

Election Documentaries Enter Greek Cinema

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ABSTRACT

Following the paradigm set by Primary, a film associated with the birth of cinema verité, documentaries on elections have appeared regularly over the last 50 years. In 2012 the sub-genre of the 'election doc' appeared for the first time in Greek cinema with the almost simultaneous release of two films: Ena Vima Brosta/One Step Ahead by Dimitris Athiridis and Dimokratia, o Dromos toy Stavrou/Demokratia, the Way of the Cross co-directed by five filmmakers under the coordination of Marco Gastine. As documentary film is often associated with alternative and more sophisticated representations of political reality, it is natural that the appearance of the two films raises expectations and questions regarding their positive contribution to the current public discourse. This article attempts a comparative analysis of the narrative construction as well as the form of the two films in order to reveal the views each one offers on current Greek politics and the potential for change. The construction of meaning is examined as a result of different ways each film organises its footage into a complex plot, of variations in the modes of documentary representation, as well as of different stylistic choices.

KEYWORDS

crisis

Demokratia, the Way of the Cross

election documentary

One Step Ahead

politics

verité

INTRODUCTION

In 1960, Robert Drew and a group of four young filmmakers, who were to be recognized as leading figures of documentary film history,¹ made *Primary*, a film considered “a landmark in the aesthetic development of cinema *verité*” (Allen & Gomery 1985: 224). The film introduced innovative techniques, rejected the use of interviews, voice over narration and any form of staging events in order to capture what its filmmakers called “the sense of being there” (O’Connell 1992: 62). This emblematic film, which is often associated with the genesis of cinema *verité*, is also the first film that followed an election contest closely. This topic became popular in many national cinemas over the years in a way that one could claim that it has formed a sub-genre of observational documentary, the ‘election documentary’. This type of documentary, also referred to as the “behind-the-scenes campaign film” (Benson & Snee 2008: 9), could be considered as a sub-genre since it bears distinctive features that are known to and recognised by audiences through the ongoing repetition of the same formula (Bell 2005: 221). A research in the U.S. filmography proves the familiarity of this type of films as all presidential elections’ campaigns of the last twenty years have been presented in documentaries following the direct cinema tradition of *Primary*,² and have been mostly broadcasted by major U.S. television networks. The main characteristics of these films are their extensive use of the observational fly-on-the-wall style and their narrative that follows candidates on the campaign trail, in public and private events, leading up to the election day, and offering along the way an inside look, both at the campaign process and the candidate as an individual (Benson & Snee 2008: 9).

In Greece, observational documentaries did not make a considerable appearance until the late 1990s, when the availability of affordable digital equipment gave the means to a new generation of filmmakers to indulge in *verité* techniques that demand a high shooting ratio, which in previous times required expensive film stock and considerably high budgets. In this sense, it is not surprising that it took 52 years after *Primary* for this particular strand of observational documentary to finally appear in Greek cinema with the almost simultaneous release of two independent films: *Dimokratia, o Dromos toy Stavrou/Demokratia, the Way of the Cross* (2012) a collective work by five filmmakers under the coordination of

¹ The team known as Drew associates consisted of D. A. Pennebaker, Albert Maysles, Terence Macartney-Filgate, and Richard Leacock.

² A short list of well-known ‘election documentaries’ from the U. S. would include: *War room* (Hegedus & Pennebaker, 1993), *A Perfect Candidate* (Cutler & Van Taylor, 1996), *See How They Run* (Duane & Morse, 2001), *Journeys With George* (Pelosi & Lubarsky, 2002), *Diary of a Political Tourist* (Pelosi, 2004), *Our Brand Is Crisis* (Boynton, 2005), *...So Goes the Nation* (Del Deo & Stern, 2006), *By The People: The election of Barack Obama* (Rice & Sams, 2009).

director-producer Marco Gastine and *Ena Vima Brosta/One Step Ahead* by Dimitris Athiridis (2012).³ The adoption of this internationally successful sub-genre also indicates a tendency of Greek documentary filmmakers with a cinematic background in the so-called 'creative documentary' to get involved in current affairs previously dealt exclusively by filmmakers with a background in journalism.

Documentaries on political issues are increasingly seen by audiences as alternatives to mainstream journalism and an outlet for partisan and polemical messages (Benson & Snee 2008: 2). This international tendency, reflected in the critical success and wide distribution of documentaries such as *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Moore, 2004), *The Corporation* (Achbar, 2003), *Inside Job* (Ferguson, 2010) and many more, has inevitably influenced the perception of political documentaries by the Greek public. Furthermore, the Greek audience's expectations have been shaped by some recent, very popular local documentaries, such as *Debtocracy* (Chatzistefanou & Kitidou, 2012), or the widely viewed work of journalist-filmmakers Stelios Kouloglou and Yorgos Avgeropoulos who express intense criticism on the political establishment in its dealing with the current economic crisis. Indicative examples would be *Oligarchia/Oligarchy* (Kouloglou, 2012) and *To Pirama tis Argentinis/The Argentinian Experiment* (Avgeropoulos, 2011).

In this context, the appearance of the aforementioned two election documentaries finds the viewers already familiar with and predisposed for a critical portrayal of the political candidates and the electoral campaign process, while the behind-the-scenes view promises a distinctive alternative to mainstream news reporting. In this paper I wish to examine whether these audience expectations are met by the two films, and to what degree. At the same time the emergence of these two films raises questions on how a group of Greek film 'auteurs', previously absent from the public political discourse, reflect on critical issues of their times and in what ways they contribute to this discourse.

This paper will examine the content of this contribution and argue that although the films refrain from being didactic and from blatantly articulating a message, they do carry underlying political views that are the result of specific formal choices regarding narrative construction and film style. As both films share the basic generic conventions of the type of documentary they have chosen to adopt, some basic, principal remarks will be drawn from the examination of the sub-genre itself and the paradigm set by *Primary*. A closer analysis of the two films

³ Documentaries on the subject of elections have been made before, but not in the observational mode that characterises the suggested sub-genre. Probably the most important predecessor of Greek election docs is *Kavala-Noemvris '74/Kavala-November '74* (Adamopoulos & Komninou, 1974) that provides a remarkable document of the first post-dictatorship elections marked by the legalisation of the Greek Communist party.

however, will reveal that although both films derive from this common tradition, they end up encouraging divergent readings of similar events. A comparative analysis would identify different ideological readings and reveal how these are also dictated by different formal choices.

THE PARADIGM SET BY *PRIMARY* AND ITS CRITICISM

The paradigm of *Primary* sets the narrative and stylistic framework of election documentaries in general, and its examination can lead to useful conclusions that are applicable in the analysis of the two case studies in particular.

Although *Primary* was conceived and produced by Drew for Time Life Broadcasting as “a new form of television journalism” (O’Connell 1992: 41), very soon it became evident that it gained much wider recognition in cinematic circles.⁴ This can be attributed to the film’s incapability to provide an adequate political analysis of the different agendas of the two candidates (J. F. Kennedy and H. Humphrey), while on the other hand, it manages to recount a dramatic story of a brief, yet intense, period of the characters’ lives. Placing the emphasis on the human experience rather than on the political debate is the result of the formal restrictions that the first election documentary had adopted, and which remains a key generic convention of election documentaries to this day.

The set of formal choices, and mainly the observational mode that laid at the heart of Drew’s experiment left little room for a political essay, which would demand an exposition of the main issues at stake (social, economical, geopolitical etc.) and a fair and balanced evaluation of the solutions proposed by each party. This discourse could only be attempted in an argumentative documentary that would have employed the expository mode (using interviews, archival material, voice over etc.) instead of the observational one, which was the main novelty that *Primary* stood for. Furthermore, the shooting restriction to the time period and locations of the campaign tour made it difficult to document and expose problematic aspects of social reality that had developed and were most evident at locations out of the campaign itinerary and at times irrelevant to the campaign schedule.

This lack of political analysis, however, left room for viewers’ engagement in the narrative, similar with the experience of viewing a fictional narrative film. In fact, Drew associates considered situations of crisis as the elections, ideal for cinema

⁴ According to an interview of Leacock, Henri Langlois of Cinematheque Francais characterised *Primary* as the “most important documentary since Lumiere” (O’Connell, 1992: 236), and he also claims that it greatly influenced *Breathless* (Godard, 1961). In the U.S. *Primary* received the Robert Flaherty Award and the American Film Festival Blue Ribbon in 1960.

verité filmmaking since they provide an existing dramatic structure (Mamber 1974), protagonists with strong will, a series of conflicts and a final resolution.

Situations like the election campaign also offered the practical advantage of a limited shooting time span and mainly the possibility of allowing the subjects to ignore the presence of the camera, as they were too absorbed in the intensity of their activities. While the candidates were under strain, Drew attempted to focus on what he called “psychological shooting” (O’Connell 1992: 72), in order to reveal as authentically as possible the character behind the politician’s public image. Exploration of characters became thus the main attraction of the emerging genre of direct cinema and of election documentaries in particular.

The interest of the public in exploring the ‘real’ personality of a political leader (such as the prospective president of the U.S.) is certainly much older than cinema *verité*, and is rooted in the popular belief in the individual as the essential agent of change (Stefani 2007: 65). Although the idea that a good character makes a good president may seem naive, research in political marketing has identified that candidates’ personality traits, such as honesty, intelligence, decisiveness, are of crucial importance for voters’ behaviour (Islamoglu, Alniacic, Ozbek 2010: 6). In this sense, election documentaries are popular and still attract the attention of audiences, even in voyeuristic terms, as they correspond to an existing public request to unveil the ‘real’ person behind the politician. As election documentaries favour this personality-centred approach, they are often criticised for misguiding the public-voters in a direction that discourages the necessary detached critical evaluation of political ideas and facts.

Finally, *Primary* attempted to illuminate the elections mechanism and reveal the electoral campaign process, at least to a certain extent,⁵ through the interaction of the candidates with many more social actors: members of the public, members of the press, campaign advisors, and many more. The observation of these interactions, apart from providing election documentaries with the function of documenting a ‘moment in history’, can also reveal the backstage engineering of this most decisive function of representative democracy offering thus material for a critique of this mechanism.

These four key aspects of the sub-genre, as well as the main critical reservations, seem to be readdressed in each case of election documentary as it shifts its focus from one aspect to the other, and places its emphasis according to the individual ways in which authors relate to the reality of different campaigns.

⁵ Leacock admits that “in no way *Primary* achieved what we set out to do, which was to show what really goes on in an election” (Saunders 2007: 22).

THE CASE OF *DEMOKRATIA, THE WAY OF THE CROSS*

The documentary *Demokratia, The Way of the Cross* follows the paradigm of *Primary* to a great extent, sharing many characteristics, one of which is that it is a collective work made by five documentary filmmakers (Katerina Patroni, Haris Raftoyannis, Christoforos Georgoutsos, Nikolia Apostolou and Yannis Misouridis) under the authorial supervision of one director. The film premiered in September 2012, and refers to the national elections held in May of the same year, that can be said to bear a historical significance in recent Greek history. In these elections the two dominant parties, New Democracy and PASOK,⁶ that have been succeeding each other in the government since the 1970s, witnessed a dramatic decline in their public support, while minor parties, such as the left-wing SYRIZA and the neo-fascist Golden Dawn, gained a surprisingly large increase, thus becoming key players in the emerging political status quo. The film documents the social atmosphere of scepticism and mistrust against politicians that came as a result of the economic crisis and its dire effects in Greek society.

One central choice concerning the narrative structure of this feature-length film is that it follows four MP candidates, one from each of the aforementioned parties: Yannis Ragoussis from PASOK, Nikos Kostopoulos from New Democracy, Rena Dourou from SYRIZA and Helias Panayotaros from Golden Dawn. The narrative devotes approximately the same filmic time for each individual character and offers a similar psychological depth in their portrayal. By following these four candidates in their intense effort, the film generates empathy towards the four opposing agents, encouraging the viewer to adopt a series of juxtaposing points of view, rather than to identify with a single perspective. Ultimately, the narrative choice of multiple characters indicates the author's aspiration to achieve an ideal of neutrality in the representation of all political agents.

The four characters never interact with each other nor do they become antagonists in narrative terms, so the viewer is presented with four separate 'chronicles' interwoven into one narrative composition. The events selected within each 'chronicle' are not linked in a cause and effect chain, but seem to follow a chronological order that becomes more evident at the last twenty minutes of the film as election day approaches. Until that moment, the narrative joins together disconnected episodes from the four individuals' campaign activities that are rarely associated in any distinct way.⁷ The lack of causality within the story shifts the emphasis from 'what will happen' to 'how it happens'.

⁶ The Panhellenic Socialist Movement.

⁷ There are only two instances where the succeeding scene is obviously connected thematically to its previous one. One occurs when a scene presenting a Golden Dawn meeting is followed by a scene of the New Democracy candidate on the phone commenting Golden Dawn's 'gang practices'. Another joins two scenes that hint at the church's influence on the campaign of the above two parties.

Furthermore, as McKee notes, substituting coincidence for causality, “puts emphasis on the random collisions of things in the universe that break the chains of causality and lead to fragmentation, meaninglessness, and absurdity” (McKee 1997: 52). In this sense, the disconnectedness of the narrative episodes creates an impression of meaninglessness concerning the whole campaign process. Witnessing individuals pursuing their personal goals repetitively, each time in a different environment, with no indication of progress, makes the campaign seem an absurd routine.

As in the paradigm of *Primary, Demokratia, The Way of the Cross* abides to the strict rules of direct cinema’s observational mode that leave very little room for the examination of the political discourse. Although candidates talk about political issues, the succession of episodes does not build up an argumentative essay. According to Gastine, “Unlike the journalist who is attracted to the content of political speech, we as documentarians are primarily interested in how the politician as a person practices their job, we film them as we would film a grocer”.⁸ The focus is therefore shifted to the portrayal of each individual’s character and their way of approaching the voters, attempting to persuade them. In this sense, the selection of the four protagonists was not based so much on their value as eloquent representatives of different political parties, but on their different attitudes, style of communication and campaign practice.

This shift from political to personal approach – which is a constant source of controversy on the evaluation of election documentaries in general – raises further questions of political correctness in this specific film, since one of the four people the film follows is a candidate of an extremist right-wing party, which is related to neo-Nazi organisations in Europe and which has a clearly racist and xenophobic agenda (Psarras 2013). The narrative approach that allows the emergence of empathy towards this character (as the audience witnesses him putting great effort in organizing and running his campaign, or showing affection to his wife) raises issues regarding the social responsibility of the filmmaker to the forefront. Does not an author have the duty to clearly condemn those political agents that threaten principal humanistic values of our society? Is this approach of neutral observation raising public awareness in order to protect these values that are at stake?

In the examination of such questions it is helpful to consider how the perception of a filmic text differs according to the spectator. As Edward Branigan suggests, the first level in the hierarchy of narrative comprehension lies outside the text itself and involves the concepts of the “historical author” and the “historical audience” (Branigan 1992: 87). In this case, the perception of such scenes relies on what the “historical audience” already knows about cinema *verité* in general,

⁸ Interview with Marco Gastine, June 4th 2013.

about the work of the “historical author” Gastine, as well as on its preconceived ideas on Golden Dawn and the party candidate himself. As the empirical conclusions drawn from screenings of the film have so far indicated, members of the audience tend to identify more with candidates akin to their own political views and, through identification, they tend to reinforce these political preconceptions interpreting the filmic text accordingly. In this sense, the filmmakers have observed that the Golden Dawn sympathizers found nothing unflattering in the particular candidate’s representation, while others were shocked by his violent behaviour and manner of speech. Such diverse readings are characteristic of observational documentaries that intend to present slices of life without providing an interpretation in the fear of being didactic. As Gastine admits:

I am worried as a citizen about the rise of Golden Dawn and I think that I have contributed in showing what it is, if some people still find this charming, I can’t do anything about it... You try to do the opposite, but at the end, one is restricted by the ethics of his film. (2013)

Once again, the audience observes the ethics of traditional observational cinema that produce this open text corresponding to very specific formal choices, which share the minimum possible degree of intermediation as their common denominator. The filmmaker uses no interviews or voice over commentary while there are only a few informative titles that are restricted to very neutral and factual information, such as statistical numbers and names. Apart from the opening sequence, the film lacks any non-diegetic music, visual or sound effects, while the camerawork follows a non-participatory, fly-on-the-wall observation. Rarely is a contextual hint provided, through focusing on some detail, as in the case of a close up on a painting of Jesus that ends a scene at the conservative candidate’s office.

Despite this effort of minimum intervention, the actual selection of the events presented, especially during the editing, the exclusion of various other possibilities that were available during the shooting and the emphasis on details, confirm that the film is not just a neutral observation of the events, but inevitably reflects the author’s personal view. The examination of the criteria for the inclusion or exclusion of scenes suggests the existence of an idea controlling the formation of the narrative, an underlying premise or message. One basis on which scenes are selected is the exposition of a variety of social problems that are considered by the author as being central in the public political discourse: tax evasion, corruption, unemployment, immigration. In most scenes, however, the prevailing issue seems to be the voters’ widespread mistrust towards politicians. The choice of excerpts indicates a strong preference to scenes where candidates are confronted by members of the public expressing their lack of confidence, doubt and disbelief. Since the relation between the people as the source of power

with the politicians who represent them is depicted as fragile and problematic, the film seems to suggest that the function of representative democracy itself is at stake. The wordplay in the title *Demokratia, The Way of the Cross* supports this reading. On the one hand, it refers to the process that leads to the cross that electors mark on the ballot paper, and on the other hand, to Christ. Therefore, the campaign period acquires connotations of suffering and martyrdom and the subject of this suffering is identified as *Demokratia*, namely democracy. However, even without this reflection in the title, the constant conflicts between electors and candidates, as well as the documentation of the emerging anti-democratic, menacing power of Golden Dawn – for the first time so intimately recorded in Greek cinema⁹ – would be enough to indicate that democracy in Athens, its historical birthplace, is in deep crisis.

Finally, this documentary also seems to offer a view on a central question of current public discourse in Greece concerning *who is responsible for the financial and social crisis of the country*: the political leaders, the citizens, or both? By following the four candidates in their day-to-day struggle, the film portrays them as ordinary, vulnerable individuals who try to overcome public mistrust, confront protests and endure their ‘way of the Cross’. This sense of powerlessness that prevails in the representation of the four candidates, in no way evokes the decision-making power and the authority that these individuals may have had prior to the elections or may acquire in the future as members of the parliament. Engagement in this narrative inevitably provokes to the audience empathy towards the protagonists, questioning the popular belief that attributes the crisis primarily to politicians’ mishandlings. Through this identification mechanism the filmic text seems to lift the burden of exclusive responsibility from the politicians’ shoulders and to question the stereotype of the corrupt politician, while hinting to the idea of collective responsibility. The press material of the film reaffirms this idea of collective responsibility by stating the filmmakers’ wish “to contribute to the moral introspection that our times require”.¹⁰

THE CASE OF ONE STEP AHEAD

Athiridis’s *One Step Ahead* refers to the mayoral elections that took place in Thessaloniki on November 2010. The film follows the campaign of winemaker Yannis Boutaris, a rather unconventional and provocative candidate, who enters the campaign with little concern for the formalities of social behaviour

⁹ In the same period, another observational documentary following candidates of Golden Dawn was made: *The Cleaners* by Konstantinos Georgousis that premiered in Greece on October 2013, having already been broadcast on UK’s Channel 4.

¹⁰ Press material used at the Athens International Film Festival (18-29 September 2013). Available at <http://www.aiff.gr/article.asp?catid=28764&subid=2&pubid=15344985>. Accessed 4 April 2014.

associated with this position. Boutaris runs for mayor against a conservative establishment, dominated by right-wing politicians with strong links to the church that had been in power of the city hall for the last 25 years. The story of an adventurous campaign is being told by observing the day-to-day activities of its engaging protagonist, a recovered alcoholic and successful businessman, who embodies the hope for change. The access granted by the main character allows the recording of intimate moments, private political meetings and events of strong dramatic potential that defined the course of a successful campaign, ending with the protagonist's victory.

It is worth noting that *One Step Ahead* was the first election documentary to be shot in Greece (although it premiered a month after *Demokratia*) and received critical and commercial success.¹¹ The film follows a complex narrative structure, which comprises of two narrative threads, or two interwoven plots. The primary plot recounts the events of the campaign through strong identification with the protagonist and follows a classical narrative structure that involves an inciting incident, a series of turning points, a climax scene and a cathartic resolution. It consists mainly of observational footage and creates the impression of a more or less chronological order. The secondary plot does not use the observational mode but the expository mode to recount Boutaris's dramatic life story. Starting with his passionate love affair during puberty that led to marriage and children, the story proceeds with the protagonist's addiction to alcohol and his subsequent divorce, followed by his rehabilitation and reunion with his former wife. The final episodes of this plot revolve around the protagonist's moral turnaround and devotion to public life with the support of his partner, who recently passed away. The main elements of this narrative are a 'de profundis' interview and archival material.

Unlike *Demokratia*, *The Way of the Cross*, this documentary presents the elections' chronicle through a single character with whom it encourages strong feelings of identification. The viewer closely witnesses Boutaris struggling to deal with low blows by his political opponents and the media concerning his appearance and lifestyle, with his campaign partners who suggest more diplomacy than sincerity, with the public opinion's nationalistic preoccupations and, ultimately, with his own physical limits. The events in both of the aforementioned plots are driven by the will of a strongly motivated film character and are linked in a cause and effect chain, abiding by the conventions of classical narration. The film's first plot, the campaign story, could be identified

¹¹ *One Step Ahead* was made in co-production with ZDF/ARTE, YLE and ERT. It participated at IDFA, ran for 6 weeks in Greek cinemas and was awarded the first documentary prize at LA Greek Film Festival 2013. It was broadcasted on ARTE on August 15th 2013.

in terms of the genre system suggested by McKee as 'modern epic', (McKee 1997: 81), a genre that presents the fight of an individual versus the establishment, as for example the fiction films *Spartacus* (Kubrick, 1960) or *The people vs Larry Flynt* (Forman, 1996). In the same genre categorization the second narrative thread, the biographical backstory, would correspond to the 'redemption plot' where "the film arcs on a moral change within the protagonist from bad to good: i.e. *Drugstore Cowboy*, *Schindler's List* etc" (ibid.). Although one can attribute other familiar generic identities to these two plots, such as political film and melodrama, the point worth noting is that the dual plot, as well as the combination of two genres to create a hybrid narration (for example mission/romance), is typical of Hollywood cinema (Neale 2000: 171). Having such foundations in classic film narration, it can be said that *One Step Ahead* presents a more familiar cinematic experience to a wide audience, compared to the experience offered by the minimal plot of *Demokratia*, *The Way of the Cross*.

The film's style employs the cinematic apparatus without dogmatic restrictions concerning *verité* ethics, sometimes even with audacity concerning documentary standards, in order to intensify the viewer's experience. The ideal of unmediated realism is abandoned for the sake of a heightened realism that is supported by the fast pace, the abundance of music (covering approximately half of the film's duration), the flashbacks and flashforwards, as well as the visual and the sound effects that are typical of a modern hypermediated text.

The intense use of different stylistic devices mainly serves the function of gaining depth of knowledge of the character's psychological state; in other words, subjectivity. An example can be traced at one major turning point of the primary plot where Boutaris is taken by surprise as the archbishop of Thessaloniki Anthimos threatens him inside the church that if he does not renounce calling him a 'mujahedin' he will never see the city Hall. After this episode, a buzzing soundscape gradually prevails, the diegetic sound becomes distorted, words echo, while a subjective point of view shot of Boutaris leaving the church is reproduced in slow motion until it fades slowly to white. At this moment, the narrative shifts to the secondary plot with a fade back to a photograph of the deceased wife of the character and Boutaris narrating his partner's course towards death, and the archbishop's opposition to her last wish of being cremated. In other instances, the film goes as far as presenting dream sequences of the hero that cut back to him waking up; a bold interpretation of the observed reality that according to Bill Nichols would be "considered ambivalent in documentary, especially in its cinema *vérité* mode", as it "trades authenticity for fictional identification" (Nichols 1991: 250). However, in Nichols' view it is just the degree of formal intermediation that differs in various approaches and raises ethical concerns, because inevitably in documentary the "actual historical being must also serve as the plastic material for the construction of the agent or character of their own narrative and the icon or persona of their own myth"

(Ibid.: 250). Athiridis's approach does not hesitate to use the historical protagonist and the historical events as the 'plastic material' Nichols mentions, in order to create a narration that borders with fiction film.

Despite the ambiguity of the film's final scene – a brief poetic flashforward to a rather unfortunate moment of Boutaris's administration met with chaos and protests – the whole narrative body with its classic structure and strong identification leaves very little space for an open interpretation or for a neutral political judgment. The identification with the goal-oriented classical hero encourages the viewer to adopt his political reasoning and expresses the film's faith in the power of individual agency to transform the world in a positive way (Thanouli 2013: 138). Furthermore, by means of its structural engineering, the film clearly produces an overall meaning, a message or an outlook on current Greek politics that is based on the moral dimension of the events which it treats. This can be examined by using the practical notion of the 'controlling idea' (McKee 1997: 115) which serves as a central composition guideline in classically designed scripts and is "expressed in a single sentence describing *how* and *why* life undergoes change from one condition of existence at the beginning to another at the end" (ibid.: 115). In this sense in the modern epic narrative, which is the electoral campaign, one could phrase the controlling idea by saying that the outsider hero wins the elections *because* of his moral integrity. In the filmic representation of the historical events, the hero manages to surpass every conflict that he encounters, mainly because of his moral integrity, because he speaks his mind openly, he is not restricted by political correctness or ideological prejudice and he maintains a sincere attitude. Yet the ultimate message derived from this narrative is not revealed if one does not consider the contribution of the secondary plot, the hero's biography. In this 'redemption plot', one could phrase the controlling idea by saying that the hero achieves a moral turnaround (and is saved from alcoholism) *because* of his courage to face himself and thanks to the loving support of his wife. The combination of the two plots expresses the overall interpretation of this story that could be phrased: The hero wins the elections battle *because* of his courage to face himself and thanks to the loving support of his wife. So a moral transformation based on self-knowledge and love is presented as the essential requirement in finding a way out of the political, social and financial crisis in modern Greece. The press material of the film confirms this reading clearly stating that "projecting a personal story on its social analogy, the film explores the relevance of concepts such as dead end, crisis, addiction, election, decision and detoxification".¹²

¹² Press material used at the Athens International Film Festival (18-29 September 2013) Available at <http://www.aiff.gr/article.asp?catid=28764&subid=2&pubid=15344985>. Accessed on 4 April 2014.

Examining the relevance of the four generic characteristics raised by *Primary's* paradigm in the case of *One Step Ahead*, it must be recognised that, apart from the engagement in the narrative, and the exploration of character where the film successfully places its great emphasis, the genre's deficiency to provide an adequate political analysis is challenged as much as the limitations of a personality-centred approach can allow, in order to present the key elements of the political discourse underlying the campaign. The formal way to overcome this inherent weakness of the election doc sub-genre is the occasional use of an expository technique that groups fragments of observation into a compilation scene centred on one political issue or conflict subject with the antagonist candidate. For instance, when Boutaris refers to the multicultural past of the city and its undermining by the dominant nationalistic ideology, different fragments from him expressing views on the issue are compiled with the unifying support of a music underscore. Regarding the illumination of the elections mechanism, one can identify a number of scenes in observational mode that imply a critique of political communication strategies as well as of the media and its role. In this direction the presence of the character of the campaign strategist is revealing. This secondary character, an expert in political communication, is portrayed in a number of scenes to dictate to the candidate mayor his speech and behaviour.

One Step Ahead places emphasis in the process of political image construction, especially in relation to the media, reflecting a tendency in election documentaries to shift focus from the candidates themselves to their campaign strategists.¹³ The public display in election documentaries of these previously hidden behind doors processes has received criticism as delivering the opposite results of those promised: instead of unmasking the campaign processes in the interest of the audience, it has been accused of becoming another strategic instrument in the service of the campaign itself, as ultimately the strategists are in control of the act of representation, defining what is filmable and what not. According to that line of thought, at the age of postmodern hyperreality where the distinction between reality and its representation collapses (Baudrillard 1993), the calculated foregrounding of the image-making process, the so-called 'meta-imaging,' has become a new tool of political communication in the hands of the campaign strategists under the guise of realism (Parry-Giles 1999). In the case of *One Step Ahead*, the ambiguity concerning editorial independence in all stages of the film's construction is intensified as filming is restricted to one side of the electoral opponents, in a way similar to the practice of embedded journalism in a war conflict. The film's narrative tries to counterbalance this ambiguity by emphasising on the amateur mode of Boutaris's campaign, and by including an epilogue scene that displays the eventual inefficiency of his

¹³ A typical example of this tendency is the case of *War Room* (Pennebaker & Hegedus, 1993) that chronicles Clinton's 1992 campaign almost without showing Clinton at all, but focusing on his campaign advisers instead.

administration concerning the city's waste management. Ultimately, the question of whether an election documentary functions as indirect propaganda, or as an independent, detached representation of events, is a rhetorical question that seems to ignore the possibility of more complex readings. Given that the notion of neutrality is considered implausible in any documentary narrative, in the particular case of observational documentary one has to take into further account that the film's very existence relies on the access granted to the filmmakers by its social actors on a basis of trust and mutual benefit. An adequate audience of observational films should be able to recognise this as a necessary precondition and consider that there is a give and take in each process of access granting. In this sense, the viewer of an election documentary, such as of the aforementioned case studies, is justified to have as many critical reservations towards the representation of historical events, as in any other filmic text.

CONCLUSION

The two election documentaries that recently appeared in Greek filmography offer an alternative representation of the electoral campaign process, quite different from typical news reporting. Their behind-the-scenes access however, is not employed in order to reveal facts or information hidden from public view in the manner of investigative journalism, nor does it offer polemical messages typical of the recent tendency of political documentary. Instead, moving within the formal framework of an established generic tradition, election documentaries aim to inform the audience about the process of the political campaign, mainly by allowing the viewer to experience it as a narrative, by exploring the characters of the candidates and by illuminating the campaign mechanism and the applied strategies.

Apart from this general common approach, these first two case studies present numerous formal dissimilarities that demonstrate the uniqueness of each author's perception of reality. The open text neutrality through multiple characters in *Demokratia, The Way of the Cross* is juxtaposed to *One Step Ahead's* gripping narrative and identification with a single candidate as the agent of positive change. The pessimistic and absurd impression of the former's film disconnected chronicles is in contrast to the optimism and justified closure offered by the classic structure adopted by the latter. The strictly observational mode that is guided by ethics of non-intervention is measured against a hybrid style of audacious hypermediation. Despite these differences, both narratives clearly suggest that the main responsibility for the crisis lies in the society as a whole and burdens Greek people collectively. The financial crisis is presented in both texts as a result of a moral crisis, of a lack of moral discipline.

The ways that these two films may have affected the public consciousness cannot be assessed due to the lack of relevant research or appropriate tools, although, in respect to statistics, *One Step Ahead* received a wider distribution and more press coverage than *Demokratia, The Way of the Cross*. However, these two films did not raise any considerable controversy among the public, the critics or different political agents, despite the fact that both the distanced and innocuous representation of Golden Dawn, in the one case, and the negative representation of Boutaris's political opponents, in the other, could have been appeared as disturbing to certain audience groups. This impassive reception can be seen as an indicator of the restricted interest of the Greek public and critics in theatrically released documentary films in general, and, subsequently, their minor role and influence in the public discourse. As both films are expected to be eventually broadcasted on Greek television, the assessment of their reception and their effect on public opinion remains to be seen.

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