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The Cultural Body's Death by a Thousand Cuts: Why Society Is No Longer a Body and Why It Can Be Cut to Pieces

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Abstract

This essay explores the British, Russian and Greek pavilions at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013 and a marginal event that took place at the foundation Prada di Ca' Corner della Regina during a visit to the exhibition opening of the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015. The author examines the relationships between art, money and power as indicators of the tensions of post-democracy, post-citizenship and the increasingly fraught representations of the cultural and social body. The *Inhalt* (latent content), in an Adornian aesthetic interpretation, is a tool by which to understand the contemporary dismantling of society and the concurrence of art in the sanctioned representations of the body politic. The 'cut' becomes the definition and defining element of a contemporary Heideggerian *Seinsfrage* (the Being), creating the premise for an aesthetic and social discourse that is based on mutilation of the cultural and social body and a re-feudalization of democratic societies.

Keywords

cut • financial crisis • post-citizenship • post-democracy • *Inhalt* • re-feudalization • *Seinsfrage*

Without doubt

*I saw, and yet it seems to pass before me,
A headless trunk, that even as the rest
Of the sad flock pac'd onward. By the hair
It bore the sever'd member, lantern-wise
Pendent in hand, which look'd at us and said,*

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*'Woe's me!' The spirit lighted thus himself,
And two there were in one, and one in two.
How that may be he knows who ordereth so.*

Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia, Inferno*, Canto XXVIII

Reflections on a Bridge 'Cut' in Two at the Venice Biennale

Who could not smile or even laugh when seeing the images of distinguished guests falling into the Venetian waters from a mobile bridge cut in two during a visit to the exhibition opening at the foundation Prada di Ca' Corner della Regina at the 56th Venice Biennale (Pivato, 2015)? The exhibition titled *Portable Classic* (e-flux, 2015) consisted of a series of reproductions of sculptures 'cut' in size. If the cutting-in-size for a higher profit was the aesthetic 'approach' borrowed from financial systems, a similar approach – but this time based on the cutting of efficiency, care and work – was perhaps the unintended ramification that resulted in a small bridge falling and distinguished guests being photographed while plunging into the Venetian waters. The whole event became a classic form of visibility,¹ a cultural allegory, which, via an image, conjured and made flesh the ethereal signs of things to come.²

A cultural analysis of an image is a complex endeavor based on a sectioning of all of its parts in order to understand not solely the image itself but its relevance to the wider context and its multiple parts in relation to the unified body of society.³ This is an approach that historically has characterized cultural understandings and misunderstandings on the role that art and culture play within the body of society: a body perceived as a whole and within which its component parts are conceived as being obliged to stand firm in their assigned places.

Salvatore Settis, who conceived *Portable Classic*, may hardly have imagined that in his vision of shrinking classic sculptures, of cutting their size, there could be a sociopolitical reference to the crisis that has engulfed and is currently collapsing Italy. Also, the idea of replicas of replicas of replicas does not really 'cut' it any longer. Presenting 'artworks' that are portable sculptural replicas of classic masterpieces – which have already been copied and replicated throughout the centuries and can also be bought at any cheap souvenir stand – questions the role of art and its relationship to money and power. One explanation might be that this whole process is just another post-postmodern redesigning and repackaging of yet another business venture from which producers, artists, galleries and everyone else involved take a cut.

One could only guess, in this world of cut-giving, cut-taking and cut-receiving, that the cut givers may be ending up under-cutting themselves. Since the cut receivers do not have anywhere else to cut and are the ones left standing at the end of the cutting line, they have the choices of cutting their services either in the quality or in the time of the labor rendered.

Another alternative could be that of cutting themselves out of the new neoliberal equation of contemporary post-democracies: but the modalities of how this self-severing away from society should happen are fraught with fears of the unknown.

This process of cutting of course can only have one final result – the instability of the world upon which the psychopathic (Babiak et al., 2010: 174–175; Bakan, 2004; Boddy et al., 2010: 121–138; Deresiewicz, 2012; Lee, 2005: 65–90) 1 per cent step. It is doubtful that the collapse of that small mobile bridge in Venice would have offered to wealthy and/or bourgeois party-goers an opportunity to reflect on ideas of social justice.

In that rather insignificant episode at the opening of the 'ceremonies' for the Venice Biennale's 56th version of its 'hunger games', the Fondazione Prada's Venetian outpost in the 18th-century palazzo Ca' Corner della Regina was the improbable source for a series of considerations on the contemporary world of cuts and crises.

The image of rich people falling into the waters reeked of a feeling of the 'chickens that came home to roost', and announced the possibility that the multitude of cuts – in Italy in particular the cuts that politicians, administrators, public officers and industrialists give and take – had finally started to undermine the unity of the social body.

The image also provided a sensation of vindication and an ominous feeling of more things to collapse following the indiscriminate cuts accompanied by taxes which have been implemented by corrupt oligarchies (national and international) and imposed upon an already faltering lower class and newly impoverished middle class.

This rather long preamble, extrapolated from a single press image at the Venice Biennale, may be nothing else than a fantasy, but it may also be a sign of the expectations that people have of things to come: an insight into the wishful thinking of those who are at the bottom of the body of society and are waiting for the bridge to be cut in half and to witness the grandiose spectacle of its collapse.

Post-democracies, as defined by Slavoj Žižek (1999: 200, 202, 353), Jacques Rancière (2006: 4, 62, 69) and Chantal Mouffe (2005: 29), are emerging from the ashes of nation-states while increasingly larger groups of post-citizens are barely a part of these new social systems. The redefinition of post-citizenship, cut out from the original perceptions and values of citizenship, implies the existence of masses that no longer actively participate in the democratic process and that feel increasingly severed from a sense of belonging. These are masses that are progressively disenfranchised – with reduced voting rights and democratic participation – and no longer have a vested interest to be a part of a society that does not recognize them as essential components to the unity of its body.

Post-democracy is enforcing the severing of the ties of citizenship and the tearing apart of the social contract. This is a cut, a separation, a distancing that

the 1 per cent has already achieved for themselves through the realization of contemporary neoliberal post-democracies and supranational corporations; whereas the lower middle and working classes, imbued with a sense of 'the social', have been unable to cut themselves free from the idea of being part of a body and therefore unable to become fully fledged post-citizens.

Post-Democracies' Aesthetics of Cuts

Contemporary post-aesthetics are characterized by reflections on the crisis and the attempt to understand what the consequences are of continuous cuts to the social body and of course *in primis* to the arts. Are we really looking at cuts or are these actually amputations of the social and cultural body? Why choose *Portable Classic* as a title and theme for an exhibition that re-presents mutilated statuary as a post-postmodern condition? Are perhaps the ideas of divide, failure, cut and amputation already mainstream currencies of the imaginary, surfacing now as the visual cues that can define the current 'shifting grounds of socio-cultural mobilities' (Bruno, 2002: 15)?

This is the reason why the cut is not only a phoneme or a cineme,⁴ as Pier Paolo Pasolini might have defined it, but a rather more complex and contextually saturated semiotic sign of a process of developing and transforming in Deleuzian and Pasolinian terms.⁵ It is impossible to understand contemporary society, its divisions, its schizophrenia, without understanding the role that the cut is playing in the developing and reassembling of the parts that the body of society has been cut into.

Reality bites – beyond the representations of the simulacra of post-democracies – via the hunger, the cold, the pain and the inevitability of slow death at the severed and marginalized ghettos of society reached by the hyper-mediated imageries on the multiplicity of screens through which people are constantly invited to believe that their Heideggerian *Seinsfrage*, the Being, is a determinant and determining part of a society that instead has already cut them off.

The beatification and beautifying of amputation, upon which contemporary aesthetics are based, is a process of admiration of the destruction of the present, which, without having the time to become the past, is already cut to pieces not by the tragedy of history but by the hand of its creators. It is an inebriated exaltation of the exclusion of millions of people from a society that is dividing itself into parts, the 1 per cent of which are more deserving, better, and morally superior than others.⁶ *Portable Classic* may be considered as a celebration of what is to come: the aesthetic discourse of a selected vision that celebrates what is favored and selected from the cut pieces, the mutilations, moving away from the process that leads to the mutilated body and disregarding the leftovers: the latent content.

The 'latent content [*Inbalt*]' (Adorno, 1997[1970]: 48) is no longer a 'formal distinction between the ugly and the beautiful' with its inherent social aspects. If 'the motive for the admission for the ugly was antifeudal' and

'the peasants became a fit subject for art', then the current elimination, ghettoization and expulsion of the *Inhalt*, its erasure as a form of elimination and dismissal, is the process for the creation of a newly re-feudalized society.

Cuts arrive announced but the action of cutting – the personalization of he or she who does the cutting is seldom seen. In this post-postmodern society, the words 'cut', 'to be cut' and 'cuts' or 'cuttings' are passive terms in which he or she who does the cutting – the cut giver – is not named nor clearly identified.

There is a sense of impending economic doom which appears to justify the slashing of budgets and of the social body, but the sense of responsibility and consequences are disjointed, displaced, dispersed and unidentifiable in a Byzantine bureaucratic process of the shifting of blame that renders it nearly impossible to pin-point someone: to clearly set the target onto someone that should be on the receiving end of the reaction that should follow the action of a cut unleashed upon the body: a slashing, a shredding, an economic wound inflicted upon those who might have the least responsibility for it. The action and reaction link within the social body, which establishes the responsibility for actions, has been severed to benefit the 1 per cent.

It is as if the cuts are arriving from Mars, or from any other alien civilization out there and are not the byproduct and responsibility of corrupt politicians, rapacious bankers, vulture capitalists and swindling financiers. The cuts arrive from the European Union (EU) but they are not its byproduct nor are they the responsibility of a series of states which, divided, fractured and fractious, are the embodiment of the institutional framework of the EU within which they tear each other apart and shift the responsibility onto mythological representations of reality: laziness and inefficiency as causes of poverty or the EU's solidarity and soft power.

Perhaps all of these corrupt politicians, rapacious bankers, vulture capitalists and swindling financiers really are aliens: alienated from the wider context of society and cut off from common realities, they live in a superior aristocratic world of their own that somehow, in a re-feudalization of contemporary society, the rest of the rebellious but subjugated plebs⁷ allow to exist.

There is always the possibility of considering corrupt politicians, rapacious bankers, vulture capitalists and swindling financiers as schizophrenics and psychopaths, therefore both victims and executioners of a process of identity definition⁸ that severs them and pushes them away from the realm of normality.

Cultural and Social Bodies Cut to Pieces

The post-democratic establishment of a society governed by psychopaths raises the question of the processes that lead 'normal' people to support and/or allow the creation of psychopathic hierarchies and institutions. It also raises the question of how artists and aesthetics can engage with a cultural body that is the expression of a degraded society.

In the ugly, art must denounce the world that creates and reproduces the ugly in its own image, even if in this too the possibility persists that sympathy with the degraded will reverse into concurrence with degradation. (Adorno, 1997[1970]: 48–49)

Concurrence with degradation is certainly a risk, but Theodor Adorno assumes that there is a possibility to classify humanity, to divide and organize it into ethical and unethical groups. The constructions of post-postmodernity do not allow such a luxury any longer. The rise of post-democracy has bisected society and freed its millions of bodies. These are societies of psychopaths, emotionally detached and with schizophrenic conflicts stemming from multiple severed identities. Post-democracies are generating post-citizens, whose confinement is no longer possible since no one is affiliated to any one any longer and everyone has become one of millions of isolated ghettos of one.

[Confinement] assumed its precise meaning in this fact: that madness in the classical period ceased to be the sign of another world, and that it became the paradoxical manifestation of non-being. (Foucault, 2001[1961]: 115)

The cutting of the social bond is a story that finds its precedent in ancient Rome with the first *secessio plebis* (secession of the plebs) on the Aventine, which cut themselves out of the social body. That did not last long and many Aventines later, spread across a couple of millennia, have solely produced an overtired sensation of déjà vu.

Thomas Hobbes in the *Leviathan* also saw the state as a complex Body formed from a commonwealth. The lack of common wealth in the current status of post-democratic commonwealth should perhaps hint at the dissolution of the Leviathan. But does this dissolution imply the cut of the cultural body?

Post-democracies appear to coast along on the idea that it may be possible to eliminate responsibility for the 1 per cent while keeping the 99 per cent subservient to the Leviathan via a representation of art that is subservient to the severed body politics of post-democracy. In fact, the cultural representation of the body politic, social structures and Big Society⁹ as a unified body has remained firmly planted within the mythologizing contexts of contemporary post-democracies, but is only applied to the 99 per cent. The mythological narrative of the social and cultural body continues to present itself as a rationalized madness that excludes a direct relationship between post-democracy and post-citizenship.

The rise of post-democracies as societies of madness has led to the confinement of rational thought through which civilization becomes the non-being, nothingness.

In this nothingness, the operational methodologies of art should be characterized by aesthetic approaches and the presentation of a new cultural body of post-citizens able to rescind itself from the narratives of contemporary globalized and supranational post-democracies.

It is at this juncture that it becomes important to understand how, why and for whom art is produced and what the message conveyed is, because either heeding Adorno's warning of concurrence or Thomas Hobbes's warning of subservience, art does not happen in a socially decontextualized vacuum:

And from love of Arts.

Desire of Knowledge, and Arts of Peace, enclineth men to obey a common Power: For such Desire, containeth a desire of leasure; and consequently protection from some other Power than their own. (Hobbes, 2003[1651]: 168)

Money and Power at the 55th Venice Biennale

Money and power are epitomized at the Venice Biennale, but how are money and power represented in the context of an economic, social and political crisis? What are the images that are constructed in a conflicting globalized context between the haves and have-nots? What are their aesthetic and metaphysical symbolisms as well as the ontological and phenomenological relations to people in crisis?

The undermining of art comes from a discourse based on its utility, its function in a system that is in crisis. Art is the first to be cut because of its futility – is often the argument – but perhaps art, one could argue, is the first to be cut because of its ability to produce imaginaries. If 'the master of the [image] is the master of us all', as per Wittgenstein's dictum (see Miles, 2006: 22), then the production of multiple and alternative imaginaries in a time of crisis has to be brought under the tight control of the body politic. If art produces simulacra – in a Baudrillardian interpretation – the danger for the body politic is based on a war of simulacra which, by bringing opposite views and perceptions, might be able, within a socially mediated society, to challenge the exercise of power via established hierarchical frameworks and networks (Foucault, 1995[1975]: 24).

The idea of the utility of art as long as it can be monetized and transformed into other goods presents a limited perception of humanity solely based on goods and their acquisition. This is a limited vision which discards, within a post-postmodern condition, any *Inbalt* notion of humanity that is not possible to be commodified and reduced to its monetary value.

The lessening of the masses as citizens to impoverished neo-plebs, deprived of their humanity, is the final condition that post-democracies promote. It follows that it has become revolutionary for art to re-present an idea of humanity that is based on '*Inbalt* values', ethical and otherwise, that

have been expunged from contemporary forms of extreme post-capitalist cronyism. The result is a reification of language, images and individuals conceived as dispersed, powerless and disposable single nodes (Rorty, 1993: 345).

In a time of profound social crises, lack of social justice and economic turmoil, financial cuts to the art sector cannot be excluded from an analysis of their contemporary political context. By tearing apart the 'social contract' of no taxation without representation and participation and shifting the burden onto middle and lower classes, the current societal divides in Europe are a reflection of requests of more accountability directed towards both the EU and the nation-states.¹⁰ If one were to agree with the conclusions of Michael L Ross that the demand of accountability increases when the prices of services in authoritarian regimes increase and that 'programmes that force authoritarian governments to bring revenues and expenditures into line should help create pro-democratic pressures' (Ross, 2004: 247) then, *ceteris paribus*, the current economic crises and its cuts are an effort to bring democracy to authoritarian national states: e.g. Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain. If this were the case then the demand of increased accountability towards the EU as an institutional supranational body defines it as an *authoritarian regime*.

Art becomes a reflection of the tensions between post-democracy and post-citizens, hinting or clearly envisioning authoritarian regimes and revolutionary impulses as part of the human condition in the 21st century.

There were three pavilions during the 55th Venice Biennale that within the context of social crisis, social justice and financial cuts reflected upon or hinted at the antagonisms between post-democratic institutions and post-citizens – these were the British Pavilion, the Russian Pavilion and the Greek Pavilion.

British Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale

Jeremy Deller's *English Magic*, curated by Emma Gifford-Mead, could also have been named '*Wishful Thinking as Authorized and Permitted by the Institutional Setting*©'. In Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) words, 'the concessions of *politeness* always contain *political* concessions'.

There was a tight restraint within the exhibition that made it so perfectly English, right down to the cup of tea in the allocated 'tea room' to sip and reflect upon the imminent sanguine but curbed revolution *in fieri*.

Characterized by a lack of visual magic, the show seemed so very 'English-middle-upper-lower class' – falling precisely in line with the safely constructed Oxford maverick daring that is just enough to barely show a hint of courage, which leaves the viewer wishing for more and feeling left out. *English Magic* was magical in the sense that it left the viewer excised from both the dream and the nightmare. Wandering across the rooms one

could admire with a stolid detached smile the painted vague hopes of a revolution, as an afterthought, which Deller only hinted at with polite columns of smoke and carefully placed fires.

The artworks were suggestive of the complexity of contemporary times; but still hung on – with that magic British obstinacy – to the illusion of a Big Society; as if society – capitalistic or not – could still be the answer that would lead to an epic revolution.

After Prime Minister David Cameron announced his plans and invited people to participate in the Big Society of Britain in 2009, it was as if society had suddenly shriveled and died and its 'values' of collective participation had been fed to the hypocritical dogs of conservatism in order for society's remains to be shredded and torn apart.

Big Society, on Cameron's lips, could not mean anything other than the exploitation of that last vestige of British values of solidarity and social participation in order to make up for the retreat of the state from the arena of public services in the name of cost-cutting, packaged and sold as efficient management while shifting the financial burden onto the poor and the newly impoverished middle classes.

What kind of British society was envisaged in Deller's artworks? Was it cut out from a Conservative or Labour template of blank acquiescence?

Deller's exhibition was a spectacle presenting the raw emotional anger of the *Inbalt* of a society. The giant bird of prey which welcomed the viewers was a clearly domesticated version of rapaciousness – it seemed cut directly from the pages of John James Audubon more than being inspired by William Hogarth's satirical vein.

Heller's destruction of St Helier, the capital of Jersey, in 2017 hints at George Orwell's *1984*, but as a utopic dystopian dream that imagines the burning to the ground of a city that is also a tax haven. Heller paints the possibility of a wishful future as a reflection of the orderly imagined destructions of the *English Magic* exhibition that does not spill blood and guts.

Finally, above everything in the exhibition floated the music that accompanied the images of an inflatable Stonehenge bouncy castle.

Bouncy castles are a favorite of the British Council and Arts Councils since they appear – in the mind of some bureaucrat somewhere – to satisfy a wide range of criteria of inclusion. Somehow these bouncy castles convey the goal of the national body politic: entertainment and annihilation of the mind presented under the guise of art participation. Unfortunately, there is a more infamous bouncy castle art project by Maurice Agis that comes to mind: *Dreamspace V*, which was blown over by a sudden gust of wind, causing panic and the death of two people, while 14 others were hospitalized (Wainwright, 2009).

If Deller's installation were to be read as a dry and cursing irony of the system, a critique of contemporary post-democracy and post-capitalism –

as a cutting and destroying of dreams, as a revolt against the sanitation processes and as the nightmare of art used to entertain, if the whole were to be perceived as a critique of the lack of 'English magic' and as a middle finger up to the bureaucratic middle-upper-lower-classes' hope for an orderly revolution, then and only then, the show was amazingly successful.

But was this the real message hidden in between the intellectual lines of the artworks? Or was it an impossible demand which required an extensive intellectual exercise on the part of the visitors and an ability of cutting through the imageries in order to seek and discover the ins and outs of British Culture but also the minutiae of killing with kind words – artworks in this case – in order to achieve a magical revelation? Or was it more convenient to direct facile moral outrage towards Roman Abramovich's yacht, the burning buildings, and the big flying bird mural titled *A Good Day for Cyclists*?

Perhaps Deller was successful with his exhibition and someone wished for a giant rapacious hen harrier to come, grasp the whole of the British Pavilion in its talons and lift it away high in the skies to then crash it somewhere on the giant rocks of a British beach or on the Queen's Sandringham Estate in Norfolk (Adams, 2013).

That, indeed, would have been *English Magic*.

Russian Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale

The artist Vadim Zakharov and the curator Udo Kittelmann put together a show of bling, particularly if compared to the British Pavilion. In the Russian Pavilion there was no space for the hope of revolution – that has long gone – the only space left was for the slick mythologizing of the oligarchs and their purchased bad taste.

Danaë, Zakharov's complex installation, was an orgy of innuendos and a constant flirtatious betrothal with money; which should have perhaps provoked some moral guilt but instead tickled and titillated a fascination with the deeper-seated meaning of money in the human psyche. Sigmund Freud, and those who followed his thought process attributing everything to Eros, would have had a fully blown orgasmic experience in reconstructing the relationship between sex, money and power that, via the artist's psyche, may have lead to understanding contemporary power relations in Russia and more largely for humanity across the globalized 21st-century world.

Gentlemen, time has come to confess our Rudeness, Lust, Narcissism, Demagoguery, Falsehood, Banality, and ...

This is the text that welcomed the visitors to the Russian Pavilion together with a man in a suit sitting on a saddle which was placed upon a beam. The sexuality of the beam, that *mentula* (Vulgar Latin for penis), spewing golden

semen that continued to raise the false hopes of a violent patriarchalism across the world was not a subtle or hidden meaning. It was like entering into a Fellinian circus in which all had been rendered 'fine' (including the artworks), and where the art messages and sexual innuendos were like giant banners, strongly wrestling the visitors in a grasp that felt as another imposed bondage, not of participation, but of slavery to money and power.

Danaë's golden coins created a mythological mound of semen, evil and greed of which women were participatory agents. The cave, the hole, the penetration, the dripping of coins, it was as if the whole of humanity had been rendered minuscule and as minuscule beings of stature and mind were there to testify to the majestic copulations of the contemporary gods: the oligarchs of Russia and everywhere else around the world.

The sterile and staged presentation of the installation, curated by Kittelmann, transposed those patriarchal structures, which are blatantly and vulgarly exhibited in Russia, into the refined halls of Europe, always ready to hide them behind the illusion of a thicker layer of civilization and spin. It was as if the Russian Pavilion did not belong: its mythological show could not have and should not have been connected to this Europe which, in the name of democracy, equality and moral superiority, presents itself as having rejected and overcome long ago 'Rudeness, Lust, Narcissism, Demagoguery, Falsehood, Banality, and Greed, Cynicism, Robbery, Speculation, Wastefulness, Gluttony, Seduction, Envy, and Stupidity' (Zakharov, 2013).

In *Danaë* the tension between the role that women play in empowering and disempowering contemporary monetary dreams and explosive inflationary bubbles was all metaphorically recoiled on the mound of shiny gold coins. When the doors opened and the press entered in a frenzy, hands started to grab the money – the seed of Zeus – and greedily took that golden falling rain for themselves. They took more than they were supposed to and scurried away as if there had been a guilty gain, rather than participating in the aesthetic process of re-sharing to let the system, put in place by the artist, continue its flow.¹¹

The aesthetic illusion of *Danaë's* shiny metal coins clashed against the reality of greed, the processes of enslavement, and the hierarchical structures of a world that no mythologizing could render palatable.

Not even the golden showers of Zeus's semen would be enough to satiate the greed of this humanity. His testicles would shrivel and die, while humanity, both men and women, would continue to grab.

Greek Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale

The Greek Pavilion was physically separated from the rest of the Biennale's pavilions by a small water canal – an island unto itself which was connected via small bridges and passageways. The separation of the Greek Pavilion could not have been more significant during the 2013 Venice Biennale and

as a metaphor of present-day Greece, which continues to be economically and politically ostracized from the rest of Europe.

To access the Greek Pavilion was like stepping into another world; a world in which the spectatorship of the economic crisis and the reality of its impact were mediated by the complex, poetic and harmonious aesthetics of the madness of contemporary life, power and money.

History Zero by Stefanos Tsivopoulos, under the curation of Syrago Tsiara, was a poetic drama, in three parts, on the incommunicability of life and on the continuously increasing divide between rich and poor,¹² with the artist standing in the middle, literally and figuratively.

Tsivopoulos, with an incomparable artistry, cut the narratives and isolated them. The films presented three dystopian stories within which the protagonists (a mad and rich collector, an artist and a poor immigrant) did not meet and within which society appeared severed, mutilated and cut into pieces. These torn pieces no longer communicated with each other and no longer intertwined in a single body. They existed as independent forms of reality within the mythology of the inhabited space, within the landscape of the city of Athens and within the millenarian historical layers that seemed to connect them, but upon which all three characters surfaced and slipped, each one closed within the insular perspective of their own representations of folly, reality and dream.

The architectonical and curatorial framework of the display further pushed this concept to its ultimate form of isolation which was embedded in the physical separation of the films in three rooms with the audience obliged to watch its own isolated narrative. There were two further separations – the audience that was waiting to enter and the audience that was lingering afterwards to exchange commentaries and reflect on the artworks.

The Leviathan of post-democracy and its economics, in Tsivopoulos's *History Zero*, was presented as an otherworldly monster that crippled humanity and from which no one was able to escape. The Leviathan appeared to be conceived as a construction of power and money within which people existed as isolated and cutoff beings.

Tsivopoulos's narrative engaged directly and indirectly with the issues of contemporary post-democracy, isolation and madness, creating a sense of reality that was experienced via the 'cut'. The exhibition was a representational form of an increasingly economically segregated society that allowed for illusory simulacra of personal histories to conflagrate in the impossibility of grasping, as post-citizens, the straws of the body politic's multi-delusional narrations that society does exist still. These delusions in Tsivopoulos's recount become like the chants of the sirens in Odysseus: an enchanting obstacle that can lead only to death, unless, like the Homeric hero, one is able to separate reality from illusion in order to bask in its beauty.

Madness, silence, incommunicability and segregation became a series of motives that were transferred from Homer's poetic to *History Zero's*

aesthetic where Tsivopoulos refuted any direct mythologizing and re-traced the seeds of hope from the barren landscape of post-democracy for basic human exchanges that may provide an alternative to the Leviathan.

The Greek Pavilion and its 'consumption' was a poetic experience; one made of dramatic realities and silenced hopes. It is on the strength of the experiential that somehow a veil was lifted, the Platonic illusion of the shadowy knowledge of the cave was no longer there, nor was there the Baudrillardian conspiracy of art (Baudrillard, 2005[1996]: 14, 18, 16) by political minstrels that call themselves artists.

By exiting into the light of the Venetian sky it was possible to *know* that something had been shared, that in the drama there was a seed of hope, and that it was perhaps possible to restart from the poetry of *History Zero*.

MoCC's Wondering at the 55th Venice Biennale

The Guggenheim was certainly not unique in its insistence on separating institutional interests from artistic ones. Indeed, the social, economic, and political links between the cultural spaces of the museum and corporate interests are part of the (repressed) historical narratives of museums in social space. (Rectanus, 2002: 16)

The representation of crisis and societal meltdown reached its poetic peak at the Venice Biennale in 2013 with Tsivopoulos, Zakharov and Deller at, respectively, the Greek, Russian and British Pavilions. It was in this context that the Museum of Contemporary Cuts (MoCC) made its first appearance at the Venice Biennale, creating a space that was a-social, arbitrary and autonomous in order to not separate its perception of art from the social, economic and political contexts.

The MoCC Pavillion, willfully misspelled, was a cut below the rest since it was not trying to be anywhere, nor was it trying to exist within the framework of the Biennale. It happened as a movable feast of incomplete and disorganized activities, which, on the spur of the moment, would float from space to space.

Since the scope of MoCC has always been that of analyzing and representing the crisis by offering a space for a range of critiques and experimentations analyzing the condition of cutting and being cut, its existence at the Venice Biennale could not be linked to traditional forms of intervention. MoCC existed via a series of physical and online collaborations with a wide range of educational institutions – from Goldsmiths to the Royal College of Art, art fairs from Art-Athina to Supermarket, and artists from the duo Revital Coher and Tuur Van Balen to Olga Kisseleva. The MoCC Pavillion aimed to 'appear' as a hidden and incongruous place situated between a wide range of international pavilions where the artists and the artworks had been 'cut' at the origin to satisfy their national body politics as well as the needs of the Venetian Leviathan in order to produce *sanctioned impropriety*.

To break this impasse the space of existence itself became for MoCC a tool to play with in order to realize a vision of disruption which could lead, via homelessness and lack of space, to finding a 'dwelling place' as Heidegger would define it:

Not only is art a stable counter-term to technology, but its capacity to disclose the world as 'a dwelling place' against the 'homelessness' threatened by the age of technology is made 'manifest in a new way' with 'the discovery of the essence of technology'. (Ross, 2007: 93)

Nevertheless this was not a Heideggerian search for the *Seinsfrage* (the Being): certainly not in strict and traditional philosophical terms. It was instead a method to achieve a cultural redefinition of aesthetic and art as counterpoint to the crisis via the usage of alternative possible models that would provide ideas on how to engage but without the hierarchical paraphernalia of power. It was an endeavor to find a home via homelessness, to cut away from tradition via classic forms, to revolutionize via conformity, to be rich via poverty. Since it was an attempt doomed to fail from the very beginning – and as such most ventures are freed from the obligation of success – MoCC had the opportunity of presenting itself as that independent voice able to offer a counterpoint: silence to the noise, a scream to the quiet.

The Museum existed within the Biennale by producing a range of activities and discourses that are still continuing to develop and that from Kasa Gallery in Istanbul – MoCC's original hosting place – will continue to be developed in the new 'hosting' body and 'dwelling space': Kalfayan Galleries in Athens.

The crisis continues and so continues the work of representation of MoCC. It is a representation of those who are left without space and without means, a representation of the voices that would only be disappearing and left as *Inbalt*, as a footnote of the art history books.

MoCC becomes a way of recording feelings, impressions, sensations and opinions. It is a glimpse into the context of a complex socio-economic and political reality. It is a process of recording that Pasolinian form of knowledge that only the artist, as a conduit of contextual knowledge, can provide.¹³ It is the alternative to the perceptions constructed by mainstream commentators and historians who will attempt to reframe, justify and validate the spinning of a reality of sufferance and abuse that is the legacy upon which the EU of the 21st century will be built upon or cut into pieces.

The divide, the cut, the separation has already happened, leaving a multitude of questions on the role that post-democracies are playing and the destiny of all of those who have become post-citizens.

Conclusions of a Post-citizen

This collection of observations and analyses – including the different experiences of MoCC that are still in progress – cannot be isolated from

a sense of the social space. While this is not a search for the *Seinsfrage* determined by technology, it is a search for a methodology of being (an artist, a curator or a more socially engaged person) that in Heideggerian terms is not solely shaped by events but is also able to reshape them.

The shaping and being shaped by events in a Western post-democratic context cannot ignore that 'for beyond the West, in countries where citizenship always existed largely in name, the central anchors of life already largely operate in a post-citizen era/mode' (Soguk, 2014: 55). Post-democracy is a cut in the standards of democracy. It is a mutilation that reduces democracy and its standards in an unraveling that at some point will degress from the point of democracy and enter into the realm of dictatorship. How much of democratic participation and principles can be cut before post-democracy becomes a dictatorship is perhaps not exactly unquantifiable, but certainly knowable.

If these are humanistic constructs of unquantifiable knowledge and therefore disregarded in scientific terms, nevertheless they are forms of understanding for the artist and the intellectual, at least in Pasolinian terms, which are derived from a contextualization and sensory experience of the multiple elements of society. The divide and being cut out from the social is constructed on the impediment of those perceptual forms of knowledge that determine and are determined by a personal *Seinsfrage* for the construction of a collective Being.

We can see the rising dissent and anger and the changing of attitudes towards the rich, but not the precise event that will come to be labelled as the turning point, just as we could not a century ago. But it is coming. We may even have passed it. (Dorling, 2014)

The inability to see the cut-off, the edge of a permanent and insurmountable divide, will necessarily determine a conflict between the body politic of the post-democracies of the 1 per cent and the insurrectional practices of the post-citizenship of the 99 per cent.

Art in this context will have to decide whether to exist in the carved out asphyxiated space of the 1 per cent as shiny propaganda and a glorification tool of a high culture determined by the few for the few and dangled as a simulacrum of existential participation to the many, or to engage directly – albeit not necessarily frontally – with the fraying context of pre-dictatorships, which, sold as post-democracies, are threatening and imposing new forms of fascism and enslavement on post-citizens, slaves in all but name.

Notes

1. 'Visuality is the term that I tend to use now, rather than visualization, meaning the visual in the overlap between representation and cultural power' (Dikovitskaya, 2005: 226).
2. 'Visual culture entails a mediation on blindness, the invisible, the unseen, and the unseeable' (Dikovitskaya, 2005: 60).

3. 'For example, that vision is (as we say) a cultural construction, that it is learned and cultivated, not simply given by nature; that therefore it might have a history related in some yet to be determined way to the history of arts, technologies, media, and social practices of display and spectatorship; and (finally) that it is deeply involved with human societies, with the ethics and politics, aesthetics and epistemology of seeing and being seen' (Mitchell, 2002: 66).
4. "“Cinemes” (*cinemi*: the individual elements within the frame, which Pasolini asserted as the filmic equivalent of phonemes)' (Fabbri, 1994: 80).
5. 'That is why Pasolini demonstrated that the essential thing ... is to be found in neither language A, nor in language B, but in language X, which is none other than language A in the actual process of becoming language B' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 106).
6. Recent German politics in reference to the current Greek crisis have introduced new discourses of fracturing and dividing, which are based on the proclamation of an economic (as well as cultural) line, establishing an inside and outside, a superior and inferior.
7. "“Plebs” is now also hegemonically identified with the people as a whole (“populus”)' (Rummens, 2009: 381; see also Laclau, 2005: 94, 107, 196, 224).
8. 'The definition of a precise us (clear-cut, rounded, discrete) was the unfinished task of national projects' (Gnecco, 2015: 263).
9. 'I find myself as Prime Minister at a time when we have this appalling budget deficit, bigger than almost anywhere else in Europe – we have to sort it out ... I have said lots of times in the past, there are too many parts of our society that are broken, whether it is broken families or whether it is some communities breaking down; whether it is the level of crime, the level of gang membership; whether it's problems of people stuck on welfare, unable to work; whether it's the sense that some of our public services don't work for us – we do need a social recovery to mend the broken society. To me, that's what the Big Society is all about' (Cameron, 2011).
10. 'This suggests that people do not generally rebel against taxation without representation; rather, they appear to rebel against taxation without commensurate government services. When the price of government services goes up, authoritarian regimes tend to become – or, perhaps, are forced to become – more accountable to their citizens' (Ross, 2004: 247).
11. The process devised by the artists was one were people would participate in the artwork enabling a continuous rain of money. After a few hours, and after many coins disappeared, the system was perfected to take into account the 'enthusiasm' of the reception that Zeus's semen had received.
12. 'In spring this year, Oxfam revealed that some 85 of the world's richest people now had as much wealth as the poorest half of all humanity. A few weeks later, Forbes magazine updated that estimate to just 67 people. Then, within days, they corrected that estimate on their website to 66 people, so fast was the wealth of the multi-billionaires rising in the world during early 2014' (Dorling, 2014).
13. 'I know because I'm an intellectual, a writer who tries to follow everything that happens, to know everything that is written on the matter, to imagine everything that is unknown or unspoken; who associates facts, even if they appear unrelated, who puts together the disorganized and fragmented pieces of an entire coherent political picture, who restores logic there where arbitrariness, folly and mystery seem to reign' (Pasolini, 1974, author's translation).

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