

## Street Art in Athens: The Aesthetics of Crisis and the Political Imagination

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In contemporary Athens, emerging from an urban landscape deeply transformed by crisis and austerity, the cultural practice of street art has gained enormous significance as a self-authorized medium of public expression. Under the prolonged state of emergency, the walls of the city have come to life with poetic scribbles and political slogans, with portraits of protest and struggle, and expressive depictions of everyday life in the city, forming a living archive of the current historical conjuncture. Relying on materials gathered during ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2013 and 2016 this talk examines how Athenian street artists encounter, reflect upon, and make sense of the ongoing crisis. Based on a dialectic approach that takes into account street art as visual artefacts mediated through historical, political, and affective narratives and iconographies, as well as a performative practice, I argue that street art is not merely a static representation of the given socio-cultural context it is embedded in. It also has the potential to actively transform urban space and reimagine everyday life by inscribing alternative histories and possibilities into the very surface of the city. In arguing this I follow the approach of Italian theorist Maurizio Lazzarato who claims that “[i]mages, signs and statements do not represent something, but rather create possible worlds which affect souls—and must be realized

in bodies... They contribute to the metamorphoses of subjectivity, not to their representation.”

### References:

Maurizio Lazzarato, ‘Struggle, Event, Media’, *RePUBLICart* (2003). Available at [http://republicart.net/disc/representations/lazzarato01\\_en.htm](http://republicart.net/disc/representations/lazzarato01_en.htm) (accessed 17 January 2017).



Image 1. Comissioned artwork done by students of the Athens School of Fine Arts - Hands (2013)



Image 2. Dimitris Taxis Meltingface Boy (2013)



Image 3. Jupiterfab\_Merkel Tsipras Bruderkuss (2015)



Image 4. Cacao Rocks\_Cut the Debt (2015)



Image 5. Bleeps Wall for Sale (2016)



Image 5. N Grams Nein (2015)



Image 6. Ino Grip (2016)



Image 7. WD Broken Wings (2013)

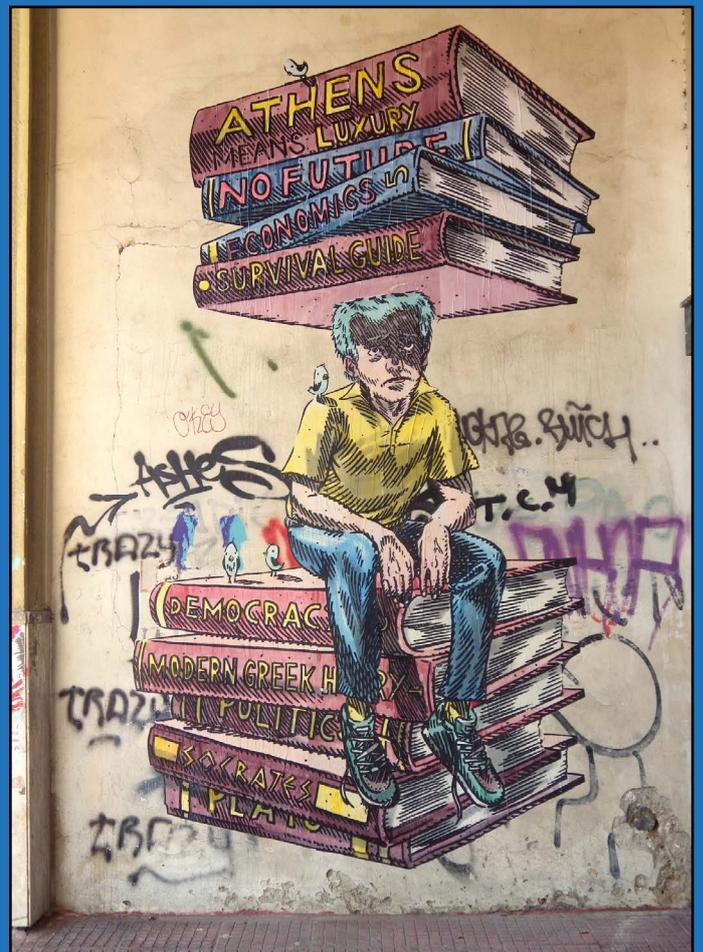


Image 8. Dimitris Taxis\_ I wish you could learn something (2013) useful from the past

## BIOGRAPHY

Julia Tulke's work focuses on material landscapes of urban crisis as sites of cultural production and political intervention. She has conducted extensive research on street art and graffiti as mediums of expression and dissent in the context of an ongoing ethnographic fieldwork project in Athens (more at [aestheticsofcrisis.org](http://aestheticsofcrisis.org)). Julia holds a B.A. in Social and Cultural Anthropology and Political Sciences from the Free University Berlin and an M.A. in European Ethnology from Humboldt University of Berlin. Currently she is pursuing a PhD in Visual and Cultural Studies at the University of Rochester, NY.