

# Sporting Weird Corporeality: 'Documentaristic' Aesthetics, Sports and Difference in Early 2010s Greek Cinema

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## ABSTRACT

*Film and sports may be considered constitutively interrelated dimensions. Both fields are construable as figurations of difference, prioritizing bodies in motion and relying on media technologies. Figured as scenic 'film sports' instead of generic 'sports films', aesthetic instances of sports in fictional films promise insight into how human differentiation and corporeality are depicted in a highly condensed manner. This paper focuses on scenes of film sports in Greek cinema of the early 2010s, especially Attenberg (2010) and Alpeis/Alps (2011). Re-reading these films on shifted conditions is accompanied by a terminological and conceptual re-approach to weirdness. As seen through an analytical lens, the corporeally and aesthetically weird initially points to phenomena of crisis related to specific consequences of the European financial crisis in Greece. Eventually, notions of weird precarity have to be extended to wide-reaching issues of subject-formation (pertaining Europe-wide at least). The exemplary study of scenic incidents of film sports shows them depicting different states of corporeality in a neither strictly representational nor strictly stylized but paradoxically 'documentaristic' way. If these film-sportive incidents are aesthetically weird, they are so in terms of the diegetically performing bodies and/or their specific cinematic staging.*

## KEYWORDS

*Alpeis / Alps*

*Attenberg*

Cinematic Aesthetics

Figurations of Difference

Sports on Film

Weirdness

**B**uilding on earlier research on current Greek cinema, the post-title sequence of the film *Wasted Youth* (Papadimitropoulos/Vogel, 2011) may serve as an example of film sports: A teenage boy (Haris Markou) wakes up, a hand-held camera tracking him strolling through a deserted bungalow. After gulping down half a carton of milk, he takes his skateboard to the bungalow's empty swimming pool. Following two static establishing shots we are close by the skater's side, dressed only in shorts, his muscular torso noticeably sweating under the morning sun. Close and medium shots, jittery and sometimes tilted, try to catch up with his sporting movements. An up-tempo punk-rock track (by Athenian band The Callas) sets in, ambi-diegetically, since the boy is sporting earphones. Fragmented by nervous jump-cuts, the young athlete attempts several skating moves – but fails repeatedly. On one of his plunges the track abruptly stops. Now accompanied by an eerie, bassy extradiegetic score, the skater's frustration steadily grows with every single of his moves flopping (**Fig 1**). Finally, he is called to breakfast by the bungalow's owner, apparently a friend of his parents.



**Figure 1:** The skating protagonist (Haris Markou) of *Wasted Youth*.

Rosa Barotsi (2016: 182) points out the relevance of this early scene of *Wasted Youth*. In relation to *Kynodontas/Dogtooth* (Lanthimos, 2009), the film that her analysis focuses on – as has most of the research on current Greek cinema, of course – Barotsi reads this scene in terms of class differentiation and economic spatiality; the suburban swimming pool is interpreted in contradiction to the sparse flat the boy lives in, as “an illusion that shatters quickly” (Ibid.) later in the film. As this paper tries to show, close re-readings of incidents of film sports like this could prove to be even more fruitful: in itself, this scene of *Wasted Youth* establishes the aesthetic's emphasis on bodies and corporeality, on performance and performativity, on precarity in every sense. Somewhat stereotypical depictions of Greece are put in marked contrast to latent signs of crisis: on the one hand, the glaring sun, idyllic pool scenario, the boy's athletic body, his

dynamic youthfulness are confronted with the red-tinged color scheme, the gloomy music, the emptiness of the pool and of the boy's everyday life as well as his continuing sportive mishaps on the other. Filmed in a documentary-like style that includes handheld camera work, mostly close-ups and several jump-cuts, the scene evokes connotations of authenticity while at the same time, audiovisually, deconstructively reinforcing fragmentation and tension.

Possibly exemplifying broader tendencies in 2010s Greek cinema, this observation leads to questions on a substantial level: could instances of film sports be construed as aspects of the films' supposed 'weirdness'? How are these aesthetic figurations de/constructing specific states of corporeality? What do they mean in terms of the relation of film and sports in general? This article will address these issues – which seem clearly related – in reverse order: the first part schematically establishes the manifold connectedness of film and sports, reconceptualizing their relation by means of differentiation and their exploration in a non-generic way; the objective of the second part is to sketch out how the term 'weird' might be useful exactly concerning cinematic aesthetics, in Greek cinema and beyond, and why the representational dilemma of fictionalized sports could be linked to the corporeally and aesthetically weird. Two additional examples of scenic film sports in *Attenberg* (Tsangari, 2010) and *Alpeis/Alps* (Lanthimos, 2011) will form the third part, highlighting what might be called their 'documentaristic' quality in weirdly depicting figurations of sporting bodies.

The main premise of these remarks is that by mutually combining sports' differentiating factuality and fictional films' differentiating modes, film sports do offer highly condensed instances of sporting weird bodies. Combined with a conceptual re-approach to weirdness, scenic incidents of film sports in these Greek films depict different states of precarious corporeality, which might be called aesthetically weird in terms of the diegetically performing bodies and/or their 'documentaristic' staging on film.

## 1. FILM & SPORTS: CONNECTING FIGURATIONS OF DIFFERENCE

Rather loosely leaning on Donna Haraway's (1997, 2008) understanding of this term, both film and sports can be construed as "figurations" of difference, thus implying their basic connectivity. Within the framework of a transdisciplinary science studies approach, figurations signify "condensed maps of contestable worlds" (Haraway 1997: 11), compact sites or fields on a social, mediated, artistic and academic level. They stress "the tropic quality of all material-semiotic processes" (Ibid.), indicating an involvement of specific corporeality and materiality which can be referred to only in a non-literal way, presuming "at least some kind of displacement that can trouble identifications and certainties" (Ibid.). As they are consequently "not [merely] representations or didactic illustrations, but rather material-semiotic nodes or knots in which diverse bodies and meanings coshape one another" (Haraway 2008: 4), figurations appear as

heuristically condensed fields in/of society, culture and media, as complex notions and serious epistemes.

Whereas Haraway's theory does not factor in either film or sports, her conceptualization of figuration might still be applicable, specifically concerning differentiation. To build on her methodology by relating figurations to the concept of difference seems particularly suitable since Haraway's use of the term figuration is firmly located in technology studies, philosophy of science and feminist theory. Subsequently, both film and sports might not only be analyzed (a) as figurations and (b) by means of difference but also (c) as parallel figurations of differences; that is, as fundamentally connected fields of society, culture and epistemology.

First of all, film may be called a figuration of difference on a basic technical level, whether analogically or digitally. As a technology it is fundamentally based on the binary differentiation of light and dark or ones and zeros. Seen as a filmic and cinematic *dispositif*, it relies on myriad differentiations as well: its material and discursive qualities, its spatial and temporal arrangements, its relations between screen and viewer, to name only a few aspects. Film can also be understood as a condensed figuration of difference insofar as it foregrounds human differences (Hirschauer 2017) almost constantly, both reflecting and (de)constructing human differentiation in crucial ways – as decades of film studies focused on gender, sexuality, ethnicity et cetera have taught us.

Secondly, sports are similarly constituted in a condensing differential manner, constantly distinguishing between (mostly binary) options, the most basic of which are winning and losing in competitive sports. Professional competitions are almost always held on the basis of topographical differences. The contrast between athletic and unfit even spreads to recreational sports. Playing an important role in current concepts of neoliberalism and late capitalism, differentiating aspects are implemented even into non-professional sports. In terms of human differentiation, sports also foreground and condense normative differences, especially – but certainly not limited to – gender and ability, since almost all of competitive and most of non-professional sports are separated along these lines.

This latter aspect is closely related to another key concurrence of film and sports, namely their two-fold reliance and emphasis on corporeal performances. Both actors/actresses and athletes are displaying their bodies within delineated spaces for large audiences, while their actions are most commonly mediated and disseminated by cameras. Part of this parallelism is the elementary significance of movement in itself – not only but particularly of bodies on display. In either case, the constitutive corporeality and principle of movement is enhanced and condensed even further by the use of close-ups and slow-motion, in short, means viable by media technologies only.

In fact, since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, sports are inextricably linked with their mediation and might thus be collectively defined as ‘media sports’ (Wenner 1998, Axster et al. 2009). In addition to these concepts and in contrast to generic approaches to cinema and sports (Poulton & Roderick 2008), this paper proposes to reconceptualize their relation: instead of limiting its scope to ‘sports films’ as a genre, the analytical focus is shifted to scenic incidents of ‘film sports’. While not excluding generic sport films, the notion of film sports crucially incorporates sportive scenes in films not primarily concerned with sports.

In either way, cinematic depictions of sports perpetually compete with other audiovisual accounts of sports, predominantly with TV reports of sporting events. Given its sheer ubiquity, conventional media coverage of sports serves as an almost inevitable blueprint or template of any sports simulated on film.

In these regards, it is important to note that, when combined, film and sports appear as highly condensed figurations of difference, be it socially, politically or aesthetically. Therefore, the first theoretical premise to reanalyze Greek films of the early 2010s is to look at film sports as multiply condensed sites of “un/doing difference” (Hirschauer 2017), as compressed figurations which crucially highlight movement and bodies, and which continually are relative to televisual depictions of sports. Before validating these assumptions analytically, the second part of this article will turn to the specific ways film and sports may be entangled when asking how sports, corporeality, cinematic aesthetics and ‘weirdness’ might come together in this recent cycle of Greek films.

## 2. AESTHETICALLY WEIRD (AND) SPORTING BODIES

The question of how the cycle of internationally distributed and hence widely discussed Greek films around 2010 could and should be labeled, is a highly contested one. Suggested in a review of *Attenberg* that also mentions *Dogtooth* and *Wasted Youth*, the term “weird wave” (Rose 2011) has since been criticized as patronizing, potentially exoticizing and essentializing an alleged national specificity (Kourelou et al. 2014: 162, Nikolaidou 2014: 21, Papadimitriou 2014: 3). These implications have been criticized rightfully so, presuming a solely derogatory value of ‘weird’. Without a doubt, in everyday language weirdness fundamentally aims for an ‘othering’ (Spivak 1985) and, insofar, a differentiation that distinguishes the self from the weird ‘other’. At least until recently, weird has most commonly been used in a rather negative way.

Aside from current (although not yet verifiable) assessments that this derogative charge of weird might be shifting towards a more ambivalent usage, especially in youth language, there is an increasing openness in academic discourse to more nuanced understandings of weirdness (Karkani 2014, Lutas 2015, Basea 2016, Psaras 2016, Lipski 2017). Could it, then, be prolific to call certain aspects of recent cinematic figurations ‘weird’? Certainly, maintaining weirdness in cinematic discourse does require a careful contextualization and

theorization, especially determining what kind(s) of crisis this understanding of weirdness is referring to. First and foremost, any contention of an ‘inherent Greekness’ of this aesthetic must be rejected. Even when applied to Greek films and current phenomena of crisis, weirdness cannot be confined to a spatially and temporally isolated idea. On the contrary, both (certain cycles of) films and (certain incidents of) financial/social crises have to be considered historically interconnected phenomena, barring any supposed weirdness. To call specific aspects of recent Greek films weird, therefore has to take into account both the relevance of their situatedness in Greece and the aesthetic indifference to national boundaries. Regardless of the precise valuation of the term, ‘weird’ points to the unquestionably negative impacts of the current financial/social crisis which unquestionably effect Greece in an exceptionally precarious way. As part of larger economic, cultural and political contexts, this weird precarity ultimately has to be both extended towards and epistemologically reattached to the overarching crisis of the (post)modern subject, at least on a Europe-wide level (Kristeva 2000).

In a recent literary studies paper, Lauren Lipski proposes to take ‘weird’ seriously beyond its popular negative usage, both as an analytical term and as what she deems an “aesthetic effect” (Lipski 2017: 59). In her explicit effort to examine “weirdness beyond its use as a value judgement or genre category” (Ibid.), Lipski concludes that the aesthetically weird “comments upon what society perceives as normal, logical and stable” (Lipski 2017: 77) while acting as “an effect that destabilizes boundaries, form, or perception” (Ibid.). Occasionally alluding to film adaptations of novels, Lipski’s concept prioritizes literature but appears to be productively transferable to cinematic weirdness. This suggestion is backed by several recent inquiries into the concept from a film studies perspective. In early 2010s Greek cinema Ina Karkani detects a shared “interest in the construction of uncanny images of the performing body that create an aesthetically ‘weird’ physicality” (Karkani 2014: 200). As Marios Psaras suggests, by a “re-appropriation of the specific qualifier” weird (Psaras 2016: 26) this term can be construed as a description of the specific “non-representational, performative [...] aesthetics” (Ibid.) of recent Greek films.<sup>1</sup> In his theoretical reframing of weirdness Psaras partly draws on Afroditi Nikolaidou’s concept of a presentational, excessive “performative aesthetics” of this cycle of films (Nikolaidou 2014: 20). In turn referring to international linguistic, cultural and theatrical theory, she argues for “a specific narrational and aesthetic stance” (Nikolaidou 2014: 39), shaping “a very substantial and adhesive characteristic of these films” (Nikolaidou 2014: 40). Given its theoretical historicity and aesthetic referentiality, this performative characteristic ultimately has to be located in a transnational trajectory, rather than within a national (exclusively Greek)

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<sup>1</sup> A potential reappropriation of weird in a political-aesthetical sense might also be analyzed and theorized along the lines of the term and concept of ‘queer’ (Psaras 2016, Richter-Hansen 2018).

momentum. Joining Lipski, Karkani, Psaras and Nikolaidou, cinematic weirdness emerges as a distinct analytical category of presentational aesthetic depiction, performative corporeality and affective perception that is (to be) situated socially, politically and historically.

Indeed, as stated above, film has a particular capability to explore questions of human differences, mainly by means of bodily performances and performative corporeality. Aesthetically, performatively – and thus affectively – weirdness implies a non-representational relationality to various concepts of normativity and subjectivity, particularly regarding hegemonic notions of corporeality. Weird aesthetics indicate certain cinematic differentiations: detachments or displacements of what are considered norms and thus potential deconstructions of normative subjectivity. As per its affinity with hegemonic differentiation, the cinematically weird is hence tied to questions of precarity but does not (aim to) represent them directly.

The most obvious instances of cinematic weirdness in Greek films of the 2010s might be stand-out scenes like the dance interludes in *Attenberg* or the animated dream sequences in *Strella/A Woman's Way* (Koutras, 2009).<sup>2</sup> As exemplified by the short re-reading of *Wasted Youth*, this article proposes to refocus the continued inquiry of these films to instances of sports. This analytic shift is driven by the assumption that in those scenes corporeality and weirdness are constituted and intertwined in a specifically condensed way. To let sports, quite literally, come into this play of cinematic weirdness raises another important issue, that of the pivotal difficulty of representation of sports on film. In light of the non-representative relation of the aesthetically weird to phenomena of crises this aspect seems exceedingly significant.

In most cases, athleticism or sporting performances can hardly be faked, calling for a documentary quality of cinematic sports if they are to be perceived as authentic. There are several, sometimes overlapping possibilities to bypass that representational dilemma: the sportiness of the performances may be enhanced analogically (by stunt doubles) or digitally (by visual effects); actresses/actors with matching athletic skills may be hired or their existing abilities may be used; sportive shortcomings may be included diegetically or deconstructively. This predicament of authenticity is comparable to the complicated linking of realism and faking in pornography or, quite differently, to the friction between truth-claiming and cinematic constructedness in war films (Richter-Hansen 2017). Drawing on Hito Steyerl's (2003) concept of "Documentarism as Politics of Truth" in regard to documentary media, the aesthetic collision of authenticating and (knowable) synthetic strategies in films could be called 'documentaristic', constituting "an integral part of contemporary

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<sup>2</sup> See Karkani (2014): 201-202, Poupou (2014): 57-59, Psaras (2016): 112 and 152, Walldén (2017): 90-91, Richter-Hansen (2018): 101-106. Psaras's film analyses do account for sporting aspects of these films occasionally without expanding on them, however.

economics of affect” (Steyerl 2008: 13<sup>3</sup>). Extended to fictional films, ‘documentaristic’ signifies the claim and incorporation of a certain degree of documentary realism while applying decidedly de/constructive measures. ‘Documentarism’, in this sense, implies a paradoxical assertion of representation in a non-representational way.<sup>4</sup> Through the analytical lenses of weird aesthetics, performative corporeality and ‘documentaristic’ means, the third part will examine two incidents of film sports in Greek cinema of the early 2010s.

### 3. ‘DOCUMENTARISTIC’ AESTHETICS: WEIRD INCIDENTS OF FILM SPORTS

Considering the premises elaborated on above, two facets seem concise when studying instances of film sports as figurations of difference: (a) the specific performative and cinematic depiction of sports and (b) the scene’s relation to the entire aesthetics of the respective film. For the sake of clarity, the following analysis of scenes in *Attenberg* and *Alps* is confined to these two aspects, focusing on non/representativity and non/normativity. A convergence of these two films seems particularly promising since they were released only a year apart (both premiering at the Venice Film Festival, both to critical acclaim), they feature the same leading actress, but were directed by different Greek filmmakers, who in turn (co-) produced the other’s film.



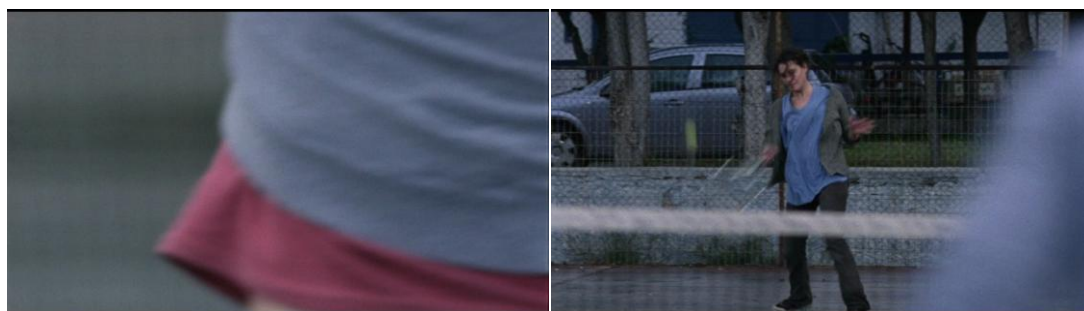
**Figures 2 and 3:** Marina (Ariane Labeled) playing tennis in *Attenberg*.

About halfway through *Attenberg*, Tsangari’s fictional film about an inexperienced 23-year-old woman in a Greek small town, protagonist Marina (Ariane Labeled) and her best friend Bella are playing tennis (**Fig 2**). The scene is set on the sparse tennis court of a largely abandoned hotel compound, their match seems recreational but not without a certain competitiveness. In terms of the visible performances, the women’s tennis play comes across as quite real, it

<sup>3</sup> Translation (from German) by the author: “[...] einen wichtigen Bestandteil zeitgenössischer Ökonomien des Affekts [...]”.

<sup>4</sup> Implicitly, this conceptional confusion tries to widen prevailing assessments of recent Greek cinema’s aesthetics as predominantly (or even exclusively) stylized and anti-realistic. Moreover, on a broader film-theoretical level, it intentionally calls into question the exclusionary, binary logic of the fictional vs. the documentary. Weirdness and film sports could help to challenge and complicate this simplistic notion even further.

does not seem enhanced in any way: Just two people (two diegetic characters, two actresses) rather casually playing, their performances suggesting that we're watching a documentary depiction of two bodies really engaging in sports. Aesthetically, this incident of film sports significantly differs from the rest of the film. Most strikingly, the scene's camera work is much more mobile than the otherwise static shots of *Attenberg*. After a few medium shots of both players from the front, the camera stays behind them but is too shaky and way too close to allow us to track the course of the game (**Fig 3-4**). Supported by shallow focus and multiple jump-cuts, this fragmentary depiction clearly does not favor any result-oriented and thus conventional reception of sports. On the contrary, it is emphasizing corporeality and movement, i.e. the sheer performative dynamics of them playing (Psaras 2016: 123). Finally, a medium shot of Marina – with Bella and the net impairing the camera's point of view, both out of focus – stays on a little bit longer, registering a sportive miscue on Marina's behalf, then her, visibly frustrated, giving up on a serve by Bella (**Fig 5**).



**Figures 4 and 5:** Bella (Evangelia Randou) and Marina playing tennis in *Attenberg*.

While this incident of film sports in *Attenberg* seems documentary-like on the one hand, clearly contrasting the staged dance interludes, on the other hand it is obviously cinematically constructed as such, aesthetically foregrounding the action's mediation in a fragmentary way. Both indicating a certain truthfulness of what is depicted (two people *really* playing tennis) and at the same time visually deconstructing a conventional recording of what is depicted (impeding the viewer's ability to actually watch their tennis match), this paradoxical cinematic mode might be called 'documentaristic' and aesthetically weird.

The evident importance of corporeality is stressed even further in the subsequent locker room scene: After staring at other women changing clothes, Marina curiously looks at herself in a mirror. The unflattering shadows on her naked body, caused by a strictly naturalistic top lighting, contradict normative concepts of beauty. Due to this scenic extension of film sports (the locker room being a generic setting of sports on film) sports are linked to overarching issues of corporeality. Thereby continuing a sports-invoked bodily comparison and competition, intricate questions of external as well as self-assessment are raised. Referring not only to physical constitutions but also to a relatively naturalistic filmic depiction of the body, this weird 'corpo-reality' counters the pervasive

sexualization and eroticization of female bodies in conventional cinematic depictions (Ibid.: 123-124, 140-143). Even so, in its dramaturgical relation to the preceding scene of film sports this particular depiction of corporeality may be read as being primarily related to sportive (dis)ability and (non)athleticism and not necessarily to questions of gender and sexuality.



**Figures 6, 7, 8 and 9:** The gymnast (Ariane Labeled) and her coach (Johnny Vekris) in the prologue of *Alps*.

Yorgos Lanthimos's fictional film *Alps* revolves around a group of people offering a service named Alpeis to replace the recently deceased (the sports term being 'substituting for them'). One member of Alpeis is a rhythmic gymnast that is, again, played by actress Ariane Labeled. Two of her gymnastic workouts serve as framing devices of the entire movie. In the opening scene, the unnamed woman practices a rhythmic ribbon dance to operatic tunes (from 'Carmina Burana') under the watchful eyes of her rigid coach. Her practice is captured rather neatly but still in slight contrast to the film's overall stylistics and to televisual conventions (such as static, deep-focus cinematography). Unlike *Attenberg*, there is an establishing shot of the gym that shows the athlete waiting for her cue (**Fig 6**). Lasting almost one full minute this wide shot lingers on clearly too long to either fulfill an orientating role or invoke conventional (TV) recordings of sports. Shortly after the gymnast has started moving, the scene cuts to a Steadicam shot, attempting to track her swift movements but at times decentering her body (Ibid.: 155) (**Fig 7**). An over-the-shoulder shot, focusing on the coach's posterior while portraying the athlete's performance rather schematically, establishes the film's distinct preference for shallow-focus cinematography (**Fig 8**). The following are slightly unsteady medium shots that do allow us to appreciate her sporting performance. Again, the images are documentary-like but considerably less shaky and from a farther distance than in *Attenberg*. Almost identically to the tennis match in Tsangari's film and the skating in *Wasted Youth*, *Alp's* prologue ends with the sporting performance eventually failing, at least in the gymnast's own estimation. Disgruntledly but half-heartedly, she demands to

dance to pop music instead of opera, only to be harshly rejected by her coach. Her submission is expressed corporeally by her sitting down on the gym's floor, her legs spread widely, while her coach is physically and figuratively looking down at her (launching monotone threats of violent punishment), and highlighted stylistically by the camera's alienating shallow focus and fragmenting cadrage, constituting another instance of aesthetic weirdness (**Fig 9**).

Shot and edited similarly to its first scene, *Alp*'s epilogue features the gymnast again, now performing to electronic music – and now succeeding. Captured in wide and medium shots, her dynamic dance moves are depicted vividly. At the same time, her corporeal performance is aesthetically troubled by the out-of-focus contours of her coach repeatedly impeding the visual axis (**Fig 10**). Consequently, the film's last moments are acted out and staged rather weirdly: having finished her act immaculately, the gymnast runs towards the coach, the camera once again lurking behind his back, and flings her arms around his neck, landing in a close-up of her face. After her audibly agitated exclamation of the submissive mantra “You're the best coach in the world” (according to the English subtitles), the shot lingers on the athlete's sheepishly ecstatic facial expression for a few seconds (**Fig 11**), then cuts to black, followed by the film's closing credits.



**Figures 10 and 11:** The gymnast and her coach in the epilogue of *Alps*.

In both scenes, *Alps* quite obviously utilizes Ariane Labed's preexisting skills of rhythmic gymnastics. The actress's sporting performance comes across as more professional and athletic than her playing tennis in *Attenberg*, all the more as her actions in *Alps* are diegetically situated as rehearsals (as opposed to an actual competition). Particularly by ending the film on a *successful* performance of competitive sports and by aesthetically stressing the athlete's inferiority to her coach, *Alps* is – perhaps warningly, perhaps ironically – reaffirming normative understandings of corporeality and athleticism. These scenes' role within the film's narrative and aesthetics illustrates the highly condensing differential function of scenic film sports, raising or intensifying issues of ability, discipline and control. In case of the gymnast and her coach, this means ostensibly affirming patriarchy and male dominance while providing a severe contrast to the other protagonist Monte Rosa's (Angeliki Papoulia) downfall.<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 12:** The gymnast contorting her body in the locker room scene of *Alps*.

While these two incidents of film sports in *Attenberg* and *Alps* do work differently in some ways, there is an additional connection that underlines their strong relation in terms of weirdly differentiating corporeality. In *Alps*, there is yet another scene that displays actress Ariane Labed's body rather non-normatively. Once again set in a locker room and once again after an unsuccessful performance (although now as part of her 'work' for Alpeis), the gymnast performatively submits to a male authority figure within the diegesis. Taking off her shirt, she tries to persuade her coach not to tell their boss about a

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<sup>5</sup> It is only fitting for this parallel re-examination of *Attenberg* and *Alps* that Monte Rosa's storyline crucially involves a severely injured tennis player, including a decidedly weird 'practice' session when Monte Rosa decides to throw balls to the immobilized girl ailing in her hospital bed. After the girl's death, Monte Rosa frantically tries to replace her but fails miserably. Unsuitably sporting a tennis dress and chattering tennis phrases which are not entirely accurate, this may constitute another cinematic depiction of desperately trying – and floundering – to live up to sportive norms.

mistake she has supposedly made.<sup>6</sup> Now topless, she performs two stretching moves, weirdly presenting and contorting her body. Initially, her slim figure is framed on the margin of a wide shot against the backdrop of the clinical tile wall of the locker room. The scene then cuts to a close-up of her athletically but discomfortingly pulling one of her legs above her head while verbally praising the coach's superiority repetitively (**Fig 12**). She finally moves into an upright posture, the camera's close framing noticeably excluding her bare breasts. The scene's latter part thus avoids an erotically objectifying representation of the female body, finally allowing for the viewer's detachment from the patriarchal, violently charged perspective.

If Marina's self-examination in front of the locker room mirror in *Attenberg* is construed as de-sexualizing, the gymnast's weird locker room performance in *Alps* looks like a re-sexualization at first: by presenting her naked body, she apparently submits herself to the patriarchal order and the scene appears to reaffirm heterosexist norms, supported by the sports-specific convention of a hierarchal (patriarchal) player-coach relationship. At the same time, this perception is ruptured by the diegetic fact that her attempt is unsuccessful and, even more distinctly, by the hyperbolic nature of her performing figures and their unconventional cinematic depiction. To absurdly twist one's body to the extreme and to aesthetically frame this bodily excess in a distant and fragmentary way seems rather counter-productive – i.e. weird – to a submissive gesture, either in terms of intradiegetic reasoning or cinematic perception. Accordingly, a different interpretation of this incident could stress that this excessive staging of corporeality rather vehemently exposes problematic workings of dependency and hegemony, whether in sports or society as a whole. Precisely in its contradictory appearance, this scene demonstrates the films' complex relation to notions of precarity that does indeed include specific as well as overarching questions of subject-formation. While the reading of this scene between re- and hyper-sexualization remains debatable, in either way it remains paradigmatically pertinent in its knotting of human differentiation, sporting performativity, weird corporeality and cinematic aesthetics.

## CONCLUSION

As the case studies of *Wasted Youth*, *Attenberg* and *Alps* have shown, film sports may and do serve as aesthetic means to explore depictions of human corporeality in a highly condensed differential manner. This capacity is substantiated by the fundamental connectedness of film and sports as figurations of difference. Verifiable analytically, sporting bodies, their condition

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<sup>6</sup> Significantly, the coach is not visible in the entire scene (we only hear his voice rejecting her pleading), suggesting it is his point of view the film takes up. Although aesthetically ambiguous, we are affectively put into his (patriarchal) perspective.

and movements, their performances and performativity, their 'documentaristic' staging, appear as linked to weird corporeality in times of crisis, be they nationally/topographically specific phenomena or larger nexuses of precarious subjectivity. Film sports do not necessarily, however, point to a fixed understanding of either normative or non-normative corporeality. To a certain degree, they aesthetically help to both deconstruct (*Attenberg*) as well as reaffirm corporeal normativity (*Alps*, albeit situationally).

In any case, the relationality of film sports to normative ideas of athletics and their conventional mediation is indispensable and systematic. The representational dilemma of any cinematic depiction of sports leads to the 'documentaristic' quality of scenic film sports. These paradoxically 'documentaristic' aesthetics incorporate preexisting athletic skills (in these cases by actress Ariane Labeled) and documentary-like measures (in these cases hand-held cinematography etc.), they foreground sportive failures and deploy cinematic strategies that impede common perceptions of sports, they combine audiovisual claims of authenticity with decidedly de/constructive means.

To specifically look at *weird* instances of sports on film – since Greek films of the early 2010s do cumulatively offer them – means leaning towards precarious accounts of bodily aspects of subject-formation, their performative and aesthetic differentiation eventually rupturing any sense of stable corporeality. Applied as an analytical lens, weirdness refers to either specific corporeal performances on film or film-aesthetic depictions of (sporting) corporeality. While both aspects do figure differences in a 'documentaristic' way, weird bodies and weird aesthetics do not have to coincide, but may interrelate in tension.

It might be possible to extend these observations to a continuing conceptualization of recent Greek cinema's aesthetics in a broader sense. In Lanthimos' *Dogtooth*, the first sequence filmed by a hand-held camera is, quite revealingly, the 'children' fencing in the garden. Visually staged by cinematographer Thimios Bakatakis as well (who also shot *Attenberg*), several point-of-view shots from a speeding motorcycle in *L* (Makridis, 2012) aesthetically deviate from the film's overall style. In turn, Athina Rachel Tsangari's *Chevalier* (2015) could be read as one two-hour sporting competition of (hindered) masculinity, clearly affiliating sporting bodies, weirdness and identity politics. Another exceptional case is *Park* (Exarchou, 2016), a film that intensely links a historically and contemporarily pivotal sports venue – the now-abandoned Olympic Village in Athens – to local youth precariously coming of age. Considering their especially complex conjunctions of sports and crises, *Chevalier* and *Park* certainly deserve in-depth analyses of these facets. In order to solidify the theses deduced from *Wasted Youth*, *Attenberg* and *Alps*, further case studies are required. If an analytical generalization is conveyed rather cautiously in

these closing remarks, this hesitance is also caused by questions of essentializing, external perspectivity and distributional availability.<sup>7</sup>

Prospectively, it seems more appropriate to broaden this paper's scope even further, that is to place the tendencies observed on a transnational trajectory. Disregarding the specificity of sporting aspects, some of these conclusions do emerge as extendable to other European cinemas of this decade's second half: Incidents of weird corporeality and weird and/or 'documentaristic' aesthetics in (varying) relations to precarious subjectivity can also be found in recent films like *Die Hannas/The Hannas* (Kaiser, 2016), *Ma Loute/Slack Bay* (Dumont, 2016), *Toni Erdmann* (Ade, 2016), *Ava* (Mysius, 2017) or *Teströl és lélekröl/On Body and Soul* (Enyedi, 2017).<sup>8</sup> Film sports, in any case, remain important epistemes because they allow for an urgent analysis and acute theorization of figurations of precarious difference – especially by sporting weird corporeality, as these instances of recent Greek cinema pointedly, but certainly not exclusively, do.

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<sup>7</sup> This article's scope is limited considerably by only being able to take into account Greek films translated into English and available internationally.

<sup>8</sup> This list is by no means intended to be exhaustive. Prima facie, these films do not seem to feature scenes of film sports as frequently as the Greek films mentioned. The slight temporal lag between these groups of films indicates a potential impact of the early 2010s Greek films' topics and aesthetics on these more recent films, whether knowingly or unconsciously.

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