

‘Crisis’ as Art: Young Artists Envisage Mutating Greece

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This article examines Greek visual arts production during the ‘crisis’—a period when the country’s contemporary art scene gained international attention. Our research focuses on emerging young artists studying at the Athens School of Fine Arts (2010–2013). We present various works exploring issues of national identity and the politics of ‘crisis’ that we consider as exceptional in the sense that the majority of students and academics consciously distance their art from current and “trendy” sociopolitical matters. Several artworks incorporate contingency in their own way and may entrap the viewers into a perplexing web of meanings that critically subvert stereotypes. [art education, crisis, Greece, Greek art scene, politics, stereotypes, traps, visual arts]

Introduction

The notion of ‘crisis’ brings to the fore the temporal dimension of social experience; it is all about discontinuity and the overwhelming complexity of processes evolving beyond people’s control.

Visual arts appear as a promising field of inquiry into ways of imaging ‘crisis,’ even at its peak, especially through the work of art students or graduates in a predicament of being young artists in Greece (a place of high unemployment and admittedly low prospects for any young adult) during the first decade of the 21st century.¹ In this article, we approach artworks as “devices” that young artists make in order to cope with their country’s constant mutation. We decided to undertake this research having as our field of study the Athens School of Fine Arts, where we first met in 2012 as teacher and student sharing the same concerns on the subject.²

In our perspective, informed by recent developments both in the anthropology of art and the international art scene, artworks are not “specimens” to be scientifically examined, but tools or even partners that help us to critically approach stereotypes and intervene in the processes of their formation. Criticizing the commonplace is a general and well-known characteristic of art practices in modern and contemporary art.³ Cultural criticism in anthropology has already been asso-

ciated with literature and art (Marcus and Myers 1995), whereas theories of agency may shed new light on the connections between art and anthropology and propose new sites for joint exploration (Schneider and Wright 2006, 2010, 2013). These perspectives inspired us to suggest certain interrelations between artistic practices and anthropological theory in the text that follows, but we reserve their more systematic theoretical elaboration for a future occasion.

Nonetheless, as far as current visual arts production is concerned, we are mindful that, from the moment an idea is conceived by an individual artist or an artists’ collective up to the final “material” outcome, there are many by-products, preparatory studies or relics, many discourses merging with objects, many images “emanating” from this process that circulate in exhibitions, catalogues, websites, and so on. In other words, there is an inherent spatio-temporal complexity of the dispersed mental-material “artwork,” in concordance with the anthropologist Alfred Gell’s (1998) analysis on art (see also Pinney 2005).⁴ More precisely, Gell sees in the work of art a movement of thought, a movement of memory, and a movement of aspiration, that is, “the evolving consciousness of a collectivity, transcending the individual cogito and the coordinates of any particular here and now” (Gell 1998:258).

Furthermore, during our collaboration, we gradually came to appreciate the notion of art as entrapment.

According to Gell (1996), a trap is a device that embodies ideas and conveys meanings (therefore, an artwork), since by its very nature it is a transformed representation of its maker (the artist as the hunter) and the prey animal (the audience as its victim) and of their mutual relationship. The trap embodies a scenario as the dramatic nexus, binding together the hunter and the victim and aligning them in time and space. The pertinence of this anthropological approach became clear especially when one of us started constructing a particular kind of trap as an artwork commenting on Greece's current sociopolitical situation. When an artwork incorporates contingency in its own way,⁵ it may entrap the viewers into a perplexing web of meanings concerning 'crisis' that critically subvert the common sense. It is in this perspective (more overtly political than Gell might have had in mind) that artworks as traps may become the artist's tools or rather partners in cultural critique.

In the first part of the article, we give an idea of the current context of visual arts output in Greece, particularly concerning the paradox of the 'crisis' as an opportunity for the young artists to present their work internationally. In the second and third parts of the article, we focus our attention on the Athens School of Fine Arts as a particular context of university education for emerging artists, in order to mount our own "exhibition" of students' work that we consider exceptional (in more than one sense). Finally, we conclude by giving the floor to the artist (and one of the article's authors), Io Chaviara, in order to demonstrate how this entrapping "device" works.

The Greek 'Crisis' Exhibited

Since 2008 in Greece and abroad, the international art scene has hosted curators and artists from all over the world in order to express their perspectives on the so-called 'Greek crisis'. Meanwhile, in the fields of art theory and humanities, many articles and publications appeared sharing the same topic.⁶

Many exhibitions were organized adopting various concepts about the Greek crisis. Among other perspectives, these included the way in which Greeks "shamelessly"⁷ leave behind their prior lifestyle (Things I Like in the Greek Crisis 2011); the acceptance of the future as failure and the reexamination of the past as the main solution to the present of crisis (Depression Era 2011); considering fear as a dominant problem, trying to exorcize it, anticipating good luck (In the Mouth of the Wolf, Die Die! 2014); an academic methodology in order to "creatively envision the future" (Enter Views of Crisis 2013); demonization of the crisis through which political and financial chaos could be understood (Hell as Pavilion 2013); and a way to subvert both the 'Greek crisis' as a single phenomenon in combination with the exotic interest of the Western world (Enjoy (y)our State of Exception 2014).

Finally, this phenomenon is considered as an exceptional paradigm of peer learning, indicating what is going on in Europe, and thus, the theme of the world-famous exhibition Documenta 14 in 2017 will be "Learning from Athens." The first Documenta took place at Kassel in 1955 and "embodied the need to deal with trauma" (referring to the Nazi regime). However, "those sociopolitical parameters that made Documenta urgent are no longer in play. This sense of urgency, then, must be found elsewhere."⁸ In that perspective, Documenta claims its existence by its temporary settlement in Athens. 'The Greek crisis' is no longer considered as an isolated case—instead, it concerns Europe in its entirety. The curator Adam Szymczyk and his team noted that "Documenta 14 would enable those artistic strategies that reach toward the reality of a contemporary world, (...) larger than Germany or Greece. ... Yet they present us with an opportunity to open up a space of imagination, thinking and action, instead of following the disempowering neoliberal setup that offers itself as (non) action implied in the (non)choice of austerity."⁹ It is quite interesting, within the short period of crisis (since the 2010 Greece IMF agreement till 2014, when Documenta 14 was launched), that the case of Greece transformed from a depressive, repulsive, and repugnant

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model to a paradigm from which the Western world will achieve experience and knowledge.

The artists of the Greek contemporary art scene are not accustomed to provoking international interest; on the contrary, it is Ancient Greece that remains the center of attention worldwide, and therefore the country's cultural policy focuses more on the preservation of the nation's "heritage" than in recent art production of an uncertain value.¹⁰ It was the supposed "return" of the Olympic Games to their "home country" in 2004 which permitted the organization of one of the major international events for the contemporary Greek art scene, namely, the Outlook International Art Exhibition (October 2003–January 2004).¹¹ In this exhibition, a rather limited number of Greek artists took their place alongside their internationally famous colleagues as "peripheral" creators of an unknown and unpromising Greek art scene. What are the similarities between this traditional consideration of classic Greek art as "heritage" for the Western world and current global interests? Is contemporary Greek art capable of conveying the know-how of dealing with a crisis?¹²

According to Sara Kuhnt's (2012) overview:

under the local state of emergency—and with the consciousness that the international art world is turning its gaze to Athens—the move towards discursive, performative, research-based and anti-capitalist art practices becomes evident, not only in the work of the Greek artists but even in the program of institutions (...) The dialog between art professionals and experts from different disciplines is aimed at a more comprehensive understanding of the current socio-economic problems, a consideration of possible solutions and a debate on the role of art in society.¹³

In short, Greek artists are invited to leave behind the post-Olympic Games lifestyle and to participate in a multiplicity of international venues where they are welcome to suggest ways of coping with the new order of things concerning the economy and politics of their home country. This phenomenon of a sudden focus of attention in "peripheral" art scenes is not uncommon in the international art world. The art of the "outcasts" captures attention for reasons well known to art histo-

rians and to anthropologists. As Papailias (2011) has put it, this is due to "blatant Orientalist tropes" dominating international and often domestic discourse on the 'crisis'.¹⁴ This change in perspective—however short-lived it may be—certainly creates a totally new context for artistic practice in Greece, which probably concerns emerging young artists the most.

'Crisis' in the Athens School of Fine Arts

The Athens School of Fine Arts, as Greece's most prestigious and fundamental public institution of art education and production, hosts the majority of the country's young artists-to-be.

The School was founded in the first half of the 19th century, as a relatively small and isolated institution where students competed to get in through specific exams and the figure of the "master" reigned, until recently, teaching the "traditional" skills of sketching and oil painting. The School valued talent and virtuosity, promoted "art" as an autonomous aesthetic experience, and served as a depository of "Greek" art, meaning the heritage of classical antiquity and modern Greek painting, especially from the 1930s onward.

The role of the "masters" of the Athens School of Fine Arts in the production, commercialization, and appreciation of visual arts in Greece was primary and remains an important one. But during the last 50 years or so, the Greek art scene has become more closely related to the wider European one and far less homogeneous, with more university departments of visual arts and young artists, theorists, and curators increasingly studying abroad or in private art schools. Therefore, the Athens School of Fine Arts is in a process of rapid change, partly due to the 'crisis' (bringing also many reforms of the university education in Greece).

The idea of research on recent art production during 'the crisis' was received with mixed emotions by the artists-members of the academic staff, in charge of the Painting and Sculpture studios of the Visual Arts Department. We informed them of our purposes, they informed the students in turn, and we visited them the day they fixed a gathering on this subject in each atelier. We discussed the opinions of both teachers

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and students on art during the 'crisis' in Greece, and we kept a journal on our conversations. We requested their help in order to collect documentation on artworks for our research archive. However, only a few teachers responded by giving us examples of their work, and a very small number of students contacted us again in the days and months that followed. Our first impression was that there is very little going on in this domain. Then, we decided to contact students we knew personally, whose work was inspired by the recent sociopolitical situation, and they informed us of other students with a similar perspective. Without our personal network of students dispersed across different studios, we would have made very different conclusions. But certainly, the "silence" we received through our "official" access to the school's ateliers is also an important finding. We have contacted artists from different generations (i.e., older and younger teachers and students), who use different media and have diverse artistic and sociopolitical orientations. We have discussed with them their ideas concerning the relationship between art practice and social reality. In spite of their many differences, most of them are critical toward art produced as an immediate response to current social issues.

One major argument for the aforementioned criticism has been that art explicitly linked to the 'crisis' becomes "trendy," and producing "trendy" art is not worthwhile. A second line of reasoning, linked to the above, explains why "trendy" art is not worthwhile: because artworks should be autonomous, not linked to any specific context, in order to be interpreted in a variety of ways over time. Most of these artists (teachers and students alike) would agree that the memorable work of art is a form, an object, a concept, which is worthy in its own right and does not serve as a second-hand illustration of any social situation or as a political statement. The formal autonomy of an artwork is considered a fundamental aspect of art making espoused by the majority of students and teachers of the School, which represents a major issue for modern Western art.

A third line of reasoning prohibits the production of artworks on 'crisis' by a small number of politically involved artists. This prohibition is not overtly admitted and is justified by the idea that speaking in any way about 'the crisis' inevitably serves to create it. This attitude may be explained by a certain political analysis of the current 'crisis' as a situation that supposedly concerns only the "capitalists" and not the "people." Students or teachers, adhering to this ideology, produce work that could certainly be interpreted as relevant to the crisis. We also came across artworks that were "recontextualized" a posteriori by curators

or theorists who understood them as referring to 'crisis', independently of the artist's intentions. But if the artists themselves refuse to link their works to 'crisis', are we allowed to include them in our research archive?

Therefore, silence on the 'crisis' may be perceived as a statement expressing the above divergent positions on art, social reality, and politics, which all contribute to a refusal to connect artworks to social contexts (such as the 'crisis'). We came across another instance of this refusal when we consulted the School's archives and in particular the catalogues edited each year, documenting the graduates' work. These catalogues include one piece of work per student donated to the establishment before graduating, frequently chosen by their teacher. The artworks bear no trace whatsoever of the intentions of the artists (no artist statement or description of the concept and the process of the work, etc.). Therefore, it is an instance of a selective decontextualization and reevaluation of the work produced by the students in order to be accepted as a part of the School's archive. We may consider this attitude as coherent with the whole conception of "high art": as meaningful form in its own right, independently of the context of its production, promoted until recently in the School. But the works that follow may serve as a hint that things are changing inside the School as well as in Greek society.

'Crisis' through the Works of Students of the Visual Arts Department of ASFA

At this point, we shall present certain artworks explicitly linked to the 'crisis' by their own makers. Given what has been described above, we must underline though that we are dealing with exceptions and not with typical productions of the School. We do not propose any explanation for these exceptions other than these students' political awareness, combined with their interest in experimenting with recent art trends (and, in some cases, in anthropology and/or art theory). We focus on students' artworks, produced between 2010 and 2013, that we consider interesting not because of some "outstanding quality" (whatever the criteria of "good art"; we are not proposing any at this point), but because they help us clarify the diversity of perspectives the students adopt that they find important, not only aspects of the 'crisis' but also their role as artists vis-à-vis current social and political issues in their country.

We have discerned three major themes referring to practices adopted by the young artists:

History Revisited

History may become a source of inspiration for artists, as for many other European citizens of our times, in search of explanations for the difficulties of the present and of examples demonstrating ways of dealing with them. In the case of the young Greek artists participating in our research, it is through a reexamination of the past that some artworks attempt to comment critically on the current sociopolitical formation.

For example, the lecture-performance *The Bird Institute* (2013) by Marilena Synodinou (Figure 1) is a constructed archive of arbitrarily connected works of George Cuvier, Francis Galton, and Alphonse Bertillon. Inspired by anthropology, the artist is tracing the genealogy of discourses of discrimination, thus cauterizing the neo-fascist rise in Greece of crisis.

Also, Chrysa Valsamaki's installation *7 Portraits and 616 Words* (2012) (Figure 2) is based on the artist's archive concerning seven notorious prisoners during the 1980s in Greece and is a tribute to the memory of those whose voices were silenced and their stories excluded from the "official" history. Valsamaki's work may be understood as a comment on different forms of resistance to state violence, which becomes prominent in times of crisis not only as different forms of law enforcement but also as decisions taken by the political and economic elites in their own favor, endangering the future of the most vulnerable to the effects of crisis.

The Other Self

While paradigms of discrimination and exclusion may be sought in the past, current affairs are full of such

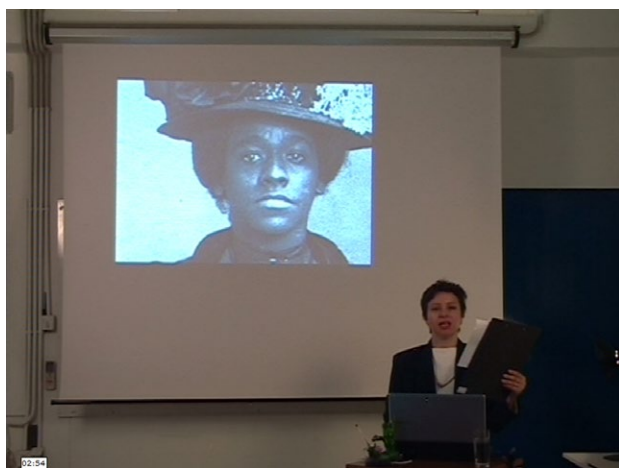


FIGURE 1. Marilena Synodinou, *The Bird Institute*, in situ lecture-performance, 2013 (Courtesy of the artist).

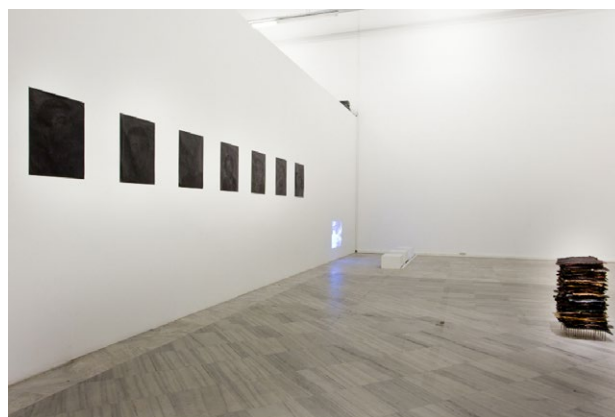


FIGURE 2. Chrysa Valsamaki, *7 Portraits and 616 Words*, mixed media installation, 2012 (Courtesy of the artist).

references and serve as a major source of inspiration for artworks denouncing these attitudes. What is more, the scope of the "other" is adopted by certain artists in order to underline important issues of Greek crisis. In her work *Rawmanticism* (2012), Maria Tzanakou (Figure 3) produced 22 photographic portraits of women (fellow artists and others) who identify themselves with the 22 women who were stigmatized by the authorities as illegal prostitutes and HIV positives in May 2012. The authorities' order was to publish their personal details and photographs in the press under the excuse of public health protection. This incident can be linked to an effort of clearing out the city as well as the Greek northern borders and more generally to the well-known attitude of finding scapegoats during socially destabilizing circumstances.¹⁵ The violent racist attacks against the immigrants in May 2011 (following the murder of a Greek citizen by immigrant thieves)¹⁶ triggered Anthi Daoutaki to question Greece as she has perceived it till now and to start seeking the immigrants' Greece. *Yunan-Dark Room* (2011) (Figure 4) consists of a photo archive of immigrants' portraits shot in a photo studio and transformed (by the use of Photoshop to change clothes and backgrounds to fancy ones) in order to send back home proof of prosperity and a video of interviews of immigrants talking about their own Greece.¹⁷

Going Public

Public space becomes interesting for many artists, as it is the theater par excellence of sociopolitical upheaval. The Athenian city center in particular renewed its significance as a space of public gatherings, inscribing the rapid changes in people's lives, especially during the



FIGURE 3. Maria Tzanakou, *Rawmanticism*, installation, 2012 (Courtesy of the artist).



FIGURE 4. Anthi Daoutaki, *Yunan-Dark Room*, video and photos installation, 2011 (Courtesy of the artist).

first years of the ‘crisis.’ The young artists of the School privileged three main approaches to public life:

Transcribing

In the work *Square* (2012), the artist, Evanthia Giannakopoulou (Figure 5), focused on Syntagma Square and collected an audiovisual material of interviews with passersby and other frequenters. Thus, Giannakopoulou

transcribed both the ordinary and the extraordinary of the life of the Athenian city center, which symbolizes the constitution of democracy as well as political protest and indignation during the difficult times.

Sophia Grigoriadou’s artwork, entitled “They constitute a threat to public health,” consists of an interactive Google Earth soundscape map of the center of Athens according to instructions from the Hellenic Center for Disease Control and Prevention¹⁸ about specific areas of people supposedly dangerous to public health

(immigrants, prostitutes, and drug addicts) (Figure 6). The continuum created by the recording of the soundscapes is proposed by the artist as a way of transgressing the boundaries imposed by the State.

Intervening

Certain artists preferred to create or transport their own artworks in public spaces, choosing in particular the squares (which acquired significance as spaces of public gatherings during the first years of 'crisis'):

Omonoia Square (2012) is where Nikos Stathopoulos (Figure 7) transported a metal cage he had constructed

and used it in different ways, including as a box-home, a coffin, a monument-cage, scrap material, and a portable accommodation module. The artist underlines the cruelty of the living conditions that more and more people are obliged to suffer living on the streets of the Athenian center.

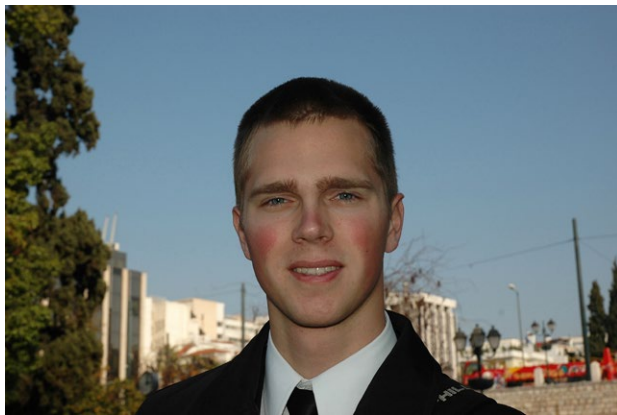


FIGURE 5. Evanthia Gianakopoulou, *Square*, mixed media installation, 2012 (Courtesy of the artist).



FIGURE 7. Nikos Stathopoulos, *Omonoia Square*, site-specific installation performance, 2012 (Courtesy of the artist).

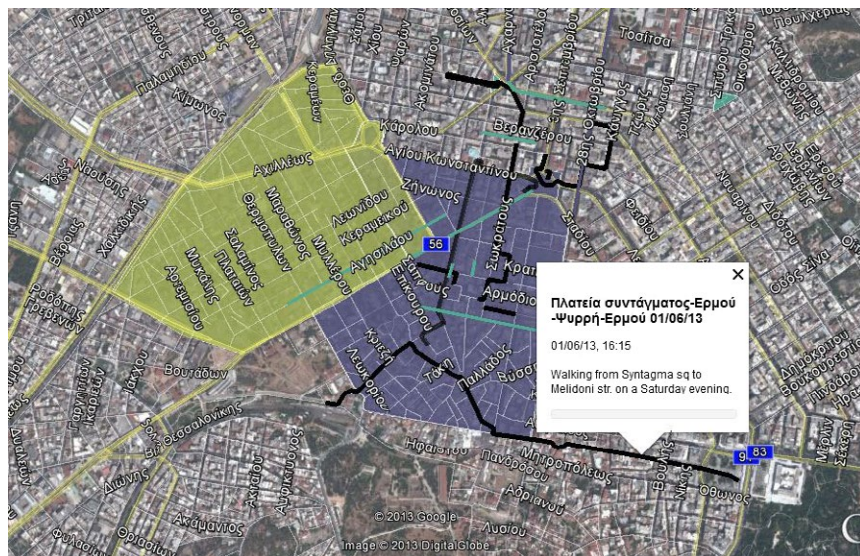


FIGURE 6. Sofia Grigoriadou, "...They Constitute a Threat to Public Health," interactive soundscape map (Google Earth), 2012 (Courtesy of the artist).



FIGURE 8. Fani Bitou, Victoria Square, site-specific installation, 2012 (Courtesy of the artist).

Fani Bitou (2012) conducted fieldwork for several months at Victoria Square (Figure 8), where the relations between Greeks and immigrants had become extremely tense¹⁹ after the murder of a Greek citizen. She focused on what the locals named “the public health bomb,” that is, immigrants selling stale bread, and she created a pile of crumbs from the bread she bought from the immigrants and let the pigeons feed on her ephemeral monument to the outcasts of the square.

Indicating

Several artists opted for another kind of intervention, by underlying certain emblematic but also problematic issues of public life.

Vivian Emmanouilidou put up a number of posters with several Constitution articles on September Third Street (2013) (the date commemorating the foundation of the Greek Constitution in 1843) (Figure 9). With her work, she inaugurated “an informal outdoor museum” accompanied by an interactive web map, indicating the spots and the content of the posters. The project aims to remind the citizens of both their civic rights and their obligations to critically re-examine their standpoint on the current political situation—commenting on the Greece-IMF agreement, which disregards the Greek Constitution as a means of socio-political awakening.

Iraklis Kopitas intervened in the city center by literally highlighting the actual “material” traces that the ‘crisis’ has left in the streets of Athens during the last five years. By *Marking the Damaged Surfaces* (2013) (Figure 10) with a pink-fluorescent spray, his artistic-activist gesture indicates the leftovers of riots and thus

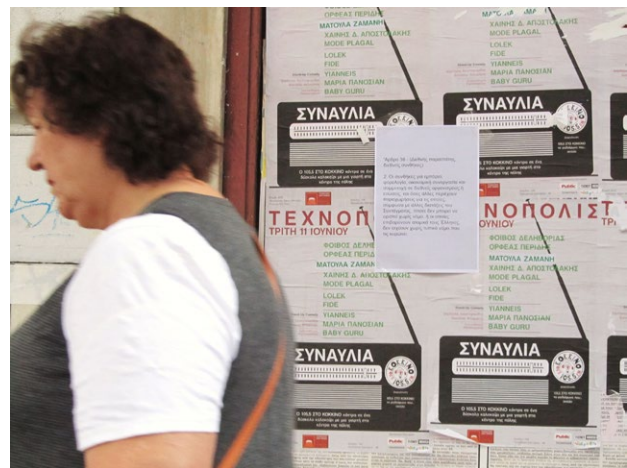


FIGURE 9. Vivian Emmanouilidou, *September Third Str*, artistic intervention and interactive map (Google Earth), 2013 (Courtesy of the artist).

intensifies their impact on the passersby and their imprint on the city’s socio-spatial memory.

Therefore, each of the above artworks—as a “knot of images, objects, performances, texts”—attempts to formulate the individual artist’s experience of the ongoing ‘crisis’. This (and every) artwork may be conceived as a “device,” that is, a certain apparatus formed by an artistic technique to serve as a means of a personal-political strategy of intervention in the social context of the artwork’s production. In this perspective, artworks may be considered as acting in their own way, each one of them proposing its own perspective of the situation. This is why we prefer to conclude by giving the ground to one of them (or rather to its maker) in order to imprint in this text an aspect of the particular “device” constructed by one of the article’s authors, Io Chaviara.



FIGURE 10. Iraklis Kopitas, *Marking the Damaged Surfaces*, artistic intervention, 2013 (Courtesy of the artist).



FIGURE 11. Io Chaviara, *Threatening Equal Opportunity (T.E.O.)*, lecture-performance, 20', 2014 (Courtesy of the artist).

Crisis' Trap: Threatening Equal Opportunity (T.E.O.)

by Io Chaviara

Artistic practice helps me bring to the fore the way my fellow citizens conceive of what it feels to be Greek at this time of 'crisis' and what the imagery of the Greek "self" entails (Figure 11). Through art and inspired by anthropology and other readings, I decided to focus on

the images of the Greeks in crisis and how they become consumable commodities both inside and outside of the country. The aim of the work I produced during the last three years is to contest the power of so-called "common sense."²⁰ I want to destabilize stereotypes that have an immense impact on the way history, politics, and "Greece," as an imagined entity, are conceived of in our days. Therefore, my art is characterized by the use and abuse of political, social, and national clichés and the appropriation of everyday practices and "ready-

made realities.”²¹ The outcome produced is grotesque, ironic, and satirical. Greece is being transformed from the outcast of Europe into a model of knowledge on crisis issues. The artwork *Threatening Equal Opportunity (T.E.O.)* takes advantage of this transformation in order to create an exaggerated image of it.

Threatening Equal Opportunity (T.E.O.) is the title of a lecture-performance (duration 20')²² that I presented to an audience of teachers and fellow artists as my thesis for a Master of Fine Arts at the Athens School of Fine Arts in July 2014. A semi-fictitious scenario unfolds in the form of a lecture which refers to the European policy on how “Mother Europe” takes EU members under her wings. The ‘crisis’ is presented as a Simulation Program proposed by European experts and technocrats who spread precautions to the world through Crisis Prevention Management, as the only scientific way to avert any kind of crisis threatening European territory. A detailed report of the Crisis Simulation Program which took place in Greece during 2010–2013 is also included.

The lecture’s structure has two parts: the first refers to the European Union’s strategy against crises based on examples from the Middle East²³ and Ukraine (2014). The EU strategy suggests a way to keep crises away from its borders and for supporting high-risk countries.²⁴ The second part is the presentation of the report of the successful Crisis Simulation Program of Greece. A detailed citation of the Greek government and Greek business world political statements, Greece’s social practices—reactions and suggestions, the European backing up of Greece, and Greek national bonding outline the context of the Greek Crisis Simulation Program (Figure 12).

While composing this lecture-performance, I adopted the dominant political discourse that offers technocratic and scientific solutions to the crisis; thus, the artwork deliberately does not look like art. The above form provides credibility of knowledge to the content of the lecture-performance. Although it was presented in an art space, part of the audience mistook it for real (asking, “when all those facts happened” or “if some of the facts presented are real”).

The appropriation of the Greek–European dominant political discourse constitutes mimicry²⁵ and apparently an imprint of the crisis. However, the lecture includes both real and false events in order to blur the audience’s perception of reality. For example, one of the false points of the lecture-performance references the “invasion of refugees” in Europe through Greece as an EU border. A sign placement is being suggested on the Aegean borderline, warning: “It is highly advised not to enter EU territory illegally. The EU is not liable for any death or personal injury.” Thus, illegal “invaders” are informed about the EU policy, which renounces any responsibility of deaths or injury within its territory.²⁶ I concluded the lecture-performance with the Johnny Walker advertisement campaign, “Keep Walking Greece” (Skai.gr 2012). The video was presented as the successful resolution of the Crisis Simulation Program. The video was a significant part of the campaign, which Johnny Walker funded in 2012 in order to inspire hope for the Greek people during the ‘crisis’. *Threatening Equal Opportunity (T.E.O.)* is activated in unpredictable ways; it implies and, at the same time, requires the notion of contingency (i.e., the interaction between the audience and the artwork is beyond my control).

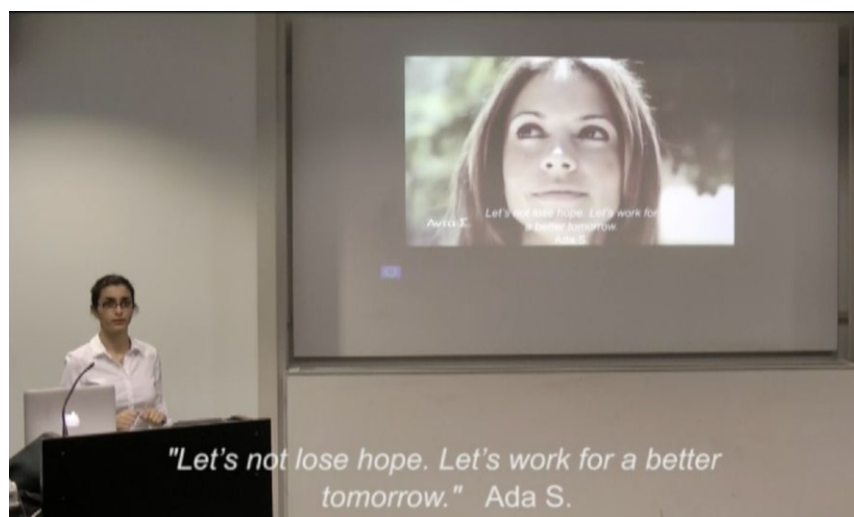


FIGURE 12. Io Chaviara, *Threatening Equal Opportunity (T.E.O.)*, lecture-performance, 20', 2014 (Courtesy of the artist).

The artwork reflects, imitates and simulates reality²⁷ (i.e., the Greek political scene and people's reactions, shaping "common sense") to such an extent that it becomes a trap in which a cynical indiscretion concerning European politics becomes unbearable. In this way, the result is to use "reality" itself as a trap and cynicism as a means of self-sarcasm.

In order to construct a trap, a preliminary study is required to be able to achieve invisibility and to blur the borderline between art and real life. This study is similar to the process of trap making for hunting purposes (Gell 1996). The built-up relations between the trap and the audience constitute the field which my artwork activates and completes. Such a trap could provoke a wide range of reactions: people could react with repulsion, neutrally, or positively. Much to my surprise, some people actually believed the information provided at the lecture-performance, while they were aware that it was all about an art piece. In any case, the field of reactions per se could constitute a platform for survey/research, which could be perceived as indicative of the people's dynamics, tolerance, and perception of the ongoing sociopolitical situation.

Based on my experience of the Greek 'crisis' and of the present sociopolitical situation in Europe, similar kinds of traps are common in everyday life.²⁸ To what extent could our sociopolitical awareness and standpoint be influenced if we adopted the aforementioned perspective as a way of perceiving and dealing with the everyday?

Conclusion

Art production during 'crisis' may serve as a lens for magnifying certain ways that people envisage the upheaval in their lives and construct various kinds of devices (artworks included) in order to cope with the everyday difficulties they encounter. Through art, people reflect, comment, and intervene in public on the cultural, social, political, and economic circumstances that brought about these major changes. The attitudes prevailing and the artworks produced during these times, especially from the students of the Athens School of Fine Arts, demonstrate reactions ranging from an effort to keep a safe distance from the flow of events and to create art that "lasts" (because it is not just trendy) to letting oneself go with the tide, hoping to come up with a finding (an artwork) that can reveal hidden mechanisms of the evolving processes (as in the case of the *T.E.O.*).

The above "exhibition" mounted in this article contributes, in a sense, to the many exhibits of the Greek

artists' experience of 'crisis' (which is also considered as an "opportunity" for the local art scene to become international) by bringing to the fore different kinds of devices that may be constructed in the last mentioned perspective (i.e., going "trendy"). Most of the works created between 2010 and 2013 that we came across during our research underline attitudes of intolerance or revolt in order to either denounce or promote them. Still, there are certain artworks aiming not only to express the artists' own feelings of anger (mostly against the Greek state or EU and IMF policies) or sympathy (for the unfortunate), but also to serve as triggers of the viewers' feelings and images of crisis and, therefore, as "tools" for research on the processes of stereotype formation.

This is the case of the work entitled *T.E.O.* by Io Chaviara, one of the article's authors, which we present at length in order to explain how an artist may use several conceptual means that contemporary political art offers (e.g., so-called "overidentification" and the form of lecture as performance) to construct what we may call a "trap" for viewers. Those among viewers who may be unaware of the difference between real and false, in regard to events that the artist refers to in her "scientific" analysis of the 'crisis', have the opportunity to realize that this kind of "trap" is not only of the artist's own making, but is molded on the traps life—and politics—construct everyday for the unaware citizens in times of 'crisis' (and on many other occasions).

We propose this as an example of the ways an artwork not only expresses its producer's feelings and ideas (as it is conventionally understood) but may act as a partner and also as a tool for the artist and the anthropologist or any social scientist wishing to comprehend aspects of imaging crisis. This perspective supports theories of art's agency and helps clarify Gell's ideas on traps by indicating when, how, and why a work of art may become an entrapping device.

As far as the works we have presented above are concerned, a future closer examination of the way each artwork came into being as a product not only of an individual but also of a knot of relations (teacher-student, peer to peer, etc.) may reveal more of the particular environment of the School as we have previously described it. Nonetheless, it is as if each one of these works, and all of them as part of an open-ended corpus of art produced by emerging artists in the Athens School of Fine Arts, perform incisions into the layers of time, bringing simultaneously to the surface diverse aspects of social relations that are involved in the way the Greek 'crisis' is actually evolving in different contexts.

Notes

- ¹ Greece is a place of high unemployment and admittedly low prospects for any youngster. More specifically, the youth unemployment rate in Greece reached an all-time high of 60.5 percent in February 2013 (<http://www.tradingeconomics.com/greece/youth-unemployment-rate>).
- ² A. Diallya, Assistant Professor of History at the Department of History and Theory of Art, was originally also a member of our research team. We thank her for her ideas and her help in several interviews.
- ³ This characteristic certainly finds an immense diversity of expression over the years. In our perspective, we may refer to Chantal Mouffe: "Art can offer a chance for society to collectively reflect on the imaginary figures it depends upon for its very consistency, its self-understanding" (2003, citing Holmes).
- ⁴ Pinney also privileges an approach to artworks in terms of temporal processes, but he questions Gell's formal analysis of a "macroscopic whole" and brings to the fore divided and mutually antagonistic forms. Pinney treats images as "unpredictable 'compressed performances' (...) whose dense complexity makes them resistant to any particular moment" (Pinney 2005:266).
- ⁵ As the artwork is not entirely under the control of the artist, respectively the trap is not under the hunter's control, but also to the potential prey.
- ⁶ Articles and essays focus on everyday practices, gestures, and people's narratives portraying the common sense through which the authors base their analysis in history, social memory, and politics (Kirtsoglou 2013; Knight 2012; Rakopoulos 2014; Theodosopoulos 2014). More particularly, Herzfeld (2011) reflects on a robbery, while Sutton (2011) comments on how food is a key idiom and practice to think on contemporary political-economic systems. Images of crisis as they imprint to the everyday, especially concerning ironic slogans, are brought forth by David Knight (2015). On his side, Konstantinos Kalantzis (2015) examines graffiti, popular protests, hip-hop, and sexual joking and uses his own "intimate lifeworld as a means of producing analysis" (Kalantzis 2015:1038) on middle-class Greek responses to the debt crisis. These articles' approach seems rather familiar to most artists' attitude seeking inspiration in their everyday life during crisis. Artists are also interested in the media, where the crisis surfaces as one of representation (Papailias 2011). However, artists tend more toward statements-manifestos than analysis or explanation.
- ⁷ The term is used in the theme of the exhibition. Examples were given such as "I enjoy shamelessly asking the price of the coffee before I order it, . . . I am not the only one well-dressed on Saturday night in the bus," and so on (<http://www.kinitiras.com/v2/gr/gre/page2col.html@n0=8c5ca142eef22facc58b24a796fa2c85&n1=d996258a16244169cb6189a76ae1c467&n2=330ac4592040d34e9bfa311abcd4d2ec&tp0=64925333c69afa7982b93a06ebd33115>).
- ⁸ See <https://m.facebook.com/documenta14?v=info&expand=1&nearby> & http://www.documenta14.de/files/Press%20release_6%20October%202014.pdf.
- ⁹ See note 8.
- ¹⁰ Whereas today the issue of the Ancient Greek heritage is widely discussed in more than one perspective, the question of the relations between this kind of cultural heritage and Greek contemporary art, especially during crisis, is rarely posed (Yalouri and Rikou in press).
- ¹¹ J. Joachimides was the artistic director of this major event for the Greek contemporary art scene, and he conceived OUT-LOOK International Art Exhibition (October 2003 January 2004) as "a major public forum for the exploration of artistic fervor and alternative cultural forms at the outset of the 21st century." Paradoxically, "Learning from Athens" was also the point, but in a different sense than in the case of the Documenta 14: "The exhibition is inextricably linked to the city of Athens—a city which is not just a hyper-archeological space or tourism's stereotyped ideal but a vibrant and amorphous network of interrelated forces. The city's idiosyncrasies, its bizarreness, its deficiencies render it an ideal location for presenting the ambiguities inherent in the art of today" (www.photography-now.com/exhibition/6075).
- ¹² Io Chaviara's artwork *Threatening Equal Opportunity (T.E.O.)* (2014), which is included in the present article, comments on this issue.
- ¹³ See <http://www.afterall.org/online/beyond-the-crisis-on-greece-s-burgeoning-contemporary-art-scene#.VpeJ7R-p96Rs>. Also see Donadio (2011).
- ¹⁴ But it is also a far more complex issue concerning visuality, colonialism, and primitivism in modern and contemporary art (Kalantzis 2012; Rikou 2013).
- ¹⁵ This incident is characteristic of the clearing out promoted during the pre-election campaign of the government party Nea Dimokratia (New Democracy), which was realized through the Operation Xenios Zeus (the Greek god of hospitality) with the support of Hellenic Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Just a while after, Greek authorities arrested and charged those women with intentionally causing serious bodily harm under the Greek Criminal Code and also for breaches of the national legislation on sex workers.
- ¹⁶ A barrage of racist attacks lasted for some days and followed one day after a criminal assassination of a Greek citizen by three immigrant thieves.
- ¹⁷ The use of photography particularly in the work of Daoutaki could be discussed further by referring to an anthropological bibliography concerning very similar matters (Kalantzis 2010; Pinney 1997). Certainly, this is true for almost every artwork presented here that brings to the fore issues concerning the relations between visual arts, visual

culture, and social practices and could be further explored in an anthropological perspective (only, this exceeds the aim of this article, which is limited to presenting certain artworks in the sociopolitical context of their production).

¹⁸ See note 15.

¹⁹ See note 16.

²⁰ See also Kalantzis (2015). His focus is on the Greek self-image and its multiple interpretations concerning the national and international Greek image.

²¹ Hito Steyerl refers to readymades not only as objects but also as social practices (<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/politics-of-art-contemporary-art-and-the-transition-to-post-democracy/>).

²² The genre of lecture-performance appropriates the form of an academic lecture and the form of a performance. It could include multidisciplinary fields such as science, sociology, pop culture, politics and even fiction (Dirksen et al. 2009:27). This specific genre requires research methodology. Lecture-performances dangling between knowledge and pseudo-knowledge, documents, fiction, irony, humor, and mockery are mixed. This dangling triggers and invites the audience into a research process.

²³ Tunisia (2010), Syria (2011), Morocco (2011), Libya (2011), Cairo (2012), Istanbul (2013).

²⁴ Such as the PIIGGS countries (Portugal, Ireland, Spain, Greece and recently added, Great Britain and Italy) (Tong 2010).

²⁵ According to the BAVO group, their work focuses on the "political dimension of art, architecture and planning" in order "to highlight architecture's symptomatic function within sociopolitical struggles" (2007). This mimicry, camouflage and simulation are the aesthetic form of art practices such as "overidentification" or "subversive affirmation." These practices share artistic and activist features, and they both attempt to manipulate/activate their recipients via appropriation and via highlighting and amplifying what they want to subvert. "It is this strategy of choosing the worst option ... applying it to today's topoi of resistance" (2007).

²⁶ This fictional story could be recontextualized according to the major refugee crisis the EU faces in 2015 and beyond (the influx of refugees from the Middle East).

²⁷ See, for instance, Arns and Sasse (2006).

²⁸ For example, from personal issues to major political decisions influencing people's benefit, any challenge may serve as a trap, constructed to trigger a person's standpoint.

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