The Futurity of Things Past

Thinking Greece Beyond Crisis

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door

Maria Boletsi
Madam Rector Magnificus,
Your Excellencies Mr. Ambassador of the Hellenic Republic and
Mr. Ambassador of the Republic of Cyprus,
Madam Chair of the Supervisory Board of the University,
Mr. Dean of the Faculty of Humanities,
Mr. General Director of the Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation, representatives
and guests of the Foundation,
Members of the Curatorium Panel of the Marilena Laskaridis Chair,
Board of the Dutch Society for Modern Greek Studies,
Dear colleagues,
Dear students,
Dear family and friends,

‘Crisis...what else?’

This phrase, which figures in an Athenian graffiti by Greek public artist
bleeps.gr (Figure 1), highlights crisis as an all-encompassing framework and
mode of living—the ‘new normal’. The phrase evokes the well-known Nes-
presso commercial, in which George Clooney charms consumers into seeing
that there is no other choice for coffee than Nespresso: ‘Nespresso. What
else?’ Similarly, the graffiti’s phrase casts crisis as lack of choice: a self-evident,
inevitable condition. Today ‘crisis’ pops up everywhere in public rhetoric: the
environmental crisis, the global financial crisis, the European debt crisis, the
refugee crisis, are all phenomena brought under the rubric of this term. In
Greece, since the debt crisis broke out in 2009, the association of the country
with ‘crisis’ has become almost inescapable: a crisis that in the course of nine
years has radically changed people’s lives and their outlook on the future, and
that still persists despite signs of financial recovery. As debates about Greece’s
traumatic years of crisis and its ‘path to recovery’ have been rekindled with
the official end of the international bailout program for Greece in August
2018, the question of how to imagine a future beyond crisis becomes now
more urgent than ever. This is the question that will guide my talk today.

The phrase ‘Crisis...what else?’ captures a current understanding of crisis as
an enduring state that limits the space of choice in the political sphere.’ If
‘crisis...what else?’ is a rhetorical question—suggesting that there is nothing
else beyond crisis—how do we turn it into a real question? How do we think
this ‘else’—alternative narratives, modes of expression, futures—beyond the pervasive framework of crisis that shapes the present? The term crisis is a good place to start thinking this ‘else’. In my work, I have learned that self-evidently used terms, like ‘crisis’, are the ones that require the most critical scrutiny. This is why I have devoted many years of my research since the start of my doctoral thesis to another self-evidently used popular term—the barbarian. Just as the barbarian, the term crisis has a long history that starts in ancient Greece. The word’s meanings in ancient Greek show that choice is actually a defining element of crisis. The verb κρίνω (krinō), from which κρίσις (krisis) derives, meant to ‘separate’, ‘choose’ ‘judge’ or ‘decide’ (Koselleck 2006: 358). For Greeks, as historian Reinhardt Koselleck writes, the word krisis meant “‘decision” in the sense of reaching a crucial point that would tip the scales’ in politics, or in the sense of ‘verdict’, ‘judgment’ or what we now call ‘criticism’ (358-59). Thus, if the framework of crisis today often works to restrict choices and the imagination of alternative futures, this understanding of crisis lacks one of its key ingredients: choice between real alternatives.

Figure 1 ‘Crisis... what else?’ by bleeps.gr (Athens, 2013)
Turning crisis from a ‘judgment [...] of failure’ or a monologic narrative into a democratic space of real choices commits us to a critique of the present—another cognate of crisis (Roitman 2014: 41). This means, first of all, refusing to take crisis as a descriptive term and exploring it as a framing that ‘produces meaning’ and that favors certain narratives of the past, present, and future while precluding others (41). Which attitudes to the past and the future have been privileged during the crisis in Greece? What alternative modes of expression have emerged through the Greek crisis-scape? Both questions are at the heart of my research. They are also central to the research group I have initiated in the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis under the title ‘Crisis, Critique, and Futurity’, which I co-ordinate with Eva Fotiadi. With scholars from different disciplines we explore how in Greece and elsewhere in the world, art, literature, social movements, and cultural initiatives turn frameworks of crisis into critiques of the present or occasions for revisiting the past to imagine the future otherwise.

At stake in these questions is what in the title of my talk I call ‘futurity’. Futurity refers to ways of thinking the future that involve both the future and the past. There are many versions of futurity, as the future today is an object of conflicting strategies and claims. Populist rhetoric of crisis in Europe today, for example, as Dimitris Papanikolaou has argued, often uses the tense of ‘future perfect’ or what Gayatri Spivak has called ‘future present’ (Papanikolaou 2012: n.pag; Spivak 1995: 70): it projects a dystopian future scenario as already realized in the present—e.g., ‘hordes’ of refugees as already having taken over ‘fortress Europe’—to enhance xenophobia, ethnonationalism, and a climate of fear and paranoia. The language of finance is also replete with future-speak: speculations, market-based projections, forecasting, risk-management are concepts invested in designing and marketing the future, based on what Arjun Appadurai calls a ‘politics of probability’ (2013: 1, 3). My understanding of futurity follows what Appadurai calls a ‘politics of possibility’ (1, 3), whereby past and future are conceived ‘as open-ended rather than as already realised’ (Stuit 2016: 99); that is, open to possibilities and to modes of being and thinking that cannot be fully calculated or articulated in the present. The past can activate such possibilities when engaging with the past is not just ‘retrospective’, based on nostalgic idealizations, but ‘prospective’: concerned, according to Svetlana Boym, with the past’s ‘many potentialities that have not been realized’ (2001: 178). By revisiting past objects to find tools and ‘grammars’ for envisioning different possible futures, we turn past archives, in Hal Foster’s words, from “excavation sites” into “construction sites” (2004: 22). In other words, ‘the remembrance of things past’—to use the first English title of Marcel Proust’s À la recherche du temps perdu—turns
into the ‘futurity of things past’. Herbert Marcuse, the great utopian visionary of the 1960s, saw such a future-oriented engagement with the past as a task for critical theory, arguing that ‘[c]ritical theory must concern itself to a hitherto unknown extent with the past—precisely insofar as it is concerned with the future’ (2009: 116).

Recasting the Past Into Languages of the Future

The search for ‘the futurity of things past’ is important in times of crisis, when future prospects feel limited and people look for guidance in the past. The role of the past in shaping the present is especially pronounced in the case of Greece, as the modern nation’s identity has been largely defined by its history. Modern Greeks have perceived the past as both ‘an asset and a burden’ (Tziovas 2014: 1). This applies especially to the classical past, which has been a source of self-determination and national pride as the country’s symbolic capital in Europe, but has also worked, particularly in the modern European imagination, as a reminder of the contrast between the classical ideal and modern Greek reality. Echoing descriptions of Greece by nineteenth-century European travelers and Romantic authors, the foreign press in the years of the crisis found in the material ruins of the classical heritage a host of visual metaphors for the present state of Greece. Through an ‘iconographic blending [...] of ancient and modern remnants,’ images of classical ruins were mobilized to illustrate Greece’s disintegrating economy and the consequences of the crisis.

In the crisis-years, the motif of the ‘burden of the past’, which has been very popular in modern Greek literature and culture, resurfaced in artistic reflections about the future. In a street artwork by Dimitris Taxis that appeared in Athens in 2013 with the title ‘I wish you could learn something useful from the past’ (Figure 2), both past and future become a burden. The work shows a boy trapped in the present between books referring to the past (e.g., Plato, Socrates, Democracy, Modern Greek History) and books that capture the contradictions of the present and the lack of future (Athens Means Luxury, Economics, Survival Guide, No Future). In this image of entrapment between a past the young generations cannot live up to and a future closing down on them, the present becomes frozen, leaving no space for futurity and hope.
In literature, a bold recasting of the motif of the ‘burden of the past’ in imagining the future can be traced in the novella Κοντά στην κοιλιά / Close to the belly (2014) by well-known author Sotiris Dimitriou. The novella sketches a fictional future, in which Greece has fully disengaged itself from the ‘burden’ of its past. After the crisis-era, which in the novella is presented as a time of relentless finger-pointing, self-blame, guilt, and judgment of collective failures, the country enters a new state of ‘lightness’ that entails historical amnesia. Disengaging from history and from the recent crisis, which are both cast as sites of trauma, people strive for a debt-less, guilt-less, weight-less state. This lightness, however, carries the ambivalence of pharmakon as medicine and poison. The consolation it provides numbs the country. History is reduced to simplified stories and decorative images for coffee cups or touristic products:
The cups depicted scenes from the nation’s three-thousand-year history. [...] Of course the tourists were stealing the cups as souvenirs but boatloads came to us from Taiwan. [...].

By painting its history on the cups, the nation was finally relieved from its everlasting burden. It now had the force of a newly born nation.¹²

Reduced to souvenirs and fairytales, history in Dimitriou’s anti-utopia is consumed by the present, just like the coffee in those cups. By disengaging from the past, however, the country deprives itself of a future. There is no change or movement towards unknown possibilities; only an eternal history-less, future-less, depoliticized present. This future (anti-)utopian society that treats the past not as a dynamic agent but only as a commodified product eventually fails as an experiment.

Against the backdrop of the crisis, artistic preoccupations with the future have intensified in Greece. The recent exhibitions ‘Tomorrows: Urban Fictions for Possible Futures’ (Onassis Cultural Centre, Athens, 2017) and ‘Resilient Futures’ (PCAI Piraeus & Thessaloniki Contemporary Art Centre, 2018), as well as the poetic anthology Futures: Poetry of the Greek Crisis (2015) are three of countless examples.¹³ Artists, writers, filmmakers renegotiate the past from the present or even imagine the future as a site of ruins for future archeologists, as in Zoi Hatziyannaki’s interactive art installation ‘The Past of Things to Come’ (2018).¹⁴

Besides nostalgic or escapist returns to the past, the crisis also prompted a critical rethinking of different periods of Greek history. This is not a wholly new trend, as the ‘nation’ and the ‘past’ have been ‘widely debated’ topics in Greek literature in recent decades (Tziovas 2016: 117). However, the major shifts in the Greek social fabric that the crisis precipitated or accelerated, disrupted what Cornelius Castoriadis called a society’s ‘instituted imaginary’—undisputed meanings and myths that ensure continuity and determine a society’s mode ‘of living, of seeing and of conducting its own existence’ (2005: 155, 145). This spurred what some have called a ‘crisis of meaning’, which was registered in artistic attempts to reconfigure people’s relation to the past.¹⁵ Dimitris Papanikolaou coined the term ‘archive trouble’ to capture this ‘iconoclastic return to the past’ in the years of the crisis (2017: 45). Writers, poets, artists, filmmakers in Greece reinvent ‘the past and its remnants’ (41); they delve into archives of the past, but with ‘a constant reference to the current sociopolitical state of affairs’; they place past objects in new constellations and unearth ‘lost patterns’ and voices, while trying to give expression to a radically changed, precarious present (45, 47, 49).
Given the fascinating work that has emerged from these conditions, many speak of a ‘cultural renaissance’ in Greece since the crisis.\textsuperscript{16} The efflorescence of domains such as poetry, public art, theater, and cinema, is receiving international attention.\textsuperscript{17} A recent \textit{New York Times} article with the title ‘Athens Rising’ presents the city as ‘emerging from the wreckage as one of Europe’s most [...] vibrant cultural capitals’ (Wilder 2018: n.pag.). Films by Yorgos Lanthimos, Athina Rachel-Tsangari and several other filmmakers associated with what has been called the ‘Greek Weird Wave’ have placed Greek cinema in the international spotlight.\textsuperscript{18} One of the most important contemporary art events, \textit{Documenta}, traditionally held in Kassel, Germany, used Athens as its second city venue in 2017, under the title ‘Learning from Athens’. What can we learn, then, from Greece today? What makes current forms of artistic production in the country relevant for international audiences or paradigmatic for new social and artistic imaginaries in Europe and the Mediterranean?

To flesh out these questions and reflections, I will take you through two works that struggle to open up the contracted horizon of a present in crisis through a future-oriented engagement with the past: an \textit{object of the present}—a film—that rethinks the remnants of the past from the experience of the present; and an \textit{object of the past}—a poem—that ‘thinks’ our present through another context and another crisis.

**The Lives of Ruins**

The short documentary film \textit{Αρχιπέλαγος, γυμνοί γρανίτες / Archipelagos, Naked Granites} (2014) by Daphne Heretakis registers the experience of a precarious present by inserting in it images of the past in unfamiliar constellations. The film takes the pulse of crisis-stricken Athens through fragmentary images and narratives. A voice-over reads the diary entries of a woman and we follow her everyday life through phases of depression, optimism, boredom, despair, inertia. The camera moves through Athens, alternating still shots with movement, panoramic views with close-ups, majestic monuments with dilapidated, graffiti-covered buildings, images of normality with shots of disruption of the public order. The diary entries are interrupted by interviews with people in the streets, who are asked to talk about their present and their future expectations.

‘If you woke up one day and found out the acropolis wasn’t there anymore, what would you think?’; ‘What would that mean for Greece?’ In the film, these questions are posed to a group of teenagers, who rush to answer: ‘The loss of our civilization’; ‘and Greece is just that’. Their response highlights the
dependency of modern Greeks on the classical past for understanding themselves as national subjects. The next scene shows the acropolis starting to collapse and turning into rubble and dust. The crumbling acropolis introduces an unimaginable event into the field of visibility. If in Greek national narratives ancient ruins have often functioned as signifiers the nation’s continuity from ancient to modern times, the rubble and dust in Heretakis’ apocalyptic image forces viewers to ask, in the manner of C.P. Cavafy: ‘And now, what’s going to happen to us without the acropolis?’ (‘Και τώρα τι θα γένουμε χωρίς ακρόπολη’).\(^{19}\) The confrontational image of the collapsing acropolis invites viewers to consider the ancient past beyond the hierarchical dependency of the present on that past, echoing perhaps an earlier poetic reversal of this dependency by celebrated Cypriot poet Kostas Montis: ‘Ό,τι και να ‘ν’ η Ακρόπολη / δεν υπάρχει χωρίς εμάς’ (‘Whatever the Acropolis may be / It doesn’t exist without us’) (2014: 17).\(^{20}\)

In the Greek national imagination, Yannis Hamilakis argues, antiquities are often ‘described in an anthropomorphic, empathic language’ as ‘living members of the national body,’ not mere ‘representations of ancestors’ (2007: 32). Another scene in Heretakis’ film tests this relation of ancient statues to contemporary subjects by means of juxtaposition. While the voice-over continues to read from the diary entries, shots of faces of young Greeks alternate with shots of sculptures drawn from the ‘Antikythera shipwreck’, a Roman-era shipwreck from the mid-first century BCE discovered near the island of Antikythera south of Peloponnese. The statues shown in this scene—partly corroded under the influence of algae, oysters, and sea organisms—were exhibited for the first time in the National Archeological museum in Athens in 2012, in the midst of the financial crisis.\(^{21}\)

Figures 3, 4, 5 Stills from the documentary film Archipelagos, Naked Granites (2014) by Daphne Heretakis. Figures 3 and 4 show details of sculptures from the Antikythera shipwreck.

Images reproduced by kind permission of the filmmaker

What relationality between past and present does this scene enact? What connects the people with the statues? Do we recognize resemblances or kinship,
or does the scene provoke disconnectedness from the past? Life and death, sickness and health, wholeness and fragmentation, beauty and ugliness, eternity and transience, intertwine in this juxtaposition that generates no straightforward analogy between past and present. The film’s title comes into play in this scene. *Archipelagos, Naked Granites* is taken from the penultimate verse of the poem “Με τον τρόπο του Γ.Σ.” / “In the manner of G.S.” (1936) by Greek Nobel laureate George Seferis (1900-1971), whose poetry forcefully explored the lives of ancient ruins in the present. The previous verse in this poem is a famous one: ‘Όπου και να ταξιδέψω η Ελλάδα με πληγώνει’ / ‘Wherever I travel Greece wounds me’ (1995: 52). In Seferis’ poem, this ‘wound’ pertained to the political traumas of his present in 1936 but also to Greece’s complex relation to its past. The idea of the wound also became central to the reception of the statues from the Antikythera shipwreck by the Greek public.

When these statues were first exhibited at the National Archeological museum in Athens in 2012, some read them as allegories for the victims of the country’s crisis: as violently dismembered or sick subjects deprived of their dignity (Psychoulis 2012: n.pag.). In this reading, the disfigured statues became material testimonies of past wounds and lost perfection, superimposed on the trauma of the present crisis. However, the ‘naked granites’ in Héritakis’ scene do not just function as metaphors for the wounds of a precarious present. Their corrosion may resemble a disease of the flesh or deformity, but it also indexes the continued life of these statues as parts of an underwater ecosystem for millennia. This other life away from the context of their emergence stresses both their vulnerability to time and their ability to survive by transforming. The film projects this shared vulnerability and transformability as connecting threads between the people and the statues, stressing the statues’ temporal existence and materiality, beyond their symbolic capital. Instead of indexing a lost perfection, the statues are cast as imperfect but active parts of the present, always in a process of becoming-other.

A linear temporality that would dictate a one-way influence of the past on the present gives way to a shared present in which the past lives unpredictably in the ‘now’. Ancient fragments and young people step into a relation with an open outcome: a relation that also resides in the word ‘archipelago’ of the film’s title. For Édouard Glissant, the great writer of the French Caribbean, the geographical formation of an archipelago—a cluster of islands—inspired a way of thinking and being in the world in which a multiplicity of fragments is interconnected in a non-hierarchically ordered totality. The relation of these islands to each other—without origin or center, ambiguous, in constant transformation—provided for Glissant an alternative to what he called ‘con-
tinental’, ethnonationalist, exclusionary ways of thinking (Glissant 1996: 89; 1997; Wiedorn 2018: 7-8). In a complex process of cultural translation, Glissant’s ‘archipelagic thinking’ re-enters the Aegean archipelago through Seferis’ verse in the film’s title: both their voices accompany the film’s search for new relationalities between ancient objects and contemporary subjects, through which ruins and fragments can become agents in shaping future languages.

So how can fragments carry futurity?

The Futurity of Fragments

To ponder this question, I turn to a poem by Constantin Cavafy, a diasporic Greek who lived in Alexandria, Egypt, between 1863 and 1933 and a central figure in European modernism and world literature. Cavafy chose not to publish his poetry during his lifetime but circulated his poems in small handmade editions to people he trusted and respected. In fact, the very first edition of Cavafy’s poems was not published in Greece, but in the Netherlands in 1934, soon after Cavafy’s death: it contained twenty-five poems translated by Gerard Hendrik Blanken (1902-1986), who later became professor of Medieval and Modern Greek literature at the University of Amsterdam. Besides Blanken’s masterful translations, other Dutch translations of Cavafy continue to be published—this year only, a revised edition of Cavafy’s collected poems by Hans Warren en Mario Molegraaf and a new translation of 73 poems by Ludovic Jansen-Stuibj appeared, making Cavafy the most beloved Modern Greek poet in the Netherlands.

There are artworks or texts that follow us in our life as constant partners in thinking, guiding the ways we read and experience other texts or objects of study. For me, Cavafy’s poems have been such partners. Cavafy could not be missing from a discussion of the ‘futurity of things past.’ His whole poetry could be read as a complex response to this question: What does it take for past objects, people, worlds, to come alive in the present? In the book I am currently writing on Cavafy’s work, I explore what I call his poetics of the spectral: poetic strategies for conjuring the past and making past objects—including the poems themselves—active forces in future presents.

George Seferis likened the effect of Cavafy’s poetry to that of a missing statue.22 ‘Cavafy’s poems’, he wrote, ‘show the emotional response [sygkinisi] we would have from a statue which is no longer there; which was there, which we saw, and has now been displaced’.23 Following Seferis, the haunting force of Cavafy’s poetry is drawn from something lost or displaced that is still ‘felt’
in the present, like a phantom limb. I exchange Seferis’ metaphor of the missing statue with that of a fractured statue. According to literary theorist Paul de Man, canonical literary texts have often ‘been made into statues’, ‘transformed into historical and aesthetic objects’ (121). These statues, de Man argues, sometimes need to be fractured, disfigured or defaced to come alive in the present. The fissure in the bust of C.P. Cavafy by artist Apostolos Fanakidis—a strip of red neon light that appears to bring life to a dead statue while fracturing it—works for me as a visual metaphor of this position (Figure 6).

Figure 6 ‘Cavafy’ (bust) by Apostolos Fanakidis. Polyester and neon (2013)

Photograph by Thaleia Kimbari; reproduced by kind permission of the photographer and the artist

Cavafy was preoccupied with fragments and ruins. His poems present attempts to animate forgotten inscriptions, fractured and partly illegible tombstones, past societies in decline or past lives in moments of ruin. In tune with Cavafy’s own strategies for conjuring the past, fracturing a poem—in the way
Fanakidis ‘fractured’ Cavafy’s bust in his artwork—can be a way of activating its potential to address future presents unpredictably.

With this in mind, I turn to the poem ‘Εν μεγάλη Ελληνική αποικία, 200 π.Χ./ ‘In A Large Greek Colony, 200 B.C.’ (1928). The speaker in this poem lives in 200 B.C. in a colony, probably in one of the Hellenistic kingdoms of the successors of Alexander the Great. The colony is in crisis and a political reformer is deemed by many a solution—a solution, however, that the poem’s speaker distrusts.

Εν μεγάλη Ελληνική αποικία, 200 π.Χ.

Ότι τα πράγματα δεν βαίνουν κατ’ ευχήν στην Αποικία
den meν’ η ελαχίστη αμφιβολία,
kai μ’ όλο που οπωσούν τραβούμ’ εμπρός,
ισως, καθώς νομίζουν ουκ ολίγοι, να έφθασε ο καιρός
να φέρουμε Πολιτικό Αναμορφωτή.

Όμως το πρόσκομμα κ’ η δυσκολία
eίναι που κάμνουνε μια ιστορία
μεγάλη κάθε πράγμα οι Αναμορφωταί
αυτοί. (Ευτύχημα θα ήταν αν ποτέ
den touς χρειάζονταν κανείς.) Για κάθε τι,
 gia to paraμικρό ρωτούνε κ’ εξετάζουν,
k’ ευθύς στον νου τους ριζικές μεταρρυθμίσεις βάζουν,
 με την απαίτηση να εκτελεσθούν άνευ αναβολής.

Έχουνε και μια κλίσι στες θυσίες.
Παραίτηθείτε από την κτήσιν σας εκείνη:
η κατοχή σας είν’ επισφαλής:
η τέτοιες κτήσεις ακριβώς βλάπτουν τες Αποικίες.
Παραίτηθείτε από την πρόσοδον αυτή,
κι από την άλληνα την συναφή,
κι από την τρίτη τούτην: ως συνέπεια φυσική:
eίναι μεν ουσιώδεις, αλλά τί να γίνει;
σας δημιουργούν μια επιβλαβή ευθύνη.

Κι όσο στον έλεγχο τους προχωρούνε,
βρίσκουν και βρίσκουν περιττά, και να παυθούν ζητούνε·
πράγματα που όμως δύσκολα τα καταργεί κανείς.
Κι όταν, με το καλό, τελειώσουν την εργασία,
κι ορίσαντες και περικόψαντες το παν λεπτομερώς,
απέλθουν, παίρνοντας και την δικαία μισθοδοσία,
να δούμε τι απομένει πια, μετά
tόση δεινότητα χειρουργική.—

Ίσως δεν έφθασεν ακόμη ο καιρός.
Να μη βιαζόμεθα· είν’ επικίνδυνον πράγμα η βία.
Τα πρόωρα μέτρα φέρνουν μεταμέλεια.
Έχει άτοπα πολλά, βεβαίως και δυστυχώς, η Αποικία.
Όμως υπάρχει τι το ανθρώπινο χωρίς άτελεια;
Και τέλος πάντων, να, τραβούμ’ εμπρός. (Cavafy 2015: 365-66)

In A Large Greek Colony, 200 B.C.

That things in the Colony are not what they should be
no one can doubt any longer,
and though in spite of everything we do go forward,
maybe—as more than a few believe—the time has come
to bring in a Political Reformer.

But here’s the problem, here’s the hitch:
they make a tremendous fuss
about everything, these Reformers.
(What a relief it would be
if no one ever needed them.) They probe everywhere,
question the smallest detail,
and right away think up radical changes
that demand immediate execution.

Also, they have a liking for sacrifice:
*Get rid of that property;*
*your owning it is risky:*
*properties like those are exactly what ruin colonies.*
*Get rid of that income,*
*and the other connected with it,*
*and this third, as a natural consequence:*
*they are substantial, but what can one do?*
*the responsibility they create for you is damaging.*
And as they proceed with their investigation,
they find an endless number of useless things to eliminate—
things that are, however, difficult to get rid of.

And when, all being well, they finish the job,
every detail now diagnosed and sliced away,
and they retire, also taking the wages due to them—
it will be a miracle if anything’s left at all
after such surgical efficiency.

Maybe the moment has not yet arrived.
Let’s not be too hasty: haste is a dangerous thing.
Untimely measures bring repentance.
Certainly, and unhappily, many things in the Colony are absurd.
But is there anything human without some fault?
And after all, you see, we do go forward.


As the speaker suggests, the political reformer that would help the colony overcome its crisis would be an outsider and thus indifferent to the effects of his decisions on people’s lives. The concern of such reformers is getting results fast regardless of societal impact. The speaker uses violent terms to reconstruct the reformers’ *modus operandi*. Their ‘liking for sacrifice’ (‘κλίσι στες θυσίες’) and words like ‘eliminate’ (‘να παυθούν’), ‘get rid of’ (‘παραιτηθείτε’), ‘slice away’ (‘περικόψαντες’), accentuate their ruthless result-oriented mentality. Giving up property or eliminating ‘useless things’ (‘περιττά’) are presented as inevitable: these things ‘are substantial, but what can one do?’ (‘είναι μεν ουσιώδεις, αλλά τί να γίνει;’). The reformer’s rhetoric exemplifies the logic of ‘there is no alternative’ that also permeates contemporary crisis rhetoric, casting aggressive measures as a necessary evil—or, in Cavafy’s words, ‘a natural consequence’ (‘συνέπεια φυσική’).

Thus, when the speaker urges ‘Να μη βιαζόμεθα· είν’ επικίνδυνον πράγμα η βία’ (‘Let’s not be too hasty: haste is a dangerous thing’), the word βία (via) may be used in its more archaic meaning of *haste* but it is also haunted by its other, more common, meaning in Modern Greek: *violence*. As such, βία is
imbued with both meanings: it performs the interrelation of violence and haste in the reformer’s approach. To the reformer’s violence, we may add the specter of another violence haunting the colony through the title’s date. The date in the title, as we read in the editor’s notes to the poem, ‘situates [...] the poem at an optimum moment of the decline of Hellenism’ (G. Savidis in Cavafy 1992: 240). Just a few years later, a series of ‘crushing blows’ will be ‘dealt by Rome to the [...] hellenistic kingdoms of Asia’, leading to their takeover by the Romans (Mendelsohn in Cavafy 2009: 449). Therefore, the date 200 B.C. in fact foreshadows the ‘imminent fall’ of this colony and of Hellenistic civilization (449).

The poem’s colony summons another colony, in which Cavafy spent his life: Egypt under British rule. Reading βία in its double meaning of haste and violence is crucial for untangling the nexus of colonialism, reform, and crisis in the poem’s colony, in Cavafy’s Egypt, and perhaps in Greece today. The British occupied Egypt in 1882, but an indirect form of colonialism by European powers had been set in motion since the mid-nineteenth century. The chief factor for Egypt’s gradual loss of political sovereignty was its debt to foreign creditors (Tunçer 2015: 29). The history of Egypt’s sovereign debt starts in 1862, when the Khedive of Egypt, Said Pasha, negotiated the first of many loans with European banks in order to fund infrastructure projects, including the Suez Canal (Tunçer 2015: 31; al-Sayyid Marsot 2007: 81). The loans soon became unsustainable, and when further loans were not possible, on the Khedive’s request, the British government sent a committee to Egypt, which looked into the country’s finances and issued a report in 1876 (Tunçer 2015: 35). On the reasons for Egypt’s financial state, the report stated:

[Egypt] suffers from the ignorance, dishonesty, waste and extravagance of the East, such as have brought her suzerain to the verge of ruin, and at the same time from the vast expense caused by hasty and inconsiderate endeavours to adopt the civilization of the West. (Cave qtd. in Tunçer 2015: 35; emphasis added)

The rhetoric of this report resonates in recent European public rhetoric on the reasons for the Greek financial crisis: irresponsible expenditure, corruption, the incompetence of Greek administrators, Greece’s incomplete modernization and Westernization, the extravagant ‘Eastern’ lifestyle of Greeks, are all familiar stereotypes that echo the language of this nineteenth-century British account of Egypt’s unsustainable debt. The comparison is revealing for the Orientalist bias and neocolonial logic inscribed in dominant Western rhetoric on the Greek crisis.
By turning to the European Powers for financial help, Khedive Ismail Pasha ‘allowed the Powers from then on to interfere actively in [...] Egyptian affairs’ through the formation in May 1876 of an institution known as the Caisse de la Dette Publique (al-Sayyid Marsot 2007: 82). The Caisse comprised ‘four commissioners representing [...] England, France, Austria and Italy’ and ‘[t]wo controllers, one English and one French’ that were to ensure payment of the debt by collecting the revenues from local authorities (al-Sayyid Marsot 2007: 82; Tunçer 2015: 36). This resulted in a European-controlled administration of public debt, in which the controllers had significant powers.24

Although all this happened in Cavafy’s early youth, the reformer-figure in the poem could have been modeled after such controllers and commissioners: ‘reformers’ that would impose hasty measures and take away ‘that income / and the other connected with it’ (Cavafy 1992: 155), gradually stripping a nation of its wealth and sovereignty under the guise of this nation’s incapability to manage its finances. In the reformer’s logic, these are ‘substantial’ possessions, but ‘the responsibility they create for you is damaging’ (155).

From 1880 on, Egypt became ‘unable to move without European permission’ (al-Sayyid Marsot 2007: 83-84). The population’s animosity toward Europeans sparked a revolt in 1881 (86). The violent outbreak that ensued in Alexandria triggered the British bombardment of Alexandria and the beginning of the British occupation of Egypt in 1882 that would last until 1956 (88).25 The occupation established a ‘Veiled protectorate’ with the British being the actual rulers ‘behind a façade of Egyptian ministers’ (al-Sayyid Marsot 2007: 89). The British reforms had disastrous effects on the Egyptian population. They strangled local industries and the living conditions of farmers deteriorated due to unbearable taxes (Tsirkas 1983: 158-59). Playing with the term ‘reformer’ (anamorfotis) in his study of Cavafy’s Egypt, Stratis Tsirkas sarcastically refers to Lord Cromer, who was in control of Egypt’s finances from 1883 to 1907, as the ‘great deformer’ (paramorfotis) (157). Viewed through Egypt’s history of debt, reform, and occupation, the reformers’ practices in Cavafy’s poem become associated with an imperialist project, in which reform is a legitimizing mechanism for foreign intervention and colonization under the guise of a society’s financial healing.

The poem stages a society in crisis. If in ancient Greek crisis (κρίσις) meant choice between alternatives, in the poem the only alternatives are represented by the speaker and the reformer. The reformer’s way is violent, hasty, and externally imposed. The speaker’s alternative—to leave things as they are—may be less violent but is hardly convincing. At best, it ensures the colony’s short-term survival, but preserves its deficient structures, and thus a crisis
without prospect of change. If this crisis is a moment of decision, neither of the suggested alternatives appears attractive.

The poem’s resonance in the contemporary Greek landscape—financially ‘reformed’ under harsh austerity measures—is so strong that it hardly merits explanation. The poem presents an entrapment in the logic of binary choices: either violent reform or preservation of the old system. There is no room for another solution, another λύσις (lysis), to the colony’s crisis. The prospect of emancipatory politics or change to the benefit of the people is strikingly absent. The title’s date, 200 B.C., makes this entrapment worse by introducing historical fatalism: any decision between the two alternatives in the poem does not matter, since soon after 200 B.C. the colony will be conquered by the Romans, who will annul any previous political decision. The poem’s horizon is contracted: there are no different possible futures depending on decisions in the present. How can we come to terms with this lack of other alternatives, which strangulates the colony’s futurity? If the colony’s future is sealed, what brings this poem and its colony to life today? Does the specter of another future lurk somewhere in the poem, and if so, what mode of reading does it take to summon it?

Cavafy published this poem in 1928. Since 1919, British colonial violence in Egypt had been met by a movement of national resistance, eventually leading to the revolution of 1919 (96). The British government was forced to nominally recognize Egypt’s independence in 1922, but with a host of restrictions that practically ‘rendered’ this independence ‘void’ (Al-Sayyid Marsot 2007: 97). The British occupation would persist until the next revolution of 1952 that would lead to the withdrawal of British troops in 1956.

The word βία in the poem evokes the colonizers’ hasty and violent reforms. But it also summons the revolutionary violence of anti-colonial struggle, which at the time of the poem’s writing (1928) had been suppressed and would only lead to emancipation from the British in 1956—beyond Cavafy’s own life. In light of this future moment, let me reread the following verse:

Ίσως δεν έφθασεν ακόμη ο καιρός

Maybe the moment has not yet arrived

In the speaker’s plea, this verse is a conservative call for preservation: let’s not rush things, it’s not time for reformers yet. Read as a fragment, however, the verse becomes invested with a subtextual desire for an unpredictable future event that is not bound by the closed horizon the poem draws. French philosopher Jacques Derrida called this a future ‘to-come’ (‘l’avenir’): a non-pro-
grammed future that arrives without us being able to anticipate it. This verse haunts us like a specter from another possible future—not the one that we know awaits this colony or the one the speaker expects. Read in relation to Cavafy’s Egypt in 1928, this verse becomes imprinted, *preposterously*, with a future emancipatory moment that would take another twenty-four years to arrive, in 1952.

‘Ίσως δεν έφθασεν ακόμη ο καιρός’ / ‘Maybe the moment has not yet arrived’. The Greek word ‘καιρός’ is aptly translated with ‘moment’ rather than ‘time’. There are two words for ‘time’ in ancient Greek: *chronos* refers to ‘the chronological, quantitative measuring of time’ (Lindroos 1998: 12) while *kairos* to ‘a qualitative character of time’: ‘the right or opportune time to do something’ (Smith 1986: 4). *Kairos* does not understand ‘movement through temporal continuity’ but ‘emphasises breaks, ruptures, non synchronised moments and multiple temporal dimensions’ (Lindroos 1998: 12). The poem’s speaker does not grasp the opportunity the word *kairos* connotes, because in his horizon, this opportunity is only identified with the undesirable prospect of reform. Instead, he pleads for a frozen present. His closing statement, ‘and after all, you see, we do go forward’, conveys a false sense of temporal progression: it is a progression without the prospect of an unanticipated *event* and the opportunity for change that *kairos* suggests: it is a continuation of the same, as time—*chronos*—passes.

Brought to bear on the interpretation of historical events, *kairos* refers to ‘constellations of events pregnant with a possibility or possibilities not to be met with at other times’ (Smith 1986: 4-5). The future-oriented energy of this word rebels against the speaker’s conservatism, leading us to search elsewhere—beyond the speaker and the reformer—for these ‘possibilities’ that the poem’s closed structure does not offer. For *kairos* to truly bear these possibilities, the verse it belongs to has to be read as a *fragment* that bears meaning beyond its immediate context. This fragment fractures the poem as a closed construct—an intact *statue*. Rereading the poem through this fragment—that is, through the possibility of an unforeseeable future that ‘has not yet arrived’—restores the *hope* of justice in a future that expands and explodes the poem’s horizon.

The speaker’s conservatism, the reformer’s violence, and the title’s fatalism, leave us with the taste of an unsettled injustice that almost compels us to fracture the poem’s context in search of the ‘otherwise.’ This injustice invites a *resistant* reader that rejects the colony’s apparent lack of futurity and looks for the excess of meaning that the poem’s fragments may carry, when temporarily disengaged from the poem’s ‘body’. To activate the poem’s futurity, then, the reader needs to become an archeologist who listens to this colony’s
future ruins. The verse ‘maybe the moment has not yet arrived’ is part of these ruins, pregnant with a different future-to-come.

The poem gives readers a challenge: to create space in language for hope and justice even in the framework of a crisis that seems stifling; to resist the supposed necessity of dualistic choices—either violent reform or preservation of the status quo—and make room for alternatives. Literature can open such spaces in language, beyond the limited probabilities that govern the present. Aristotle wrote in his Poetics that a poet is concerned not with ‘what has happened’ but ‘what may happen’ (par. 9; 1989: 66-67; emphasis added). Literature expands our sense of the possible.

The crisis in the poem’s colony will meet its violent lysis (dissolution) with the colony’s conquest by the Romans. But through the poem’s fragmented verse, Cavafy’s colony can dream of another future, beyond the title’s implied verdict. This poetic fragment also intervenes in contemporary Greece, resisting monologic crisis-narratives that dictate the future as a one-way-street. I hear this fragment in contemporary searches for futurity in Greece. It resonates, for example, in the title of Christos Ikonomou’s Κάτι θα γίνει, θα δεις / Something Will Happen, You’ll See (2010), a short story collection that has ‘become the literary emblem of the Greek crisis’. The book’s stories read as a haunting ‘elegy on the impoverished, working class’ people in Greece and those most afflicted by the crisis—laid-off, unemployed, indebted people, whose dreams dissipate as the future contracts. The small acts of protest or resistance the book’s characters perform may seem futile. But the book’s title registers the stubborn hope for an unexpected event—the ‘something’ that will open up the future, against all odds.

The space of political hope, according to feminist scholar Sara Ahmed, involves the past, the present, and the future:

> hope involves a relationship to the present [...] as affected by its imperfect translation of the past. It is in the present that the bodies of subjects shudder with an expectation of what is otherwise; it is in the unfolding of the past in the present. The moment of hope is when the ‘not yet’ impresses upon us in the present, such that we must act, politically, to make it our future. (2014: 184)

I link this hope to a responsibility to read for the ‘otherwise’ and to read ‘otherwise’. Reading a past object anew in the present allows us to encounter it with a sense of what Ahmed calls ‘critical wonder’: as an object appearing before us ‘as if for the first time’ (179). In our approach to past objects, critical wonder often springs from attention to details or fragments that surprise us,
contradict our impression of the whole, and yield alternative stories: a practice of close reading that I owe to my teacher Mieke Bal and the example of her work. An object of the past thereby becomes a new event in every present—a ‘moment’ that ‘has not yet arrived’ and that will never arrive finally, fully.

Beyond the motif of the past as a burden, beyond the sacralization of past objects as statues that only tell stories about the past, thinking Greece beyond crisis requires strategies of reading the past that activate the promise of futurity: of unknown moments, languages, narratives that have ‘not yet arrived.”

Thinking Modern Greek Studies Beyond Crisis

Crisis is not a foreign term to the field of Modern Greek studies and the Humanities in general. In recent years, departments of Modern Greek in several countries are shrinking or fail to survive budget cuts, as is the case with many small literature and language departments. In this light, initiatives such as the creation of this chair are significant, because they send a different message. The Modern Greek department at this university carries a rich tradition of scholarly work. Its history started with professor G.H. Blanken in 1963 and continued with professors Wim Bakker and Arnold van Gemert, whose research into the literature and culture of the Cretan Renaissance was pivotal in the field. This important work was continued by professor Marc Lauxtermann, the last to hold the chair of this department. This university also owns one of the richest library collections in Byzantine and Modern Greek studies in Western Europe. We have to make sure this collection is put to good use in the future. The tradition that my other colleagues and I have inherited strengthens my commitment to work hard for this department’s future. But how are we to imagine the future of Modern Greek studies, through and beyond crisis?

Considering the crisis in the Humanities that threatens many language and literature departments internationally, one could perhaps find solace in the final line of Cavafy’s poem: ‘and after all, you see, we do go forward.’ I reject this line and its logic of struggling only to survive by preserving the old, wary of any form of change. ‘Going forward’ should not be a mere survival struggle, even though for small departments I am aware that this struggle is a reality. I am equally opposed to the ‘reformer’s way’, when reform only translates into ‘eliminating’ and ‘slicing away’ without offering the prospect and means for growth and positive change. I am fortunate to work for the University of Amsterdam, which truly safeguards the study of a plurality of languages and cultures. I look forward to thinking creatively with colleagues at this univer-
sity about the future of our program. For our department’s future, then, I choose the other fragment from the poem as my motto:

maybe the moment has not yet arrived

This line contains the possibility and hope for another, better future. While being realistic about what we can achieve in a small department like that of Modern Greek, and even if, to use Appadurai’s words, ‘we cannot design the future exactly as we please’, we need to form an image of the present that offers ‘the right balance between utopia and despair’ (2013: 3). This requires an endeavor to renew the field.

Greece has been in the spotlight in recent years, but not only for the wrong reasons. The efflorescence of several artistic domains in the country and the international attention these domains have been receiving create an opportunity for an interdisciplinary, critical, wider field of Modern Greek studies to make a mark in Greece and internationally. This is already happening: scholars around the world working on Greek topics are creating platforms for debates through which we are reinventing the field and transform the small islands of our departments into dynamic networks—or archipelagos. Modern Greek studies are called to win this bet: to engage students, scholars, and audiences beyond the field: in comparative literature, cultural studies, area studies, anthropology, art history, philosophy, history, heritage studies. This requires structuring our research and teaching around questions that partake in transnational debates. Such questions also guide my research into alternative modes of expression and ‘grammars’ (such as that of the middle voice) in new artistic imaginaries emerging in Greece, Cyprus, and other Mediterranean sites through and against frameworks of crisis.

My goal is that this chair contributes to making Modern Greek studies at this university a place not only of teaching but also of new research and academic debate, which brings dynamism to teaching too. Creating an engaged community of students and scholars with individual and shared research goals, and setting up collaborative activities, are my priority. The two doctoral students who have just embarked on their Ph.D. projects under my co-supervision and our research group on ‘Crisis, Critique, and Futurity’ are a good start. There is more to come. Earlier today, Mr. Konstantinos Mazarakis-Ainian announced on behalf of Mr. Panagiotis Laskaridis, President of the Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation, the sponsoring of 1 to 2 visiting fellowships per year at this university for research in the field of Modern Greek studies. With this valuable support, I will work to expand my existing networks and collaborations with other universities and Modern Greek departments inter-
nationally and to engage communities outside academia. I also look forward to collaborating with the Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation, whose rich Historical Library contains so many opportunities for future research.

Thanks

In this effort, many institutions and people have already offered their collaboration and I am counting on their continued support. Those people deserve to be thanked.

My deep gratitude goes out to the Executive Board of the University of Amsterdam and the Rector Magnificus, as well as the Faculty of Humanities and its dean, for supporting this chair and trusting me to fill it.

I also want to thank the President of the Hellenic Republic, who was planning to be present today but unfortunately had to cancel his trip. His genuine interest in our department and in the creation of this chair, the only one in the Benelux, and his commitment to the promotion of Modern Greek culture internationally, have been of instrumental importance. We are extremely grateful for that.

I am also grateful to the curatorium of this chair, professors Arnold van Gemert, Joep Leerssen, and Arjen Versloot, and the curatorium’s secretary Hotze Mulder, for entrusting me with this important task and for their valuable advice so far. I look forward to our collaboration in the next five years. To Arnold van Gemert, particularly, who was the driving force of the department of Modern Greek and Byzantinology for years: thank you for your inspirational work and continued support for this department. I still recall the time we happened to share a flight to Thessaloniki in 2000, when I was returning from my term in Amsterdam as an exchange student. With hindsight, running into you during that flight was probably a sign that Amsterdam would follow me in that temporary return to Greece and that our paths would cross again many more times.

Without Ernst van Alphen and Mieke Bal, my Ph.D. supervisors and mentors, I would not be the scholar I am today. Mieke, thank you for pushing my thinking and for being a constant source of inspiration and guidance. Ernst, your support in the last thirteen years has been an anchor, and your belief in me a propeller for my work and career. Thank you for your fascinating work, your generosity and—here comes another Greek word—your parrhesia.

This chair was realized with the financial support of the Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation, the chief sponsor of this chair and a foundation whose library collections and cultural and educational programs have turned it into a
major factor in Greek cultural life. I owe a very big thank you to Panagiotis
Laskaridis, President of the Foundation, for believing in the importance of
this chair and for his investment in the future of Modern Greek Studies
through our department. I also thank the Foundation’s General Director,
Konstantinos Mazarakis-Ainian, and the other representatives of the Founda-
tion who travelled from Greece to be here today. A thank you is also due to
the members of the Dutch Society of Modern Greek Studies and all the other
private donors, as well as the Ministry of Culture of Cyprus, which also con-
tributed to funding this chair.

This chair bears the name of the late Marilena Laskaridis, former vice-
president and co-founder of the Foundation. Although I never met her per-
sonally, the impact of her work, her dynamic and warm personality, and ded-
ication to the Foundation’s mission were vividly felt in the stories that some
of the people who worked closely with her were kind enough to share with me
during my visit at the Foundation last December. I am honored to hold a
chair named after her and, as far as I know, the only chair of Modern Greek
Studies in Europe and the US named after a woman.

The Mariena Laskaridis Chair was established by the Dutch Society of
Modern Greek Studies (NGNS). I thank its members and particularly the
board, for working hard to realize this chair. A special thanks to the treasurer,
Peter Bander, and our alumna Thomai Diamanti, for all the time and energy
they invested in solving complex administrative matters pertaining to the
chair. One person deserves the biggest praise here: Tatiana Markaki, president
of the NGNS and program director of the Modern Greek department. You
put your heart and soul to the program and the establishment of this chair.
We practically owe the chair to your Cretan stubbornness and resourceful-
ness, your year-long efforts even when the odds were against you.

I look forward to working with you, Tatiana, and the other colleagues in
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erm Greek dictionary project at this university years ago. Thanks to the hours
we spent puzzling over the translation of strange idioms, I now have Greek
and Dutch sayings for every occasion.

When I took on this chair at the University of Amsterdam, it felt like com-
ing home after a long absence. I owe this feeling to the many colleagues I
knew at this university, some of them good friends. I cannot name them all,
but many are concentrated at the department of Literary and Cultural Analy-
sis. I also owe the homecoming feeling to the Amsterdam School for Cultural
Analysis (ASCA), a true intellectual home since the theory seminars I fol-
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I feel fortunate that taking this job did not mean giving up my main posi-
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gether.

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To my parents-in-law and my brother-in-law and his family: thank you for
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To Savas, my husband: thank you for giving me the space to be myself and
sharing your life so lovingly and patiently with someone from the strange
species with the crazy working hours called ‘academics’. Finally, to my four-
year-old son, Aris: thank you for teaching me that a bit of chaos and anarchy
are not such a bad thing, and for reminding me constantly that there is so
much life—good life—beyond work. Raising you makes all engagement with
futurity a concrete commitment in the here and now.
I have spoken with Cavafy today, but it is now time to part with his verse so that I can say: Έφθασε ο καιρός. The moment has arrived—for celebrating.

Ik heb gezegd.
Notes

1. As Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben said in an interview from 2013, ‘crisis’ today ‘serves to legitimize political and economic decisions that in fact dispossess citizens and deprive them of any possibility of decision’ (2013: n.pag.). Against the backdrop of the Eurozone crisis, for example, austerity politics was often presented in public rhetoric as a ‘one-way street’ without alternatives.

2. The description of the research group can be found at <http://asca.uva.nl/content/research-groups/crisis/crisis.html>.

3. For the way the ‘grammar’ of the crisis, particularly in the case of Greece, casts the future, see Papanikolaou 2012.

4. Finance, Maurizio Lazzarato writes, ‘is a formidable instrument for controlling the temporality of action, neutralizing possibilities’, and ensuring that the future is not radically open to unforeseen possibilities of action (2012: 71).

5. On this notion of futurity, see also Eshel 2012.

6. Also quoted in Papanikolaou 2017: 40.

7. This phrase, with which Scott Moncrieff translated the title of Proust’s À la recherche du temps perdu in 1922, is from Shakespeare’s Sonnet 30.

8. In Greece, as in most Mediterranean nations, the popular motif of the burden of the past also captures ‘the difficult task’ of forming coherent national histories by dealing with long historical periods and ‘combining different and significant pasts’ and cultures (Liakos 2016: 203).

9. During European Romanticism, the perceived contrast between ancient and modern Greece yielded an image of the country, to use Lord Byron’s verse from ‘Child Harold’s Pilgrimage’, as a ‘sad relic of departed worth’ (Canto 2, stanza 73). At <http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Byron/charoldt.html>.


11. In my discussion of Dimitriou’s novella here, I draw from my elaborate analysis of this novella and the way it recasts the ‘burden of the past’ in Boletsi 2017.


13. For these exhibitions, see <http://tomorrows.sgt.gr/> and <https://www.cact.gr/> respectively. Scholarly engagements with futurity have also intensified in the context of the crisis. See, for example, Vradis and Dalakoglou 2011; Botanova, K., C. Chrissopoulos and J. Cooiman 2017 e.a.

14. The installation constructs a dystopian future through which it explores ‘elements that belong to unofficial urban legacies of everyday city narratives.’ It was exhibited in A-dash space, Athens, from April 20 to May 20, 2018. At.
15. See, for example, Marios Psaras’ Introduction ‘The Meaning of the Crisis Or the Crisis of Meaning’ in The Queer Greek Weird Wave (2016).

16. In the description of the poetic anthology Austerity Measures: The New Greek Poetry (2016; ed. Karen van Dyck) on the publisher’s website, we read that the cultural renaissance in Greece since the crisis is ‘unlike anything seen in the country for over thirty years’. At <https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/292028/austerity-measures/>. The anthology charts this efflorescence in Greek poetry. For the features of this new generation of poets in Greece, see Lambropoulos 2016.

17. For example, several new anthologies of recent Greek poetry have been published in Greek and English translation for international audiences (e.g., Chiotis 2015, van Dyck 2016, Siotis 2015).

18. The term ‘weird wave’ was first used by Steve Rose for recent Greek cinema (2011) and has been an object of debate among filmmakers and critics.


20. The verses are originally from Montis’ Εν Λευκωσία τη... (In Nicosia, On...), 1970. The English translation is from Lambropoulos 2010: 182. In this article, Lambropoulos probes the remarkable fact that in the Greek literary imagination the Acropolis is ‘usually an object of attack rather than admiration’, with some writers even desiring or staging its destruction (182).

21. The ongoing underwater research of this shipwreck, which is also supported by the Aikaterini Laskaridis Foundation, continues to bring new findings to the surface.

22. Seferis borrowed this metaphor from Petros Vlastos, who saw Cavafy’s poems as pedestals without statues (Seferis 1993: 240).

23. My translation from the Greek: ‘τα ποιήματα του Καβάφη δείχνουν τη συγκίνηση που θα είχαμε από ένα άγαλμα που δεν είναι πια εκεί· που ήταν εκεί, το είδαμε και το έχουν τώρα μετατοπίσει’ (Seferis 1993: 240).

24. The role of the Caisse in tax collection was pivotal from 1876 to 1904, as it ‘controlled more than 45 per cent of government revenues’ (Tunçer 2015: 51).

25. Even though Cavafy and his family fled to Istanbul just before the bombardment, the invasion of 1882 left its mark on the poet, as their apartment was destroyed in the fire (M. Savidis: n.pag.).

26. Derrida said in an interview: ‘I try and distinguish between what one calls the Future and “l’avenir” [the ‘to come’]. […] There is a future which is predictable, programmed, scheduled, foreseeable. But there is a future, l’avenir (to come) which refers to someone who comes whose arrival is totally unexpected. For me, that is the real future. That which is totally unpredictable. The Other who comes without my being able to anticipate their arrival’ (qtd. in Dick and Kofman 2005: 53).

27. With ‘preposterously’ I refer to the concept of ‘preposterous history’ as Mieke Bal developed it in Quoting Caravaggio, where she defines it as an act of reversal that ‘puts the chronologically first (pre-) as an aftereffect behind (post-) its later recycling’ (1999: 6-7).
29. See also Hamilakis 2015: 71 and Papanikolaou 2018: n.pag.
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