

Editorial Note: From an International Conference to a Journal Special Issue

This Special Issue is the result of a chance encounter between three Greek film researchers from the University of Glasgow and the University of Reading in the UK, and the conference they organised in London soon after. *Contemporary Greek Film Cultures 2013* (July 2013)¹ was an international event with the aim of bringing together scholars of Greek cinema under a common roof. This was a first step towards charting the expanding field of Greek Film Studies, identifying its loci, and key figures and practices; an important task particularly since the academic study of Greek cinema has until recently been underdeveloped in Greece and abroad. However, this initiative was not entirely coincidental but a response to a sudden surge of international interest in Greek cinema, following the success of a handful of films, particularly from 2009 onwards.

The presence of Greek films in international film festivals and their increasing availability on DVD, as well as their incorporation in the programmes of cinemas abroad, further assisted Greek cinema's propagation in the local market and internationally. What this success also made evident was a strong appetite by the general public towards the *contemporary* in Greek cinema, in other words, a quality that made it different and current. This was accompanied by a keenness by critics and scholars not only to examine the *contemporary* characteristics of Greek films, but also to attempt to define and explore the *contemporary* period of cinematic production and highlight its break from previous Greek film and Film Studies output, and the various fixities that characterised the latter.²

The team's key aim during the conference was thus to spur a productive discussion on the slippery term "contemporary" and to acknowledge, as well as evaluate, the multiplicity of current Greek film cultures. This idea is part of a by now long-established argument in Anglophone Film Studies (Higson 2000: 68-69; Eleftheriotis 2001: 32-33; Williams 2002: 3-5) – and recently more

¹ For further information about the conference, visit <http://contemporarygreekcinema2013.wordpress.com/>. For a report on the conference, see Fotiou, M., Kazakopoulou, T. & P. Phillis (2013).

² For a detailed account on the periodisation and name designation of contemporary Greek cinema, see Papadimitriou's introductory article in this Special Issue.

frequently applied to Greek Film Studies – that, apart from examining the text itself, demands taking into consideration the cultural, creative and social contexts of a film, its reception, and the discursive value of film policy, which in many cases is a driving force of a film per se and of its impact.

Additionally, the aim was to invoke the amalgam of contemporary theoretical frameworks and methodologies, in order to discuss and interrogate the evolution of Greek cinema *towards* its contemporary form, without forgetting another underexplored section of this contemporary Greek cinema: popular and commercial cinema, which rekindled the interest (of audiences at least) in national production in the 1990s to the 2000s. However, during the conference, the attention of speakers mostly focused on the so-called festival or art-house film and in particular on Yorgos Lanthimos's *Kynodontas/Dogtooth* (2009), a landmark film released in a landmark year, which ushered not only the since-continued success of Greek cinema abroad, but also the economic and social crisis that has had a palpable impact on film, both in terms of text and context.

This special edition then appears not only as a further outcome of the aforementioned international conference, but also at a moment in time when Greek cinema is performing a shift to a broader and increasingly rhizomatic³ entity, demanding and receiving attention from scholars, critics, and audiences in Greece and internationally. This rhizomatic quality can prove productive in approaching the study of Greek cinema through multiple entry points or, to carry on with the metaphor, through tracing multiple roots, and routes at the same time.

It is with this in mind that this collection of articles is conceived, as it showcases a multitude of scholarly frameworks, methodologies, and modes of interpretation pertinent to Greek cinema, and deriving from various fields of inquiry. In addition, this approach sheds light on the increasingly complex and labyrinthine modes of Greek film production, reception, circulation, subsidy... or, in other words, of contemporary Greek cinema and its numerous manifestations. We are witnessing therefore the continuous development of certain *cultures* surrounding contemporary Greek cinema that grow towards any direction, some still beyond our perception. Its manifestations are visible and on display, but how these very cultures came to be and how we can interpret them, classify them, and assess them is a challenging and ongoing task, which this Special Issue aims at promoting further.

The very theme of this special edition – contemporary Greek film cultures – is examined in the introductory article of this issue, 'Locating Contemporary Greek

³ For the term, see Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (1977).

Film Cultures: Past, Present, Future and the Crisis' by Lydia Papadimitriou. The author proposes that 2009 can be set as a turning point, when change in production and reception of Greek cinema, both at home and internationally, was identified more widely, giving impetus to a new wave of Greek cinema that has been assigned various terms (such as 'New Greek Current', 'New Greek Wave' or 'Weird Wave of Greek cinema'). Papadimitriou in her article considers and problematises some of these terms. Indeed, we would argue, her overview of academic writing concerning the semantic 'battles' of this new phase of Greek cinema demonstrates the importance and need to define and locate this latest development in the country's cinematic output and the interesting scholarship springing from it. The author closes by suggesting potential developments of Greek filmmaking, as well as frameworks for its critical understanding currently and into the near future, thus framing some of the reflections in the articles that follow.

One of the most prominent interests of current scholars has been the attempt to map the characteristics of this new wave of film production in order to move closer to its definition/s. Afroditi Nikolaidou, with her article 'The Performative Aesthetics of the 'Greek New Wave'', pinpoints the attested 'weirdness' of this wave in the contemporary Greek films' performativity. Nikolaidou traces an interconnection between works that bear little resemblance to one another at first glance, such as *To Agori Troi to Fagito tou Pouliou/Boy Eating the Bird's Food* (Lygizos, 2012) and *I Eonia Epistrofi tou Antoni Paraskeva/The Eternal Return of Antonis Paraskevas* (Psykou, 2013). However, the author argues for and traces commonalities in performance strategies and aesthetics of the selected films, as well as identifies a strong link between these films and contemporary postdramatic theatre, stemming from the filmmakers' work both in cinema and theatre. Thus her article also further promotes the case for cross-media studies, by placing contemporary Greek films within a wider Greek performance culture and performativity studies.

Aspects of this observed new wave or current are also dealt with in Anna Poupou's article 'Going Backwards, Moving Forwards: The Return of Modernism in the Work of Athina Rachel Tsangari', but from a different perspective. Poupou examines Tsangari as an auteur and traces the changes, as well as recurrent stylistic and thematic elements, in the director's oeuvre. The author observes a "return to modernism" in Tsangari's work; something she also identifies in the work of other filmmakers of the new wave of Greek cinema, maintaining a comparative approach much like Nikolaidou, adding to the map of characteristics of this wave. One of the most interesting propositions in Poupou's argument is that this return to modernism is filtered through influences from postmodernism and the avant-garde. She thus locates another set of routes that can lead to a better understanding of contemporary Greek film cultures.

The diachronic importance of the avant-garde in the country's film culture, politically and formally, is noted by Rea Walldén in her article 'Greek Avant-Garde Cinema and Marx: The Politics of Form in Sfikas's *Modelo* (1974) and Angelidi's *Idées Fixes/Dies Irae* (1977)'; hence providing a useful backdrop to some of Poupou's theorization about Tsangari and the avant-garde. Walldén proposes that avant-garde filmmaking combines formal experimentation with political radicalism, therefore triggering a politics of form. She further analyses the aforementioned films in conjunction with the two filmmakers' political ideology, and mostly their Marxist influences, and suggests that the selected films constitute revolutionary texts in Greek cinema history, created in cinematic language. Placing this article in the middle of this Special Issue aims to provide a glimpse at the continuity of some aspects of Greek cinema, its themes, forms, and politics and how the period that the author chooses is one root that generates current thought on Greek cinema.

A political discourse is also prevalent in the films discussed in the article 'From Reconciliation to Vengeance: The Greek Civil War on Screen in Pantelis Voulgaris's *A Soul so Deep* (2009) and Kostas Charalambous's *Tied Red Thread* (2011)' by Kostis Kornetis. The author deals with the depiction of the Greek Civil War in these two contemporary films and traces the connections between film and historiographic production. Kornetis notes a transition from a cinema of reconciliation, which was promoted around 2008, to a cinema of vengeance and ultra-violence as encapsulated by Charalambous's film, which has no Greek precedent in its depiction mode of historical violence; and which mode the author further links to the economic crisis and the political transition in Greece since 2009.

Political transitions during the socioeconomic crisis in Greece are also the main topic of the two documentaries examined in the article 'Election Documentaries Enter Greek Cinema' by Apostolos Karakasis. Karakasis maps the late emerging election documentary subgenre in Greece and offers a comparative analysis of the narrative construction and form of *Ena Vima Brosta/One Step Ahead* (Athiridis, 2012) and *Dimokratia, o Dromos tou Stavrou/Demokratia, the Way of the Cross* (Gastine, 2012), aiming to provide the readers with each documentary's insight into the current political situation in Greece. Quite importantly, Karakasis's article also points towards a new-found popularity for documentary in Greece, which is another way that Greek cinema has engaged with, and has sought to, comment on its current contexts.

Another starting point of analysis is introduced by Marios Psaras, whose article 'Soft Fantasies, Hardcore Realities: Greekness and the Death Drive in Dennis Iliades's *Hardcore* (2004)' addresses issues of Greek identity, a long-standing preoccupation of critical investigation. Psaras, however, innovatively frames his discussion of the films through post-Lacanian psychoanalysis and contemporary

queer theory. He suggests that a psychoanalytic pendulum is staged in *Hardcore*, both thematically and formally, through the notions of identity, family, home and the nation, and through an ambivalent construction of cinematic space and time.

The last article, 'Matchbox (2002), *Knifer* (2010) and the 'Oikographic' Hypothesis' by Evgenia Giannouri moves to the microcosm of the domestic space in Yannis Economides's films and, like Psaras's article, maintains a connection between home and nation. The author moves away from close textual analysis and brings in a philosophical perspective, discussing the presentation of the 'noxious *oikos*' in contemporary Greek films as a symptom of a collapsing society and points to the Aristotelian diptych *oikos/polis*. Giannouri further argues that contemporary Greek filmmakers systematically apply the 'oikographic drive' to their films, which historically traverses Greek cinema.

Finally, this Special Issue includes the video essay entitled 'The Spatio-temporal Journeys of Theo Angelopoulos' by Marilena Parouti, a part of which was filmed during the *Contemporary Greek Film Cultures 2013* conference in London, and which features a number of the conference's delegates. This commendable work focuses on one of Greece's most important film directors, Theo Angelopoulos, and, in light of his still recent death, is made available in this Special Issue as another instance of Contemporary Greek Film Cultures.

The Editors: Mikela Fotiou, Tonia Kazakopoulou, and Philip Phillis

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