

Article

EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF

Cultural
Studies

State interventions in public space in Athens and the mediatization of the crisis: Sustaining the unsustainable using precarity as a tool

European Journal of Cultural Studies

1–16

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DOI: 10.1177/1367549415597925

ecs.sagepub.com



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Abstract

The article argues that since December 2008, the continuous presence in public space in Athens and the spectacular mediatization in news reports, of various forms of the so-called anomie, as well as (since 2012) of its spectacular and violent repression by the police, were instrumentalized by the Greek austerity government in an attempt to enhance and manipulate already existing feelings of precarity among the population. Organized police operations in public space were turned into 'media events'. Specifically, 'affective precarity' is considered as a way of demobilizing precarity as a politically and economically operative concept. The article adopts Lauren Berlant's analysis of the relation between precarity and the austerity state.

Keywords

Affective precarity, Athens, crisis spectacle, Greek crisis, Lauren Berlant, media events, mediatization, precarity, public space

An early version of this article was presented at the conference *Inverting Globalization* in October 2014 in Amsterdam (The Netherlands), as part of a panel that aimed at re-evaluating precarity as a politically operative concept (see also Neilson and Rossiter, 2008). At the time, Greece was governed by a coalition of pro-austerity parties with a

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strong neoliberal orientation. This is the context this article refers to. I have returned to it in January 2015, before and after the general elections of 25th January that brought to power an anti-austerity coalition between the populist – known as radical – Left and a small populist conservative party. Signaling their different approach to the presence of the State in public space, within a couple of days the new government dismantled a fence that had been placed in front of the parliament on Syntagma Square during the occupation of the indignados in 2011 and announced the removal of police busses from the area of Exarcheia, the heart of Athenian anarchism. Moreover, a fight against ‘oligarchic’ interests and Greek mass media that serve them was also declared a top priority (Varoufakis, 2015). I hope that beyond the performative value of these gestures and announcements, the State’s approach to public space, to the mediatization of the crisis and instrumentalization of precarity, which I discuss in this article, is part of the past for Greece. However, the period between October 2014 and January 2015 gave me reasons to return to this article.

To be more precise, I will argue that since 2008 the continuous presence in urban, public space and especially in the center of Athens, as well as the spectacular mediatization by news media (namely, television, newspapers printed and online), of various forms of disorder and, especially during 2012 and 2013, of the repression of disorder by the police had been instrumentalized by the Greek austerity government in an attempt to enhance and manipulate already existing feelings of precarity and insecurity among the population. Through that, it has been used – and here I quote Lauren Berlant – ‘to reattach collective fantasy to the state’s aura as sovereign actor and to block recognition of the similarity of their debt pathos and the corrupting influences of capitalism’ (Berlant, 2011a: 2).¹ Disorder and precarity have been central to the construction of a ‘state of emergency’ situation that has already been extensively discussed in the recent ‘crisis’ literature (e.g. Athanassiou, 2012; Douzinas, 2013; Filippidis, 2013b; Koukoutsaki and Emmanouilidis, 2013; Koukoutsaki, 2014b, 2015; Lazzarato, 2012). What interests me in particular in this article is that especially since 2012, certain acts of violent repression by the state of an undifferentiated mix of civil disobedience, crime and social marginalization primarily referring to (the center of) Athens have been made into news events *by* the media, produced as spectacles. They drew legitimization from representations of the ‘state of emergency’ discourse: ‘the ghetto’ of the city center, the ‘reoccupation of the center from migrants’, the ‘war against anomie’. Some could therefore be called ‘media events’, rather than mediated or mediatized events, because – as I will explain further down – the actual event is their becoming-news or becoming-public.

Around the time of writing the conference paper in September 2014, having myself been to Athens that year only three times, it seemed that in urban, public space and in the media things had calmed down. Protests were not reported; crime and police operations did not make spectacular news. Then, in late November 2014, two interesting things occurred. First, the government was cornered by a young anarchist prisoner who, consciously or not, turned the government’s tools against it: the production of a media event of state repression and the appropriation of the affective impact of precarity on the population of news’ spectators. I will refer specifically to this case more extensively in the last part of this article. Second, the conservative, strongest party in the government coalition showed the extent to which the politics of fear and instrumentalization of affective

precarity among the population played a key role in shaping its agency, by building up its campaigns both for the presidential elections of December 2014 and for the general elections of January 2015, on projecting the subject of fear and future disasters upon their anti-austerity political opponents – mainly the populist, radical Left. The central message in their political advertisements was that if an anti-austerity government would be elected, the country would descent into chaos, as opposed to the re-election of the austerity government as the only guarantor of future stability, development and membership in the European Union. The austerity state sought legitimization and agency in the figure of the care-taker of an exhausted, and confused about the future, population (New Democracy 2014, 2015a; 2015b; Samaras, 2014).²

Theoretical framework – affective precarity, mediatization and media events

Let me start with notes on the theoretical framework. In this article, I rely significantly on Lauren Berlant's approach to the relation between 'Precarious People', the 'Austerity State', fantasy and affect. I quote,

The Austerity State's claim is that it is bankrupt and therefore that the people are too expensive for their own maintenance, such that they must undergo both an expectation and resource shrinkage *and* a transformation of their fantasy of the state. But fantasy can't be garbaged in the same way that governmental infrastructures have been: for the state's legitimacy to continue appearing sovereign and performative, the state finds it still imperative for citizens and denizens not only to appear to consent to the law, the police, and the tax code, but also to harbor the sentimental collective memories of suffering and optimism that maintain the fantasy of the common that still floats the nation form's promise [...]. (Berlant, 2011a: 1)

Regarding the notion of precarity I quote again Berlant (2011a):

Precarity has taken shape as many things: a realist term, denoting a condition of instability created by changes in the compact between capital and the state; an affective term, describing the historical present; and an ideological term, a rallying cry for a new world of interdependency and care that takes the public good as the apriori whose energies do not exist for the benefit of private wealth and which should be protected by the political class. (p. 2)

While the notions of precarity and fear are not identical, Paul Virilio's approach to the administration of fear in relation to contemporary instantaneous means of communication that allow a synchronization of emotions beyond geographical limitations is quite relevant here (Virilio, 2012). Virilio maintains that fear used to be 'a phenomenon related to localized, identifiable events limited to a certain time-frame', whereas today it is 'an environment, a surrounding' (Virilio, 2012: 14–15). With the acceleration of reality due to technologies of instantaneous transmission of information, fear is an environment of global scale, as the faceless global terrorism or contagious stock rises make evident (Virilio, 2012: 14–15, 30). Virilio speaks of an 'information bomb' that creates a 'community of emotions', a communism of affects (Virilio, 2005, 2012: 30–31). The speed of transition does not anymore leave time for the standardization of opinions as the industrial expansion of

mass media – press, radio, television – rendered possible in the 19th century. Rather, the ‘current regime is comprised of the synchronization of emotions, ensuring the transition from a democracy of opinion to a democracy of emotion’ (Virilio, 2012: 30–31). Part and parcel with fear comes the demand of security, which for Virilio is linked to the phenomenon – and major psychopolitical question – of mass individualism and the role of the body: ‘In a world of mass individualism, my body becomes the final rampart ... The surface of the body becomes an emblem of my finitude’ (Virilio, 2012: 52). For the interests of this article, the uses of technology for the continuous transmission of news on various forms of disorder and the suppression of disorder indeed create a synchronization of emotions among receivers country-wide rather than globally (although comparable news from more countries in crisis feature international news), enhancing, in turn, feelings of individual precarity and mass individualism. Specifically, the phenomena of disorder in public space and their mediatization, which continuously foregrounds bodies of protesters, criminals, socially marginalized groups, radical fascists or police officers, act upon the threshold of the body and individual survival. Moreover, the aesthetics of instantaneity and live-feeds that dominate breaking news render easier the promotion of what I call ‘media events’.

Virilio’s preoccupation with the acceleration of reality through technology and the global environment of fear leave specificities of their local expressions unattended, for which the work of Frank Esser and Jeroen Strömbäck on the mediatization of social reality and politics – and political events for that matter – can be useful. They maintain that today the media are present and deeply woven in all social and political processes, but also point out that ‘information gained from or through the media merges and mingles with information gained through *interpersonal communication or personal experiences*’ (Esser and Strömbäck, 2014: 9, emphasis mine). Influenced by Schultz (2004), in their understanding of contemporary mediatization ‘the media’s definition of reality amalgamates with the social definition of reality’ (Esser and Strömbäck, 2014: 9). Esser and Strömbäck also distinguish between media theories of ‘media effects’ and their own approach to ‘mediatization’. They argue that most media effect theories see a causal logic in how media effects follow from content communicated by media (Esser and Strömbäck, 2014: 10). To the contrary, their understanding of mediatization entails that ‘the media increasingly permeate all social life and this makes difficult to treat the media as exogenous’. For the interests of this study, this means that a discourse that has been developed about the center of Athens as ‘ghetto’ or ‘city under siege’ (for analysis of this discourse see, for example, Chatzikonstantinou et al., 2012; Filippidis, 2013a; Kalatzopoulou et al., 2011; Koukoutsaki, 2014b; Koukoutsaki, 2015; Koutrolidou and Siatitsa, 2012), which implied disorder and legitimized its crackdown, has been produced through experiencing social reality in public space but also by internalizing a discourse in the media. While all kinds of media – from press to social media, Internet blogs and so on – should be taken into account in relation to mediatization, here I have limited my object of study to materials from news media, and more precisely to television news as well as printed and online press,³ the content of which further circulated in other media (e.g. Facebook, YouTube). This has a special importance for the population outside Athens, for whom the media representation of disorder and its repression in public space after the riots of 2008 has rarely coincided with the daily experience of their own environment and more with that of residents of the city of Athens. Although central issues of the crisis and disorder

discourses (e.g. illegal migration, racism, the rise of criminality, the rise of the fascist organization Golden Dawn) might also play a role in their personal daily experience in the periphery, the latter only makes national news if events occur that interest Athens.

Moreover, I use the term ‘media events’ here to refer to situations, occurrences, actions, operations or interventions linked to the repression of ‘disorder’ by the state, which have been taking place sometimes for years (e.g. the so-called police ‘sweep’ operations of ‘cleaning’ areas of the center of Athens from the presence of migrants, sex workers or drug users) but at certain moments are taking extraordinary dimensions, as well as given extraordinary media attention and the spectacular aesthetics of ‘breaking news’. While they do relate to some degree to media events as pseudo-events (Boorstin, 1961), made primarily or staged especially for media coverage, the term ‘pseudo’ is problematic here as the practices that are selectively highlighted have been taking place since years and performed various functions as *under*-reported operations (e.g. urban gentrification). As media events they do not fall within Baudrillard’s all-too explanatory logic of simulacra and hyperreality. Rather, they relate to Virilio’s accelerated reality and democracy of emotions, rather than opinions. This brings me close also to Jill Bennett’s understanding of media events especially in distinction to the event as conceived by philosophy and aesthetics. If, in the latter, the event ‘has no determining boundaries, the distinguishing feature of the media event is that it defines its own beginning and end. Media events finish when coverage stops ...’ (Bennett, 2012: 77). I definitely do not argue that spectacular operations of state repression were made primarily for the sake of media publicity. Nonetheless, their mediatization played an important role in how operations taking place especially in the center of Athens could have an impact country-wide. It should also be noted that such media events in the news do maintain a causal logic of ‘media effects’. However, they occur in an already highly mediatized social and political life, and the kind of affective environment that this mediatization entails.

In this context, the use of the characterization ‘spectacular’ regarding the aesthetics of breaking news – and subsequently also of media events – should be clarified. I understand media events as partaking to the phenomenon of media spectacles that include political happenings, reality programs and so on and which employ sensationalist aesthetics of political scandals, the War on Terror, natural disasters and so on. However, media spectacles are (still) often considered explicable either with Debord’s (Debord, 1995) generalized notion of the spectacle (see, for example, Kellner, 2003; RETORT, 2006) or Baudrillard’s approach to media spectacles (e.g. Baudrillard, 2001). I would rather suggest that the spectrum of possible appropriations of the mediatization of politics and media events, for instance, by contemporary media activists or by Nikos Romanos, the case of whom I will explain later, renders W.T.J. Mitchell’s critical twist of Debord and Baudrillard’s spectacle more productive. Instead of relying upon Debord’s ‘too powerful, too all-explanatory’ figure of the spectacle, Mitchell proposes to take the concept of the spectacle as an ‘idol of the mind’ that we have inherited and we are stuck with. Instead of smashing it, he proposes that ‘[w]e must reconceive the spectacle as the site of struggle, the contested terrain, and stop personifying it as a Baudrillardian “Evil Demon of Images” that will be dissolved by our ruthless criticisms or trumped by our long-term predictions that history will ultimately vindicate us’ (Mitchell, 2008: 577) (Mitchell’s approach is actually inspired by Nietzsche’s book *Twilight of the Idols*).

Last but not least, the operation of aesthetics with regard to media events requires some contextualization. Since several years, there have been various adaptations of aesthetics beyond the field of art, often influenced by Rancière's aesthetics. Among them, Jill Bennett's (2012) 'practical aesthetics' is most relevant, as it traces affective relations that animate both art and real events. Practical aesthetics is seen as a 'modus operandi', an approach that employs different methods and works not only within the field of art but contemporary culture at large. An aesthetic analysis of media events exceeds the aims and scope of this article.

Greece after the 2004 Olympic Games

Let us take a closer look at Greece. Soon after the mid-2000s, so also after the 2004 Olympic Games, one could sense that things were not going too well. However, it was not something coherently perceptible in public discourse. It did not have a face in the media, it was more like Massumi's (2011) understanding of event, in-the-becoming phase, accumulating momentum, becoming vaguely sensed, especially in urban space and in the public sphere. In December 2008, it erupted. The riots were a bursting out of everything that had been going wrong, it took over public space and media time. Small occasions of riots especially in Athens reached deeper into spring 2009 than what international and mainstream Greek media reported. The change of government in October 2009 brought to light Greece's terrible financial situation. In 2010–2011, the new government 'negotiated' a bailout with the troika and the parliament voted for it. People protested massively, it is all well known, with the 2011 Syntagma Square occupation of indignados and so on. The massive protests had zero impact on governmental decisions. However, they had significant impact on the affective register. On the one hand, they increased the government's fear of its own people. On the other, they filled many people with a feeling of energy, of the potential of finding forms of collectivity beyond traditional political and class affiliations (Alexandrakis, 2010; Filippidis, 2013a; Jovanopoulos and Mitropoulos, 2011; Mentinis, 2010; Papadopoulos et al., 2012; Petropoulou, 2010; Stavrides, 2010), as well as of living and participating in a historical moment, ongoing since December 2008. As such, they also mobilized bottom-up collective social and cultural self-organized initiatives. Meanwhile, between 2009 and 2012, besides the continuation of various forms of protest that inevitably disrupted the flow of daily life – or better: disruption *was* the rhythm of the flow – the face particularly of Athens had been radically altering due to an increasing, visible presence of poverty, homelessness, crime, use of drugs, hostility against migrants, racist and populist actions of the far-right association and political party Golden Dawn, alongside a lack of maintenance of public spaces, and the closing down of thousands of retail shops and offices. All these also produced news especially when violence occurred. Such news increased dramatically in various periods between 2010 and 2012.⁴ There were streets in the city center that taxis refused to enter even by daylight. And in the media, the crisis was unfolding as a spectacle.

Anomie – a crisis of genre and its crackdown

Berlant's concepts are of interest here. She has suggested that, as events, crises are crises of genre. In the sense that there is no genre to describe what is happening, and although

something happening in the present is affectively perceived, it is registered first affectively; there is an awkwardness in the process of adjustment and adaptation that finds its supports also in discovering its genre. I quote, 'The historical present is always a time of transition, but crisis is ... a transition that has not found its genres. Phrases like "precarity" and "occupy" are placeholder affordances while aims and fantasies become both discovered and take shape' (Berlant, 2011a: 2, see also Berlant, 2011b: 4). The Greek government found for itself a 'genre' in a concept of 'anomie' that with a sweeping gesture encompassed anything perceived as disorder and threat. From tax evasion to civil disobedience, from crime to illegal migration.⁵ To quote Costas Douzinas (2013), 'the government chose law and legality as a favorable terrain for delegitimizing the resistance' (p. 50), and, I would add, in the affective register, anomie was promoted to encompass also everything that related to the population's precarity and daily anxiety.

During 2012, there was an important shift in what was reported in the news. To the spectacle of the crisis, large-scale and organized operations by special police forces were added. Moreover, media news, mainstream and alternative, brought before spectators' eyes violence inflicted by the police on those groups of the population identified as lawless and threatening. Below here are some prominent examples.

In late April 2012, shortly before the general elections of May 2012, police forces (so-called special guards) rounded up in the early morning hours about 120 women from areas of the city center known as hubs of drug use, homelessness, sex work, as well as of migrants. Police conducted enforced HIV tests to women, and 12 of them, who were visibly drug addicts, were found HIV-positive. In the news, they were called 'sex workers', although all but one – who was found in a brothel – were rounded up from the street not during situations – for example, exchanges with clients – that legitimized the characterization (Douzinas, 2013: 39–42; Mavroudi, 2013).⁶ The police uploaded on their website their mug shots, names, names of parents, age, place of birth and residence. They were called a 'health bomb' and a 'threat to the Greek family' by the ministers of health and public order, respectively, who played a key role in the television and press scandal that followed. Soon the women's photographs and personal data circulated extensively online and made 'breaking news' on news and analysis media. The women faced a prosecutor on charges of intentionally causing grievous bodily harm, a felony, and spent up to 1 year in prison before their trial.⁷ On 5 August 2012, the police launched the largest crackdowns on suspected illegal immigrants, the operation 'Xenios Zeus' (hospitable Zeus), deploying 4500 police around Athens and detaining more than 7000 immigrants in less than 72 hours. Within 6 months, police stormed 528 houses, brought 84,792 migrants to police stations for controls, but only 4811 were eventually arrested as illegal. The operation received large publicity during the first months, again as top news, with photographs of groups of police and groups of migrants in various open, public spaces (see, for example, Antenna News, 2012; Mega Gekonota, 2012; Unknown, 2012).⁸ Moreover, from December 2012 and during 2013, police evacuated violently a number of squats all over the country, again with considerable television and press coverage. Evacuations in Athens took place especially in January 2013 (see, for example, Skai news, 2013; STAR News, 2013a; Vythoulkas, 2013) but also continued later, for instance, in August 2013 police raided a 20-year-old squat in the National Technical University of Athens. University buildings and streets around were blocked by police forces for a few hours during investigations (Psara, 2013). In February

2013, a gang of six youngsters robbed a bank and the post office in the town of Velventos in north-western Greece, but were arrested almost immediately. They were members of the anarchist group 'Nuclei of Fire', listed as terrorist organization, known for several cases of attacks against private property since January 2009, primarily in Athens. When the police released images of the arrested on TV news, it was visible that the images were digitally manipulated to hide extensive bruises on their faces, inflicted after their arrest. Images before the use of Photoshop eventually also leaked, causing an outcry against police violence (Makeleio.gr, 2014; Mega Gekonota, 2013a, 2013b; STAR News, 2013b).⁹

What was particular about the mediatization of the Greek government's war against anomie in 2012–2013 was that the types of operations that it included, as well as police violence in general, were by no means a new phenomenon. The so-called sweep operations for 'cleaning' particular streets from migrants, drug users or sex workers, as well as the mistreatment of detainees, have been taking place for years. However, the scale, strategic organization (Filippidis, 2013b) and especially the degree and public manifestation of excessive physical violence in police stations and prisons, the disclosure of patients' medical records and names, and so on *were* new (see also Koukoutsaki, 2015). Therefore, also, I call them 'media events'. They were communicated in television news and analysis programs as well as in the press as spectacular news; however, they were not sudden or uncontrollable events, but situations with a deliberate beginning and end, deliberate distribution of roles, vocabulary and grammar of representation. Criminology meets Rancière's aesthetics here. According to leftist criminologists, that what had changed in state repression was that violence, selectivity among population groups and severity of punishments are not hidden away from the public eye, but deliberately brought to the public, almost advertised (Domoney, 2014; Koukoutsaki, 2015), drawing legitimization from the discourse of anomie that distinguished between categories of lawful citizens and unlawful groups. All these spectacles, in which the times and places of different groups are carefully distributed, determining what group may be visible and audible in public and which one not, seem almost like an illustration of Rancière's aesthetics of politics and the distribution of the sensible (Rancière, 2004: 12–19).¹⁰

The crisis in Greece – financial, social, political – as well as events that marked it, such as the 2008 riots and 2011 Syntagma Occupation by Greek indignados, can be understood philosophically and aesthetically as events (see, for example, Douzinas, 2008; Stafylakis, 2009). It was difficult to locate agency and intentionality, beginnings and ends to their experience. It was difficult to fully perceive their internal logic or the roles, actions and places of agents caught up in their mist. They have transformed a part of the population's social and political experience of daily 'reality', as it were, ever since (Petropoulou, 2010). This confusion and radical indeterminacy was the actual content of anomie or lawlessness. To the politics and aesthetics of the event, the state opposed politics and aesthetics of a spectacle that was placing groups back in order. Moreover, while the actual source of everyone's precarity – the state's included (Berlant, 2011a) – was the abstract and hardly graspable, for most people, workings of neoliberal economy of global capitalism (see also Virilio, 2012: 34), the constructed media events instrumentalized social symptoms of the crisis that were visible in public space – poverty, homelessness,

drug addiction, and so on. In that way attention was diverted to a very material and sensual spectacle of the concrete, the physical, the bodily and the familiar: the city center, the police, the migrants and so on.

The mediatization of social reality and politics is quite important to remember here in understanding the operation of media events. At the level of how real events as well as media events were perceived by the population, especially for citizens not frequently in the center of Athens, there was not necessarily an instantly graspable distinction. Mediatization is something that both 'real' and 'media' events share in common. The use of all kinds of media (meaning here also social media and networks, not primarily news media) is crucial in producing, spreading and processing news, images, calls for action and so on. The representation and the aesthetic perception of events become an often undifferentiated mix of direct and mediated, personal and collective, experiences.

Cruel optimism – the affective adaptation and adjustment to one's daily predicament

To return to the relation between affective precarity and media events, what is important regarding precarity in the description of the historical present (Berlant, 2011b: 4) is that this distribution of roles and places affectively targets the ones watching the news, who still fall within the category of lawful citizens. The physical and bodily spectacle of heavily armed police forces, of Golden Dawn members in fascist outfits, mistreated detainees and migrants and sick drug addicts, had as recipient the lawful population. Under conditions of austerity, recession and unreasonable taxation, lawful citizens were aware that there was no guarantee what side of the law they would find themselves on, in the near future. The physical spectacle of the repression of anomie enhanced citizens' anxiety due to their own precarious position, regardless also of whether they lived in the capital or anywhere else.

Moreover, the ideological formation of the 'war against anomie' promoted the conflation of civil disobedience, crime and corruption in an undifferentiated whole of disorder. At some point it could be expected that the psychological pressure of living precariously *and* surrounded by images of violence, misery and disorder would be exhausting for people. That was another target. Targeting affect, it included the attempt to turn on their head the widespread feeling of collective energy and potential, and the demand for political transformation that had been nurtured during the massive riots, protests and occupations since 2008, primarily in the capital. These had given many people something to hold on to, both in the form of a collective political project and of individual action, in the process of adapting affectively to a radically uncertain present and future. Drawing upon Adam Phillips' analysis of 'the synergies of radical democracy and psychoanalysis' in people's affective adaptation and adjustment to precarity, Berlant writes,

[...] the central sensual experience of equality and democracy is not knowing where one is. But people come to fear and hate these processes because they exert a constant pressure for negotiating social location. Cruel optimism or not, they feel attached to the soft hierarchies of inequality to provide a sense of their place in the world. (Berlant, 2011b: 194; see also Berlant, 2008; Starr et al., 2011)

A relation of cruel optimism occurs, according to Berlant (2011b), when people opt for something that they hope will improve their lives, but that same thing is an obstacle to their well-being.

Anomie – the other side of the same coin

Interestingly, in November and December 2014, the use of a media event for the enhancement of affective precarity was turned on its head. In 10 November 2014, the 21-year-old anarchist prisoner Nikos Romanos, after having succeeded in the university entry exam for a technical school of higher education, went on hunger strike for being denied his legal right to take educational leaves.¹¹ Hunger strikes of prisoners are not too unusual and do not necessarily make national headlines or cause political pressure. However, Romanos was a special case. He was the friend of Alexandros Grigoropoulos who happened to be next to him the night when Grigoropoulos was shot dead by police (6 December, 2008). He was one of the middle-class teenagers who, following the riots of 2008, evolved into a new breed of radicalized anarchists (Maltezou and Babington, 2013). As such, he was also one of the arrested and maltreated detainees of the Velventos bank robbery, whose pictures before and after Photoshop had filled all kinds of media. Moreover, Romanos was the child of an upper middle-class family of intellectuals which was relatively recognizable within Athenian society, because in previous decades another member was involved in a murder trial covered by the media, and another one was an author. Due to the extreme symbolic power of all these precedents, the legally not solid ban of prisoners' educational and other leaves that had recently been imposed as part of 'state of emergency' measures, as well as the time coincidence with the anniversary of Grigoropoulos' killing, his hunger strike was inevitably picked up by the media (see, for example, Mega Gegonota, 2014; Leontaridis, 2014; Mandilara, 2014). As a media event, there was a beginning and an end to the media coverage, depending upon the duration and result of the hunger strike. It included all ingredients of media events mentioned earlier – but with a twist: the 'anomous' subject was now the government that refused the young prisoner's right to education. The 'state of emergency' enabled the Greek state to bypass existing laws, to act, in a sense, beyond the law.¹² Quite importantly, the visual representation of the media event was fed with recycled stories and images from 2008 and 2013. The only new picture of Romanos was shot from outside the prison at night, showing him behind the bars of a window that hid details of his body and face, reminding us that visibility and spectacular imagery in media events were controllable. Moreover, the subject of a precarious future was again placed on a human body, but this time not one with an externally imposed, impersonal group identity – the lawless migrants, the contaminated women or the anarchist terrorists as a collective threat to lawful citizens. Rather, the body of the hunger striker was, on the one hand, direct victimizer of its own precarious future. While, on the other, Romanos was simultaneously part of a collective victim of 2008 and its aftermath – in the sense of traumatized teenagers, middle-class and well-educated schoolboys turned violent anarchists – as well as an individual with a known name, a personal story and the capacity of making his statements public (Romanos, 2014).

If, in the affective register, spectacular media events of violence and its suppression had been instrumental in promoting people's political passivity and adjustment to their

daily predicament (Berlant, 2008, 2011b; Virilio, 2012), the media event of Romanos twisted the affective impact of the media events of state repression and led people back to street protest. In a way, Virilio's synchronization and democracy of emotions were turned into an emotional urge toward democracy, despite there being little belief in democracy or justice in Romanos' anarchist political stance and actions. Moreover, Romanos as anti-hero brought to the foreground again all the ambivalence of places, roles, actions that the 'war against anomie' – with its spectacular distribution of the sensible – had been an attempt to obscure by distributing roles and places to groups of 'lawful' and 'lawless' citizens.¹³

In conclusion – precarity as a tool

To conclude, let me return to the question of the sustainability of precarity as a politically operative concept. That the austerity state (here the Greek one) as sovereign state appeared to be politically, financially and socially unsustainable, at national and international levels, was difficult to dispute after 5 years of recession. That the spectacular performativity of the austerity government between June 2012 and January 2015, first as a severe punisher and later as a care-taker, was more a performance of agency rather than evidence of actual agency, as in fact the State was also in a precarious state outside of its own control, seems also most plausible. Still, its performances were attempts to 'reattach collective fantasy to the state's aura as sovereign actor and to block recognition of the similarity of their debt paths [the state's and the population's]' – to remember Berlant.¹⁴ In this context, I have tried to show that, for the part of the previous Greek government, precarity as the economic and political condition both of itself and of the population seemed to be taken so much for granted and beyond its control, that the way of doing politics had become the manipulation of the ways in which a population would affectively adjust and adapt to its predicament and would keep cool and composed. And that has been a way of trying to demobilize precarity as an economic, political but also realist and ideological term for the part of the population, which as such had stirred up 4–5 years of citizens' social and economic initiatives, as well as ongoing political protest.

Funding

The research for this article has been supported by fellowships of the Seeger Center for Hellenic Studies of Princeton University, and the Dahlem Research School of Free University of Berlin.

Notes

1. See also Athanassiou (2012) for a similar approach specifically to the Greek crisis, which is further taken up by Filippidis (2013b).
2. In advertisements of New Democracy – the strongest party in the austerity government of 2012–2015 – youths appear almost clueless and relying on the older generation, as opposed to advertisements of the radical left that capitalized on the youth revolt of 2008 and their subsequent participation in protests, citizens' movements and self-organized initiatives.
3. The research for this article includes browsing through every issue of the printed newspaper *Ta Nea* between 6 December 2010, 6 December 2011 and 1 December 2012 in order to follow the flow and density of news that concern this study (e.g. Athens' center, protest, reports of violence

in public space, police repression, migration, etc.); search with keyword 'ανομία' (anomie) of the digital archive of the Lambrakis Press Group for the printed newspaper *To Vima* 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 (there is no separate archive of the online version of the newspaper); search with keyword 'ανομία' in the digitized archive of news of ERT (EPT), the Hellenic Public Radio and Television that includes the TV channels ET-1, NET and ET-3; search with keyword 'Ξένιος Δίας', 'Ξένιος Ζευς', 'οροθετικές', 'Βελβεντός', 'ληστεία Βελβεντού' ('Xenios Dias', 'Xenios Zeus', 'HIV-positive women', 'Velventos' and 'Velventos robbery') for videos of the news from various TV channels (often still available online only if an unknown user would place them there), in the online search-engine of the newspapers *To Ethnos* and *Kathimerini*, and general Google-search with these keywords. Furthermore, I have used the timeline of news of the research project 'A City at a time of Crisis' covering the period 7 September 2008–29 September 2013 and including links to various English online sources (e.g. www.bloomberg.com, uk.reuters.com, blog.occupylondon.org, etc.). Only samples of all the above, rather than systematic outcomes, are used in the article.

4. See <http://crisis-scape.net/resources> for a timeline of Greek crisis news in English. It also includes reports on police and Golden Dawn violence published on alternative media (e.g. <http://blog.occupiedlondon.org/>) that were not always reported by mainstream media.
5. It is indicative that in the mainstream newspaper *To Vima* between 1 January 2009 and 16 October 2014, the term 'ανομία' appears 266 times. In a search in the archive of the national television channels ET-1, NET and ET-3 between 1 January 2009 and 30 January 2013 (digitized for the largest part), the term appears at least once per month with reference to a vast array of topics, such as the general condition of the state as well as the government's politics altogether (15 March 2009) and according to the leader of the opposition party (e.g. 22 May 2009 and 1 June 2009), issues of criminality and citizens' insecurity (8 April 2009) and specifically in connection to the uncontrolled action of groups of youths (23 January 2009), illegal migration and hooliganism (9 October 2009). From 2010 through 2013, the 'war against anomie' in parallel or merging with the 'war against corruption' formed central issues in governmental discourse.
6. The story of the arrested women is documented and analyzed in the film *Ruins* by Zoe Mavroudi, which also includes several extracts of television news and analysis programs as presented in four different channels, one of which is the state channel NET (Mavroudi, 2013).
7. Informally, it has been heard that the police rounded up also transsexuals, but failed to find any of them HIV-positive. Moreover, it was revealed that the police operation was designed with the expectation of finding migrant, especially African women, infected by HIV. However, all of those HIV-positive were Greek, apart from one Russian girl. She was actually the only one found in a brothel, but no investigation was made to ascertain whether she was a victim of trafficking. In general, the women were neither treated as separate, individual cases nor as patients. Two of them committed suicide (Mavroudi, 2013).
8. 'We will not allow our towns, or our country, to be occupied and become a migrant ghetto', said Minister of Public Order, Nikos Dendias, 'as authorities discussed plans to build eight detention centres capable of holding up to 10,000 immigrants, in the capital' (Smith, 2012). Search with as keyword 'Xenios Zeus' in the newspaper *I Kathimerini* between 1 August 2012 and 30 September 2012 resulted in 95 articles.
9. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conspiracy_of_Fire_Nuclei accesses 2.2.105
10. The aesthetic is again understood here in a Rancièrian sense, as a mode of articulation between forms of action, production, perception and thought that might be dominated by a 'police order', meaning here not any policemen but the coordinates of the distribution of the times, places and roles of different groups in a community, as well as the modes of sensing that make this distribution, its inclusions and exclusions, perceptible within a community (see, for example, Rancièr, 2001, 2004: 13–19, 85–89).

11. The prisoners' right for leaves was suspended following the escape of a member of the notorious '17th of November' terrorist group during a leave in January 2014.
12. About the 'state of emergency' in relation to lawlessness and the state during the Greek crisis, see, for example, Athanassiou (2012), Domoney (2014), Filippidis (2013b) and Koukoutsaki (2015).
13. On the 31st day of the hunger strike, after having announced a thirst strike as well, the government agreed on a compromise.
14. This was most eloquently manifested in advertisements of the 2015 general elections campaign, in which the prime minister, with a very paternalistic tone and attitude, was presented discussing with families and with groups of teenagers. See New Democracy (2015a, 2015b).

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