

## Editorial Note

It was a tropical July's night in a tiny bar at a dark alley of Exarhia, during the summer of 2014, when we first discussed about what would be a hot topic for the next *Filmicon's* thematic issue, admitting that, so far, genre has been a major research focus on the commercial cinema of the 1950s and 1960s. We all agreed that an attempt to re-read the familiar notion of genre cinema in multiple contexts could be the ideal point of departure not only for a discovery journey in unknown territories of the post-dictatorship commercial Greek cinema but also for a reconsideration of art-cinema through the generic transformations and hybridizations that can be traced in post-dictatorship and contemporary art films. The need and urge for such a publication became obvious when the same period, films like *To mikro psari/Stratos* (Economides, 2014), *Norvigia/Norway* (Veslemes, 2014), *Tetarti 04.45/Wednesday 04.45* (Alexiou 2015) and *Chevalier* (Tsangari, 2015), that were circulated in the film festival circuit, were widely promoted with their genre elements. In reality, looking back at the Greek art-cinema produced the last ten years as part of the processes now called Greek New Wave, it is evident that very often genre elements infiltrate the iconography and narrative of the films – see, for example, Koutras's and Tzoumerkas's melodramatic narratives, or the mixture of science fiction and political thriller with avant-garde cinema in *Higuita* [2012] and *Nima/Thread* [2016] by Alexandros Voulgaris – and at the same time that genre becomes a stronger label for festival and theatrical promotion (in contrast to the “cinophile” label often used by Greek popular press and criticism to indicate art-cinema).

This generic turn (Nikolaidou & Poupou 2017) is not only in tune with contemporary films, but also gives us the chance to question long established assertions and myths in the study of the history of Greek cinema. In the last twenty years, genre in Greek cinema has often been at the centre of scholarly research that produced a significant and acknowledged body of work on the subject (e.g. Kymionis 2000; Athanassatou 2001; Dermetzopoulos 2002; Paradeisi 2002; Delveroudi 2004; Kartalou 2005; Papadimitriou 2009). Research interest, however, has been limited predominantly to national versions of popular genres such as comedies, musicals, melodramas, or the mountain film (*foustanella*) and to the mainstream narrative films of the Old Greek Cinema. This restricted focus has created two misconceptions: on the one hand that generic forms disappear after the decline of the industry in the early 1970s, and on the other that genre is the exclusive domain of commercial cinema. In this context, elitism and commercial failure have been simplistically ascribed to the films and filmmakers of Greek cinema of the 1970s and 1980s, while it is methodological

approaches derived from auteur theory and cultural criticism that have been mainly applied to their work. Thus, commercial successes such as *Petrina hronia/Stone Years* (Voulgaris, 1985), *Loufa ke parallagi/Loafing and Camouflage* (Perakis, 1984) or *Rembetico* (Ferris, 1983) and their relationship to genre have been disregarded, while the generic features of Nikolaidis's, Panayotopoulos's or Tsiolis's films – just to mention a few of the most significant filmmakers of New Greek Cinema – within particular local and international contexts, have attracted little attention.

Although in the 1990s and 2000s genre cinema gained growing importance as post-classical expression in both art and mainstream global cinema, and Greece saw a resurgence of commercial and art film, only a few studies have explored the various manifestations and transformations of genre in contemporary Greek film production. The flourishing of popular comedies drawing on the conventions of Old Greek Cinema and/or Greek TV series, the emergence of melodramas with a camp or queer sensibility, unexplored genres and subgenres such as the thriller, the neo-noir or the costume drama, the biopic and the nostalgia film, representations of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and class in genre films are only a few aspects of this unexplored field.

More importantly, research on the subject follows academically mainstream methodological frameworks (see Mittel 2004): film scholars either conduct textual analysis in their attempt to define Greek versions of established genres (drawing mostly from equivalent work done on Hollywood cinema) or they combine the texts with their social contexts in an attempt to interpret genres or to trace representations of cultural politics. Work on the audience reception of genres, on the uses of genre by the audiovisual industry or on the cultural and mediatic processes of the emergence of genres in recent years still remains to be conducted.

Therefore our intention with this issue was to open a theoretical and historical discussion that will address the notion of genre in films previously neglected as an industrial and cultural label that emerges in specific local and transnational contexts, perceived within specific circumstances by specific audiences. Keeping in mind that the boundaries between 'Old', 'New' and 'Contemporary' Greek cinema, as well as between popular/commercial/mainstream and art cinema are more fluid than these schematic terms tend to describe, this thematic Special Issue has aspired to broaden, reassess and reposition the notion of genre in the context of Greek Film Studies, focusing mainly on film production from the 1970s to the present.

The issue opens with the article 'Negotiating Heteronormativity in the Family Melodrama: A Case Study of Giorgos Katakouzinis's *Angelos/Angel* (1982)', in which Spyridon Chairetis explores the ambiguity of the melodramatic genre and

its potential to be transformed into an ideologically subversive cinematic form. Using recent theories on queer melodrama, he analyses the controversial case study of *Angel* arguing that the film negotiates heteronormative values and reflects a diversity of roles, desires and sexualities. In a similar perspective that interlinks representations of gender and sexuality with the genre of film noir, Nikitas Fessas and Yvonne Kosma in their article 'The Crisis of Gender Identity in the Greek Film Noir: Sexuality, Paranoia and the Unconscious in *Efialtis/Nightmare* (1961) and *O Ergenis/The Bachelor* (1997)' are drawing on Lacanian psychoanalytic terminology and on a feminist psychoanalytic theoretical framework to compare a very interesting and less studied Greek film noir of the 1960s with an art-house thriller from the 1990s. While situating their analysis within two different specific sociopolitical and cultural contexts, the authors argue on the subversive ways of representing sexuality, which links to paranoia and psychosis.

Mikela Fotiou's and Nikitas Fessas's 'Greek Neo-noir: Reflecting a Narrative of Crisis' reinforce a discussion started with the promotion of *Stratos* about the neo-noir aesthetics being the major tool for mediating the Greek crisis. Their paper focuses on two films, *O hamenos ta pairnei ola/Loser Takes it All* (Nikolaidis, 2002) and *Wednesday 04:45*, produced in different socio-cultural contexts and directed, the former by one of the most important figures of New Greek Cinema and the latter by a director of the generation of Greek New Wave. By linking a narrative of crisis to specific neo-noir tropes and character typology in two different periods, the writers bridge the cleavage between pre and post crisis cinema.

Vasiliki Petsa's paper 'Junctions, Dead ends and Uncertain Trajectories: Mapping Out the Greek Road Movie' discusses a variety of New Greek Cinema and contemporary Greek films in order to foreground mobility and travel as variations of a national version of the road movie. Petsa's paper explicitly places itself in a definitional textual analysis approach without neglecting the cultural significances emerging from such analysis. Therefore her text provides both a historical and theoretical framework for travel as a narrative device for articulating the historical, national and cultural vicissitudes of contemporary Greek society.

Ursula-Helen Kassaveti's article with the title 'From Glory to Decline and back again: Notes on the Greek Popular Film and Direct-to-video Musicals of the 1980s' explores a rather unknown era of the Greek audiovisual sector, the 1980s. Kassaveti discusses the film and video musicals that regained popularity in the 1980s – after a period of decline – along the axis of introversion/extroversion highlighting their formal and content articulations under the prism of MTV and American popular film musicals that infiltrated Greek culture of the period.

'Introduction to the Greek Sitcom: The Case of *I Tris Charites/The Three Graces*' by Betty Kaklamanidou is the only article of this Special Issue that deals with comedy and in particular with the unexplored subgenre of the television situation comedy. In her study of the iconic sitcom, Kaklamanidou acknowledges its cultural importance and puts forward the main themes, structures and sociocultural resonance regarding gender politics in the late 1980s and early 1990s, while making a brief introduction to the American prototype and underlining the sitcom's key position in Greek television.

In addition to the above six peer reviewed articles which focus on particular genres, we decided to include two interesting texts that highlight genre from a different point of view. While the notion of genre is historically and culturally connected from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards with popular forms of art and commercial cinema – and this is its dominant use in Film Studies – if we chose a more inclusive understanding of the notion, poetry is also a genre. The particular case of a "poetic" cinema is discussed in 'Conversing with Dreams: An Encounter with Antoinetta Angelidi' by Rea Wallden, an interview with probably the most important Greek avant-garde filmmaker of non-narrative and experimental cinematic forms.

The second text, by Athena Kartalou-Aducu, is an article entitled 'Genre in Old Greek Cinema: from a general overview to the cycle of the films of "social protest"'. It is a reworking of previous research done by Kartalou and we decided to present it in Greek in order to expand the Greek literature on genre for educational purposes. Kartalou attempts an overall approach to Old Greek Cinema through the use of genre theory, applied on a corpus of four movies (1966-1973). She suggests that the whole of the cinematic production of the period could be seen through a framework of two sets of interrelated parameters: "mode" (melodrama/comedy) & "hero" (melodramatic/comic) and "space" (the city and the countryside/society) & "time" (present and past/history). The combinations between these parameters were neither "natural", nor formed simultaneously but derived gradually along with the development of the Greek film production.

Finally, considering the response to our open call for papers, we reached a few conclusions. The most obvious one is that the auteur perspective is still hegemonic when we speak about the cinema of the post-dictatorship era (*Metapolitefsi*), even when the notion of genre is considered and applied, in a rather loose way, on films that belong to the art film tradition. Another conclusion is that most of the researchers (including the authors of proposals that did not finally find a place in this issue) depart from a corpus that can be considered as genre cinema in order to propose other approaches on specific themes, films and filmmakers. For example, for many of the articles of the issue and other proposals we received, it was theories on gender, identities and

sexuality that provided the principal methodology applied on a corpus of genre films, rather than a theory based on generic procedures.

A final conclusion is that, in the context of contemporary Greek cinema, major genres, such as comedy remain still totally unexplored although, paradoxically perhaps, a comic undertone can be found not only in commercial comedies but also in the so called Greek Weird Wave. Moreover, we did not receive any proposals on other less developed subgenres such as fantasy film, sci-fi and horror. It is also interesting to note that, while today there is a strong interest in the relation of film with public history (see, for example, the discussions on the latest film by Pantelis Voulgaris *To teleftaio simeioma/The Last Note* [2017]), we did not receive any papers dealing with representations of the past in genres such as the historical film, the costume drama or the nostalgia film. This absence, however, does not indicate a lack of researchers working on the field of film and history, but a lack of acknowledgment that this corpus of “serious” films can be explored under the prism of genre, and possibly – in favor of more cultural approaches – a reluctance to use a methodology that is strictly related to Film Studies. We believe that the predominance of textual approaches when working with genre has to do with the general state of academic research in Greece, namely with the lack of consistent and funded research on and teaching of Greek cinema within Greek universities. Last but not least, our intention was to include articles from young researchers in the field of Greek Film Studies, so most of the contributors to this issue belong to a new generation of film academics. Against all odds, we want to consider this issue as the first stop of a loose, non-linear, long road movie in the highways and alleys of Greek film genre that has just begun.

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