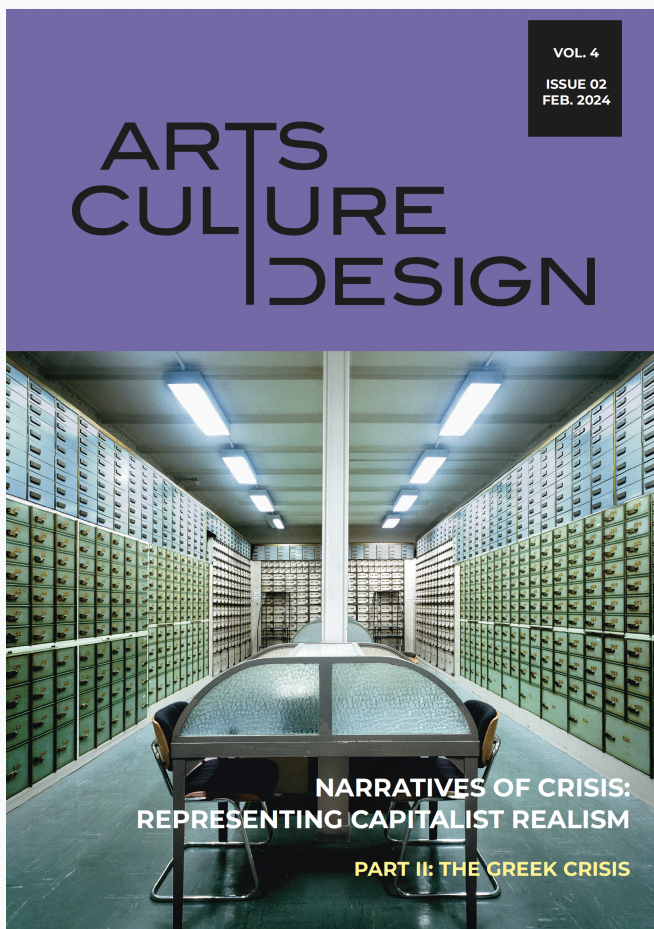


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NARRATIVES OF CRISIS: REPRESENTING CAPITALIST REALISM PART II: THE GREEK CRISIS



### NARRATIVES OF CRISIS: REPRESENTING CAPITALIST REALISM

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# NARRATIVES OF CRISIS: REPRESENTING CAPITALIST REALISM

## PART II: THE GREEK CRISIS

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Ayn Rand, whose ideas gained significant traction and extensive discussion in Greece during the crisis, has been labeled as the high priestess of "neoliberal realism," or more precisely, Capitalist Realism. As the architect of a philosophical school known as "Objectivism," Rand propagated her ideology primarily through novels such as the *Atlas Shrugged* (1957). The novel, depicting a dystopian United States in which private businesses suffer under increasingly burdensome laws and regulations, stands as a cornerstone of Rand's literary contributions, wherein she fervently advocated for a utopian vision of capitalism: An individual's life outcomes are solely determined by their abilities; anyone can overcome challenges with intelligence and capability; any form of state involvement in society is enabling unproductive individuals to "leech" off the wealth earned by the industrious.

In 2011, appropriately coinciding with a year since the initiation of memoranda - a period characterized by substantial job losses and economic instability, *Atlas Shrugged* was published in Greek. At that point, savings had dissipated, businesses were shuttering, and entire public sector services were collapsing. The abrupt and violent closure of the national broadcasting corporation (ERT) exemplified the ruthless manner in which these changes unfolded. Universities, nota-

bly in the humanities, faced significant undermining and were labeled as unproductive. The overarching result was a forceful reconfiguration of income, rights, and future prospects.

Simultaneously, this period starkly showcased the absolute dominance of international markets over constitutionally enshrined popular sovereignty. Notions of public welfare and state support were readily sacrificed in favor of vested interests, shrouded in an aura of singular truth. During this time, politicians and journalists openly argued that the crisis stemmed from an excess of distributive democracy, framing talk of elections and referendums as irresponsible populism. Rather than addressing the intricate financial dynamics of neoliberal capitalism, the focus shifted towards public employees, with mass layoffs proposed as a solution to unemployment within the private sector.

As Yannis Stavrakakis (2013) vividly described:

[They] say that the political decline of the post-dictatorship period should certainly be blamed more on those who opposed and certainly not on those who governed; that the solution to the economic and moral pathology of Greek excessive debt is ultimately to increase the public debt and stabilize it in about a dozen years at about where it was at the beginning of

the crisis; that the problems of the state television did not come from the political party's demoralization but from the fact that it was "communist"; that the market is not affected by the recession and the collapse of the citizens' purchasing power, but by the demonstrations and trade union protests and that the solution will be found in the opening of shops on Sundays and so on. [...] These claims attempt, first and foremost, to redefine radically the very social and biopolitical horizon of post-war Europe, to revise the historical path of post-dictatorship Greece. Beware, what is at stake is not the mitigation of the potential failures of the welfare state and social democracy, nor is it the confrontation of the existing excesses of post-independence. The aim seems to be the violent reconstitution of our memory, experience and expecta-

tations: the complete reversal of the very value/biographical core that inspired the course of political and economic democratization in post-war Europe and post-dictatorship Greece.

In this vein, Capitalist Realism could now be considered a historical artifact that reflects the prevailing sentiment following the 2007-08 financial collapse and the subsequent crises, including the Greek one -a turmoil that should not only be perceived as an economic event but equally as a political one- exposing the political system's ability to rationalize issues that should have fundamentally challenged it. Since the escalation of the economic crisis in Southern Europe, the dominant moral discourse stressed collective responsibility for the crisis and asked people to "collaborate" by making sacrifices. In Greece, crisis demanded pre-emptive or emergency measures, such as welfare-state



Figure 1: Nikos Pilos, from the series *Youth Resistance*, 2011-16.



Figure 2: Milos Bicanski, from the series *Greek Crisis*, 2010-16.

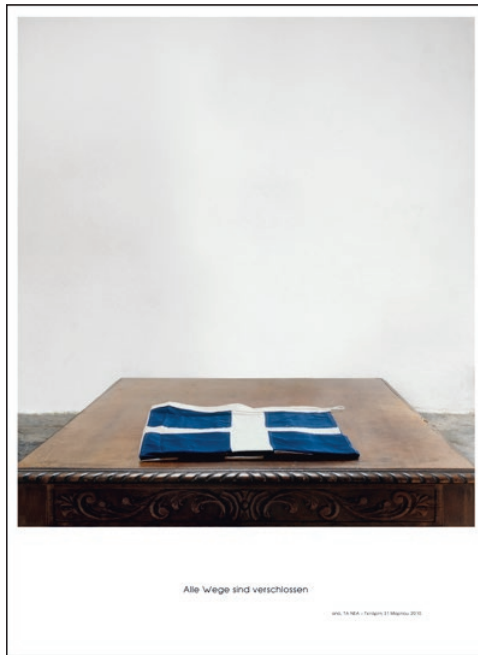


Figure 3: Lydia Dambassina, *Alle Wege sind verschlossen*, 2010, from the series *Party's over – Starts over*, 2012-13.

All ways are closed  
from TANEA – Wednesday March 31, 2010

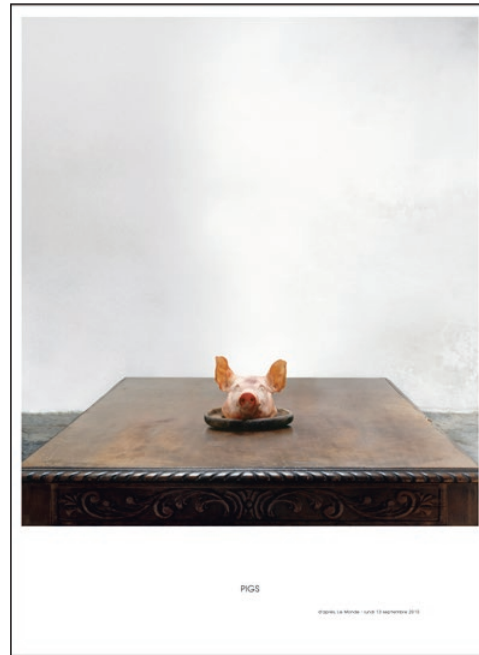


Figure 4: Lydia Dambassina, *PIGS Portugal Italy-Ireland Greece Spain*, 2010, from the series *Party's over – Starts over*, 2012-13.

PIGS  
from Le Monde – Monday September 13, 2010

and income cutbacks, under the rubric of national unity. Anger over the crisis triggered an intense blame game. An increasingly self-contained and self-serving political class kept ruling, united in their claim that 'there is no alternative' to them and their policies. Doubts about the compatibility of a capitalist economy with a democratic polity have powerfully returned among ordinary people, whereas the ruling elites claimed that what caused the fiscal crisis has been an excess of redistributive democracy. Diffusing accountability has been manifested in several occasions worldwide, ranging from statements like Phil Angelides', head of the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission, likening the situation to "the Murder on the Orient Express: everyone did it" (Chan, 2010), to controversial claims such as Socialist veteran Theodoros Pangalos' assertion that "We-all-ate-together" ("*Μαζί τα φάγαμε*") In the realm of Capitalist Realism, the persistent question remains: who exactly are "we"?

## PART II: THE GREEK CRISIS

This collection of essays and visual explorations present the multifaceted dimensions of the Greek Crisis, weaving together threads of cinema, art, literature, architecture, politics, and urban life.

In "Spaces of Capitalist Realism: Representing the Normalisation of the Crisis in Con-

temporary Greek Cinema" **Anna Poupou** offers a thought-provoking analysis of the evolution of Greek cinema in response to the economic crisis that struck the country post-2009, highlighting the intricate connections between film, society, politics, and artistic expression. The new wave of films during the crisis, argues Poupou, was politically charged, employing irony, cynicism, and black humor to criticize institutions, question capitalism, explore gender and sexuality, and engage with audience affect. The analysis of specific films, namely *Patis-sion Avenue*, *Her Job*, and *Pity*, reveals how the dialectics between crisis and normality are depicted through various narrative elements. The examination of space, class, and social representations in these films demonstrates how these works mirror the blurred lines between crisis and normalcy, both in terms of individual experiences and broader societal contexts. By employing different cinematic techniques, these films engage with the political discourse surrounding crisis and its subsequent normalization.

In the series "Billboards," **Nikolas Ventourakis** explores the complex dynamics inherent in interpreting visual art, specifically within the domain of photography. Through the presentation of previously unreleased images captured in 2013 Greece, Ventourakis examines the intriguing role of inconclusiveness within the narrative of visual storytelling. The project seeks to demonstrate how viewers of-



Figure 5: Lydia Dambassina, *Ich war, Ich bin, Ich werde sein*, 2010, from the series *Party's over – Starts over*, 2012-13.

I was, I am, I will be  
from Libération – Monday August 23, 2010

ten approach images with a natural inclination toward resolution, influenced by societal norms and collective perspectives shaped by media and personal experiences. Ventourakis challenges this instinct by focusing on instances where visual artworks intentionally omit crucial contextual information. By doing so, he encourages viewers to question their automatic conclusions and embrace a sense of discontentment, fostering a deeper engagement with the images. The narrative unfolds against the backdrop of 2013 Greece, a period marked by financial turmoil, during which billboards conspicuously stood emp-

ty. While widely interpreted as symbols of a nation in crisis, Ventourakis reveals the mundane reality behind their abandonment – a legal crackdown on illegal constructions. The portfolio, rooted in the project "Leaving Utopia," underscores the power of visual inconclusiveness to disrupt prevailing narratives and stimulate critical inquiry. Ventourakis navigates the juncture where perception diverges from reality, highlighting the ability of art to challenge assumptions and provoke a reevaluation of shared viewpoints. "The Tourists: a campaign", in turn, explores the multifaceted and subversive project



Figure 6: Dimitris Michalakís, from the series *Burnout*, 2009 – 14.



initiated by the **Depression Era collective**, connecting seamlessly with the discourse on Capitalist Realism. Originating as a collaborative research and discussion platform in Athens, the project has evolved into various forms, including public spaces, posters, digital campaigns, publications, and exhibitions. Critically responding to global events such as the European refugee crisis and the surge in tourism, "The Tourists" engages with the complexities of identity, citizenship, and displacement. The project's response to Documenta 14 is highlighted, where it addressed hegemonic stances and post-colonial perspectives, critiquing the exoticization and touristification of Greece. Through images, slogans, and a keen exploration of landscapes, the project navigates the blurred lines between tourism and disaster, revealing a generation marked by conflict, resilience, and displacement in a hyper-mediated world, and echoing the critical inquiries into societal norms and shared viewpoints characteristic of Capitalist Realism.

**Paraskevi Kertemelidou's** essay addresses the intricate relationship between avant-garde artists and museums in the 20th century, particularly focusing on the Museum of Cycladic Art's exhibition of Jannis Kounellis' works. The exhibition, conceived as a response to Greece's economic crisis, employed raw materials and objects from Athens' junk shops to comment on contemporary socio-economic conditions. The essay analyses Kounellis' artistic trajectory, his use of unconventional materials, and the impact of his interventions on the museum space. Additionally, it examines how Kounellis' artworks served as a narrative of the crisis, evoking emotions of empathy and discomfort in visitors. This exhibition, Kertemelidou claims, captures the essence of Greece's cultural and societal state, prompting viewers to associate their own lives with the exhibited materials and fostering a participatory, interpretive experience. Ultimately, Kounellis' art mirrors the collective human experience in the face of crisis while imbuing a sense of humanism and hope.

In "Clepsydra @ 37.94578, 23.61960: Unveiling Political Phantasma Through Mnemonic Performance and In-Situ Light Installation" **Maria Paschalidou** explores the intersection between art, history, and politics. Paschalidou presents an engaging narrative on the practices and conceptualizations of a public mnemonic performance, transforming a specific geographical location into a canvas for confronting historical trauma and challenging conventional mnemonic representations. The essay addresses twenty-one selected cases of lethal political violence in Greece from 1978

to 2020 through an in-situ light installation, mapping out a complex and often haunting trajectory through time. In this sense, *Clepsydra* aspires to serve not only as a platform for acknowledging historical memory and mediating political narratives, but also as a catalyst for envisioning alternative futures. The author's ambitious goal of creating an archaeology of the political phantasma, encourages readers to consider their responsibilities to the past and contemplate the role they play in shaping a more just and equitable future. Furthermore, the article's emphasis on countering the rise of neo-fascist movements in Western capitalist societies adds a layer of urgency to its significance. By seamlessly merging artistic expression with a call for heightened political awareness, the author empowers readers to critically engage with pressing contemporary challenges and actively contribute to positive societal transformation.

**Maria Moira's** essay turns to literature, to explore the representations of habitation in Athens during the financial crisis and subsequent challenges, emphasizing the profound impact of economic turmoil on urban spaces and the lives of its inhabitants. The analysis showcases how literature serves as a medium for understanding the profound effects of crisis on the concept of habitation and the dynamics of urban life. Moira presents five (plus one) stories that illustrate different facets of habitation during this period: "The City of the Streets" discusses Rea Galanaki's novel "Absolute Humiliation", which portrays the vulnerability of homeless people in the city, contrasting the concept of "street" as humiliation with the dignity of a "street" denoting a proper address; "From Eutopia to Dystopia" shifts the narrative to Vangelis Raptopoulos's novel "The Man Who Burned Down Greece," highlighting the transformations of public spaces in Athens due to the crisis; "Forms of Disconnection" explores the work of Lila Konomara and Alexis Panselinos, where the focus shifts from private spaces to the struggles of urban apartment living, showcasing the deteriorating condition of middle-class apartments and the impact of the crisis on family dynamics; "For Sale – For Rent" discusses Diamantis Axiotis's short stories and Vangelis Frangeskaki's novel present an Athens inundated with "For Rent" and "For Sale" signs, offering a glimpse into the deteriorating urban landscape marked by economic decline and social decay; "The City Ablaze" discusses the representation of resistance and protests in the city through the works of various authors. Demonstrations and the reclaiming of public spaces become focal points of the narratives, capturing the



social response to the crisis; "The Floor Plan" is a plus-one story focusing on Manolis Lydakakis' novel: it presents a symbolic reconstruction of a demolished family home through a younger brother's drawing on an empty lot, which highlights the longing for a past that has been lost due to economic turmoil. Throughout the essay, the narratives depict a city in flux, where economic crisis, homelessness, and uncertainty reshape urban spaces and challenge individual and collective identities.

The next contribution is also about urban space: "Athens: A Text Under Editing?" is a visual essay by **Io Chaviara**, which invites readers to explore the dynamic and ever-evolving urban landscape of Athens as a living text constantly undergoing revision and editing. Drawing parallels between the city and a text being edited, the essay examines the non-institutional interventions that disrupt the city's narrative, from political slogans to artistic expressions. Chaviara navigates the complexities of these interventions, comparing them to annotations, deletions, and corrections in the editorial process. The essay unfolds with vivid examples, such as the phosphorescent pink markings documenting clashes between protesters and security forces, the controversial vandalism of the Polytechnic building, and the creative correction of police uniforms with pink paint during a protest. Through these instances, the visual essay reveals how the city becomes a negotiated text, continually reinterpreted with each editorial act, reflecting the diverse voices and perspectives of its users. This exploration offers a fascinating lens through which to understand the intricate relationships between citizens, the state, and public space in the vibrant tapestry of Athens.

**Ioanna Barkouta's** essay discusses the multifaceted nature of crises, particularly in the context of contemporary society where the concept of "normalcy" intersects with various crises ranging from financial and economic to health, ecological, and geopolitical upheavals. Focusing on the spatial interpretations of crisis, the essay explores the evolution of the term "crisis" from its historical roots to its current economic connotations. Barkouta utilizes the Marxist theory of crisis as opposed to conventional economic theory, emphasizing the spatial dimension of crisis as highlighted by geographers and urban planners. With a specific focus on Greece, particularly Athens, the essay examines the intersection of the economic crisis with habitation practices, shedding light on the housing issues exacerbated by austerity measures. Through narratives and case studies, the essay reveals the spatial transformations within households

and the everyday struggles faced by individuals in navigating the housing crisis.

Several of Carl Schmitt's ideas, such as the *katechon*, the *nomos* of the Earth, and his political-spatial concepts, have been thoroughly examined and incorporated into discussions within international political discourse. One such concept is the notion of *Großraum* which, in the case of next portfolio (a collective project by **Yannis Karpouzis, Yorgos Karailias, Yorgos Prinou**, and **Pavlos Fysakis**), is actively integrated into the artists' own critical practice. The interest in Schmitt's *Großraum* resurfaces after the Cold War, with discussions in the 2000s focusing on two main threads. Firstly, efforts within international relations theory to recover Schmitt's thought and connect it to broader theoretical discussions, including political geography. Secondly, the use of *Großraum* as a genealogically relevant concept for theories describing a globally interconnected yet divided world, potentially moving toward a multipolar order. In this vein, "Grossraum C21" stands as a critique of the current dominant economic model and its expansionist policies. It suggests that both war and economic control are rooted in the same doctrine of creating a *Großraum*, which expands a state's interests and influence. This expansionism, whether through military or economic means, is seen as part of the same economic model that divides people into classes. The project, thus, highlights the global and intangible nature of modern capitalism, much like Fisher's notion that capitalism has become an all-encompassing system that's difficult to escape or challenge. Furthermore, it emphasizes the need to challenge and reclaim public spaces as a means of countering the prevailing economic and political order, which aligns with Fisher's idea that capitalist realism can be disrupted through acts of resistance and alternative thinking.

**Myrto Marini's** article, in turn, explores the role of museums in preserving and presenting collective memory, particularly in the context of difficult cultural heritage. It discusses the concept of memory, especially in relation to traumatic and painful historical events, and how memory is constructed and interpreted. The article first explores the interest in difficult heritage worldwide and its representation in museums. It then focuses on Greece and its history, particularly the use of exile and repression against political opponents. Marini studies three specific cases of political exile: Ai-Stratis, Chios, and Anafi, highlighting their historical significance and the challenges in preserving their memory. The conclusion suggests that these sites of difficult heritage should receive more attention



Figure 7: Panos Kokkinias, *Urania*, from the series *Here We Are*.

and support from the state for preservation and educational purposes. Overall, the text explores the complex relationship between memory, history, museums, and societal perceptions of difficult historical events. Finally, in the last contribution of the issue, **Dimitris Kechris** chronicles the evolution and impactful interventions of the MedPhoto Festival, a lens-based initiative conceived amidst the refugee and immigration crisis in 2016. By ingeniously combining photography with critical discourse, MedPhoto transcends conventional artistic boundaries to foster a socially engaged cultural community. Kechris critically reflects on the festival's exhibitions, from the poignant focus on displacement in "Borders - Crossroads" to the critical examination of European identity in "Europe: The Faces and the Territory", unpacking its explorations of power dynamics, democracy, and the role of the technical image in shaping reality. The

culmination in the latest edition, addressing the essence of democracy, reveals MedPhoto's unwavering commitment to challenging the status quo through lens-based media. In this sense, Kechris' narrative not only serves as a comprehensive overview of MedPhoto's trajectory but also highlights its transformative potential in shaping dialogues around pressing contemporary issues.

Overall, these diverse perspectives converge to elucidate the complex fabric of the Greek Crisis, illustrating how artists, filmmakers, writers, and activists engage with and respond to the challenges posed by socio-political and economic upheaval. Together, at the same time, they aspire to paint a nuanced picture of resilience, resistance, and the constant negotiation of identity in the face of crisis. Seen collectively, they might ultimately suggest that perhaps *There Is An Alternative*.

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