

Imagi(ni)ng 'Crisis': Materialities of Seeing and Representing in the Greek Critical Conjuncture

British School at Athens

Upper House

16th-17th December 2013

The 'crisis' is currently emblemized as the fundamental term for organising, sensing and representing Greek social experience. Broadly defined as the destabilisation of any number of spheres (financial, social, environmental etc.), the 'crisis' entails the workings of imagination and representation as engaged by individuals and by official mechanisms of signification. The 'crisis' thus engenders poetics, ideologies, polemic, aesthetics and rhetoric. This workshop seeks to make sense of the Greek 'crisis', its experiences and representations, by bringing together anthropologists and visual practitioners. The workshop emphasises the sensorial level, and particularly visibility (taken to mean both the embodied act of seeing and the act of representing). The workshop approaches the 'crisis' as a field of experience, an object of representation, a sphere of affect and a realm of cultural production.

The focus on visibility takes up the challenge to destabilize the dominant social-science hierarchy of value that privileges discursive and linguistic modes. The workshop turns to the visual as a means of complicating information that stems from the study of discourse and rhetoric (Pinney 2004). At the same time, it explores questions of ideology in the construction, dissemination and perception of the 'crisis'. Themes of interest include: visual media and protest; aesthetics and the senses; cultural production and agency; representation of suffering; subalternity; re-conceptualizing periphery and the margins; social imagination; poetics of dissent; ethnography in conditions of 'crisis'; hegemony and the body; theorizing mainstream and other forms of media, activism and art-practice.

The keynote lecture will be delivered by Christopher Pinney (Professor of Anthropology and Visual Culture, University College London). Pinney's work on Indian visual culture, and particularly his propositions concerning *Other* possibilities of visual ethnography and visual history, are fundamental to the workshop's aims.

Workshop organised by Konstantinos Kalantzis (Panteion University)

Programme

Monday 16th December

9.30-10.10: Coffee

10.10-10.20: Catherine Morgan (BSA): *Welcome*.

10.20-10.30: Konstantinos Kalantzis (Panteion University): *Introduction*.

Mediascapes and the Crisis

Discussant: Athena Peglidou (University of the Aegean)

10.30-10.55: Penelope Papailias (University of Thessaly): *To Mavro: The Black Screen of the 'Crisis'*.

10.55-11.20: Eleana Yalouri (Panteion University) and Nina Pappa (Athens Polytechnic School):
The Metaphysics of the Greek Crisis.

11.20-11.45: Konstantinos Kalantzis (Panteion University): *Highland Crete as Anti-Germany: Photographic Engagements 'in-Crisis'*.

11.45-12.30: Discussion

12.30-13.00: Coffee

Visuality, Visibility, Evidence

Discussant: Penelope Papailias (University of Thessaly)

13.00-13.25: Alexandra Bakalaki (University of Thessaloniki): *Chemtrails and the Temporalities of Seeing*.

13.25-13.50: Athena Peglidou (University of the Aegean): *'Transparent' Envelopes: Moral Crisis, 'Corruptive' Practices and Health*.

13.50-14.15: Eva Stefani (University of Athens): *Filming the Crisis at an Athenian Hospital*.

14.15-14.50: Discussion

14.50-16.00: Lunch Break

Art Practices in-Crisis

Discussant: Christos Varvantakis (Freie University, Berlin)

16.00-16.25: Elpida Rikou (Athens School of Fine Arts) and Io Haviara: *Art in 'Crisis': Questioning Established Connections Between Works, Discourses, Contexts*.

16.25-16.50: Eirene Efstathiou (Athens School of Fine Arts): *Remembering in Public: Thoughts on Studio Practice and the Politics of Found Images.*

16.50-17.15: Discussion

18:00: Keynote Lecture

Crisis, Citizenship and the Camera: The Civil Contract of Photography in India
Christopher Pinney (University College London)

A reception will follow

Tuesday 17th December

09.45-10.25: Coffee

Visualizing the Greek Crisis: Film and Photography

Discussant: Konstantinos Kalantzis (Panteion University)

10.30-10.55: Christos Varvantakis (Freie University, Berlin): *Occupied Visions: Greek Youths' Digital Video Making and Sharing in the Crisis.*

10.55-11.20: Konstantinos Aivaliotis (Panteion University): *Searching for Ways to Portray the Crisis: Cinematic Tools and Anthropological Thoughts.*

11.20-11.45: Penelope Petsini (University of Western Macedonia): *From National Exaltation to Great Depression: Greek Photographers Representing the Crisis.*

11.45-12.10: Discussion.

12.10-12.30: Coffee

Spatializing the Crisis

Discussant: Eleana Yalouri (Panteion University).

12.30-12.55: Pafsanias Karathanasis (University of the Aegean): *Nicosia in 'Crisis' and the City Walls.*

12.55- 13.20: Zafos Xagoraris (Athens School of Fine Arts): *Legal Texts and Public Space.*

13.20-13.45: Maria Papanikolaou (Athens School of Fine Arts): *Merry Crisis and a Happy New Fear!*

13.45-14.15: Closing discussion.

Abstracts

Konstantinos Aivaliotis: *Searching for Ways to Portray the Crisis*

“If indeed national film production reflects the country’s socio-economic conditions then Greece should certainly be exempt from this rule”.

This quotation, referring to the intriguing diversity of recent film production in Greece (despite a landscape of absent infrastructure and the increasing ‘crisis’) has been used to excess in the last few years and has thus become a cliché. Nevertheless, it is true that during the recent period there has been a revitalized emergence of interesting films produced in Greece which portray current Greek social experiences in a diverse fashion.

Escaping the familiar and repetitive images of homeless people, street riots and bankrupt shops which have become the *Image of Crisis*, this paper draws attention to recent cinematic attempts to bring the crisis into the (big) picture by using different film tools to approach multi-faceted social realities.

Alexandra Bakalaki: *Chemtrails and the Temporalities of Seeing*.

The word ‘chemtrails’ is a key term pertaining to the theory according to which the atmosphere is deliberately and systematically sprayed with chemical/biological agents that endanger ecological balance and human health. The term refers to the visible marks left behind by spraying aircrafts. This paper examines photographs of chemtrails that commonly appear in various anti-spraying activist websites. I focus on the deployment of this imagery as evidence of spraying practices and of resulting damage that these allegedly cause. I also examine the use of photographs as tools for raising consciousness and building up resistance. I argue that these images concretize a series of assumptions concerning the subjects and the nature of the world in which spraying takes place. These images further underline the importance of observing the sky: they instruct viewers on what to look for, how to correlate spraying incidents with abnormal weather, and how to *see through* official discourses, and they substantiate claims concerning the agencies behind this lethal practice. Above all, these images create a sense of urgency – they suggest that spraying quickly transforms the human organism and the world and that soon this process may be irreversible. In fact, an unthinkable regressive future may already be underway.

Eirene Efstathiou: *Remembering in Public: Thoughts on Studio Practice and the Politics of Found Images.*

I present images from my recent body of work which examines and uses public images from moments of ‘crisis’ in post-dictatorship Greece. I will speak about the ways in which these images evoke ruin, deadlock, conflict and oppression, but also depict resilience, resistance and hope. I thus examine the ways in which power narrates itself, but I also explore the ruptures and inconsistencies in these narratives which reveal instances and sites of public memory. Finally, I will speak about my own experience of the relationship between traditional media (painting and printmaking) and archival-based research as well as studio practice.

Konstantinos Kalantzis, *Highland Crete as Anti-Germany: Photographic Engagements in ‘Crisis’.*

A recent motif in certain Greek public contexts presents Germany as a threatening entity that subjugates Greece through austerity and political monitoring. At the same time, nativism, as a fantasy of vernacular Greekness that may purge the internal elites and external tutelage, has also emerged in various Greek social spheres. Crete is often signified as the ultimate embodiment of such nativism and is hence cast for the role of the anti-German force (with references to the Battle of Crete of 1941 etc.). Cretans partly participate in this media context but also have their own sensibilities based on their current relationships with German visitors, some of whom have bought property on the island. This paper takes us to highland Crete and examines Greek-German social relations during the ‘crisis’. In my talk, I privilege the visual both as a form of presentation and as a mode of ethnographic investigation. My paper explores photographic practices as a sphere that may perform *Other (Hi)stories* (Pinney), complicating what we assume or already know about the position of Germany in Cretan social imagination and the dynamics of Greek-German relations in the ‘crisis’.

Pafsanias Karathanasis: *Nicosia in ‘Crisis’ and the City Walls.*

This paper will focus on the relationship between graffiti/street art and public space in (within-the-walls) Nicosia - the liminal historic centre of the divided capital of Cyprus. This area is not only affected by the current economic crisis, but is also marked and defined by the previous Cypriot ‘crises’. As has been noted in other cities in crisis, graffiti emerge as a central feature of changing landscapes, producing vivid visual expressions of dissatisfaction and dissent. The spatial and visual intervention of contemporary graffiti and street art thus emerge as a practice corresponding to the socio-political changes occurring in cities. Street art affects the ways in which people understand and relate to the urban landscape. It also forms part of a trans-local cultural production. Concentrating on stencil graffiti –an iconic genre of street art– my analysis

will focus on stencil visuality in an attempt to decipher the relationships between stencil pieces and people as well as the ways in which stencil graffiti represent and visualize ideas and attitudes towards the city-in-crisis.

Maria Papanikolaou: *Merry Crisis and a Happy New Fear!*

On the 6th of December 2008, a 15-year-old boy named Aleksis Grigoropoulos was killed by a police officer in the Exarchia district. His death resulted in massive demonstrations and riots that mainly took place at the city centre. That was the starting point of the December 2008 uprising. During those days the city centre was utterly transformed. One of its many transformations involved the creation of a peculiar gallery. The city walls and streets hosted political ideas, pent-up feelings and unfulfilled desires expressed in a variety of creative forms (graffiti, murals, stencil-art, street theatre, banner-paintings, street poetry, etc.).

These dynamic forms of expression communicated topics already familiar to the inhabitants of the city (anti-police, anti-authoritarian, anti-government, anti-capitalist, critically related to gender, etc.). There was, however, one relatively new topic: the ‘Crisis’. One of the most popular slogans was: ‘Merry Crisis and a Happy New Fear’. Since the official beginning of the Greek Crisis is often set in 2008, the question of how was ‘the crisis’ was visualized in counter-culture art forms of the December 2008 uprising is posed. Are these art forms updated today? How do they relate to present visual practices encountered on the streets?

Penelope Papailias: *To Mavro: The Black Screen of the ‘Crisis’.*

Arguably the most striking image of the ‘crisis’ is ‘the black (screen)’ (*to mavro*) that Greek viewers encountered on their televisions following the June 11, 2013 decision by the Greek government to close the national public broadcaster and lay off 2,656 employees. In this paper, I consider the visceral experience of this blackening of the screen (and the analogous loss of radio signal) for Greek viewers and the use of the term (and image of) *to mavro* in protests over the broadcaster’s closure. This image of ‘no-image’ drew attention to the signal itself: that is, to the materiality of mediality and, by extension, to the politics of representation and communication at stake. Given that employees occupying the broadcast centre continued to broadcast after the closure via the European Broadcasting Union (until the end of August) and by way of independent and citizen internet news portals, the incident also foregrounded issues of intermediality and transnational (and regional) publics.

Athena Peglidou: *'Transparent' Envelopes: Moral Crisis, 'Corruptive' Practices and Health.*

The 'crisiology' (E. Morin) which has followed the financial crisis of 2010 and the EU-IMF restructuring programme contains a discursive explosion around morality and ethics - a preoccupation with designating 'crisis' as a moral figure which shakes 'corrupted' Greek society. Petty bribes in *fakelakia* (literally 'little envelopes') constitute an emblematic materiality of Greek 'moral decay' affecting the whole country but more specifically the public sector and doctors. These notions are reinforced by oft-used metaphors of 'disease' and 'cancer'. The *fakelaki* is assessed in international and national reports as an illegal practice that takes place in hidden, occult and unofficial settings. It is thus linked to the concept of transparency, one of modernity's moral compulsions (Sanders 2003) which guides anti-corruption rhetoric. Drawing on ethnography in a public hospital, this paper explores the paradoxes of visibility and invisibility, morality and immorality, truth and lies in various social exchanges between patients and doctors. It examines power and reciprocity and scrutinizes notions of (in)visibility in narratives, texts and images of 'corrupted' doctors. I related these issues to questions of legitimacy and surveillance, and to hopes and fears about emerging biomedical technologies.

Penelope Petsini: *From National Exaltation to Great Depression: Greek Photographers Representing the Crisis.*

This paper discusses how photographers have confronted and represented the recent severe economic and political crisis in Greece, producing extensive projects which portray both crisis narratives and strategies or modes of resistance. The discussion focuses on works anticipating the current crisis, such as Nikos Panayotopoulos's *Terra Cognita* (2000-2007) and Dimitris Michalakis's *NATO Avenue* (2004-2011), as well as works representing recession and crisis itself (i.e. Panos Kokkinias's *Leave Your Myth in Greece*, 2009-11; Dimitris Michalakis's *Burnout*, 2010-2013; Yannis Kontos's *Greece in Crisis*, 2012; Nikolas Venturakis's *Leaving Utopia*, 2013).

Christopher Pinney: *The Civil Contract of Photography in India*

This talk traces the way in which a changing photographic apparatus makes possible new kinds of publics, especially in circumstances of crisis. If the archetypal space of colonial Indian photography is that of the foothills of the Himalayas, the opposing nationalist space, which emerges in the early 20th century is that of the street, dominated by armoured cars and tear gas. This transformation is considered through the liberating work of Ariella Azoulay, Sharon Sliwinski and others who free us from hegemonic Foucauldian and Althusserian approaches that assume that the authority of the photograph is ultimately the 'truth' of the state.

What Benjamin called ‘smaller and faster’ apparatus is the precondition for a radical nomadic image-making that challenges the ‘tripod regime’ of oppressive states. But in the early 21st century, increasingly miniaturized cameras convulse exteriority and interiority in ways that are troubling. However, they also constitute the terms for a set of new demands about the ‘distribution of the visible’ and demands for the recognition of citizens by a state which is imagined to be ‘blind’.

Elpida Rikou: *Art in “Crisis”: Questioning Established Connections between Works, Discourses and Contexts.*

In this paper, I discuss certain findings from research into recent art production and art education in the Athens School of Fine Arts. This research brings to the fore traces of Greek social change through the work of students and teachers at the School. Artists use different media (painting, sculpture, video, performance etc.) and have diverse artistic and sociopolitical orientations. Their perspectives on the relationship between art practice and social reality differ significantly. However, most adopt a critical attitude to art produced as an immediate response to current social issues. I pursue such questions as: should artworks ‘speak for themselves’, as many artists (and anthropologists) suggest? How must we ‘translate’ their ‘statements’ in relation to particular historical circumstances? Can art production in times of ‘crisis’ question established connections (both in art and anthropology) between an artwork’s material ‘presence’, discourses on art, and social context?

Eva Stefani: *Filming the Crisis at an Athenian Hospital.*

This presentation examines the potential of observational cinema to explore and visualize the crisis. I will screen parts of my documentary film *Soutsou 21* (from the *Docville* series), which studies people working at the Spiliotopoulos Hospital during the autumn and winter of 2011. During that period the hospital staff was experiencing severe changes owing to the institution’s potential merger with other health units in Athens. My main problem can be encapsulated in the following question: how does one film the crisis without merely producing a visualised version of a talk or a journalistic reportage?

Christos Varvantakis: *Occupied Visions: Greek Youths’ Digital Video Making and Sharing in the Crisis*

This presentation examines what young people in Greece are presenting, representing, and commenting on in digital videos concerning the economic crisis. I focus on the ways in which

adolescents visually convey and communicate their encounters with the dominant crisis-related discourse. I explore how these videos may offer elaborate critiques of the context discussed. Digital video making and on-line video sharing provide young people with novel ways to publicly express their political views and experiences of the crises that have engulfed their reality. The exploration of cultural practices such as YouTube videomaking and commenting opens up new ways to grasp how adolescence is lived, constructed, and negotiated. In particular I will present videos concerned with school-life, the job-market and the mass media, and I will focus on how producers envision and negotiate power in the context of the economic crisis.

Zafos Xagoraris: *Legal Texts and Public Space* (“Analytic Series”) [2 videos].

I will screen two videos made in 2012 in Syracuse (Sicily) and Nicosia. The material was produced in collaboration with the MAR art centre and the University of Cyprus. The project’s aim was to locate and describe the legal constraints on the use of public spaces in the city. Such constraints include regulations on sound or the modes of inhabiting public areas. In this project, members of the team seek to represent activities that are prohibited, while visualising those official documents that regulate public space practices. The people who have participated in this project focus on the potential to change the boundaries that define daily life in the city.

Eleana Yalouri and Nina Pappa: *The Metaphysics of the Greek Crisis*.

What are the borders between priests evoking prophecies, astrologers forecasting the horoscope of a country in crisis, and chartists employing financial charts as if they were tarot cards to predict the financial future? How can a ‘scientist’ have visions of holy monks and an archbishop report on stock quotes and financial markets?

In times of uncertainty, abeyance and ‘crisis’, the religious and the metaphysical acquire particular resonance and are often employed to explain experiences of oppression, deprivation and insecurity which cannot be accounted for in rational terms. The clear boundaries between science and culture, the rational and the metaphysical, nature and culture are blurred, urging us to revisit old questions regarding the relationship between myth and history and whether ‘we have ever been modern’ (Latour).

Through a montage of YouTube videos we draw attention to the metaphysics of ‘the Greek crisis’ and the power of its visual cultures. Our aim is to point to unexplored aspects of social experiences of ‘the crisis’ and to indicate some of the ways in which people make sense of the disrupted spatiotemporal framework of their current lives.