

Locating Contemporary Greek Film Cultures: Past, Present, Future and the Crisis

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a critical contextualisation of developments in Greek cinema around the nodal date of 2009, which brought together the beginning of the financial crisis, an increased international visibility of certain Greek films, significant grassroot-motivated institutional changes for cinema in Greece, as well as the emergence of Anglophone criticism on Greek cinema. In so doing, it aims to identify key dimensions of contemporary Greek film cultures, and point towards some possible developments in terms of modes of production and reception of Greek cinema, but also new frameworks for its critical understanding.

KEYWORDS

Contemporary Greek Cinema

crisis

FOG

Greek 'weird' wave

media industry studies

national

transnational

By the end of the first decade of the 21st century, Greece found itself in the midst of a major financial crisis. Its suddenness and intensity, as well as the danger that it posed for the financial stability of the rest of Europe, catapulted the country into the international limelight. Depicting Greeks as either victims of global neo-liberalism or perpetrators of corruption and financial mismanagement, the media coverage circulated predominantly negative images of the country. Around the same time, a harsh, claustrophobic and often absurdly funny film from Greece attracted prestigious festival awards and, for the first time in 34 years, represented the country at the Oscars. At home, the film divided critics and the public, and was met by a mixture of surprise, pride and even anger. Whatever the internal reception, the international critical success of *Kynodontas/Dogtooth* (Yorgos Lanthimos, 2009) suggested that despite – or, possibly, because of – the crisis, the country seemed to be able to produce cinema worthy of attention.

The connection between the advent of the financial crisis and the release of Lanthimos's film, however, was not directly causal. As Maria Chalkou has demonstrated (2012) *Dogtooth* was in many ways the culmination of years of prosperity in the Greek audio-visual sector. Throughout most of the 2000s most Greek filmmakers – including Lanthimos – were able to hone in their skills through regular practice in the then flourishing advertising sector. Furthermore, advertising companies – such as Boo, which co-financed *Dogtooth* – had enough financial surplus to take risks in feature filmmaking production (Papadimitriou 2014). And last, but not least, despite its many dysfunctions, the Greek state – through its main funding body, the Greek Film Centre – could and did co-finance *Dogtooth*. If *Dogtooth* is to be seen in any way as a product of the crisis, this would not be with reference to the financial one, but to a broader crisis of values and identity that has arguably characterised Greek society for a number of years (Calotychos 2013: 35-57). Avoiding any direct references to contemporary socio-political reality, Lanthimos depicted an enigmatic and allegorical crisis by creating a self-enclosed world in which a wealthy domineering *paterfamilias* denies his offspring any contact with the outside world. Financial hardship is not at issue in this film's world; instead, what seems to be more at stake here is a pathological fear of contamination and loss of control – a critique, perhaps, of Greece's claustrophobic impulses (Celik 2013).

Despite the lack of direct causality between the Greek financial crisis and the production and acclaim of *Dogtooth*, there is no doubt that the former, at the level of publicity at least, turned 'Greece' into a keyword that made people who would not otherwise have taken notice of Greek cinema, do so. *Dogtooth* premiered at Cannes, winning the *Un Certain Regard* award in May 2009. Its award winning festival run continued in Dublin, Montpellier, Montreal, Sarajevo, Sitges and Stockholm, culminating (symbolically, at least) in Hollywood for its Oscar nomination in February 2010. Critics and juries responded to the film for

its own merits, but we can plausibly speculate that the unfolding of the Greek financial crisis from the end of 2009 provided a broad interpretative framework through which to read the film. Despite its grim subject matter, *Dogtooth* represented a positive creative counterpoint to the broader gloom. Especially for those audiences and critics based outside Greece who watched the film at the height of the crisis-related media coverage of Greece, *Dogtooth* implicitly suggested that culture from Greece could flourish in difficult times.

Dogtooth's success strongly affirmed the merits of international exposure in prestigious film festivals prior to a film's opening in Greece. This practice had been adopted among Greek filmmakers previously, but intensified after 2009, as the indicative list of films that premiered outside Greece, below, suggests: Panos Koutras's *Strella/A Woman's Way* (2009, Berlin), Filippos Tsitos's *Akadimia Platonos/Plato's Academy* (2009, Locarno) and *Adikos Kosmos/Unfair World* (2011, San Sebastian), Athena Tsangari's *Attenberg* (2010, Venice), Syllas Tzoumerkas's *Hora Proelefsis/Homeland* (2010, Venice), Lanthimos's *Alpeis/Alps* (2011, Venice), Argyris Papadimitropoulos's and Jan Vogel's *Wasted Youth* (2011, Rotterdam), Babis Makridis's *L* (2012, Sundance), Elina Psykou's *I Eonia Epistrofi tou Antoni Paraskeva/The Eternal Return of Antonis Paraskevas* (2013, Berlin), Michalis Konstantatos's *Luton* (2013, San Sebastian) and, most recently, Alexandros Avranas's *Miss Violence* (2013, Venice), Yannis Economides's *Mikro Psari/Stratos* and Athanassios Karanikolas's *Sto Spiti/At Home* (both 2014, Berlin). Aside from festival exposure, many of these films won awards and critical acclaim.

Anglophone critics used the suggestive, if rather vague, word 'weird' to describe *Dogtooth's* semi-absurd narrative premise (Scott 2010), and the term was soon adopted more widely to refer to the common characteristics of Lanthimos's and Tsangari's films (Rose 2011). The term 'Weird wave of Greek cinema' became so associated with the recent Greek cinema that reviewers refer to it even when they intend to differentiate certain films from this category (Marshall 2013). Greek critics used the terms 'New Greek Current' (Demopoulos 2011; Soumas 2013) or 'Young Greek Cinema' (Kerkinos 2011). These are more inclusive labels and instead of focusing on thematic and stylistic dimensions, they place emphasis on the films' break with previous practices and their focus on topics of particular relevance to contemporary Greek society – whether those were represented obliquely, such as by Lanthimos or Tsangari, or more directly, such as in Tsitos, Koutras, Tzoumerkas or Papadimitropoulos and Vogel's films. Irrespectively of labels, however, and notwithstanding the degree of coherence or not of this 'New Greek Current', consensus has it that since 2009 Greek cinema emerged as an energetic presence internationally.

The aim of this introductory essay of the special issue of *Filmicon* is to provide some contextualisation of what might be understood as 'Contemporary Greek

Film Cultures' in 2013.¹ As already indicated, 2009 is a nodal point in this discussion because it marks the beginning of both the crisis and of the new international visibility of Greek cinema. It is also important because of the dynamic establishment of the self-organised 'Filmmakers of Greece' (FOG) whose intervention contributed to the establishment of a new institution to support Greek cinema in its international orientation, the Hellenic Film Academy. But apart from offering an analytical snapshot of Greek cinema and contextualise its emergence and circulation since 2009, the essay also aims to raise some broader questions with regard to methodology and the study of contemporary Greek film cultures. It will highlight the significance of identifying the plurality and multiplicity of the different contexts in which film can be produced, circulated, experienced, understood and analysed. The essay therefore will function not only as an exposé of a particularly dynamic period in Greek cinema, but also as an exploration of some of the different ways in which the fast evolving film cultures of the last few years can be studied and situated both in relation to the history of Greek cinema and to its future prospects.

2009: A TURNING POINT

The return to democracy in 1974 saw Greece intensify its European orientation. Despite ambivalent and conflicting political views, Greece joined the European Union in 1981 and adopted the European single currency, the Euro, in 2001. The 2000s were, for the most part, a period of intense economic growth, fuelled by extensive (and what then seemed to be cheap) external borrowing, that was facilitated by the country's entry to the Eurozone. The organisation of the Olympic Games in Athens in 2004 contributed to the very high level of borrowing, but it also played a major role in fuelling the growth of the economy. When the 'credit crunch' hit the US and the globally connected village in 2008, Greece, initially, seemed impervious. A year later, however, it emerged that the country's public finances were in disarray, its fiscal debt was unsustainable and the possibility of bankruptcy was imminent.

This revelation emerged a month after a change of government in October 2009. The scandal-ridden outgoing government had been replaced by what had seemed to the Greek electorate a return to a more socially oriented politics that would distribute benefits, opportunities and jobs among the population. Instead, it found itself facing the potentially catastrophic effects of a debt that could not be paid, and of lenders who had lost their benevolent smile. Anger surfaced, both against politicians – current and past – for their corruption and lying, and against the iron-fisted Europeans who were not prepared to compromise. By the end of 2009, the shock of the size of the national debt had just emerged, but few had anticipated the prolonged and deep recession that it would throw the country

¹ *Contemporary Greek Film Cultures 2013*: an international conference, London, 5-6 July 2013.

into. Four and a half years later, by mid 2014, unemployment, especially among the young, remains very high; salaries have been slashed and taxes raised. Morale among the population is very low and the prospects for a recovery appear dim.

In such a depressed climate, it may seem odd that a number of Greek films with difficult and highly critical subject matter stood out. It should, however, be stressed, as already indicated, that many of these films were produced before the financial crisis, and that their success originated outside Greece, in international film festivals. The key criterion for acceptance and recognition in film festivals is 'quality', not anticipated popularity. The critical appreciation of films, and/or their acceptance in the programming relies on the ways in which they manage to express significant issues in original and/or striking ways. While the curatorial priorities of particular festivals vary (De Valck 2007), and even though commercialisation is rampant, festivals remain sites where film as art is still celebrated, and where the potential of cinema to express social concerns is still encouraged (De Valck 2014). In the international film festival circuit, films are not primarily valued for providing escapism and/or comfort – both attributes that broader audiences tend to prioritise. The post-2009 cycle of Greek art films under discussion consists of films with difficult subject matter and few – if any – generic thrills, making them hard to market and, as a result, even harder to achieve commercial success with. For such films, festival awards and positive reviews play a key role in their chances for market survival. However, despite the festival attention and critical recognition outside Greece, local reviewers have been more ambivalent and at times outright negative, thus partly undermining some of these films' potential to reach a wider audience. (We may also argue that the critics voiced the reservations of a sizeable section of the Greek public towards the more-often-than-not troubling representations on show).

The critical visibility, and, at times, controversy around a number of these films – with *Dogtooth* probably being the most widely known and discussed among them because of its Oscar nomination – marks a shift in what we may characterise as the dominant cinematic culture of Greece, at least around the start of the crisis. It is worth drawing a contrast with cinematic developments in Greece during the prosperous 2000s. This was a decade during which Greek cinema overall saw a significant surge in popularity among Greek audiences. For 30 years Greek cinema had suffered commercially, and only a few titles managed to attract sizeable audiences. Since 1999, many Greek films – the majority of which were comedies – became profitable, while a small but significant number of them exceeded the breakthrough figure of a million admissions each. The 2000s was the decade of the 'Greek blockbuster' (Papadimitriou 2011; Kokonis 2012). Often financed by distribution and/or exhibition companies (Odeon, Village, Audiovisual) that had seen very healthy returns as a result of their

investments in multiplexes and the broader economic growth in the country, most of these films were designed with commercial imperatives at the forefront. With some rare exceptions of expensive productions that did not manage to break even, these films regularly brought healthy profits to their investors. Most of these films had no ambition to travel outside Greece, satisfied in the success of a system that brought financial results by capitalising on home grown, television-originating, stars. Two of the most prominent box office successes, however, Tasos Boulmetis's *Politiki Kouzina/A Touch of Spice* (2003) and Yannis Smaragdis's *El Greco* (2007) opened up transnational horizons both in terms of their production and target audiences, and went against the grain of the predominantly inward-looking tendencies of popular Greek films in this period (Papadimitriou 2011). The increased cinematic activity in the 2000s raised the bar in terms of technical achievement and professionalism, even though among the box office successes one can easily find a number of films of dubious aesthetic and/or artistic quality. The advent of the crisis, however, led to a reduction of revenues for exhibitors, who, in turn, became more cautious in their investments in productions for predominantly domestic consumption.

Four years into the crisis, the commercially-orientated sector and the film culture it represents are dented but resilient: examples include the crisis-set love story by television actor-director Christophoros Papakaliatis's *An/What if...* (2012); the English-speaking but Greek-themed co-production by Yannis Smaragdis's *O Theos Agapaei to Haviari/God loves Caviar* (2012) which brought together an international cast of stars; and the period-set romantic drama *Mikra Anglia/Little England* (2013) by established director/writer team Pantelis Voulgaris and Ioanna Karystiani. However, alongside these more mainstream films which have also had some international exposure, the international acclaim of *Dogtooth* in 2009 brought to the forefront the group of critical and challenging art and festival-orientated films that has dominated, if not cinematic attendance, then certainly critical discussion on Greek cinema since (as is evident, among other reasons, by the high number of papers on this film presented at the 'Contemporary Greek Film Cultures' conference in July 2013). The critical recognition of these films reinvigorated the interest in Greek art cinema that for many years seemed to be dominated by the work of Theodoros Angelopoulos whose international reputation far surpassed any other Greek director's.

The financial crisis had a direct impact on state funding for Greek art films, as the funds available for production were significantly reduced and/or dramatically delayed in being delivered to the filmmakers. The dearth of financial investment in Greek film production from commercial sources or the state, led to the espousal of different financing options, some of which had only been modestly used before. These include the adoption of a system of 'labour exchanges' whereby filmmakers work without pay in each other's films (Papadimitriou 2014); the increased embrace of co-productions with European and other

international partners (see *Plato's Academy*, *Unfair World*, *The Eternal Return of Antonis Paraskevas*, L); and the entry into the field of more internationally orientated producers, most notably Christos Konstantakopoulos's 'Faliro House Productions' that has been offering financial support to Greek cinema, while also investing in independent American films.

The discussion so far has focused on culture as production and reception of films in the period just before and after the crisis. However, approaching contemporary Greek film *cultures* stresses the plurality of the different contexts in which variable and potentially contradictory cultures emerge. In other words, it highlights the significance of identifying the different stakeholders involved. Identifying Greek cinema as a distinctive entity suggests that there are different agents (individuals or groups) that contribute to its existence, enabling its activities and potentially benefitting from them. Filmmakers are, of course, the key stakeholders. But without producers, distributors, cinema-owners, website designers, festival organisers, critics, the state, and last, but certainly not least, audiences, Greek cinema cannot exist, let alone flourish. Any examination of film *cultures*, therefore, requires that these stakeholders be identified, and that the tensions and creative or destructive frictions among them explored. In such a context, it will be useful to foreground two different aspects of Greek film culture that emerged in 2009 and that impacted on future developments in Greek cinema: the formation and activities of the self-organised group 'Filmmakers of Greece' (FOG; or 'Kinimatografistes stin Omichli' in Greek) and the consequent establishment of the Hellenic Film Academy.

FOG emerged as a result of the filmmakers' frustration and anger at what they saw as the Greek state's lack of support of Greek cinema. Formed in March 2009, FOG initially consisted of a small group of first-time filmmakers; it gradually expanded to around 250 members that also included screenwriters and producers. While its specific aim focused on renewing the legislation on cinema and aligning it to other European countries, its broader purpose was to help modernise the institutional framework of Greek cinema so that it could function more effectively in a European and global context.

The emergence of FOG marks a significant instance in which a conflict between stakeholders – filmmakers and the state – brought results at an institutional level. FOG's specific demands from the state focused on the implementation of existing laws (such as the request that the state fully released the funds from television income that were meant to support Greek cinema); and to changing aspects of the existing law on cinema (which included the abolition of the State Film Awards and their replacement by Awards offered by the filmmaking community). In order to achieve these goals, the group put pressure on the state by boycotting the Thessaloniki International Film Festival in November 2009 – the site where all Greek films that were eligible for the State Awards were

shown, and where the Awards were given out (Filmmakers of Greece 2009b; Lee, 2012). While FOG emphasised that their boycott was not aimed against the institution of the Festival as a whole, the ensuing detachment of the awards from it undermined its traditional role in showcasing Greek films.

The confrontational approach that FOG adopted produced some concrete outcomes: a new law about cinema was drafted in consultation with the group (despite the fact that it was not a legally recognised body); the Hellenic Film Academy was formed (following the models of other national academies, such as the American Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the British BAFTA etc); and the State Film Awards were replaced by awards offered by the HFA at a special ceremony in Athens. It is not surprising that after these achievements FOG lost momentum, and despite not being formally dissolved it has effectively stopped functioning. Its decline, however, was also probably due to its internal disorientation (as different sub-groups tried to promote their own interests), as well as to the intensification of the broader crisis, which further weakened the state's ability to offer direct support to filmmakers.

The formation of FOG as well as the culmination of its efforts in effecting institutional change is indicative of the Greek filmmakers' increasing confidence in raising their voice and carving a space for their interests in the national context. In the light of the global transformations in the audio-visual sector, and the need to further intensify Greek cinema's integration in a global system of cinematic exchanges, the establishment of the Hellenic Film Academy has already provided a very useful supporting framework for Greek filmmakers, and will hopefully continue dynamically to do so.

STUDYING CONTEMPORARY GREEK FILM CULTURES

If 2009 was a turning point for the production and critical reception of Greek cinema, we can adopt this date as marking the intensification of its academic study because of the first use of the term 'Greek film studies' in English. While the establishment of this academic field was part of a gradual process which took place both within Greece and abroad and started to take shape since the 1990s, the 2009 article *Greek Film Studies Today: In Search of Identity* (Papadimitriou 2009) was the first publication in English that offered a systematic critical review of existing bibliography on Greek cinema and aimed to locate disciplinary developments internationally. The fact that the term 'Greek Film Studies' was not previously used is indicative of the isolated way in which Greek cinema had been studied before and the lack of an overall academic focus and direction. It is unsurprising that the vast majority of the articles and books published till 2009 and reviewed in the article were in Greek. While this has been very positive in terms of enhancing film culture within Greece, it was also limiting as it kept the study of Greek cinema in national isolation and eschewed broader critical (and creative) interactions and exchanges. Until 2009, publications on Greek cinema

in English remained a handful. These included Andrew Horton's monograph and collection of essays on Theo Angelopoulos (Horton 1997a; 1997b); my own monograph on the Greek film musical (Papadimitriou 2006); a special issue of the *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* (2000); as well as a few of articles published in different journals and collections (Eleftheriotis 1995; Papadimitriou 1998; 2000; 2004; Stassinopoulou 2002; Papanikolaou 2008).

Since 2009 publications on Greek cinema in English have increased, with 2011 and 2012 witnessing a particular surge of Anglophone editions. In these years, two very important books on Greek cinema have appeared: an edited collection that brings together fourteen methodologically varied academic articles on Greek cinema (Papadimitriou and Tzioumakis 2012); and a monograph that offers the first ever history of Greek cinema in English (Karalis 2012). Published within months of one another, these two books complement each other very effectively. Karalis's monograph presents a chronological narrative of transformations and changes in Greek cinema highlighting key moments in this development, and, at times, subverting existing canonisations. The book serves as an introduction to the topic for non-Greek speaking readers, while for those who are already familiar with Greek cinema it offers an alternative synthesis of events and a distinctive perspective on developments. My co-edited collection brings together diverse articles and foregrounds the multiplicity of their approaches. It also showcases the productive possibilities offered by the co-pollination between established methodologies in film studies and the specific challenges offered by Greek cinema. The book does not attempt a cohesive overall synthesis, but it is more analytical in orientation, aiming instead to open up the field to diverse lines of interrogation. Both books have been key in establishing Greek Film Studies in the English-speaking world, and enabling the topic to be taught and researched in Universities.

But these publications have not appeared in isolation. In 2011, the *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* dedicated a special issue on Greek cinema, with eleven articles on topics ranging from comedy, censorship, criticism, immigration and the representation of women. Even more articles have appeared in academic journals such as *Interactions* (Basea 2012; Chalkou 2012), *New Review of Film and Television Studies* (Papadimitriou 2011), *Journal of Popular Romance Studies* (Kaklamanidou 2011) as well as book collections (Celik 2013). This activity is complemented by further publications in Greek, not all of which are *about* Greek cinema, but contribute to the establishment of film studies in Greece and set foundations for even more work on Greek cinema. Such publications include a monograph on New Greek cinema (Valoukos 2011); a collection of essays on cinema and the city (Sifaki, Poupou and Nikolaidou 2011); a monograph on domestic space in Old Greek Cinema (Milonaki 2012); a collection about cinema in Thessaloniki (Milonaki and Grosdanis 2012); and a historical account of Greek

filmmakers in Istanbul (Bozis and Bozi 2011). (More details about these and other publications can also be found in the relevant sections of *Filmicon*).

The most significant development, though, in terms of setting up foundations for the future study of Greek cinema in its global outlook is the establishment of two journals dedicated to its study. The open-access online publication (in which this essay is published) *Filmicon: Journal of Greek Film Studies* was launched in September 2013 and publishes articles, reviews, and blogs in both English and Greek. This bilingualism ensures that the study of Greek cinema does not lose contact with its original linguistic community, while at the same time it warrants its outward-facing orientation, which enables it to be part of a global dialogue on cinema. The interdisciplinary *Journal of Greek Media and Culture* (Intellect), the first issue of which will appear in September 2014, is more wide-ranging, aiming to provide a platform for debate and exploration of various manifestations of media and culture in and about Greece. This includes, of course, cinema.

The post-2009 flourishing of the academic activity on Greek cinema has not engaged only with topics related to the contemporary production and circulation of films in and from Greece. More often than not the topics explored are historical. The authors examine past cinematic expressions through contemporary theoretical prisms. Such analyses sometimes prioritise insights into the broader culture of a historical period, as explored through its cinematic culture (e.g. Christophides and Saliba 2011; Hadjikyriakou 2012; Leros 2012; Tsitsopoulou 2012); at others, they explore the formal workings of particular films (e.g. Mini 2012; Thanouli 2012). Whatever the emphasis, it is important to highlight that historical explorations are in dialogue with concerns of the present (and often reflect aspects of the subjectivity of the author). Stassinopoulou's (2012) emphasis on avoiding the 'trap of exceptionalism' in her essay on historiography highlights precisely this: that accounts of the nation and its culture that see it as a phenomenon isolated from parallels elsewhere are now understood as deeply ideological and therefore problematic. This attack on exceptionalism in the writing of history and in cultural perceptions, more broadly, reflects a broader movement towards emphasising the interconnectedness and co-dependence that characterises the contemporary world. So while it is not *about* contemporary cinema, current film historiography, nonetheless, constitutes one of the many 'contemporary film cultures' – even if only obliquely so.

The recent academic activity on Greek cinema, however, increasingly addresses aspects of the recent and contemporary Greek cinema. Explorations of queer cinema in Constantine Giannaris's, Ana Kokkinos's and Panos Koutras's films (Papanikolaou 2008; 2010); feminist auteur studies of the popular films of Olga Malea (Kazakopoulou 2011); industrial and/or textual analyses of the blockbuster of the 2000s (Eleftheriotis 2012; Kokonis 2012; Papadimitriou

2011); examinations of migration (Kaklamanidou 2011; Papanikolaou 2009); a study of the 'new cinema of emancipation' (Chalkou 2012) are among the topics on very recent cinema examined. The films of the 'New Greek Current' increasingly become the objects of academic examination, and a significant number of them are included in this special issue, as well as in forthcoming publications.

By way of closing this introductory essay, I want to make some broader comments with regard to future directions for the study of Greek cinema. One of the key issues to be considered is the extent to which the concept of the *national* will remain relevant in future explorations of Greek cinema. In other words, to what extent is it productive and necessary to examine (aspects of) Greek cinema as *Greek*, and with reference to specific contexts of its production and/or reception within national boundaries. I have already been discussing the necessity of opening of Greek cinema and its critical examination beyond the Greek boundaries. This reflects both the current globalising trends in the circulation of media (and capital), as well as the concomitant emphasis on the *transnational* in terms of cultural exchanges and interactions. Originating in cultural studies, postcolonial theory and sociology, the term has increasingly gained a lot of currency in film studies. As Higbee and Lim (2010) have insightfully identified, three main approaches to the transnational have been applied in film studies (9-10). The first, exemplified by the work of Andrew Higson (2000), focuses on questions of production, distribution and exhibition highlighting how "cinema's relationship to the cultural and economic formations [is] rarely contained within national boundaries" (Higbee and Lim 2010: 9). The second, represented among others by Lu's work on transnational Chinese cinemas (1997), "privileges an analysis of the transnational as a regional phenomenon by examining film cultures/national cinemas [with a] shared cultural heritage" (Higbee and Lim 2010: 9). And finally, the transnational can also be conceptualised with reference to diasporic, exilic and postcolonial cinemas, and to the issues of migration, loss and displacement that such cinemas tend to foreground, as the work of Naficy on "accented cinema" (2001) has shown.

With the exception, arguably, of the second approach indicated above (although even this could be adopted for exploring films from Greece and Cyprus), such frameworks could be employed in order to resituate Greek cinema in broader contexts. Indeed, as already noted, Greek films are increasingly co-produced with foreign partners, circulated in international film festivals and reviewed in publications across the world (that can be easily accessed from everywhere on the Internet). As for the Greek diaspora and its production and reception practices, it is increasingly becoming a worthy object of attention (Verhoeven 2013). In a self-reflexive turn, to highlight that academic writing on Greek cinema in English is becoming more prominent thus facilitating intellectual

exchanges across national boundaries, underlines further the question of how relevant (and for how long) will it be to discuss *Greek* cinema as a distinct entity.

There is no doubt that both empirically and conceptually we can still recognise the idea of a Greek *national* cinema, however vaguely, variably and intuitively. *Greek* films are generated (mainly) in Greece; by people who (for the most part) live and work there; they deal with issues that largely draw on the particular realities experienced in Greece (although such connections may not always be foregrounded); they address predominantly (but not exclusively) audiences who share that social or cultural space. And yet, even presented in such a tentative manner with plenty of qualifications, it is clear that such attempts to contain and territorialise the concept of the nation (and of a national culture) highlight its limitations. Indeed, one of the direct consequences of the intensity of the financial crisis discussed earlier has been a new wave of emigration from Greece – especially among educated and professionally qualified members of the population. Such physical displacement, combined with the cultural proximity brought by the possibilities offered by the Internet, has resulted in the increasing dissolution of boundaries among cultures and nations.

Language, in our case Greek, has traditionally been one of the key decisive factors for national differentiation; however, the risks of insularity that being 'lost in translation' in an increasingly globalised world brings with it, is increasingly reducing its primacy. In the context of the different 'film cultures' examined in this article, the importance of maintaining the national language varies: in terms of academic analysis, the embrace of a *lingua franca* (that is, English) is the *sine qua non* for opening communication outside national boundaries. ('Google translate' is not, really, a viable option here...). On the other hand, films themselves provide a sense of authenticity by having their dialogues spoken in the original language. Multi-lingual films (such as certain European co-productions) often highlight their constructed-ness in ways that are unpalatable for audiences. Furthermore, the maintenance of a national language serves the system of film festivals, for which national brands are a key factor for differentiating the films they showcase.

Beyond the issue of language, though, there is no doubt that the different, but not unrelated, concepts and practices of globalisation, transnational collaborations and cosmopolitanism, all work towards radically transforming the national. It is not clear yet what form this transformation will take. For now – and for the foreseeable future – I would argue that the national remains a useful frame of reference and point of identification; but that instead of reifying it, we need to place it in a broader, global, context and let it loose, like a 'floating signifier', so that it cross-pollinates and produces new hybrid cultures – including new hybrid cinemas.

If the *national* is one concept worth challenging, though, another one is *cinema* itself. Cinema is both a product (the film, traditionally defined as feature-length or short) and a mode of reception (traditionally, the film house, or film theatre, or, indeed, cinema). However, the advent of digital media has already radically transformed what *film* is: it is no more a physical object (the reel), but digital information stored on hard drives. The means of shooting films has changed; digital cameras have effectively replaced film cameras in both the low and the high end of production; editing software is widely available; digital special effects (or visual effects) are increasingly employed for life-like simulations at very high cost; and, finally, theatres are increasingly equipped with digital projectors. The above transformations, however, have not yet radically changed the audience's experience of going to the cinema, as whether a film is digitally shot or projected makes no difference to them. Surely, the enhanced visual effects and the immersive effects of digital surround sound intensify and alter the viewing experience – but only in terms of degree rather than kind. On the other hand, it could be argued that watching films on the computer, the tablet, the mobile phone, having access to them on demand at any time and any place with Internet connection and an electronic device, *has* radically changed the experience of watching films. Their easy availability and ever increasing choice, the possibility of fragmenting the viewing experience by stopping, starting, posting (or watching) extracts on You Tube, the sheer abundance of film-related material breaks away from the traditional experience of cinema-going as an event. And yet, the feature film remains a recognisable and enduring format that is here to stay, in my view – for the foreseeable future at least.

Whatever the resilience of the feature film proves to be, however, what I want to highlight here is that the future promises fundamental and continuous changes in the audio-visual sector. And that, whether we are emotionally attached to the feature film format or not, it is very important to locate it within the technological and industrial contexts from which it depends. One recent rebranding of “film industry studies” refers to it as “media industry studies” (MacDonald 2013) and places emphasis on the ways in which the (American) film industry exploits the possibilities offered by the new technologies in order to maximise its profits. Crucial in this context is the way in which synergies between films and other media products are developed. Such synergies are largely the result of the increasing concentration of power by the multinational companies that own not only the major film studios but also the companies that produce the technology (e.g. Sony-Columbia). While this discussion may seem far removed from the realities of ‘contemporary Greek film cultures’, especially at times of crisis, the fact is that because of globalisation, technological convergence affects Greece almost as much as any other part of the world. In order, therefore, to understand the impact of convergence upon the realities of producing, distributing, experiencing, writing about film, it is important to take into account

these broader industrial and technological changes. Film studies have already demonstrated that films are not only texts for close analysis (although they certainly are this too); they are also products – industrial and/or artistic – that can be examined as specific instances and articulations of a complex interweaving of agencies and structural determinations. As such articulations affect what films are made and how, as well as how they circulate and who consumes them, it is important to remain constantly alert to the broader changes that take place that may, at some point, annihilate (although, hopefully, not too soon...) the identity of film and cinema as we know it.

Well past its fourth year, the financial crisis that has affected Greece so harshly shows few signs of receding. There is also no doubt that the crisis is a much broader one and it brings about radical organisational and cultural transformations not only in Greece but elsewhere too. The almost total domination of neo-liberalism as a system of governance, worldwide, means that there is little – if any – ideological choice on offer. The question nowadays is not so much one of choosing camps, but of survival. For Greek cinema to survive and to remain relevant in the contemporary world, it needs to continue its path towards openness. The next challenge will be to define its new identity – even though, in this world that is so permanently in motion, identity may also soon become a thing of the past.

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