
ΠΡΟΒΛΗΜΑ Β ΦΟΚΥΣΕ: ΝΑΣΛΕΔΙΕ Κ Κ ΒΥΖΟΥΒΥ ΣΟΥΒΡΕΜΕΝΝΟΥΤΗ

Katsaridou Iro

THE CRISIS DISPLAYED:
GREECE'S PARTICIPATIONS IN THE VENICE ART BIENNALE

Katsaridou, Iro—PhD, Curator, Museum of Byzantine Culture, Greece, Thessaloniki, akatsaridou@culture.gr.

Since the end of 2009 Greece has experienced a sovereign debt crisis that continues to plague the country up to today, especially in the light of the recent COVID-19 pandemic. The Crisis, as it is widely known in the country, reached the populace as a series of sudden European Union-driven reforms and austerity measures that led to a harsh impoverishment of the population. Meanwhile, since 2015 Greece has experienced an unprecedented influx of migrants and refugees fleeing war and deprivation in their home countries in the Middle East and South Asia in search of a better and safer life in the EU. The present paper focuses on the artistic discourse addressing the financial and social crisis in Greece, as this is exemplified in three artworks selected to represent the country at the Venice Art Biennale (2011, 2013, 2017). The fact that despite the economic difficulties and political turmoil, Greece continued to be represented in this important international event throughout all the years of the crisis, makes it a unique case study for the discourse that the official Greek cultural policy chooses to adopt in international art forums.

Key words: Venice Art Biennale, contemporary art, curatorial policies, economic crisis, refugee crisis, ethical regime of images.

Introduction: In art, we are doing well ...

“In art we are doing well, although things for our country have been difficult lately”¹. With these words Theodoros Pangalos, then Vice President of the Greek government inaugurated the country's pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011. Infamous in the Greek public discourse for his controversial comments, the Greek politician, speaking in 2011, in the midst of the Greek economic crisis, summarized the contradiction between a country plagued by a sovereign debt, and ensuing humanitarian, crisis, and its flourishing art scene, as proved by the 2017 hosting of *documenta 14*.

In the aftermath of the world financial crisis of 2008, Greece has experienced a sovereign debt crisis since the end of 2009 that continues to plague the country up to today, especially in the light of the recent COVID-19 pandemic. The Crisis, as it is widely known in the country, reached the populace as a series of sudden European Union-driven reforms and austerity measures that led to a harsh impoverishment of the population, and subsequently to

¹ *Pangalos T. Τον τελευταίο καιρό έχω πει αρκετές... βλακείες* [I have talked much nonsense lately] // *To Vima*, 3 June 2011. Available at <https://www.tovima.gr/2011/06/03/politics/theodwros-pagalos-ton-teleytaio-kairo-exw-pei-arketes-blakeies/> (last visit 13.4.2021).

a social and humanitarian crisis, marked by severe unemployment and thousands becoming homeless.

Meanwhile, since 2015 Greece has experienced an unprecedented influx of migrants and refugees fleeing war and deprivation in their home countries in the Middle East and South Asia in search of a better and safer life in the EU. More than a million people have transited through Greece to other EU countries, but with the closure of the so-called “Balkan migration route” in March 2016, tens of thousands of refugees were left stranded in the country. Social tensions often occurred as racism, xenophobic attacks, rejected asylum applications, poverty and lengthy bureaucratic processes became the experience of many refugees and migrants in Greece.

The present paper focuses on the artistic discourse addressing the financial and social crisis in Greece, as this is exemplified in three artworks selected to represent the country at the Venice Art Biennale (2011, 2013, 2017). The fact that despite the economic difficulties and political turmoil, Greece continued to be represented in this important international event throughout all the years of the crisis, makes it a unique case study for the image that the official Greek cultural policy chooses to present in international art forums. At this point it should be noted that the purpose of this paper is not to evaluate the works themselves, works by internationally renowned artists who have generally received positive reviews from the Biennale audience. Rather, I will seek to examine the ways in which these works formed part of the general political discourse on crisis/crises.

Beyond Reform (2011)

In the 54th Biennale in 2011 with the general title ILLUmiNations, Diochandi presented the installation “Beyond Reform”, selected by a committee of the Ministry of Culture to represent the country under the supervision of Maria Marangou. Unquestionably one of the most prominent Greek female artists, Diochandi is known for her site-specific and minimalist installations which she has been creating since the 1970s². The 2011 Greek participation at Venice was a site-specific installation that enclosed the entire national pavilion within a structure made of wooden boards, thus covering its Byzantine-like façade and pillars³. From the crevices, the visitor could peer, like through a keyhole, at the pavilion itself, an allusion, according to Marangou, to its history. The visitor could enter the structure through a rising corridor and then walk between water surfaces—as if the canal had entered and “flooded” the pavilion—in order to finally see a column of absolute light⁴.

This light, a common feature in Diochandi’s work in the past years, was also the basis of the narrative. As she states in an interview, the boarding of the pavilion symbolized the imperative for the country to “focus”. Which meant that the Greek people felt like they were being ‘boarded up’, however, as the artist explained, the interior route towards light suggested “possible ways out of the crisis,” as the “Greek light would rise again”.⁵ In the same climate, and with intense references to the ancient Greek tradition of catharsis, the curator notes how the installation expressed:

“[...] the current situation in Greece, which today is overwhelmed by the recession and the International Monetary Fund. It is a land of light that lives, willingly or not, in darkness

² *Leopoulou A.* Diochanti. Available at https://biennale7.thessalonikiennale.gr/en/event/main_mmst/diochanti (last visit 13.4.2021).

³ *Marangou M.* Beyond Reform // Diochandi. Beyond Reform, 54th International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia. Hellenic Ministry of Culture, 2011. P. 46.

⁴ *Ibid.* P. 47.

⁵ *Marinos C.* The Ephemeral is Eternal // Diochandi. Beyond Reform. P. 65–66.

and decadence, hoping for a spiritual and socio-political reconstruction: that is, the vision of light, a major catharsis as well as clarity of thought”⁶.

Light-darkness, decadence-reconstruction: it was through these opposing schemes that curator Maria Marangou seemed to form her argument, which leaves room for hope and regeneration, “catharsis”, as she characteristically mentions, not accidentally mobilizing the ancient Greek term for purification.

The optimistic tone of the curatorial and introductory texts did not seem to have found a corresponding resonance among the general public. Just two weeks after the opening of the exhibition, the installation was vandalized by strangers, who wrote the phrase “Sold Out” on the facade, while adding on the right side “Anon stateless Immigrants Land”⁷.

The era did not exude the optimism that had been invested in the discourse of Greek participation in the Biennale. The summer of 2011 was marked by mass, daily mobilizations, which became known as the “Aganaktismeni” (the Indignant), a movement placed in the framework of the numerous anti-globalization Occupy and anti-austerity protests across Europe and the United States, that became the main agent of social resistance to the memorandum signed by the Greek government, the European Union and the International Monetary Fund. Rallies in squares, informal popular assemblies calling for Real Democracy Now, internet resolutions and the total disapproval of the entire political system were the main features of the mobilizations⁸.

The Ministry of Culture with a simple announcement condemned, as it had to, the vandalism of the pavilion. But also, the artist’s reaction, expressing her frustration with the event⁹, was undoubtedly the politically correct one, despite the artistic dimension that one might attribute to the gesture, largely recalling the practices of the Situationist International, the radical movement of the 1960s, which often still provides the blueprint for artistic dissidents to follow today¹⁰.

History Zero (2013)

Stephanos Tsivopoulos’ *History Zero* installation, a tri-partite film accompanied by an archive of texts and images that evidence various models of alternative, non-monetary exchange systems, represented Greece at the 55th Art Biennale (2013). Mainly established as a film-based artist, Stephanos Tsivopoulos has exhibited extensively at art institutions and film festivals worldwide¹¹.

The filmed episodes of his installation narrate the experiences of three very different individuals, questioning the value of money and the role money plays in the formation of human relationships. In the film’s first episode, an elderly art collector, suffering from dementia, makes

⁶ Marangou M. Beyond Reform // Diohandi. Beyond Reform. P. 47.

⁷ Adamomopoulou M. Θύμα βανδαλισμού το ελληνικό περίπτερο της 54^{ης} Μπιενάλε [The Greek pavilion at the 54th Biennale a victim of vandalism] // Ta Nea, 17 June 2011. Available at: <https://www.tanea.gr/2011/06/17/lifearts/culture/thyma-bandalismoy-to-elliniko-periptero-tis-54is-mpienale/> (last visit 13.4.2021).

⁸ Gerbaudo P. The indignant citizen: anti-austerity movements in southern Europe and the anti-oligarchic reclaiming of citizenship // Social Movement Studies. 2020. Vol. 16 (1). P. 36–50.

⁹ Η Ελλάδα ξεπουλήθηκε [Greece was sold out] // Deal News, 17 June 2011. Available at: <https://cutt.ly/KcRzWcF> (last visit 13.4.2021).

¹⁰ Lang M. From Watts to Wall Street: A situationist analysis of political violence // Cultures of Violence: Visual Arts and Political Violence. Ed. by R. Kinna, G. Whiteley. London; New York, 2020. P. 26.

¹¹ Stephanos Tsivopoulos. Bio. Available at: <https://www.stefanostsivopoulos.com/about> (last visit 13.4.2021).

origami flowers using euro banknotes. Renewing her origami decoration from time to time, she throws the old flowers into a rubbish bag. In the second story, a young African immigrant makes his living collecting rubbish in a supermarket trolley. He accidentally finds a garbage bag full of flower-shaped banknotes, which changes his life. In the last part, an artist wanders the streets of Athens recording scenes of the Greek crisis with his iPad. He finds an abandoned supermarket trolley full of scrap metal, which he takes for his artwork¹². The archival material that accompanied the filmed episodes focused on examples and testimonies of alternative, non-monetary exchange systems. It sought to present the ability of such models to question the political power of a single currency, highlighting at the same time circumstances under which societies can bypass a monetary economy altogether and turn to an exchange system for goods and services¹³.

The relationship of the work with the Greece of the austerity-inducing Memorandum becomes more than obvious. However, again the connection made with the crisis was based on hope, the tone was optimistic. As mentioned in the foreword by the then Deputy Minister Kostas Tzavaras, the title of the work “History Zero”, “... does not imply the end of History but rather a turning point that allows us to envisage a new trajectory and a new perspective for Greece within the international environment”¹⁴. In this same climate, the curator of the exhibition, although acknowledging the era as a “time of rupture and change”, pointed out that “every crisis creates the opportunity for new meanings to emerge in our relationships to each other and to our environment”. And it is precisely in this framework that she placed the narrative of the installation: a work that “attempts to see our relationship to money poetically, putting it in a broader philosophical perspective”¹⁵.

Although looser, the connection with the tradition and the ancient Greek culture of the country is present here as well. The text by Minister Kostas Tzavaras emphasized the constant presence of the country in the visual arts, and in the Venice Biennale in particular. A steady presence that, even in adverse conditions, aspired on the one hand to reaffirm the “belief in the value of intercultural dialogue and our aim to imbue this dialogue with the principles and ideals of Greek civilization” and on the other, to strengthen the “artistic production within Greece itself through an osmosis with international creativity in the visual arts”¹⁶.

The two distinct poles correspond to the ethnocentric, but at the same time pro-European discourse of the center-right coalition government of the era, in which New Democracy, the party of the Pro-European Right played the main part. In this discourse, Greece sought to remain within the European ideals, without on the other hand betraying its history and tradition. This quite often self-contradictory discourse was also reflected in the selection of the texts included in the catalogue that were to illustrate man’s relationship to money; an extended quote from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* was followed by others from Western thinkers such as Marcel Mauss, Charles Eisenstein, Bernard Lietaer and Thomas H. Greco¹⁷. Not by chance, the only non-contemporary one is Aristotle himself, whose appearance at the beginning seems to ‘hellenize’ and hence legalize any radical thinking.

¹² Tsiara S. On the Surplus Value of a Dream // Stefanos Tsivopoulos. History Zero. 55th International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia. Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Education, and Religious Affairs, Culture and Sports, 2013. P. 15.

¹³ *Ibid.* P. 13.

¹⁴ Tzavaras K. Foreword // Stefanos Tsivopoulos. History Zero. P. 9.

¹⁵ Tsiara S. On the Surplus Value of a Dream. P. 13–15.

¹⁶ Tzavaras K. Foreword. P. 9.

¹⁷ Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book V-Chapter 5-Section 10 & 11 // Aristotle in 23 Volumes. Cambridge, MA; London, 1934. Vol. 19. translated by H. Rackham.

Laboratory of Dilemmas (2017)

The ancient Greek narrative was the basis for the work that represented the country at the 57th Biennale (2017): George Drivas' video installation *Laboratory of Dilemmas*, curated by Orestis Andreadakis. Its narrative was based on Aeschylus' play *Iketides (Suppliant Women)*, which poses the dilemma: save the Foreigner or preserve the Local¹⁸. Thematically, in other words, there was a shift of focus from the economic to the refugee crisis, which became a major issue that the country was then called upon to face.

According to Aeschylus's tragedy, the fifty daughters of Danaus (the Danaides) left Egypt to avoid getting married to their first cousins, and sought asylum from the King of Argos, Pelasgus. The King faces the dilemma: to help the foreign women, risking turmoil and a war with the Egyptians, or to not help them and break the sacred laws of Hospitality and the principles of Humanism.

The play's dilemma is connected with the fictional story from a 1960s scientific experiment, presented through the excerpts of an unfinished documentary. According to the story, a team of researchers is called upon to decide whether it will save the vulnerable new cells that unexpectedly appeared and might threaten the laboratory's cell culture. The installation was presented in a complex labyrinth-like construction, extending over two levels. As the spectators wandered through the pavilion, they became challenged by the film excerpts and the relevant "documents", which allowed them to form numerous thoughts and associations, and in a way transferred to them the dilemma of accepting or rejecting the "other". No clear answer about which solution was finally chosen by the scientists was given at the end¹⁹.

The parallels drawn between the dilemma that Aeschylus' play and the scientists' decision present and the concurrent historical conjuncture of the immigrant and refugee crisis were explicitly stated by the political representatives. In her introductory note, the Minister of Culture Lydia Koniordou summarized it through a series of questions about how we are "supposed to treat the foreigner, the refugee, the hobo, the vagabond," as well as on "our duty towards the persecuted, to those who unwillingly flee their home and seek protection in ours"²⁰.

In the same climate, the text by Katerina Koskina, then Director of the National Museum of Contemporary Art and commissioner of the Biennale participation, sought to connect the work to its historical context, following the same spirit. In fact, she made a special reference to the welcoming reception and the spirit of solidarity exhibited by local residents of Greek islands, in spite of the economic recession and deprivation they faced²¹.

More implicit is the connection the curator Orestis Andreadakis made in relation to associating the dramatic Suppliants with the refugees of today. The major part of his interview with George Drivas is dedicated to analyzing the main concepts of Aeschylus' play, such as the Foreigner, the hospitality provided, or King Pelasgus' dilemma, whereas the situation of the refugee crisis emerges from time to time, such as the foreigner-refugee as a perilous figure for social cohesion today, or the divinely protected tradition of hospitality, which is associated with Orthodox Christian tradition, and more specifically with the Great and Holy Friday Troparion,

¹⁸ Vitali D. In search of narrative between stillness and moving image // *Laboratory of Dilemmas*. George Drivas, 57th International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia. Hellenic Republic: Ministry of Culture and Sports, 2017. P. 111–112.

¹⁹ Koskina K. *Laboratory Conditions as a Seedbed of Dilemmas // Laboratory of Dilemmas*. George Drivas. P. 27.

²⁰ Koniordou L. Foreword // *Laboratory of Dilemmas*. George Drivas. P. 10.

²¹ Koskina K. *Laboratory Conditions as a Seedbed of Dilemmas*. P. 25.

and is juxtaposed to the views and policies of “priests and political parties who claim to be Christian”²².

An optimistic discourse on crisis/crises

Beyond Reform and *History Zero* concentrated on Greece’s economic crisis, while *Laboratory of Dilemmas* focused on the refugee crisis the country has experienced since 2015, when more than a million people fled war in the Middle East through Greece. Despite their differences, the three works relate to the dominant discourse on crisis that developed on a national level, telling the story of a predictable crisis, expected from a country that never managed to modernize enough in spite of the opportunities offered by the EU²³. This economic downturn was further compounded by the influx of refugees and migrants. The complementary side of this semi-official discourse considers this crisis as Greece’s last chance for reformation, an opportunity for the country’s “new trajectory and perspective”²⁴, and to “break new ground in the universal dialogue of cultures”²⁵, to quote the introductory texts by two Ministers of Culture coming from different political backgrounds.

What becomes clear from the brief presentations of the Greek participations at the Venice biennale of recent years is the existence of a specific discourse regarding the way in which official Greek cultural policy chooses to present crisis/crises in international art forums. Despite the differences traced, all narratives share an optimistic/positive approach to crisis and confronting it, with the significance of human relationships being especially emphasized. Hence, *History Zero* challenges the role money plays in the formation of human relationships, highlighting alternative, non-monetary exchange systems²⁶. Similarly, Katerina Koskina, Director of Greece’s National Museum of Contemporary Art and commissioner of Drivas’ *Laboratory of Dilemmas* underlines in her text the altruistic generosity of the Greek islanders who defied recession and helped refugees²⁷. This optimistic discourse is exemplified by particular features that are traced in the narratives of the artworks presented at the Biennale; the recurrence of which I will try to examine below.

First, the works establish a **loose, if not controversial relation to History**. Classical heritage is invoked as a safe choice in *Beyond Reform* and even more in *Laboratory of Dilemmas*, on the basis of its international prestige and recognizability, however the narratives that are articulated are self-contradictory. In *Beyond Reform* Diochandi invites the viewer to see History through the cracks of the installation’s wooden structure; here History is vaguely defined as the Byzantinesque architectural aspect of the Greek pavilion. The catharsis, however, takes place in the timeless minimalist interior, the historicity of which is not mentioned. In *Laboratory of Dilemmas*, the artist uses the validity of the documentary medium to narrate the fictitious story of the scientific experiment, a pseudo-documentary in film terminology²⁸, which finds its equivalent in the Aeschylean myth. As the historical moment of the refugee crisis attains the status

²² *Andreadakis O.* George Drivas, Orestis Andreadakis: mail in progress // *Laboratory of Dilemmas*. George Drivas. P. 41.

²³ *Kouki H., Liakos A.* Narrating the story of a failed national transition: discourses on the Greek crisis, 2010–2014 // *Historein*. 2015. Vol. 15 (1). P. 49–61.

²⁴ *Tzavaras K.* Foreword. P. 9.

²⁵ *Yeroulanos P.* Foreword // *Diohandi*. *Beyond Reform*. P. 43.

²⁶ *Tsiara S.* On the Surplus Value of a Dreamo. P. 13.

²⁷ *Koskina K.* Laboratory Conditions as a Seedbed of Dilemmas. P. 25.

²⁸ *Jacobs D.* *Interrogating the Image: Movies and the World of Film and Television*. Lanham, 2009. P. 188.

of myth²⁹, emphasized by the curator in his interview with the artist, the political is eliminated and any critical intention is silenced and appeased.

On the other hand, *History Zero*'s narrative appears historically misplaced: Although documenting the Athens of the crisis era, Tsivopoulos' generalized urban landscapes rather belong to what art critic Elisa del Prete has identified for earlier works of the artist as the "a-temporal dimension of myth, through which he presents the questions of Man today like those from time immemorial"³⁰. Turning a historical moment into myth is, in Barthes' terms, to "transform History into Nature"³¹. Tsivopoulos' ahistorical, naturalized urban landscapes aestheticize the Greek crisis culminating in an appeasing and ultimately apolitical stance.

Similarly ahistorical is the curators' equating the crisis invariably with the misfortunes caused by natural disasters. Martha Rosler's critique on the liberal documentary finds an equivalent, as here too "Causality is vague, blame is not assigned, fate cannot be overcome"³². For Maria Marangou, economic crisis is "our Greek problem", a generalized expression she mobilizes to vaguely contextualize Diochandi's work in the framework of "the recession and the International Monetary Fund"³³, without any further clarification. Tsiara's poetic approach presents Tsivopoulos' alternative economies as an antidote to the current standstill, for which no explanation is given, whereas neoliberalism as a term is never named by the curator herself and appears only once in the exhibition catalogue—in the text by Gregory Sholette³⁴. In the same way, in *Laboratory of Dilemmas*, the word "war" characterizes only the potential war of Argies in Aeschylus; no mention is ever made of the 21st century wars that created the unprecedented flux of refugees.

This lack of historicity leads us to the second feature of the discourse on crisis: a void that is to be filled with a discourse that resides in the "**ethical regime of images**", or a "zone of indistinction", to quote Jacques Rancière, in which art is not judged as such, but instead "in terms of their intrinsic truth and of their impact on the ways of being of individuals and of the collectivity"³⁵. The enclosed pavilion is interpreted as the country's imperative "to focus", so as to get motivated to proceed out of the darkness; moral dilemmas are expressed on the fate of difference as exemplified in Drivas' viability of the new cells; even in Tsivopoulos, an artist who seems skeptical about the moral dimension of contemporary art, the "Happy end" where everyone gets what they want, could be seen as a kind of moral rehabilitation. In this ethical community, in Rancière's words again, where everyone is included, and the excluded does not exist, consensus has been achieved³⁶. The heterogenous elements that coexist in the installations do not underline the contradictions of a world of conflict. Rather, the works' prime function is that of social mediation: "to restore lost meaning to a common world or repair the cracks in the social bond"³⁷.

This consensual logic implied is also discerned in what constitutes the third feature of the discourse that the Greek participations articulate: that is the constant effort of the curatorial

²⁹ Barthes R. *Mythologies*. New York, 1972. P. 108.

³⁰ Elisa del Prete, *Arte e Critica*, 61, Dec 2009—Febr 2010.

³¹ Barthes R. *Mythologies*. P. 127.

³² Rosler M. In, *Around and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography) // Decoys and Disruptions*. Selected Writings, 1975–2001. Cambridge, 2006. P. 179.

³³ Marangou M. *Beyond Reform*. P. 21.

³⁴ Sholette G. *Stefanos Tsivopoulos and the Fiscal Unconscious // Stefanos Tsivopoulos. History Zero*. P. 73.

³⁵ Rancière J. *Aesthetics and its discontents*. Cambridge, 2009. P. 28.

³⁶ *Ibid.* P. 115–116.

³⁷ *Ibid.* P. 122.

enterprises and the introductory notes of the political representatives to **relate crisis to artistic creativity**. Not limited to the Greek example, this paradoxical scheme is used as a repetitive pattern to typify different subjects, from modern Danish cinema to the Greek post-punk scene. According to this widespread discourse, artistic creativity is presented as the reverse aspect of the discourse of the crisis, as the re-activation of what several researchers of different backgrounds call “a gift culture”, that is promoting artistic leadership and solidarity amidst partners within a context of national reconstruction as well as transnational collaboration³⁸. For others, austerity appears to promote a particular form of creativity, which mobilizes the resourcefulness and ingenuity of citizens in their ability to adapt and restore what is seen to be lost in the face of cuts to the welfare state³⁹.

Recurrent in researchers examining the cultural impact of the Greek recession, such as Dimitris Tziouvas, according to whom “an explosion of creativity has been witnessed in Greece during the crisis,” despite funding difficulties⁴⁰, the crisis/creativity discourse is echoed in the texts that accompanied the Greek participations at the Venice Biennale. Hence, Minister Yeroulanos highlights the symbolic significance of Diohandi’s work, which “becomes a vehicle for showcasing the country’s contemporary, dynamic, extrovert character ...in a period when it is struggling with all its might to redefine itself and set out on a new path of hope”⁴¹. Similarly, for Tsiara, Tsvivopoulos’ work constitutes a response to the present crisis and a stimulus to envision the future. It proposes dynamic ways to reaffirm solidarity, cooperation and co-responsibility⁴². Equally, in the words of Minister Koniordou, the dilemma posed in the *Laboratory of Dilemmas* is one that everyone must answer on their own. In her words, the artwork that represents Greece prompts people to “prevail over fear and disregard prejudices”, to prove themselves bold and “act in solidarity”⁴³.

Decontextualized by the international political events that led to the economic and refugee crises, as well as the radical, nationalist or xenophobic reactions they prompted dividing public opinion among Greeks, the solidary tendency the texts highlight seems to exemplify consensus, that is the symbolic structuration of the community that evacuates the political core constituting it, namely dissensus, to quote Jacques Rancière. According to the French philosopher, a political community is not equated with the sum of a population, but in effect is structurally divided⁴⁴.

Concluding: towards a positive side of the crisis

To conclude, the ambivalent association of crisis to creativity is best exemplified in depoliticized sayings that seek to unravel the ‘positive side of the crisis’, such as the viral phrase “In art we are doing well, although things for our country have been difficult lately” by Vice President Theodoros Pangalos. Maybe the viral saying would have more meaning if paraphrased: Are we doing well in art **just because** things are difficult? A well-known art market

³⁸ Kouroulou O., Liz M., Vidal B. Crisis and creativity: The new cinemas of Portugal, Greece and Spain // *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film*. 2014. Vol. 12 (1 & 2). P. 147; Hjort M. *Small Nation, Global Cinema: The New Danish Cinema*. Minneapolis, 2005. P. 22–23.

³⁹ Forkert K. *Austere Creativity and Volunteer-run Public Services: the Case of Lewisham’s Libraries* // *New Formations*. 2016. Vol. 87. P. 11–28.

⁴⁰ Tziouvas D. Introduction // *Greece in Crisis: The Cultural Politics of Austerity*. Ed. by D. Tziouvas. London; New York, 2017. P. 5.

⁴¹ Yeroulanos P. Foreword // Diohandi. *Beyond Reform*. P. 43.

⁴² Tsiara S. *On the Surplus Value of a Dream*. P. 15.

⁴³ Koniordou L. Foreword // *Laboratory of Dilemmas*. George Drivas. P. 10.

⁴⁴ Rancière J. *Aesthetics and its discontents*. P. 115.

practice in the years of neoliberalism is to promote art from counties or regions under crisis, creating the corresponding “brands”. Recent examples include Eastern European or Balkan art in the 1990s, Middle Eastern art in the 2000s and so on. Could the Greek art of crisis be such a case? Indeed, amidst the crisis, many art galleries, artist-run spaces and institutions appeared, including the Athenian branch of the Gagosian Galleries in 2011 and the non-profit cultural organization NEON founded by the industrialist, art collector and philanthropist Dimitris Daskalopoulos, while in 2015 the *documenta* organization announced the hosting of its 14th edition in the Greek capital. Exhibitions, festivals, organizations, art galleries. So yes, in a sense, the crisis is related to creativity and the assertion from Theodoros Pangalos that “we are doing well in art” seems to apply. However, it is an art that that seems to turn Greece’s alleged “backwardness” into an opportunity for creativity; that doesn’t delve into the reasons behind the crisis, appeasing the role of global neoliberalism and the EU’s neo(colonial) policies towards it. An art, consensual in its official version, that presents a saleable and “affordable” view of the crisis to the international public.

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