

windows in crisis



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Windows in crisis
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rotterdam 2017

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INTRODUCTION



View of Athens from Lycabettus hill (Katri N., 2013)

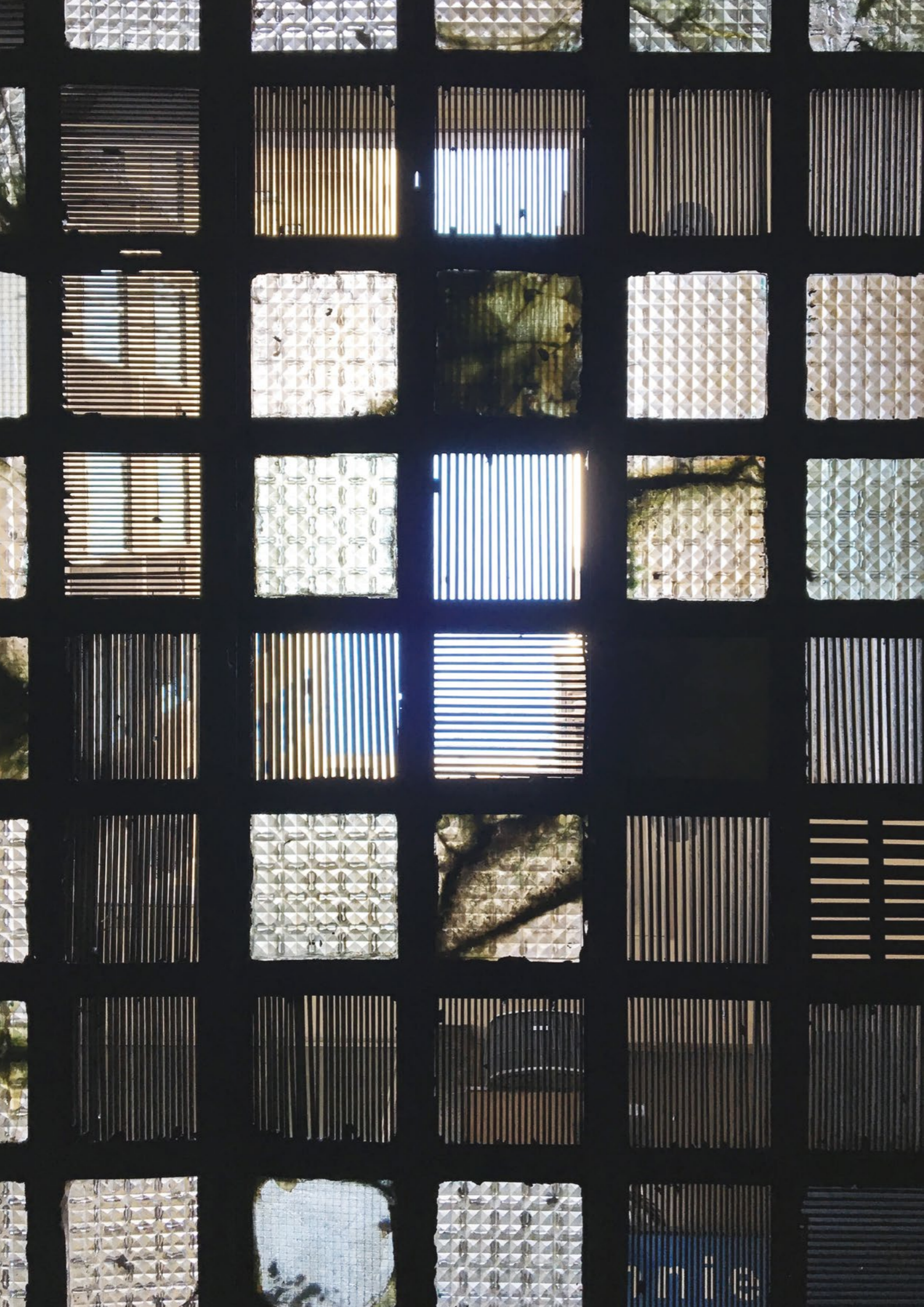
The city of Athens as we experience it today is a city in a state of emergency. An ongoing economic and humanitarian crisis started in 2009 and has been following an almost statistically linear downwards path. Greek society is facing the collapse of the banking sector and numerous imposed austerity programs that have produced 'one of the worst modern depressions ever recorded in a developed country' (Latimer & Szymczyk, 2015). Meanwhile, a humanitarian crisis is escalating with the displacement of four million refugees fleeing civil wars and violence.

The Greek crisis is an example of a bigger crisis. Already since 2005, in his engagement with the discomfort of European culture, Jacques Derrida suggested that 'perhaps we are enduring a tremor... something other, in any case, than a crisis of reason, beyond a crisis of science or of consciousness, beyond a crisis of Europe, beyond philosophical crisis...' (Derrida, 2005).

Athens could be seen as a paradigmatic

metropolis, a case study of today's reality. Its location between East and West and its contradiction as a southern place to the North's idiosyncrasy and politics makes it a transitional space. 'Greece is not an isolated case, it is emblematic of the fast-changing global situation, and it embodies the economic, political, social, and cultural dilemmas that Europe must face today. If Athens exemplifies the current issues that extend beyond the proverbial notion of the "Greek Crisis," these problems—which are as much European and global as they are Greek—remain unresolved. Yet they present us with an opportunity to open up a space of imagination, thinking, and action instead of following the disempowering neoliberal setup that offers itself as (non)action implied in the (non)choice of austerity' ("Documenta 14 brings Kassel to Athens," 2014).

Under the motto 'Learning from Athens' documenta 14 (2017) takes place at two locations, Kassel and Athens. According to the organizers, this innovation came from the need to expand beyond its own boundaries and to change perspectives.



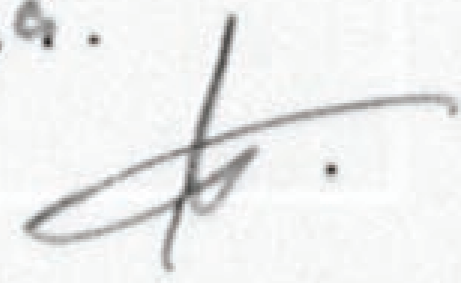
Athens is a contemporary example of a city that due to its political and historical background and presence becomes a 'fascinating place to be' (Folkerts, 2016). 'While the specific post-traumatic timing and choice of locale of Kassel in 1955, were precisely the factors that allowed documenta to develop into a now half-century-old venture, those sociopolitical parameters that made documenta urgent are no longer in play. This sense of urgency, then, must be found elsewhere' ("Documenta 14 brings Kassel to Athens," 2014).

According to Marina Fokidis (2017), curatorial advisor of documenta 14, the title 'Learning from Athens' is describing 'a situation of Greek people that we are learning on how this European capital has been once the cradle of civilization and now it is this kind of place that has accumulated so many miseries. The documenta 14 cannot change the economic crisis, it can give a hope to people, to the artistic scene [...] The world and the events have become so compact. There has been so much turbulence in every level. So, how can you not act politically? Part of documenta's themes are displacement, repatriation, dispossession, hunger, and history'. Next to the reference to documenta, there is an interesting relation of time and trauma that can be associated with Athens and its state of today. A traumatic era for Europe is a de facto reality again. This time it is not a war that had a particular duration and ways in which it was expressed, but an ongoing crisis with unclear means of expression. Athens is facing such a reality and its urban landscape is transforming into a (post-) traumatic landscape of decline. It becomes a model of a topography of 'economical war' where crisis and everyday life intertwine.

The clearest indication of that phenomenon can be seen through the great amount of closed shops which are turning into urban voids. The massive number creates an alienating experience for the citizen. Once you walk in Athens, you pass long distances of vacant shop windows that eventually constitute the façade of the public space, the face of the crisis. Stadiou street, in the

very center of the city, is a good example of a major street that has transformed from a commercial spot into a place of vacancy. A paradigmatic example, rather than a unique case, it could be seen as an open field for speculations.

Αὐτό πῶς καὶ καὶ νὰ κτίσαστε καὶ
 νὰ κατοικήσαστε - πλανώμενοι - ἐν ἄβυσ-
 ρῷ ἀλλὰ νὰ γὰρ χώρα ἐν ἄβυσσῳ καὶ
 εἰς μίαν γιγαντιαία ὄσο καὶ μὲν ἰσχυρὰ ἐπι-
 μὴ εἰρησὶ ὑποχρεώμενοι νὰ εἰς ἄβυσσῳ
 ἐπιδοῦμε, ἀνοχρῶς ὁ αὐτὸ πῶς γερῶμεν.
 Τίς εἰρήνη.



Alexander Calder
Illustration pour "Fêtes", 1971

Printed in France
 © 1997 A.D.A.G.P.
 Éditions du Désastre
 21, rue Visconti
 75006 Paris

CA03

'What calls us to build and dwell -as wonderers- cannot take place but on the brink of the abyss and in the gigantic and petty desert. This is what calls us. We are obliged to respond to it, open to what is collapsing. All best. Kostas Axelos' (Axelos, n.d).

1.

**THE CITY AND
THE VOID**



Possession and dispossession, displacement and debt. It seems that the facts that shape the now are generated out of facts that shaped our past.

Even if 'History (with capital H) ends where the histories of those people once reputed to be without history come together', as the Martiniquais philosopher Edouard Glissant (1989) noted, there is always the tendency to look back to the historical grounds that shaped us.

In terms of the 'History' of Europe, the very ideals of democracy and freedom that form the basis of its theoretical and constitutional principles may also be tied to a denial. From the fifteenth century's colonization and enslavement up to the refugees of our era and the distribution of monetary funds, we could recognize a number of examples that the European ideals have failed or lead us away from our present crisis. Hence, an unconventional notion of the relationship between past, present, and future could be seen.

The politics of today may appear from the notion of forgetfulness – a notion that is a key point for documenta 14 as well. 'Forgetfulness is not just a psychological

mechanism; it is the result of economic and political choices. In its logic, there is no need to do away with inequalities and precariousness. They are, in fact, structural to neoliberal logic. What is important in this system is to negotiate and renegotiate the threshold of 'bearable' precariousness, to avoid revolts and insurrections by shifting the blame onto individuals (if their lives are precarious, it is because they are lazy), by systematic displacement and dispossession' (Vergès, 2015). If we accept forgetfulness as a capitalistic and neoliberal mechanism and memory as the antonym and antidote to forgetfulness, then, in a way, memory can be the catalyst of the everyday experience of crisis and a trigger towards experiences of 'commoning' and activation.

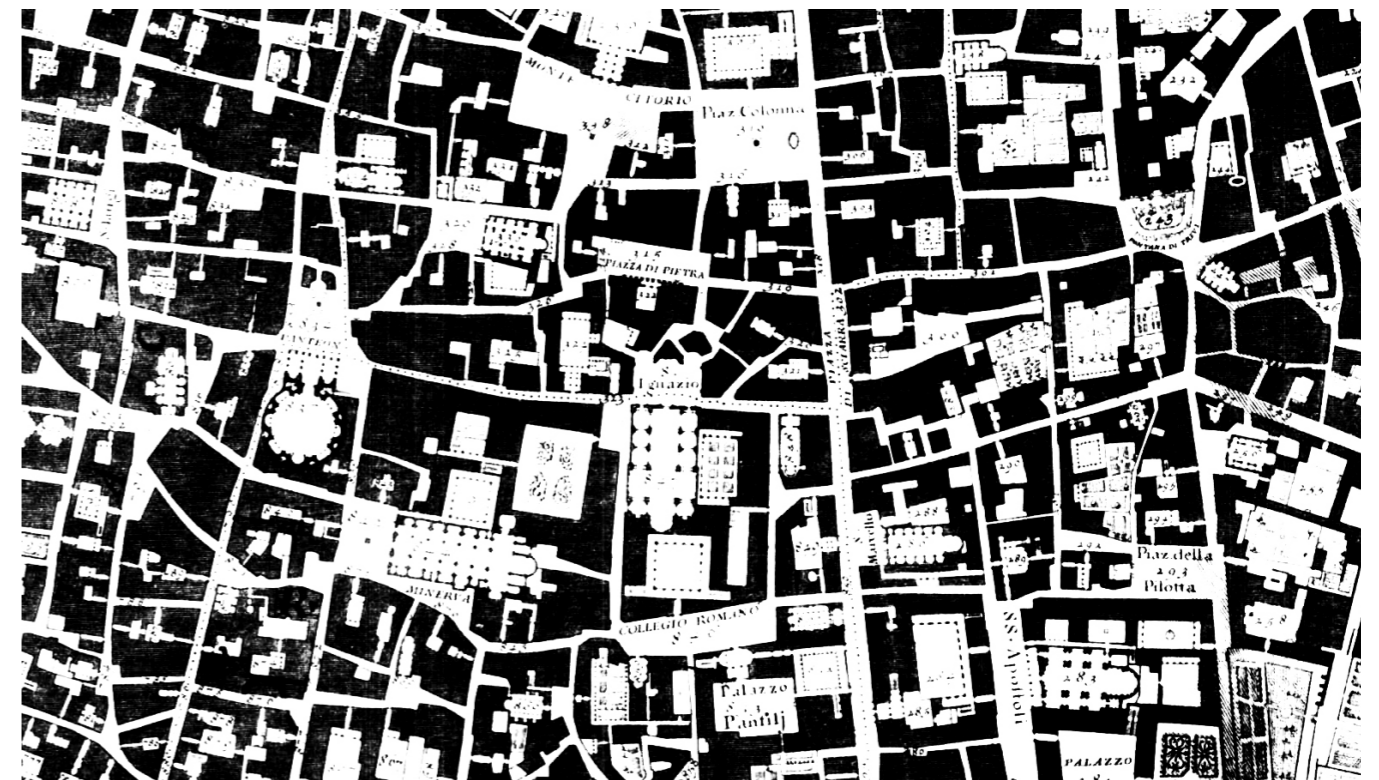
Thinking of the city as the container of identity and society, each metropolitan environment could be considered as both the guardian of its own History and the expression of the urban life that takes place in its open spaces. In any case, the question is how we, as its inhabitants, converse with the city's everydayness. In the current

case of Athens or even more particularly of Stadiou street, the question would be understating the dialogue between the passerby, as the citizen of a country under a deep crisis, and the street, as an urban space with a *History* that affected its image and function. Maybe the answer could be derived from understanding the city as a system of solid and void spaces.

The city, polis, from the Greek πόλις, by its very nature is political. 'The division of territorial space is negotiated, land is assigned and void spaces such as streets and squares are created to connect and provide spaces for civic life' (Ahmed & Jameson, 2011). The plan of Athens integrated the Agora, the space that linked the main civic institutions. The plan of Rome by Giambattista Nolli depicts the city as solid (black) and void (white) and describes well the reachable nature of the void space. The fact that in Nolli's plan the interior of churches is marked white makes us reflect on the notions of space and use. In that sense, the void is not only described as an

unused space but as a space full of different affordances. According to Nolli, for instance, a church is as reachable and, hence, open to the public as a square. In the case of the modern voids and non-used spaces, what could be the level of physical or even mental accessibility; similar to the 'whiteness' on Nolli's maps? There are clearly complexities regarding the spaces of the city that are remains or unused and the level of their *accessibility*.

The official conditions that define the control and ownerships over unused spaces may not overlap with the unofficial and shared interpretation over it. When a building remains empty for a lot of years, boundaries are often vague; it could be interpreted as 'common space'. Aristide Antonas (2016) in his book 'Archipelago of Protocols' suggests a speculative system of legal strategies concerning the condition in the current post-crisis scenarios, especially focused on the case of Athens. His *Urban Protocols* are meant to introduce temporary occupancies – legal and organized – of the abandoned city



Nolli's map of Rome, ca. 1692- 1756 (cityeu, 2010)

center that will be accepted and controlled by a municipal common authority. More particularly, in one of his protocols called 'Rhizome of non-proprietary uses', he declares that 'non-used private commercial spaces are programmed as an expanding rhizome of planes, allowing non-proprietary and non-profit common uses' (Antonias, 2016). Antonias's *planes* could also be seen as a reference to Hakim Bey's 'temporary autonomous zones (TAZ)', as a liberated area that eludes formal structures of control and aims to new ways of being human together and become the creators of the art of everyday life (Bey, 2003). Antonias's main idea is an answer to the inability of private property, in this case commercial, to remain in use. His own speculations formulate a whole system of rules that could be applied to different cases. But, the interesting point of this speculative process could be the blurring boundaries between the private and the public especially in times of crisis. In Stadiou street, the row of the empty shop windows could be interpreted as the *common space* – even if only in a surface level.

It is clear that in the Athenian context and its streetscape, the most direct manifestation of the crisis and the inability of the market comes from its closed and non-used commercial spaces. In their majority mini industries, but in a few cases, also shops of multinational businesses, closed shops constitutes 1/3 of the commercial spaces in Athens. One could say that they could easily be interpreted as the representatives of the crisis in the world. Territories or properties that have been affected by failure, relics of the economic vanity of the last decades.

'The contemporary urbanized world is a world predominantly ruled by interests around the economic extraction of profit' (Stavrides, 2016). The numbers are fairly comparable with those in the exemplary shrinking cities, such as Detroit in the US or Leipzig in Germany, with 30% empty houses and 20-50% empty stores according to the street and 25% population drop from 1981 in the municipality of Athens. Statistics could declare Athens as a shrinking city, which

refers to a permanent scale down of a city (Theodorou, 2016). Even if that permanence is something still unpredictable, it is true that one of the biggest problems of Athens is the big amount of empty buildings.

The 'empty' space can be read through various lenses and philosophical perspectives. In modern western philosophy, the void and emptiness have often been seen as negative, as a nihilistic 'other' space. However, the notion of empty and nothing is celebrated since ancient times in Greek architecture where the 'counter-space' of buildings, i.e. the formal qualities of the surrounding space, is as important as the buildings themselves. That intimate link between the interior (buildings) and the exterior (surroundings) helps us assume that there was no 'empty' space for classical architecture. This notion that mainly applies to 'counter spaces' might be applied also to the spaces that were built to have a function but due to several circumstances, came to be empty or abandoned.

Furthermore, in both western and eastern philosophy 'empty' has often been understood as a physical element. 'The void rather than being nothing is something – where its otherness is rich with imagination and possibility. A space that can be intimate or sublime, it is the formless field that allows things to dwell or move, as well as the space in between or the hollow contained within. The void suggests both absence and presence and is a process involving negation – towards nothing, zero, entropy, erasure, tabula rasa' (Ahmed & Jameson, 2011).



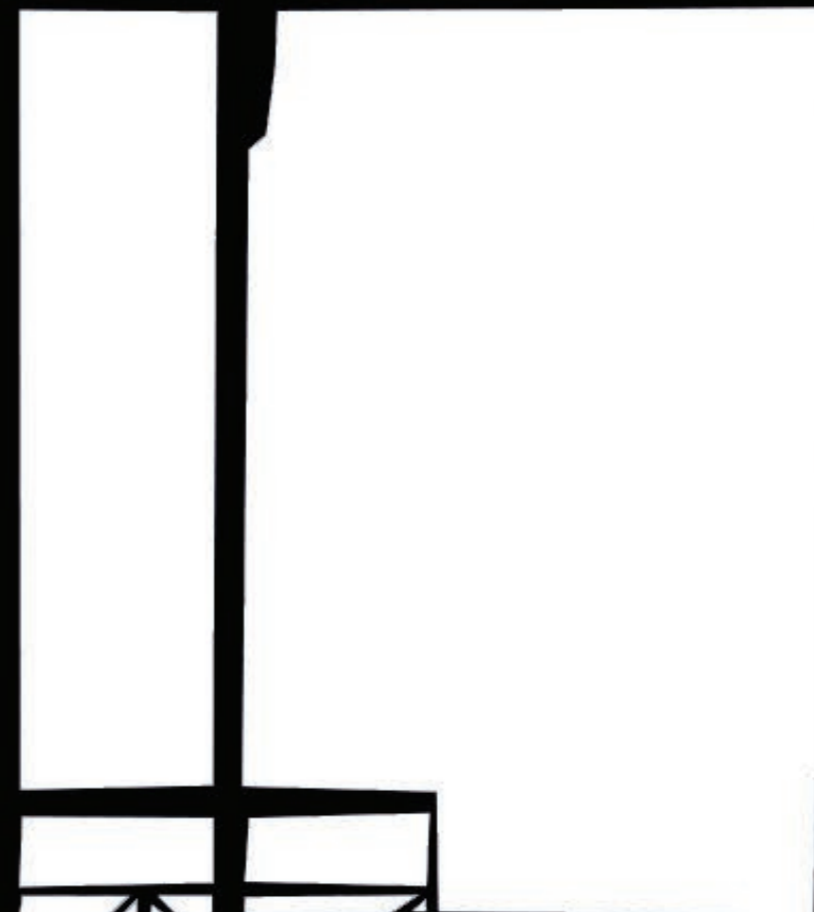


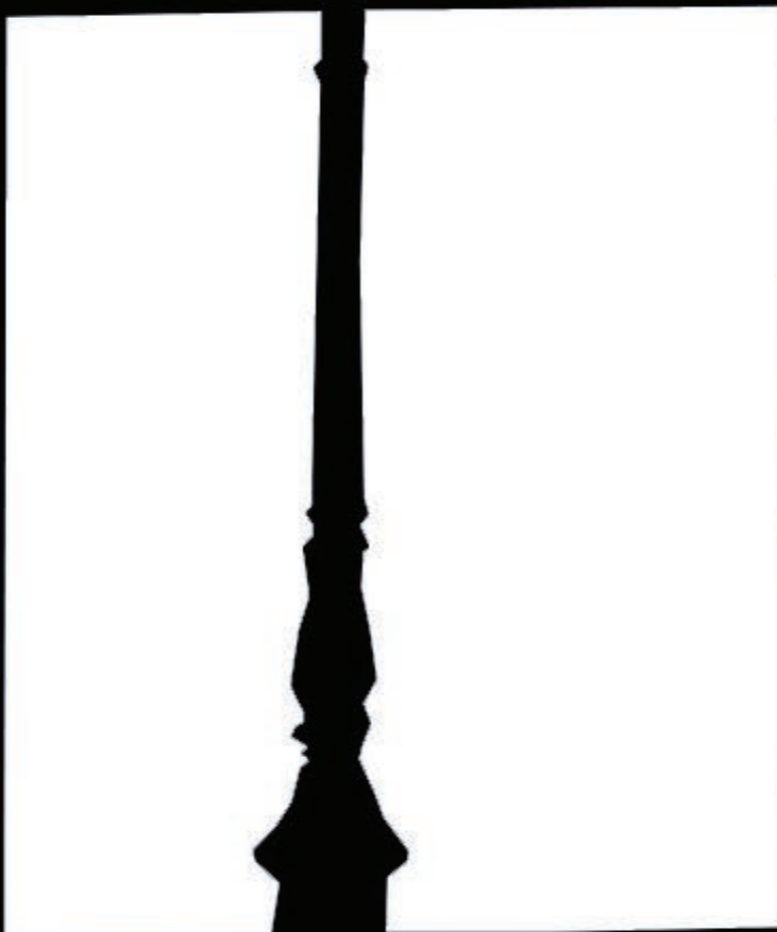
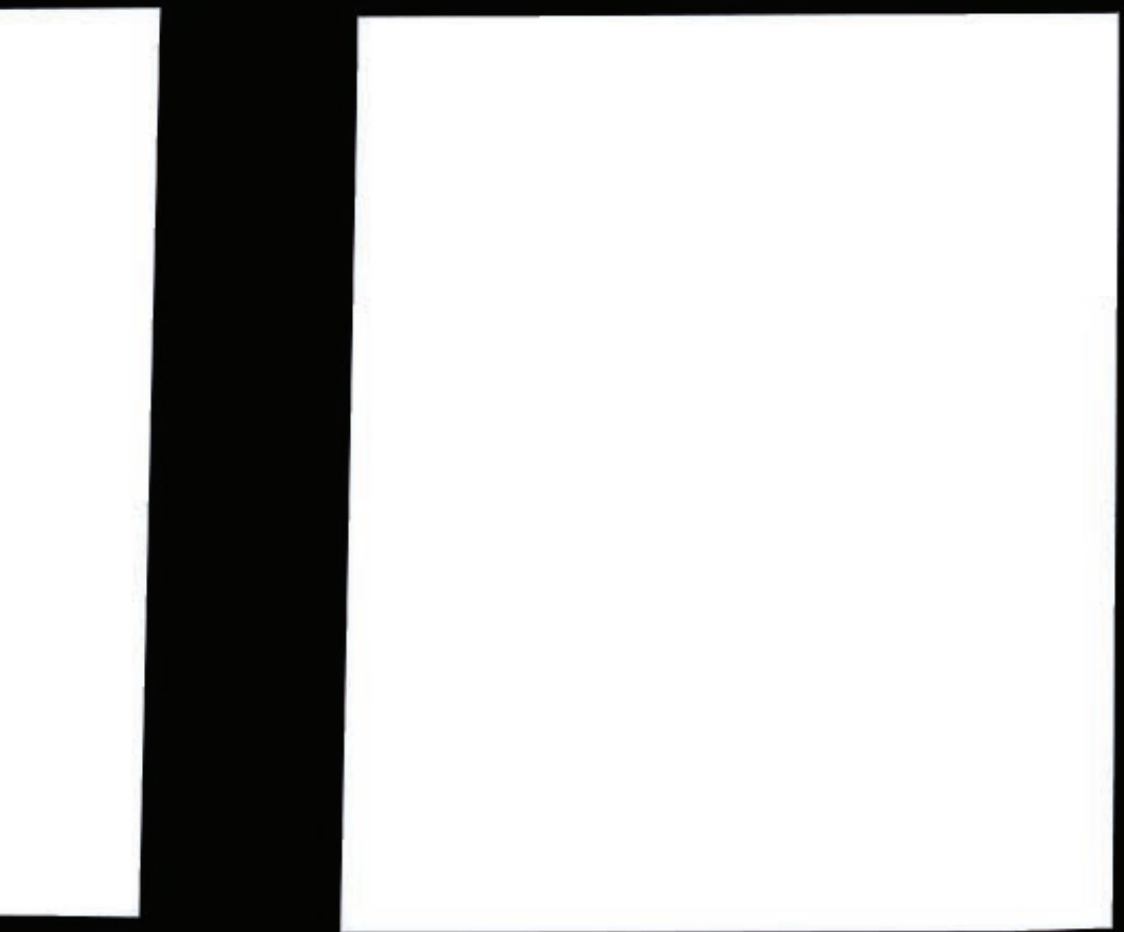
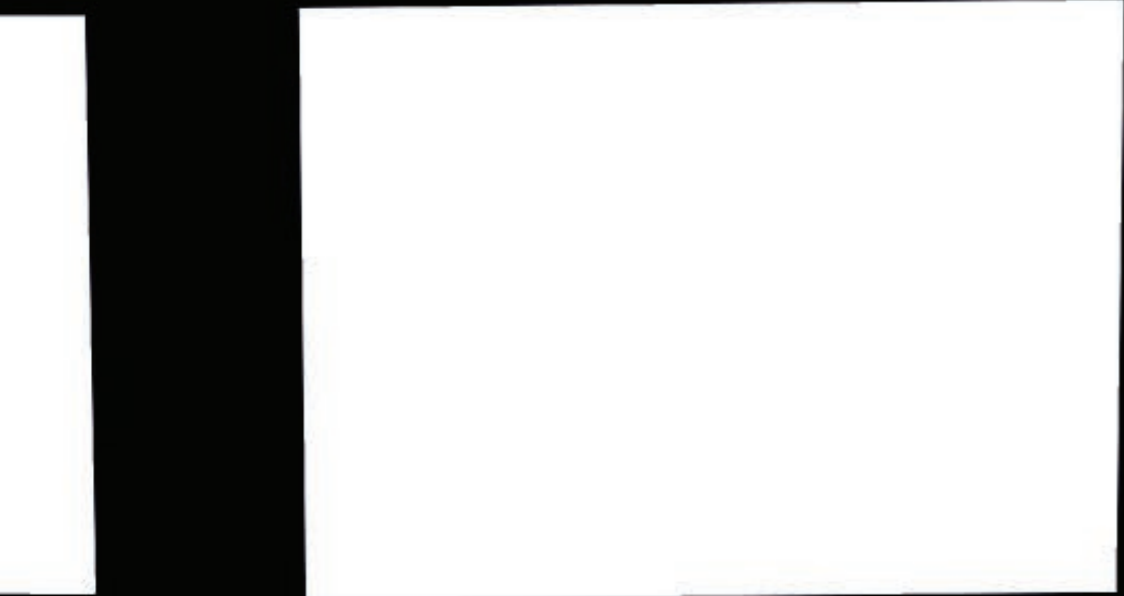








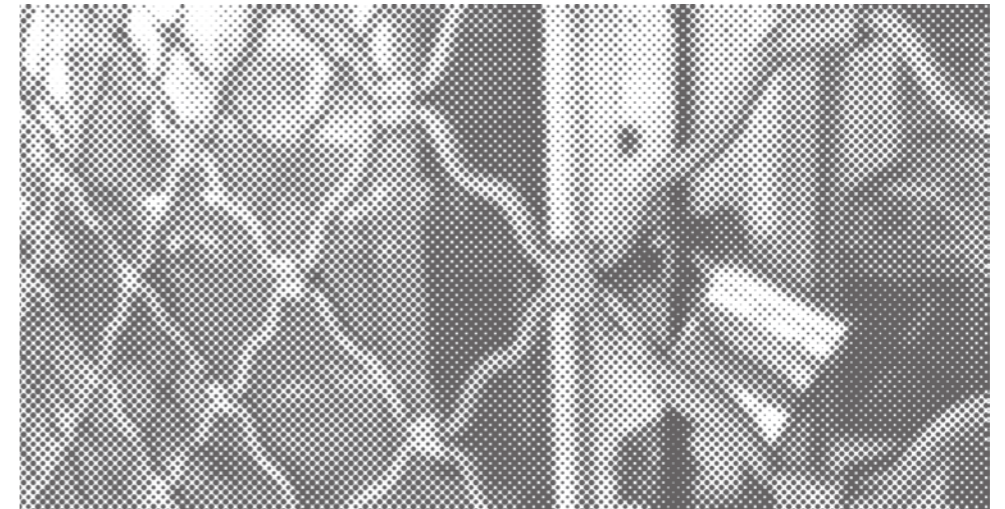






2.

**THE SHOP WINDOWS AND
THE SURFACES**



If the ‘streets of a city are the main emblematic elements of its ephemeral character’ (Philippidēs, 2009) the shop windows are those intermediate spaces that follow their network and impermanence.

As central elements of modern civic life and indicative features of the economic flow, their ephemeral role is revealed by the means of content and purpose, as promotive tools of consumption – and by their appearance and disappearance.

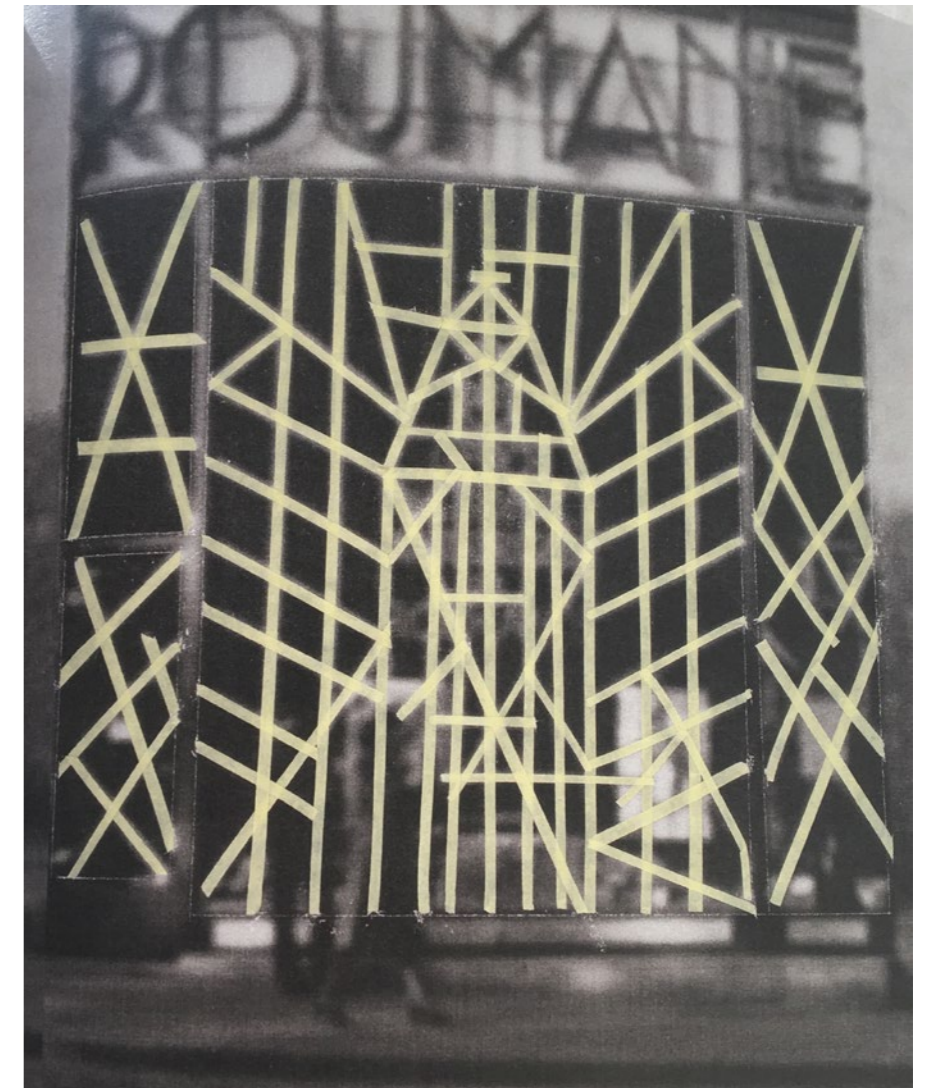
Historically, shops, have formed one of the clearest expressions of the public face of the modern interior, as it was formed in the second half of the nineteenth century. New building technologies and materials, such as glass, iron, and steel, made possible a transformation of commerce. Those materials facilitated the construction of large, open plan interior spaces and the high level of transparency which helped to emphasize the commodities located within them. 'Most accounts of the late nineteenth-century metropolis, and of modernity, have ignored those new public interior spaces, choosing instead to emphasize the outside, visual spectacle of the urban streets' (Sparke, 2008). Besides, before that evolution, for instance in medieval times, shops were workshops where the customer could actually walk in without any glass separation. This historical reference shows how the 'ground floor' of the city has always been the commercial heart of the urban space.

Apart from their main nature as retail showcases, shop windows could also be seen as sites of sociality and communication. The way they were treated in times of war is fascinating. Due to their vulnerability, their glass facades were fortified by scrim tape, a glass fiber mesh tape. The roll of tape might be plain or adhesive coated to facilitate its installation. The scrim was handed out during World War II in Britain and the Spanish Civil War, to tape windows, so that they should not create hazardous shrapnel in case of a bomb blast. Horizontal and vertical stripes applied in the shape of a star. Yet, there is also a marketing potential the tape offers. Right from the introduction of scrim, spectacular examples of decorative windows started to appear, ranging from intricate geometric patterns to elaborate illustrations of the goods on offer inside. From this historical reference emerges a sense of community as residents decorate their windows in preparation for what is coming (Kabel &

Office de Tourisme de Roumanie, Paris, 1939, (MacGuffin, 2016)



Candy store in Seoul, 1948 (MacGuffin, 2016)



Koehorst, 2016). That sense of community is also present in the case of Athens and Stadiou street with a great number of political or artistic gestures written or painted.

Furthermore, the vacant commercial lots of Athens offer the potential to create multiple connections and spatial notions of dichotomies: We can see them as thresholds that separate the private from the public, the exterior from the interior, the future from the past. As Greek architect Stavros Stavrides (2016) writes, 'thresholds may appear as boundaries which separate an inside from an outside, as, for example, in a case of a door threshold, but this act of separation is always and simultaneously an act of connection. Thresholds create the conditions of entrance and exit, prolong, manipulate and give meaning to an act of passage'.

In the case of Athens, as the previous function of the inside space now is no longer used, it results in a totally different environment that does not relate to its primary state. The shop windows physically stayed the same, but functionally and probably conceptually work in a radically different way. However, in any case, the surfaces of those façades still communicate with the everydayness of the city and the focus is now set on themselves (instead of the interior space).

In reflecting upon the nature of things, Lucretius suggests that we consider surfaces as anything but superficial. Opposite to this consideration of antiquity, Giuliana Bruno (2015) points out a more complex elaboration on the notion of the surface. 'As textural matter builds up planes of perceptual intersection between inside and outside, a thick, layered space of interaction between subject and object – and between interior and exterior – emerges in time. In this way, such a pliant surface becomes capable of retaining the inner structure of temporality and the folds of memory in its material substance. It can also express the sensorium of affects, the sensations of mood, and the sensuality of atmosphere. It is in this sense that surface can be read as an architecture. Not only does it constitute a space in itself; it is a maker of transitional space' (Bruno, 2015). The transitional space of the vacant shop

windows has now become a borderline between the outside (public space) and the inside (void). The value of the surface in that sense is important. Similarly, to follow up on Bruno's reference, the surface holds a kind of *atmosphere and memory in its substance*. That memory may refer to the original space and functioning as a shop (through the choice of protective materials, the signs and traces of use) or the interaction with the public environment (through the natural decay or the spontaneous interventions on them).

The massive presence of the surfaces of empty shops in the city of Athens, and their decay and collapse, establishes the aesthetic perception of the city's urban skin. It is interesting to observe how this perception is generated materially. Metal rolling grids and gates, wood panels, paint or paper are the tools for protecting or hiding the commercial voids by literally, in some cases, blocking the view of the passersby. On the other hand, as mentioned before, non-use gives birth to exterior interventions that have a character of either spontaneous artistic or non-artistic expressions such as graffiti, public promoting gestures or political context. 'The urban palimpsest created in such acts 'hides and reveals different layers of meaning inscribed on the city's body' (Stavrides, 2016). It is one the many ways that cities become 'stages for the ephemeral reconfiguration of meaning on the streets' (Robinson, 2005). Getting closer to those derelict spaces, it is inevitable to focus on the details of them. The power of the fragment to evoke considerable detail was of great significance to Benjamin Walter in his *Arcade Project*, particularly as a tool for remembrance in urban space, where progress is so often materially destructive, and where material traces are a trigger of remembrance, both collective and biographical. In the case of Athens, detail could be a tool to express the radicality of the metamorphosis of function.

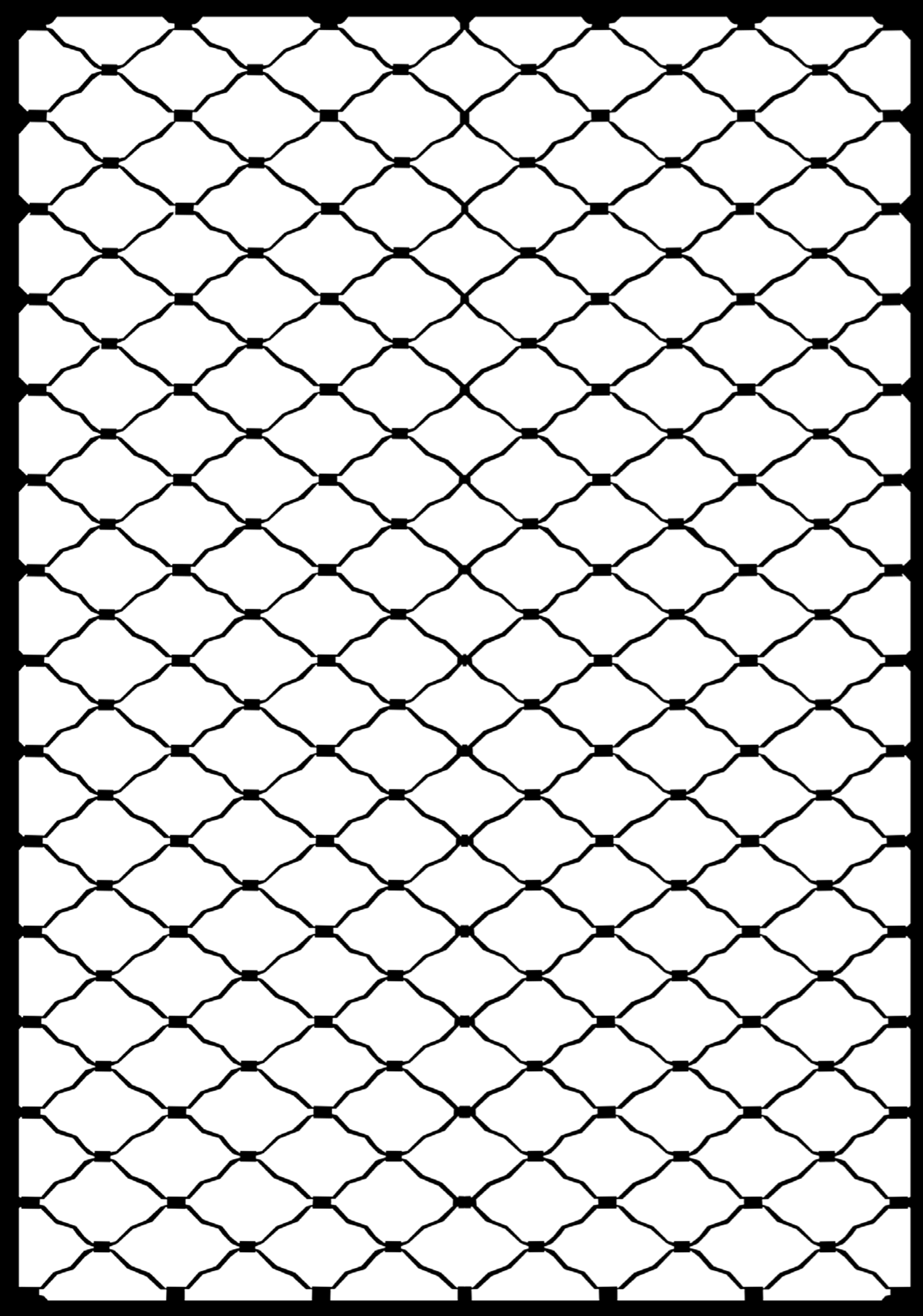
There is a fascination of material ruins that comes along with the romantic aesthetics of decay. 'Decay has been regarded as beautiful precisely because it holds the germ of what was, representing the passing of all things, and the portent of our own demise and disappearance, an eloquent reminder of our

own mortality' (Dillon, 2014).

In Athens, the decay of the vacant shop windows holds not only this aesthetic interest based on its material traces but also a social and idiosyncratic character. If Greece and Europe are facing an important moment, this image of decay and abandonment could become a symbol and a *trigger for remembrance* and envisioning the future. That symbol would address the social decline and turmoil of the era. Seeing those spaces as traces of an important past, almost inevitably gives rise to the need to document them or *collect* them. Along with this idea of *collection*, arises another notion, that of the irretrievability and the time that will never occur again. Indeed, even if those shop windows of Stadiou Street will be used again, returning to their primary function, that does not mean that once they were not at that state and that the people who were affected did not experience that particular reality.

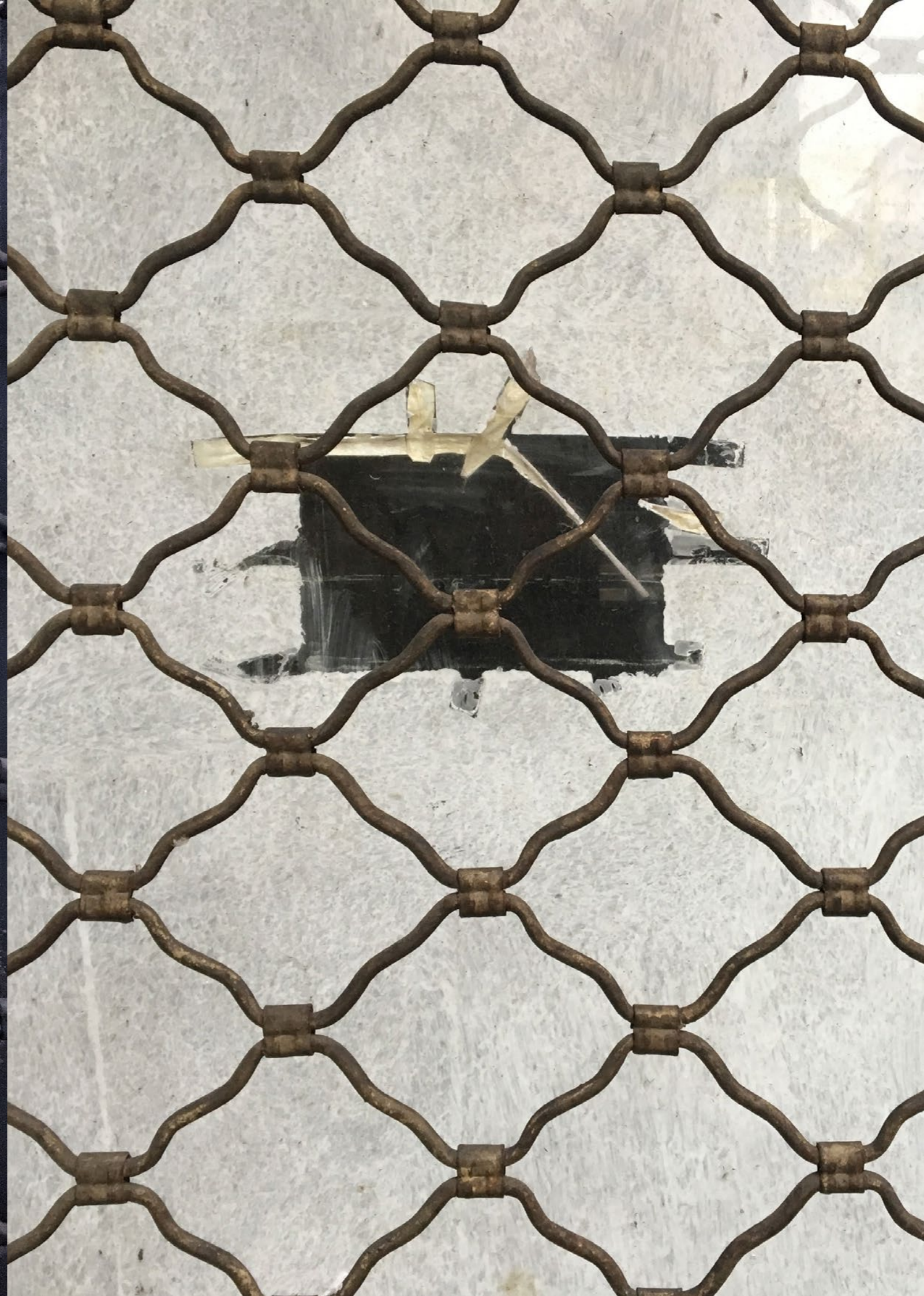
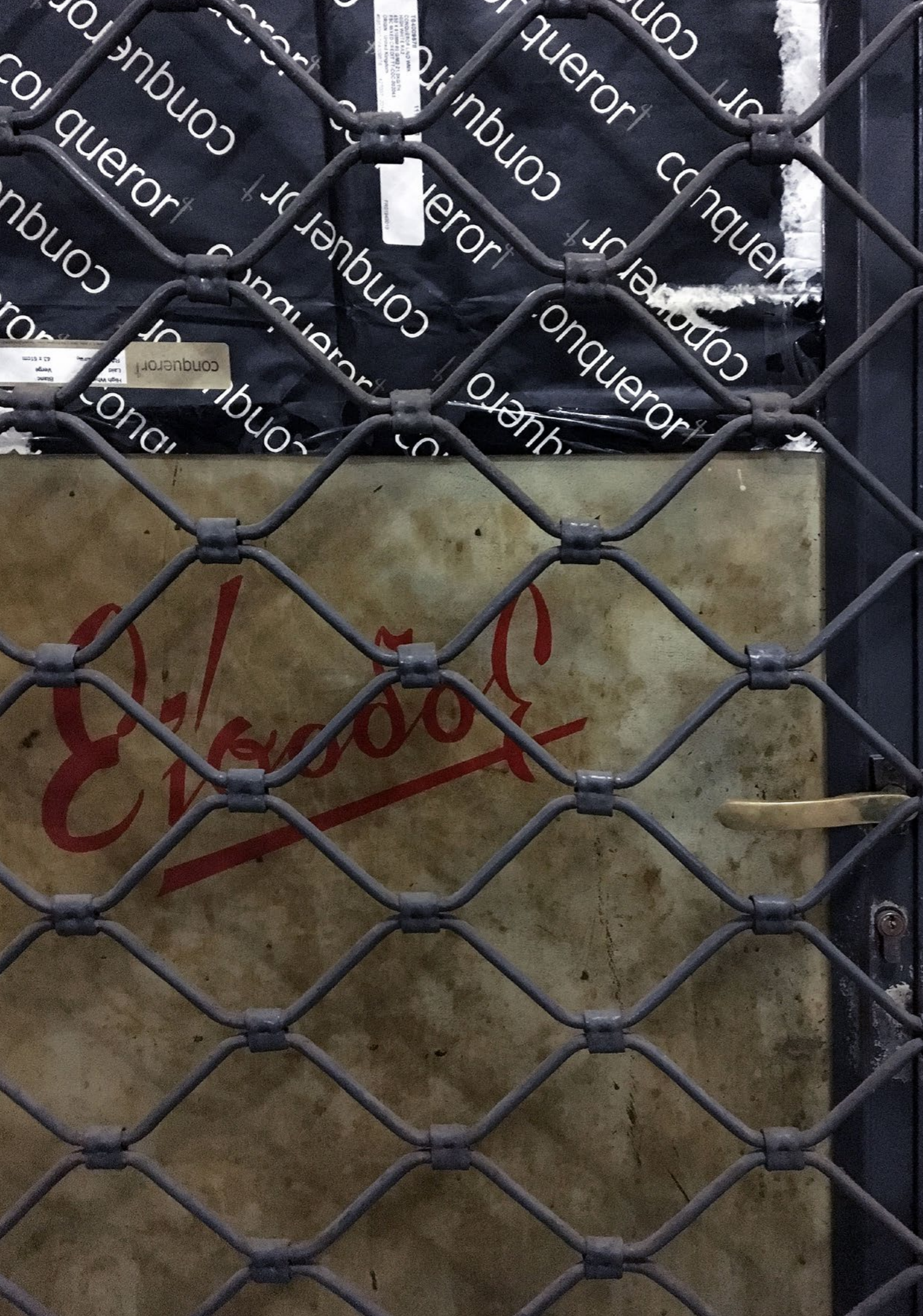


Collection of vacant shop windows (Katri N., 2016)



materiality

metal rolling grids and gates, wood panels, paint or paper are the tools for protecting or hiding the commercial voids by literally, in some cases, blocking the view of the passersby.







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GREEK...
НОВА АВ...
СЧИТАНО...
СОФИЯ-ПЛОВДИВ-...
СЛИВЕН-АЙТОС-БУРГА...
ГАБРОВО-ВЕЛИКО ТИ...
РУСЕ ДИМИТРОВ...
НАСКОВО...





Giorgos Spanos (48), owner of an old-books store in the center of Athens for more than 20 years, shares his own point of view on the crisis and the closed shops.

interview conducted by Nancy Katri on April 26th 2017

left: The facade of closed shop in Lykourgou arcade, image (Katri N.,2017)

‘At 4 pm the city transforms. The act of just walking around is now much more targeted. At 4 pm the ‘morning people’ have done their job, their cycle’

How are you related to Athens?

GS: Our business exists since 1929. For all these years there have been several physical stores. The one we are today, exists in Mauromixali street since 1976. It is very close to Akadimias street which is one of the most central in Athens.

How did you experience the crisis?

GS: The crisis for the center of Athens started in 2009. Especially for the ground floor of the city which traditionally constitutes the commercial life the image started changing at 2009. In 2010 a lot of shops closed or changed the way they were existing until that time. In our street there were shops that couldn't survive, couldn't afford the liabilities, the debts etc. The value of their stock started declining and there were a lot of cases that people were trying to sell their stock in very low prices. I know a case of a bookstore that was existing for more than 20 years and the owners had to mush up thousands of books because they couldn't sell them. This kind of disasters did not only affect the businesses but also the social and human relationships of the people involved. I know people that after their bankrupt they left the city and they disappeared.

What were the consequences for the city, in your opinion?

GS: In the city, it is not only the closed shutters and metal grids that you notice. It is a general shift. For us, people that were coming to our bookstore were following a traditional route like a walk. Their interest was both professional or recreational. In that area, for many decades, there was an invisible yard that was connecting all the bookstores. Bookstores were this type of cases that were stimulating the citizen to walk through the city in a systematic way. Something like a hangout, a meeting point. We had a traditional 'audience'. Between 2010-2012 this behavior changed. Those 'meeting points' closed down.

Another coincidence is that the Greek crisis concurred with the Internet and technological boom. For the first time we meet the e-commerce and the virtual shop windows. So, for us that was a second crisis within the crisis. I think the change of the image of Athens has also to do with that. We should take it into account for sure. Before the crisis, you wouldn't see people walking and looking at their smart-phones. I cannot be sure for the level that this influenced the commercial crisis. Soon the generation that was born in the crisis and the virtual world, will come and then we should see its reactions on things.

So, you notice a transformation in the city's image.

GS: The life of the city, from the beginning of the crisis, started lasting less within the 24h day. Until 2009 the city was alive for 24 hours. You could see that great movement of pedestrians, vehicles, several events etc. With the crisis this declined. Especially, after the capital controls during the summer of 2015, the city is alive only during the working hours, i.e. 4pm. At 4 pm the city transforms. The act of just walking around is now much more targeted. At 4pm the morning

people have done their job, their cycle. Saturday mornings that used to be very vivid days now are not. One reason is that people that live in the suburbs of the city now are not heading towards the center. They don't want to see the graffiti, the closed shutters because they can't afford to face the real situation of the country. In contrast, before the crisis, people were always happy to go to the movies or to a theatre and mostly for shopping in the center. Now they will do anything to avoid the center.

Among with the closed shops and probably due to that, there is a general decline in the urban landscape. Pedestrian streets, shared spaces, roads are abandoned. Criminality is arising, homeless people are getting more and more. There is a relation of continuity and discontinuity that brings all those negative consequences. If one block has only one shop in use and 10 closed, then the entire horizontal relation of the passersby, the employees or the inhabitants is being affected. Moreover, the verticality, i.e. the relation of the street with the upper floors is negatively affected. For example, a lot of burglaries are now occurring through the top floors of the *polikatikia* which are empty. The same is happening with the basements. Those are all hidden parts of the city that have been affected as well.



Surface of closed shop at Mauromixali street (N.Katri, 2016)

What feelings do you think this image generates?

GS: The view of the closed shops could cause from the biggest emotional affection to the biggest bleakness. For some they seem depressive, whereas for others they seem like a cold toll of the damages. For many people, the closed shops are the simplest proof of the crisis.

For many years, it was said that the main sector of the Greek economy was counting on the small and medium businesses. In opposition to the US, where it is common to have a center in a suburb that is the main market, Athens as a city was offering a big system of shops, offices, services that was mainly focus on the small and family businesses. This is very important, because you can now think of what happened with all those families that lost their businesses. There is an emotional affect.

GS: The image of the now has a great importance. I think that the future historians and psychiatrists will have a lot to say. This particular moment Athens is experiencing a traumatic almost an embattled situation. Of course, it is not Aleppo but there are some social aspects that have some commonalities. In psychology there is this term called 'denial'. There is a part of the Greek society that denied to accept that the city took a turn. They prefer not to see it, not to remember. I have seen that. Some others thought that crisis will never affect them and now it does. This is something that Europe has to consider. I believe that Europe will face more problems in the future.

'In psychology there is this term called 'denial'. There is a part of the Greek society that denied to accept that the city took a turn. They prefer not to see it, not to remember'

In that context, is there any kind of development that you notice?

GS: The only case of development is affecting some downgraded areas of the center where new bars, coffee places and cheap restaurants appeared. Now a downgraded street is Stadiou. That no one could predict it. This kind of streets were traditionally full of purchasing movement. That means that a historical continuation breaks. Shops that existed for 30-40 years are closing. A part of the history of the city is disappearing. And this is very bad for our country because there is zero regard on archiving. Thus, even if something new appears, it will not have the continuation of that historical depth.

My personal point of view is that the new generation did not act intelligently within the crisis. That means that I didn't see new innovations. The only I saw was new food and coffee places. I think this is because of the fear to risk and the big governmental control. Also, Europe made things very difficult for new ideas. Even if something good came, it couldn't last long. There is a general imbalance. Now we are in the point that the market is waiting for something.

How does your shop survive?

GS: When a lot of shops are closing, the ones that have an endurance absorb the clients of the former shops. That is something that happened with us as well. Some type of shops is also able to decrease the prices. Books is a product that can decrease the price more than 50%. If you are able to do so, you automatically address to more clients. Moreover, our business has old clients that will come here to find what they look for. Last but not least, very important is the tenacity and the zest you have. This you cannot demand it from old people. That is why there were a lot of cases of 70 years old shopkeepers that couldn't survive within the crisis. Thus, another consequence from the crisis and the closed shops is the loss of the knowhow from those old people.

Do you see this reality as a pause or as a permanent condition?

GS: Crisis will be a confrontation for the businesses with overabundance. It will also be a pause for the city and a heavy blow for the generation under 30 years old that grew up within the crisis. However, this generation is much more sensitized and maybe abler to claim what their parents' lost. It will be a challenge.

3.

THE RUINS



It is both the social and the aesthetic perception, that this emptiness and vacancy precipitate, what makes those urban voids so interesting.

According to how many years they remain empty, they represent different perceptions of the crisis and time. A strong symbolism is emanating from them, that of the layers of time and, thus, crisis passing through them. In an allegorical way, these spaces are standing within the city next to all those layers of history and ruins present in and around Athens nowadays. In that realm, one could say that those façades are turning into the 'new ruins' of the city, creating a new 'archeology' and a contemporary urban ruinscape. Of course, the way memory works regarding those spaces and the ancient ruins of Acropolis, for instance, is a totally different process since we are referring to different pasts, durations and values. Nevertheless, the crisis in Greece seems or at least feels as a permanent reality. Thus, highlighting the aspect of permanence could be an interesting point of departure, linking both to notions of monumentality – if we think about it in aesthetic terms – and crisis – if we think of it in political terms.

The notion of permanence is also mentioned by Aldo Rossi (1984) based on Marcel Poete's theory about persistence that says that ruins are the physical signs of the past. Rossi conceptualizes permanence as having two aspects. The first one are the *propelling* elements which have different functions over time but still condition the urban space. The second are the *pathological* elements, which are artifacts not in use and are isolated in the city. Persistence can transform an artifact into a monument, and a monument takes part in urban development.

In the Paris arcades of the 1920s and 1930s, Walter Benjamin recognized the traces of a recent past, that has easily occurred by forgetting, a reference that brings to mind the *politics of forgetfulness* of today (as mentioned in chapter one). For the visitor in Benjamin's time, the Parisian arcades presented a collection of unused shop façades and peculiar stores. The various reflections that grew out of Benjamin's fascination with these semi-derelict spaces of early consumer culture provided the foundation for *The Arcades Project*. What

was the value that Benjamin was looking for in the arcades? As portals crossing the threshold between the now and the what-has-been, the arcades in a state of decay proved to be a fertile ground for Benjamin's ideas. In them, he found the origins of his own era and he saw those arcades as a depiction of the degeneracy of the industrial capitalistic system. Benjamin lays their gradual decay in the tendency of capitalism to regenerate from its own forces. Seeing those arcades or the current ones not only as a consequence but also as a cause a question would be easily formed. If the abandoned spaces are used not despite, but because of their decay, what purpose can modern ruins serve for understanding contemporary urban spaces (Fraser, 2013)?

Seen in this light, the modern ruins of Athens are as much a stage in which history is taking place as any newsroom or the parliament. The example of the vacant shops of Athens is a case of ruined sites of a recent, remembered and reachable past. In those derelict façades decay is not only a natural phenomenon but also a social condition and a process that followed an almost mathematical, linear procedure, that of crisis. In Stadiou street the question is expanding; how can these modern ruins serve for innovating the contemporary public space?

In the Athenian context, hidden in the city's surface there are layers of multiple foundations from the area's different epochs: ancient Greek, Roman, Hellenistic, Byzantine, Ottoman. As Aristide Antonas (2015) suggests, the modern city can also be conceived as such reading material. We could see Athens as a palimpsest of those epochs. A palimpsest of time passing and stories. This emphatic character of the city is inevitably affecting the way we observe it since the idealization of Classical Greek remains, which was constructed in parallel with the establishment of Athens as the new Hellenic capital.

In relation to this argumentation stands the theory that evokes the immediacy to delete the old reference to the ancient ruins as a characteristic of the Athenian present.

'Today the post-democratic imaginary is built as the impossibility of a return to the European state; in it, ancient Greece might have been an uninteresting idealization but it also formed the fire of instability and a promising negation of the present' (Antonias, 2015). Indeed, the recent *modern ruins* of Stadiou street hide a deeper radicality and urgency of the now.

Thinking of those commercial voids of today, there is this correlation among them and the city. The palimpsest of time passing and stories is still a feature of both. Taking the empty space of the closed shops as a case study of the character of the city or more particularly of the city in times of crisis, we can decode them and analyze them as systems of elements both spatially or politically. 'When we wander through contemporary Athens, we experience its collapsed materiality as barely legible, encoded subject-matter. We read it as a prophecy that announces the cataclysmic,

but nevertheless heroic, collapse of Europe' (Antonias, 2015).

There is a great fascination regarding the *ruin*, which is this exact dichotomy of its nature. Being on the one hand the ultimate inconsumable object and on the other a direct product of market forces, albeit possibly in a negative way. As a remainder of the principle of supply and demand, but also as a structurally necessary remainder, as the excess of supply. The fascination with ruination does not stop with contemplation; it has affected renovations and new constructions as well. 'But the ruin is an ultimately ambiguous object; its allegiance tends to shift when one is not looking. Its meaning turns out to be impossible to control in the long run. The rubble that to the entrepreneur signifies future opportunities can easily be regarded as a social or environmental disaster to others' (Kosec, 2016).



Modern ruins of Athens: Likourgou arcade, Omonoia (Katri N., 2016)

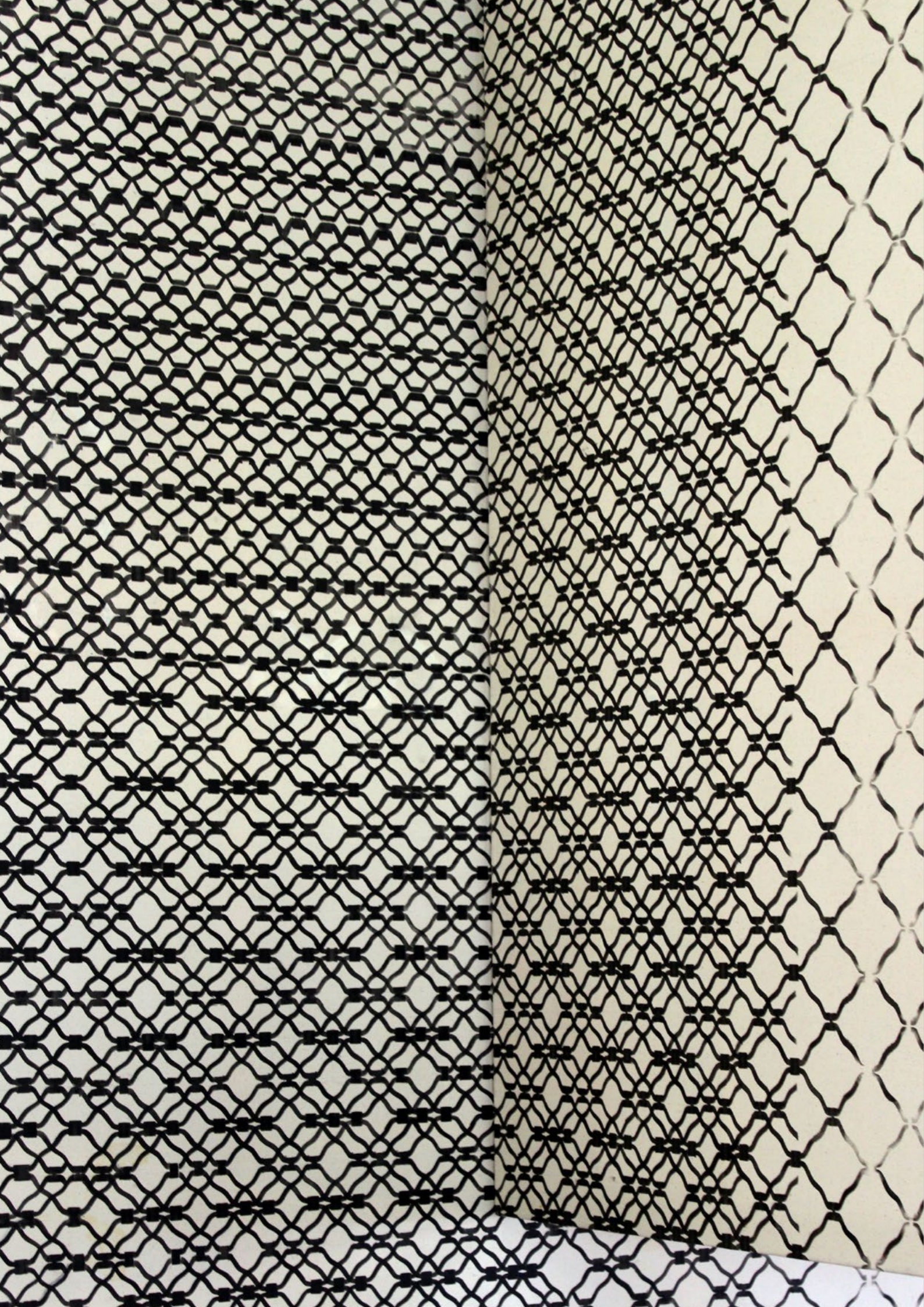
The Athenian shop window, mirroring this unusable but structurally necessary void of the globalized market is one of the most direct manifestations of this peculiar rift between *unused and structurally necessary*. There is an intermediary role of the former shops in the public space, which is only reinforced by their abandonment. Ruination as a kind of communal project, at the same time, communalize and seals off the *ruin*. In that realm, Stadiou street in its derelict state of the last decade could be seen as the outcome of the market and as the epitome of the experience of reality and memory in Athens but also as a trigger for envisioning the future. The information that could be found regarding and/or on those modern ruins and their image can be a challenge for a generic interpretation of the urban space and crisis as a fact. The documentation of the image of the ruined shops in Athens is important for Giorgos Spanos, an owner of a bookstore in the center of Athens for almost 30 years. 'The image of the now has a great importance. I think that the future historians and psychiatrists will have a lot to say about it. This particular moment Athens is experiencing a traumatic, almost an embattled, situation. In psychology there is this term called 'denial'. There is a part of the Greek society that denied to accept that the city took a turn. They prefer not to see it, not to remember. Some thought that crisis will never affect them and now it does (Spanos,2017).





Acropolis view from Lycabettus hill (Katri N., 2013)





Frini Mouzakitou (53), artist, talks about her latest project ‘The Athénée Project’ which is hosted in the interior of a closed down shop in the Arsakeios arcade, which is now a ‘landmark’ for the vacant commercial arcades of Athens. It is an ‘in situ’ project that reflects the notions of crisis through the patterns that the closed down shops and the arcade provide.

interview conducted by Nancy Katri on April 30th 2017

left: Detail of ‘The Athénée Project by Frini Mouzakitou. image (Katri N..2017)

‘When I first came here I was completely shocked by the number of the closed shops and that image of dereliction. It was like a corridor of impressions that you just walk through and everything is still.’

How are you related to Athens?

FM: I was born in Athens and I have experienced the city in several conditions. Ten years ago I moved in the northern suburbs and I lost the everyday contact with the center. In reality, the years that I do not live here were the years that changed Athens due to the crisis.

How did you decided to work in the Arsakeios arcade?

FM: When I first came here, I was completely shocked by the number of the closed shops and that image of dereliction. It was like a corridor of impressions that you just walk through and everything is still. There were only 3 shops left open. Meanwhile, due to the fact that this arcade is supervised by the owners, it is very clean, well ordered. It is not possible for homeless people to sleep or for anyone to place something here without permission. I think that’s why there a strong character that this arcade holds. You cannot even remove the signs of the former shops. This is happening because this arcade is unique for Athens due to its architecture. When it was built is was addressing mostly to the bourgeoisie and that is why it reminds of the European arcades of the 19th century.

My drawings of the patterns of the grids from the closed shops were already exhibited before in a gallery. Once I came here and I saw all those metal grids of the locked shutters and thought that those pieces became live again. I knew that they have to be here, that they belong here. The fact that I chose this space, gave a second reading on it. Although in the begging I thought I will make a static exhibition, afterwards I realized that I cannot help it but using the space what is provided me. It felt like it couldn’t have happened differently.

What was the idea behind this patterns?

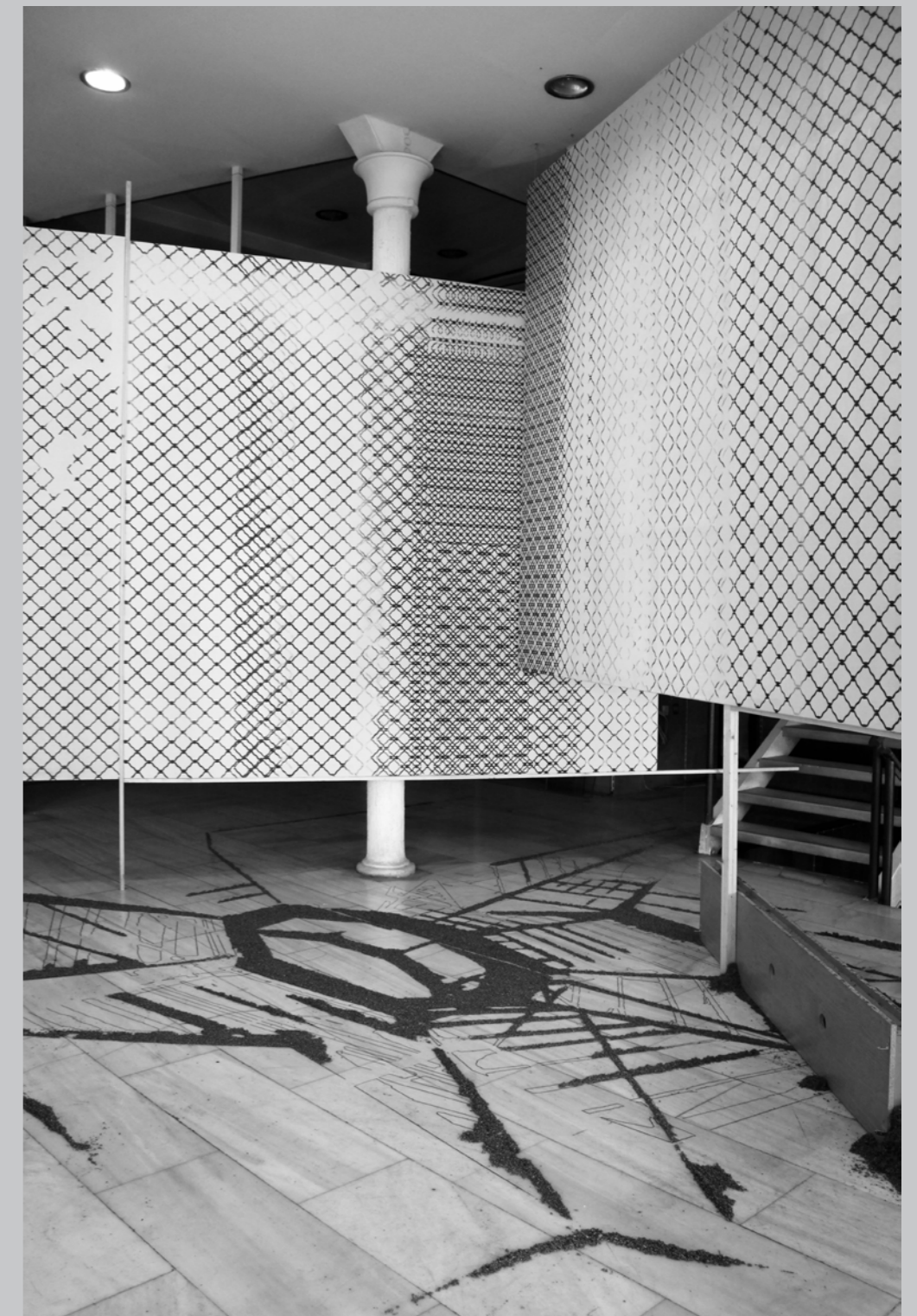
FM: In that project the main point was the repetition of the patterns and the mesh that the overlap of the same pattern creates. It creates a rhythm and a motif. What I was interested in showing was the shift of one thing to another. Something exists, it changes in something else through repetition and it appears again in its primary state. That was a simulation of how I was thinking of the crisis. That pattern was the economic situation of the country.

In the description of your project you refer to the ‘cabinet of abstraction’ as your main influence, could you explain why?

FM: It is a reference from the art history. The ‘cabinet of abstraction’ was an initiative of Lissitzky, in close collaboration with Alexander Dormer who was the curator of the Hannover Provincial Museum. That idea was that to exhibit modernist pieces of art in a space that will correlate with them. They wanted to create one unseparated unity of the art and the space. That reference encouraged me to put my pieces in that space. But, eventually, after coming here I noticed that the space itself

generated a condition and a desire to work with it. I worked with the pattern of the beautiful roof, with unused materials that I found inside the shop, like glasses, carpets, hangers etc. The space itself and the neighborhood fed this project.

Another aspect that completed my thoughts was the presence of Benjamin Walter, who was an emblematic figure of Modernism and wrote the *Arcade Project* referring to the politics of his time. He talked about those commercial arcades, he talked about history and he was a victim of the Nazis. He gave me the inspiration for this piece of the iron filings that is a reference to the degeneration of the capitalistic system.



‘The Athénée Project by Frini Mouzakitou, image (Katri N.,2017)

In what sense?

FM: The iron filings that reminds me of a decomposed condition has a great meaning for this project. It is not only the connection with the grids of the shops or the material or the roof but it is a reference to modernism and history. The alternation of political forces, the polarization, the violence, the demonstrations where the features that changed the image of the city. It was not only the economic crisis that shut down the shops but also the great amount of riots and fires. There was a general negative feeling towards the city center. I found a connection with the situation of Athens and the situation of Germany during the Interwar period, of course in a different scale. There was a period during the Weimar Republic that there was a feeling of defeat, punishment, economic crisis and all that created a good condition for Hitler to be democratically elected. I was shocked by the fact that fascist parties got elected in Greece as well. Seeing that those voices become more and more, I see that there is no common sense in things. We lost our logic. So, this extreme polarization of Germany back then, came in Greece nowadays and you see that people act extremely. For me, this project is referring a lot to the moment that we are experiencing now. It could be named 'Learning from Weimar' just like documenta is named 'Learning from Athens'. In generally I believe that history repeats itself either as a comedy or a tragedy. We should study it a lot.

'The space itself generated a condition and a desire to work with it. I worked with the pattern of the beautiful roof, with unused materials that I found inside the shop, like glasses, carpets, hangers etc. The space itself and the neighborhood fed this project'

Was the image of the city an influence as well?

FM: It became eventually. The fact that I had to walk in the very center every day in order to reach the arcade was a route that I found it shocking and at the end this route shaped this project. I was walking through Exarcheia district, through the main streets of the city, seeing what is happening, smelling and experiencing the urban space. The facades of the closed shops outside the arcade are not like the ones here. They are full of graffiti and posters and colors that they constitute the skin of the city and this is a feature of Athens that you cannot see in other European cities that much. The foreigners that come here to visit the country or to work find this as an expression of freedom. Athens right now, especially because of the crisis and the refugees, is in the center of attention. It is the European city that its image reflects, better than no other place, the drama of our era.

Were there any conclusions for you after working in the arcade?

FM: What I understood from the shopkeepers that still have their businesses here, is that when a lot of shops are closing in a space or a street, this is spread like a disease, a virus. When there is only one small shop open people do not reach it. So, when a shop is shutting down, in reality, the whole neighborhood is doing

'The facades of the closed shops outside the arcade are not like the ones here. They are full of graffiti and posters and colors that they constitute the skin of the city'

the same. The commercial fabric is weakened. This is happening in Athens. There are some open shops but the general movement is low. The commercial competition that two shops next to each other might have is an advantage eventually.

The crisis in Greece had lasted a lot of years, almost a decade. It is difficult for things to change, but I believe things will develop somehow. We have been in worse situations and we made it. What I fear is the monster of fascism that comes. When people do not live good, they start questioning the political system and democracy and they can act without thinking.

Do you think that art can give solutions?

FM: I am not sure how powerful art can be nowadays. Maybe films or music can affect the society more than a project like mine. I don't consider myself only an artist. I am a citizen. I can talk, I can act, I can have my opinion. I am also a teacher, a mother. But, there were some people who came here and got emotional when they saw again this space and they recalled their memories from it. Everyone is hurt and everyone is experiencing the crisis. People now are more sensitive. In that sense, the crisis helped us to realize who we are, what we have, how we should have acted when we had more.

What would be a summary of your experience in that project?

FM: For sure, this project is a political one. The way that I experienced that space, the pieces and the references to Weimar and Modernism within the limits of a ruin, that is this space, made me talk about Democracy and how uncertain it is nowadays. And this is a global problem of course.

'People now are more sensitive. In that sense, the crisis helped us to realize who we are, what we have, how we should have acted when we had more'



Interior image of an empty shop at Arsakeios arcade (Katri N., 2013)

4.

THE MEMORY



The first, straightforward approach to the city, taken by every individual, is looking at it, which constitutes a five sense aesthetic experience through space and time.

An urban system can, therefore, be either perceived as stable or in constant change, which is the most noticeable effect of external factors affecting any environment (Lynch, 1960).

Returning to the primary role of the shop window, the latter exists only with the commodities it displays. It is a promotional tool, a stimulation of consumption. Still, the shop window, as it is, expresses the way one's identity is depending on social standards, as mentioned by Laura Oswald. 'The pane of glass separating the object of desire from the shopper resembles a psychic 'mirror', a surface for receiving and reflecting back the projections of the shopper both looking and being looked at' (Oswald, 1996).

Now that the object of desire is gone, this 'mirror' effect continues to happen spontaneously with each movement of the citizens, the flow of society. Due to its materiality, the surface in the cases that the glass is still exposed and not hidden, is still *receiving and reflecting back the projections* of a society and of an urban space, in this case, astir and chaotic respectively.

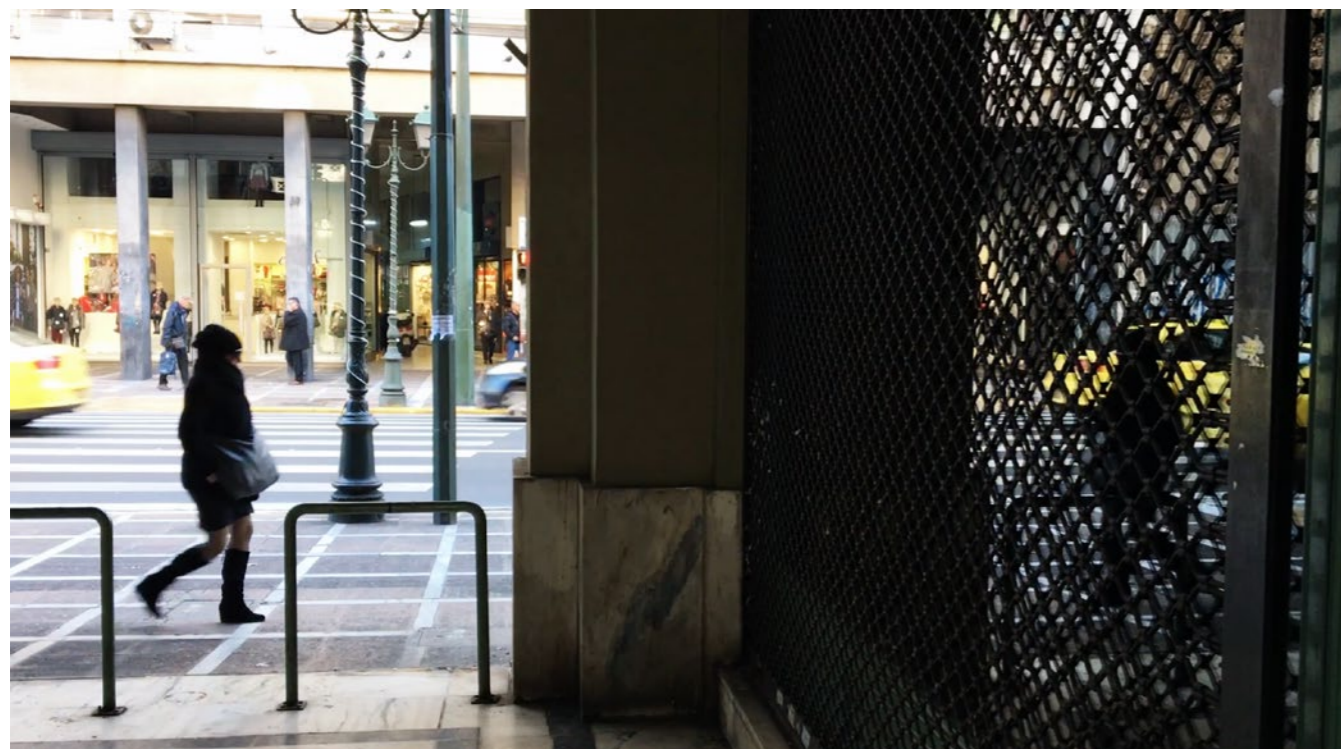
The compelling feature of this phenomenon is the symbolism that is being unfolded; life still continues despite and within this *ruinscape*. Nevertheless, although human nature has the tendency to adjust, the reason why memory is important is because it stands at the antipodes of *forgetfulness*.

In an essay "Anorexic Ruins" published in 1989, the French theorist Jean Baudrillard reads the Berlin wall as a sign of a frozen history, of an anorexic history, in which nothing more can happen, marked by a "lack of events" and the end of history, taking the Berlin wall as a sign of a stasis between communism and capitalism. Even if shortly thereafter, rather significant events destroyed the wall that Baudrillard took as permanent, his description strongly reveals the parallelism of space and memory. 'It is no longer the building that goes up in flames and the cities that collapse; it is the hertzian relays of our memories that crackle' (Baudrillard, 1989).

We usually understand collective memory as related to particular places where specific events are being recalled. 'Collective memory, thus, uses space as a kind of repository of meaning, open to those who know how to navigate their way in an inhabited environment marked by socially recognizable indicators' (Stavrides, 2016).

Thus, one could argue that the understanding of collective memory runs parallel to experiencing the space. If, however, we identify memory as always in-the-making, then we should also try to recognize the ways that space is engaged in such a process. As a further thought, memory in-the-making not only employs space but also affects it. In his study on oblivion, Marc Augé uses a spatial example to describe the relationship between memory and oblivion. 'Memories are crafted by oblivion as the outlines of the shore are created by the sea' (Augé, 2004). Following an association on Augé, 'if it is always a matter of struggling to define the porous border between memory and oblivion, then space too is created through a kind of heightened awareness about the role that outlines play. And it is on the intermediary zones (like the beach) that the meaning of spatial outlines is at stake (Stavrides, 2016).

Still frame from the short film 'reflected' (Katri N., 2016)



4.1

DEFACEMENT

What could possibly follow is to perceive the logic of a certain memory mechanism that forms this kind of intermediary zones. Trying to analyse such actions, Stavros Stavrides (2016) writes that ‘this particular mechanism involves acts and gestures that interfere with the meaning of public space (a crucial component of collective memory) by manipulating images that shape its perception’. In describing this, we can use the term *defacement*. Defacement refers to acts aimed at distorting the image of space and also generate memory shocks by providing the ground for revealing comparisons between the past and the present status of a certain ‘face’. It is not simply a matter of recalling but also a way of bringing forth layers of repressed collective experiences and activating knowledge connected with the defaced places.

In 1995 an official act of defacement took place in Berlin. The Bulgarian artist Christo, extended his art of wrapping buildings and sites to include the Reichstag building. This act was argued as a gesture towards the Reichstag’s role in German history. The building was masked and hidden from view without, however, disappearing. The distorted image reduced the site to a strange object, like some kind of memory erasure. According to Andreas Huyssen, what Christo managed was to create ‘a monumentality that can do without permanence and without destruction ... informed by the modernist spirit of a fleeting and transitory epiphany’ (Huyssen, 2003). While the creation of historic monuments is an essentially selective act (Boyer, 1996) which defines what is worthy of remembrance or of oblivion, Christo’s wrapping generates a kind of contradictory monumentality. In a way, it unveiled what was out of sight when it was visible (Stavrides, 2016). Could this be a reaction towards Stadiou street? Possibly, a *contradictory monumentality* is what

could manage to innovate the particular urban image of Stadiou street in favour of a communal interpretation (as mentioned in chapter three). Following that process, defacement could be the way to go.

Defacement can be expressed through different physical forms, directed against the spatial form or the materiality of the public space. Traces of destruction, rebuilding or erosion. Additionally, a mental defacement can occur by means of re-interpretation or a narrative following a specific site.



Eirini Mari (49), phsycologist and employer in the center of Athens for more 25 years, shares her own point of you on the crisis and the experience of the city.

interview conducted by Nancy Katri on April 26th 2017

left: The 'house' of a homeless person in front of the facade of a closed shop (Katri N., 2016)

‘There is still a kind of contact with the closed shops. When I see them, with all those posters, they remind me of a forest that was burnt but there is still life in it. Life that has resistance and water underneath’

How are you related to Athens?

EM: I live in Athens since I was a child. I am a psychologist and for the last 25 years I work in the center. I work in Exarcheia which a very vivid and intense area of a high political context. I use the public transportation and I walk every day in the center.

The big amount of closed down shops is a common image in the city center. What are your thoughts regarding that?

EM: In the beginning, seeing that great amount of closed down shops was very intense. Mostly, because it was happening at the major streets and a lot of well-known shops were closing one after the other. That effect was a shock in the sense of a dereliction. Of course, it concurred with a general feeling of compression. We experienced a shock.

However, new alternative and creative businesses started appearing. Women that were selling homemade food or clothes, for example. Maybe there were not famous brands, but there was a personal creativity and in affordable prices. Other shops or better their facades became spots of posters covering. In that sense, you can see advertisements of theatrical and other cultural events. This is very common. There is still a kind of contact with the closed shops. When I see them, with all those posters, they remind me of a forest that was burnt but there is still life in it. Life that has resistance and water underneath. So, as time is passing the urban landscape takes a different shape.

Is that ‘new’ image of the city affecting the society?

EM: For sure, there is a part of the society that is still in shock when facing the new image of the city. The center of Athens has always been the place where you could have a walk, a coffee or window-shop. That has been limited today.

The image of the closed shop windows has already been recorded in the collective memory of the society. The last years, as I walk towards my office, I see homeless people sleeping in front of the closed shops in the ground floor of a *polikatikia*. This will never be deleted from our memory. When, you notice, in a limited period of time, such a change and disaster, you cannot forget it. Not only as a fact but also as a feeling.

Is there any kind of information we can get out of those shops and their image?

EM: In the beginning, the level of depression was huge but now I notice some traces of hope. But still, we talk about a transitional moment. And because that moment is important, the documentation, the image, the research of the situation is important to be done so that we recall that things in life are not always following an increasing and positive path.

On the other hand, another part of the society could see that big amount of shops and those extremely high prices as provocative. It is true that there was a kind of exaggeration in every aspect, such as extremely high rental prices. The result on this exaggeration was the high price of the products and so on. In my opinion, there was a hubris and something fake in the way that the market and the whole system was working. Maybe this is now shown in that derelict image of those facades.

Could you elaborate a bit more on that?

EM: Crisis was a way to highlight that fact that we can do it in a different way and we can survive based on our own forces. It feels like a bubble that deflated. Of course, the healthy businesses existed and possibly still exist. And, maybe those who had certain quality had a profit. I have seen cases of shops that have been benefited from crisis. But, I think the key point is that they are working with Greek raw materials, with a high qualified product and uniqueness.

So, what do the closed shops represent in your opinion?

EM: For sure, the closed down shops represent the crisis in a high level. A large part of the population was supporting those businesses and that part now is not able to do so. This is justified by the reduction of salaries and all the burdens that the society has to face. But, personally I always like to have an optimistic point of view on things. I could say that we are experiencing a transient state as a country. Phoenix has to rise from the ashes. So, maybe the closed shops apart from the representatives or the results of the crisis, are also the reminders of that exaggeration that was happening and the need for the urban image to change into something new. Maybe this is a big chance for a positive change.

Even the fact that we can survive with closed shops in Stadiou street and we can still have fun and that the city can look nice, means a lot for the future. Some facades of closed shops that you see are beautiful, full of messages and interesting features. This could mean that we might not need all those shops with shoes, or with clothes, but instead new images. Personally, I need that. I need to see new things. And this is not happening yet. Maybe in a low level, I see it in the area of Exarcheia where those closed facades have turned into canvases.

‘There was a hubris and something fake in the way that the market and the whole system was working. Maybe this is now shown in that derelict image of those facades’

How could you imagine them in the future?

EM: Especially because most of the cases of the streets with closed shops are in the very center, I could imagine them as spaces of multiple functions where you could have a coffee, read a book, meet with people, do a presentation, sell your homemade products. These kind of spaces does not exist in Athens. We need something fresh. Crisis can be both a danger and an opportunity. I believe that in Greece we can see it as an opportunity.

‘Some facades of the closed shops that you see are beautiful, full of messages and interesting features. This could mean that we might not need all those shops with products, but instead new images’

Posters covering the facade of a closed shop in Exarcheia (Katri N., 2017)



However, the ‘old’ always has a strong endurance. Maybe the future can be a mixture of the old and the new. The only sure thing for me is that something better will occur. Not despite but because of the pressure that we face in economic and social terms, better things are happening, better spaces have been created.

Do you see this reality as a pause or as a permanent condition?

EM: I do not see this period as a pause nor as permanence. For me, both of those notions hide a kind of ‘stasis’, a stagnation. I believe that nothing can stay stagnant. I see it as a transition, as a wave with different levels. Maybe now we are experiencing the highest moment of crisis and in a way or another this will back down. I trust the forces of the people and this place that was always trying to find its way. Memory is part of the history but also part of the force to rebuilt and go on. Maybe those images of the situation are both the tool and the material for what is about to happen.

‘Memory is part of the history but also part of the force to rebuilt and go on. Maybe those images of the situation are both the tool and the material for what is about to happen’

5.

STADIOU STREET



Benjamin's *flâneur* of modern Athens could possibly face a similar experience with the one he faced in the arcades of Paris.

The streets of the city present a big collection of unused shop windows and semi-derelict spaces of the current culture. Again they are marking the borderline between the now and the what-has-been in the recent past.

The network of streets of the Greek capital is a chaotic and dense system. Nigerian photographer Akinbode Akinbiyi (2017), one of the participant artists of documenta 14, characteristically highlights that 'Athens from above looks so peaceful and well ordered. But, once you are down in that density, you realize how many the problems are, the economic problems but also how people accommodate this closeness and pressure'.

Stadiou street is one of the city's major streets, and the borderline of the so-called *commercial triangle* of Athens that connects the two main squares of the city center. In the encyclopedia article, Stadiou street is described as 'mainly a shopping street, with upscale shops clustering towards Syntagma Square and lower scale ones towards Omonoia Square' ("Stadiou Street," 2017). However, the reality of today is different. The latest surveys announce Stadiou street as one the streets that have suffered the worst impact from the crisis with more than 1/3 of its shops closed down. The local newspapers report that 'in a street that was traditionally considered as one of the most commercial streets of the Greek capital, the shops are closing one after the other. The most striking is that it is impossible to be replaced by new businesses due to the high rental prices which makes it hard for people to risk their capital' (Papadopoulos, 2011).

It becomes clear that the whole face of the street has completely transformed. Due to its very central location, Stadiou street is now holding a political identity. Stadiou street has suffered from immaterial and material damage, but it has also been the site of political and social expression. Starting from Omonoia square and ending at Syntagma square, where the parliament of Greece is located, the street is part of every riot and demonstration. Stavros Stavrides (2016) argues that 'demonstrations and

relevant transgressive practices not only produce political events but may also deface dominant street images'. If we consider that public space is also understood as a social artifact through commonplace images that set and recreate its meaning, then 'this kind of *defacement* practices directed against the recognizable material support of these images can produce collective memory shocks' (Stavrides, 2016).

Following Stavrides, the streets of Athens, and particularly in our case Stadiou street, are already experiencing a certain defacement. Apart from that, it could be further interpreted as a site where a (con) temporary *contradictory monumentality* (as mentioned in chapter four) will provoke an extra reading of the street and the urban derelict space. An emphasis could be given which shows the importance of those spaces as *commonplace, thresholds, modern ruins, memorial and social sites* (as mentioned in the previous chapters).

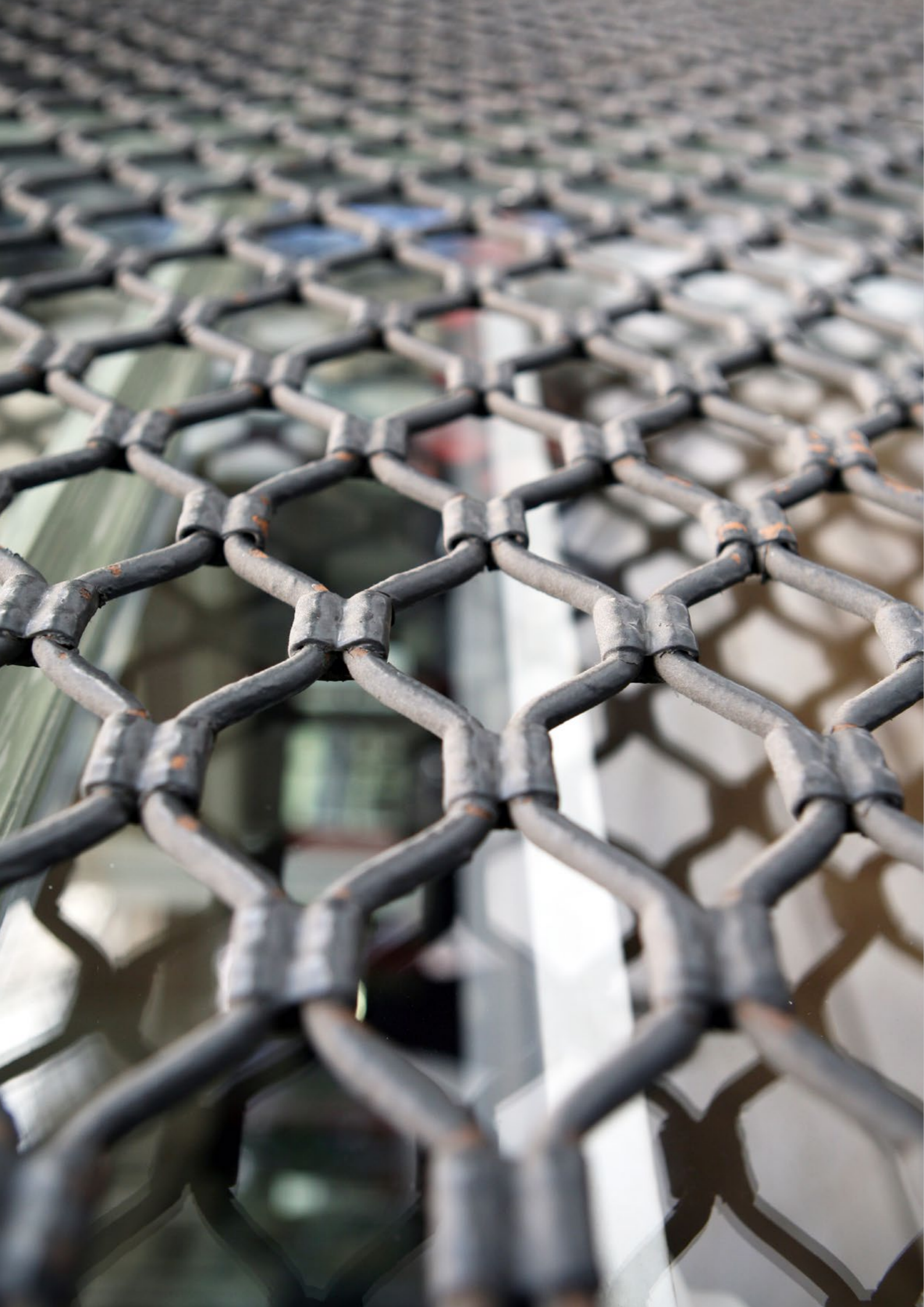




58

ΚΑΜΙΑ
ΔΙΩΣΗ
ΣΤΗΝ ΑΝΤΙΣΤΑΣΗ

CAMBIO



The owners of two of the oldest shops in Stadiou street share their experience in a spontaneous conversation.

interview conducted by Nancy Katri on April 28th 2017

left: Detail of the window of a closed shop in Stadiou street (Katri N..2017)

**‘Stadiou street was ‘gold’. Back in the 80s’
the value of the street was 20.000€ per m2.
That was a huge amount for the era’**

**Evangelos Papageorgiou (74) is the owner a men’s clothing
shop in Stadiou 39 for 35 years.**

When did you open this shop?

EP: I have my shop in Stadiou street since 1980. Back then, that street was ‘gold’. In order to open a shop here you should have been in a special position, have money and good connections. Back in the 80s’ the value of the street was 20.000€ per m2. That was a huge amount for the era. I managed to buy this shop and have a great success.

What is the situation today?

EP: The quality of the street decreased. The new shops that open are only cafeterias or fast food shops. The cafeterias you see now open took the place of old shops selling clothes, shoes, watches, jewelries. Next to me, there was a men’s clothing shop as well. It is now closed for 5-6 years. The rent that they were paying was 12.000€ per month for 80m2. When the shop closed, they open a children’s clothing shop where the rent was 2.000€ per month. Even with this rent, they didn’t make it more than 2 years and now it is closed again. This is the cycle. Shops that opened during the crisis stayed only for 2-3 years. The situation is disappointing. But, the problem is that since you own a shop, like I do, you cannot sell it or rent it because its value will decline dramatically. If you are not able to work on your own, you will lose your business. That is what happened with a lot of shops close by. I am lucky to have my son who is helping me. And I still have my clientele. It is very difficult. But let’s see. We hope.

**‘If you are not able to work on your own,
you will lose your business. That is what
happened with a lot of shops close by. I am
lucky to have my son who is helping me.’**

**‘In Stadiou the biggest problem now is the
great amount of riots happening almost
every day. Unfortunately, the biggest
commercial street of Athens had been
transformed into a riot street’**

**Anastasios Makriniotis (66) is the owner of ‘Platon’, a
jewellery’s shop in Stadiou 33 for 30 years.**

**As an owner of a shop in Stadiou street, what is the biggest problem that you
are facing?**

AM: In Stadiou street the biggest problem now is the great amount of riots happening almost every day. Unfortunately, the biggest commercial street of Athens had been transformed into a riot street. After a riot, we spend the entire night cleaning the sprays from our façade. Every day we are afraid and we ready to save our shop from vandalism. They break the glass from the windows and the marble from the pillars to use them as weapons against the police. Riots in Athens is not an easy case. The damages for a shop are extremely big. A lot of shopkeepers were tired to deal with that and closed their business. That was the case for the shoe shop next to us.

**In that sense, it is very hard for a business to survive in Stadiou street. Is that
right?**

AM: All those everyday riots limit the access of Stadiou street. That decreased the profit for the shops that together with the economic crisis couldn’t survive. There are only 5-6 old shops that survived and this is due to their typical clients. Nowadays, it is impossible to create a shop. My advice for the young people is not to do it. It will be a mistake. The only type of shops that is easier to open are the cafeterias or snack shops. But even them, after 2-3 years they are closing. This is what I see in Stadiou street.

How does your business still survive?

AM: I have been having my business here for 30 years. All those years a certain clientele has been created which is composed by the employees of the city center. There is no visitor in the center of Athens anymore. No one from the suburbs will come to the center to shop. This habit changed. Thus, the shops that are still open are only serving the employees mainly the ones at the banks. This is what holds us still here, but I cannot tell for sure if we will be able to be here next year. This is a big uncertainty. The street at 7pm is empty. It is an absurdity to think that the most commercial street of the center is becoming dangerous.

**The only type of shops that is easier to open
are the cafeterias or snack shops. But even
them, after 2-3 years they are closing.**

5.1

SPECULATIONS

Stadiou street can possibly be the receptacle for speculative moments and interventions that absorb all the former analysis. The list of the different possibilities and affordances could vary, of course, based on the multiple consequences that they might evoke. Defacement could be an attempt to first capture the situation and then to challenge memory and interpretation.

Using Christo's reference, an addition of an extra layer that might hide but at the same time emphasizes the façades of the shop windows, could be a first almost instinctive gesture. By multiplying and varying those moments along the street, in different spots, the gesture might be communalized.

This idiosyncratic and simplistic action could be followed or accompanied by more radical ones. The two-dimensional space remains a communicational feature towards the public. In order for the passersby to notice it, to challenge it and think about it as a *modern ruin* or/and a *borderline*, the space that surrounds this surface needs a kind of reinforcement, either spatially or conceptually. The reinforcement could be achieved with material elements that reflect the analysis of the material ruins that form those spaces and façades. Since the interior space is blocked, a challenge for the public could be to re-experience the spatiality of those locations in the exterior open space. The perimeter of the façade might formulate the borders of the intervention. The visual, material or spatial language could follow the whole theory regarding *memory*, *remembrance*, *irretrievability* (as mentioned in the previous chapters). A metal frame, a scaffolding, a billboard structure are all examples of how the 'public space' of the closed shops could be reformulated to not only symbolize but also create a literal space to host events, collective or individual.

Additionally, the character of the interventions could expand beyond the borders of the spatial additions. The reverse, again instinctive gesture, could be the demolition of the façades that will reflect on the interpretation of the public space. As a reply to Nolli's reference, the commercial void becomes 'white' space and returns to the inhabitant of the city in order to act, depending on social or spatial affordances; a place for the informal market to occur, for instance. This moment created could also address the 'failure' of the globalized market and refer to the historical time when the 'ground floor' of the city served not only the shop culture, but public life in general. The speculations that could possibly follow might be more or less radical and aggressive. The common consequence for the urban landscape would be similar to that *contradictory monumentality* that defacement practices accomplish (as mentioned in chapter four). By those means, an emphasis is given to how the city is being transformed and how functions have changed. The moments offered should be both social and aesthetic and represent a given reality in a given city facing a given process of crisis.

The Greek crisis is an example of a bigger crisis. Athens is not a unique case. However, its emblematic character could be a case study of how finance and space can converge and transform urban landscapes. Thinking in a larger scale, the representation of the unused and *white* space of Stadiou street could become a trigger for activation and a 'template' for possible futures to occur that will address to any location dealing with similar realities. The *template* of Stadiou is a challenge for memory and activation and both the tool and the material for what is about to happen.





Demolition of the vacant shop windows in Stadiou street as a defacement gesture (Katri N., 2017)

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