

The Importance of Sincerity: Gerasimos Vokos and the Position of the Intellectual in Early-Twentieth-Century Athens

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Introduction

The historical and sociological debate on whether intellectuals can be defined as a homogeneous class has been a long and controversial one (see for ex. the work by K. Mannheim or T. Bottomore; studies by Lukacs, Gramsci, and Sartre have also been formative in this discussion). The issues it has privileged range from the intellectuals' spiritual and cultural ties, their social allegiances and their necessary role in formulating or contesting dominant ideologies, through their moral responsibility and real transformatory power, to their archaeology and modern rebirth as a distinct social group. A recent interest in qualifying the modern Greek case has enriched its relevance to this debate.¹

It has been observed –by, among others, C.D. Gounelas (*The Socialist Conscience in Greek Literature* 288) and R. Beaton (*Introduction to Modern Greek Literature* 99)– that there is a coherence in the themes and rhetoric of the Greek intelligentsia of the period straddling the turn of the twentieth century. Put very broadly, literary works, journalism and political essays are spurred by a conscious, and often didactic, commitment to social causes. Preoccupation with a national language, reference to predetermined and immobile systems of traditional community, irredentist national aspirations and the messianic expectation of an individual political saviour combine to build up a circuit of shared interest. In what ways, though, and at what cost, did this bring and keep together people who were not linked professionally to the same institutions, were not necessarily of comparable socioeconomic status and were not brought up in the same place? Complicating the issues both of their phenomenology and their role, the intellectuals' overall practice does not seem to have avoided a marked disarticulation between transplanted ideas and cultural modes on the one hand and everyday local realities on the other.

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For, while at times they appear to have engaged with matters of social injustice in a polemic way, by taking up a supra-class nation-building responsibility intellectuals often reproduced and deepened the contradictions inherent in their own condition. In other words, they were perhaps hindered by their collective *raison d'être*² itself from creatively perceiving real social conflict. Scholarship has presented this general reluctance to question their own perceived mission as symptomatic of their multiple dependence on a socially detached and thus often ideologically restrained diaspora. The expatriate communities, who provided the basic readership of the cultural journals as well as the indispensable financial support of education and most other cultural institutions, and who were surrounded by an aura of foreignness and cosmopolitanism, must somehow have constituted a compensatory field of social reference. How else could one explain the intellectuals' remarkable isolation from a growing public unrest among the lower social strata during the first decade of the century?³

They are handicapped in other ways as well. It has been observed that the intellectuals' contribution to progressive thought, through publications and cultural activities, especially after the 1880s, was not immediately felt, due to their small number (Dertilis 133): in 1907 Athens, the country's capital which acquired central importance as late as the second half of the nineteenth century, had a mere 300,000 inhabitants, within a national total of 2.5 million. Intellectuals active in the cultural journals between 1897 and 1910 number just over a hundred. Their role, then, as has been convincingly argued, must have been less formative of the soon-to-become-dominant bourgeois ideology than much literary historiography would have it (e.g. Gounelas, *Socialist Conscience* 305). Indeed, an examination of the intelligentsia's production during the brief, mainly Athenian, 'spiritual renaissance' of 1897-1910 and the immediately following 'golden era of Greek liberalism' (the terms are from Andreopoulos 208) between 1910 and 1920 reveals an erratic performance in solidifying the political ideologies that would dominate over the next decades, those of the royalists, the liberals and the Left.

However fluid and flexible their allegiances, Greek intellectuals did succeed in developing a sense of collective belonging. Certain traits in their common conscience typify their profile and position them within the general behavioural framework of modern intelligentsias. At once fascinated and disgusted by life in the city, permanently obsessed with travelling to European metropoleis for their self-cultivation, and dedicated (perhaps inevitably) to the values inherent in their professional medium, be it writing, painting, sculpting, composing or publishing, they moulded for themselves a distinct regime of inclusions and differentiations, in other words, a kind of class.

Cultural institutions in nineteenth-century Greece, such as the University, the Academy, the governmental cultural offices or the literary and artistic associations, lack the antiquity and stability that would lend them adequate reliability as sources. The cultural press, recording the often incestuous discussions amongst the men of letters and the arts and their attempts to establish or criticize

institutions, proves more eloquent a guide through their activities. In this sense, the touchstone for their actual historical impact is partly also their personal relationships, their techniques of collective self-construction and their networking tactics.

There are yet links to be recovered between long-term cultural developments and moments of individual production, between social actors and their milieus, and finally between the phases of evolution in different media and technologies of expression in the modern era. As a small way into such a multi-layered project, I would like to examine some aspects of the artistic activities of Gerasimos Vokos (1868-1927), the son of a navy officer who grew up in Patras, abandoned his studies at the Economic Department of the Merchant Navy to live most of his life in Athens as a journalist and later publisher, poet and playwright, and spent his last years as a painter in Paris. In a juxtaposition of strictly biographical data and events of a broader scope, I will suggest some preliminary insights into the historical significance of his decision to become a painter at the age of forty-five, with no prior artistic education, a decision which is exemplified in a sketch he published in his Athenian journal in 1912.

I

Vokos' oeuvre, relatively extensive and stylistically diverse, was well-known to his contemporaries.⁴ He left no anonymous, lost or forgotten masterpieces to be posthumously discovered. The critical record has over time rated him among the mediocre. It would be futile to force fragments of originality out of his writing and painting and subject them to inspection. Hardly any innovative elements in his narrative and expressive techniques would justify an assessment along these lines.

It is another level of appreciation that permeates and counterbalances every openly critical review among his serious critics, a level that is still at work as late as 1958, in the art critic Al. Kondopoulos's enigmatic verdict that Vokos's "aesthetic position was more a 'moralistic' than a 'plastic' one" (Kondopoulos 15). A certain respect for some quality of Vokos' works apparently not inherent in the works themselves, the acknowledgement of a value referring to the author's personality rather than to his actual production, forms a constant in the criticism of G. Kazantzaki, K. Varnalis, P. Nirvanas, Z. Papantoniou and others, both in contemporary reviews and in obituaries.

Vokos was certainly aware of reviews such as the one below, published (under the pseudonym Petroula Psiloreiti) in the respectable and well-distributed mainstream journal *Παναθήναια*. It refers to the performance of the play "Beyond this World" (*Υπεράνω του Κόσμου Τούτου*), of which Vokos had promoted both a plot summary and the script through the pages of his own journal *Καλλιτέχνης* (*The Artist*):

This play by Mr. Vokos is hardly worse than the rest of this year's crop. All characters are treated insufficiently and their behaviour is spectral. Their ideas are confused and their perception of life is superficial and weak. Moreover, there is a comic confusion between platonism and socialism, and laughable scenes of terrible, inexplicable sudden poverty. Yet, beyond all this, some unaccomplished poetic effort indeed provokes our sympathy. There is something noble in this whole effort, a soul that can truly feel pain, beautiful but frail, ill and dazzled. Amongst all the rest of its kind, this work, though I can hardly appreciate it, somehow moves me, I don't know why.

[Το δράμα αυτό του κ. Βόκου δεν είναι χειρότερον από τα υπόλοιπα της εφετεινής εσοδείας. “Όλοι οι χαρακτήρες αναιμικά διατυπώνονται και φασματικά σαλεύουν. Αι ιδέαι των συγχυσμένοι και η αντίληψις των περί ζωής ψεύτικη και ασθενής. Έπειτα, κωμική σύγχυσις πλατωνισμού και σοσιαλισμού, σκηναί φρικτής ανεξηγήτου και ξαφνικής ανεχείας που προκαλούν το γέλιο. Κι όμως επάνω απ'όλα αυτά, κάποια ποιητική προσπάθεια που μας προκαλεί, αλήθεια, την συμπάθειαν. Κάτι πιο ευγενικό ενυπάρχει μέσα εις όλην αυτήν την προσπάθειαν, μια ψυχή που αληθινά μπορεί να πονέσει, ώμορφη μα αδύνατη, άρρωστη και θαμπωμένη. Ανάμεσα στα τόσα άλλα, το έργον αυτό, χωρίς να το εκτιμώ καθόλου, όμως δεν ξέρω γιατί, με συγκινεί κάπως.]

In an obituary of Vokos, the writer Z. Papandoniou, director of the National Gallery, positioned him as a painter amongst “the myriads of the spontaneous and the indépendants. The only difference is that, while most of them are mere charlatans ... Vokos expressed through [this spontaneity] a sincere sentiment” (Papandoniou 162).

P. Nirvanas (pseudonym for P. Apostolidis), a journalist and critic who had known Vokos since their brief experience in the navy in their early twenties and had practically co-directed Vokos's first major publishing enterprise, *To Periodikón mas* (*Our Journal*) in 1900, wrote in the daily *Εστία* (*Hestia*) in 1925:⁵ “These works [paintings which Vokos had exhibited at the Zappeion in Athens] confirm that before us we have something rare, especially in our times: a sincere creator.” Other accounts focus on his “purity... and his love for art” (Georgiadis), his “offering his life to art” (Kazantzaki).

Besides being aware of the reviews, Vokos was also sensitive to their critical currency and weight. He was a perceptive critic himself (albeit not always as acute and articulate when it came to the “fine letters and the arts” as he was in his political analyses). He was one of the first to appreciate the writer Pl. Rodokanakis (alongside K. Palamas and G. Xenopoulos) and to have foreseen the capacity for innovation and success in the sculptor M. Tombros as early as 1912.

Having long dwelt, through journalism and criticism, in the intermediate space between the cultivated intellectuals and public taste, Vokos was alerted to the fact that it was much less feasible for him to compete with the most demand-

ing spirits of his time than it was to strike a commercial success. The play, for instance, the formal qualities of which G. Kazantzaki quite emphatically condemned, sold a considerable number of tickets over numerous performances. However, becoming a member of the 'chosen class' meant more to Vokos than recognition by the general public.

He was actually one of the first effectively to focus his efforts on making explicit such a social distinction for men of letters and the arts. Vokos himself is probably to be credited with first introducing to the Greek public the forum for opinion as a genre in the cultural press. In his journal *To Periodikón mas* in 1900, he surveyed contemporary intellectuals' opinions on Premier Harilaos Trikoupi.⁶ Mounting a forum for opinion (or a literary competition, a genre introduced in the 1880s) quickly became a common method for attracting public attention in the following decade (Gounelas, "The Literary and Cultural Periodicals in Athens" 23-25). And when, a couple of months after the the Goudi putsch in 1909, Vokos called for the "opinions by the chosen class of Greek writers, artists and scientists" (*Καλλιτέχνης* 1, p.2) on the results of the 'revolution', he was quite confident about his reasons:

... [W]e thought that we had to know [their] opinion on this matter, which is of interest to the entire country, hoping that for the first time, they would be given a chance to speak about a cause they have for years fought to realize, they who feel [the revolution] is their own cause, with their tendencies towards reform.

Vokos realized that the function of the forum for opinion was ultimately to encourage the creation, both among readers and among those contributing to it, of a distinct notion of a front of intellectuals. In turn-of-the-century Athens, it served to produce the impression of an ongoing series of lively debates with which intellectuals constantly preoccupied themselves. The conscious character of its construction, and of conflicts justifying their existence, is most evident in the fact that after 1900 several writers wrote for several publications using pseudonyms in order to "disguise their allegiance to several causes at once, or, most significantly, in the technique some periodicals used to stimulate controversies".⁷

Vokos's journalism was exemplary of this relativism. This is how he greeted the new year in 1897:

Ideals are being formulated and presented anew every day. Immediately, satiation occurs. No principle seems to dominate. Everything finds its page in this voluminous and unending book... Before socialism has had its final say,... the chapter of anarchy emerges.... The inspiration of patriotism itself, love of one's fatherland, after being reduced to the scornful language of chauvinism, is already in decline. Our fatherland is no longer the country that gave us birth. The fatherland is the whole world. Every idea and every feeling has been inverted and the exotic has taken the place of the customary and the natural (*Ακρόπολις*, 1 Jan. 1897, p. 2)

[Ιδεώδη διατυπώνονται, προβάλλονται ανά πάσαν ημέραν. Ο κόσμος επέρχεται στιγμιαίως. Ουδεμία αρχή φαίνεται δεσπόζουσα. Όλα ευρίσκονται τας σελίδας των εις το ογκώ[δε]ς αυτό το ατελεύτητον βιβλίον... Πριν ακόμη ο σοσιαλισμός ειπή την τελευταίαν του λέξιν εκεί μέσα διεγράφη το κεφάλαιον της αναρχίας. Αυτή η έμπνευσις του πατριωτισμού, ο έρωσ προς την πατρίδα, αφού περιστάλη δια της περιφρονητικής εκφράσεως του σωβινισμού ήδη εκλείπει. Η πατρίς δεν είναι ο τόπος ο γεννήσας ημάς. Η πατρίς είναι όλος ο κόσμος. Και πάσα ιδέα και παν αίσθημα διεστράφησαν και το εξωτικόν επήρε την θέσιν του συνήθους, του φυσικού...]

In the first decade of the century, a common conscience amongst intellectuals could potentially still include both the “servants of beauty” and those who would later dedicate themselves to sociopolitical causes (like e.g. Pyrros Yannopoulos and K. Hatzopoulos). This consciousness was still somewhat unfocused, though it had properly entered a process of stabilizing itself in literary salons and cafés, and in numerous literary periodicals between 1899 and 1912.⁸ The intellectual front had played its part in the “anxious idealism and unremitting urge upwards” (Biris 259) with which the capital had welcomed the century. By 1912, a kind of swan song of heightened activity being the only evident sign of segregation, it was preparing to question itself.

II

The Parisian institution of the annual election of the ‘Prince des Poètes’ had inspired, in 1911, a poetry competition at Neon Kentron, the Athenian café frequented by the *literati* during the 1900s and the place where Vokos built the foundations of his journal *Καλλιτέχνης*. Along the same lines of direct influence, a year later, the journalist of the Athens daily *Εφημερίς* Pyrros Yannopoulos decided to invite “people unrelated to the art of Appelles” to “submit their sketches for publication in response to a similar invitation by an Italian journal to writers and musicians” (*Καλλιτέχνης* Feb. 1912, p. 413).

Gerasimos Vokos reproduced some of the sketches sent to *Εφημερίς* in his journal *Καλλιτέχνης* in February 1912. Vokos was delighted with the “primitive” and “childlike” results and wished to share them with the widely dispersed international Greek readership of his journal.⁹

The poet S. Martzokis presented a signed idol of a dunce (Fig. 1). “According to Mr. Yannopoulos it represents the plight of poetry in the hands of today’s young poets”, reads the caption added by Vokos. Pl. Rodokanakis’s contribution (Fig. 2) earned a longer comment: “...The author of *De profundis*, where all the distant times and the heroes of history are depicted in the finest and most ethereal style, refers his painterly symbol back to the remote ages of the Pharaohs, with the basket of offerings being reverently posited upon the hem of the throne of the reigning genius. Is



Fig. 1

this perhaps the author himself enjoying a well-deserved tribute by his readers?"¹⁰

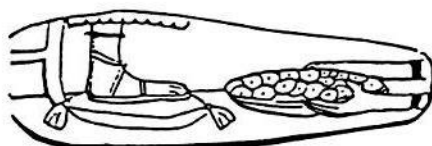


Fig. 2

Sp. Melas's "mannequin with garb in the latest fashion", bearing the inscription 'qualifications for a Greek's success in all professions' (Fig. 3) was jokingly interpreted as a "modern Greek representation, characteristic in that it lacks a brain [to judge] such a cheap expression of human grandeur" (... νεοελληνική χαρακτηριστική παράσταση ως προς τον ελλείποντα εγκέφαλον απέναντι τόσω ευθηλής εξωτερικεύσεως ανθρωπίνου μεγαλείου").

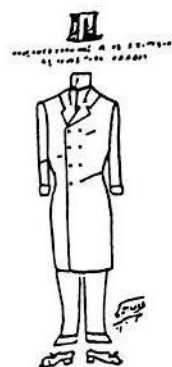


Fig. 3

Finally, Vokos introduced Spandonis' sketch (Fig. 4) exclaiming "ecce homo", and observing that Nietzsche and "the artist" were both preoccupied with the same philosophical problem of man.



Fig. 4

The whole article has the air of an established community, based on the contributors' generational and occupational affinity. The act of republication by Vokos and the casual style of the commentary presupposes their familiarity with contemporary poetry and issues of artistic recognition, as well as their notoriously free handling of Nietzsche. The tender irony in the remarks makes use of a shared interest in a specific social problematic and might be thought to contain a sense of authority and control over a certain public.

Perhaps this condescending rhetoric even captures a cautionary tone, the intellectual old guard's fear of challenge. The potentially acute social satire of the modern Greek professional ethos or of young poets' competence was in any case deactivated by its very broadness and self-conscious frivolity. Indeed, this harmlessly patronizing critique of the contemporary intellectual scene built an uncomplicated, and thus also perspectiveless, consensus.

At Yannopoulos's invitation, Vokos himself had been keen enough to submit several sketches. One of them, an unrefined ink drawing of unknown size,¹¹ he reproduced in *Καλλιτέχνης* together with the rest of the caricatures (Fig. 5). But his was surely not an offhand sketch, let alone a doodle. Far from being a constellation of a few single lines floating in the vacuum of scrap paper to the effect of some conceptual parody, his was a drawing with dense penwork, organizing his subject with the logic of a landscape composition on canvas. In it, a heavily cloaked man and a dog were set against the background of a building surrounded by trees. The caption read: "This is undoubtedly a symbolic representation. The dedication to the master is perhaps a token of joy at the belated discovery of genius" ("Προφανώς πρόκειται περί συμβολικής παραστάσεως. Η δε αφιέρωσις προς τον διδάσκαλον είνε ίσως δείγμα χαράς δια την όψιμον ανακάλυψιν της ιδιοφυίας").



Fig. 5

One can only presume that this is a touch of self-mocking modesty.¹² In any case, this brief interpretative note to Vokos' own sketch stands somewhat uncomfortably in this sequence of satirically titled and artistically totally unambitious drawings spread across two pages of *Καλλιτέχνης*. Whilst willing to suggest ridiculous exegeses for all other sketches, he doubly refutes satire in drawing and footnoting his own. Instead, he shows honest gratitude to the professor of sculpture Thomas Thomopoulos, a friend and close collaborator of his in *Καλλιτέχνης*, for complimenting Vokos on his artistic talent. Moreover, he offers a method, (rather than an outrageous punchline), to guide the reader through his "representation". He thus fails, unlike the other writers, to acknowledge the grotesqueness of his figment and to distance himself from it.

Indeed, if the other contributors' relaxed agnosticism towards visual creativity derives from their confidence as artists of the written word, Vokos' perplexing *gravitas* marks the beginning of an inverse obsession. "I am deaf and dumb to prose" he would declare a few years later (Peranthis 336).

III

This collection of sketches appeared under the headline “Newspapers” (“Εφημερίδες”), and thus introduced a new sub-column within the standard column of the journal, “The Fine Letters and the Arts” (“Τα Ωραία Γράμματα και αι Τέχναι”). With this standard column, which covered a variety of current events and topical commentaries, *Καλλιτέχνης* subscribed to a pattern of content organization which has proved remarkably persistent in the structure of cultural periodicals throughout their history, i.e. the division of subject-matter into long feature columns, usually significant for the depth of research and the originality of the chosen topics, and into columns with news and shorter reviews.

This division seems to epitomize the central social vocation of the cultural journals since the emergence of mass communication. In separating the absorbing and demanding reading material from brief and more trivial information, the division brings the reader into contact with a cultural cosmology where the crucial act of reading is defined by the balance of two basic relationships: on the one hand the umbilical cord connecting the introvert reader with the authoritative rhetoric of the book, and on the other the open-ended and ongoing intellectual engagement of the active citizen with a polyphonic, multivalent and pervasive flow of recorded events.

The fluctuation in titles of columns and in the whole structure of these journals indicates their flexibility and experimentation in mapping out the mental categorization of knowledge. In early twentieth century Greek cultural journals column titles change constantly, paralleling the public and private domains which are just beginning to take a definitive shape. The column “Εφημερίδες” crops up erratically in *Καλλιτέχνης*, signalling yet another failed intention to institute a symbolic space for public activity.

Could such a failure be read as one of Vokos’ ultimate attempts to keep together a public space that he felt was disintegrating? In general, construction of common experience appears to have been a conscious process: In 1917, conversations at the Neon Kendron café had already become an object of reminiscence and nostalgia in the cultural press.¹³

Καλλιτέχνης, Vokos’ most accomplished and acclaimed project, was discontinued in 1912 with the outbreak of the Balkan War and the consequent lack of funds. A final issue appearing in 1914, the twilight of Vokos’ endeavour, anticipated the stage of solitude and introspection that was to take over his life. As if driven by a tremendous force of intellectual inertia, Vokos preserved the same fundamental structure of contents as before. But this time, everything in *Καλλιτέχνης* –poetry, short stories, essays, reports and illustrations– was signed by the director-artist Vokos himself. In an essay entitled “Endeavours: A Psychological Study”, a sort of prologue to this one-man show, Vokos seized the opportunity to remind the readers of his sketch submitted to *Εφημερίς* two years earlier and confessed that the praise he had received for it from numerous friends had made him aware of his vocation as a painter: after seeking consolation in

writing for the theatre and in music –according to some accounts he would occasionally hire a piano and bang on its notes while loudly reciting Victor Hugo– “this soul”, he wrote, “has finally discovered itself” (*Καλλιτέχνης* No 31, p. 7).

IV

What the 1919 psychiatric reports would call a “chronic periodic delirium”, Z. Panandoniou “the blow of fate”, and most of his collaborators and friends would agree was an “illness of the soul”, seems to have been the symptomatic expression of what at other instances had been described as a hyper-active and restless brain. Vokos’ mental episodes were, it seems, mostly crises of over-excitement in recounting a grand event reported in the press or a particularly moving work of literature. Furthermore, they appear localized in very creative periods of his life. One brief account of Vokos’ personality, by a writer – Stamelos– who is unlikely to have known him well personally, is particularly sensitive to the concrete conflictual nature of Vokos’ suffering and hints at the fact that certain ideological allegiances censored and filtered his forceful creative impulse. Yet, Stamelos (14) found it necessary to tame the picture of insanity by prioritizing a moral justification of it.

And for all this unceasing effort, the creative orgasm brightly reflecting on the works of his imagination and his hands, Vokos remained meek and kind. He remained meek until the time when his sensitivity could not stand the strain –a strain to which he was subjected by his inexhaustible vitality, his uncompromising character, his modesty and his superiority.

[Και μέσα σ’όλη αυτή την αδιάκοπη προσπάθεια, στο δημιουργικό οργανισμό που αντιφέγγιζε και λαμποκοπούσε στα έργα της φαντασίας και των χειριών του, ο Βόκος έμεινε πράος και αγαθός. Έμεινε πράος ως την ώρα που η ευαισθησία του δεν άντεξε στη δοκιμασία που του επέβαλε η ανεξάντλητη ζωτικότητα, ο ασυμβίβαστος χαρακτήρας του, η μετριοφροσύνη και η ανωτερότητά του]

How did this “vitality” deal with change? A speculative solution is in order here, more hermeneutic than factual: The act of shoplifting, for which he was arrested by the police while working as a foreign news correspondent for *Ακρόπολις* (*Acropolis*) in Berlin,¹⁴ and the immediate onset of the first of his recorded mental crises¹⁵ for which the Trieste consulate confined him to a lunatic asylum in 1896, spell out his desperate urge to partake, through direct acquisition, of the massive flow of original commodities and information related to them that had at once surprised and frustrated him. While the only relationship we can establish between his mental condition on the one hand and his behaviour and actions on the other is one of metaphor, it is still worth noting how his contemporaries understood it: This pathologized instant of mass consumption was played down in all the obituaries of Vokos as resulting from the failure of his employer, V. Gavriilidis, to send him enough money to get by.

V

Turn-of-the-century Athens,¹⁶ with its rapidly changing architectural profile, its increasing and intensely differentiated population, the acceleration of the overall rhythm of life due to new labour conditions and means of transport, the new electrically-lit all-night entertainment establishments, and most crucially, a remarkable condensation of stimuli, challenged its citizens to rearrange their perception of time and space at a rapid pace. New possibilities and obligations were imposing themselves on old continuities.

This set of changes in the city demanded the formulation of coherent constellations of meaning on the part of its users, and the inflation of symbolic notions of the real space of the city. Columns like “The Life of the Fortnight”, or “Monthly Echoes” in cultural periodicals speak of a new rhythm of urban life and of the gradual articulation of a concept of the day-by-day unravelling of time.

Vokos and his company must have been amongst the first to enjoy a ride in the second Athenian car, imported by the theatre director and writer Christomanos in 1899, and to travel on the new railway towards the holiday resort of Faliron. We know that Vokos became for a while a developmental planning enthusiast.¹⁷ His experience of the emerging ‘nightlife’ must have also been quite definitive.

In a series of brief articles in *Ακρόπολις* Vokos was commissioned to write about the Athenian suburbs, the noisy neighbourhoods, the alluring panorama of resorts. In these brief articles the reification and mythologization of the city becomes more and more intense. Working as a correspondent for the Olympic Games and watching the frantic preparation and transformation of Athens, he exclaimed in 1896: “White city, eternal city, what a pity that your poet has not yet been found! What a pity that your painter has not yet been born! What a pity that you were not loved by your leaders as you deserved” (“Πόλις λευκή, πόλις αιώνια, κρίμα, ότι δεν ευρέθη ακόμη ο ποιητής σου! Κρίμα, ότι δεν εγεννήθη ο ζωγράφος σου! Κρίμα, ότι δεν σε ηγάπησαν όσον σου ήξιζε οι άρχοντές σου”).¹⁸

Their frequent travelling to and from Europe, as well as excursions out of the city and into the countryside, made certain Athenian intellectuals particularly conscious of a new way of seeing that was gradually becoming established. In numerous articles of the time, the Athenian citizen-intellectual was beginning to employ techniques of observing and relating to the city, techniques which formed part of a new regime of visibility. Walking down the streets of the city offered the observer the density of meaning one would expect from a work of art. Information in the changing urban environment was read as a code of a revelatory narrative about life.

When in August 1900 Pavlos Nirvanas, recently returned from Paris, warned the readers of *Το Περιοδικόν μας* that he intended to review two exhibitions rather than one, he was making a point about the city unfolding meanings through a multiplicity of stimuli. Besides the Exposition Internationale, the exhi-

bition taking place simultaneously in Paris was “the whole invisible world founded in the depths of the manifold soul of the peoples.” He compares this second exhibition to the first: “Even your painting reveals nothing but outward appearances”.¹⁹

While clearly referring to the quality of the works at the first art exhibition of the Editors Association, K. Michailidis, the editor of *Παναθήναια*, also touched upon the significance of the pleasurable reception of visual information in 1909, this time talking about Vokos’ “eternal city” itself (*Παναθήναια* vol. 1, No. 221-222, Dec. 1909, p. 172):

I believe people do not like half-finished business, and rather than a hastily set up exhibition they would prefer to go for a walk and see the great master of light.... That is exactly how I felt the other day walking to Faliron with two artist friends of mine. Syngrou Avenue was constantly offering us a thousand impressions. Envidable impressions, as one sees them in the colours of the imagination, or in the works of our good painters.

[Νομίζω πως ο κόσμος δεν αγαπά τα μισά πράγματα και από μίαν βιαστικήν έκθεσιν προτιμά έναν περίπατο όπου θα ιδή τον μεγάλον τεχνίτην του φωτός.... Αυτό αισθανόμουν κι εγώ προχθές πηγαίνων εις το Φάλιρον πεζός με δύο φίλους μου καλλιτέχνας. Η λεωφόρος Συγγρού μας έδινε ολόένα χίλιες εντυπώσεις. Ζηλευτές, όπως τις βλέπουμε με της φαντασίας τα χρώματα ή μέσα στα έργα των καλών ζωγράφων μας.]

M. Sigouros concluded his “Impressions from Paris” in 1910 with an ode to the overwhelming and antithetical sentiments the city evoked (*Παναθήναια* 1, 15-31, July 1910, pp. 228-244):

You cannot distinguish the laughter of joy from the pain of mourning.... Paris, land of Glory and Pleasure, land of desire and desperation, you are beautiful and disgusting. Deep in my soul I listen, as if to a harmony of a million voices, to your great life, vast as the ocean.

[Δεν διακρίνεις ποιο είναι το γέλιο της χαράς, ποιος ο θρήνος του πόνου.... Παρίσι, γη της Δόξας και της Ηδονής, γη των πόθων και της απελπισίας, είσαι ωραίο και απάισιο! Μεσ στην ψυχή μου βαθιά γροικώ, σαν μυρόφωνην αρμονία, τη μεγάλη, την απέραντη, την ωκεάνεια ζωή σου.]

The establishment of new codes of vision in modern Athens deserves a separate study, of wider scope. It was certainly not a straightforward process of perception and response, as indeed is no cultural, i.e. representational and thus mediated, process. Making sense of the city had been the preoccupation of Londoners, Parisians, Viennese and metropolitan inhabitants all over Europe and the States for decades. There are striking analogies between their thoughts on urban living and these belated Athenian reactions, analogies which say a lot about the appropriation of foreign sources and the transplantation of sensibilities into modern Greece by its agents of intellectual exchange.

For my purpose, which is the inquiry into the formation of Vokos' aesthetics, only a limited point need be made: In addition to the usual juxtaposition of his art criticism, and later his painting, with the history of painting he would have been familiar with, it would be helpful to trace Vokos' aesthetic development in the transformation of conditions in the city and the phases of his own creativity within it.²⁰

Such a hypothesis is encouraged by the great distance between his perceived taste and his own work. Both the art criticism and the paintings used as illustrations in *Καλλιτέχνης* (aspects which of course do not exhaust the visual discourse of the journal), reveal that ideal painting for the Vokos of that early period was more a haven for symbols of truth or morality expressed through emblematic figures, or tranquil landscapes and genre scenes, than a site constantly generating stimuli for an observer seeking insight into the changing conditions of culture. Vokos did not show much interest in –though definitely not hostility to– impressionism. He rather appreciated classicist qualities and art-nouveau symbolism with mythological subjects, as well as naturalist or genre paintings for their symbolic depth. On the other hand, there is no hieratic posture, no epic grandeur, and no concerns for art-nouveau-inspired formal symmetry or content in the oil paintings and pencil sketches he would produce after 1912.

VI

From 1912 to 1917 Vokos worked as a war correspondent and occasional critic in the press and wrote his long *History of the Balkan-Turkish War*, a book half-way between historical novel and journalistic report published in 1914. In his journalism and brief works of literature from the period until his death, his interest in 'sociology' or politics in general seems to have died away, giving way to self-reflection and the treatment of individual creativity. During the period he was publishing *Καλλιτέχνης*, Vokos' doxology of the liberal politician Venizelos, the Nietzschean superman-saviour of the country between 1910 and 1912, was typical for a large number of intellectuals of his generation. Now, his interest in overtly advertising the new era of trustful order and rationalism was replaced by his private horror at the atrocities of war.

Choosing to concentrate on painting as an amateur was not easy. Evidence of how he struggled to come to terms with his new role can be found in some of his (non-commissioned) writing, where he glorifies some of the aspects of the suffering underestimated artist. In his short story *The Displaced*²¹ Vokos employed a variation of the common motif of the overlooked genius painter, which had been a (secondary) feature in his 1910 play *Beyond this World*. The central character in this short story, a pessimist alcoholic artist whose "business was not going well" and who thus chose to stay "on the margins of life", as one newspaper review reads, appears dangerously autobiographical. When he inquires about his paintings only to find that he has still not sold any, the protagonist, suggestively named Volkas, remarks: "Nobody paid attention to such things anymore"

(“Δεν επρόσεχε κανείς πλέον αυτά τα πράγματα”). With the magical word ‘anymore’ Vokos is activating a defence mechanism, in the form of a slight distortion of his own past, indeed hardly harmful to what he could admit as being the historical truth of his status as a creator: The works of Volkas, he implies, were not contemporary enough, either in their philosophical quest or in their formal qualities. But this fictional artist had seen, and had deserved, better days, and so had Vokos, even though not as a painter.

Still, at the end of the day, Vokos’s romanticism was always reluctant, and his last-minute refusal of such exalted self-gratification claims is perhaps the historically most significant part of his much-celebrated ‘sincerity’. At some point, abruptly interrupting the logical flow of their dialogue, Volkas tells his younger friend Spikas: “Let me give you my opinion. Do not be autobiographical, do not try to be the hero of a dramatic plot, do what most people do... A little selfishness is always necessary.”²² To this alarming self-reference, the uncertain author immediately adds another reflection: “Still, not even he himself believed those words, for he recognized the limitless sovereignty of sentiment and the sorrowful wreck of his life to which the very absence of selfishness had brought him.”²³

Vokos would dedicate all his free time after 1912 to painting landscapes directly from nature, managing to make them appear very static in their horizontality and carefully limited palette, and to drawing model studies. On his numerous “educational trips”, as he called them, to the States, where he visited relatives and friends, to the artistic capitals of Europe and to the villages of Mount Pelion in Greece, he started putting down on paper more detailed impressions of rural or urban scenes of everyday life, never frontal, never involving the viewer: women sitting in cafés, dogs passing by, soldiers on benches, a priest. Awakened by the war, the introvert urban observer had won over the publicly active and sociable entrepreneur. Now a traumatized traveller, Vokos could only find comfort in rendering ‘natural’ settings, for their predetermination, silence and timelessness, and in recording his voyeuristic social distance.

Again, *The Displaced* illustrates the way in which his “inward movement” towards painting was interwoven with his political turn: “The movements of defection... he discovered were harmful and he saw others, who had supported them even more persistently, return to the eternal laws of love, which are the most lasting feature of life, as in nature tranquillity is the most eternal [*sic*] phenomenon.”²⁴

Painting directly from nature offered Vokos a philosophically consoling and therapeutic preoccupation. Painting became for him the site of absolute stillness, a value unmediated and untouched by the frantic restructuring and transmutation which life around him was undergoing. It possibly allowed him never to abandon his respect for what would be accepted as the sublime quality in the work of art. Was he too ‘sincere’ to resort to the populist or popular ideologies at hand that denied intellectual work or denigrated the role of the artist? Papan-

doniou (164) has credited him with never giving in, for speculative profit, to the “halluciné, the imaginary, or the morbid” in “that age of critical debauchery” when everybody could get away with it.

In a 1917 article on writing Vokos could very well be dignifying his own choice, rather than simply reformulating the generally accepted corporativist argument that wanted citizens to support the *litterati* for their privileged access to the citadel of knowledge. His liberal humanist metaphysics of culture starts from a fixed and undebatable notion of artistic creativity (in other words, from an ideology of creativity), be it an active and formative act of sublimation or merely a passive, yet conscious and refined reception of culture, reduced to the “soul’s communication with the book”.

[Reading] is no word of limited meaning... If one does see well and does hear harmoniously [the ever incomplete book of the world, and remains alone], one needs to express oneself and put down his thoughts, his feelings, and his observations. Then one will paint, if one is a painter, compose if one is a musician, write if one is a writer. And if one has not seen or heard enough, or has no such ability, there is a spiritual need for one to participate in the cultural life that others have prepared, as a simple and faithful follower....

[Δεν είναι μια λέξις αυτή εννοίας περιορισμένης ... Ἡ ἀν βλέπει καλῶς καὶ ἀν ἀκούει ἀρμονικῶς (μόνος του, τὸ πάντοτε ἀτελεῦτητον βιβλίον τοῦ κόσμου), εἶναι ἀνάγκη νὰ ἐκδηλωθεῖ καὶ νὰ ἀποτυπώσῃ τὰς σκέψεις, τὰ αἰσθηματὰ του καὶ τὶς παρατηρήσεις. Τότε θὰ ζωγραφίσῃ ἀν εἶναι ζωγράφος, θὰ συνθέσῃ ἐὰν εἶνε μουσικὸς, θὰ γράψῃ ἐὰν εἶνε συγγραφεὺς. Καὶ ἐὰν δὲν ἐπρόφθασε νὰ ἰδῇ ἀρκετὰ καὶ ν’ἀκούσῃ ἀρκετὰ, ἢ δὲν ἔχῃ τὴν ἱκανότητα αὐτὴν, εἶνε ἀνάγκη ψυχικὴ νὰ συμμετάσχῃ τῆς πνευματικῆς ζωῆς, τὴν ὁποία ἄλλοι παρασκεύασαν, ὡς ἀπλὸς ἀκόλουθος καὶ πιστός....] (G. Vokos, “Τὸ Διάβασμα” [On Reading] in *Επιφυλλίς τῆς Φιλολογικῆς Κυψέλης*, No. 2, 8 April 1917, p. 1).

One might not be prepared to read any self-referential bitterness into this mid-war text. It nevertheless condenses Vokos’ obsession with an integrated and dominant milieu of men of letters, held together by the intrinsic value of their occupation. Here he accepts the meritocratic strictness and fierce antagonism of modern creativity, conditions which eventually made *laissez-faire* rules so prevalent in the enclosed and elitist capitalist art market.

It is certainly true that Vokos himself unashamedly benefitted, especially as a visual artist, from the general lenience towards amateurs, that is to say the populist attitude that had prevailed in the late-nineteenth-century *Kunstgenossenschaften* and *salons*, as well as in the rules for inclusion in the Athenian artists’ associations. Although he had opportunities to exhibit his paintings in hospitable yet respectable places, like the Salon d’Automne, the Galerie Balzac, the Galerie du Taureau and the Galerie Charles Brunner, this democratic attitude was slowly shifting out of the mainstream, and he knew, when choosing to live as a foreign

painter in the Paris of the early twenties, that he was choosing to accept his fate as a “simple follower”.

In 1922, having abandoned journalism altogether, and avoiding writing as much as he could,²⁵ Gerasimos Vokos introduced himself to the Parisian Galerie Charles Brunner with an austere autobiographical note, justifying his connection to Paris, and taking a reserved pride in his new skill, autodidactically acquired through ‘nature’:

J’ai édité à Athenes avant dix années la revue artistique “O Kal-
litechnis” (L’artiste), mentioné et analysé chaque mois par “Le
repertoire [sic] d’art et d’archéologie” a Paris.

Je suis devenu peintre moi même à une âge avancé de 45 années.
Je n’ai subis aucune influence et je me contente à apercevoir la na-
ture. Avant j’étais écrivain et j’ai écrit de romans, de nouvelles, et
plusieurs pièces pour le théâtre, qui sont représentées [sic] plusieurs
fois chez nous, c’est à dire en Grèce.²⁶

VII

What Vokos’ critics understood and shared with him was his burning desire to speak the language of his time. Moreover, they sensed the poetic undertones of his hopeless insistence to write and paint while inevitably realizing his essential lack of competence. His adept sensitivity to culture, which he had developed as a journalist and a publisher, intensified his frustration. With his ‘sincerity’, Vokos invented perhaps one of the weakest survival techniques within modernity. Still, this distinct stance of confessional dignity, a self-awareness that borders on self-abandonment, has a modern flavour.

‘Sincerity’ (εὐκρίνεια), one of the most overused words in the criticism, literature and political rhetoric of the period we are discussing, formed a textured pre-ideological category. It denoted a whole moral and ethical metaphysics of creativity dealing with cultural change. (A determining nuance of the Orthodox Christian notion of meekness is also detectable here.)

In the arts, for instance, it was closely associated with modesty and with an acknowledgement of the inability to tackle grand subjects: “Ferekydis paints with sincerity”, Vokos admitted before a painting he did not want to completely condemn (*Καλλιτέχνης* vol. 1, p. 55). “Sigalas has shown an idyllic naivity in his sincere description of Greek nature”, he commented elsewhere (*Καλλιτέχνης* vol. 1, p. 102). The word also signified what might appear as a contrary quality: it pointed to the ability to avoid imitation and achieve originality. K. Hatzopoulos recognized the great Palamas’ “sincerity of inspiration” in an otherwise critical article (*Καλλιτέχνης* vol. 1, p. 27). For all its abstraction, ‘sincerity’ was what connected a work to its maker, it was the quality of an artist’s relation to the cultural medium. When ‘sincerity’ was granted, then qualities more inherent in the work, formal, stylistic and thematic, could be discussed.

In politics, 'sincerity' had, again, two basic meanings that seem quite distinct from each other: On the one hand, it stood for soberly engaged, or –in contemporary terminology– 'civilized' argumentative conduct, the ethical prerequisite for all effective public negotiation and political decision-making: After the 1909 putsch, Vokos hoped to see "the organization of new principles, sincere and modern" (*Καλλιτέχνης* vol. 1, p. 30). On the other, 'sincerity' denoted the virtue of daringly expressing one's unpopular opinion, be it a socialist or an ultranationalist one: Both the chauvinism of Pericles Yannopoulos (*Καλλιτέχνης* vol. 1, p. 35) and the concerns with issues of poverty and social injustice of the journal *Κοινωνισμός* (*Socialism –Καλλιτέχνης* vol. 1, p. 94) were granted the title.²⁷

On the whole, the praise of 'sincerity' promoted certain works and practices without wounding the hierarchies within the networks of individuals and without exposing risky political allegiances and social affiliations. It thus also allowed a tactful acceptance of amateurism and incompetence, settling simply for a kind of purity of intention. It ultimately safeguarded the notion of a common national project beyond apparent conflict and division, especially when employed in contexts of reception of foreign cultural influence.

The currency of the word might also suggest that intellectuals, under the burden of imported behavioural prototypes, were afraid of being taken for fake poets and bohemian *poseurs*. Indeed, testing ideas and stances against their origin in 'sincerity' (not a socially embedded act of faith but an innate tendency) was a defensive mechanism against the hierarchical pressures of the milieu of intellectuals, both the actual Athenian and the mythical one. Artists, critics, journalists and politicians all needed an arbitrating rhetorical tool to secure a certain inertia in their their milieu. In postponing antagonism, this multi-layered discourse on 'sincerity' somehow cancelled expression of any self-asserting, sharply differentiated identity. But how far can one go in burdening the fatalist mentality conveyed by this term, sincerity, with all the modern Greek reluctance and conservatism?

VIII

Let us return to Vokos's 1912 sketch of a man and a dog published in *Καλλιτέχνης*. What Vokos called a "symbolic composition", both in effect and by intention, was the rendering of and a farewell to a nineteenth-century European intellectual, exhibiting his somewhat dismal autarchy.

Vokos's figure is analogous in size and form to the trees harmoniously integrated in the landscape, the mythical deposit of nature for the numerous nineteenth century *plein-air* painters and the counter-environment of the odious, densely built and noisy cityscape for the emerging and rapidly expanding social category of holiday-makers. Is this a case of self-portraiture? In one of his "Greek Symphonies", short reflections of his visits to the countryside which Vokos first published in *Καλλιτέχνης*, Vokos "...remembers [him]self in those

refuges under the large trees”, the “great areas of bliss which life offers, a life of lesser expectations before the grand works of the creator”.²⁸

The figure occupying this charged landscape is wearing black, the bohemian’s smart black, and is heavily shadowed, absorbing and deflecting all the signs in the picture. This might indeed be the Vokos of his 1910 poem, where again he pictures himself, this time through the eyes of a woman. There he addresses the town of Herakleion:

...if her glance happens
to alight on your small forest
give her the whole picture:
me wandering like a shadow
still looking for memories
of that sacred love.²⁹

The figure in the sketch bears the attributes of cognizance and power, the winter cloak mystifying his sage masculinity and the domesticated dog, no longer the hunting companion or farm servant, but in its recently elevated historical role as the loner’s faithful urban friend. It could very well be Vokos’ Rex, a dog who had been run over by the electric train in 1911, months before this sketch was drawn. Vokos had paid a tender and respectful, almost too formal tribute to his friend known by “almost all the men of letters and the artistic world of Athens” in a long article in *Καλλιτέχνης* (“Rex” in vol. 2, Sept. 1911, pp. 226-228).

The dynamic of the figure’s pose along with the position of the building in the middle-ground narrates a spatial relation (and in it a symbolic one) of direction: Vokos is facing and perhaps heading towards a house. Does this house suggest the outskirts of the city, and is the protagonist just returning to the intellectual’s true home from a walk in the countryside, or are we being shown a house in a village, the *topos* colonized by romantic and genre painters and writers, national historians and ethnographers alike?³⁰

IX

Vokos never actually gained the full status of an adjusted *flâneur*. He was not flexible enough for the kind of psychic splitting whereby the modernist intellectual would seek to entertain the perspectives of both hedonistically passive consumer and detached creator of culture.³¹ Yet as author and commentator of this sketch, or as a writer who would give his characters biographies close to his own and thus doubly confess and doubly reflect on his own actions, he got as far as recreating and observing, from an external point of view, a social phenomenology of his own self.

He did not enjoy the undisputed admiration and approval of his peers as a writer or painter that would have enabled him to develop the aristocratic and Masochian cynicism of Baudelaire, to whom Vokos confessed feeling so close. He also found Periklis Yannopoulos’ “descent to Hades [suicide by riding a

white horse into the sea] ... remarkably consistent with his overall vanity" ("εκπληκτική η συνέπεια προς την όλην ωραιοπάθειάν του η ... κάθοδος του εις τον Άδην", *Καλλιτέχνης* May 1910). The narcissism of the nationalist writer was too radical for a moderate aesthete like Vokos.³² After all, he himself had had the humility to become a dilettante.

These fragments of Vokos' biography recover one of the numerous accounts lurking under a forceful and still prevalent current in the studies of modernity, for which artists and writers merely formulate perception through their capacity for innovation or reaction, from a safe place outside the Panopticon of ideology, immune to change and promptly avoiding the internalization of its consequences. Vokos' short passage through history offers as much a metaphor for the reception of modernity in Athens as a concrete materialization of it.

His traces, however faint, inevitably bear, in an accentuated manner, all the scars and the privileges of an Athenian intellectual. Throughout his work as a writer and a journalist, Vokos reserved his idealism for the domain of art, keeping it intact from his political views, where social idealist rhetoric struggled only to lose every time to his cold-blooded nationalist pragmatism. The gradual subsuming of socialist into nationalist rhetoric is a general phenomenon of the early Venizelist polity, one which encouraged a lot of politically aware ideologues, who had been interested in reform yet were ambiguous about their social allegiances, to join the Venizelist project of liberal reformist rhetoric and active irredentist foreign policy. The confinement of art to a space of unchangeable tranquillity was not so much a separation from, but rather an assimilation into this project: the official concept of artistic creativity would have to purify itself of the complexities of the social role of art and become more closely associated with an individualist pursuit in order to be further institutionalized within the state.

On the other hand, Vokos' preoccupation with painting, while not safely lucrative, had its good moments. Critical appraisal did establish him as a painter, at that uncertain age of modernist painting where art critics were even less answerable to fixed principles of public taste. They could define much more arbitrarily what was noteworthy and what was not, and forging the passport of 'sincerity' served as an effective technique of integration. It is not hard to understand how Vokos' noted friends from his sociable days were always predisposed to find quality in his exhibitions.

Conclusion

After overcoming the initial shock of familiarity caused by the radiant ordinariness of the works of Gerasimos Vokos, one is invited by this very ordinariness into a convenient background of early-twentieth-century modern Greek ideologies. The early Vokos had an absolute faith in the moral power of intellectuals and represents a prevalent tendency to include the modern Greek national culture in the European canon with moderation and a sober reprocessing of a severe anxiety of influence.³³ Throughout his career as a public figure, he operated

very much, and consciously so, as an antenna for circulating aesthetic and political ideologies. We watch him experiment with Nietzsche and socialism, nationalism and aesthetic purism, with the enthusiasm –indeed the authoritarian enthusiasm of fanatics– that vibrated in turn-of-the-century European metropolises.

“He might have had a belated aesthetic conscience... [but] he was *somebody*”, the historian I. M. Panagiotopoulos had to admit (pp. λα'-λβ'). Far from disqualifying him as an influential social actor, the average standing of Vokos illuminates a set of broader issues. His considerable yet ephemeral success in promoting a notion of a united front of the intellectuals, through his sociability and publishing enterprise, suggests that perhaps the opinions he expressed were in the most literal sense of a mean and medial character: in attempting to recreate and enforce a sense of belonging among intellectuals through ‘forums for opinion’ on political and social issues, and also through his critical lenience towards young artists and writers in his two periodicals, he could have been carefully tuning his own rhetoric each time according to its compatibility with this ideal. With the currency and topicality of initiatives such as the establishment of the journalistic genre of the forum for opinion and his particular mix of artistic and political issues in his journals, he helped introduce an *ethos*, born of the Paris of the Dreyfus affair, which was quickly spreading throughout Europe (the Dreyfus trial was covered in detail in *Ακρόπολις* during the summer of 1899). This *ethos* emphasized the intellectuals’ public responsibilities and mandated for the creation of a public space where all trends were allowed to compete, as long as they were not considered threateningly extremist.

It is precisely this conception of the meaningful role of the intellectual within modern society, and the initial liberality of institutions where inclusion was concerned, that helped mould and justify theories of national cultural production in the next decades. Throughout Europe the integration of intellectuals into a separate class with a defined function, however temporary, would allow the formation of the corporatist ideologies behind the writers’ and artists’ demands for support by the state, demands which all competed with each other in sycophantic nationalism and in rejection of art’s critical potential (again, examples abound throughout Europe, characteristic instances being the conflict around Vinnen’s *Protest Deutscher Künstler* in Germany, or, in the Greek case, the artists approaching the dictator Metaxas to demand favourable treatment).³⁴

In the case of Greek pre-war modernity, Vokos, a Europeanist and a patriot, acted for a while as a factor of harmonization between overtly chauvinistic and nationally unaware tendencies. In an age where notions of ‘national forms’ had not yet reached the degree of articulation that would inspire a more systematic ideologization of different expressions of ‘Greekness’ in the 1930s, the very nomination of certain works, their acceptance, whether critical or wholehearted, into the world of artistic production was a necessary condition for a national consensus. The very existence of a cultural market, not the quality of its standards, was still at stake. Those ideologies which balanced the concern to be included

into the European canon with the appreciation of native production and its contradictions acted as a stepping stone for this market.

The process of moulding modern national ideologies of culture is intertwined with a number of rearrangements in social life.³⁵ The creation (and reproduction) of an intellectual milieu involved slowly officializing and rendering public a set of private relationships: through the wider diffusion of the cultural periodical press, and its profound impact as a medium, coherence was created almost at random vis-a-vis the readership, a set of relevant names and works rose up in a single stroke to claim exclusivity to the emerging institution of a Greek intellectual elite. This had been a process of social selection and cultural 'refinement' that had repeated and transmuted itself since the beginnings of the 'Greek Enlightenment' in the second half of the eighteenth century, until other, stabler (yet never fixed) institutional criteria could predetermine the modes of access to the public domain.

Vokos' need for a vital space within an explicit collectivity, resulting in the conditioning of his creativity by peer-recognition in a mainstream milieu (the secure haven that would later be painfully lost) also explains his increasing difficulty in adjusting to certain crises, like the Balkan wars and the First World War: the price he would have to pay in individual discontinuity is aptly symbolized in his abandonment of prose. "Each assertion of identity [is] liable to failure or misfiring, rather than being... a straightforward expression of [its] actor's attributes" (Tilly 6): historically, the manifestations of his mental disarrangement coincided with, and were perhaps marked by, his failed attempts to subscribe to the emerging social demands. Vokos proved unable to devise clearer partisan political commitments or produce more informed and cultivated work, though he could feel that the age was signalling the beginning of the end of mainstream amateurism and unionist generosity. The story goes that his compulsive behaviour and the hysterical comprehension of past events, catalyzed by the fatalism of his 'sincerity', left him exposed to celibacy, poverty and finally to the limits of cultural adaptability.

It is somewhere, then, within the topology of decline of his bohemian milieu, the further segregation of intellectuals and their forced abandonment of the center stage of public opinion that one must locate part of the strain placed upon Vokos' ability to rationalize his ambiguous and floating economic and social position as an intellectual. It is within the general framework of transformation of the modern city that we can start to approach his turn towards a new aesthetics. Finally, the power of the liberal polity to assimilate socially radical sensitivities and encourage the separation of general ideological from more specific artistic concerns was in part due to certain patterns of immobility and control in the circles of Athenian intellectuals within the changing scenery of modern space and communication.

Much like the craftsmen who lost their faith and pride in their labour with industrialization, Vokos the sceptical journalist and romantic publisher can be

seen as one of the casualties of the psychosociological establishment of modernity. Still, imperialism being (as Homi Bhabha puts it) “a two way street, and more...”, for Vokos the painter, the oppressive ideal of Paris and its culture offered an escape route out of his prolonged social disillusionment. Until his lonely death in a Parisian attic, the city was the retired bohemian’s exile and refuge at once. A peacefully continuous flow of colourful cultural opportunities rewarded the now anonymous foreign painter with a kind of preoccupied tranquility, beyond the ruptures and constant dislocations of history.

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Notes

1. An interesting account of the position of Greek intellectuals is offered by Th. Alexiou. In view of a series of characteristics in the sociohistorical make-up of Greece during its establishment as a nation-state and its period of modernization –characteristics partly shared with other Balkan countries rather than with either Western European countries or their colonies– modern Greek scholarship over the last twenty-five years has worked out its own liberating deviations from linear and economic analytical models of capitalist development (see, f.ex., the work by G. Dertilis, K. Tsoukalas and N. Mouzelis, and the debate on Greek liberalism in the *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, particularly the article by G. Andreopoulos). For one thing, the analysis of class struggle could not be conducted within the models applicable to Western European countries. After the war of national independence, there occurred no decisive conflict between the bourgeois and the landowning classes, partly because there was more overlap than distinction between them. Frequent peasant unrest was soon followed by social peace and compromise, mostly due to the success of a royalist nationalism amongst the rural population. The number of urban industrial workers that would engage in class-conscious proletarian resistance remained limited well into the early twentieth century, and the metropolitan and small-town petty-bourgeoisie prevailed both numerically and ideologically. For many scholars, such factors account for an overall image of political hesitation and conservatism. Most crucially, the persisting influence on economic and ideological developments at home of a large diaspora of educated Greeks residing in Ottoman, European, and U.S. cities (see the classic study of by N. Psyroukis, especially pp. 184-191 for the turn-of-the-century period), combined with a deep-seated clientelist patronage systems (cf. Tsoukalas 1983 and Mouzelis 1993), further problematized the notion of class in the Greek context.
2. V. Lekas summarizes the discussion of the *ex definitio* nationalist intelligentsias. See esp. p. 272.
3. See accounts on the September 14 demonstration in favour of the military putsch in Dertilis, Mouzelis 1978, e.a.
4. M. Megalidis, a relative of Vokos, showed an interest in his work and organized an exhibition of it in 1985 at the Cultural Centre of the Municipality of Athens. Ch. Karaglou must be credited with the first attempt to systematize Vokos’ small private archive.

5. These and other newspaper critiques can be found in the exhibition leaflet of the Municipal Gallery of Athens, *Some Opinions of Greek Writers on the Work of Gerasimos Vokos* (in Greek).
6. See e.g. *To Periodikón mas* on “The Contemporaries and Harilaos Trikoupis”, or another opinion poll held by *Παναθήναια* designed to find out which form of language was most popular among both writers and non-writers. See also “Poetry Competition”, *Πινακοθήκη (Pinakothiki)* Oct. 1902; “Short Story Writing Contest”, Apr. 1904; “Photographic Competition”, *Παναθήναια* 3, p. 197; Gounelas 1981, p. 23. As early as 1883, the influential periodical *Εστία (Hestia)* announced a literary competition “for a short story on a Greek theme” and initiated a new kind of literary realism “which took its subjects from Greek life in the remote villages of the Greek mountains and islands” (R. Beaton, 1990, p. 4).
7. Gounelas, p. 25: “*Ο Νουμάς (O Noumas)*, for example, a literary journal that played a leading role in establishing progressive ideas concerning the linguistic question, presented in grave tones a “manufactured” debate on aesthetics carried out mostly by K. Hatzopoulos and P. Nirvanas, main contributors to the journal, and then an exchange of philosophical arguments between nationalists and socialists between 1907 and 1910. In 1936, Kambysis, who had been a frequent collaborator of K. Hatzopoulos during those years, chastised the latter for engineering these controversies. It has been alleged that these were not the only cases where this practice had been followed” (*Νέα Εστία*, vol. 1936, p. 711).
8. Gounelas 1984 is a significant study of the periodicals of the age. Another highly useful volume is the recent, mainly bibliographical study by C.L. Karaoglou (ed.), *Literary and Art Periodicals 1901-1940*, University Studio Press, Thessaloniki 1996 [in Greek].
9. A recovered list of subscribers includes just under 900 names (867, according to Karaoglou 189), of which less than 200 refer to addresses in Athens and Peiraius.
10. “... Ο συγγραφέας του *De Profundis* εις το οποίον όλα αι μακρυσμένα εποχάι και οι ιστορικοί ήρωες απεικονίζονται με την εκλεκτικότεραν, την αιθериωτέραν γραμμήν, ανήγαγε το ζωγραφικόν του σύμβολον εις μακρυνούς αιώνας των Φαραώ με το εναποτιθέμενον κάνιστρον των δώρων ευλαβώς παρά τα κράσπεδα του θρόνου της κρατούσης μεγαλοφυείας. Να είναι άρα γε ο ίδιος με τον δίκαιον φόρον των αναγνωστών του;”
11. It is very unlikely that it exceeded the size of a 15x25 cm sheet of paper.
12. Karaoglou (186) suggests, but with a cautionary parenthetical question mark, that the commentary on the sketches was by G. Xenopoulos, probably on the reasonable assumption that the pseudonym *Εραμιστής* (Compiler) signing the article is Xenopoulos’ trademark pseudonym. Still, though there is evidence for Xenopoulos’ collaboration with Vokos at this time (see issue 2 of *Καλλιτεχνής*), the style of the commentary as well as the use of the pseudonym under a newly introduced column (which rather serves to support the column) seem to me to point towards an attribution to Vokos himself. However, even if the text was in fact written by Xenopoulos, my argument in this paper would not, I feel, be seriously affected.
13. See f.ex. the series of articles on “Σκηναί της Νεοεντρικής Ζωής” (“Scenes from Life at the Neon Kendron”), Spring 1917 in *Επιφυλλίς της Φιλοσοφικής Κυψέλης*.
14. In 1927, Th. Vellianitis (quoted in M. Megalidis’ compilation of obituaries on Vokos) spoke of a mental crisis occurring while Vokos was in Dresden during the same period. There are no other records confirming this episode. Peranthis (336) locates Vokos’ first crisis in Vienna.
15. His second major crisis occurred in 1906 in Faliron. During 1910 and 1912 he voluntarily confined himself several times to the Dromokaition asylum for brief periods. His

- longest period of institutionalization, again at the Dromokaition asylum, was between 1919 and 1920.
16. The work of K. Biris on the urban structure and history of Athens remains unsurpassed in its breadth. See also Guy Burgel and the papers from the International Symposium of History.
 17. Stamelos mentions (17) that in the 1890s Vokos designed a bridge in Papadia, which he believed was more convenient than the one that was going to be built, and presented it to his colleagues at the offices of *Ακρόπολις*.
 18. *Ακρόπολις* 12 January 1896. An obvious precedent for such prose is Baudelaire's *The Spleen of Paris*.
 19. "...όλος ο κόσμος ο αόρατος, ο θεμελιωμένος εις τα βάθη της πολυμόρφου ψυχής των λαών.... Και αυτή ακόμα η ζωγραφική σας δεν μας αποκαλύπτει παρά θεάματα εξωτερικά." P. Nirvanas, "Παρισνοί Περίπατοι. Για δύο εκθέσεις" ("Promenading in Paris: On two exhibitions") in *Το Περιοδικόν μας*, vol. II, pp. 131-132.
 20. A challenge to the opinion that painting was the most significant factor in engendering visual codes in the nineteenth century has been summarized by J. Crary, who has suggested that "[visual codes] were produced and assumed meaning not in some impossible kind of aesthetic isolation or a continuous tradition of painterly codes, but as one of consumable and fleeting elements within an expanding chaos of images, commodities and stimulation" (20).
 21. "Ο Εκτοπισμένος" was first published in *Πρόδος*, March 1917, and later along with other short stories by Vokos (*The Displaced and Other Short Stories*, Athens 1923) and since then has been included in a few short story collections. The title translates appropriately also as "The Outcast".
 22. "Θα σου έδινά μια γνώμη, του παρετήρησε ο Βόλκας με λεπτότητα. Μην αυτοβιογραφήσαι, μη θέλεις να γίνεσαι ήρωας μιας υποτέσεως θεάτρου, κάνε ό, τι κάνουν οι περισσότεροι άνθρωποι... Λίγος εγωισμός χρειάζεται πάντοτε..."
 23. "Αλλά και τα λόγια αυτά δεν τα έπίστευε ο ίδιος που τα έλεγε, γιατί ανεγνώριζε στο αίσθημα απεριόριστη κυριαρχία και στην ίδια τη ζωή ένα θλιβερό νανάγιο, που τον έφερε ακριβώς η έλλειψις εγωισμού."
 24. "Τα κινήματα της αποστασίας ... τα ανεκάλυψε βλαβερά και είδε και άλλους, που τα υπεστήριζαν πλέον επίμονα, να επιστρέψουν [sic] στους αιώνιους ωόμους της αγάπης, που είναι ο διαρκέστερος χαρακτήρ της ζωής, όπως στη φύση η ηρεμία είναι το αιωνιότερον [sic] φαινόμενον."
 25. Still, a translation into Greek of E. Fague's *Initiation Litteraire* and an extensive volume in French containing Vokos' own essays on ancient Greek art, *Esquisses Grecques* (a second edition -Paris 1927- of a book entitled *Phidias-Socrates*), both date from this period.
 26. Copy of a letter from Vokos to Gallerie C. Brunner, 29, rue Vavin, Paris, dated 14 Nov 1922.
 27. A study combining the social anthropology and the intellectual history of the age needs to define the content of terms like 'sincerity' historically and avoid interpretative terms that are in equal need of contextualization. Today the modern Greek word for 'sincerity' is still used generously in relation to cultural production. The current associations of the word have more to do with independence from publicity (in the sense of manufactured exposure to the mass-media) and indifference to commercial success. Within the multiculturalist discourse, the term denotes the 'authentic', as opposed to the 'appropriated' or commercially adapted work of popular or folk art, whether indigenous or not.

28. "...Θυμάμαι μόνο τον εαυτό μου σ'αυτά τα καταφύγια κάτω από τα μεγάλα δέντρα."
G. Vokos, "Ελληνικά Συμφωνία" ("Hellenic Harmonies") in *Καλλιτέχνης* vol 2, August 1911, pp. 187-188.
29. "... αν τύχει και το βλέμμα της / το μικρό δάσος σου φωτίσει / Δος την εικόνα ολάκερη / εμένα να πλανώμαι σαν σκιά / όπου αποζητεί ενθύνησες / στη θεία εκείνη αγάπη."
G. Vokos, "Ηράκλειον" ("Herakleion"), in *Καλλιτέχνης* vol. 1, August 1910, p. 156.
30. When I presented an earlier version of this paper at the Postgraduate Seminar of Art History at the University of Thessaloniki, Professor A. Haralambidis proposed a reading of the building as representing the Dromokaition mental asylum. I seize the opportunity to thank him for his kind invitation and for this interesting idea.
31. The idea that Baudelaire's reaction to modernity was a splitting of his personality is articulated in E.W. Holland's *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis*.
32. 'Aestheticism' is used in the sense articulated by A. Sachinis: "Aestheticism, besides faith in the autonomy of art, also professed indifference towards morality, society, life" (9). Such a trend can be observed in *Το Περιοδικόν μας* (see e.g. vol. 1, 1900, pp. 257-271, pp. 302-308 and pp. 337-345), as in Episkopopoulos' *Άσμα Ασμάτων* and in numerous contributions by P. Nirvanas, P. Yannopoulos, P. Nirvanas, Sp. Pasayannis, K. Christomanos, and Pl. Rodokanakis, all of whom were influenced by G. D'Annunzio, M. Maeterlinck, Ruskin and O. Wilde, all featured in *Καλλιτέχνης* and were admired by Vokos.
33. The major ideological trends in attitudes towards Europe are aptly summarized in Kitromilidis.
34. In an earlier study I attempted a theoretical systematization of such instances, using the paradigm of the Metaxas regime (see Yoka 1993).
35. I have tried to steer clear of discussing whether 'nations' in general are primordial essences or modern 'constructs'. It is, however, a different issue altogether to acknowledge that state-nationalist ideologies were quite consciously and purposefully manufactured in the modern period.

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Lia Yoka

The Importance of Sincerity: Gerasimos Vokos and the Position of the Intellectual in Early-Twentieth-Century Athens

Υπάρχουν ακόμα δεσμοί που μένουν να διαλευκανθούν μεταξύ των μακροχρόνιων πολιτισμικών εξελίξεων και των στιγμών ατομικής παραγωγής, μεταξύ των κοινωνικών παικτών και του περιβάλλοντός τους και, τέλος, μεταξύ των εξελικτικών φάσεων σε διαφορετικά μέσα και τεχνολογίες έκφρασης στη σύγχρονη εποχή. Το άρθρο επιχειρεί να συνεισφέρει σε αυτό το πολύπλευρο έργο μέσω μιας μελέτης της ζωής και της σταδιοδρομίας του Γεράσιμου Βώκου, ενός Αθηναίου δημοσιογράφου, ποιητή και θεατρικού συγγραφέα των αρχών του εικοστού αιώνα, που πέρασε τα τελευταία χρόνια της ζωής του ως ζωγράφος στο Παρίσι. Σε μια αντιπαραβολή αυστηρά βιογραφικών στοιχείων και γεγονότων ενός ευρύτερου πεδίου και μέσω της ανάλυσης ενός σχεδίου του Βώκου και του πλαισίου δημοσίευσής του, προτείνω κάποιες προκαταρκτικές σκέψεις για την ιστορική σημασία, στο συγκεκριμένο αυτό ιστορικό πλαίσιο, της απόφασης του Βώκου να γίνει ζωγράφος στην ηλικία των σαράντα πέντε ετών.