourism industry, that sort of doesn't really rely on a place necessarily, it's about a desire, and it's about kind of, I guess, it's sort of would you say it's a simulation, like you kind of experiencing people's dreams? Yeah. And it's this whole history, maybe, maybe you could just explain it a bit. Because I think it's really interesting.

Erica Scourti  33:14

Which bit exactly? The idea of it being a simulation?

Nina Davies  33:18

Sort of like the dream, the dream scape and sort of this idea of like a body mind, worker..

Erica Scourti  33:23

Yeah. Yes. Because it to begin with, I had kind of I, and it has remained in, in this piece, but almost like in the background, so I had this idea of like, a dream worker who would be this kind of like a dream-fluencer, who would be this kind of body mind worker, in some way connected to these like dream industries. And maybe it would function in a way that, you know, you would be able to, to literally dream, somebody else's dream. But instead of this happening through an obviously technological interface, it would happen through the kind of body mind of these actual, you know, of these humans. Perhaps they've been technologically enhanced, perhaps there's some artificial intelligence, something they're probably or like some being, you know, tapped into a network, I kind of, you know, I didn't really want to go into like the mechanics of it, because that would get all very complicated.

Nina Davies  34:18

It'd get really sci-fi

Erica Scourti  34:18

Yeah, and it would just obviously fall apart. But as an idea, this idea of a kind of, yeah, of a dream worker, that to begin with, that kind of written a narrative based around one of these like dream workers, Dream-fluencers, who are at this kind of hub somewhere in Athens and trying to find somebody else like some somebody who could be who's going to maybe help them to get out of there, or help them in some way. But I removed the narrative of this and kind of try to leave almost like, throughout you hear the snippets, which are my voice and it's as if this person, this kind of protagonist is talking. But everything is so fragmented, and it's just, it's almost just this kind of jumble of like experiences of, you know, being on this peninsula. And then like the concrete steps and like the sex, the sex show signs, and it's all kind of like churning there, and it's like, are they her memories are the the ones that she's had to take on in order to do her job, which is offering up almost like being a host, or like a carrier, for dreams for other people to tap into. And it's all become kind of confused. And that's the same that like, echoes the, you know, the kind of form of the rest of the piece where it's like, you know, which bit is she is she tapping into? And I was almost thinking about it, like, maybe the track is like a scrambled training manual. You know, maybe she had to kind of listen to this, to be able to take in these kind of different aspirational things? And then there's, and then there were these kind of interruptions or suggestions of this other, this other world. And I'm not saying that they, oh, it's like, you know, the dream world and the real world, but they're all kind of happening at the same, at the same time. So yeah, I wanted it to be a little bit less clear, but maybe now I've kind of given that in there, it kind of creates a frame for like, maybe what is this?

Nina Davies  34:33

What is this space?

Erica Scourti  34:42

Yeah, what are these? What is the language, which isn't the found the found text and the found snippets? You know, what is it kind of referring to?

Or? Yeah, or even like, who it looks at? I was kind of interested in? Obviously, I know, it's your voice. Yeah. But like, Who is that? Who is that person? Are they the protagonist? Or? Like, are they a narrator? Like, like, like, do they author, are they the author of the dreams? Are they the experience? Are they experiencing this cacophony of, you know, snippets of all this advertising? So I think there's something interesting there.

Niamh Schmidtke  36:48

Yeah, I think also, when you think about it as a dream worker who's maybe trying to escape, you know, way, it's like, how do they disguise that almost, to like, not, not being so blatant that someone would just take off, or kind of stop or remove themselves from this kind of, shared experience and leave, but subliminal enough, in the same way as perhaps these kind of targeted advertising, that you create a subconscious thing of? Oh, actually, maybe I am taking advantage of someone, maybe they don't want to do this. You know, how does that work?

Erica Scourti  37:22

Yeah, but also, I mean, it's funny, because the idea of the subliminal, you know, obviously, this, this, this idea of, like, subliminal advertising, and all we're being programmed, it's a bit kind of crude. It's this idea of like the customer, the consumer being this kind of passive, like, just yeah, just like being fed by by the media. But I was also thinking about this idea of like, the subliminal maybe with this track that actually, the bits, which are kind of, like the bit where you hear somebody shouting, that he's having an argument with the boss, when when, when there's a very loud, like, Greek bid, and the bid was like, I hate my boss. Yeah. So there's this kind of, maybe there's a suggestion that this the training manual, or something has been, there's been some sabotage, like some other bits have come in there that are like, you know, what, it's like bla bla, bla, bla bla, that thought will make you feel terrible. And it's kind of like, and, you know, suggesting these suggesting these other, these other things, which are maybe getting the dream worker to think differently, but they don't realise, and then it's like, who is giving them? Who is giving those messages? Is there like an outside narrator? Is there an outside person? And that's maybe who the she, when she keeps saying, she's saying this? And you know, towards the end? Yeah, the she seems to appear?

Niamh Schmidtke  38:37

Or I'm wondering, like, Is there is there a protest happening within this somewhere as well?

Erica Scourti  38:41

Exactly, yeah. Yeah. Because I mean, there is there was a little bit taken from, from a protest in Athens, that, you know, just a little bit, you hear somebody saying something like that, you know, that orário tis Kyriakís, which is like the Sunday timetable, you know, the Sunday work hours, which are under threat, you know, which had been protected for very, very long time in Greece. So, yeah, so that's kind of tie- tied in there. But also, you know, obviously, for somebody listening to it who doesn't speak Greek, the bits were the, the taxi driver, you know, like service industry. So you've got like the taxi, the taxi rank, operator, who's, that's one of the goals that we had kind of going 'poú tha pas?', And then hear like clickety, clicket, click, you know, and she's asking where are you going? Right was somebody listened to that doesn't, who doesn't know Greek, I was so, as kind of also wanted to play with that sense of like, just as when you go somewhere and you don't speak the language, you don't, there's a lot you don't get, and it's going on, you know, it's going on all around you, but you don't get it so you, you're not paying attention.

Niamh Schmidtke  39:45

Well it's kind of making me think one thing I picked up a lot on when I was listening to the piece was because there's all these different qualities of voices as well is kind of the role of acting or the role of tone in a way. I mean, I guess especially in the parts where you're, you're kind of narrating, it's like, it's it feels quite deliberate that it sounds like someone who's reading a script rather than something that's spontaneous, kind of the tone is quite mono. But then, when you're listening to, for instance, you talked before about snippets of it coming from kind of, mindfulness industry, which is obviously designed to calm you down. Yeah. I mean, how much were you thinking about in terms of when you're kind of narrating part of the piece yourself? Was it quite deliberate that you wanted to not, I guess, overly act, or?

Erica Scourti  40:35

Yeah, I mean, I think the other thing, the other thing, I was thinking about this, in terms of I was gonna say this before, which is that obviously, like, well, maybe not, obviously, but the protagonist is a version of myself. So the bits that I was reading, I didn't write, I, I adapted them for this. And the bit at the end, I did (write for this). But you know, those are based on things that I've written before. So in the sense that it's also like a version of me. And there's actually the bits from the mindfulness thing is from an old piece of work of mine called 'Citizen Choice', where I had collage together, like, you know, video, audio, collage together, bits from these kinds of meditation and positive affirmation, podcasts and videos. So, so again, it's like, it is kind of, it does kind of relate also to, to me, so again, it's this kind of slippage between the fact that like, it's not just a completely imaginary person that, you know, they're based on something, and they're kind of like, potentially a version of myself, but they could also, they could also be kind of somebody else's memories. And they're probably quite are, quite similar to somebody else's memories who grew up at the same time as me and so on.

Nina Davies  41:46

So it's your simulation?

Erica Scourti  41:50

But then, you know, well, you know, I guess I would then say, but isn't kind of, isn't every version you? You know, it's not like one, it's not like, oh, the the social media version of you is, like, fake, you know. And there's another one that's real, you know, I don't think you can make that distinction.

Niamh Schmidtke  42:06

Because I remember we had a conversation before, we were talking about fiction and about kind of, I guess how this show explores different kinds of fiction, you saying, Oh, I don't write fiction, yeah, in my work, but in my mind, in my mind, when I think about your work, it's kind of it's about that line of, I guess, maybe truth and authen-, authenticity, and where fiction can fall into that and maybe kind of versions of yourself which you present as kind of feeling or maybe seeming fictional to someone else, perhaps, but maybe not to yourself?

Erica Scourti  42:37

Or maybe to myself as well, but yeah, I mean, I do I think, thinking about it more like that as a kind of process or as a verb of, of making fictions. Yeah, that definitely makes sense to me. Because, you know, like, I was saying, I think, reality or, you know, documentary is as, is as much fictionalised maybe, and this idea of, you know, I'm obviously my work has got a lot in common with ideas of auto fiction as well, which is this idea of like, starting from the self and, and then making something of it. And it's not that it's real. It's not that it's like all this bits of fake and this bits real, but it's based on based on true events, or I've also thought a bit of almost as, as if like being playing a cameo role in your own life or something. What would that be? That again, talks about that is, you know, refers to types of fiction because a cameo, a cameo is almost like the interruption of like something real into a fictional space, like, oh, played by themselves, like that's what a cameo-, cameo is, right?

Nina Davies  43:37

Yeah. Yeah,

Niamh Schmidtke  43:38

Well even I was reading that you sent us an extract from 'The Outage', a book you released a few years ago in 20-

Erica Scourti  43:45

2014.

Niamh Schmidtke  43:46

2014, and kind of, you were talking before with us about how it was written by a ghostwriter, based on what they could find of you online. And one of the things I found most interesting in reading that was, there was a lot of descriptions about picking up a camera or writing something or recording something. So in a way, as I was reading it, I could almost see the footnotes that they had found of, okay, so this thing has happened and I'm going to write everything that leads up to it. At the same time, last week, I was listening to an old conversation I had with someone and we're discussing Hilary Mantel, and how when she's kind of constructing, let's say, a conversation in historical fiction, she'll look at everything that's happened before the event and kind of prepare herself in order to say, okay, so if this character is in this mindset, and that character's mind, that mindset, this is the conversation I'm going to fictionalise when everything else is kind of, already known to be true. So this book about like, the opposite, in a way, for me, it's like your interjection has happened. And so they're figuring out how did you get to that point?

Erica Scourti  44:57

Yeah, and also Yeah, I think yeah, that's, that's a good, good interpretation of it. I think also in in 'The Outage', I mean, that there's that thing, there's like, I think possibly in the excerpt that I sent you, there's a bit where it's like, she starts crying, and then she picks up the camera and thinks this would make good footage. And you know, this idea of like a lit-, and another point where it says something like a life, a life lived only through its performance. And in a sense, in The Outage, there's this idea that somehow maybe the avatar or this kind of some version of the protagonist has kind of maybe escaped in some way, or is like just living, it's kind of living on or has maybe awoken out of some, some kind of slumber, whether it's like a technological slumber, or what is, or like a spiritual one is, it's uncertain. But there's a sense, a sense that there, yeah, are they separate? Are they the same thing, but there's always a sense of like, always been within mediation, always kind of thinking, like, oh, this could be a story, which, of course, is part of the way that we begin to experience ourselves through social media and so on, it's like, oh, this could be a tweet or I better save this, like, this would make a good anecdote or like, oh, when should I put that post up? And so there's that thing of, like, always thinking about, how is this going to look in, in its mediation? How is this gonna look, you know, to the gaze of others, you know,

Niamh Schmidtke  46:16

Yeah, cuz there's even a section in the, in the piece that we listened to today that says, Oh, I'm, it's my final night in Athens, and I'm still waiting for my anecdote. Yeah, you know, that that moment is sort of, I know, I need to make something, but I haven't, haven't found it yet. And that kind of pressure of not just being able to exist in the in the moment just for yourself, but kind of who is the audience that's going to be perceiving this?

Erica Scourti  46:41

Yeah, exactly. And even if the audience in a way is, is yourself, you know, this idea of like, oh, you know, something to tell the grandkids, this kind of idea that, like your future, your future self is going to want to look back on the, on- on these years and be like, oh, you know, I've got all of these stories to tell, which is like a weird kind of way of almost putting pressure on, on your current self because of either you have to have some future self is going to like, judge it or something or not, you know, that your life won't have like, measured up but like to what you know?

Niamh Schmidtke  47:13

yeah, or it's like, don't live with regrets. And it's like, well, wha- what?

Erica Scourti  47:17

Regrets for..? Yeah, exactly. Yeah,

Nina Davies  47:19

Yeah, it was also like, I guess it's sort of like searching for like some sort of immortality as well, isn't it? Like, you want to have some sort of story to be remembered, like remembered by even if it's a story that's told through through your offspring? That's such a weird way of putting it but yeah. But...

Erica Scourti  47:35

Or your artwork.

Nina Davies  47:36

Yeah, or your artwork

Erica Scourti  47:37

One the things we were talking about before, that's kind of made me think about it with also talking about like immortality, and like kids coming in here somewhere, was this idea of cruel optimism that I'd mentioned before, like Lauren Berlant's idea that the the investment in certain hopes and dreams can end up having, you know, it can be a relation of cruel optimism, because there's, there's hope in something, but the reality while you're living it in the present, is, is not a good one, you know, and the classic one being like the American dream. So there's also that sense of the, of the way that you know, kind of dream, dream is operating. And part of that is the heteronormative script, and this idea that there are these scripts for happiness, you know, and maybe like, that's what a lot of these kinds of adverts and like tourism, things, they're all kinds of little like recipes for, you know, happiness, and so is those kind of meditation things, it's like, okay, you know, this is the way to be happy quite often. And this is a critique made against meditation and positive affirmations, particularly more, moreso positive affirmations is this idea that by just telling yourself, like, I am great, and everything, my life is wonderful, you can, you know, just blur out the fact that actually, the reality you're in is shit. You know, like, you've got your, you're paying too much rent, you've got precarious work, and this future that's being kind of held up for you is keeping you stuck in this present, you know, so this, there's that cut somehow comes into this piece as well.

Niamh Schmidtke  49:01

Completely, or even it kind of ignores, for instance, if someone is neurodiverse, and there's just, your brain is just working in a way that's not ever going to work in tandem. It's not going to be efficient. Yeah. Like, yeah, like efficiency is quite simply not, not your mode of being and that's completely okay. It's more so because we're kind of wrapped into this insane work structure at the moment that there is no space given for that. I think a lot about coral optimism in terms of moving to London and people saying, why can't I make it or why can't I do this as well. And we were discussing before kind of being an artist and going to exhibition openings and thinking because it's, it is a work event, in a way even if it's your best friend's show. You're still there with,

Erica Scourti  49:43

You're still on show.

Niamh Schmidtke  49:45

Yeah, being surrounded by peers kind of, oh, you might meet this art producer, you might meet a curator or someone might talk about a show that's coming up or there's that cruel optimism of what maybe maybe this will be like where I get my next opportunity

Erica Scourti  49:58

Or my break?

Niamh Schmidtke  49:59

Especially Really, yeah, especially when you hear people's stories of how they get to kind of from A to B, and it's like, because they did some random thing in the middle of nowhere that ended up..

Erica Scourti  50:09

And again, is kind of this idea of like, all the chance encounter, and like, you've got to be out there. And, and then, you know, this kind of this thing can can go on for a very long time. I mean, you know, to the extent I'm still still doing it. There's, there's still this idea that like, round the corner, there's, there's the thing that will, yeah, that will kind of take you out of this, let's say in the case of artists and many other people who are, you know, either gig workers or precarious workers and so on, like, that will take you out of this difficulty, because you're gonna be one of the ones who makes it. So this idea again, you know, it's really prevalent in, in the, in the art world, and like, no matter how many times you kind of, say, like, artists get paid, like very, you know, they think like, mostly on kind of 10 grand, I think, like, really, really low. But it's like still this idea, no, but you know, but what if it's me, what if I'm the one who makes it, which sustains the whole idea that the dream that you could make it, you know, rather than be like, much more realistic, and let's say we're, you know, coming together to form a union or to be like, this is shit, you know, we need to have more rights, or we need to get paid better, because there's always this kind of like, dangling like, you know, golden ticket 'could be you'.

Niamh Schmidtke  50:12

Yeah. But then when you see those movements do start to happen. There's usually a large rate where things can become quite successful. I guess I'm thinking in Ireland, they recently set up an Artists Union. And they're now piloting a scheme where artists get given a living wage. Now, there's a bunch of different issues with that. Yeah. I don't think anyone wants to listen to here. But it's more so that idea of when that collectivity happens, it is usually really successful, but then there also becomes this thing of, oh, but then they get more opportunity than I get or, you know, kind of that certain basis of the individualism, of it-could-be-me.

Erica Scourti  51:53

Yeah, exactly. And I think, you know, I think that's one of the issues with, with the art world as is and the whole idea of the of the artist as this kind of individual. I mean, I think we don't need to say genius anymore, but let's say individual, you know, rather than rather than another worker who's like just trying to get by, like a lot of other workers, and if they're able to look and be like, oh, actually, we've got some material things in common, that could be the basis for solidarity, then certain things could move. But yes, you would have to give up some of that thing of being, you know, just just you, your vision, I don't know which which most artists struggle with. Not all.

Nina Davies  52:30

When I go on tick tock, like, there's sort of this collective form of making and like, you make something that someone else makes it and then it kind of like, builds it, there are also some issues with that, that are being talked about as well. But there is no such thing as the individual genius. It's sort of it's like actually quite horizontal, like the success of something is more horizontal than it is vertical. If that meant like, it's not one person that shoots up to the top. It's about like, even if you made a trend, it's, it's only, it's only good, because everyone else did it. So everyone else has been everyone else who's doing it is being seen in the process.

Erica Scourti  53:06

Yeah, that's kind of maybe like influencers in a sense, isn't it? I mean, I'm really interested in like, this rise of like the influencer, hence the kind of idea of the dream-fluencer because it's like, this new economy, which is just, it's almost like taking the branding thing to the next to the next stage, which is just like me the protagonist. Oh, actually, just me. Yeah, that's the product that you know, that's it the way that that, you know, from what I've understood, that is becoming a very, very desirable, like, idea of like, you know what, the, what I'm going to do is like, get...

Nina Davies  53:38

I'm going to sell my lifestyle, in some way.

Erica Scourti  53:41

So I wonder how that would work on on Tik Tok, because that model, the influence is still really relies on like, you know, it's, it's, you know, like, of course, there's other people in your kind of crew or whatever, but you want people to be clicking on your stuff, not everybody else's, because that's how you get your brand endorsement and spawn con and so on, you know.

Nina Davies  54:00

Your work is looking at sort of, like an algorithmic human experience, or, I mean, with this work, it's also kind of about the sort of gentrification of the self. Yeah. Which, you know, when you kind of say those things out loud, sound bad? Yeah, yeah, it sits somewhere in between it being dystopic and utopic, it doesn't, it doesn't really take a hardline position on whether it's bad or good.

Erica Scourti  54:25

I mean, in a sense, you could it kind of goes back to like that word, you know, of extractivism. And also capture, you know, this idea of, like, of everything being fully captured, you know, whether it's your experiences, whether it's your thoughts, whether it's your kind of consumer preferences in order to generate evermore kind of granular models of, of who you are as a, as a consumer, and therefore, you're going to do. All of that. It does sound very, like doomy, you know, and there's this. I mean, I've heard it referred to as the Borg-complex, which is this idea that like, we can't escape technology's gonna just crush us. Yeah, that's it like if you if you fully give in to that well, then yeah, There's no point doing anything. Yeah, he might as well just give in to that, to that. So I think that's the kind of, I still want to retain a sense of like, no, there is there is refusal, there is refusal against capure, and not everything is totally, like, of course, it's co-optible. But, you know, to just be like, well, everything, everything can be co opted and commodified, therefore, well,

Nina Davies  55:23

I might just leave that.

Erica Scourti  55:24

Yeah. And then, in that case, you know, kind of like, oh, there's no diff, there's no kind of point to politics or like, all money's dirty, so it doesn't matter if I take money from there, or from there, it's all money. It's like, yeah, you got, you know, that's where I wouldn't go. Like, I think there's there is always, there is always a space of, of action, you know, it might change and, you know, maybe look at it differently at different times in your life. But, like, otherwise, it's just kind of full cynicism.

Niamh Schmidtke  55:51

I guess I'm also thinking about the distinction between cruel optimism, versus em, just general pessimism as well. I'm kind of how, just because you can see that there's an overly optimistic side of something that, quite simply is not possible, because of all of the inequalities in the world we have doesn't mean that you can't hope for more than your present moment gives.

Erica Scourti  56:15

Yeah, exactly. And also, I think, you know, you know, the realisation that those things, unlike what the kind of positive affirmations, and so on, it's not something that's just going to change in your mind. You know, that is something that is, you know, you have to actually take actions, maybe make some sacrifices, maybe don't, you know, don't go to, don't like, there are some things you might have to say, to say no to. But again, let's say the case of, let's say, artists boycotts of it, the point is to do it collectively, if you just do it by yourself. It's kind of no point. So you know, it's yes, that there is yeah, there is there is always a point of hope, and often is in something in something collective, and maybe that's where there's, there is a sense of kind of connection, or like a kind of coming coming together. And that's kind of like going back to the piece, I did think of that. But, you know, maybe there's a yeah, like, the kind of she at the end is almost, is maybe, you know, there's, there's somebody to help, you know, there's somebody there who's kind of going to show her way out.

Yeah, or it's making me think, what, what would the union of dream workers look like?

Niamh Schmidtke  56:27

Yes, exactly.

Or mind Workers be like, or kind of, does this world or does that role only exist? Because they don't have a union? Or they don't have a collective space? Or kind of what the person who's listening to this, what action will they take after being part of that experience? You know, kind of what kind of collectivity or I guess care will come from it. Yeah.

Erica Scourti  57:38

Yeah, and like, how will they, you know, Will? They will? Will they kind of realise like, oh, actually, I've been exploited or like, you know, I'm being you know, this isn't fair or something like that. Is there like a kind of moment of coming to kind of coming to realisation but I thought one other thing, you know, on the topic of kind of dystopia/ utopia, like, as we've discussed before, as well, that a lot of the kind of bad, like, the negative things are already here, you know, that already in this world. So we don't, we don't need to wait for it to get any worse or like, imagine something worse, you know, we can just look at the world we're in right now. And that's, that is also the role that the, there was snippets from Frontex, the European border guard organisation, and so there's also snippets from their adverts. And, you know, what they do is, you know, according to them, is protect Europe, but you know, what they do is push away like, desperate people who are seeking safety and a better life. And that's actually what they do. Far away from all of us. We don't have to see it. But you know, and there's so there's also this, that is the kind of the that dystopia is here and now, and there's a sense in which it also, how is it linked to these other dreams, it's like, it's the kind of it's the other side of it. And like, all of these people who have to be left out in order for these kind of dreams to exist and persist, you know,

Nina Davies  58:58

Well, we're gonna have to finish there. I'm really sad, because I think we probably could have easily kept talking for another hour.

Niamh Schmidtke  59:03

Yeah, there's loads of things that I wish we could have asked. But I think, yeah, it's, it's, it's been really, really lovely having you. And really nice to expand more on the work and kind of talk a bit more about that relationship between authenticity, dreams, kind of creation of the self, and then towards the end as well, kind of community and care and coming together.

Erica Scourti  59:26

Thank you for your questions and your consideration, like it's really, it's quite rare to be able to just sit and talk about one particular work in some depth. So yeah, it's really nice to do that. Yeah.

Yeah. Not have to do it in a press release.

Yeah, or just in like one paragraph or one setence. Yeah.

Nina Davies  59:42

Great. We'll see you back in two months. Thanks for joining.

Erica Scourti  59:46

Thank you. Bye