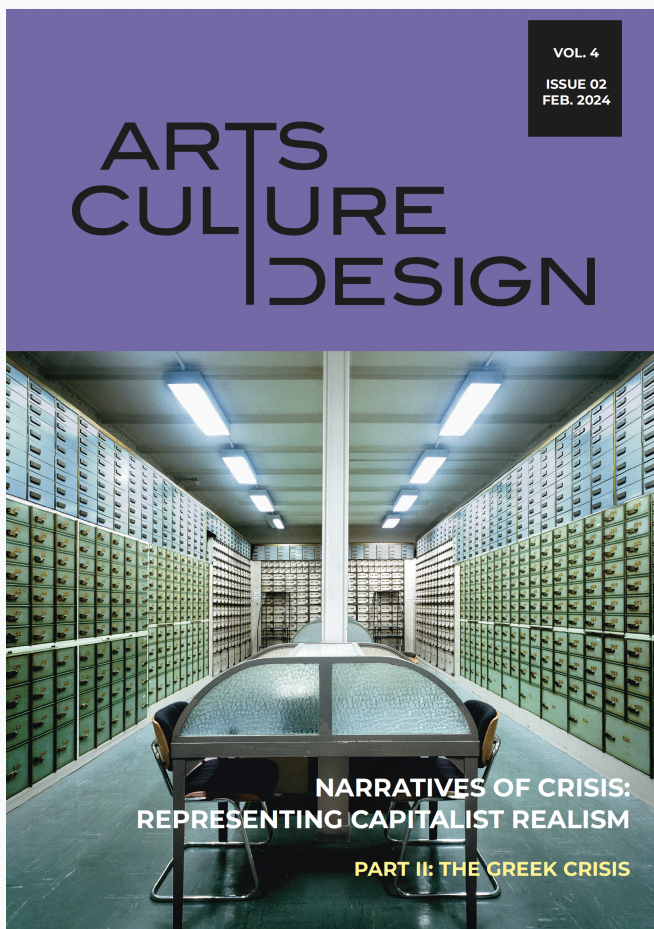


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NARRATIVES OF CRISIS: REPRESENTING CAPITALIST REALISM PART II: THE GREEK CRISIS



### 5+1 Stories of Habitation

*Maria Moira*

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# 5+1 STORIES OF HABITATION: LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF HABITATION IN ATHENS OF THE CRISIS

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## ABSTRACT

Keywords:  
Greek Crisis  
Literature  
Habitation  
Athens

The article explores the representation of urban space and human habitation in Greek literature, particularly in the aftermath of the financial crisis that began in 2008. The narrative focuses on the city of Athens as it grapples with economic turmoil, the shock of the pandemic, and the ongoing war in Ukraine.



**MARIA MOIRA** was born in Athens and graduated from the School of Architecture at the National Technical University of Athens in 1986. In 2002, she obtained her master's degree in the field of "Design-Space-Culture" from NTUA. In 2012, she presented her Ph.D. in the section III "Architectural Language, Communication, and Design" at NTUA with the title: "The Indiscernible City of Herakleion: Literary Representations of the City During Periods of Reconstruction—The Poetics of Transition, Herakleion at the Threshold of Modernism." She is an Associate Professor at the Department of Interior Architecture, focusing on architectural design and the configuration of external spaces. Her primary research interest centers on the relationship between literary representations and the city. Moira has actively participated in numerous conferences and has published articles in scientific journals and collective books. Currently residing in Athens, she is working as an architect.

*Space is transformed into an indicator of  
social structure and change,*

*but also into an organic fabric that  
establishes and underpins the unity  
of common, collective, public, social  
experience:*

*the public space of the city, as a  
mediating element of the interpersonal  
relations*

*of its citizens, becomes the framework  
for the formation of collective memory,*

*collective experience, collective identity.*

—Kracauer

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Cities do not show their true face, or  
rather their infinite faces, on any map.*

*A city is merely a black dot, nothing else  
— and one must actually go there*

*in order for the city to be reflected not  
only in their eyes*

*but also deep in their soul.*

—Rea Galanaki

Fifteen years after the breakout of the financial crisis — which developed into a humanitarian one — in Greece, the shock of the pandemic, the ongoing war on European soil in Ukraine, as well as the new tremors in the economic system at a global level, currently form a permanent condition of emergency, or “permacrisis,” which brings about radical changes, not only on the social and economic level, but also on human behaviors. Starting in 2008, the reality of Greece found itself yet again amidst a cyclone of a profoundly anthropological crisis of values, as new forgotten archaic fears emerged, bringing to the fore the vulnerability and fragility of human existence.

Literature, which captured this major crisis, drawing its raw material from the gloomy economic reality, incorporated in its narratives the multiple symbolic levels of meaning that are inscribed on urban space and captured the deviations from normality in urban life. The theme of crisis, with the narrative plot focusing on unprecedented forms of habitation and various different deviant literary characters, highlighted the way in which the material layer of the city is imbued with new social paradigms, unexpected forms and versions of habitation, and unexpected uses, claims and appropriations of spaces.

In the novel plots of Greek writers from the period 2010–2020, the city is redefined in terms of deterritorialization (emigration, loss of housing), claiming of public space (demonstrations in squares, strikers and new-homeless people squatting in public spaces and buildings), transformation of the lives of its inhabitants (impoverishment, unemployment, homelessness), and a radical redefinition of their social and political identities.

In his Introduction of *Greece in Crisis: The Cultural Politics of Austerity*, Dimitris Tziouvas notes:

Greece may have defaulted on its debts on several occasions in the past (1827, 1843, 1893, 1932), but since 2010 it has been experiencing the longest period of austerity and economic downturn in its recent history, further compounded by the influx of refugees and migrants. It has suffered more severely from the economic crisis than any other European country with harsh austerity measures, high unemployment and capital controls. What has happened in Greece since 2010 has occurred nowhere else in the developed world... Some fear that the syndrome of a failed society may become widespread, recovery will be hard to achieve and a persecution mentality may become entrenched. Resignation and despair could become everyday conditions.

(Tziouvas, 2017: introduction)

Cultural memory, according to Jan Assmann (2011), who coined the term, refers to the traditions that are transmitted orally or in writing and have a special value in the formation of the collective identity of a group. Moreover, it is of major importance to highlight the ways in which this cultural memory is produced and transmitted, a memory that is “collective” since it is the memory of wider groups, “social” since it plays a big part in the dissemination of social values, and “communicative” since it is rooted in the communication among the members of a community. Jan Assmann also points out the central role it plays in shaping a community’s identity and self-

awareness, since cultural memory is used by a community not only to understand its past but also to structure its present. The world of things in which we live (from a chair, bed or piece of clothing, to houses and cities) has a time index that refers not only to our present but also to different substrates of our past (Assmann, 2011: 6). So, this memory has a reference to time and place and leaves a distinct imprint on the literary discourse, which approaches the living reality as a revelation rather than a reflection of it.

Heidegger focuses his attention on the hidden word and on etymological transcendence, i.e. on the perception of language as a nod about the essence of things, on the composition of "being" through its poetics, through its animation and defamiliarization and integration through language in a hidden confession. The authors in the example of Athens capture, in novels and short stories published between 2010 and the present day, privileged vistas of scenes of habitation, human behaviors, political and social morals. They compose a mosaic of urban spaces or events and, through the personal and collective experiences that are integrated into the plot, attempt parallel interpretations of the historical city through the interaction of places and people. They adopt homologous or distinct thematic patterns, expressive structures, perspectives and focuses of the narrative function, symbolisms and metaphors, to represent the new, completely differentiated condition of inhabiting the city due to the socio-economic crisis.

The narrative discourse, drawing material from political current affairs and social reality, chooses symbolic Athenian places that carry a special meaning. It documents the ominous condition of Athens in crisis and of its inhabitants living in a state of alarm and constant pressure, as they watch the city's identity change. Literature fictionally represents the city of Athens, synthesizing the age-long past with the present. It processes the individual experience, the micro-history, the personal journey of the resident, alongside the "big picture" of collective experiences and the echo of wider socio-political and historical events. It constructs a hypertextual diagram that captures the individual and collective expression of habitation through the embodied negotiation of the urban field. Competing or parallel narratives meet in the public urban space, highlighting a different

collective memory, heterogeneities, opportunistic desecrations, and traumas.

With the spectre of the crisis in Greece haunting every aspect of everyday life, the tendency to reduce cultural and artistic expression in present-day Greece to a product of the 'crisis' is amplified. This tendency has to be met with scepticism, insofar as it risks turning the 'crisis' into a master-narrative: an overarching framework for understanding every expressive form, which often ends up appropriating cultural products to dominant discourses of the crisis.

Writers are inspired by Athens of the crisis, attempting new representations of the urban space, new readings and interpretations of the metropolitan experience. In their novels or short stories of the past decade, they follow the painful changes that occur in the city, radically altering the psyche of its inhabitants. They collect the mutual interactions of space and psyche of their heroes. They reconstruct the image of the city through comparative valuations of districts, buildings, streets and public spaces with intense social and political life. They alternate between the present and the past. They follow their heroes as the latter move aimlessly or protest in iconic spaces around the city. In squares-condensers of the collective experience, such as Syntagma Square "of the revolted citizens," and Omonoia Square, the refuge for immigrants and a place for political gatherings. In Athenian arcades and subway stations that serve as dormitories for the homeless; in dark streets where human wrecks wander about, the victims of the collapse of humanitarian values. They underline with lucid descriptions the bleak image of dilapidated neoclassical houses, empty stores with dark dusty shop windows, burnt listed buildings, city landmarks (such as the historic Attikon and Apollo movie theaters), decaying hotels, shelters and soup kitchens, unrented or dilapidated apartments of Athenian apartment buildings. They enlist in the structure of the plot iconic places that have lost their usual function and familiar image, injured and depreciated by widespread resignation, pervasive gloom and disheartening abandonment. In her essay "The writer in an environment of crisis" (2017), Jina Politis cites the viewpoint of Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa, who claims that major "traumas," such as the current economic crisis, are "stimulating" because they "prod"

and “fertilize” literature, but she explicitly also expresses her skepticism, arguing that major disasters take a long time to mature so that they do not constitute superficial stereotypical descriptive representations of a “crisis” (Politi, 2017: 210).

## 2. FIRST STORY OF HABITATION

From the eutopia of development to the dystopia of social and economic crisis. Omonoia Square receives the deposits of the sediment of the crisis

In her novel *Absolute Humiliation* (2015), author Rea Galanaki represents an urban space dotted with the signs of economic crisis and relinquishment. She negotiates versions of the city that make up the monumental cultural heritage of classical antiquity, alongside current images of the actions and practices of individuals and groups. The supremely beautiful city-amalgam of symbolic mnemonic places and poets meets the city of “the streets and the homeless.”

The heroes chosen by the authors represent the most vulnerable social groups: the elderly, the young, the unemployed, the needy, the homeless, the immigrants, the mentally or physically ill. Those who most dramatically experience the analgesia of the big city (Tsirimokou, 1988: 28). In her novel *Absolute Humiliation*, Galanaki decides to wander into the abyss of impoverishment. To plunge into the “hidden and uncharted city of the homeless,” “the city of outcasts, which was hidden like a nightmarish fetus inside the belly of once again pregnant Athens” (Galanaki, 2015: 211). In the invisible world of the humbled and the poor, “the most populous wilderness” of this city. She chooses her heroines from among the most vulnerable to the effects of this ominous condition. Two cultured, elderly, mentally ill women who live in a downtown hostel and who, on February 12, 2012, are caught in the whirlwind of the dramatic events that transpire on Syntagma Square. On the fateful night that shook the ancient city to the core and plunged it into despair and mourning, the two women will find themselves protesting in the city’s “navel,” among people hurt and discouraged, young and middle-aged, homeless and uprooted, angry and lost in the dark labyrinths of

politics and social impasses. The next day will find the two women lost and helpless, amidst the rings of beggary, the misery of the streets, and the at times selfish and at times selfless kindness of their fellow homeless people.

Galanaki contrasts the concept of “the streets” with that of the orderly and dignified “street”:

Nothing was as easy for you as it was in a house enclosed by walls, particularly everything that had to do with your bodily needs and personal hygiene. No other way was available to you; you adapted as best you could to life on the streets — the vast difference between singular and plural made you sad, a simple “s” denoting a whole other class of habitation; you see, “street” implies a house with an address, while “streets” stands for humiliation.

(Galanaki, 2015: 212-213)

The urban landscape in crisis literature is constantly under construction and reshaped based on the different experiences and actions of the subjects who come into contact with it. The authors sketch a city that is unstable and in motion, constantly changing, but also polyphonic and alive. An outdoor theater stage where new forms of social life and publicity take place with an unpredictable character. They map a network of public spaces that functions as a field of negotiation between different cultural identities (Stavridis, 2010: 73).

In his collection of short stories *Brave with a Thousand Terrors*, the author Diamantis Axiotis constructs and deciphers mental landscapes that are threatened by upheavals, invasions and attacks, or inhabited by memory and nostalgia. The homeless heroes of the nineteen stories are trapped in dystopian environments. Uprooted, stateless, unaccompanied, actually or metaphorically, they move along borderlines, hover in the void, inhabit unfamiliar or threatening spaces, get trapped in labyrinths, follow unknown routes, get isolated in nightmarish universes, encased in hermetic crypts. They are people who live in the shadows, on the margins, in shelters, in prisons, in the city or on the countryside, in a state of alarm and under constant pressure. Identities in confusion, sorely tested by social conditions, eroded, shattered, alienated by mental anguish and burnout. Outcasts and pariahs, for the longer or the shorter term, faced with emergency situations without a safety net.

### 3. SECOND STORY OF HABITATION

From the eutopia of development to the dystopia of social and economic crisis. Omonoia Square receives the deposits of the sediment of the crisis

Maurice Halbwachs underscored the key importance of space in the formation of collective memory, noting that the mnemonic recall of spaces by members of a community is just as vital to social memory as the recollection of time periods (Halbwachs, 2013). Through disjunctive relationships and dipoles, with the mobilization of all the senses, the contrast between the present image of the city and the past is emphasized.

Dystopian and utopian narratives also pose among fiction of 'the crisis'. Dystopias certainly take the lead over utopias, as Greek fiction – especially from 2009 to 2013 – registers the desolation that overcame the country. Utopian fiction in this context is never straightforwardly optimistic: alternative societies and heterotopias set up in fiction usually lapse into anti-utopias or carry both utopian and dystopian dimensions.

(Boletsi, in Tziouvas, 2017)

In order to intensify the topographic identification and emphasize the unfamiliar image of the city's disintegration after the fires of 2012, Galanaki invokes the cultural past and the historical monuments of Athens around Monastiraki as "sites of memory," that is, as functional, symbolic and material spaces in which history and memory, according to Pierre Nora (1984), interact and are mutually defined, co-shaping the social and political identity of inhabitants.

It was quiet in the shed, as if your Athens here became another city; the cleaner atmosphere [after the February twelfth fire] also helped. But it wasn't another city, it was your city; this was evident to you by the nearby square with the mosque and the church, the ancient columns next to them, the entrance to the electric rail and the subway, the high sacred rock of the Acropolis with the ancient temple as a crown on top of this amalgam of time, thoughts and feelings.

(Galanaki, 2015: 203)

In Axiotis's short story "The ball on zero," the hero is unable to connect the image of Omonoia Square that is registered in his memory with the present one. The thriving square, an indicator of the modern phantasmagoria of the city during the sixties (one recalls the metropolitan night shots of Greek cinema of the time) with its futuristic fountain, newly built hotels, popular restaurants, the underground station and the brightly lit shops, is compared to the present-day fluid state of decay and decline.

The hotel with the dozens of balconies towers before him, decorated with colorful bunting. The carvings on the facade are worn, the cornices missing. The plaster is peeled here and there – like a toothless whore. He grieves for this abject state. His mother took her last breath in this mansion [...] Behind the rickety counter stands a lanky sixty-year-old man with matted hair and yellow teeth. Next to him a blonde woman, flaunting her rich gifts [...] He sees the department store where his father had bought a shawl for his mother and a cast-iron car for himself. He looks for the "fancy" restaurant where they used to eat. He searches for the basement store with the suitcases. The first one is gaping pitifully, the second one has been turned into a cookhouse called "Stop Over." Komkom cuisine, specifies a tin sign. Recommendations include the pounded yam and the Nigerian soup egusi.

(Axiotis, 2016: 160)

The metro takes him to Omonoia. He emerges from the bowels of the earth, trying to orient himself with his gaze. All around him are glass and iron buildings. The asymmetrical square is dry of water [...] Wretched junkies are lying on the stairs, oblivious to tourists who photograph them. Two homeless people are preparing their dinner on the concrete.

(Axiotis, 2016: 159)



#### 4. THIRD STORY OF HABITATION

Forms of disconnection from private space. The transformations of the urban apartment building unit

The narrative plot emphasizes the dwelling (private space) or its absence (homelessness-inhabiting public space). The center of the city, as a structural generative core, and its traditional districts, as symbolic places of identity, persistently come to the fore, as it is there that the change of paradigm takes place. There is a visible continuous degradation: from the flamboyant splendor and feverish, often forced, gentrification of entire areas of the past, to abject gloom. From the optimistic contemplation of a future of prosperity and uninterrupted growth, from the carefree era of frenzied, wanton, bulimic consumption, which was undoubtedly the driving force behind the "growth" of previous years, to suicides, idleness, embarrassment, and misery.

The city has an identity. The city carries memories. The city has a past [...] but at the same time the city mutates like a living organism where various systems intervene. They grow on the main body and multiply like a virus. Next to the Propylaea, a guy is shooting up. Face ravaged; you can't tell his age. Down below, gutted plastic bags and strays all around them...

(Konomara, 2018: 91)

In Lila Konomara's novel, the voices of the three members of a family alternate, resonate and intersect to express different perceptions of the crisis. The near-retirement disillusioned middle-aged pharmacist father, who operates on the basis of solidarity practices; the young, promising scientist daughter, who is plagued by work pressure and the stress of advancement and success; the disorganized teenage son, in a state of awkward disorganization, are representative examples of dealing with the problem. Through the gasping voice of the daughter (bio researcher in a multinational pharmaceutical company), the author describes a discontinuous city that is constantly transforming in search of its identity. She presents an anarchic image of heterogeneity, in an environment "with human needs that are not being met and broken lives moving on the fringes like

*mini jungles.*" Thus, a rhythmic pattern is produced, where opposing concepts and dipoles alternate in a porous, murky and indeterminate urban landscape: the empty and the full, the dark and the bright, the familiar and the unfamiliar.

The city is sucking me in. Cheese pies, gift shop, school supplies-empty-, lottery, women's clothing-empty-, dry cleaners, mini market, electrical goods, funeral home-empty, empty, empty-, shops explode like quick flashes, old and new, little compasses next to bubbles, brand names, cheap stuff, for money laundering or gifts, staying open late, proper goldmines, and others putting their dreams on clearance sales. Concrete gaping here and there throwing up scrap metal. Graffiti devouring walls. Walls devouring dreams. Here and there lonely reflections in shop windows. Hook-ups, haunts, alternative crowds. Pointless wanderings. A deep web navigation in search of a hazy promise of happiness. I am contained within these materials, I feel them as my own, and at the same time the elements I do not recognize are multiplying...

(Konomara, 2018: 92)

The once well-to-do middle-class apartments of the city center are being divided and welcoming new cohabitations and cotenancies. In Alexis Panselinos's novel, a dark romance with elements of a love mystery and references to the socio-political situation, although the plot unfolds mainly in the interior of an apartment, the crisis breaks through the barrier of the walls and erodes the lives of the tenants, changing their appearance and content. As a fluid condition of deregulation, it builds up cumulatively like dust in the once-thriving and respectable districts of the inner city.

The city was burning only a few hundred meters away, the riots had spread amidst flames and smoke, fires were consuming buildings, bins and cars, shop windows were breaking, and hooded people were emerging from the shops carrying the loot they had grabbed. But up there, at the height of the apartment building, the sounds were distant and apartments were closed, immersed in their sleep; only few people were tuned to the television to watch the breaking news and the stern frightened faces of the newscasters.

(Panselinos, 2016: 172)

The ornate graceful neoclassical buildings of the 19th and 20th centuries in Exarcheia, in Neapoli, at the foot of Mount Lycabettus, on Asklipiou and Ippokratous Streets, examples of habitation from other, happier and carefree times, are crumbling or occasionally inhabited by homeless people, students, immigrants and the new poor, as downtown riots reaching all the way to their front door act as a deterrent, intensifying the state of desolation and decline.

The old urban neighborhood was filled with students, unknown faces who kept the apartments for a while, left after a year or two, and the landlords filled the entrances and walls with for-rent signs [...] For the old residents, those still alive, the decline was not visible as it coincided with their own. They were growing old in the same part of town where they were once young...

(Panselinos, 2016: 9)

## 5. FOURTH STORY OF HABITATION

### For Sale – For Rent: The elegy of empty spaces, or, traversing the city from one end to the other

A ride from Syntagma to Kifissia. The public bus drives through the city, from its center to its northern suburbs. A ragged, disabled, and injured man boards without a ticket, his presence tolerated and aided by other passengers, triggering an angry reaction from the bus driver and a torrential, out-of-control, incoherent monologue. The “other,” the unlawful, the outcast, the outsider, the invader of normality, will activate all the conservative reflexes of the person in charge of the vehicle, who shows signs of rage, disorganization and fear, bordering on panic, almost right from the start.

En route to KAT General Hospital in Kifissia, the mental derailment and anxiety-ridden phobic delirium intensifies as it falls in sync with the rhythmic succession of vacant for-rent or for-sale buildings. The bus driver's daily treadmill, being pinned on his seat, subject to the same repetitive stimuli (buildings, advertising signs, commercial messages, noise, stops, traffic lights, congestion of cars and people), turns into an acute existential crisis, with symptoms of paranoia. Words like hunger, filth, disease, death, drugs, unemployment, illegality,

creep into his sentences rhythmically and repetitively. Like a denunciation, or perhaps an exorcism.

Like another Perec, the bus driver records during his daily routes everything he sees fleetingly through the panoramic windshield, while the hitherto familiar, now hostile and inhospitable, city flies past him in the opposite direction. It slips away from him. Menacingly persistent urban signals succeed one another in the declining Athens of the crisis, the “troika” and the class conflict: *“For Rent – For Sale, Banks, Shopping Centers, Department Stores, Private Clinics, Night Clubs, For Rent - For Sale Now, the present property, Bourgeois Neighborhoods, For Rent.”* An orchestrated daily assault on the psyche of the residents, who are unconsciously trying to decipher the ingredients of this dystopian condition oozing bleakness and despair.

Nothing's left standing. *For Rent, For Rent, For Rent, everything closed! For Rent, For Rent, For Rent* — if stores are closed here too, it's all gone to hell. *Offers, Kotsovolos, For Sale, Angelos Coiffures For Sale, Peugeot, For Rent, For Rent, Great Offers, For a Few Days Only, Public, Alpha Bank, Citibank, Eurobank, Goody's, Fresh Fish, Venetis, For Sale, European Credit, For Rent, For Rent, For Rent* — where are the good old days when you almost wouldn't dare look at all the riches? Through the windshield I could see the tiles and the bathtubs and lose my bearings. Are there people who afford to spend so much money on a bathroom? Where are they now? But they'll be fine. Both parties will be fine. Those selling the goods and those buying them. They've taken all their money abroad. Switzerland. Piece of work, both of them. *Entire Floor for Rent, Shop for Rent, We Struck Gold, For Sale, Ground Floor for Rent, Warehouse, Remos, For Rent, For Rent, For Rent, Hygeia.*

(Frangeskaki, 2019: 59-60)

The protagonists in most, or rather in the most representative, of the seventeen short stories that make up Maro Douka's collection *Giati emena i psychi mou* [Because my soul] (2012) find themselves far from the familiar and intimate place of family warmth, far from hearth and home, from their personal safe haven. They roam about or stand still; they meet up, communicate, or become alienated; they demonstrate, rebel, or bog down; they dream, fall into melancholy,





Figure 1 : Nina Lasithiotaki, *Untitled*, 2015.

or become overwhelmed by painful or comforting memories, in the shared center stage of urban life, in the public space of the capital city or a small town. In the streets, on the squares and in crowded cafes, somewhere in Greece or elsewhere, deprived of the warmth of collective visions and the sense of communalism. Most of her heroes, lost in the city's labyrinths, are faced with the spectrum of exclusion and marginalization. Exposed in the public space, defenseless, misled, disappointed, old-timers, alone. Suffering political subjects with injured hope and dignity, on trajectories of despair and frustration, or action and resistance. Everyday anonymous people, with shattered dreams, existential fears and anxieties, their livelihood impaired, their survival uncertain. Only some of the narratives exude the claustrophobic intensity of an enclosed interior, a place of surveillance and confinement, a prison with no escape and no way out, while others resort to the representation of a nightmarish future of doom and gloom, in which humanity has finally succumbed to the despotic structures of the global dictatorship of money and the markets.

## 6. FIFTH STORY OF HABITATION

### The city ablaze, representations of resistance

The urban space, habitat of relationships and souls, is not univocal and cannot be taken for granted, whether as an image or as a representation. It is a product of social practices, and the right to the city emerges as the central issue during the time of economic crisis, destabilization of political structures and decline of social acquis; and this awakening, as well as this deconstruction, is recorded by authors in their topical fictionalizations. Their heroes are faced with a series of trials that disrupt and radically divert the course of their lives. The plot starts from the individual experience to arrive at the socio-political stakes. It is no coincidence that all the authors under study consider it appropriate to include in the narrative plot the gatherings of citizens in Syntagma Square. Social concern is either overtly evident or implicit in the literary narratives after 2008. The heroes' wanderings, in the form of transit or aimless walking, spatialize the city of economic, political and social crisis, of awkwardness, of insecurity.

The focus of literary representations shifts

from the interior of houses to the streets and their habitation, as the narrative moves out of the enclosed personal space of intimacy and security to capture events in the open. The "homeless citizen" exists in all the texts, either as a central character driving the plot, or as a secondary significant person that sharpens the critical stance of the reader. He or she is now visible, highlighting the intensity and extent of the problem. He or she appropriates, according to Lefebvre, the public space of the city and, through actions of negotiation, assertion and establishment of informal rules of habitation and behavior, transforms it into his or her vital space and ephemeral outdoor stage. According to Pierre Bourdieu, the "literary microcosm," a relatively autonomous field, functions by means of a group of acting subjects, works and phenomena, in which social forces are also present, since literary writing has the unique capacity "to concentrate and condense in the concrete singularity of a sensitive figure and an individual adventure, functioning both as metaphor and as metonymy, all the complexity of a [social] structure and a history" (Bourdieu 1995: 24).

On the same wavelength as Galanaki is Vangelis Raptopoulos in his novel *The Man Who Burned Down Greece*. The fired journalist, father of two daughters, who abandons his family and his home and becomes homeless out of despair and shame, maps Athens of the crisis in a very different way. This unusual grapheme highlights parts of the city where homeless people find shelter: major roads (Stadiou, Panepistimiou), downtown districts (Psirri, Metaxourgeio, Kerameikos), metro stations (Monastiraki, Omonoia), downtown squares (Koumoundourou, Omonoia), Athenian arcades, deserted shops, areas under bridges over major avenues (Kifissou, Pireos, Petrou Ralli, Lenorman). It records the places where entire ephemeral improvised camps are set up, the haunts where the homeless eat, sleep or spend the day, making visible everything dark and hideous that is hiding behind the city's phantasmagoria. The author interjects into the flow of the narrative a wide list of homeless fellow citizens, briefly describing their lives and the spaces they choose to move around in the city:

STAMATIS: Acquaintance of Koumoundourou. Like most of us, middle-aged Stamatis has set up a makeshift shelter out of cardboard boxes and nylon. Instead of a sleeping bag, he has a pile of quilts...

ALEXANDROS: It's uncanny how much he looks like any bourgeois gentleman.

Washed, clean, you would never guess he is homeless. And yet, he lives and sleeps in Omonoia, opposite a bank....

YIANNIS ANGELOPOULOS: 45 years old. Once upon a time, he used to live in Peristeri. He was forced to sell his home: he had started a business that failed. He now lives in Psirri, but we met in our makeshift camp, near the spot where Pireos street passes under the elevated Kifissou Avenue. Yiannis was part of a relatively closed group of seven people who slept next to each other.

VOULA: 53 years old, homeless for six months. The best deal she has had was in the dormitory for the homeless, and she thanks from the bottom of her heart the members of Médecins du monde who have embraced and cared for her and all the other homeless people.

CHRISTARAS AND ADRIANNA: Since the crisis, the meaning of the word "homeless" has changed. Previously only the delinquent, the drug addicts, the mentally ill were homeless. Now anyone who was once a householder may be homeless. Christaras is still a householder, only now his house has no walls. He sleeps with Adrianna under the bridge of Petrou Ralli. Their bed is delimited by the railing of the road and the flower bed... In actuality, the only things that are theirs, his or Adrianna's, are a few pillows, an orange blanket, and two cats who curl up on the couple's blankets to keep warm...

(Raptopoulos, 2018: 186–207)

## 7. PLUS ONE STORY OF HABITATION

### The floor plan. Inhabiting the empty space

According to Ricoeur, fictional narrative is an iconic augmentation of the world of human action, which consists of conjuring plots and constructing events in a rational manner. Speech, action and integration into a storyline create new networks of reading an experience or producing it, precisely because they lend a dimension of denotation or notification rather than reduplication of reality. Fiction resorts to reality not to copy it but to propose a new approach to it of distinct cognitive value. The conceptual mental image created by the writer is marked

by his or her characteristic intention to offer a model for a different perception of things, more specifically a paradigm of a new vision (Ricoeur 1990, 66–70).

In his novel, author Manolis Lydakakis stubbornly closes, almost to the end, all escape routes for the characters of his work, persistently representing a crippled world, with no values or ideals. An unbearable condition of the "total social event" type. The predominant image is that of the deserted plot where the hero's family house used to be, a property now repossessed and demolished. His younger brother, who never managed to become an architect, draws the floor plan onto the ground with his bare hands. He draws the walls, the doors and the windows, plucking out the weeds from the virtual rooms. He rebuilds the happy family home of the past, and stubbornly inhabits the empty space.

Because my family house did not exist. The lot stood there empty, a grassy field now. Only its imprint remained on the wall it shared with the neighboring house, an outline made of stone and loose mortar. Traces of bricks where walls once stood, the built-in cupboard with the marks from the shelves, the chimney, the horizontal concrete floor and the sloping roof line, the colors now faded there on the wall, marks on them from the frames that used to hang there, the mirror and the sideboard where it rested against the wall for as long as I can remember.

I stood there dumbfounded, staring into the void.

(Lydakis, 2020: 249)

## 8. EPILOGUE

The authors in the example of Athens capture, in novels and short stories published between 2010 and the present day, privileged vistas of scenes of habitation, human behaviors, political and social morals. They compose a mosaic of urban spaces or events and, through the personal and collective experiences that are integrated into the plot, attempt parallel interpretations of the historical city through the interaction of places and people. Their works, the offspring of a restless consciousness and a keen prophetic political reflection, condense and translate into literature the agony about people's willingness to conform and assimilate, the concern about the passivity and complacency of the





Figure 2 : Nina Lasithiotaki,  
*Untitled*, 2015.

masses. About everything that, in the context of the dynamic penetration of capitalist realism, imperceptibly alter the perception of subjects about the world, sweeping away values and principles. About language, independence, respect for the environment and self-determination of the peoples who, in the name of prudence, modernization and development it promotes, are led to servitude and decline.

The condition of uncertainty and constant fear leads to internal violence and conflict. It brings out the repressed vulnerability of human existence by making conscious a radical self-awareness of the city's inhabitants. The characters of the authors are ordinary people who are faced with an all-out attack by the social, economic and political establishment. Nevertheless, they struggle to rise above the possible, the permissible and the predetermined. The hard, generalized condition of the crisis leads them to run through the whole spectrum of reactions. From capitulation, resignation and nihilism, that expresses acceptance and submission to a sovereign and omnipotent system of power, to extreme anger and resistance to institutions and symbols through acts of violence.

From the nostalgic recollection of a beautified bright and happy past and its passive encapsulation to a utopian situation, to the dynamic reconstruction and confrontation of dystopian conditions through inventive practices and resourceful solutions aimed at claiming the vision of a fairer society

The noteworthy literary contribution of the political origin of short stories and novels is their ability to balance the narrative on a slight verge between conformity and disobedience. To combine with skill and sensitivity opposing forces in their attempt to represent and highlight the spatial discontinuities, conflicts and contradictions of an era of mutations.

In the novels of this period, Athens, the supremely beautiful city-amalgam of symbolic mnemonic places and poets, presents a new multiple identity in narrative discourse. It meets the city of abandonment, unemployment and doubt. The city of "the streets and the homeless"; and is thus radically re-defined and reconstructed.

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