

BOOK REVIEW

***Η ανάδυση ενός νέου κύματος  
στον σύγχρονο ελληνικό  
κινηματογράφο: Διαδικασίες  
καλλιτεχνικής παραγωγής,  
καθιέρωσης και επικοινωνίας  
στον κόσμο της τέχνης / The  
emergence of a New Wave in  
contemporary Greek Cinema:  
Processes of artistic production,  
legitimization and  
communication in the art world  
[in Greek]***

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*The emergence of a New Wave in contemporary Greek Cinema* is a welcome addition to the bibliography relating to contemporary Greek cinema and more specifically those publications examining the Greek New Wave. The authors, Eirini Sifaki, Anastasia Stamou and Maria Papadopoulou, approach their subject from a cultural sociology perspective, a novel disciplinary approach, at least in

the study of contemporary Greek cinema. The authors present a wealth of primary and secondary research that aims to account for the genesis and validation of a cinematic trend still in development at the time of writing their book.

This publication covers the first five years of the Greek New Wave, from 2009 to 2016. Some critics argue that by 2016 we had already seen the death knell of the movement, though others continue to discuss and identify new film productions as part of this creative trend well past that year. In any case, the authors very decisively demarcate their period of analysis, and recognise that further research will be required to mark the progression of the New Wave.

The book comprises a Prologue and Introduction, as well as six chapters that seek to describe in detail the researchers' findings. Qualitative research and analysis are the major approach here, though some quantitative data and deductions are offered throughout the book.

More specifically, the Prologue states from the outset the aims of this book, as well as the methodological challenges faced by the authors. In short, the book aims to look at the varying contexts—social, political, cultural, economic and industrial—that led to the *rise* and *validation* of the most recent cinematic Greek New Wave. Indeed, the most interesting premise of the book is that it discusses at some length the ways a new wave or trend of cultural production is understood as such by various synergetic factors and actors of reception: i.e. academic and popular criticism and the ways they make sense of and promote culture, as well as audiences more widely. This is a productive approach that enhances links between creation and reception/consumption of cultural products, films in this instance, and considers all cultural activity and conception within current contexts.

The Introduction identifies more clearly a complex system of relations between creators, organisations, institutions and audiences, as well as socio-political, cultural, industrial and economic contexts. All these, the authors state, constitute the 'opportunity space' that informs the way creative work gets made and then disseminated. This web of relations is the standard by which, and within which, artworks are understood and acquire value. Artists often challenge this established, and, in time, limiting system, thus effecting change and maintaining a state of flux in cultural production, always being informed by, and at the same time influencing, the wider contexts. A key contention of the book, from its main cultural sociology perspective, is that cultural agents, such as critics and academics, are the 'gatekeepers' of value and meaning, actively intervening in our understanding of artwork in terms of waves, movements and trends. Placing emphasis on this interpretative work, rather than its creation and distribution, is the main innovative contribution of this volume in the New Wave of Greek cinema literature, both in Greek and in the English language.

The naming of a group of films distributed internationally from 2008/9 onwards as the 'Weird Wave' of Greek cinema (Rose 2011) becomes the starting point for

a dialogue among popular media, cinephile audiences and academia, which in turn raises awareness of the new name and 'wave' to the wider public. This dialogue occurs in the face of disagreements over the name—which subsequently is replaced by the more accepted term 'Greek New Wave', the authors tell us—and despite the refusal of the creators themselves to see their work as part of a movement. In this sense, the book makes a compelling argument about the construction of a cinematic wave through discourse, and the potency of this discourse as a marketing strategy for the country's cinema internationally.

The Introduction closes by reiterating the methodological challenges of research happening concurrently with developing texts and contexts. This is important in recognising that this is not a definitive work, but rather an invitation for continuous enquiry.

Chapter 1 aims to contextualise the term 'New Wave' more generally and to provide an outline of conditions that facilitate the emergence of new movements and tendencies. The chapter continues to more gainfully examine the sociological dimensions of the legitimation of movements, particularly referencing Baumann's work (2001, 2007), and applying this to the case of the Greek New Wave. In this analysis, wider socio-political and legal contexts, as well as a communications movement from within the world of (Greek) cinema concur, resulting in the establishment of a recognisable trend or wave, of a new way of making and promoting cinema in Greece and beyond. This sociological analysis further proceeds by outlining a number of legitimating factors that enhance the formation of the Greek New Wave, such as changes in film education within the country and the access to international film festivals facilitated by wider European institutions. Complementing this are critical and analytical frameworks introduced at the level of discourse, drawing from established art, film and cultural studies literatures. The chapter, thus, is quite extensive in its description of all these factors and contexts, and its review of existing literatures, and therefore assumes something of a foundational character within the context of the book.

Chapter 2 focuses its investigation on gathering information about the critical reception and creation of a certain discourse around the 'Weird Wave of Greek cinema', a term introduced by the journalist Steve Rose (2011) writing for *The Guardian*. It is the first instance of naming a perceived change in the national cinematic landscape of Greece, a conversation which is subsequently taken up by popular, journalistic and academic criticism. This chapter is dedicated to explicating the authors' methodology in collecting and evaluating the text samples for their research, through the World Wide Web and the Google search engine primarily. This is a chapter that one might more commonly find in PhD theses, or in academic textbooks targeted at undergraduate students, though this book has not made such claims about its identity. Yet, some interesting information about key search terms is offered here, which points to the

semantics of the New Greek Wave, though this aspect is not explicitly explored in the chapter.

Chapter 3 discusses the process of selection and evaluation of an academic corpus of work, in the Greek and English languages, which deals with the Weird or New Wave of Greek cinema. The authors outline in some detail their methodology of inclusion and exclusion of materials, and their thematic and semiotic analysis of the designated corpus. This analysis results in a grouping of the compiled literature into three broad categories: a) main theme of the text, b) definitions of the New Wave within the context of contemporary Greek cinema and c) interpretation of the New Wave of contemporary Greek cinema. What is interesting is also an observation that the majority of the authors of the academic entries in the corpus are aligned as a generation with the filmmakers (young, educated in Greece and abroad, and informed by the same socio-political, cultural and economic contexts). An implied shared 'world view' through this cinematic New Wave makes for an intriguing argument that is not pursued any further, however. The qualitative analysis of the selected bibliography also yields some quantitative data presented in this chapter, in terms of the approaches to study adopted by the various authors. A marked interdisciplinarity in the study and understanding of the New Wave is noted by the authors. The chapter closes with an overview of the creation not just of a discourse, but also a distinct discipline of Greek Film Studies, using the New Wave of Greek cinema as a springboard for the study of Greek cinema more generally in Greece and abroad.

Chapter 4 looks at publications in the popular press and the ways they covered or sought to legitimize the Greek New Wave. In the first part, the authors detail their methodology for selecting the texts, and give an outline of the types of sources that their sample comes from. The latter parts of the chapter focus on a qualitative analysis of the journalistic texts, using a similar approach to that adopted in the previous chapter about scholarly texts. In order to maintain a cohesive approach in the way the authors compare and analyse their material, here, too, they have categorized their sample under three broad headings: a) main theme of the text, b) definitions of the New Wave and identification of its key characteristics, and c) interpretative approaches to the New Wave within contemporary Greek cinema. Notable in this chapter is the breadth and wealth of data relating to the source of the texts (publications as well as journalists/authors), as well as the listing of key terms used to characterise and/or refer to the New Wave, with the term 'weird' in English, and 'παράδοξο' (paradoxical) in Greek, topping the list. Here the researchers also refer to the intent of such semiosis in designating something new and different, thus shaping audience and reader expectations about this group of films, but also proffering personal opinions about the designated name of the trend or wave. The content analysis in this chapter is more extensive than in others; though in line with the work presented so far in the book, quantitative data is presented in tandem with qualitative conclusions.

Chapter 5 turns its attention to recorded marketing and communication strategies of the New Wave, adding to the book's stated aim to explore 'value added' factors and interpretative contexts that have helped the rise and legitimization of the Greek New Wave. The international context of promotion is highlighted as a challenge for the researchers, but also as a key marketing practice in consolidating the Wave's perceived identity as 'high art', 'high value', 'new' cinema. The authors draw on Kerrigan's (2010) work and focus on two marketing processes deemed central in the overall strategic promotion followed by agents of the wave (creators, marketing managers, sales agents, distributors etc.): the "break-through product" and the "it's new for us product". They have also noted, in the previous two chapters, how this was a line of analysis taken up by scholars, critics and journalists, i.e. the new, authentic (in its weirdness or innovation at least) and high art qualities of the New Wave. The authors briefly identify the generation of 'positive word of mouth' as a key, interactive communications strategy and offer specific examples as to the way this was used, sometimes unsuccessfully, by films associated with the Wave. On the other hand, a large part of the chapter is dedicated to a close description of features, and some analysis, of the posters associated with some of the main films linked to the New Wave.

The final Chapter 6 provides a summative synthesis of all the data and observations provided in the previous chapters, aiming to reach some conclusions about the way a New Wave of contemporary Greek Cinema has been conceived, established and legitimized. In this, the authors here also turn their attention more decisively towards external, contextual factors that have framed, at least, if not played a part in the formation of, this distinctive 'weird' wave of Greek cinema. Such contexts include: the financial crisis, as well as the tumultuous political and social implications of this crisis, which plagued the country at the time when many of these films were made and released internationally; changes in the way film creatives organise themselves in demanding a new and coherent way of organizing the country's cinema (it is not easy to refer to a film industry in Greece); international successes in established film festivals that are often the gatekeepers of 'quality', 'worthwhile' cinema; and even technological developments that preceded the Wave, but impacted the access and education of its film creatives. In other words, the authors conclude that it is less the aesthetic and production values of the films themselves, and more the contexts within which the films of the New Wave told, and sold, their stories, that helped researchers and critics identify a cohesive trend, though some attempts have been made, especially in academic writing, to pinpoint common aesthetic traits, too.

One of the most interesting sections of this final chapter is that of the positioning of the filmmakers themselves towards the idea of a Wave, and a Weird one at that, in contemporary Greek cinema. By and large, the authors demonstrate the creators' resistance towards the term 'weird' and towards

belonging to a trend or film movement, by providing evidence from interviews where the filmmakers were asked to comment directly on the New Wave. However, this section could have gone further and could have strengthened its analysis if the authors had considered some of the reasons behind such resistance, even if they suggest that this does not form part of the current remit of the book. It is commonly known that creatives, and perhaps film directors in particular, do not wish to discuss their films as anything other than original, singular and often personal creations that belong to no tradition, wave or movement, as the authors of this book briefly note. At best, they might recognise some influences by other filmmakers. This may explain why, in the case of the New Wave of Greek cinema, Greek filmmakers are reluctant to pigeonhole their work, and reluctant to make their own, particular vision part of something bigger. After all, as some of them recognise in the interview excerpts quoted in the book, this is precisely the theorist's or the critic's job—to find connections, to raise awareness of trends and to introduce them as such to audiences.

The book finishes with an evaluation of the potency of the New Wave and the strong brand that has opened new opportunity spaces for Greek film production. The book thus ends with an open call for further research into the phenomenon of the Greek Weird and/or New Wave, which will allow for some historical and cultural distance from which to view this undoubtedly potent creative period in contemporary Greek cinema.

Overall, this is a worthwhile volume that offers intriguing and useful data relating to the first five years of the Greek New Wave, and some useful insights in the ways cultural waves, trends or movements are recognised, named and validated by a number of contextual agents and processes. Some repetition in the way the book presents its content could have been avoided, but this does not significantly detract from the reader's interest in the research and analysis presented here. In my view, this is a book that could work very well as a textbook directed at undergraduate students starting to learn about the Greek New Wave, especially because of its methodological insights; and it is equally useful to those researching the Weird/New Wave in that it summarises effectively the ways a distinct group of films was conceived of, understood and disseminated as a discrete artistic trend, a useful marketing brand and a product of its space and time. Numerous other texts relating to the Greek New Wave (weird or not) have been published since 2016, and, as the authors themselves have signalled, some distance from these initial years of dynamic production and reception of the Wave can result in further valuable research, expanding on the conclusions of the present volume.

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