Greek Film Studies today: in search of identity

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This essay aims to provide a critical overview of "Greek Film Studies", a field of knowledge that is increasingly being recognised as important in understanding Modern Greek culture in the 20th century – and beyond. Greek Film Studies focuses on the study of films produced and shown in Greece, as well as on the broader experience of cinema-going in this national context. As part of the wider discipline of Film Studies, it raises similar research questions to other cinemas, but its national focus highlights its formal and cultural particularities, which may or may not have parallels elsewhere. Writing on Greek cinema is not a new endeavour, but until recently publications in this area have been predominantly journalistic, promotional and (auto-)biographical. It is mainly in the last couple of decades or so that some systematic, methodologically consistent and theoretically informed studies of Greek cinema have been produced and published. And it is roughly in the same period that universities in Greece have begun to introduce the critical study of cinema as part of their curricula, opening the path for the institutionalisation of Greek Film Studies. However, despite the significant increase of publications, especially in the last decade, the field remains in the process of discovering its identity not only in terms of institutional presence, but also in terms of theoretical and methodological approaches. In offering an overview of existing bibliography, the greater part of which is in Greek, this essay seeks to identify some trends and tendencies in the field of Greek Film Studies, while suggesting directions for future research and development.

For those unfamiliar with the history of Greek cinema a sketchy periodisation will help navigate through the material. The four-period division suggested below is based on broadly accepted distinctions and is meant to function as a rough guide rather than a definitive schema.

Greek cinema can be divided into the following four periods:

- Pre-War Greek Cinema: defined by the use, predominantly, of silent film technology and the first attempts at a sound cinema, the period refers to films made until 1940.
- Old Greek Cinema: refers to the privately produced, popular cinema of genres and stars of the (late) 1940s to early 1970s.
- New Greek Cinema: refers to the political, art cinema of the 1970s and 1980s, which was often financed by the state.
- Contemporary Greek Cinema: refers to the multifaceted cinema of the 1990s and 2000s with its attempt to regain popularity.[1]

As in any historical periodisation, the boundaries between periods are not fixed and absolute. The periods are distinguished with reference to particular decades, but also through some dominant technical, industrial, thematic or formal characteristics. However, not all these characteristics define each and every film that falls within a particular chronological band. The main advantage of such a periodisation is convenience – the ease with which it acts as a reference point; by definition, however, it is fraught with problems, as there is considerable overlap and fluidity among the characteristics that Greek cinema in each period can be seen to consist of.

With this basic periodisation as a starting point, the attempt to chart the current state of Greek film studies will be wide-ranging but also selectively focused. The analysis is based on a review of the current bibliography on Greek cinema, including published monographs, collections of essays and reference materials published in Greek and in English. Examination of this material reveals the significant increase in relevant publications in the last

[1] For a different periodisation, see Constantinidis 2000.

decade. Of the 220 or so books on Greek cinema in print and in libraries, more than half have been published since 2000. Of the remaining titles, more than half were published in the 1990s; less than half of those remaining appeared in the 1980s, with the publishing activity of the 1970s and 1960s being in single figures.[2]

But this quantitative wealth of publication on Greek cinema does not coincide with work on Greek Film *Studies*. Almost half of these titles consist of biographies, memoirs and albums, which often offer significant primary material for further study on Greek cinema, but no critical analysis. Nonetheless, this increasing rate of publication on Greek cinema has expanded the range of resources that could be used for further study. This has been further reinforced by the extensive digitisation of primary material, by which I mean: the increasing commercial availability of Greek films on DVD (albeit often without English subtitles); the addition of Greek films to the International Movie Database (www.imdb.com); as well as the digitisation of archival material and their availability on line. Both the Greek Film Archive (www.tainiothiki.gr) and the Greek Film Centre (www.gfc.gr) now have websites that contain listings of their film holdings, as well as additional material such as, in the case of the former, a selection of photographs, stills and programmes. The Greek Film Archive has also undertaken the digitisation of a collection of early Greek cinema feature-films, newsreels and documentary footage, which will be soon housed in its new purpose-built location. The Greek Film Centre, which has been the main funding body for feature films in Greece since the 1980s, offers online access to data about its activities past and present, filmographies and its in-house journal *Moteur*. The online availability of databases is increasingly replacing printed filmographies, such as those of Valoukos (1998), Koliodimos (1999) and more recently

[2] The quantitative analysis is based on a bibliography compiled by the author with the assistance of Olga Kourelou and Mariana Volioti, and does not include essays and articles published individually in journals or collections of essays.

Rouvas and Stathakopoulos (2005), which have been very useful in helping establish serious research on Greek cinema.

Histories

The desire to offer a historical account of Greek cinema has been among the first impulses towards its more sustained study. The year 1960 saw the first published history of Greek cinema, written by journalist, film critic, actor, scriptwriter and later film director Frixos Iliadis. The book consists of a mixture of biographical information, advertising of production companies and their films, previously published reviews, and filmographies. As an early attempt to collect relevant information, the book is laudable; the author's serious intentions are indicated by the fact that he differentiates his book from earlier similar endeavours, which, according to his judgement, were based mainly on personal recollections and oral sources. As a historical project, however, his book, ironically, suffers from similar shortcomings: it provides useful information but often lacks in historical argument. The 1980s saw the publication of three histories of Greek cinema, by Mitropoulou (1980), Soldatos (1979-85) and Kousoumidis (1981). Of these, the first two in particular have been especially influential, as their more recent revised editions also indicate (Mitropoulou 2006; Soldatos 2000 and 2001-2).

Aglaia Mitropoulou's single-volume study is organised mainly as an account of creative individuals. She initially focuses on "pioneers" of silent Greek cinema (Joseph Hepp, Dimitris Meravidis, the Gaziadis brothers). She then moves on to discuss producers who established the industry in the 1950s and 1960s (Filopoimin Finos, Christos Spentzos, Andonis Zervos), as well as some of the most acclaimed representatives – mostly film directors – of that era (Alekos Sakellarios, Giorgos Tzavellas, Grigoris Grigoriou). Clearly influenced by the auteur theory of the 1960s and 1970s, Mitropoulou celebrates the work of three directors – Michael Cacoyannis, Nikos Koundouros and Theo Angelopoulos – to whom she dedicates special chapters. She then focuses on what she identifies as the "Athenian School" –

directors influenced by neo-realism and American cinema, combining the desire to portray an authentic view of contemporary reality with, usually, melodramatic elements. This is followed by an examination of the work of innovator-directors who worked in the period preceding the dictatorship of the Colonels, and who, in different ways, broke away from established convention. A large section focuses on directors who made "political" films, during the dictatorship and beyond. There are smaller sections examining documentary, women directors, Greek directors abroad as well as institutions supporting Greek cinema. The choice of topics offers a (more or less explicit) assessment of the relative value of particular film-makers, placing emphasis on the artistic dimension of cinema. This is consistent with the fact that Aglaia Mitropoulou was the main figure behind the establishment of the Greek Film Archive in the 1960s, and was committed to promoting quality cinema in Greece.

Yannis Soldatos's multiple and often reprinted volumes on Greek cinema are extremely valuable as collections of primary material, a lot of which belongs to his extensive private collection of film journals, photographs and posters. Soldatos is a publisher, film director, collector and writer. His publishing company Aigokeros is the main press in Greece specialising in cinema, and a significant part of the increase in relevant publications during the last two decades is a result of its activity. Soldatos's history often relies on the assumption that the material speaks for itself; this is clear from the fact that either images or extensive quotes/ reproductions of (at times incompletely referenced) primary sources are used instead of a historical account. His explanation of historical events is often based on commonsense assumptions that reproduce the views of the contemporary press, other film-makers and middle-class audiences. This is particularly evident in his damning account of popular/commercial Greek cinema and especially of melodrama, a genre that was primarily addressed to less educated audiences. His account of films after the 1980s consists mainly of a critical commentary of the films shown at the Festival of Thessaloniki.

Both Mitropoulou's and Soldatos's histories rely on the critical judgement of their respective authors based on their knowledge of the field as archivists, critics, collectors, and, generally, people involved with cinema in Greece. Their response to the material is often instinctive and intuitional. The same applies, to a large extent, to the history written by film critic Ninos Fenek Mikelides (1997; 2001), the main difference being that Mikelides is aware of the fact that he applies subjective critical judgement and highlights his conscious intention to use his history in order to shed light on disregarded and less known films. A succinct but illuminating account of the main historical trajectory of Greek cinema, as well as an examination of such aspects as genre and format (popular film genres, avant-garde, documentary, newsreels, short films) can be found in the entries on Greek cinema in the Educational Greek Encyclopedia (1999), signed by different authors. Finally, a two-volume, luxurious edition published recently on the centenary of the introduction of film to the country in 1905 (Rouvas and Stathakopoulos 2005) consists of an extensive and well presented filmography referring to 2,650 films and documentaries; an album of more than 5,000 photographs; a biographical dictionary of 400 film-makers and members of the industry; and a historical account that reaches to the contemporary era. Written by two cinephiles rather than historians – an animator (Rouvas) and a film memorabilia collector (Stathakopoulos) – the book offers a lively and illuminating account of a number of aspects of Greek cinema, but does not fulfil the need for a clearly documented and methodologically coherent history of Greek cinema.

An article by Maria A. Stassinopoulou (2002), instead, offers an example of such work. It focuses on Greek film production during World War II, a period on which very little information and even fewer films exist. Stassinopoulou argues that certain conditions created during the German occupation of Greece enabled investment in the production of Greek films, which in turn prepared the ground for the "golden era" of the sixties. In other words, she stresses continuities in film business from the

pre- to the post-war era (an example being the figure of distributor-producer Theofanis Damaskinos). This case study provides a valuable example of a historical analysis based on archival material, which foregrounds its argument, its theoretical assumptions and its limitations.

As film historians Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery (1985) identify, there are at least four different ways of writing film history, each of which has different aims and focus: aesthetic, which places emphasis on film as art; technological, which highlights the impact of technologies on film form; economic, which focuses on the economic and industrial conditions that underpin the production, distribution and exhibition of films; and social, which examines the patterns of film reception by audiences (Allen and Gomery 1985: 37). Most of the existing accounts discussed above offer an aesthetic approach with an emphasis on the "great man" and/or "masterpiece" tradition. Stassinopoulou's approach instead is predominantly economic. Its emphasis is on film as business, and on the production/distribution/exhibition network that supports it.

The field of industrial-economic analysis of Greek cinema is an area ripe for further research. Such research is very closely dependent on relevant archival information – such as contracts and financial data from private production companies – which is often unavailable. Existing publications on Finos films, for example, the main private production company of "Old Greek Cinema", are largely based on oral accounts from regular collaborators, members of the crew and cast (Triandafyllidis 2002; Zervas 2003). There are two books that cover aspects related to the economic history of Greek cinema. Sotiropoulou's (1989) study of the institutional and financial framework of Greek cinema in the years 1965-1975 offers some very illuminating statistics about the production and distribution activity in the period and highlights the need for more detailed study of the workings of particular companies, as well as of the system as a whole. Kouanis's (2001) study of the market for cinema in Greece focuses on the purchase of foreign films for distribution and

exhibition in the period 1944-99. The book highlights the extent to which imported (rather than locally produced) films constitute the main source of income for distribution companies, and analyses some of the processes for the selection of these films.

An altogether different approach to history, based on the social sciences, is adopted by Maria Komninou (2001) in her study of the Greek public sphere in the second half of the 20th century. In this study she examines cinema as a mass medium alongside the press and television. Her account of cinematic transformations highlights the political subtext of the films, and relates them within the contexts of either a conformist or an oppositional public sphere.

While there are relatively few purely historical studies of specific periods or case studies in Greek cinema, history in a broader sense greatly informs Greek film studies as they have developed so far. In some cases this has taken the form of the study of representations, in the sense of the examination of the content of the image and its relation to the society that produced and (originally) consumed it; in others, it consists of the examination of history as a self-conscious theme present in particular films or the work of specific film-makers. The study of representations has been applied predominantly in existing studies of Pre-War and Old Greek Cinema, while history as a theme is extensively present in New Greek Cinema. Below I will provide an overview of key publications on each period of Greek cinema and highlight the ways in which they explore questions of history.

Pre-War Greek Cinema

Silent and early sound Greek cinema is one of the most under-researched areas in Greek film studies. This is largely due to the fact that resources on Pre-War Greek Cinema are significantly more limited and often not available online. For example, there is no silent film filmography indicating how many films were made in Greece, when and by whom. Furthermore few silent films can be found in archives, and even fewer are available digitally. The Greek Film Archive holds a number of titles, although it is

difficult to specify from the website exactly how many. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece has a significant archive of newsreels and documentaries from the period, a published catalogue of which offers chronological and thematic classification (Constantopoulou 2000).

The histories of Greek cinema discussed above offer historical accounts of the era, but these are extensively based on oral testimonies. As there is no public archive containing journalistic or industrial sources from the era, the researcher has to rely on fragmented information and private collections. Soldatos's reproduction of some of his archival material is very useful in this context (2001-2). Eliza-Anna Delveroudi's accounts of pre-war Greek film in the two volumes of the *History of Greece in the 20th century* (Chatziiosif 1999 and 2002) constitute the most thorough historical analysis of the era so far. Often relegated, more or less explicitly, to the status of a "prehistory", Pre-War Greek Cinema is usually discussed as part of a broader historical account. There is, however, one notable exception, and the only book-length study of an aspect of this period: film director Fotos Lambrinos's study of pre-war newsreels as historical evidence (2005).

Lambrinos focuses on the extent to which newsreels can be used to collect historical information and identifies their main value for the contemporary researcher in their function as documentation for the period. Lambrinos organises the book in a loose chronological order, on the basis of the existing material. He examines footage by the Manakia Brothers, the first Balkan filmmakers, identifying their value as ethnographic sources, but also acknowledging the varied and original camera angles used, which indicate the cinematic sensibilities of their makers. He then focuses on footage of the Athens "Olympic Games" of 1906 – the first extant footage shot within the boundaries of what was then Greece – and compares it to Leni Riefenstahl's filming of the Berlin games of 1936. Other chapters focus on the coverage of war, on the Asia Minor campaign, on the extensive footage of national parades and the glorification of the military in their

uniforms (an ironic contrast with the significant military defeats of the early 1920s). He also examines the aborted attempt by the Gaziadis brothers to create a commissioned fiction film celebrating the national victory in Asia Minor, which was thwarted by the military disaster. Other topics include the first attempts to recreate a festival of ancient Greek culture and theatre in Delphi, as well as the footage of the royal family and the Metaxas government. Lambrinos's analysis is very attentive to the material, offering detailed descriptions of the content of the images, but also of some key stylistic choices (such as camera angles, distance, etc.). He highlights the ideological bias and propagandist function of most of the footage, which was commissioned by state institutions. The book conveys vividly a particular view of the nation as experienced and imagined with the help of the moving image in the first three decades of the 20th century.[3]

Lambrinos's detailed study of pre-war newsreels is not as yet matched by an equally detailed study of pre-war fiction films of the era. These consist of silent short comedies of the 1910s and 1920s, as well as the first feature films of the late 1920s and 1930s, which were folk-costume dramas (*foustanellas*) and melodramas. The absence of a book-length study on this era might be the consequence of the significant archival limitations. A recently published essay on actor Michail Michail tou Michail (Dimitriadis 2008) offers an examination of his career based primarily on the actor's autobiography and the contemporary press. This short but well researched biography portrays Michail as a quixotic character, who tried – rather unsuccessfully – to establish himself as a film actor with his short silent films.

The transition to sound in Greek cinema is examined in an article by Franklin L. Hess (2000), which analyses the first Greek sound film, *Ο Αγαπητικός της Βοσκοπούλας* (*The Shepherdess's Lover*, 1932). Hess examines the film as the locus of tension

[3] A significant part of the material discussed in this book has been used to compile the documentary series *Πανόραμα του Αιώνα* (*Panorama of the Century)* produced by ERT, 1982-87, and available at: www.ert-archives.gr

between, on the one hand, the desire for national distinctiveness resulting from the introduction of verbal language and dialogue, and, on the other hand, the aspiration that a film should use a universal language and be able to be consumed anywhere in the world. Hess argues that this film does not offer a successful negotiation of this tension but lays bare the terms in which it was expressed. The article thus throws light on some of the national/ ideological problems that came with the transition to sound, and offers a very illuminating example of the ways in which close textual analysis of the sound and image of a film can be used to examine broader cultural and social tensions. It moves beyond the study of representations, towards an examination of history as the interface between film form and social/cultural context.

Despite the acknowledged significance of the Gaziadis brothers in the Greek cinema of the late 1920s and early 1930s, no detailed study of their work has yet been produced. The discovery and restoration by the Greek Film Archive of a copy of their *Αστέρω* (1929), a feature-length *foustanella* that was an important critical and commercial success of the time, opens opportunities for understanding this period. A lot of questions remain unanswered with regard to the pre-war era, especially the silent film period, starting from questions related to production (who made which films, under what conditions, funded by whom?), to questions related to distribution/exhibition (how did these films circulate, who saw them, in what kind of conditions?). However, as Constantinidis (2000) and Hess (2000) forcefully argue, the shift from silent to sound cinema, which started in the 1930s and was completed in the 1940s, is not just about technology, but also about the conception of the medium: the advent of sound turns Greek cinema inwards, towards a nationally defined set of themes and representations. As the introduction of language defines most clearly a national audience, it also opens up opportunities to offer nationally specific narratives. This, as we shall see below, becomes systematised through the genre system. Looking back at the more outward-looking silent cinema, it is worth asking whether it is useful to explore it as "*Greek* silent cinema", rather

Looking back at the first sustained critical writings on popular Greek cinema in the 1970s, it is notable that they adopted some of the idioms of ideological criticism, producing very condemnatory accounts of what they saw as the products of "dominant bourgeois ideology". More recently, however, similar theoretical tools have been used to reassess pre-dictatorship popular Greek cinema and to argue in favour of a more complex relationship with their audience. In her book-length study, Athanasatou (2001) differentiates between the films of the 1950s and the 1960s, with regard to the extent to which they are grounded in a "popular discourse". More specifically, she argues that 1950s films were addressed to an audience that had very vivid memories of the Greek Civil War, and should be seen as instances of "popular culture" that helped the post-war audiences to deal with some of the recent traumas. In contrast, the mass-produced films of the 1960s are addressed to a society that has started to forget these traumas in the light of rapid modernisation and urbanisation. While the former have many traces of an authentic popular culture, the latter embrace a constructed version of popularity (λαϊκότητα). The book offers many acute observations, especially in the close textual analysis of her sample of twelve films, which are nonetheless occasionally compromised by the density of the theoretical framework it embraces.

Genre features as a theoretical tool in Athanasatou's work, but her argument cuts across generic categories. One of the first publications to highlight genre in Old Greek Cinema was the first volume of *Οπτικοακουστική Κουλτούρα* (Levendakos 2002a), in which most articles address either a particular genre, or a thematic/representational aspect of a genre. Athina Kartalou's article (2002: 27) sets the parameters for genre studies in Greek cinema, identifying four main genres: comedy, melodrama, mountain films (or *foustanellas*) and musicals – all of which are individually explored in the collection. Elsewhere, studies have focused attention on the "smaller" genres of the war film (Papadimitriou 2004; Tomai 2006) or the *film noir* (Dermetzoglou 2007).

A closer look at the mountain film, a genre with a distinctively Greek iconography, as indicated by its common generic name *foustanella*, illustrates some of the applications of genre analysis. In his essay on the genre, Kymionis (2000) distinguishes between two subgenres and their different ideological emphases. Based on stage plays, the dramatic idylls, on the one hand, represent peaceful, harmonious village communities temporarily torn apart because of parental disapproval of a couple's relationship, and create an idealised representation of the nation's past. Drawing on popular bandit literature and the heroic figure of the bandit, on the other hand, the mountain adventures focus on social injustice and allow the use of violence for the restoration of order; these films foreground conflict and by extension hint at recent historical memories. This work is further continued by Demertzopoulos (2002) in an article on the mountain adventure, which further examines the genre's ideological and social significance.

There are rather fewer book-length studies examining particular genres. My own study of the musical (2006 and 2009), offers a detailed formal analysis of the Greek genre, relating it to both its theatrical predecessors (the *epitheorisi*, the operetta, the *komeidyllio*) and to its cinematic relatives (the comedy). The book explores the common assumption that the Greek musical is a bad copy of its Hollywood counterpart, and refers to studies of the American film musical in order to challenge this claim. Proving inadequate to illuminate the specificity of the Greek musical, the relevant theories are appropriated and adjusted to make them useful for exploring questions relevant to the Greek films. One of the key questions asked is how the Greek musical uses – and develops – its generic conventions in order to express some of the key cultural tensions of the time. Drawing on the distinction between a *Romeic* and a *Hellenic* cultural identity, the analysis is used to demonstrate how elements of the musical express and negotiate their co-existence. It is through the use of its genre-specific dimensions, such as music, dance and plot, that the Greek musical illustrates the tensions between the two versions of

Greekness, and provides utopian solutions for overcoming them. In this way it was possible, in some cases, to map on to some of the formal characteristics of the American musical, such as the use of binary oppositions, a different set of meanings from those used in Hollywood.

Studies of genre in Greek cinema have often been linked with particular themes or aspects of representation. Delveroudi's (2004) book-length study of youth in Greek comedies of the period 1948-1974 uses the films as historical testimonies for the examination of the social roles of young people in this period. The book offers an exhaustive content analysis, examining youth with respect to such social contexts as family, education, marriage, work and leisure. It pays little – if any – attention to the form of the films, aiming to illustrate practices and ideas about youth that were prevalent during the period. A similar methodology, but on a smaller scale, has been used in articles that examine youth in social dramas (Paradeisi 2002a), politics in comedy (Delveroudi 2002) or women in comedies (Paradeisi 2002b).

Gender explorations consist, for the most part, of studies of representations – images of women in a particular group of films. A notable exception is Eleftheriotis's (1995) article on constructions of masculinity in popular Greek cinema of the 1960s, in which he argues against the universalising assumptions of gender theory that developed with the influence of psychoanalysis. More specifically, he indicates that the argument that dominant masculinity (as expressed in cinema, but not only) is associated with power, control and mastery is flawed in that it is based on a white, Western male subject and does not automatically apply to all cultural and historical contexts, such as that of modern Greece, which he sees as related to post-colonialism.

The emphasis on aspects of representation that is evident in most of the published work on Greek cinema is directly linked with the aim of illuminating a social and/or historical phenomenon. Issues around the diaspora and immigration, social phenomena that have shaped the Greek experience mainly in the 1960s and 1990s respectively, have preoccupied scholars

(Sotiropoulou 1995; Tomai-Konstandopoulou 2004; Kartalou et al. 2006). An examination of the themes of occupation and the resistance in Greek cinema (Andritsos 2004) is complemented by a more wide-ranging examination of aspects of war (Tomai 2006). A collection of essays on the representation of children has attracted various methodologies, but its focus is for the most part thematic (Theodorou et al. 2006).

There is, as suggested above, a notable absence in published studies of formal analyses of popular Greek cinema, focusing on its stylistic transformations. This can be largely explained as the result of a persistent perception about the quality of these films – the notion that Greek popular films are simply not good enough to examine as aesthetic objects. In a recently presented paper,[4] Eleftheria Thanouli argued for a liberating break away from this set of assumptions, with the assistance of Bordwell's methodological propositions, which argue for a "piecemeal history", for the writing of the history of film style against reductive "grand narratives" of historical transformation (Bordwell 1997). Thanouli adopted this approach to identify the specific stylistic choices that director Dinos Dimopoulos made in some of his films, examining their relationship to the script and to the options available to him in his working context. She looked closely at stylistic dimensions such as the staging of the action; the editing rate; the adherence (or not) to the principles of continuity editing; the use of stylisation. Far from making an auteurist case about coherence of vision and personal style, this paper located the specific stylistic dimensions of Dimopoulos's films as the result of particular problem-solving processes.

It would be very encouraging to see more "piecemeal" studies of the formal and stylistic dimensions of particular films in the context of their production. Such focus on detail could eventually lead to revisiting the established historical grand narratives on Greek cinema. It could also help assess whether the use of the term "classical" in the context of popular Greek cinema is suitable

[4] Presented at the conference "Greek Cinema: Texts, Histories, Identities" (Liverpool, 23-24 May 2008).

or not. While the general principles of classicism in cinema, as defined by Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson (1985), are certainly present in popular Greek cinema, the specific ways in which they have been achieved does not necessarily follow the American case as identified by the authors. For example, while most Old Greek films place emphasis on character-based plots that prioritise narrative clarity over style and aim to focus the attention on what is happening rather than how this is presented, they do not necessarily follow the principles of continuity editing in the same way, and to the same effect, as the American films. The adoption of the term in the context of Old Greek Cinema removes some of the specificity with which it was used in the American context and generalises it, making it synonymous with "mainstream narrative" cinema. A thorough investigation of the terms of its use and its relation to the original context would be welcome; this should involve a detailed and in-depth account of the industrial and formal characteristics of this cinema – an extensive project that has not yet been conducted in the Greek context.

New Greek Cinema

Questions regarding a possible "group" style emerge with regard to New Greek Cinema, a term that has been used to refer to the modernist, politically aware and sometimes intensely personal cinema that was produced mainly during the 1970s and 1980s. While alternative voices in film-making emerged during the 1960s with the work of, among others, Takis Kanellopoulos, Nikos Koundouros, Alexis Damianos, it was in the 1970s, and with the collapse of the commercial mode of production that supported Old Greek Cinema, that the Greek "new cinema" emerged. Initially, the funding options for film-makers who worked outside the established system were very limited. They often had to rely on private donors or personal and/or family savings. It was only in the 1980s, when the Greek Film Centre became part of the Ministry of Culture, that a systematic project of funding films valued for their cultural – rather than industrial – significance began.

While not being thematically or stylistically coherent, certain trends are evident in New Greek Cinema. On a closer look, a distinction between the two decades also emerges. Thus, broadly speaking, the films of the 1970s often deal with social and political issues, highlighting, for example, the problems emerging from rapid urbanisation. The troubles of the persecuted Left were explored in many films, even if those had to be conveyed cryptically to avoid the censorship of the Colonels. By the 1980s such activism gave way to a pessimistic existentialism. Many films became inward-looking, focusing on their characters' crises and deadlocks (Levendakos 2002b). The opaque style and often depressing subject matter of these films alienated their potential audiences, and, by the end of the 1980s, many Greek films struggled to find distribution.

In an article that examines visual style in New Greek Cinema, Skopeteas (2002a: 92-5) argues that the films from each decade demonstrate different stylistic characteristics. In 1970s films long takes and long shots prevail. Shots are often static, taken from neutral camera positions distancing the audience from the action and the characters. Camera movements are often unmotivated, while handheld camera and location shooting provide a raw edge. The use of lighting and acting is naturalistic, while compositions emphasise deep focus. These stylistic choices indicate the influence of both the Brechtian "alienation effect", and of the realist tendencies of the European New Waves.

Looking at the 1980s Skopeteas distinguishes between two different tendencies: the "expressionist" films, on the one hand, and those that begin to revisit mainstream narrative modes and genres, on the other. The former match their existentialist subject matter with characteristics derived from the original German movement: an emphasis on interiors shot from varied camera angles, the use of symbolically loaded interior sets and chiaro-scuro lighting, the placement of the camera closer to the actors, theatrical acting. The use of long takes continues, however, and as the author indicates, it becomes a dominant characteristic of New Greek Cinema as a whole. The second tendency – termed "New

Classical Cinema" by Skopeteas – is a precursor of the trends that would dominate from the 1990s, and will be discussed below.

New Greek Cinema has been a self-proclaimed "cinema of the author", a fact evident through the numerous interviews of its representatives, as well as through the pages of the film journal *Σύγχρονος Κινηματογράφος*, which explicitly promoted ideas of individual creativity as developed in the European New Waves. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the vast majority of published works in the area consist of studies of individual directors. It is worth noting that many of these books are published with the financial assistance of the Thessaloniki International Film Festival, an institution that has historical links with New Greek Cinema. Launched in 1960 under the title "Week of Greek Cinema", and subsequently renamed as "Festival of Greek Cinema" (1966-1991), it functioned throughout the 1980s as the main exhibition and promotional space for Greek films, which otherwise struggled to find distributors and audiences.

The series includes collections of essays on Antouanetta Angelidi, Theo Angelopoulos, Alexis Damianos, Takis Kanellopoulos, Frida Liappa, Roviros Manthoulis, Tonia Marketaki, Nikos Nikolaidis, Nikos Panayiotopoulos, Giorgos Panousopoulos, Nikos Papatakis, Kostas Sfikas, Dimos Theos, Stavros Tornes and Pandelis Voulgaris, all of which were published in the 2000s.[5] Incidentally, there are also publications focusing on the work of some Old Greek Cinema directors, whose work has been reassessed in the context of the theory of the auteur. The collections on Michael Cacoyannis, Jules Dassin, Dinos Dimopoulos, Grigoris Grigoriou, Giorgos Tzavellas and Dinos Katsouridis indicate the artistic evaluation of these directors, who worked within a commercial system of production that has traditionally been seen as a hindrance to creativity. Most publications on individual directors include reviews of the films by the contemporary press, functioning as resources for further research rather than as sustained auteur studies. There are few monographs

[5] www.filmfestival.gr/inst/Festival/gallery/eshop/bookshop_en.pdf

on particular directors, among which Soldatos's study of the body in Koundouros's work (2007), Kyriakos's exploration of the theatrical dimensions in Damianos's films (2007), and Sotiropoulou's analysis of Stamboulopoulos's oeuvre (2004) may be mentioned.

The discussion above has so far omitted the bibliography on Theo Angelopoulos, Greece's most internationally known and extensively researched film director. Angelopoulos's first feature-length film *Αναπαράσταση (Reconstruction*, 1970) is often seen as the starting point for New Greek Cinema because of its critical success that led to both national and international recognition at film festivals (Bakogiannopoulos 2002: 14). Angelopoulos went on to make a series of highly political films, managing to evade the censorship of the Colonels by setting their stories in recent history and presenting them in an oblique Brechtian mode. His four-hour-long *Θίασος (The Travelling Players*, 1975) was shot during the dictatorship and screened just after its fall, marking a particularly resonant moment in recent Greek history. The complex interweaving of themes from ancient myths (the *Oresteia*) and a popular dramatic idyll (*Γκόλφω*), as well as thinly disguised references to the Civil War not only encapsulate the director's unique vision, but also provide a very powerful insight into Greek history. Despite somehow changing direction from the mid-1980s towards a more character-based, existentially focused storytelling, Angelopoulos's consistent thematic concerns and stylistic choices render him an archetypal director-auteur.

The bibliography on his work in Greek, English, French and Italian is extensive, reflecting his international appeal. Andrew Horton has published both a monograph (1997a) and a collection of essays (1997b) in English, aiming to make Angelopoulos's work more accessible to those unfamiliar with Greek culture and history. David Bordwell (2005: 140-85) uses Angelopoulos as one of the four case studies in his study of cinematic staging and style, offering a dissection of the ways in which the director organises space through his camera. His close analysis of particular sequences from the director's films, focusing on their recurrent stylistic techniques, locates Angelopoulos's work within the

broader context of European modernism. Methodologically, it offers a good example of an approach based on film form and style that could be adopted more widely in the study of Greek cinema. Among the bibliography in Greek, Irini Stathi's (1999) monograph on space and time in the films of Angelopoulos offers an extensive and methodologically consistent semiotic analysis of his work. This is complemented by a volume that brings together, often in translation, some of the key articles written on his work, together with contemporary reviews (Stathi 2000). It is worth noting here the two collections of critical writings by Vassilis Rafailidis (1990; 1996), a very influential critic who voiced the call for New Greek Cinema and helped establish Angelopoulos as a major figure in this context.

Looking at the writing on New Greek Cinema, and especially on individual authors, it is worth noting that the vast majority aims to offer interpretations, in other words, it tries to unpack the dense, hidden and ambiguous meanings of the films behind their often high modernist form. The opaqueness of many films invites such an approach, and it is in this context that Bordwell's approach is particularly welcome as it offers an analysis based concretely on the stylistic choices in specific films. On the other hand, the increasing historical distance from New Greek Cinema is opening up possibilities for examining the films in the context of the discursive networks from which they emerged. The search for an authentic Greekness that would be expressed through a modernist aesthetic becomes, in this sense, one of the major discursive/ideological contexts in which New Greek Cinema evolved.

Contemporary Greek Cinema

The alienation of audiences from New Greek Cinema that reached its peak at the end of the 1980s was counteracted by the persistent popularity of Old Greek films through their repeat screenings on television. These two factors, arguably, have led to a return to a narrative-centred, genre-based and thematically accessible cinema since the 1990s. While this return to a mainstream narrative

cinema appeared in the 1980s, it has become significantly more prominent in the last two decades. The term "contemporary" to characterise this period is undoubtedly problematic as this is clearly a temporary temporal designation – what is contemporary now will soon cease to be so. It has, however, been widely used and for this reason is adopted in this context (Levendakos 2002c). An alternative offered by Skopeteas (2002a) is "New Classical Greek Cinema", which focuses on the main stylistic characteristics of most of the post-1990s films, but adopts a loose use of the term "classical".

The changes in the funding structures and policies in the last two decades have contributed towards the shift in emphasis towards a more mainstream, but also a more globally oriented cinema. In the early 1990s, the Greek Film Centre began to fund films by young directors who sought to examine contemporary social issues without trying to establish an authorial signature. As some of these films (for example, *Τέλος Εποχής/End of an Era*, 1994) increasingly appealed to audiences, the funding options began to expand. Television channels started contributing towards film production, either in collaboration with the Greek Film Centre, in the case of state-owned television, or independently, in the case of private channels (for example, *Safe Sex*, the box-office hit of 1999, was funded by Mega Channel without any state participation). The vast majority of contemporary Greek films are the result of co-productions, as the Greek Film Centre has also shifted its emphasis in this direction. European and international partners have entered the scene, opening questions about the national identity of the films and challenging the concept of national cinemas. Angelopoulos's films are a good example of such globalisation: since the 1990s his films increasingly involve non-Greek funding partners (mainly from Europe), international stars (Marcello Mastroianni, Jeanne Moreau, Bruno Ganz, Harvey Keitel, Willem Dafoe and Irene Jacob, among others) and even adopt the use of English as the main language (*Η Σκόνη του Χρόνου/The Dust of Time, Το Βλέμμα του Οδυσσέα/Ulysses' Gaze*). Angelopoulos's films are, of course, clearly "branded" as

auteur films, and in some ways they follow a trajectory of their own. But the role of co-production and the internationalisation of the cast and even the content of the films are also evident in some of the box-office hits of the 2000s. *Πολίτικη Κουζίνα/A Touch of Spice*, for example, was financed by Village Roadshow Productions (the first venture of a distribution and exhibition company into film production in Greece), the Greek Film Centre, and a Turkish company. The film had an international (mostly Greek and Turkish) cast, and also used the English language in parts of the dialogue.

Little has been published, as yet, on Contemporary Greek Cinema, opening a range of avenues to be potentially explored by researchers, one of which is the closer examination of the relation between the changing funding structures, as sketched above, and the form and content of the films. The third volume of *Οπτικο-ακουστική Κουλτούρα* (Levendakos 2002c) is the only collection of essays so far dedicated to post-1990s films, while most of the thematically organised collections discussed above (for example, on immigration, children, etc.) include essays referring to contemporary Greek films. Skopeteas's (2002b) examination of post-1990s films through the perspective of post-modernism offers many insights. The use of pastiche and nostalgia is present in the subject matter and style of many Contemporary Greek films (such as *Τέλος Εποχής*, 1995, *Peppermint*, 1999, *Πολίτικη Κουζίνα*, 2003, all of which focus on nostalgic reminiscences of childhood and adolescence; remakes such as *Ο Ηλίας του 16ου/Elias of the 16th*, 2008). Skopeteas also identifies an "oppositional" postmodernism in films that use inter-textual allusions and a mixture of styles to offer some form of social critique (such *Από την Άκρη της Πολης/From the Edge of the City*, 1998, or *Singapore Sling*, 1990). A very different approach is adopted in Maria Paradeisi's (2006) monograph, which offers close analyses of six Greek films chosen because of their thematic reference to transgression, made between 1994 and 2004. This study is inspired by Bordwell and Thompson's formalist analysis of narration and combines it with thematic explorations, such as

representations of gender and transgression. The films of Renos Haralambidis have become the object of Horton's attention in a short monograph (2005) on the young director.

The exceptional box-office success of a handful of Greek films in the last decade, such as *Safe Sex* (1999), *Πολίτικη Κουζίνα* (2003), *Νύφες/Brides* (2004), *Λούφα και Παραλλαγή: Σειρήνες στο Αιγαίο/Loafing and Camouflage: Sirens in the Aegean* (2005), *El Greco* (2007), has not as yet led to any extended publications on these films, but it is bound to trigger further academic interest in these and other Contemporary Greek films. This can take a range of directions, among which: the analysis of the formal and stylistic texture of individual films, or specific groups, in the context of the options available at a particular time and place; questions of group style, with the use of such terms as "classical" and "post-classical" carefully considered; a further examination of the industrial parameters of Greek cinema – the funding structures, production companies, distribution and exhibition; the study of audiences.

Last, but not least, a significant question emerges with respect to the study of Greek cinema as a whole: to what extent is it useful to study it as a "national cinema", an approach that implies its uniqueness in content, form, function, development? Should we not examine it (only) in relation to the rest of the cinematic production? As suggested above, such questions become even more relevant with the increasing globalising trends in film production in the last couple of decades, which dilute the commonly understood national identity of films produced, say, with Greek funds, Greek creative personnel, in the Greek language and addressed, predominantly, to a Greek audience. The debate has taken different guises over the years: the Greekness of Old Greek Cinema, for example, has been challenged, because of its extensive – and eclectic – borrowings of forms and styles from non-Greek models, and its failure to develop a "national school". The search for a national identity has also haunted some filmmakers of New Greek Cinema and led to the production of a group of films focusing on explorations of Greekness. More

recently, the terms of the debate have been reversed, with emphasis being placed on unpacking the ideological processes behind seeking a fixed "national identity". By extension, some national (film) histories have been criticised for their Hellenocentric focus, while emphasis is placed on finding parallel phenomena elsewhere. While this is not the place to develop such debates further, I wish to stress the necessity to examine the history and form of cinema in its specific contexts of production and reception, without necessarily making ideologically charged claims about uniqueness. Greek cinema is bound to have parallels elsewhere, and their exploration is welcome. Greek cinema is undoubtedly the result of multiple formal and cultural influences; it has been used to express multiple ideologies and, at times, to serve particular interests. Its national identity, therefore, should not be seen as unified, but as the product of a multiplicity of factors coming together at a particular time and in particular forms. As such, examining Greek cinema in its own terms and context can only strengthen further attempts to place it in a broader, comparative framework, such as, for example, its recent inclusion in the study of Balkan cinemas (Iordanova 2006).

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