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The Pedagogy of Listening: the Poetics of Crisis in Contemporary Europe

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ABSTRACT

This chapter situates the epistemological category of crisis in Europe into a framework that includes both listening and reading as critical acts that force European subjects to reorient their critical understanding of the social terrain and reinscribe it in terms of relationality and community. The chapter explores the poetics of crisis in contemporary Greece and considers how understandings of crisis might shift when the act of listening is privileged as an analytical tool. I argue that the poetic output of the loose poetry movement in Greece known as the Generation of the 2000s is a response to crisis being experienced as ongoing and chronic instead of an event that can be overcome. Drawing on theories of listening from both philosophy and theories of education, I argue that not only are readability and listening intimately entwined, but that a pedagogy of listening is a tool that can make crises *readable* beyond the structures of the university. A poetics of crisis that uses a pedagogy of listening not only engages citizens where politics and economics has failed, but also re-energises the acts of listening and reading with radical possibilities of contestation and healing during times of temporal dislocation.

KEYWORDS

Crisis; Greece; Listening; Poetics; Pedagogy

In his book *How Capitalism will End?* (2016) economic sociologist Wolfgang Streeck is fascinated with the disconnection he perceives between the star-studded social science departments in the United States and the progressive decay in politics and the economy. How was it possible, he asks, that the sociologically most sophisticated generation in history would produce leaders such as George W. Bush and Dick Cheney? What was all that obvious brilliance good for? A typical rejoinder from his colleagues was—*why bother? nobody ever listens*—and since the book’s publication not only have populist leaders come and gone, but that disconnection appears deeper and more unforgiving (Streeck, 2016, p. 237). Fear, anxiety and crisis are understandably the buzzwords commonly invoked to ascribe that disconnection with meaning. It is a similar story in Europe where the volume of research on Europe’s ills from star-studded departments is staggering. The question is: who is listening? Outside of academia, artists, community workers and concerned citizens are forging connections at the grassroots level. Who is listening to them?

This chapter argues that part of the reason we fail to understand the fundamental nature of European crises lies in our insistence of *talking* about crises, instead of *listening to* and *reading* crises. A failure to read is not necessarily a failure to interpret the significance of a crisis. Rather, it points to a failure to enact Mary Louise Pratt’s aphorism: “to be read, *and to be readable*” (2008, p. 7). It is the second part of her construction that concerns me in this chapter: how can crises be made readable outside of academia, thus opening up a dialogue to create and share common memories? One pathway, I suggest, is returning to the archaic definition of listening, meaning *giving an ear to* (Merriam-Webster, 2021), or in other words, extending our ample consideration to something. In Europe today we *hear* the cacophony of crises without necessarily *giving an ear to* the voices that make up the static noise that perturbs us.

In this chapter I therefore situate the epistemological category of crisis in Europe into a framework that includes both listening and reading as critical acts that force European subjects to reorient their critical understanding of the social terrain and reinscribe it in terms of relationality and community. The chapter explores one key case study, the poetics of crisis in contemporary Greece, and argues that when crisis begins to be experienced as ongoing and chronic instead of an event that can be overcome, it engenders “affective atmospheres” (Anderson, 2009) that foment temporal dislocation, overloading one’s ability to make sense of the present. Drawing on theories of listening from both philosophy and education, I argue that not only are readability and listening intimately entwined, but that a pedagogy of listening is a

tool that can make crises *readable* beyond the structures of the university. A poetics of crisis that uses a pedagogy of listening therefore not only engages citizens where politics and economics has failed, but also re-energises the acts of listening and reading with radical possibilities of contestation and healing during times of temporal dislocation.

The Pedagogy of Listening

Who knew that amidst the chaos wrought by economic crisis, austerity, and precarity, poetry would cause such consternation? Dimitris Plantzos (2015) relates a telling anecdote about the battlelines that poetry unexpectedly sparked in 2013 at the height of Greek discontent with austerity. The situation he describes was as follows: In October 2013, city buses in Athens were plastered with selected quotes from celebrated Greek poet Constantine Cavafy. One quote read: “Haste is a dangerous thing.” The line was taken from Cavafy’s poem “In a Large Greek Colony, 200 B. C.” Crucially, Cavafy uses the word *via* (βία) to signify “haste” when in modern Greek, *via* means violence, not hurriedness (Plantzos, 2015, p. 192). The bus was also painted red when typically buses in Athens are painted blue and white like the Greek flag. Plantzos asks: “Was this a lame attempt by some Machiavellian authority somewhere, trying to convince the Greek public that, even in the time of the most aggressive recession, life goes on regardless?” (2015, pp. 192-193). In fact, the quotes were a publicity campaign to advertise the Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation’s acquisition of the Cavafy archives (Plantzos, 2015, p. 193). To average Greeks the line “violence is a dangerous thing” had an ominous tone and academics and media pundits debated how the lines should be read. Were Cavafy’s poetry lines denouncing the widespread protest movements against austerity? Can a poem be appropriated by authorities for “specifically approved messages” (Plantzos, 2015, p. 197)? Ironically, the debate caused the average Greek to seek out the original poem which read more as a “formidable ally” to the anti-austerity movement (Plantzos, 2015, p. 199). Cavafy’s poetry seemed, according to Plantzos, “to advocate the return to poetry as metaphysical essence, and to the poet as an untouchable authority, unsuitable for mingling with the everyday life of Athens and its citizens” (Plantzos, 2015, p. 199).

Plantzos’s anecdote not only reveals the power of words to collapse meaning but points also to an underlying double tension. On the one hand, the dual meaning of the word *via* (βία) as both haste *and* violence, intimates an anxiety about what it “means to be read, *and to be readable*” (Pratt, 1992, p. 4). The mix-up between modern and ancient interpretations of the word makes present Dimitris Papanikolaou’s contention that in crisis-stricken Greece, Greeks “return to

(their) history for answers” (2017, p. 45). Interpreting the word via (βία) as “violence” further evinces how words retain a phantasmatic trace, a trace that Greeks reproduce to make their affective experience of crisis *readable*. On the other, it alludes to how words are performative, mirroring dynamic processes that are inscribed on city streets and in the affective responses of people experiencing crisis. The Cavafy anecdote in that sense supports Jill Robbins’ contention that “poems can circulate in public spaces in unexpected ways, creating links and relationships that can be ephemeral or binding” (2020, p. 126). The public debate that ensued with Cavafy’s poetry plastered on city buses, though unintentional, was one example of how a crisis was made readable outside of academia, providing opportunities for Greeks to participate in resistance and reflection. It also reveals that for something *to be readable* it first requires that it be *given an ear to*; that is, to be listened to. Readability cannot, I insist, be separated from the act of listening.

Listening as an object of study has received scant scholarly attention outside of the disciplinary areas of philosophy and education. In philosophy, Jean Luc Nancy’s short book *Listening* (2007), originally published in French in 2002, asked: “Is listening something of which philosophy is capable?” (2007, p. 1). For the first time “listening,” as distinct from “hearing,” was given primary attention. This chapter aligns with Nancy’s contention that to be listening “is to be straining toward a possible meaning, and consequently *one that is not immediately accessible*” (my emphasis) (2007, p. 6). If we accept Nancy’s definition it follows, then, that to listen takes *work*; it is not a simple reflexive action. He asks his readers to “*prick up [their] philosophical ear*” (original emphasis) for although philosophers might be attuned to “hearing” everything, philosophers are not trained to listen; or rather philosophers “neutralise” the act of listening so that they can philosophise (2007, pp. 1-3). This chapter is therefore an attempt to privilege the act of listening over and above the philosophical turn to explain, synthesise, and evaluate. To paraphrase Nancy (2007, p. 4), I ask: What does it mean for a European to be immersed entirely in listening, formed by listening or on listening, listening with all her or his or their being?

Education scholars have a long history of carefully considering what *to be* listening might entail, since educators must constantly question how their students receive, understand, and process what they say. Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire, an advocate for critical pedagogy, sought to overcome students remaining “docile listeners” and instead transformed into critical citizens that are in dialogue with their teachers and communities (2005, p. 81).

Linje Manyozo draws on Freirean theory to suggest that practitioners must develop their capacity to listen in order to produce citizen voices and improve communities (Manyozo, 2016, p. 955). Listening for Manyozo is both an act of faith and an act of war. It is an act of faith in the sense that it places responsibility on ourselves to enter into dialogue with others who can question our ideas (2016, p. 958). It is an act of war in the sense that it challenges us to fight for the ideas that that we stand for (2016, p. 958). We might prepare ourselves for battle against ideas that we deem unethical, but we must do so with empathy and learn to communicate our arguments to others in an appealing manner (2016, p. 958).

I thus seek to bring into the discussion of crisis in Europe a pedagogy of listening. The concept emerged from the Reggio Emilia educational philosophy for early and primary education that embeds listening as a core principle in its pedagogy and curriculum. According to Carlina Rinaldi (2001), listening in the Reggio Emilia approach has multiple meanings. In my analysis of the case study below, I take four of the meanings that Rinaldi highlights (quoted verbatim) and use them to make a case for how a pedagogy of listening can make crises in Europe readable, both within and outside of academia: (1) *listening produces questions, not answers*; (2) *listening is emotion. It is generated by emotions; it is influenced by the emotions of others, and it stimulates emotions*; (3) *listening as time. When you really listen, you get into the time of dialogue and interior reflection, an interior time that is made up of the present but also past and future time and is, therefore, outside chronological time*; (4) *listening is an active verb, which involves giving an interpretation, giving meaning to the message and value to those who are being listened to by others* (2001, pp. 2-3). Where meaning is “not immediately accessible”, as Nancy contends, I argue that a pedagogy of listening can begin a process of making crises readable (2007, p. 6). Although such a process likely does not offer solutions it can at least *strain towards* a possible meaning of crisis (Nancy, 2007, p. 6).

In *The Politics of Listening*, sociologist Leah Bassel similarly attempts to foreground the importance of listening as a means of resisting social exclusion (2017, p. 6). Like Streeck above who questioned why nobody is listening to the brilliant sociological analysis being done on American campuses, Bassel begins her book frustrated with her academic role in which she is able to critique “what was going on” but only to an audience of some ten people (2017, p. 3). Listening, she argues, is a powerful tool that has the potential to disrupt privilege and power and be a source of recognition for marginalised voices (2017, p. 9). Even so, the politics of listening are never simple. Marginalised voices, she argues, are “listened” to only when they

reinforce dominant conceptions of “us and them” (2017, p. 19). For instance, Somali women in the UK have complained that they are only listened to when they “bash” their own culture and often inaudible when their opinions clash with overriding narratives propagated by media and authorities and even, at times, with academics (Bassel, 2017, p. 17). In another case study from the UK, Bassel notes that young, racialised men object that they are “only remembered when [they] riot,” always reminded that they are responsible for the situation in which they find themselves (2017, pp. 37-41). Speakers that are not deemed legitimate agents in the political discourse are often only selectively listened to. Bassel thus calls for a politics of listening that has “equality at its core” (2017, p. 89). Such a politics of listening must pertain to both the future and the past as a means of recognising the root of material inequality (Bassel, 2017, p. 50). It is noteworthy in Bassel’s example of the Somali women that being given a voice to speak does not automatically translate into being listened to in Nancy’s sense; she is *heard* yet not listened to. In my discussion of the poetics of austerity in contemporary Greece, I argue that shifting the focus to listening as opposed to the traditional postcolonial studies approach of *giving a voice to*, is a call for scholars to “prick up [their] philosophical ear” (Nancy, 2002) and encounter new ways of engaging with crisis.

There is a risk, though, in mythologising listening as a solution to the all-encompassing social and political turmoil that crises engender; as if listening was some kind of tool to disentangle the knots that materialise when Crisis with a capital C is elevated to a historical “super-concept” that demands *action* (Roitman, 2014, p. 10). In his critique of former US President Barack Obama’s conjecture that what is lacking in the United States is a narrative of unity and a “common story,” that is, what is needed is for Americans to listen to each other’s stories, Nicholas Russell objects that such reasoning is specious as it assumes that “every issue across the country could be distilled down to the essential quandary of ‘listening’” (2021). It ignores that most common stories that forge a nation are simply myths that are mobilised to foster an imagined community (Anderson, 1983). It also conceals the underlying issues that make enacting social change complex: the decimation of unions, increasing inequality, global media power, ever-deepening neoliberal economic policies, and so on (Russell, 2021). A pedagogy of listening, I suggest, avoids such mythologising of listening as an *answer* to the question of crisis. It eschews the assumption that a crisis is an event that can be *overcome* if the right medicine is administered to the problem. Rather, it positions listening as an a priori condition *for* the potential to enact social change (future-oriented); and as a condition *to* make crises readable and thus a potential site for both resistance and reflection (present-oriented). For a

pedagogy of listening to be successful it must balance the future/present nexus and avoid elevating crisis as a historical “super-concept” that precludes questioning its premises and claims (Roitman, 2014, p. 10).

Making sense of crisis is complex. The emerging disciplinary area of crisis studies has revealed that the origins of crises are often vague, interpretations multitudinous, and explanations contested (Koselleck, 2006). In *Anti-Crisis* Janet Roitman skilfully identifies the processes that elevated the status of “crisis” as an object of knowledge where “crises” are positioned and interpreted as an epistemological impasse (2014, pp. 3-4). She argues:

crisis is mobilized in narrative constructions to mark out or to designate “moments of truth”; it is taken to be a means to access historical truth, and even a means to think “history” itself. Such moments of truth are often defined as turning points in history, when decisions are taken or events are decided, thus establishing a particular teleology.
(p. 3)

Within such a framework, Roitman points out that explanations of crisis generally proceed from the question: “what went wrong?” (2014, p. 11). Such a question implicitly differentiates between the past and future; if a crisis is a turning point, then it must necessarily open up new horizons and futures (2014, p. 8). Consequently, Roitman is more interested in how we “know” crisis itself and suggests that crisis “serves as a primary enabling blind spot for the production of knowledge,” since for her, crisis is an observation that is neither observed nor viewed (2014, p. 13). Her aim, therefore, is to make that blind spot visible.

The case study on Greek poetry in this chapter similarly seeks to identify and make visible the blind spots that Crisis with a capital C propagate in contemporary Greece. As the poems by Cavafy plastered on Athenian buses attest, poetry is an artform where the acts of reading and listening are inseparable, where to be *readable* requires a pedagogy of listening in order to reveal what, according to Alain Badiou, “cannot be said” (Badiou & Tusa, 2019, p. 44). Badiou notes: “In poetry it is clear that the real potential of the poem lies in its piecing together a certain saying that is manifestly the saying of that which cannot be said ... The saying of the unsaid makes no sense, and yet that is what the poem strives for” (p. 44). In dialogue with Badiou I suggest that the poetics of crisis emerge from this very gap between the said and the unsaid. It is in poetry where the unsaid has the potential to be *made* readable. The pedagogy of listening

is the tool that enables the unsaid to *become* readable. In the next section I trace the historical conditions that converged in Greece to make present a poetics of crisis, where clinging to words translates into a mood of connection, collection, and bodies coming together. As I discuss below, however, a pedagogy of listening avoids mythologising such collective responses. Enacting a pedagogy of listening, I argue, can potentially avoid simplistic narratives that position collective sovereignty as an antidote to the alienation generated by economic crisis (Stafylakis, 2017, p. 240).

The Emergent Poetics of Crisis in Contemporary Greece

For Greek poet Titos Patrikios, “every interesting time is also a very difficult time” (PBS News Hour, 2012). Scholars in the disciplinary area of Modern Greek Studies have been at the forefront of unpacking the epistemological concept of “crisis.” This is perhaps not surprising considering the severe impact of the Global Financial Crisis on Greece, a crisis that is just as much social and cultural as political and economic. While acknowledging the materiality of the economic crisis on both the Greek body and political/social landscape, scholars have pointed to how quickly the crisis morphed into an identity crisis (Botanova, 2017). Maria Boletsi’s work underlines how crisis in Greece functions as an all-encompassing framework where “imagin[ing] a future beyond crisis becomes ... more urgent than ever” (2018, p. 4). Dimitris Papanikolaou’s conceptualisation of what he calls “Archive Trouble” (2017) is particularly resonant in the context of what such an identity crisis might mean for the Greek nation/subject. He argues that the crisis in Greece spurred an intense outpouring of art that in some form or other return to the idea of the archive that is rooted in the past and serves as a “practice of reinvention” (2017, pp. 40-41). Via Lauren Berlant (2011), he suggests that the arts in Greece are driven by a “*cruelly optimistic archival impulse*” (original emphasis), characterised by a return to history (p. 42). Although such an archive does not necessarily offer solutions it nonetheless is immensely powerful in its radical political critique of what he calls the “archival present” (Papanikolaou, 2017, p. 50).

There is a certain appeal to the idea of a city in a state of crisis (Misouridis, 2017, p. 77). Since the onset of the Greek economic crisis in 2008 the Greek art landscape in Athens, where a third of the country lives, has undergone what can only be described as a renaissance, capturing the imagination of activists in and outside Greece. Athens is, according to Misouridis, “living its own myth-making” and as such is a place where one can encounter “sought-after answers” since it “seems to have a lesson to teach” (2017, p. 82). Art exhibitions, concerts,

documentaries; photographers, writers, activists; Greeks, Europeans, nomads: all have assembled in Athens to represent visually and through the written word the anxiety triggered by economic crisis (Misouridis 2017, p. 78). No artform, perhaps, has been more associated with the Greek crisis than cinema, particularly the movement known as the Greek Weird Wave that encompasses a loose collection of films that utilise absurdist tropes to allude to social alienation. This filmic wave coincided with the onset of Greece's economic crisis in 2008/09 and gained international prominence in 2010 with the release of Yorgos Lanthimos's iconic *Dogtooth* (2009). As Dimitris Papanikolaou puts it, the Greek Weird Wave "is not so much defined by the answers it might give to these questions, but by the questions themselves" (2021, p. xi). The films with their non-traditional storytelling are also "radically queer" in how they "deconstruct and reframe" the Greek nation, leading to "a radical openness of meaning" (Psaras, 2016, p. 29). By effectively erasing the traditional tropes of "Fatherland, Religion, Family" that once defined Greek cinema, they allow, in Psaras's words, an encounter with the "crisis in meaning" that the lived experience of crisis may provoke (2016, p. 22). Although they do not directly deal with crisis in their subject matter, the films have been analysed through the lens of the crisis because, as Yorgos Tzirtzilakis points out, the crisis itself is what has piqued international interest in Greek art (2017, p. 112). It was Greek cinema, too, according to Papanikolaou, that captured the "unease" provoked by the Greek crisis (2021, p. 3). In the ensuing years, the "weird" label stuck and became "a (post-)identificatory space for a new type of cinema" and widely adopted to promote the Greek art scene (2021, p. 5).

Although the Greek Weird Wave has received, and continues to receive, the most attention from scholars, another artform that has intimately mirrored the crisis has been poetry, its words mingling in the everyday life of Greek citizens like the example of Cavafy poems on city buses illustrates (Lambropoulos, 2016, p. 2). Since the onset of the economic crisis, there has been an exponential growth in the number of poetry collections published, with major collections published internationally in English or bilingual editions, including *Futures: Poetry of the Greek Crisis* (Chiotis, 2015) and *Austerity Measures* (Van Dyck, 2016). Similar to the Greek Weird Wave, many of the poems in these collections do not directly deal with the crisis yet have been read by scholars through the critical lens of "crisis." The poets whose oeuvre can be considered as being somehow representative of the historical moment defined by Crisis with a capital C emerged from around 2005 and have been dubbed the "Generation of the 2000s" (Lambropoulos, 2016). Poets such as Eftychia Panayiotou, Thomas Tsalapatis, Danae Sioziou, Elena Penga and Yiannis Doukas are highly educated and involved in writing critical reviews

and essays and although they tend to write in Greek they have near native levels of both English and/or German (Lambropoulos, 2016, p. 2). They are, according to Theodoros Chiotis, a heterogeneous collective whose poems examine the conditions that could potentially enact alternative ways of forming community (2017, pp. 221-222). As Lambropoulos puts it, these poets have been experimenting with “illustrating, illuminating, supplementing, reciting, composing, enacting, dispersing, linking, accompanying [...] and so on” (2016, p. 13). They are unafraid of engaging with personal and collective trauma in order to “invent, to fabulate, ‘a people to come’” (Chiotis, 2017, p. 223). This poetry movement is therefore just as much about the performative production of poetry as the words on the page. Performative gatherings are popular and point to expressions of solidarity with the public and readers. Athens-based poet A. E. Stallings suggests that poetry readings and literary events are so well attended because people want to be together and be out talking to people: “that there’s nothing left to lose is a kind of freedom as well” (PBS News Hour, 2012). One poet, Eftychia Panayiotou, claims that her creative inspiration comes from “entering a society that looked a lot like a bad movie and fear[s] that [she] might end up playing a predetermined role in it” (Bausells & Stefanou, 2016). This “bad movie” emerges when the nation-state fails to provide basic material security to its citizens and, more significantly, when the nation fails to embody its ideal (Manganas, 2020, p. 195). When this occurs it undermines, Mary Zournazi argues, one’s sense of home and belonging (2002, p. 150). By carefully traversing the future/present nexus by using poetry as a “diagnostic tool” instead of a “surgical tool” (Chiotis, 2017, p. 230), this poetic movement makes present a poetics of crisis that is both potent and unsettling (Papanikolaou, 2017, p. 50).

The period of vigorous artistic and intellectual activity in a Greek society subsumed in crisis I have cursorily outlined above reads, perhaps, as a hopeful narrative where collectivity is naturally produced to restore Greek society to an idyllic version of itself that existed before the financial crisis (Stafylakis, 2017, p. 240). It is important, however, to bear in mind Stafylakis’s warning that such a narrative is a “local—yet rather global—pseudo-anthropological mantra” that bears little resemblance to reality (2017, p. 238). Such a narrative, he contends, perpetuates the myth that “impoverishment and precarity enhance a collectivity by default, bring disenfranchised people together and emancipate social forces through the development of relationality, horizontal self-organisation and structures of mutual care” (2017, p. 238). In such a precarious context it is an understandable mythological rendering—but a myth nonetheless—that seeks to celebrate the bringing of bodies together in physical space as a story of the common people against the alienation caused by neoliberal global forces (Stafylakis, 2017, p.

239). The risk with perpetuating such a totalising narrative is that it positions Greeks at the forefront of a national rebellion against neo-liberalism (Stafylakis, 2017, p. 244) that at best degenerates into unhealthy neo-patriotism; and at worst a noxious populism that disregards the realities of lived experiences. Engaging with a pedagogy of listening, I suggest, avoids unnecessarily celebrating the nation as an ontological object of hope because such acclamation will neither necessarily reclaim self-sovereignty nor habilitate a collective expression of sovereignty.

In the Greek context, then, anthropologist Henrik Vigh's conceptualisation of crisis as "chronic" and a "pervasive context" instead of an "aberration and particularised phenomena", is particularly relevant (2008, p. 8). Vigh argues that chronic crisis "may become normal in the sense that this is what there is most, but it does not become normal in the sense that this is how things should be" (2008, p. 11). A pedagogy of listening that is enacted through a poetics of crisis can thus provide a space for reflection that can facilitate a kind of *working through* of the trauma provoked when crisis is experienced as chronic and ongoing. On this point Cathy Caruth notes that: "To listen to the crisis of a trauma ... is not only to listen for the event, but to hear in the testimony the survivor's departure from it; the challenge of the therapeutic listener, in other words, is *how to listen to departure*" (original emphasis) (1995, p. 9). In the next section I discuss excerpts from the poetry of the Generation of the 2000s that precisely can be read as such a testimony of the survivor's departure. It may seem odd to refer to poets who are living through crisis as "survivors," but as poet Elena Penga puts it, "We are all shaken up and blinded by the shock [of crisis]. We have lost perspective and see no horizon [...] All cultural trends in Greece are a kind of resistance to giving up" (Bausells & Stefanou, 2016). I therefore agree with Caruth when she challenges us to consider trauma as being intrinsically linked to cultures (1995, p. 11). A pedagogy of listening, in this sense, is embedded in contemporary history and as such hones our ability "to listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves" (Caruth, 1995, p. 11).

The systemic structures of neo-liberal capitalism make it notably difficult to imagine alternative frameworks. The role of the writer in an age of crisis is therefore immense. Writers lay out the complexity of modern experiences of crisis, help combat grief, and materialise pathways for working through the trauma of crises. In the Spanish context, Olga Bezhanova perceives the writer's task as one of "demystifying" crisis within a "familiar and nonthreatening network of literary production", thus serving as a conduit to reclaim a certain measure of

control in the face of global financial flows (2017, p. xv). Jill Robbins similarly regards poetic production as a space where both readers and poets can “contextualise their pain, anger, and loss, and to reflect upon what has happened in a broader framework of human experience” (2020, p. 4). Tellingly, US poet Gregory Orr frames poetic production as a mode of “survival” that emerges when crisis is translated into language and imbued with symbolic expression (2002, p. 4). For Orr, the disordering power of trauma is enormous and poetry is a means of ordering that disorder (2002, p. 12). Translating crisis into language is thus the first step towards healing (Orr, 2002, p. 119).

It is perhaps odd, then, that in the Greek context Lambropoulos does not perceive the poetic output of the Generation of the 2000s as inviting readers (and listeners) to confront the trauma(s) provoked by economic crisis (2016, p. 3). Instead, he contends, the poetics of crisis is an expression of a philosophical mood, a Left Melancholy, whereby the poets of the 2000s use their poetic output as a channel to come to terms with the loss of the revolutionary ideals (political convictions, faith in freedom) that ended with the triumph of neo-liberalism (2016, pp. 4-9). Nonetheless, he perceives the radical output and performative gatherings of these poets as fostering a space for cultural activism where writers can express their solidarity and experiment with autonomy (2016, p. 15). In the next section I turn to the words of the Greek poets and argue that Lambropoulos was perhaps too hasty in his dismissal of the idea that the poems of the Generation of the 2000s may indeed *invite* readers to confront their traumas. Despite this poetry very rarely addressing issues such as precarity and poverty directly (Lambropoulos, 2016, p. 3), I underline that what is important in the poetic output of the Generation of the 2000s is the process in which the poetry becomes a mode of “survival” in Orr’s sense. A pedagogy of listening, I argue, emerges from the act of translating the trauma of crisis into language, allowing for crisis—with or without a Capital C—to be read and to *become* readable. As such it is in language itself where we may locate hope and search for future possibilities (Eagleton, 2015, p. 53).

The Gift of Listening

It has perhaps become commonplace to declare that we *need* poetry in times of crisis; that the language of poetry can assuage our temperaments in the face of disorder (Wallace, 2017). Nobel laureate George Seferis, for example, regarded Greek poetry as a “shy nightingale” that shadowed Greece’s traumatic history across space and time (Barley, 2015). If poetry is needed in times of crisis, then it is likely because it is one of the few artforms that still require “deep,

contemplative attention” (Han, 2015, p. 13). Accepting we live in what Byung-Chul Han calls a “burnout society” marked by rising incidences of depression and demands for hyperattention, poetry remains one of the few avenues for us to give what he calls “the gift of listening” (2015, p. 13). The deep and contemplative attention that poetry demands is one way to avoid speaking of *the* “crisis” or *a* “crisis,” as if the concept of crisis with a capital C could be reduced to particular phenomena, typically stemming from political or economic events. The deep and contemplative thinking that poetry demands points rather to understandings of crises as “affective atmospheres” that are both individually and collectively felt and experienced. Affective atmospheres, according to Ben Anderson, are ambiguous and blur the distinction between subject/object, definite/indefinite, presence and absence (2009, p. 77). They occur, he adds, “*before* and *alongside* the formation of subjectivity, *across* human and non-human materialities, and *in-between* subject/object distinctions” (original emphasis) (2009, p. 78). The poetic output of the Generation of the 2000s, I argue, reveal complex processes of cultural memory, embodiment, and the shaping of social responses to crisis that are situated within the ambiguous spaces that affective atmospheres make present (Robbins 2020, 54). It is thus important to recall here Rinaldi’s multiple meanings of listening as they frame my analysis of the Greek poems I discuss: (1) listening produces questions, not answers; (2) listening is emotion; (3) listening as time; and (4) listening is an active verb (2001, pp. 2-3). Using a pedagogy of listening to make crises readable is a discursive move that seeks to shift the poetics of crisis into what Emmerich calls “a move *beyond discourse*” (original emphasis) and “into the ‘beyond’ of the university as currently configured” (2020, p. 39).

A listening that produces questions instead of answers is rather counterintuitive. Surely a pedagogy of listening should be about searching for and encountering answers to the questions that confuse and disorient us. But there is an instinctive logic to conceptualising listening as a mode of questioning and this mode can be encountered in the poetic output of the Generation of the 2000s. Consider George Prevedourakis’s two-line poem “Plakoto” (Chiotis, 2015, p. 111):

Every September the verbs fester
Who reordered your letters my homeland?

The poem’s simplicity does not conceal the complexity that its question frames. The two-line poem toys with the poetic self (my homeland) as is typical of modern poetry; yet also prods

the reader to question: What happens every September? Which are the verbs that fester? Why are the letters of my homeland reordered? This questioning thus facilitates, as T. S. Eliot asserts, poetry's ability "to communicate before it is understood" (Rossoglou, 2019). In Yiannis Stiggas's much longer poem "In the Style of Y. S." (Chiotis, 2015, p. 130) he similarly includes a two-line stanza at the beginning that prompts readers to consider a curious question (notice that he omits the question mark):

Blood is in our future
And how can one dance to it

The juxtaposition of violence (blood) and celebration (dance) is evocatively utilised to propel the reader to query how the present self will be able to fare with a future *trauma-to-come* that is predestined to be defined by savagery. In another poem by Stiggas (Van Dyck, 2016, p. 33) he writes:

This world
is the most compassionate form of never

Here Stiggas paradoxically enlaces two very distinct ideas: finality (never) with love (compassion) and as such invites readers to consider the role of these concepts in their own worlds. The questioning that this form of listening activates calls for a "withdrawal and turning inward" (Nancy, 2007, p. 3) of the self. Any meaning, however, is not immediately accessible and must be worked through (Nancy, 2007, p. 6).

Conceptualising listening as emotion might also, for many, be counterintuitive. We are perhaps more accustomed to perceiving words and actions as being generated and stimulated by emotions, while considering listening as a mere objective and reflexive response to social interactions. A pedagogy of listening recognises that emotions are intimately inscribed in our processes of listening; and the emotions in question are always culture-bound and complex (Wierzbicka, 1990, p. 4). For this reason, Rousseau noted that our understanding of the world begins with feeling and not by reasoning (Orr, 2002, p. 40). Consider the final two lines from Yiannis Doukas's poem "Epitaph" (Chiotis, 2015, p. 139):

We lay wreathes and weep

but we are what we burn, we are what we bury deep.

And the final two lines from Nikos Erinakis's "The New Symmetry" (Chiotis, 2015, p. 203).

We have always had the sun with us
And from what I see the sun is still here

The endings of these two poems express two very different emotional responses to crisis. Whereas Doukas translates the crisis into the language of despair and futility (burn/bury), Erinakis ends his with a spirit of hope (the sun). Unlike the language of philosophy, here the use of the plural first-person pronoun (we) provides a sense that the poem is addressing the reader (and listener) personally (Orr, 2002, p. 46). Here we witness the "affective atmospheres" produced through the poetics of crisis (Anderson, 2009). Poems, Orr argues, move us when they bring us close to our own threshold (Orr, 2002, p. 55). To truly listen to the poet's voice is to "momentarily yield [our] sense of separateness" and become the "we" and the "I" of the poem, sharing the poet's emotional response, and ultimately consoled that like the poet, we too, somehow survive the disorder that comes with experiencing crisis (Orr, 2002, p. 85). In this way, when Erinakis writes "I see the sun is still here" we can transform the present moment into something less elusive; into a felt capacity that the present need not always be unreadable, at least in that moment.

Much scholarship on crisis focuses on its temporal dimensions. Common accounts of crisis frame it as a kind of rupture, a turning point, distinguishing a before from an after. Hence for theorists like Foucault, crisis is productive as it can lead to transgression and transformation (Roitman, 2014, p. 35). Other accounts stress that crisis can be experienced as a prolonged phenomenon (Vigh, 2008), a *longue durée* (Rakopoulos, 2014) and a permanent concept of history (Roitman, 2014). The poets of the Generation of the 2000s almost unanimously express their experience of crisis in the language of the latter:

Just for a couple of years, we said, a dozen years back.
Nothing is more permanent than the temporary.

(A. E. Stallings, "After a Greek Proverb" in Chiotis, 2015, p. 15)

Duration is an obsession.
 An obsession you do not see in the cinema
 because movies last two hours at the most
 and when the end comes
 life goes on.

(Mihalis Ganas, “The Smoker’s Sleep” in Siotis, 2014, p. 37)

A pedagogy of listening is not only responsive to different temporal dimensions but is also a vehicle to cultivate interior reflection that *springs from* and *bounces to* past, present and future temporalities. In the Greek context, when crisis is experienced as chronic and pervasive (Vigh, 2008), time begins to feel like a perpetual present. When this occurs, Maria Boletsi argues that “future prospects feel limited and people look for guidance in the past” (2018, p. 7). She calls this phenomenon “the futurity of things past,” since in Greece the past has shaped its contemporary identity (2018, p. 7), a past that is often perceived as both asset and burden (Tziovas, 2014, p. 1). In Yiannis Dhallas’s poem “Welcome” (Siotis, 2014, p. 27) all three temporal dimensions collide into a dialogue that ultimately extinguishes chronological time:

‘Welcome glorious German!...’
 said an artisan who recognized you,
 ‘German of the Third Reich back then,
 and now of the euro zone... Welcome
 to this fiefdom of yours, of the South

In the year 2013, yes!... where the victim is obliged
 to declare the victimizer as benefactor
 With his body bleeding indebted and with his soul out resisting
 As a serf who raised his head

Oh the rage of the people, my soul, who holds you?

In this poem we can observe how Dhallas promotes a sense of Greeks belonging to what Dimitrios Theodossopoulos (2013, p. 200) calls a “larger international community of discontent” (the rage of the people) on the one hand; and what Papanikolaou (2017, p. 45) calls

an “iconoclastic return to the past” on the other (Third Reich). By positing that the Third Reich somehow continues in the present day through modern Germany’s control of the Eurozone, Dhallas translates the Greek search for answers in the current crisis into a “strategic attribution of blame” (Theodossopoulos, 2013, p. 202). This tactic from below takes what is unexplainable to the Greek people and translates it into a culturally meaningful narrative, a narrative that seeks to provide order to the disorientation caused when past, present and future time(s) converge and obliterate (Herzfeld, 1992). Poetry therefore readily illustrates that crises extend and are located across multiple temporalities (Grossberg, 2010, p. 311). The poem thus strives to make sense of the unsaid (Badiou & Tusa, 2019, p. 44) in its attempt to link the Greek economic crisis to a longer historical trajectory that can be traced back to the German occupation of Greece during the Second World War and its subsequent control by the Great Powers.

Finally, a pedagogy of listening recognises listening as an active verb that can lead to both giving an interpretation of events and to valuing those being listened to (Rinaldi, 2001, pp. 2-3). Such an approach does not necessarily mean giving an “explanation” of the crisis; that is, a deconstruction of what occurred and an accounting of who was responsible for a particular crisis (Hayward, 2010, p. 283). Roitman, let us remember, warned about elevating crisis to a “historico-philosophical” concept that claims to find possibilities for new futures and alternative historical trajectories (2014, p. 4). Lawrence Grossberg, too, underlines that when there are multiple accounts of crisis it is not that they are *not true*, but paradoxically that *all* the accounts are true, yet *not true* enough (2010, p. 300). Here neither Grossberg nor I are suggesting that we must somehow accept all accounts of crisis in the hope of someday arriving at one “true” explanation. Rather, it is about recognising that crisis as an object of study is always “in conversation with” a context or conjuncture that articulates both change and contradiction (Grossberg, 2010, p. 310). In this sense the overwhelming feeling when crisis is experienced as chronic and all-encompassing can be reduced to the axiom: “Everything is different, yet nothing is changing” (Hayward, 2010, p. 284). The poetic output of the Generation of the 2000s carefully straddles that tension between difference/stasis and in doing so makes readable the specific contexts and conjunctures in which lived experiences circulate. Consider Adrienne Kalfopoulou’s “Ungodly” (Chiotis, 2015, p. 65):

You want to flee, but flee where? The urban concrete elsewhere
does not seethe, does not breathe the scent of carob trees.

“Flee” you hear it everywhere, the taxi driver, the farmer at the

Laiki

tell you “Go!” and are puzzled that you are still here,

you who actually could – with your American passport,

your several tongues – you could translate home into longing, so

why not go?

The repetition of the active verb “flee” underlines one of the structural consequences of the crisis—a brain drain—where emigration is no longer dictated by career choice but imposed by need (Labrianidis & Pratsanakis, 2017). Kalfopoulou’s American passport is objectified as a linguistic signifier of freedom to save her from the Greek nation that has apparently failed her. Yet the poem complicates that message when it claims that:

[...] this ancient land of rock cliffs,
 seas that bleed their myths, Greece with its tales of flight
 and light, returns, rebirths, keeps teaching the stubborn human
 lesson

Here we can see that the poem denotes a context that is not necessarily a projection of hope but instead a call to reach beyond the dichotomy between difference/stasis in order to bring forth what Chiotis called “a people to come” (2017, p. 223). In this sense Kalfopoulou, despite her American passport, is staking her claim to be part of the imagined community of Greeks in crisis (Anderson, 1983), and in doing so shares an intimate closeness with her fellow survivors, seeking to overcome the burden of national shame that demands its nationals to flee.

Taken together, a pedagogy of listening that involves conceptualising listening as producing questions, generating emotions, functioning outside of chronological time, and giving meaning to the message (Rinaldi, 2001, pp. 2-3), makes visible certain blind spots that Crisis with a Capital C propagates, blind spots that might be traumatic, unintelligible and even, at times, nostalgic. A pedagogy of listening further seeks to close the gap between what Badiou refers to as the said and the unsaid (Badiou & Tusa, 2019, p. 44), enabling that gap to *become* readable, at least for the duration of reading or listening to the poem. It may be short-lived but the poems themselves invite their readers (and listeners) to work through some of the disorder that crisis foment, what Robert Frost called “a momentary stay against confusion” (Orr, 2002,

p. 51). There is, then, a sense that the poetic output of the Greek poets of the Generation of the 2000s transmits a message of personal triumph in how they express the felt capacity that emerges from living and surviving the “affective atmospheres” of crisis (Anderson, 2009). When those poems are unleashed into the world, whether in written or spoken form, readers and listeners are invited to also benefit from that survival power (Orr, 2002, p. 84). Although poetry as an artform is still addressed to only a small audience compared to other artforms such as cinema and popular song, its demand for deep, contemplative attention (Han, 2015, p. 130) means that the experience of engaging with crisis and disorder through language can be immensely empowering to both readers and listeners. As Siotis wryly notes: “Poetic language alone does not start revolutions. But, as Odysseus Elytis put it, people who read poetry might be inspired to do just that” (Siotis, 2014, p. 10).

Conclusion

The case study of the poetics of crisis in contemporary Greece underlines that a crisis cannot simply be *overcome* with the correct antidote or by attempting to answer the question: what went wrong? (Roitman, 2014, p. 11). This is because the poets of the generations of the 2000s are writing their poems during a time when crisis is increasingly perceived as chronic and pervasive (Vigh, 2008) and as a material reality that engenders affective atmospheres (Anderson, 2009). Thus, translating those affective experiences into language is a mode of survival for both the poets and their audiences. The focus on “listening” instead of resorting to the typical analytical approach that involves explaining, synthesising, and evaluating, is an unabashed strategy to underline that to truly *listen* is an expression of solidarity. Not surprisingly, pedagogues have long conceptualised listening as a fundamental component of education and hence Manyozo’s assertion that listening is both an act of faith and an act of war (2016, p. 958) is a reminder of how much is at stake when we choose to privilege listening as our analytical tool.

In a Europe now devoid of any encompassing narrative that tells the story of Europe to Europeans, Badiou insists that we are living in the age of poets: “[with] systematic metaphysics being over, devalued, finished, the poem alone was the guardian of a thought for our time that would be total and yet free of philosophical pretention” (quoted in Badiou & Tusa, 2019, p. 43). This chapter has made the case for harnessing a pedagogy of listening as a tool to enable the “unsaid” of crises to be read and to *become* readable (Pratt, 2008, p. 7). The poetics of crisis in contemporary Greece, however, is just one small case study in the broader European context.

The stories of crisis in Europe and the ruptures, convergences and conjunctures they encompass, could benefit from a pedagogy of listening that seeks, where possible, to move beyond the university and into the streets, squares and spaces where bodies come together to feel that they are, indeed, surviving. It is in these spaces where we can foster “contexts of multiple listening” (Rinaldi, 2001, p. 3) to veritably tell the survivors of crisis: I have learnt from your story; *I have listened*. A Europe that adopts a pedagogy of listening is a Europe that no longer clings to a traumatic past, but a Europe that longs to heal.

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