

POSITION PAPER

Walls of Crisis: Street Art and Urban Fabric in Central Athens, 2000–2012

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Introduction

Street art, an offspring of the global metropolis and a product of its socio-urban fabric, has inevitably grown on, and been sustained by, urban architecture. Individual taggers and graffiti crews have proliferated in European cities since the 1980s. In the beginning, they mirrored their North American counterparts' socio-political preoccupations that were a product of deteriorating socio-economic and socio-urban conditions in depressed sectors of metropolitan areas. In the early 1990s, however, with economic development and the beginnings of urban regeneration processes came the first large-scale mutation of tagging into 'graffiti art'. With larger and more recognizable works, and visual rather than textual content, by the late 1990s graffiti was accepted by increasingly broader sections of urban population as 'street art'. A new form of public art, street art could claim a legitimate part in the forming and transforming of urban identities in both their visual and their spatial iterations.

Twenty-first-century Gothic: Commissioned graffiti art on public architecture in the Olympic city (2000–2004)

In the case of Athens, an ascending scale and scope of engagement between commissioned graffiti art and architecture can clearly be traced during the years of economic development leading to the Olympic Games of 2004. In a one by one-and-a-half kilometre section in the northwest of central Athens as the area of study [fig. 1], initial, smaller works on disparate parts of the urban landscape give way to compositions on interior and exterior walls of institutional and residential buildings, and eventually works appear on complete perimeter walls and envelopes of industrial and transportation complexes.

In 1998, a few months after the Greek capital won the bid to host the 2004 Summer Games, the country's first international graffiti festival, an initiative of the Hellenic-American Union, was held northwest of the Acropolis and the Ancient Agora. The festival's art was created on side façades and perimeter walls of the neoclassical and postindustrial buildings along Ermou Street,¹ in the eastern end of the area of study. During the same year, and

with the Olympics in mind, a public company was set up with the mandate to upgrade a number of downtown arteries and squares via urban design competitions, rejuvenating the city's monuments and unifying its archaeological sites into a five kilometre-long 'Cultural Promenade'. By 2000, Ermou Street, with its buildings and scattered graffiti works, was already included in the extension plans of the 'Cultural Promenade', showcasing the possibilities that graffiti art held in uniting past architectural legacies with contemporary visual culture.

Also in 2000, four local graffiti artists were invited by Athens' Goethe Institute to transform its atrium walls as part of its fiftieth anniversary events, signaling the first commissioned large-scale graffiti art project in Greece. Soon after, Goethe held a graffiti exhibition on its grounds called 'Neverending Story', pairing the work of those same artists along with international counterparts. The following year, under the auspices of the Municipality of Tavros, at the southwestern edge of central Athens, and with the support of Goethe and corporate sponsors, the same artists implemented two exterior murals on a pair of low-income housing apartment buildings. Significantly, the public was invited to not only attend a series of parallel events focusing on street culture, but also participate in the creation of the street art themselves, on side walls of the same buildings. Thus, two public institutions – a foreign cultural foundation and a state housing agency – invited graffiti artists to work on complete blank walls of existing buildings, demonstrating the transformative impact such initiatives can have in the perception of both intimate and larger interiors, both on individual buildings and on urban landscapes.

One of the artists in the Goethe and Tavros projects, Vangelis Hoursoglou (a.k.a. Woozy), had earlier established the group called Carpe Diem, to support graffiti artists and to provide them with a legal basis as well as urban canvases. Active since 1991 as Greece's first graffiti crew, Carpe Diem became a legal association and obtained a mandate to materialize its objectives in the spring of 2002 (Bailey 2011), just as the Ministry of Culture unveiled the 'Cultural Olympiad', an interdisciplinary preamble to the Olympics. 'Chromopolis', a unique project included in the 'Cultural Olympiad' that involved ten international and six local artists, catapulted street art into the national mainstream during the summer of 2002.² Co-ordinated by Carpe Diem, they traveled to ten cities around the country, putting large-scale works onto industrial and public

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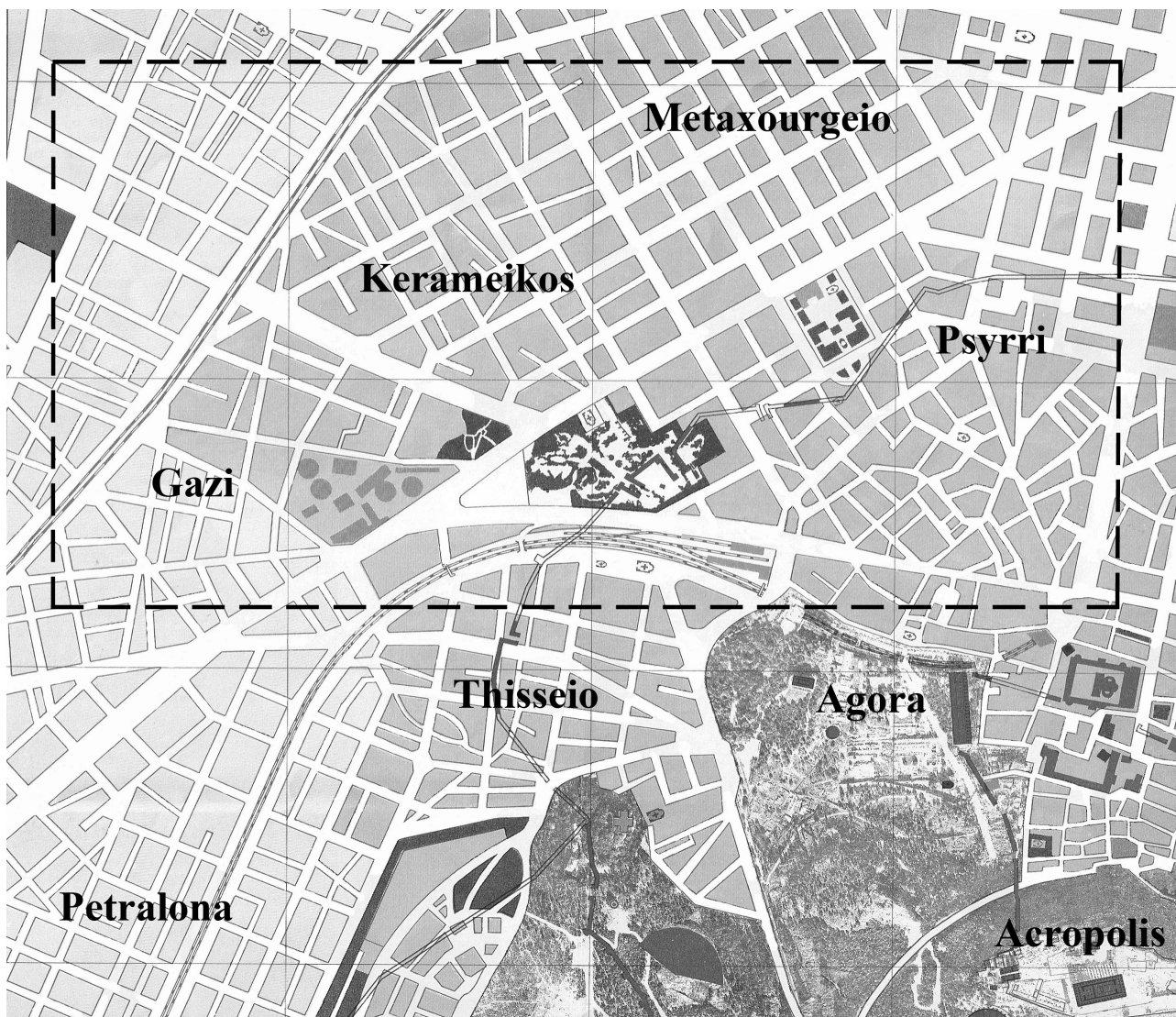


Figure 1: Area of Study. (Northwest Quadrant of Athens Historical Center)

buildings. The ministry's agenda was evidently broader than aesthetics. Instead, the ethics of finance were taking over: The urgency to re-color the grayness and drabness of the country's industrial past in cities that were to hold Olympic or parallel events was undoubtedly linked to the sensitivities of the visitors that were to arrive soon. Lessons learned from the Goethe and Tavros examples were now used at a national scale for economic reasons.

One of the six local artists involved in 'Chromopolis', known as Bizare, was about to complete his studies at the Athens School of Fine Arts,³ a short distance south of the Tavros Project, along Peiraios Street. Following his threat to paint the entire school building, Bizare obtained approval to work on one wall and the pillars of a floor as his graduation project. The composition, entitled 'Hell', was a narrative commentary of Dantesque imagination and proportions that focused on the contemporary Athenian predicament. As a result of this project, Bizare's name became known, and he was soon responsible for the first high-profile and large-scale exterior work in the city, again on Peiraios Street, further south of the area of study.⁴ Created in September of 2003 as part of the annual

'European Days of Cultural Heritage', under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and Carpe Diem, the work is a tribute to the olive tree, 'a symbol of culture, peace and sport', on the perimeter walls of the ELAIS olive oil factory on a corner of Peiraios leading to Karaiskaki Stadium, undergoing refurbishment for the Olympics. This monumental creation (4 x 120 m) was filled with classical characters, mythological references, Byzantine-style figures and carefully executed compositions. The work signaled a turning point for graffiti culture in Greece. A grand gesture, aligned with the global movement of street art, it also explicitly presented 'official' socio-cultural views to the public.

With the success of pre-Olympic large-scale graffiti art projects, now referred to as street art by both the creators and the public, the genre began to proliferate on a multitude of surfaces. Perhaps the most well-known project of this time is the mural along the southern and western exterior walls of the ILPAP electric trolley-bus depot, in the very heart of the area of study [fig. 2]. Under the auspices of the Ministry of Transportation, the guidance of Carpe Diem, and the sponsorship of ten public and private agen-



Figure 2: Various Artists. “For a Sustainable City” (ILPAP Trolley Depot, detail), 2005. (85 Peiraios Street, Kerameikos)

cies, it was created in 2005 to celebrate the annual ‘Car Free Day’, part of the initiative ‘For a Sustainable City’ (Bailey 2011).⁵ The mural, with its narratives of trolley depots, drivers, urban landscapes, ‘good’ pedestrians, bicycles and buses versus ‘bad’ private automobiles, reiterated to the surprised public how (if not why) positive messages can emerge from graffiti culture and street art.

In the tradition of Gothic sculptural exteriors or Byzantine mural interiors, these new ‘medieval cathedrals’ communicated to the urban masses of Olympic Athens a variety of sponsored visual narratives that their patrons wished to relay. While the agenda was certainly not religious, the social, political, economic and at times even ethical intentions of the commissioned art are more than evident.

Art’s call to arms: Disused architectural canvases in the area of study (2004–2008)

Commissioned graffiti art was invited not simply to ‘beautify’ inhabited residential, commercial and industrial buildings and complexes across the center of Athens; such art was also intended to relay a number of messages to both local and visiting public audiences. As a result, during the years of economic downturn following the Games, a younger generation of street artists, who appropriated both new and older disused buildings, understood the

power of architecture to display their noncommissioned work and make their intentions known to the city.

Initially, signs of the city’s reversal of fortune after the Games were few. In the vicinity of the ILPAP depot and its didactic mural, along the streets of Psyrri and Gazi in the southern half of the area of study, the period of economic growth prior to 2004 left evident marks. Psyrri, a bohemian quarter once populated by night-crawlers and riddled with seedy basements, was now a fashionable destination of minimalist taverns and carefully designed bars. Gazi, a low-income cluster of humble dwellings surrounding the old Gas Works factory that was transformed by the Municipality of Athens into a cultural park called Technopolis, became the city’s design and social Mecca.⁶ In the northern half of the area of study, however, in the quarters of Metaxourgeio and Kerameikos, a different story was unfolding [fig. 3]. The influx of national and international migrants seeking employment in the aftermath of the Olympics, and the absence of such opportunities, led to the rise of crime, drug dealing and prostitution, reaching an intensity not seen since the 1980s. In just three years, the trend of downtown building renovation and reuse had been reversed. Residents and merchants commenced a slow but steady flight to the periphery and the suburbs. The exponential increase in the number of disused buildings between 2005 and



Figure 3: Renovated and Disused Neoclassical Buildings. (15–17 Iasonos Street, Metaxourgeio)

2007 heightened both the perceived nervousness about, and the on-the-ground reality of, the re-depressed north-western part of downtown.

It was at this moment that a number of street artists ventured out and transformed vacant architectural ghosts in dilapidated areas, not only using them as sites for their art, but including them as part of the art itself. A characteristic example is the artist b., at the time a student of architecture.⁷ His early stickers and stencils, posted on walls in Athens, Barcelona and Berlin, drew inspiration from urban signs and traffic signals,⁸ bearing his signature yellow and black strokes and female figures. By the time b. earned his architecture degree in 2006,⁹ he had worked on architectural projects in Psyrri and Gazi. He integrated windows, doors, and structural and decorative elements of the area's disused buildings into his pieces.¹⁰ His bright images and three-dimensional compositions of buildings within buildings were, in his own words, 'an art brand virus which spreads in the urban landscape with colorful perseverance and cheerful mood' [fig. 4].¹¹ A number of b.'s co-authorships with younger street artists further altered both the mental and the actual landscape in the area of study. One of those artists who worked closely with the three-dimensionality of the urban canvas was Dreyk the Pirate.¹² His resilient mermaids, seamen, pirates and octopi of 2004 to 2006, mainly on doors of boarded-up buildings, still provide a colorful gateway that instantly

merges the grey of Athens with the blue seascape that surrounds it.

The fountain of 'cheerful mood' in the city was drying up quickly, and the artistic and architectural establishment finally took note of both the commissioned and noncommissioned writings, and colors, on the walls. In 2006, the DESTE Foundation, Athens' most respected contemporary art institution, announced plans for an exhibition titled *Anathema*, intended to 'present works by artists based in Athens, largely unknown to the city's "mainstream" [...], local undercurrents of small groups and individuals who do not necessarily work together and, in their vast majority, do not insist on calling what they do as art' (Fokidis and Gioti 2006). *Anathema*, a play on what was understood by some as non-establishment Athens, by others as anti-Athens, and quite certainly by a few as *anathema*, iterated the emergence of an independent movement that attempted to intervene in the city's post-Olympic fabric of nervousness and search for identity. The exhibition was held between October 2006 and February 2007 and featured, among others, Bizare and b.

The art world did not stop there. The first Athens Art Biennale proclaimed, by means of its title and theme, what was on everyone's mind by the fall of 2007: 'Destroy Athens!' The logic was simple. Existing in a wished-for reality, Athens was refusing to accept its real image, one that not even the Olympics had been able to alter.



Figure 4: b. “Untitled”, 2009. (16 Voutadon Street, Gazi)

Beneath any residue of shiny surface, Athens was still a socio-urban fabric of injustice, a place of increasing violence and brutality, a fragmented world of inequality, but the city continued to romanticize itself as a contemporary version of its fifth-century-BC predecessor.¹³ *Destroy Athens*, in which Bizare and Dreyk the Pirate participated, was centered at the Technopolis in Gazi and was organized as a series of installations and events forming ‘a story of ruptures and dead-ends’ (Kalpaktsoglou and Zenakos 2007: 16). It was preceded by a publication called *Suggestions for the Destruction of Athens – A Handbook*.¹⁴ Though the curators carefully disclaimed any intent other than that *Destroy Athens* should be viewed strictly as a series of art narratives,¹⁵ the conceptualization of the exhibition eerily anticipated things to come.

Bizare’s impressive mural for *Destroy Athens* is of particular significance. Entitled ‘Socrates Drinks the Conium’, Bizare used the classical philosopher’s fate as an allegory for the contemporary city and its leaders. The mural presents an urban landscape of acute socio-economic disparities, a city of uneven distribution not only of wealth but also of justice bathed in the limelight of a number of political and financial scandals, a city where corruption reigns supreme and unpunished for the benefit of the chosen few, a city that, as in the case of Socrates, poisons its very citizens who love it the most, and who now were armed and ready to finally revolt.

In the years following the end of the Olympic Games, therefore, street artists used the vast possibilities presented by the disused urban fabric to not only transport and instantly deliver their work’s meaning and message to the city, but also to express their generations’ (few) hopes and (numerous) fears, and to ultimately foreshadow the coming socio-economic crisis.

Urban corpses, urban sites: Crisis, street art and the destruction of architecture (2008–2012)

By the fall of 2008 it was evident that, as portrayed by Bizare during *Destroy Athens*, the kettle of discontent boiling within the city was about to overflow. Fuel was added to the fire, violently, in the critical event of the 6th of December.¹⁶ The series of events that followed, paired with the outbreak of the global financial crisis, engulfed the city in a socioeconomic state of emergency not seen since the 1940s.¹⁷ Between December 2008 and February 2012, the crisis extended throughout Europe, with Greece unwillingly placed at its very core. Peaceful demonstrations were followed by fringe rioting, and a number of buildings in the center of Athens were repeatedly destroyed.¹⁸ On Sunday, 12 February 2012, during the most destructive series of events since December 2008, forty-five buildings, including eleven listed historic edifices, were gutted by fire across the



Figure 5: Sonke. “Untitled”, 2010. (2 Konstantinoupoleos Street, Gazi)

downtown, widening the multiple, deep wounds to the capital’s economic development, cultural heritage and urban fabric.

Athenian street art was deeply affected by the city’s new plight. Artists turned not only to disused but also to destroyed architecture as their new urban canvas. Non-commissioned artists now carefully chose sites according to what message was to be conveyed and who the intended audience was. Unavoidably, artists became ever more political as their work emerged on the urban and architectural corpses. A sense of the unknown, of ‘what next’, waited at the end of the painted walls.

One characteristic example of site-specific work in the area of study is that of the artist Sonke,¹⁹ who proclaimed that ‘of course I am influenced by Athens, the cityscape and the people of Athens [...], that is the reason for having sadness behind my work: Behind their smiling faces on Saturday nights, most of the people here are sad’ (Gelly 2011). But as the crisis engulfed the city, Sonke was going through a more personal strife. The localization of Sonke’s ‘sad princesses’ or ‘weeping mermaids’ of 2009–10, expressions of a world of love and betrayal, can perhaps be traced to a recent romance and separation, after which he started creating teary-eyed girls and flowers on the walls of buildings his ex-girlfriend frequented, or along streets she passed from [fig. 5].²⁰ Be that as it may, Sonke’s numerous ‘hurt and pathetic lovers’²¹ earned him quick and broad recognition, largely thanks to the careful choice of site, often around popular Gazi cultural and entertainment venues.²²



Figure 6: bleeps.gr. “Forty Years of Debtocracy”, 2011. (Plateia Theatrou, Psyri)

Closer to institutions that were directly linked with the crisis and its socioeconomic iterations, examples of deeply political and politicized street art emerged. This work focused not only on the theoretical crisis of finances, percentages and numbers, but also on the real crisis of the people and the streets, of the urban and social fabric, and of the welfare state, with the eminent collapse of its decades-old institutions hovering above the city. The artist bleeps.gr,²³ whose work from 2008 to 2010 involves a variety of approaches commenting on the shape of things both ‘as they were’ and ‘to come’, is scattered throughout the western part of central Athens.²⁴ His post-2010 work, though, following a more uniform format of thick-stroked blue backgrounds in which figures act or carry signs that demonstrate the intended message, is all but scattered. This body of work, almost exclusively located in the area of study, on corners and walls of high visibility, is carefully sited so that the adjoining fabric, the specific building and the art are mutually informing. Thus, the work ‘Forty Years of Debtocracy’ [fig. 6], featuring a haloed female embracing a bag of euro coins, is fittingly placed in close proximity to City Hall and within blocks of the old Stock Exchange, as is ‘Greece: Next Economic Model’, showing a slim figure marching sensually down a catwalk.²⁵ The work ‘I Dream of Love, I Search for Clients’ stands next to the door of a brothel, while ‘Immigrant, my Love’ is placed around the corner of the site where a group of neo-Nazis assaulted two foreign migrants.²⁶

Athenian street art, which emerged from the world of graffiti and the urban underground, has in fact a long-



Figure 7: Dimitris Taxis. “I Wish You Could Learn Something Useful from the Past”, 2012. (91 Kerameikos Street, Kerameikos)

standing connection with the world of migrants and ‘others’.²⁷ Dimitris Taxis, born in Szczecin, Poland, and currently living in Athens,²⁸ has been active in street art since 2006, when he occasionally ventured into the city for poster paste-ups with Dreyk the Pirate. The outbreak of the crisis, however, significantly altered Taxis’ work.²⁹ The injustices he perceives are translated into sad, confused, hopeless, or even frightened figures, expressing or showcasing the compositions’ subject-matter. Unlike Sonke or bleeps.gr, pieces by Taxis have a broader scope and almost always appear in high-density residential streets around the area of study.³⁰ His ‘I Wish You Could Learn Something Useful From the Past’ [fig. 7] features a sad boy sitting uncomfortably on a pile of books with the titles *Plato*, *Socrates*, and *Democracy*, and he is burdened by a second pile above his head, reading *Athens Means Luxury*, *Survival Guide*, and *No Future*. In both the localization and the message of his work, Taxis appears to reach out to the residents of the areas worst hit by the crisis, in an empathic attempt to ‘dress’ their buildings with imagery of what they themselves must be going through.

Similarly, the artist WD (Wild Drawings), born and raised in Bali, Indonesia, arrived in Athens in 2006 and almost immediately faced the beginning of the crisis, when his wings, his aspirations for life in his new homeland, were ‘severed’.³¹ His work, ‘a commentary on consumerism, lifestyle and social matters’, has focused on the city and its current predicament, with the rising, ugly face of racism being what worries him most: ‘It just takes a walk in Ath-

ens to realize the different cultures, the uncertainty and the rage of the people, the inequality in the society and the tough present times’ (Hulot 2011).³² WD has often engaged the urban fabric destroyed in the last few years’ rounds of rioting. His characteristic masked figure has been pasted on many a fire-destroyed building, usually axially placed above doorways, holding dolls, flowers, or the occasional Molotov cocktail, and proclaiming, ‘Welcome to Athens’.

Epilogue

As the socioeconomic crisis has taken hold, affecting central Athens more than any other area around the country, street art has flourished on the decaying urban body. The ever-increasing quantity and scale of street art parallels the ever-increasing intensity of the unfolding state of emergency grappling and crippling the socio-urban heart of Athens. Many of the emerging artists who worked in the area of study since 2004, such as Bizare and b., belong to a new generation of urban superheroes who are gaining national and international recognition,³³ as their work accompanies Athenians negotiating new difficulties. It is work that often speaks of a desire to depart, or to escape [fig. 8], but the wounded city, both hated and loved by its citizens, still enchants and keeps them within its walls. The street artist WD reiterated that ‘in this chaos you can also see the carefree spirit that characterizes the Greeks’ (Hulot 2011). In this spirit, and in the spirit of hard and creative work, the city will soon reassemble itself.

Notes

- ¹ This first Athenian encounter between Greek and international graffiti artists came two years after the first national graffiti festival had been held in Thessaloniki, the country’s second largest city.
- ² For examples of this project, see Ganz and Manco 2004: 162–163.
- ³ See ‘Stelios Faitakis’, *The Breeder Gallery*, ‘Athens’, ‘Artists’, <http://www.thebreedersystem.com> [Last accessed 12 September 2012].
- ⁴ For examples of Bizare’s work, see Ganz and Manco 2004: 144–145.
- ⁵ The mural, which was created during August and September 2005, and unveiled on the 22nd of September, was a collaboration of nine artists, six from Greece and three from Brazil.
- ⁶ The area’s reign on the city’s cultural and entertainment life further solidified in May 2007 with the opening of a new subway station in the heart of Gazi’s central square.
- ⁷ b.’s involvement with graffiti began in 1996 when, at the age of fourteen, he joined the tagging crew called Socially Rejected (conversation with street artists M.I. and N.B., 18 July 2012).
- ⁸ Especially abstract and geometric ones, such as the triangular sign for ‘danger’ (Myridaki 2010).
- ⁹ b.’s first ‘graduation’, from tagging and graffiti to street art, came soon after 2000 when he entered the School of Architecture at the University of Thessaly in Volos (Fakis 2012: 11).



Figure 8: Dimitris Taxis. "Floating above Our City", 2010. (11 Agatharchou Street, Psyri)

¹⁰ b. completed these pieces in collaboration with Zoe Zillion, his life-partner at the time (Myridaki 2010).

¹¹ See <http://pinterest.com/okyrhoe/this-is-my-b-world/>.

¹² For detailed biographical information on Dreyk, who was born in 1986, refer to Fakis 2012: 27–29 and Tsevis 2012, wherein numerous examples of his work are posted.

¹³ The curators proclaimed, 'We feel that this persistent effort to present any rupture, any violence and any deadlock as something that should not exist, as something that does not belong to the constitution of the world and of the subjects that inhabit it, is perhaps the greatest lie of our time' (Kalpaktsoglou and Zenakos 2007: 17–18).

¹⁴ Defined as 'a conceptual guide for the process leading up to the exhibition' (Kalpaktsoglou and Zenakos 2007: 17).

¹⁵ They maintained that the exhibition 'does not wish to argue in favor of a practice or against another [and] does not wish to predict where things are heading right now or where they will be tomorrow' (Kalpaktsoglou and Zenakos 2007: 18).

¹⁶ The shooting and death in the central Exarheia district of fifteen-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos by two policemen, followed by widespread demonstrations and rioting, in varied intensities, for almost three weeks.

¹⁷ The series of events occurred during the eighteen-month period from 6 December 2008 through September 2009 (elections and change in government), then until 5 May 2010. At the news of the country's probable economic default and the signing of the first IMF/ECB/EU loan, between 100,000 and 500,000 people marched peacefully in Athens, and a second large wave of rioting occurred. Three people died inside a Marfin bank branch following the throwing of Molotov cocktails in the building. These events had a profound effect on Greek society in general and Greek youth in particular. The shock of the bank deaths numbed the momentum of protest for at least a year, but the country was subsequently catapulted into the center of the global financial crisis.

¹⁸ The string of mass peaceful demonstrations followed by fringe rioting and looting returned to Athens in June 2011. During the global 'Indignant' movement, inspired by student organizations across Southern Europe, the parallel events in Athens turned violent once again. With measures taken to secure the initial loan choking both the economy and society, and with the crisis deepening, extreme left and anarchist groups lead violent clashes. The city center was wounded in June and December 2011 during the three-year commemoration of the Grigoropoulos killing; the media was hungry for

- sensational images. A sentiment of disillusion sank in, as many searched for fresh targets to vent their frustration and anger. The void in the list of available answers was now to be filled by the other, long-silent, political extreme. The gradual rise of the extreme right in the shape of the fascist Golden Dawn party was made clear in February of 2012. After a parliamentary vote on a second, broader loan agreement between Greece and the EU/ECB/IMF, with harsher measures accompanying it, a 100,000-strong protest in Syntagma Square followed. Subsequent clashes were not only between the leftists/anarchists and the police, but also between protesters and the bullies of Golden Dawn.
- ¹⁹ Sonke began drawing on the streets in 1995, at the age of eleven. A few years later, he started painting outside his neighborhood, mostly on metro trains and in avenues around the northern suburb of Maroussi, before studying at a downtown school of illustration (Gelly 2011). He currently teaches cartoon design and animation in Athens.
- ²⁰ Conversation with street artists M.I. and N.B., 18 July 2012. On the other hand, the princesses, while initially alone or accompanied by the equally sad prince, have since 2011 appeared in female pairs, or even become complete crowds of collective sadness.
- ²¹ As he himself has characterized his work (theflashgib 2012).
- ²² Sonke's work was the subject of a solo exhibition titled 'Poor Lovers', held at the Hoxton Gallery in Gazi from 16 March to 3 May 2011. Asked why he decided to abandon the streets and exhibit his work in a gallery, he replied, 'I didn't think a lot about it, I mostly took it as another chance to draw. A year ago I was drawing outside Hoxton, now I get a chance to do it inside' (Gelly 2011). Sonke's work can now be found not only on dilapidated walls around Gazi, but also in interiors of its apartment buildings and refurbished lofts.
- ²³ Active since 2003, the year he moved to the UK for studies at the Bristol Art School, bleeps.gr keeps a low profile. He refuses to be photographed or give his real name, and even has an art-curator colleague represent him in events where his non-street art is available (Pavlidou 2010). Fellow street artists iterate his 'life-and-death' subject matter, use of poetry and political stigma (conversation with M.I. and N.B. on 18 July 2012, who mention Bristol's legendary 3D and Inky as informing bleeps' work).
- ²⁴ During a rare interview, bleeps mentioned that he is not only 'interested in reflecting the crisis and how it affects the lives of ordinary people', but is also 'trying to get people to think more deeply about the country's dire situation, and to interpret more of what is going on' (Osborn and Tagaris 2012).
- ²⁵ During multiple encounters between bleeps and local law enforcement, the reported result was of police congratulating the street artist for his work (Pavlidou 2010), which speaks of the acceptance, by a spectrum of Greek society, of political and crisis commentary in a variety of forms.
- ²⁶ As if to verify his socio-economic and political beliefs, and his take on Greece's predicament, the manifesto on bleeps' website reads, 'The established motivation for every activity is money. The motivation was never, after all, human beings. In a capitalist system, human beings have learnt to think in terms of equivalence, subjugating their entire lives under the law to give less than what you take as an exchange. Goods follow the arbitrariness of hyper-value. The configuration of desires from consumers gradually installs the power of the status quo. "I want what you are selling to me because you can convince me that with that I will feel better and more supreme". In capitalism, if you are not a part of the bourgeoisie, you are just a consumable unit. This system has to become more humane' (bleeps.gr, 'Manifest', <http://bleeps.gr> (last accessed July 23, 2012)).
- ²⁷ Recognition and acceptance are hard earned and often come at a heavy price for youth interested in being on the 'inside', not unlike American hip-hop or even gang culture of the 1980s. However, Athenian street art has been more forgiving, accepting, and at times celebrating of difference and diversity.
- ²⁸ Taxis' (b. 1983) journey of migration to Greece is yet to become public knowledge.
- ²⁹ While Taxis was, and still is, part of a crew called 'GPO', active in train and building tagging, his individual work has taken a more sensitive approach to its subjects, its audience, and the urban fabric it engages.
- ³⁰ Taxis has also been active in Barcelona and Berlin, cities with more accommodating attitudes to graffiti and street art, and sites of significant developments in the unfolding of, and debate on, the crisis.
- ³¹ WD, whose real name is Dania, engaged with art early in life, from painting and paper constructions at Balinese temples to coal drawing on the walls of his home. He attended an art lyceum, and later the Bali School of Fine Arts, from which he graduated in 2005 (Hulot 2012). Though he refuses to speak of his 2006 journey to Greece, WD was apparently following his girlfriend home (conversation with street artists M.I. and N.B., 18 July 2012).
- ³² Unlike most Athenian immigrants, WD's story has recently turned mainstream, leading him to further art studies at the downtown Ornerakis School, following a 2010 graphic novel competition, award and scholarship led by *Pontiki* magazine (Mpotoulas 2011). WD's work was part of a January 2012 group show called 'High Tech – Low Life' at Stigma Lab in the central district of Exarheia. WD has commented, 'Street artists "immigrating" to galleries is a choice, and not necessarily an evil. However, street art does not remain the same, it gains an economic interest. Everyone has to make a living, I guess. I find it healthy. The important thing is that the artists maintain the desire to keep the art in the streets alive'.
- ³³ After his seminal 'Socrates Drinks the Conium' mural for *Destroy Athens*, Bizare was chosen as featured artist by the influential Breeder Gallery. During the 2011–2012 season alone, he had work commissioned for the

Winwood Walls project in Miami, for the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, and also for Denmark, who asked Bizare to 'dress' the Danish Pavillion at the 54th Art Biennale in Venice. b., whose street work has 'internationalized' into the Americas, has been designing books and exhibitions, accepting commissioned architectural work, and exhibiting and selling drawings and paintings. His work formed an instrumental part of the Greek pavilion at the 2012 Biennale of Architecture in Venice.

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