Cultural markers and cultural blankets in the study of fiction film

A critical examination of the Greek weird wave

A master's thesis for the Degree Master of Arts (Two Years) in Visual Culture

Petrina Vasileiou

ABSTRACT

Cinema has often been embraced by social sciences as a culturally informative medium, yet culture is not always addressed with the complexity it requires. Especially within the context of interdisciplinary studies, the study of the cultural markers of fiction film is guided by a narrow understanding of what the cultural relevance of fiction films is, informed by dominant and topical interpretative frames. By critically examining the case of the weird wave of Greek cinema as an example of a group of contemporary films framed, in light of the 2008 Eurozone crisis, as expressions of a decadent society, this thesis attempts to dismantle the ease with which the interpretation of the films is unproblematically associated with a national understanding of culture. More specifically, this study constitutes an attempt at lifting the cultural blanket which has attributed specific dominant readings to the films of the Greek weird wave, and revealing the significance of film as a culturally complex object. What is more, the study argues for the importance of individual film analysis as an approach that discloses individual specificities, and promotes a contextual understanding of the interpretation of fiction films with regards to questions of topicality, contemporaneity, as well as the researcher's familiarity. Finally, by bringing together anthropology, film studies, and visual studies, this thesis stands behind a *conscious interdisciplinary* approach promoting sensitivity with regards to how the cultural markers of fiction film are identified, analyzed and established as a part of its identity.

Keywords

Fiction film
Cultural markers
Greek weird wave
Culture as context
Conscious interdisciplinarity

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

Problem diagnosis/Background

Fiction film has been studied as a culturally informative object by diverse academic disciplines such as film studies, visual studies, anthropology, cultural geopolitics, among others. However, the processes through which we attribute cultural relevance to films, as well as the very notion of culture, have rarely been the sole focus of attention. Rather, the connection between fiction film and its cultural background is often taken as a truism, presented as a fact beyond the point of doubt. Nevertheless, it might be possible that the unproblematic affiliation with a specific, yet vaguely conceptualized, cultural background informs and sustains a dominant reading of fiction film, promoting particular interpretations while downplaying others.

In this thesis, I focus on the *Greek weird wave* which serves an example of how, within, and as a result of, the circulation of discourses about the Greek financial crisis by international media, films are conceptualized as products of the particularity of the Greek situation, reflecting central issues of this period. Having anthropology, film studies, and visual studies as the theoretical and methodological foundation of my research, my approach aspires to shed light on the ideas upon which the cultural relevance of Greek weird wave films are based by adopting a conscious interdisciplinary approach. I become involved with an attempt to arrive at a theorization of culture which derives from an evaluation of its complex dimensions. At the same time, I address methodological issues concerning the study of fiction film based on an identified need for sufficient interaction and reflection.

Relevance of the work

This study departs from a body of literature that deals with the study of fiction film as cultural product from a social sciences perspective and aspires to contribute to this discussion (a) by addressing problematic aspects of this correlation which need further elaboration or clarification, as well as (b) by enriching this correlation with a discussion about the current status of the notion of culture and recent debates around it. To be more specific, I look at theories which have circulated among the disciplines of anthropology, film studies and visual

studies in an attempt to investigate how culture has been addressed in the context of analyzing fiction films. My main argument lies on a two-fold base: on one hand, I believe that scholarly works of the afore-mentioned approaches usually promote the cultural value of fiction films based on dominant and powerful ideas (e.g., a national-oriented understanding of culture), without allowing other readings to flourish within their analyses. In other words, these approaches, in one way or another, lead towards restricted, partial, and often loose interpretations of culture. To defog this vagueness, this thesis seeks to unravel the Greek weird wave as a cinematic movement constructed on the basis of current social trends and debates (Greek financial crisis). Therefore, this case study may inform general problematics in the study of fiction film of other geographic and chronological periods. That is, drawing on the Greek weird wave and the possibility that the understanding of the cultural relevance of a corpus of fiction films has been based on current social trends, it could be worthy to examine whether such stimuli or inspiration has fed the interpretations of the concept of culture in other contexts and other cinematic products, too. In my study, I intend to embrace the practice of incorporating social trends in an academic research as an analytical tool in order to find a possible definition of culture informed by contemporary ideas (e.g., positionality, subjectivity).

Furthermore, my proposed study aspires to contribute to the theorization of fiction film as an object of study by emphasizing the fact that films travel and are circulated across people, time, and cultures, hence their cultural readings may vary contextually. In this respect, I wish to gather the theoretical discussion around the cultural character of fiction film and to elevate its potentials by introducing new aspects which would illuminate further such conceptualization from different perspectives; by bringing the artistic nature of fiction film to the fore as another element of its cultural understanding, or by opening the possibilities to connect a fiction film with more than one cultural context depending on the aspect of the film that one wishes to focus on.

What is more, I intend to provide some reflective remarks in my research about the standpoint of the researcher, which could broaden the methodological approach in the study of the cultural markers of fiction film. The scholarly works from which I am inspired have paid little attention to the researcher's standpoint and how the latter's involvement affects the directions of the study, and therefore a body of literature that raises the question of self-reflection about the way fiction films are analyzed has been obscured. Here, I reflect on my own involvement with the case study of my research, drawing not only on my familiarity with Greek culture, but also on the contemporaneity of my research and the proposed case study.

2

Finally, this thesis is committed to identifying and exemplifying the benefits of an intentional interdisciplinary study, by focusing on the possible contribution each of the disciplines involved in the project can make. On that note, one of my main goals is to work toward revealing the potential of a substantial and productive exchange of disciplinary concepts, theories and methods, rather than toward an unconscious use and borrowing.

Research question, research goals, hypothesis

My preliminary hypothesis, and a kick start for my proposed study, is that even though the cultural markers of fiction film have largely been investigated by many disciplines, the very notion of culture and its multiple, complex dimensions have not met analogous elaborations with regards to specific contexts. As a result, my research aspires to provide a theoretically and methodologically oriented analysis directed toward the general inquiry of how one can approach and interpret the cultural markers of fiction film. However, in order to delimit the possibilities in the spatial and temporal requirements of a master thesis project, I chose one case study for pursuing my inquiry. Hence, I work with the case of the Greek weird wave, which is a cinematic movement discussed internationally by film scholars and film critics since 2010.

The term 'weird wave of Greek cinema' was coined by journalist Steve Rose in his 2011 article in *The Guardian* when he connected the works of Yorgos Lanthimos's and Athina Rachel Tsangari's (*Dogtooth* 2009 and *Attenberg* 2010, respectively) with a society in crisis, referring to the Eurozone crisis and Greece as the epicenter of the events.[1] Since then, journalists and film critics have adopted the term and used it widely, adding more and more films that could fit into the movement. Generally speaking, the Greek weird wave has been assessed by film critics and scholars with regard to questions of style, form, narrative, and genre and has been characterized by notions of anti-realism and latent humor, engaging with topics such as family, patriarchy, and power. Based on the link between the broader cultural reference (a society in crisis) and the fiction films (Greek weird wave), both serving as the key constitutive elements of this study, my research question is formulated in a two-fold manner.

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[1] S. Rose, 'Attenberg, Dogtooth and the weird wave of Greek cinema', *The Guardian*, 27 August 2011, http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/aug/27/attenberg-dogtooth-greece-cinema, (accessed 15 January 2016).

How have the Greek weird wave films been construed as expressions of the Greek crisis? As well as, is this framing a sufficient informant about the cultural relevance of fiction films?

Crisis is a prevalent concept for the understanding or framing of the films of Greek weird wave. However, the present research aspires to investigate the concept of crisis in a deconstructive yet reflective manner, by problematizing its roots and several facets in the Greek weird wave. Since crisis and the Greek weird wave are connected in a relational manner, as the films emerge from a society in crisis and crisis is a condition reflected upon the films, both aspects of this correlation offer an understanding for the other. In other words, through the films we may understand how the condition of crisis was experienced by the people, an understanding which will accompany the history of the film across time. At the same time, the films are conceptualized through the condition of crisis which exists at the moment in Greece, and is widely discussed and negotiated. Therefore, crisis is an aspect that frames the films and offers a way for them to be comprehended and reflected upon as objects.

Although the relational link between the films and the crisis seem to make sense and the two of them fit together as pieces of the same puzzle, my intention is to go beyond their easy correlation and to concentrate on the elements that make the link work. This approach will allow me to (i) unravel the ways in which the cultural markers of the Greek weird wave films, specifically, are identified and/or constructed, (ii) reflect on conceptual and methodological issues in the study of films as cultural products, and finally, (iii) contribute to the identification of new directions for the study of the cultural traits of fiction film, in general.

Theories and methods

Fiction films are regarded by film studies as capturing imaginary beings, places and events which are tied to actuality by commenting on the real world.[2] This *real world* is what I regard as *culture* in my thesis*,* and I seek to analyze how distinct approaches have tried to interpret this correlation. Indeed, as Gillian Rose argues, visual culture (including fiction films) is defined nowadays as 'a whole way of life', similar to the way 19th century anthropological

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[2] D. Bordwell and K. Thompson, *Film Art: An introduction*, 5th edn., New York, St. Louis, San Francisco, McGraw-Hill, 1997, pp. 45.

accounts conceptualized culture, and suggests that a further elaboration is lacking.[3] The demand for fresher definitions of the concept of culture constitutes a driving force for my research in which I seek how contemporary theorizations of the concept in social sciences could promote the research of fiction film even further.

To be more specific, the conditions of postmodernity and globalization – among other things- have promoted a strong criticism within the academic circles about the notion of culture since as early as the 1990s. Anthropological accounts question the concept itself as an inclusive one and its definitions as determinative, which leaves little space for alternative possibilities in its conceptualization.[4] This criticism has taken many forms in the course of the years resulting in the formation of theories such as 'cosmopolitanism'[5] or 'positionality',[6] and makes it difficult to relate an object with the notion of culture unproblematically, as this would generate an inevitable need for clarification and elaboration about the qualities one attributes to the notion. As a result, since there is no such thing as a 'self-evident' or 'commonly accepted' conceptualization of culture, what I suggest with my own research is to be as concrete and precise as possible when one uses the term in the context of analyzing fiction film.

My inspiration for the proposed research derives from a number of diverse approaches for the study of the cultural significance of fictional cinematic works and involves three different disciplines. To begin with, anthropology is primarily and traditionally engaged with the study of cultures, and self-reflection has been addressed as one of the most important analytical tools introduced by the discipline. These qualities significantly contribute to the theoretical and methodological orientation of my research, because they add a reflexive and dialectic tone in my discussion; as the concept of culture comprises anthropology's central concern, the discipline's perspective contributes to the task of seeking and establishing a particular relationship between the films and the social context.

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[3] G. Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An introduction to the interpretation of visual materials*, London, SAGE Publications, 2007, pp.13.

[4] A. Gupta, and J. Ferguson, 'Discipline and practice: The 'field' as site, method, and location in anthropology', in A. Gupta, and J. Ferguson (eds.), *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*, Barkeley, University of California Press, 1997, pp.1-46. See also:
L. Abu-Lughod, 'Writing against Culture', in R. Fox (ed.), *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, New Mexico, School of American Research Press, 1991, pp. 137-162.

[5] M. Scheller, 'Cosmopolitanism and Mobilities', in M. Rovisco and M. Nowicka (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Cosmopolitanism*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2011, pp. 349–365.

[6] S. Merriam, J. Johnson-Bailey, M. Lee, Y. Kee, G. Ntseane & M. Muhamad, 'Power and positionality: negotiating insider/outsider status within and across cultures', *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, vol. 20, no. 5, 2001, pp. 405-416.

Apart from anthropology, I incorporate visual studies theories which regard cinema as a medium able to construct a 'world'.[7] This world is what inscribes the information that is conceptualized as culturally informed, therefore, a visual studies perspective sheds light to the powers of the medium. One of the paramount concerns for the discipline of visual studies is to contribute to theorizations of visuality, a notion attached to the intellectual process of interpretation.[8] However, *visual culture* - already as a term- demonstrates its embracement of the concept of *culture*, therefore *visuality* in this context often overlaps with the interpretation of culture. As a result, approaches coming from a visual studies perspective, often tend to take for granted the notion of visuality/culture based on the assertion that films as visual objects/technologies do say something about a specific social or cultural context.

Finally, I turn to the discipline of film studies, too, as one which investigates cinematic works drawing on their dramatic and performative qualities. David Bordwell and Kirstin Thompson, discussing a number of practices, methods and theoretical concerns in the interpretation of fiction film, argue that the products' cultural relevance is to be found in their implicit and explicit meanings. In other words, they address fiction film as 'bearing traces of a particular set of social values' and define the film as cultural product, the traces as symptomatic meaning, and the social values as a social ideology.[9] In concert, then, with Sarah Pink's call to be sensitive about the ideas and the historical development of all the disciplines involved in an interdisciplinary research,[10] I attempt to intertwine the above different perspectives in the study of fiction film, in order to put forth the theorization of fiction film as cultural product through the understanding of the possibilities of fiction film as object and medium.

This thesis has a special relation with methodology, since its method does not equate only to the application of a particular set of analytical tools, but it also constitutes an object of inquiry in itself. That is to say, my approach in the study of the cultural relevance of Greek weird wave films does not rely on a particular methodological model through which I draw my conclusions. Rather, I seek to find a model which incorporates transparency and reflexivity as key aspects of the research in order to pursue and to name the cultural references of fiction films. Content or thematic analysis of films are introduced as reflective and collaborative tools, which anthropological works have used as the central methodological

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[7] Rose, 2007.
[8] Ibid, pp. 6.
[9] Bordwell and Thompson, pp. 76.
[10] S. Pink, 'Interdisciplinary agendas in visual research: Re-situating visual anthropology', *Visual studies*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2003, pp. 191.

apparatus, accompanied in some cases by ethnographic interviews. Already since the 1960s, Martha Wolfenstein and John Weakland propose an 'intense' thematic analysis[11] by incorporating self-reflexivity and reconsideration at several stages of the research.[12]

David Altheide, too, introduces ethnographic content analysis (ECA) as a model opposite to qualitative content analysis (QCA) by distinguishing their characteristics with regards to goal and data analysis, among others, in an attempt to make the method less objective and more appropriate for highly interactive studies.[13] Admittedly, an analysis of the content of the film is necessary to approach its thematic and representational qualities and, as visual anthropologist Jay Ruby suggests, content analysis should, by virtue, incorporate ethnographic interviews focusing on modes of the filmmaker's intentionality, audiences' reception and criticism in order to deliver a collaborative and reflexive study.[14] Evidently, the above accounts strive to find potential ways to make this method relevant - or even accurate- in an ethnographic study. However, is content analysis a complex, reflective and interactive enough method for the analysis of the cultural markers of fiction film?

In this research, I begin with a critical literature review of the responses in scholarly and film critics' works generated after the emergence of the so-called Greek weird wave films. This method attempts to unfold the ambiguity of the definition and the impact of the discourses coming from specific agents (film scholars and critics), as well as to decipher how the above has lead to the constitution of a dominant view of the Greek weird wave as mirror image of a society in crisis. In addition to that, after an investigation of the cinematic movement as a whole, I turn to specific films which I regard as individual entities. My intention is to excavate the dominant national-based readings of the cultural references that cohere Greek weird wave films together, as well as, to suggest other venues through which the films can be conceptualized.

Drawing on the possibilities of a film analysis approach,[15] and by incorporating visual studies theories, I address aspects of content and thematic representations of the films in order to emphasize the choices of the filmmakers and the unique formal system of each film. At this point, my choice to perform film analysis, instead of adopting a thematic analysis approach as

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[11] J. Weakland, 'Feature films as cultural documents', in Hockings, P. (ed.), *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, Berlin and New York, Mouton de Gruyter 1995, pp. 55.

[12] M. Wolfenstein, 'Movie analysis in the study of culture', in M. Mead, and R. Métraux, (eds.), *The study of culture at a distance: The study of contemporary Western cultures*, New York and Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2000, pp. 296.

[13] D. Altheide, 'Ethnographic content analysis', Qualitative Sociology, vol. 10, no. 1, 1987, pp. 65- 77.

[14] J. Ruby, *Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2000.

[15] Bordwell and Thompson, 1997.

anthropological works usually do, is in order to benefit from an analytical model introduced by film studies, as the latter constitutes the expert in the analysis of cinematic works. Finally, I raise a meta-discussion for the study of the cultural references of fiction film in which I reflect on my methodological approach and the contribution of each of the three disciplines, involved in my study, make in this context.

Review and state of current research/ sources and literature

During the 1960s, fiction films, among other visual and popular culture material, start to be addressed by anthropologists as a source that points to a specific ethnographic reality. The legitimation of an anthropological approach in the study of fiction film is based on the assertion that in contemporary societies, fiction films should be considered as culturally significant as their predecessors (i.e. stories, myths, rituals, and ceremonies) and are therefore overall categorized as cultural products.[16] At these early stages, the perspective of psychoanalysis dominates the investigation of the cultural markers of fiction film. For example, Martha Wolfenstein offers a set of guidelines for the analysis of the film content and themes in order for them to be valuable for the study of cultures.[17] Wolfenstein's approach interrelates psychoanalysis and culture based on the presumption that certain psychological processes are characteristic for certain cultures, while she juxtaposes film plots and real life by suggesting that films offer a mirror or defending image of the respective culture. As a result, for Wolfenstein the cultural significance of films is to be found through the study of unconscious desires and fantasies.

Apart from psychoanalysis, other conceptualizations of culture in the study of fiction film have been suggested. Anthropologist John Weakland introduces in the 1970s the theorization of fiction film as cultural document capable of registering general patterns of a culture,[18] which places an emphasis on the contextual networks between the films and the culture from which they supposedly come from and therefore reflect upon. This approach is also explicated in the more recent ethnography of Ranjani Mazumdar who addresses cinema,

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[16] Weakland, 1995, pp. 54.
[17] Wolfenstein, 2000.
[18] Weakland, 1995, pp. 60.

and more specifically popular Bombay fiction films, as archives of a range of urban subjectivities.[19]

Without a doubt, the view of fiction film as 'document' or 'archive' of a specific cultural reality may indeed sound promising for that these terms inscribe many of the visual qualities that films do capture as entities. For example, the notions imply a visual nature and a product that survives across time and consumption, as films do. However, the terms also contain a feeling of finality on how films can be culturally informative and what relationship they inscribe with a culture, which (always) demands further elaboration. At the same time the notions are charged with meanings which do not necessarily apply in the context of a cinematic work. For instance, 'document' or 'archive' usually refer to products that enclose or record moments of events, and are usually served as realistic proofs about a situation that took place in the distant or more past. And even though films may sometimes be comprehended as representative fragments of an era or a society, their artistic nature points towards a broader array of ways through which they communicate with a cultural context. At the same time, psychoanalysis occupies a significant chapter in the analysis of the cultural relevance of films and has produced a number of diverse insights in the study of cinema (e.g., viewing experience,[20] gender identities,[21] the cinematic body).[22]

Nevertheless, both approaches (cultural document or archive, and psychoanalysis) tend to reduce the multiple and complex dimensions of the concept of culture in a sense that they promote the idea that the cultural meaning is beyond doubt inscribed in the fictional products and it is up to the researcher to excavate and interpret it.[23] This assertion proposes a connection between the film and a culture as evident and retrievable, which in turn implies that a film could be tied together better with one rather than another cultural context. As a result, this view disregards reflectionist elaborations on culture which look at cultural meaning as a dynamic process that makes people or products, but is also made by them, [24] a perspective already well-established at the time.

Gillian Rose, too, dedicates a chapter in her book *Visual methodologies* to discuss psychoanalysis as a distinct approach in the study of visual culture. She refers to characteristic

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[19] R. Mazumdar, *Bombay cinema: An archive of the city*, Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 2007, pp. xviii.

[20] C. Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier,* London, Macmillan, 1982.

[21] L. Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in L. Braudy and M. Cohen (eds.), *Film theory and criticism: Introductory readings,* New York, Oxford UP, 1999, 833-844.

[22] S. Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body,* Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

[23] Wolfenstein, 2000.

[24] C. Geertz, *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*, New York, Basic Books Inc., 1973.

theoretical trends - such as the *Lacanian gaze* or Laura Mulvey's *male gaze-* and regards the psychoanalytical take on film analysis, especially since the 1970s, as a philosophical approach to an object which can create 'a total world for its audience'.[25] Other definitions of culture initiated or embraced by a visual studies approach involve the aspect of visuality. For example, Luc Pauwels, who attempts to introduce an integrated conceptual framework for the study of the visual drawing on a number of social sciences disciplines, identifies fiction films as visual objects which act as 'mirrors of the social and cultural world'.[26] Within the similar context of establishing the contribution of visual studies in the social research, Richard Chalfen maps out visual culture as a social scientific study, and addresses fiction films, among other visual culture objects, as ways of looking or presenting oneself.[27]

Indeed, visual studies draw on an interdisciplinary approach based on the assertion that 'visual culture is everywhere', yet 'all mediatized representations are mixed'.[28] Hence, the relatively new-born 'interdiscipline'[29] of visual studies, as W.T.J Mitchell calls it, engages with other academic fields (e.g., philosophy, visual sociology, anthropology) in an attempt to produce and promote scholarly research by investigating the visual dimension of diverse technologies (e.g., cinema, photography, social media, etc.). In other words, visual studies places emphasis on the aspect of visuality, based on the assertion that the visual constitutes a central aspect of cultural constructions.[30] As such, cinema is primarily regarded as a medium which offers a view of the world. However, what is it that connects a particular visual representation with one cultural context rather than another?

The study of films from the perspective of the homonymous discipline has contributed to a theorization of film through specific cultural frames. Thus, within the context of film studies, cinema is often addressed as a product of national cultures, with many publications dedicated to the study of 'national cinemas' appearing throughout the years.[31] This is not to say that the study of film within film studies has been limited to its reduction as national product; it could, however, be argued that the 'national' as a category has proved a valuable

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[25] Rose, 2007, pp. 101.

[26] L. Pauwels, 'An integrated conceptual framework for visual social research', in Margolis, E. and Pauwels, L. (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook: Visual Research Method, London*, SAGE Publications Ltd, 2011, pp. 16.

[27] R. Chalfen, 'Looking two ways: Mapping the social scientific study of Visual culture', in Margolis, E. and Pauwels, L. (ed.), *The SAGE Handbook: Visual Research Method*, London, SAGE Publications Ltd, 2011, pp. 24-49.

[28] N. Mirzoeff, *An introduction to Visual Culture*, London and New York, Routledge, 1999, pp.3.

[29] W.J.T. Mitchell, 'Interdisciplinarity and Visual Culture', *Art Bulletin*, vol. LXXVII, no. 4, 1995, p.540, http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Mitchell-Interdisc_and_Visual_Culture-ArtBulletin-77-4-1995.pdf, (Accessed 25 March 2016).

[30] Rose, 2007, pp.6.

[31] A. Higson, 'The Concept of National Cinema', *Screen*, Vol. 30, No. 4, 1989, pp. 36-46.

and resilient concept, fueling the study of films even today. In fact, Mette Hjort and Duncan Petrie have argued that, despite the need for the development of a whole new vocabulary (e.g., global cinema, transnational cinema, postnational cinema), so that film studies could address the large issues of our times, the focus and the interest on the national remains alive, legitimate, and necessary.[32] Therefore, despite the assertion that films constitute polysemic texts affording multiple interpretations, the national appears to remain the primary interpretative frame within which different forces struggle to fix meaning.[33]

This persistence of the national has been explained from a variety of perspectives. Historically, the attribution of national characteristics to films is associated with aspects of film production and policy. As Patrick Merziger points out, the embracement (or the invention, as he calls it) of national cinema is a result of European film industries wanting to protect their productions from the influx of a large number of American films during, but especially after, WWI. The national framing of cinema acquires, then, political implications and films are identified as part of a nation's cultural heritage.[34] The power of the national has also been addressed from the point of view of reception, and the argument that people tend to prefer cultural products with which they feel a cultural closeness;[35] indeed, as recent studies have shown, despite the popularity and circulation of US and UK films in Europe, there is still a strong connection, or to use Joseph Straubhaar's term, proximity between national products and the majority of nationals in a given country.[36] However, it has also been argued that one of the most influential sources for the cultural and national framing of cinema is film criticism and film studies discourses. Dudley Andrew directs our attention to the fact that national labels are still widely used in many platforms and occasions, for instance film festival entries, film studies textbooks and university courses.[37]

The above exploration into the cultural framing of cinema through the lens of the national does not in any case constitute an attempt at reducing film studies to a specific mode

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[32] M. Hjort and D. Petrie, Introduction, in (eds) M. Hjort and D. Petrie, *The Cinema of Small Nations*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2007, pp. 1-19.

[33] V. Vitali and P. Willemen, 'Introduction', in (eds) V. Vitali and P. Willemen, *Theorising National Cinema*, London, British Film Institute, 2006, pp. 8.

[34] P. Merziger, 'Americanised, Europeanised, or nationalised? The film industry in Europe under the influence of Hollywood, 1927-1968', in (ed.) K. Nathaus, *Made in Europe: The Production of Popular Culture in the Twentieth-Century*, London and New York, Routledge, 2015, pp. 57-77.

[35] J. Straubhaar, 'Beyond media imperialism: Assymetrical interdependence and cultural proximity' *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1991, pp. 39-59.

[36] I. Bondebjerg, and E. Novrup Redvall, 'Introduction mediated cultural encounters in Europe' in (eds.) A. Higson, I. Bondebjerg and E. Novrup Redvall, *European Cinema and Television: Cultural Policy and Everyday Life*, Hampshire, Palgrave MacMillan, 2015, pp.1-22.

[37] A. Dudley, 'An atlas of world cinema', in (eds.) S. Dennison and S. Hwee Lim, *Remapping World Cinema: Identity, Culture and Politics in Film*, London, Wallflower, 2006, pp.26.

of reading and analyzing the cinematic text. Nevertheless, it aims at drawing our attention to the fact that the national frame for the study of film has a historical foundation, a reception-based explanation and a discursive character, which all together may have contributed to the dominance of a (primarily) national conceptualization of cinema.

Drawing on the above theoretical review - which is selective and reflective rather than exhaustive- I suggest that a theorization of culture should avoid the promotion of dominant views and the undermining of others, and should rather try to engage with the very nature of the medium of cinema as inviting multiple interpretations. These endless interpretations, in turn, require specific definitions of culture in the context of a research; however, in order to avoid intellectual biases, such definitions should be reflected upon as a concluding remark rather than a point of departure in the research. Finally, along the same lines, one should also take into consideration aspects of positionality which promote one theorization of culture rather than another.

Structure of the work

My research aims at providing a theoretically and methodologically driven study which deals with fiction film in an attempt to seek its resonances with specific cultural markers. In order to address such an inquiry, I intend to focus on a specific case study, namely the Greek weird wave, by problematizing aspects which I believe have been taken for granted both by film scholars and film critics in the conceptualization of the respective films as products of Greek society in crisis. Therefore, throughout the first chapter, I present the weird wave of Greek cinema as a whole, focusing on the discourses that framed it and the ways it has been analyzed with regard to the current socioeconomic situation in Greece, while in the end I provide a criticism of the way that a movement might work as a cultural blanket. In the second chapter, I turn to specific films and apply film analysis in Alexandros Avranas' *Miss Violence* (2013) and Panos Koutras' *Strella* (2009), two of the proposed Greek weird wave films. I start by analyzing the films, focusing on their form and content, and I end up discussing the theoretical and methodological aspects emerging from the film analyses.

Although in both chapters my main aim is to problematize the cultural resonances of the Greek weird wave as a whole and the selected films individually, my angle in each chapter is different. In chapter one, I look at ideas which seem to be so powerful that may undermine

readings that do not belong to the movement's framing. Whereas in chapter two, my analysis is directed toward individual film analysis in order to see what the film itself can reveal about possible cultural markers - within or beyond the Greek weird wave context. In so doing, I intend to shed light on how particular cultural readings of fiction films are constructed by external narratives. Therefore, the proposed analysis takes me one step closer to reflect on methodological aspects of this process, as well as to find a possible theorization of the concept of culture which attempts to be open for multiple interpretations without, however, resulting to a loose, unhinged term.

CHAPTER 1

The weird wave of Greek cinema and a society in crisis:
The cinematic movement as a cultural blanket of fiction films

As this thesis adheres to a methodological sensitivity, I adopt a conductive approach in order to guide myself through the research. Having said that, I initially intended to dedicate a small section in the beginning in order to describe the weird wave of Greek cinema and introduce my reader to the broader context in which the films I analyze have been argued to be a part of. However, I soon realized that it was difficult to summarize the wave in a descriptive manner because I found myself being constantly critical about the way it was talked about and constructed as unique group of cinematic works. Therefore, I decided to turn this analysis from small and introductory into one of the core components of my argumentation and analysis. By focusing on film scholars' and film critics' works - whom I regard as the most decisive forces in the construction and preservation of the Greek weird wave- I reflect on the rise of the wave, the more culturally embedded characteristics of the movement, as well as the impact and inspiration it has generated in other fields.

The reason why I consider this discussion relevant to my study, important in the development of my argumentation, and innovative in terms of methodology, is because what has been regarded as definitive cultural markers of the films of this period, has actually been constructed on the grounds of specific intentions and presuppositions, resulting in the discursive formulation of a wave. A critical overview of this discursive aspect of the wave could help to assess the cogency of the argument that a film is from the outset culturally tied with specific contexts - rather than others. Anthropologists do not necessarily or intensively refer to broader cinematic movements which the films they analyze may be a part of. [38] However, as will be apparent in the case of the Greek weird wave, the cinematic movement as an umbrella term functions as a dominant frame through which cultural relevance is understood; it attributes to films a type of collective identity, characterized by the identification of shared production values, thematic preoccupations and particular ethos.

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[38] In fact, often the broader contextualization of a film is introduced in anthropological studies as self-evident truth. In this sense, anthropologists tend to acknowledge further connections between the film and the respective context (e.g., propaganda film, Bombay film) rather than critically reflect on the role the latter may play in the identification of the former's cultural relevance. G. Bateson, 'An analysis of the Nazi film Hitlerjunge Quex', in Mead, M. and Métraux, R. (eds.), The study of culture at a distance: The study of contemporary Western cultures, New York and Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2000, pp.331-347. And Mazumdar, 2007.

Apart from arguing for the significance of addressing the wave as a blanket term which attributes to fiction films specific readings or cultural markers, I feel the need to explain why I choose to deliver such an analysis drawing on the works of film critics and film scholars. As I discuss in the following section, my research on the Greek weird wave reveals that film critics constitute the initial force behind the discovery of a new cinematic trend in Greek cinema. That is to say, due to film criticism pieces, which mainly appeared in Anglophone media platforms, a discussion regarding a group of films mirroring Greek society in crisis was initiated. This conceptualization, as I propose in my analysis, is what film scholars (mainly Greek film scholars who deliver their research on Greek cinema in English) have contributed to with excitement, yet without proposing specific or further directions of study. Hence, in the following pages, I comment on aspects which contribute to the equation of the cultural relevance of Greek weird wave with a Greek-crisis context. In this respect, I analyze not only those elements which directly identify the cultural markers of these films - as is for instance the crisis concept- but also, characteristics which even further complicate the cultural resonances of these films - for example the name and corpus of the cinematic movement.

Rise and framing of the weird wave of Greek cinema by the international critics

"What was that?" "I don't know. Weird." "Yeah." [shudder]. "Weird." .[41] This is what A.O. Scott envisions as a possible post-viewing conversation between two audience members of Lanthimos's *Dogtooth* (2009), and concludes his film review in *The New York Times* by admitting that he can't go any further than this remark at this point, since this would have required him to invent a brand new vocabulary. Interestingly enough, Scott's initial response to Lanthimos's film constructs a whole new horizon for conceptualizing the current Greek cinema, which from 2009 onwards started to reach the international audience on a regular basis and to offer intriguing frames of reception and interpretation with regard to the current financial and sociopolitical conditions in Greece. Indeed, a year later, a wave is starting to develop into a distinctive entity when Steve Rose describes the films of Tsangari and

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[41] A.O. Scott, 'Dogtooth: A sanctuary and a prison', *The New York Times*, 24 June 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/25/movies/25dog.html, (accessed 22 March 2016).

Lanthimos, as 'brilliantly strange' and introduces the term 'Greek weird wave' to describe a 'growing number of independent, and inexplicably strange, new Greek films'.[42]

But how did all this start? What exactly do these critics recognize as a new trend in (Greek) cinema which needs to be highlighted? First of all, we may highlight 2009 as a memorable year for Europe and especially Greece, as the country comes to the forefront of the international media's attention because of the Eurozone crisis. During the same year *Dogtooth's* premiere at Cannes Film Festival elicits a number of enthusiastic responses regarding the cinematic work of Lanthimos, which is automatically read as a political allegory,[43] receives a number of awards, and later becomes a nominee for the 83rd Academy Awards as the 'Best Foreign Film'.[44]

Dogtooth, the story of a five-member family in which the parents act over-protectively and raise their children controlled and isolated from any exterior stimuli, conveys messages which are addressed by several film critics for their philosophical quality and fundamental character tied with a cynical, distant perspective.[45] After the success *Dogtooth* establishes in the international scene, Athina Rachel Tsangari's *Attenberg* (2010) premiers at Venice Film Festival, receiving awards and positive responses from audiences and critics. Ever since, and especially when Lanthimos releases his next film *Alps* (2011), film reviews in international media begin to highlight the commonalities between the works of the two filmmakers and underscore their political background; Sukhdev Sandhu suggests that both Lanthimos and Tsangari point to a political statement which criticizes modernity,[46] while Peter Bradshaw takes the interpretation of their films one step further and connects them directly to the current socio-political circumstances in Greece; he writes 'Are we seeing the consolidation of a Greek new wave? […] The latest product of the Greek new wave is an intriguing oddity that suggests the troubling mind-state of a country in social and economic meltdown'.[47]

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[42] Rose, 2011.

[43] S. Adams, 'Dogtooth director Giorgos Lanthimos', *A.V. Club*, 25 June 2010, http://www.avclub.com/article/idogtooth-idirector-giorgos-lanthimos-42525, (accessed 23 March 2016).

[44] Yorgos Lanthimos's *Dogtooth* (2009) was one of the three films in total that Greece ever submitted for the Academy awards. The previous one was submitted about 30 years before *Dogtooth*.

[45] J. Mooney, 'Dogtooth: film review', *Filmosophy*, 28 February 2013, http://filmandphilosophy.com/2013/02/28/dogtooth/, (accessed 24 March 2016).

[46] S., Sandhu, 'Attenberg is needling, idiosyncratic and fascinating', *The Telegraph*, 1 September 2011, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmreviews/8736083/Attenberg-review.html, (accessed 24 March 2016).

[47] P. Bradshaw, 'Attenberg – review', *The Guardian*, 1 September 2011, http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/sep/01/attenberg-film-review, (accessed 24 March 2016).

The discourses about a new wave born out of the ashes of a declining Greek society[48] are initiated by Anglophone film critics, who regard Lanthimos and Tsangari as the pillars of a new cinematic movement.[49] Something *weird* seems to be the primary quality these two filmmakers share, a weirdness that has mainly been identified in terms of shooting style (wide shots and minimal camera movement),[50] choice of social context (seclusion, isolation, integration),[51] and aesthetic composition; V.B notes in *The Economist* 'Indeed the films of Lanthimos and Tsangari share a similar aesthetic: haunting, washed-out cinematography, alienated protagonists and sparse, near absurdist dialogue. […] These films are studies in power and control'.[52]

However, it would be unusual or even odd to expect the creation and consolidation of a whole new wave in cinema based on the works of just two individuals. Hence, other films have been incorporated in the corpus of the Greek weird wave. Based on the different voices proposing different corpuses of films as part of the wave, one may assume a disparate set of standards which define a Greek weird wave. For example, Rose includes Argyris Papadimitropoulos' *Wasted youth* (2011), Syllas Tzoumerkas' *Homeland* (2010), Yiannis Economides's *Knifer* (2010), and finds 'further up the strangeness scale' Panos Koutras' *Strella* (2009).[53] Yeung, in a later account, additionally suggests Alexandros Avranas' *Miss Violence* (2013), Panos Koutras' *Xenia* (2014), Nikos Kornilios' *Matriarchy* (2014), and Elina Psykou's *The eternal return of Antonis Paraskevas* (2013), among others, while he does not refer to some of the films Rose did.[54] Uhler, on the other hand, in an account of the same period, also incorporates Ektoras Lygizos' *Boy eating the bird food* (2012) and Babis Makridis' *L* (2012).[55]

Extending the conflicting ideas about the corpus of the Greek weird wave films further, one would expect that depending on the films included, there should be a different

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[48] P. Yeung, 'Greece may be broke, but its film scene is rich', *Dazed*, July 2015, http://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/25454/1/the-new-names-in-greek-cinema, (accessed 23 March 2016).

[49] R. Uhler, ''The Lobster', 'Chevalier' and the importance of new Greek cinema', *Indiewire*, 19 October 2015, http://blogs.indiewire.com/criticwire/the-lobster-chevalier-and-the-importance-of-new-greek-cinema-20151019, (accessed 23 March 2016).

[50] A.O. Scott, 'Searching for herself, she's odd and familiar: Attenberg, Athina Rachel Tsangari's new film', *The New York Times*, 8 March 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/09/movies/attenberg-is-athina-rachel-tsangaris-debut-feature.html?_r=0, (accessed 24 March 2016).

[51] A. Schenker, 'Attenberg: Film review', *Slant magazine*, 22 March 2011, http://www.slantmagazine.com/film/review/attenberg, (accessed 24 March 2016).

[52] V. B., 'Greek cinema: dark haunting and wonderfully weird', *The Economist*, 6 December 2011, http://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2011/12/greek-cinema, (accessed 2 March 2016).

[53] Rose, 2011.

[54] Yeung, 2015.

[55] Uhler, 2015.

conceptual framework of the movement, a distinct agenda, in other words, and a diverse understanding of the 'weirdness'. Indeed, Yeung defines the wave for its 'proclivity for bizarre and shocking ideas' emphasizing mostly the thematic choices, and points to weirdness as an aesthetical and representational value. Rose, on the other hand, conceptualizes the wave as 'a product of Greece's economic turmoil' exemplifying the links between the films and the conditions of the society from which they emanate. Additionally, Uhler draws on the independence of these productions and the absence of any governmental funds to support them, at the same time exploring the limitations and freedoms such arrangements involve in cinematic avenues. Evidently, there is something about Greek cinema of this period which attracts the attention of reviewers and audiences, however, it is hard to trace what its distinctive character - the weird quality, so to speak- is attributed to, especially when the number and the thematic and aesthetical quality of the films proposed to constitute the movement vary.

Recapping this short introduction in the weird wave and how it is formulated by the film critics, what I have tried to illustrate so far is that Greek films of this period have generated a discussion on an international level linking them to the financial crisis and a decadent society, which started to be the most recurrent frames to talk about Greece since 2009. This discussion is driven, in my view, by a forceful imagination of the Greek situation which contrasts a talented and exquisite version of Greek culture and art on the one side, and a corrupt and unstable version of Greek society and economy on the other. The numerous accounts about the weird wave demonstrate a variety of different perspectives when it comes to the corpus of the films and its conceptual and analytical agenda. However, the plurality of voices here, instead of offering a multi-layered analysis of the films and its cultural resonances, actually produces an inconsistent body about a wave whose nature and conceptual framework are essentially debatable.

The study of the weird wave of Greek cinema

After Greek films begin to attract international attention with regard to the country's economic crisis film scholars start to produce accounts about Greek cinema in English, systematically drawing on the interest of the international film critics and audiences. In this attempt, different approaches and discourses appear, however, one can identify a common place where the majority of scholarly works are concentrated, at least initially, and that is the

weird wave of Greek cinema. I examine here the approach of the study of Greek cinema, having in mind the following inquiries: how did the international attention become a kick start for film scholars to deal with Greek films through the framework suggested by the Anglophone film critics? Additionally, what does the analytical agenda of the study of Greek cinema involve?

In order to investigate how the trends in the study of Greek cinema have been described, I turn to the annual reviews of English language bibliography on Greek cinema offered by the *Filmicon Journal* since 2010.[56] The publications of the years 2010-2013 have been interpreted by Olga Kourelou as ultimately connected to the 'Greek weird wave' phenomenon, emphasizing the economic crisis. At the same time, a critique begins to appear from scholars arguing for Greek film studies to be established as an academic field in the Anglophone world.[57] Between 2013 and 2014, a changing strategy is noted by the introduction of a growing number of different approaches for the study of Greek cinema in terms of 'methodology, contexts and frameworks' drawing on the concepts of class, gender, and power as well as the study of diasporic cinema, film festivals and audiovisual archives.[58] Georgia Aitaki emphasizes the diversity explicated by the sources of this period, a characteristic all the more progressing in the bibliography gathered for the years 2014-2015; Greek filmmakers, production frameworks, genre and cinematic tendencies seem to become trends of the academic research of this period, while the theories of transnationalism, feminism, sexuality and the concepts of power, politics, nostalgia and representations of Greekness take the lead.[59]

Apart from these accounts, Greek film scholars have elaborated extensively on the formulation of the wave in order to trace its roots. Here, the perspectives from which such an inquiry is undertaken vary again. First of all, a number of different labels have appeared as the name of the wave. International film reviewers have coined the tags 'Greek weird wave'[60] or 'New Greek cinema',[61] while film scholars have mainly depicted the phenomenon as the 'New Greek Current'; a notion which reflects on a more domestically generated interpretation

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[56] These annual reviews cover a variety of academic (books, articles, chapters) and semi or non-academic works (blog posts in academic journals, film and book reviews, festival reports, among others).

[57] O. Kourelou, 'English-language bibliography on Greek cinema', *Filmicon: Journal of Greek film studies*, vol. 1, 2013, p. 221.

[58] G. Aitaki, 'English-language bibliography on Greek cinema', *Filmicon: Journal of Greek film studies*, vol. 2, 2014, p. 235.

[59] P. Vasileiou, 'English-language bibliography on Greek cinema', *Filmicon: Journal of Greek film studies*, vol. 3, 2015, p. 139.

[60] Rose, 2011.

[61] Uhler, 2015.

of these films in which the idea of old institutions of the country and the 'ethos' of the filmmakers collapsing and new coming to the fore[62] is incarnated.

In addition to the name of the wave, the approaches to its historical framework, as well as its place in the broader research of Greek cinema, constitute another dubious feature of its formulation. The year 2009 is considered by Greek film scholars to be an arguably significant period. Despite its acclaimed international success, *Dogtooth* was not the only Greek film to debut in international film festivals in 2009 receiving prestigious awards and reviews; *Strella* (2009) by Panos Koutras and *Plato's Academy* (2009) by Filippos Tsitos are considered part of what has fueled the discourses about a new turn in Greek cinema. Maria Chalkou, for example, finds a common pattern among these films in terms of production, reception and aesthetic framework, and suggests that 2009 is regarded as a period of 'exceptional creativity and renewal' for Greek cinema.[63]

Lydia Papadimitriou, too, sets 2009 as the nodal point which 'marks the beginning of both the crisis and the new international visibility of Greek cinema'.[64] She observes a shift in the study of Greek cinema in academia since 2009 in terms of production (from a scattering to a more systematic one) and approach (from a historical perspective to more contemporary-based frames of interpretation). Papadimitriou names the new English-language Greek film-oriented academic journals created after the extensive visibility of Greek cinema, as well as some international conferences dedicated to the same subject.[65] In fact this specific article by Papadimitriou is part of a special issue - at *Filmicon: Journal of Greek film cultures*- inspired by the recently created international conference 'Contemporary Greek film cultures 2013' which was held in London.

However, Chalkou attempts to deconstruct the view that Greek films appear as a sudden, bright thunderbolt in a decadent, corrupt society. Hence, she contextualizes the Greek weird wave through a wider social and institutional spectrum and creates the sense of a gradual transition, which results in the formation of the cinematic movement. Drawing on the 2000s as a whole, she points out significant changes which take place in several areas of Greek society throughout this period, arguing that in order to comprehend the new trend in Greek filmmaking, it is essential to trace important developments made in governmental, technological, and financial fields. Papadimitriou, on the other hand, with a more celebratory

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[62] M., Chalkou, 'A new cinema of emancipation: Tendencies of independence in Greek cinema of the 2000s', *Interactions: Studies in communication and culture*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2012, p. 244-245.
[63] Ibid, pp. 244
[64] L., Papadimitriou, 'Locating contemporary Greek film cultures: Past, present, future and the crisis', *Filmicon: Journal of Greek film studies*, vol. 2, 2014, p. 4.
[65] Ibid.

tone, investigates the 'New Greek Current' - as she refers to the movement- by juxtaposing modes of production, reception and institutional actors before and after the financial crisis, setting 2009 as a key point in time. As a result, she seems to be more interested in the future of Greek cinema rather than its progress/past.

Here, we may notice a distinctive approach of the wave in terms of the place it occupies within the study of Greek cinema. Chalkou approaches the wave with an emphasis on the past and the notion of process/progress drawing on practices and developments which contributed to the formation of the wave. Papadimitriou, on the other hand, refers to the movement mostly as a departure point for Greek cinema to enter a new era and new conceptual spheres such as transnational cinema. These distinctive accounts are representative of how the wave has been conceptualized within the study of Greek cinema, a condition that feeds the shaky character of the very entity of the wave, let alone its cultural resonances.

Undoubtedly, international film critics have initiated a vigorously positive climate toward Greek cinema by establishing a connection between the weird wave films and a society in crisis. As the review of the bibliographic entries in English showcases, this climate has been an inspiration for Greek film scholars to account for the respective films. Nevertheless, the production of academic works puts forth the study of Greek cinema and introduces a number of different frames to discuss either the complexity and uniqueness of the case of this cinema –focusing on the financial crisis and Greek society-, or to put Greek cinema within broader contexts of academic strands such as transnational or feminist cinema. Hence, it would not be excessive to suggest that the study of Greek cinema has benefited from the international attention the films gained throughout this period. Such declaration, actually, could explicitly apply if one considers the ongoing efforts of film scholars to establish the grounds for a new academic discipline to evolve in the Anglophone sphere, namely the discipline of Greek film studies.

World's most messed-up country is making world's most messed-up cinema[66]

Having established Greek weird wave as a shaky entity in terms of its constitutive characteristics (name, corpus, conceptual framework, place in study etc.), I now intensify my focus on the cultural resonances of these films, that is the Greek socio-political context and

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[66] Rose, 2011.

especially the economic crisis. Since my major focus in this research is to investigate how fiction films are regarded as objects which reflect on specific cultural context(s), I am particularly interested to see how film critics and scholars have attributed to the films the quality of reflecting the current socio-economic conditions in Greece. I have classified my analysis drawing on two distinct aspects of the Greek weird wave films (production and content) which are conceptualized as being affected by the financial circumstances of the country.

Beginning with the production of the films, it is important to stress at this point that the lack of state funding in cinematic endeavors is the only aspect of the wave which Lanthimos, among other Greek filmmakers, recognizes as a common feature that the weird wave films share.[67] The inability to find governmental avenues to finance their works resulted in the fact that filmmakers have started to seek alternative ways to have their films done, an effort mainly achieved through support and collaboration they established on different levels with one another. For example, Lanthimos and Tsangari, have been producers to each others' films more than once and Lanthimos has even acted in Tsangari's *Attenberg*.

Apart from the collaboration between filmmakers and the little money invested in the films, another common feature in terms of production among the Greek weird wave films is their orientation and focus; these filmmakers share a common interest in an international prospect rather than a domestic one, and they prefer to create festival-oriented films rather than domestic blockbusters. To put it in other words, the filmmakers choose to present and distribute their films primarily within and through film festivals. This choice has been conceived as an act of differentiation from an older generation of Greek filmmakers in 'ethos', mentality, perspective and focus,[68] which further implies that the crisis has been communicated - apart from its materialization through the lack of (governmental) funding, as we have seen above- through the films as an inspiration for alternative options to arise.

Chalkou emphasizes that fact and notices that the impression made in international circles by the Greek weird wave films has mainly been 'imported' by the domestic media.[69] Along the same lines, Greek film critic Yagkos Antiochos has labeled one section of his article[70] about the weird wave 'Praise the awards from wherever they come'[71] concluding that

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[67] Rose 2011.
[68] M. Demopoulos, 'Νέο αίμα κυλά στις φλέβες του ελληνικού σινεμά'/ 'New blood is flowing in the veins of Greek cinema', *Cinema*, no. 219, 2011, p.52.
[69] Chalkou, 2012, pp. 244.
[70] Y. Antiochos, 'Ελληνικό σινεμά τώρα: το weird wave, οι πρόγονοί του, που ποντάρουμε φέτος' / 'Greek cinema now: the weird wave, its predeseccors, where we place our bet this year' *Athinorama*, 11 November 2013,

'Greek cinema is in the middle of a creative phase in an attempt to breath out within an overwhelmingly muggy socio-economic period. The only thing remaining is that state and audiences begin to trust it'.[72] These assertions suggest that Greek filmmakers of the wave and Greek audiences, critics, and state are not on the same page and comprehend the significance and the very points of these cinematic works differently.

When it comes to a content analysis of the films, it is apparent that there is a recurrent targeted aspect of Greek society. I am referring here to the intensified illustration of the institution of family and its further resonances toward an undesired, superfluous past. Rose suggests that *Dogtooth* and *Attenberg* play with an indirect reflection about the new generation of Greeks who suffer 'a tyranny' from their own history, and that these films demonstrate the need to focus on the present, the here and now, rather than the overwhelming, often nostalgically approached, past.[73] Here, the societal crisis as a moment of reflection and reconsideration is brought to the surface, a moment to imagine the transformation of a society in tension. Apart from *Attenberg* and *Dogtooth*, other films could be said to be primarily concerned with the institution of family, as is for instance *Miss Violence* and *Strella*.

Film scholars have approached the study of the so-called Greek weird wave films through a variety of different perspectives; focusing either on films of the wave individually, or producing collective readings by grouping films together. Notions of gender, body, loss, the institution of family, politics, and patriarchy become central themes in a number of scholarly papers, studied through the analytical category of borders,[74] modes of performativity,[75] and aesthetic style.[76] For example, Alex Lykidis argues that the neo-liberal circumstances that are reflected in Lanthimos's *Dogtooth* justify the exercise of violence, power, and patriarchy within the context of a dynamic socio-economic system.[77]

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http://www.athinorama.gr/cinema/article/elliniko_sinema_tora_to_weird_wave_oi_progonoi_tou_pou_pontarou me_fetos_-1001149.html, (accessed 24 March 2016).

[71] Original text 'Επιδοκιμάστε τα βραβεία απ' όπου κι αν έρχονται'

[72] Original text 'Το ελληνικό σινεμά βρίσκεται σε δημιουργικό αναβρασμό προσπαθώντας να αναπνεύσει σε μία πνιγηρή οικονομική περίοδο. Το μόνο που μένει είναι η πολιτεία και οι θεατές να το εμπιστευθούν προσφέροντάς του πολύτιμο οξυγόνο'.

[73] Rose, 2011.

[74] I. Celik, 'Family as internal border in *Dogtooth*", in R. Merivirta, K. Ahonen, H. Mulari, and R. Mähkä, (eds.), *Frontiers of Screen History: Imagining European Borders in Cinema 1945-2010*, Bristol, Intellect, 2013, p. 217-233.

[75] A. Koutsoukakis, 'Cinema of the body: The politics of performativity in Lars Von Trier's *Dogville* and Yorgos Lanthimo's *Dogtooth'*, *Cinema: Journal of philosophy and the moving image*, vol. 3, 2012, p. 84-108.

[76] A. Poupou, 'Going backwards, moving forwards: The return of modernism in the work of Athina Rachel Tsangari', *Filmicon: Journal of Greek film studies*, vol. 2, 2014, p. 45-70.

[77] A. Lykidis, 'Crisis of sovereignty in recent Greek cinema', *Journal of Greek media & culture*, vol. 1, no.1, 2015, pp. 9-27.

In another example, Stamos Metzidakis connects domestic education (a notion appearing in *Dogtooth*) to the recent economic decline of several Greek households and the cut-off of their children's private tutorials.[78] These works regard the institution of family as a microcosm of the entire society, and the processes of education and self-exploration as processes that reflect a current state. In addition to that, these approaches build on a rather literal conceptualization of the crisis as a condition in the analyzed films, and they doubtlessly constitute characteristic analyses of a national-based understanding of the cultural resonances of fiction films.

The aesthetic and narrative characteristics of the films of this period have also been addressed as reflecting on the societal situation of the country. Afroditi Nikolaidi, for instance, attempts to trace the common aesthetics and narrative processes of the 'Greek New Wave' - as she calls it- which she seeks in theater and performance.[79] She concludes her analysis by assuming that the films manifest a bodily-centered and presentational narration which further illustrate a kind of trauma and loss. She connects, then, these tendencies with the socio-economic sphere of the country by suggesting that the performative elements do not demonstrate a trauma for the past but for the loss that is present in the course of the cinematic expression.

Drawing on the above, the films of the weird wave of Greek cinema have mainly been described as low-budget, festival-oriented films with international appreciation which incarnate the contextual situation of the crisis based on a number of different perspectives. Firstly, the production reflects on crisis as an effect (absence of funding), and the collaboration between the filmmakers, as well as their shift in geographical and cinematic orientation illustrates the crisis as an inspiration for new opportunities to arise (a shift in the way films are made). At the same time, the choice of thematic representations leads to the interpretation of crisis as moments of critical thinking and reconsideration (a focus on the present rather than the past), while the aesthetic and narrative form of the films demonstrates a reading of the crisis as loss, which further creates 'shock and destabilization'.[80]

Indeed, the above conceptualizations of Greek weird wave films as aspects of Greek society in crisis advance an understanding of the cultural markers of fiction film through the integration of a national point of view. In other words, by admitting that what connects these

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[78] S. Metzidakis, 'No bones to pick with Lanthimos's Dogtooth', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2014, pp.367-392.
[79] A. Nikolaidi, 'The performative aesthetics of the Greek New Wave', *Filmicon: Journal of Greek film studies*, vol. 2, 2014, p. 20-44.
[80] Ibid, pp. 40.

films with a specific cultural context is in principle a common Greek identity (embodied by the filmmakers) or a common experience of a country's conditions (depicted in the films), is what primarily makes the cultural resonances of the Greek weird wave films refer to a national understanding of the concept of culture. However, this argument reduces the artistic character of the film to a simple representation of a cultural context to which is supposedly attached. In other words, this view promotes the interpretation of the film through a mirror images perspective.

Pauwels describes fiction films generally as being able to offer a mirror image of the social and cultural context to which they are referring,[84] while, Wolfenstein especially bases this correlation on the assumption that every culture has its own distinctive characteristics. She suggests 'If we […] see a French film, an Italian film […], we will anticipate […] a certain recognizable world, characteristic for each. The aim of our analysis is to substitute for such inarticulate impressions […] of what has happened to produce them'.[85] Along the same lines, although without incorporating the psychoanalytical perspective on which Wolfenstein serves her analysis, the films of the wave are indeed treated as distinctive by-products of Greek culture which say something about the specific characteristics of Greek society, identity, and context.

In order to conclude my argument and to push the analysis of these fiction films with regard to their supposed references to the socio-cultural context, I decided to extract a film review piece on *Attenberg* that vividly depicts the intensity with which the weird wave films have been approached as 'cultural products' of the crisis.

> Given the Greek economic and political landscape, there is the inevitable question of whether these filmmakers are commenting on their country's problems. There is a scene in "Attenberg" when Marina and her father are looking out over a blank, decaying housing development; he spits "It's as if we were designing ruins, calculating their eventual collapse with mathematical precision." His disappointment at Greece's failure to capitalize on opportunity for growth and modernisation is the closest any of the films come to being explicitly political. However, the father-child relationships seem to make their own oblique point. There is no direct reference to crisis, but to the disappointments and odd prisons of each successive generation. These films convey the weight of history, as child-like 20-somethings attempt to shoulder their parent's expectations and their mistakes.[86]

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[84] Pauwels, 2011.
[85] Wolfenstein, 2000, pp. 296.
[86] V.B, 2011.

Without a doubt, the Greek weird wave coincides with a period of severe exposure of the image of Greeks internationally and the country's framing as a synonym to the Eurozone crisis. At the same time, film festivals are arguably considered platforms where social concerns are encouraged to be expressed through the art of film.[87] My intention, though, to refer to the above review, attempts to challenge the contextual frame of crisis, one which indeed serves as a convincing frame to interpret these films and is undeniably hard to surpass once it is thrown on the table. My principal critique, based on the above analysis, can be epitomized in the following inquiries: How do we assume that the films reflect specific context(s) simply because they originate within it/them? Additionally, how can we attribute cultural reflections on the films which the filmmakers themselves - whom I regard here as the primary intentional force of their own work- deny?

A critical review of the weird wave of Greek cinema

As I have already argued, the discourses which formulated the very existence of the wave have been ambiguous and have mostly reinforced a reading of the films through their, already over-emphasized, contextual framework. On top of that, Greek filmmakers have not become part of the wave voluntarily; in fact, some of them remain strategically neutral about whether they belong in the wave, while others stand critically against it and seem to be annoyed by the fact that their artistic works are primarily conceptualized through an economic/societal crisis perspective.[88] Despite the filmmakers' skeptical position towards the framing of their films in such manner, the wave finds abundant supporters around the globe. Stephanie Bunbury's relatively recent piece in an Australian newspaper, for example, accounts for the weird wave as overall and admits that '[…] the Wave's impact has been so powerful that it colors the way you watch any Greek cinema'.[89]

Drawing from the above, one would inquire whether the impact of this cinematic movement is based on its credibility, or on the fact that what it demonstrates fits and feeds the

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[87] M. De Valck 'Supporting art cinema at a time of commercialization: Principles and practices of the international film festival Rotterdam', *Poetics*, vol. 42, 2014, p. 40-59.

[88] G. Patlakas and M. Kakosimou, 'Xenia-Cannes 2014: Interview with the director Panos X. Koutras and the two leading actors', *Cinefreaks*, 18 June 2014, http://cinefreaks.gr/enpost/xenia-cannes-2014-interview-with-the-director-panos-x-koutras-and-both-the-two-leading-actors/, (accessed 24 March 2015).

[89] S. Bunbury, 'It's all Greek to me: The lobster rides in on cinema's weird wave', *The Sydney Morning Herald,* 9 October 2015, http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/movies/its-all-greek-to-me-the-lobster-rides-in-on-cinemas-weird-wave-20151006-gk199r.html, (accessed 24 March 2016).

current trends and ideas about specific issues that media consumers around Europe –to say the least- have been exposed to (e.g., financial crisis, society in decay, cultural resistance in hard times). In fact, Bunbury's articulation about the impact of the weird wave constitutes a major point of dispute in this thesis because it brings to the fore both the limitless interpretations that films as artistic products invite, but also how forceful ideologies may direct and orient the audience to comprehend a film from a specific point of view.

Furthermore, domestic media have started to talk about the future of the wave considering the possibility that it has already ended and regard Lanthimos' latest film *The lobster* (2015) as the final product of it. Antiochos describes the Greek weird wave as a short, dynamic movement which, in contrast to how he coined the wave two years earlier (as being in a creative period),[90] he now argues that it has started to lose its momentum and innovation over the course of the last couple of years.[91] He goes even further by suggesting that Lanthimos segregates the 'Greek' from the 'weird wave' which he believes has already became a significant page in European cinema, and argues that Greek cinema is now seeking a new identity.

In fact, the economic crisis as concept and cultural marker – a major feature of what constitutes the weird wave-, although still apparent in many cases, has started to mostly be placed in the surroundings of the films and no longer at the heart of their interpretations. For example, in the 39th Göteborgs International Film Festival the description of Tsangari's latest film *Chevalier* (2015), which was screened in the 'Masters' section, places an emphasis on its theme as a study in patriarchy and masculinity, and only refers to the crisis as a background which makes the upper-class males of the film and the luxury around them to seem odd.[92] This example is indicative of how the discourses about the bonds between the wave and the crisis in Greece continue, though now crisis is not the central cultural frame of the film, but it just serves as another aspect to think about its content.

Looking closely at the various conceptual ways and the various levels of intensity with which the term 'Greek weird wave' is used, it becomes discernible that the extent to which this movement has been fully accepted and comprehended by the scholars differs. For example, if we draw on Nikolaidi's attempt to explore the performative aesthetics of the

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[90] Antiochos, 2013.

[91] Y. Antiochos, 'Ο «Αστακος» και το τέλος του Greek weird wave'/ 'The lobster and the end of Greek weird wave', 22 October 2015, *Athinorama*, http://www.athinorama.gr/cinema/article/o_astakos_kai_to_telos_tou_greek_weird_wave-2509839.html, (accessed 24 March 2016).

[92] T. Åkesson, 'Chevalier', https://festival.giff.se/events/chevalier, 2016, (accessed 24 March 2016).

movement,[96] we may trace direct and explicit links between the films and the conceptual framework of the weird wave. On the other hand, studies which loosely (if at all) account for the term and its ideas also exist. Lykidis, for example, offers an analysis of films (Tsangari's *Attenberg* 2010 and Lanthimos' *Dogtooth* 2009 and *Alps* 2011) and a conceptual framework that is placed at the heart of the weird wave (economic system, political resonances)[97] without actually acknowledging the movement; he consistently refers to the corpus of these films as 'Lanthimos's and Tsangari's films', and avoids referencing the term 'Greek weird wave'.

Metzidakis, on the other hand, uses the term, yet without investigating it thoroughly, elaborating extensively on it or attributing further characteristics with his analysis; only when he reaches the conclusion does he make a more direct link between his analysis on *Dogtooth* and other films of the wave based on the fact that they all address inquiries of the same kind: long-repressed questions concerning serious social issues.[99] Finally, Angelos Koutsoukakis analyzes *Dogtooth* and plays with similar aspects of the film that the weird wave suggests (performative characteristics, body, crisis)[100] which he not only addresses as part of another movement and conceptual framework ('Cinema of the body'), but also he resituates their interpretation. In his conclusion, he assumes that the politics of performativity of the above films construct an anti-commodity aesthetic and reproduction and invites research accounts to interrelate this framework with the current economic crisis and the counties of Hungary, Greece and Romania.[101]

Admittedly, the prominence of the discourses around the Greek weird wave have generously and positively affected both the visibility and attention, but also the study of contemporary Greek cinema. Nevertheless, what the above remarks underline is that in the case of the Greek weird wave the relation between the films and their cultural framework (crisis) is either taken for granted from the beginning, or it is addressed as a trendy tag rather than a deeply-elaborated remark. As a result, the phenomenon illustrated as 'Greek weird wave' - or through other discursive frames- in fact constitutes an entity so elusive that it is possible to apply the term or its agenda to any film of this period.

It is definitely very hard to completely detach the films from their contextual framework and this is not something that I actually suggest in this study. Nor do I aim to establish the idea that the accounts which have been produced so far about these films using

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[96] Nikolaidi, 2014.
[97] Lykidis, 2015.
[99] Metzidakis, 2014, pp. 386.
[100] Koutsoukakis, 2012.
[101] Ibid.

the crisis perspective are groundless or inaccurate. What I do want to advocate, though, is to take a step back in order to look critically at aspects which haven't been elaborated on systematically; do the analyses of these films accentuate the study of Greek cinema per se or do they constitute mirrors of topical media issues and their illustrations? In other words, what I claim is that rather than relying on dominant frames of interpretation, one should pay attention and reflect upon the place of Greek cinema (fiction film), the place of Greek crisis (cultural markers), and the way they are addressed in the numerous (academic and other) accounts.

Concluding this chapter, so far I have described what propositions, statements and concepts construct the cinematic movement called 'Greek weird wave' emphasizing conflicting ideas around its conceptualization both as a self-standing entity, but also as a cultural marker of the films of this period. I started by illuminating aspects of problematic and turbulent theorizations about the wave which overall indicate that the wave is a questionable entity/framing. At the same time, I challenged the assumptions of the cultural relevance of these films which draw mainly on a national perspective, downplaying other facets of the notion of culture. Last but not least, beyond that, rather than addressing the wave as a general common entity, I dug into the very pieces that construct it by referring to film critics' and scholars' extracts of their own analyses of the wave or the respective films. In so doing, my principal aim was to emphasize the distinct approaches and ideas which accompany the wave in order to critically reflect on the presuppositions and presumptions which constitute it.

What I ultimately wanted to disclose with the above critical overview of the discourses surrounding the Greek weird wave is the function of the concept of the cinematic movement as a cultural blanket, which I would like to clarify before entering the next chapter. As the above journey through the critical and scholarly responses to the Greek weird wave illustrates, the cultural blanket - in this case, a patchwork of crisis-related themes and debates- organizes and groups together films with diverse aesthetical and thematic preoccupations. At the same time, by covering these films with a dominant reading, it cuts them off from possible intersections from other cultural references. The chapter that follows specifically aims at lifting the blanket and exposing films that have been categorized as belonging to the Greek weird wave to alternative cultural frameworks.

CHAPTER 2

Writing against or beyond the wave:

What individual film analysis can reveal about the cultural markers of fiction film

Chapter one was all about exploring the Greek weird wave as a broader characterization, which attributes cultural understandings to a group of Greek films. By investigating how the wave, as a cultural blanket sustains particular readings of the films while conceals others, my analysis revealed a tendency on behalf of film scholars and critics to address the cultural resonances of the Greek weird wave films based on a 'national' understanding of the term which is explicated through a mirror image perspective. As a result, Greek crisis has been elevated as a dominant aspect in the films through modes of production and artistic value in a somewhat literal manner – absence of money, loss of control, critical moments, among others.

This chapter is dedicated to the investigation of the cultural relevance of fiction films through a perspective that attempts to guide the research of the cultural markers through an individual film analysis, rather than broader umbrella contexts (the wave). In what follows, I analyze two of the films which supposedly belong to the Greek weird wave from a view that attempts to dismantle the easy assumptions that relate them to the specific cultural context. In other words, what can individual film analysis indicate about the extent to which the Greek weird wave films share a common identity? As well as, what other readings of the cultural markers of these films may be introduced beyond the Greek and the crisis context?

First of all, I argue that for the interpretation of the Greek weird wave films it is perilous to rely solely or mostly on such declarations which regard crisis as moments of corruption and reconsideration, while pointless and risky at the same time to detach the films completely from their contextual surroundings. Therefore, rather than isolating the film from the broader picture (by regarding it *primarily* through the crisis perspective), or the narrower picture (by *disconnecting* it completely from the crisis perspective), I seek the relevance of the films in multiple arrays. That is to say, I connect and/or juxtapose a film of the weird wave (i) with other films of the wave, and (ii) films of common thematic content yet emanating from another cultural context. My principle intention through my approach is, on one hand, to question whether the proposed relation that ties together a film with a cultural context (e.g., mirror image, cultural document, etc.) acts as a bias in the research. On the other hand, to

explore aspects of the cultural markers of fiction film which travel beyond a national theorization of the concept.

With my thesis I attempt to challenge dominant elaborations in the study of the cultural markers of fiction film, as well as to provide theoretical and methodological stimuli toward resituating the study of the cultural relevance of the given material. Hence, I dispute, on one hand, already grounded arguments about the concept of crisis as a dominant aspect of Greek culture assimilated in the Greek weird wave films, while illuminate, on the other, connections between these films and cultural contexts apart from the Greek one. By breaking and establishing connections between a film and a cultural context, my main purpose is to reflect on the ways a research project attributes cultural relevance to fiction film. As a result, to provide a meta-discussion of my research later in this chapter is of equal importance as to conduct the research itself.

As far as my methodology is concerned, I perform film analysis emphasizing primarily the form and content of the film. Hence, I draw on film studies - the expert in analyzing the artistic nature of fiction film-, anthropology - the expert in the study of cultures- and visual studies - since the cultural markers are addressed through the visual quality of the medium. My choice to focus on the analytical categories of content and form is based on a conductive approach, one which reflects on how I was inspired by my material. As my former analysis indicated, themes and representations constitute paramount aspects of the cultural relevance of these films and I believe that they may be considered more relevant in a study from a social sciences standpoint, rather than aspects of production or aesthetics, modes through which the connection between the wave and the crisis has also been analyzed.

This is my attempt to introduce a distinct conceptual framework from the one elaborated so far by film critics and scholars to connect fiction films with specific cultural context(s) and I base my analysis on two films which are argued to be part of the weird wave; *Miss Violence* (2013), and *Strella* (2009). A main reason triggering my choice for this specific corpus is to draw on a rather extended scale of the wave's chronological spectrum, therefore the films suggested correspond to the so-argued beginning of the wave (2009) and the approximate middle or heart of it (2013). At the same time, my choice of the specific films is motivated by the fact that they have been analyzed as incarnating characteristic examples of the institution of family and its theorization as a central aspect of Greek culture reflecting on the pathogenies of crisis.

Miss Violence, Alexandros Avranas, 2013

Opening scene; At home. Family celebration. Angeliki turns eleven. The father dances with the birthday-girl and the other children, Myrto, Alkmini and Filippos, while the mother and the older daughter, Eleni, cut the cake. When the father asks everybody to pose together for a family photo, Angeliki, is already peacefully walking to the balcony and falls into the void. Against her in the background, the family calls around for her to appear in the picture, and the song plays 'Dance me to the end of life' (figure 1). This is how Alexandros Avranas introduces as to the haunting story of *Miss Violence* (2013), a story in which the sense of creepiness and disgust never finds an end. Here, I analyze the formal system of the film focusing on the characters, and I have particularly chosen the figures of the father, the mother, and the youngest child to address the central topic of patriarchy as an issue reflecting on the Greek-crisis context.

My close analysis of *Miss Violence* helps me to question the relationship proposed between a film and a cultural context (in this case mirror image). If, as argued by film scholars and reviewers, there is a common perspective towards the Greek-society-in-crisis framework which these filmmakers share, then, my primary concern here is to challenge the basis of such assumption by incorporating the often underestimated insights of the filmmaker's choices in terms of the formal system of the film. Hence, I address the artistic nature of fiction film in order to juxtapose *Miss Violence* with other Greek weird wave films by focusing primarily on the possibilities of the medium of cinema to communicate ideas, feelings, and meanings to their audience.

Gillian Rose argues that one of the powers of the medium of cinema is that it makes it possible to control the visual, spatial and temporal circumstances of a story, therefore the cinematic codes are able to create what Laura Mulvey calls 'a gaze, a world and an object'.[102] Although the cinematic codes can include a variety of several aspects of a film such as editing, narrative and non-narrative forms, mise-en-scène, cinematography, among others, here, I draw on David Bordwell and Kirstin Thompson's line of reasoning that a film is able to enact ideological meanings based on its unique formal system.[103] Bordwell and Thompson provide an illustration of what constitutes the formal system of a film which they divide into a narrative and non-narrative one.[104] My analysis relies on the narrative system, and more

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[102] Rose, 2007, pp. 101.
[103] Bordwell and Thompson, 1997, pp. 76.
[104] Ibid, pp.168.

specifically the form and content of Avranas' *Miss Violence* in order to examine whether an investigation of this film, engaging primarily with the artistic nature of the medium, would result in the assumption that it does share a common viewpoint with other filmmakers of the Greek weird wave towards Greek society and crisis.

A number of film critics and scholars explicate *Miss Violence* as a film about the exercise of patriarchy. Marios Psarras, for example, describes the film as a 'litmus test on patriarchal violence'.[105] Indeed, in my view, patriarchy is a subject matter negotiated in the film centrally, and Avranas is interested to see the development of this kind of social arrangement, especially, by incorporating the aspect of sexuality and the ways it enters a familial bonding. Bordwell and Thompson argue that the content (i.e., subject matter) is shaped by the film's formal context and the viewer's perception, and that the form requires the presupposition that all the elements that construct the 'world' of a film are 'there'.[106] In other words, films do invite multiple and endless interpretations –based on the individual's view-, though these interpretations should take into account the film's formal system, that is the filmmaker's choices to depict an issue in one rather than another way.

Based on the filmmaker's choices (formal system) to construct the dynamics of this small social arrangement (the institution of family), we may draw some conclusions about the way Avranas intends to depict patriarchy and reflect on it as a form of cohabitation in a social context. To be more specific, I address patriarchy as the content of the film and I analyze the form with which it is established by focusing on the characters who incarnate the dynamics of this notion. Since content and form are related dynamically because the one affects the way the other is going to be interpreted,[107] what I am interested to analyze here is not the way patriarchy is established and formulated; for example, by taking the film and exploring all the modes of the notion being constructed scene-by-scene. Rather, I want to explore how the choices of the filmmaker, and in this case the development of the film characters, reveal the distinctive views expressed among a group of different films which negotiate a similar topic (patriarchy). In other words, in his intention to address patriarchy, what is Avranas's main 'ideological' point?

Drawing on his central role in the film, a sense which is emphasized also in terms of the filmmaker's shooting style by the mise-en-scène settings - which in the majority of the occasions the father is put in the center of the attention (figure 2)-, my analysis begins with

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[105] M. Psarras, 'Film review: *Miss Violence* (2013) by Alexandros Avranas', *Filmicon: Journal of Greek film studies*, vol. 3, 2015, pp. 87.
[106] Bordwell and Thompson, 1997, pp. 68.
[107] Ibid, pp. 67.

the father figure of *Miss Violence*. Actor Themis Panou plays a character of a seemingly calm personality from whom everyone asks for permission about anything they do in their lives. This fact demonstrates early on in the film that not only the father is always concerned about his family but also reveals his controlling personality and obsession about being constantly aware of everybody's whereabouts. A mysterious atmosphere and a secrecy about the father's actions are generated from the beginning of the film, a characteristic which is illustrated mainly in terms of the development of his character; for example, we repeatedly watch him enter or leave open empty spaces, often dark, which resemble parking areas, underground bridges or parks. The reason for his visits in such places is one that the viewer only in the last thirty minutes of the film comes to realize. In fact, what the viewer encounters at this specific moment is a five-minute long violent rape of a female in a small dark room enacted by three individuals in a row - one of them being the father. The moments before this scene we have seen the father picking up Myrto from school with his car and parking at one of these dark areas (figure 3).

Earlier in the film, there is another scene when the father takes Eleni to someone's house; there they have some drinks together, the father dances, and Eleni, albeit smiley at the beginning, eventually throws up on the floor. After this reaction, the man who owns the house, under the father's supervision and presence, grabs Eleni from the hand and takes her to a room while the focus of the camera remains on the father who cleans up the messy floor. This scene explicates, in my view, the incarnation of establishing patriarchal dynamics which make the same person who dominates in one context become the one who is dominated in another, in the exchange of economic profit. Hence, the suspicious, controlling personality of the father which is apparent early on in the film, when the story approaches the end, it is revealed that he not only performs incest toward his children, but also exploits them to other men while he is present.

Apart from the character of the father who sustains a patriarchal dynamic within the family by becoming the provider and controller to whom everyone else should rely on for both permissions and rewards, the mother is another important figure in the film who endures how patriarchy is enacted within the context of their family. The mother does not play an important role in the film actively, since she does not carry the whole plot forward by her standpoint or actions. In fact, in the majority of the scenes where she is present, she is illustrated as watching TV, or reading a magazine. What is particularly important about this depiction, is the fact that she observes whatever happens within her own house with the same look that she watches TV. Figure 4 serves as a representative scene when the camera is

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focused on the mother's face who is seated in front of the TV, while we hear the father and Myrto talking in the background. One may assume, then, that there is an implied remark about the mother acting as an audience within her own life and toward her own family.

The mother character, who promotes patriarchy in the form of oppression, control and exploitation by embodying a grown-up who does not do anything to change what the family experiences, finds her exact opposite in the character of Alkmini. She is the youngest child of the family and daughter of Eleni - along with Filippos and Angeliki. Alkmini is in her early teens and embodies the innocent young child who now learns life. This aspect of the character is what makes her the ultimate opposite of the mother; Alkmini is a child and whatever is presented to her is something she can believe, while the mother already has an opinion about the actions happening in the family but she chooses to keep silent. In order to illustrate how patriarchal power relations involve Alkmini, I chose the following scene (figure 5), when a Greek pop song is heard on the TV and she stands in front of the screen – while all the family is present casually sitting in the living room- and dances in a manner that resembles the way the singer would perform the song; she accentuates her curves and dances passionately. The father is the only one who pays attention to her, invigorating the power dynamics of the male gaze. In another scene pedophilia is explicitly implied; when the father takes Alkmini to the same man's house Eleni did earlier. These scenes illustrate that patriarchy is understood by establishing relations which are based on the one's power to be imposed on another.

Although the combination of the topics of patriarchy and sexuality are brought together by other filmmakers of the so called 'Greek weird wave', one can notice that the way the above themes are addressed and the concerns they raise differ from one film to another. For example, if we are to name a few thematic frameworks illustrated in Avranas' film, we would include (i) the intertwining of the institution of family with the themes of patriarchy and sexuality, (ii) the father-child relationship, (iii) the upbringing and future of the next generation. Drawing, then, on the filmmakers' individual choices and by letting out any presupposition about the relation with which the film is tied to specific cultural contexts (e.g., mirror image, or cultural document, etc.), do these films share a common ground of concerns? Do they indeed reflect on national issues?

For example, in Lanthimos's *Dogtooth* we have the closest version of a similar patriarchal depiction. The father takes control of every little aspect of the children's upbringing and education. Having established an ideology about the outside world as a place full of danger, he has ensured their isolation within the house. *Miss Violence* and *Dogtooth* demonstrate a primary focus on the children's experiences and upbringing within an

oppressive and controlled context where other individuals take care and/or advantage of them. Hence, although in both films the main concern is placed on the younger generation and their way of surviving in a society where they are constantly 'used' by the older generation, the distinct formal system of these films - for example, the role of the mother or the imposing of incest (figure 6)- maintains a different view of the notion of patriarchy. Lanthimos illustrates the exercise of patriarchy in the form of emotionally-detached power dynamics resembling a social experiment, while Avranas as an emotionally and physically oppressive social system. The distinct illustrations of patriarchy and the concerns around the notions is what suggests a disassociation of these films with the specific national conditions to which they supposedly refer.

In another example, like *Miss Violence*, Tsangari's *Attenberg,* too, explores the father-daughter relationship throughout the whole film. Sexuality as a recurrent aspect within their familial bonding is put to the fore here by Marina's questions to her father; in one scene, she asks him, during his chemo-therapy, casually and unashamed, 'do you ever imagine me naked?' (figure 7). The constant interaction between the male father and the female daughter, is what manifests as Tsangari's way of addressing patriarchy in the film; the father provides all the answers to Marina's inquiries. However, unlike *Dogtooth* and *Miss Violence*, the father figure in this film is never interested in his daughter's actions - at least not conspicuously. Therefore, as the older generation is coming to a (symbolic) death, the main concern is about the next generation, though, through their own efforts to become integrated by the society and while the older generation places a self-critique on their own choices.

Finally, as we will come to see, in Panos Koutras' *Strella*, there is also an extensive negotiation of the child/father relationship, one which takes many different forms - including a sexual and incestual one. The approach of this film is mainly a focus on the here and now solution based on the personal decision and not on the societal norms, demanding that the individual be responsible for their own choices, which serves as a contradictory view of patriarchy in comparison to the ones provided by the above three films. Therefore, here, the older generation is informed by the younger and they establish together an interaction and a world in which they try to coexist creatively, unlike with the power relations imposed in *Miss Violence*, *Dogtooth,* and *Attenberg*.

Evidently, different approaches emanate in each of the above films when it comes to challenging a common issue. Indeed, these films have mostly been regarded as mirroring Greek society in crisis and formulating a wave together based on the similarities they serve; thematic choice, negotiation of common topics. However, my approach proposes an

evaluation of the artistic nature of the fiction films (here using the formal system) in order to determine whether these films do constitute similar illustrations of the institution of family as cultural marker and therefore a mirror image of Greek culture. What my analysis reveals is the fact that the Greek weird wave frame reduces the interpretations of the films as expressions of the current sociocultural conditions. Therefore, we see, for example, that the central thematic notions of the films (e.g., patriarchy, social integration) are conceptualized primarily through the narrower lens of crisis. As a result, the grouping of the weird wave films is not necessarily based on a detailed account of their thematic representations, but rather it is to be found in the current dominant discourses.

Strella, Panos Koutras, 2009

As I argued in the beginning of my thesis, I wish to inform the theorization of the cultural relevance of fiction film primarily drawing on (i) the artistic nature of the film, as well as (ii) the possibility of the medium to travel across people, time, and cultures. My analysis on Panos Koutras' *Strella* is based once again on the formal system of the film, drawing on the dynamic relation of content and form. Here, rather than addressing form and content as aspects which highlight the artistic nature of fiction film – as I did in *Miss Violence*-, I use them as indicators for possible contextual networks to rise between fictional cinematic works. That is to say, by studying *Strella's* formal system, I attempt to inform the theorization of the cultural markers of the film beyond a national point of view (Greek weird wave), and incorporate aspects of the study of culture which reveal its multidimensional character.

Maria Rovisco analyzes cosmopolitanism within the context of cinema drawing on the recurrent notions of mobility and borders and the way they have been investigated in social sciences. She argues that a cosmopolitan point of view is beneficial for the study of fiction film especially in terms of production and reception because it incorporates a transnational view, which as a result shifts the way the film is going to be comprehended, and, at the same time, the dialogue that is initiated between audience, filmmakers, and critics.[108] In addition to that, Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin admit that 'as anthropologists we take for granted a

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[108] M., Rovisco, 'Towards a cosmopolitan cinema: Understanding the connection between borders, mobility and cosmopolitanism in the fiction film', *Mobilities*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2012, pp.148-165.

'global' perspective on media'[109] suggesting that film - as one of the media platforms- can be communicated to audiences cross-culturally. In line with these approaches, I wish to open my analysis and involve cinematic works beyond the cultural, geographical, and chronological spectrum established by the Greek weird wave in order to inform the conceptualization of the cultural relevance of these films from broader cultural contexts.

Panos Koutras' 2009 film *Strella* (figure 8) is a story about the life of a transgender woman and her commitment to the ex-convict, Yorgos. The initial focus of the film is set in the negotiation of the type of relationship a straight male may create with a transgender woman who has not undergone the sex reassignment surgery. Even though the illustration of a transgender person in Greece who attempts to live a life of dignity and respect is already critical for the time being and for Greek society's acceptance of such issues, Koutras pushes the envelope by adding another spicy ingredient to the story. Strella reveals to Yorgos that she is his biological child and the negotiation of their relationship acquires additional facets.

Beginning with the storyline, as an aspect of the content of the film, I believe that *Strella* is a multi-dimensional story addressing three main issues, all of which revolve around the way a LGBTQ person attempts to establish relations with other members of the society while at the same time pinpointing issues that make such interactions problematic. Firstly, in the beginning of the film the viewer watches the struggles of a transgender woman in Athens to create a healthy affair with a straight male without feeling any discrimination about her gender identity. Indeed, although difficult in the beginning, the two finally formulate a relationship that meets the expectations of both. Later on, the main plot is placed on the father-child relationship that connects Strella and Yorgos, one that is decisive for the future of their commitment. For this subject matter, the resolution comes from Yorgos's poetic acceptance of Strella 'You made me love you with any possible way a father could love his child'. Finally, the end of the film illustrates Strella and Yorgos living together in her apartment while having a young daughter to raise - who ended up with them after a series of circumstances involving the death of a family member. As this is the closing scene of the film, Koutras contemplates the future of a controversial familial network like this one in the context of traditional societal norms.

If we are to account for *Strella* through the Greek weird wave lens, we would take the society-in-crisis framing as a reflection of Greek society's need to question its own societal norms. However, if we broaden the cultural and geographical spectrum, rather than remain

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[109] F.D. Ginsburg, and L. Abu-Lughod, and B. Larkin (eds), *Media worlds: Anthropology on new terrain*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002, pp. 2.

restricted in a national conceptualization of the cultural resonances of a film, then we could easily inform the interpretation of *Strella* from works outside the Greek weird wave. More specifically, since *Strella* is a film about the life of a transgender person, it could be connected with films which negotiate transgender identities especially when it comes to the depiction of the society's acceptance and the experiences of these characters. Both frames (economic crisis or acceptance of LGBTQ people in a society) constitute topical issues negotiated within a contemporary context; for example, Greek financial crisis has been a recurrent news media topic within Europe or the US since 2009, at the same time, a recent discussion regarding transgender rights (e.g., during the writing of this thesis, the transgender bathroom policy is creating huge controversy in the US) has put to the fore the acceptance of LGBTQ people by society and the state. The difference, though, about the two frames, is that the one places an emphasis on the direct geographical context (national understanding) of the film, whereas the other negotiates an identity whose formulation and enactment is not necessarily attached to nationally-specific grounds.

Indeed, the social life of a transgender person is a central theme in a number of different contemporary films. For example, the box office success *The Danish girl* (2015) by director Tom Hooper delivers a representative case of our time. In the film, Einar, a painter in 1920s Copenhagen married to his wife, Gerda, tries to find his own way in life by allowing his feminine side to appear and evolve. The relationship of the couple lies at the heart of the story as the wife actively and passionately supports her husband's decisions (figure 9), while at the same time we come to see society's reaction in the form of old and new friends, doctors, and casual people in the street whom Lili (Einar's feminine personality) meets. In another example, Alexandra-Therese Keining's coming-of-age drama *Girls Lost* (2015), set on the Swedish countryside, follows a company of three teen girls who try to survive the intense and constant mocking of their schoolmates. One day they drink the nectar of a magic plant and turn into boys for a couple of hours (figures 10 and 11). While they enjoy the fact that as boys they become accepted by their schoolmates - as they are asked to join them in sports, nightlife, and illegal activities-, one of them, Momo, starts to realize that she feels more of herself as Tony (her male transformation). As Tony begins to have his own life - since Momo drinks the nectar several times- the friendship of the three teens becomes problematic because of Momo losing, or finding (depending on the perspective), herself - a fact that bothers her close friends as they fail to understand her. The film is a representative example of the negotiation of the social dynamics established by the notion of gender in the interaction with others.

What the discussion of the above examples attempts to illustrate, is the fact that *Strella* shares a similar thematic approach with *The Danish girl* and *Girls Lost*, a realization which further questions the relevant contexts to which a film is supposedly connected. By associating *Strella* primarily with the Greek society and its obsession with the institution of family, we would assume that the film is a story that reforms the model of family and concerns every member of this correlation individually, drawing them as actors who promote political discourses.[110] On the other hand, if we connect *Strella* with films from other geographical, cultural or chronological contexts, we may evaluate the familial bonding of the protagonists as one of the ways to negotiate gender identity. For example, *Girls Lost* touches upon transgender identities by negotiating the relationship between friends, *The Danish girl* by following the marriage of a loving couple, and *Strella* through the relationship between a father and a child. As a result, an analysis of the storyline of the film may open different directions in the analysis of its cultural markers. That is, we may either identify *Strella* as a Greek weird wave film offering an insight on national issues, or we may construct a group of films with LGBTQ orientation which depict the struggles of these people in different sociocultural contexts and occasions.

Moving on to the form of the film, I take the spatial arrangements where the plot is located, as well as the supportive characters that promote the story, as important aspects of the understanding of a film and its relevance within broader spheres. Based on the topicality of the issues they negotiate (the acceptance of LGBTQ people by society in different forms), I focus on what negotiations are made in this context. Inspired again by Gillian Rose's definition of cinema as a visual medium in terms of what kind of experience offers to the viewer, I draw on her conceptualization of cinema as a 'world', focusing this time on the visuality it constructs. From a visual studies point of view, Rose argues that the film has the power to construct 'looking' among the fictional characters as well as between the protagonists and the spectators.[111] In other words, she points to aspects of the film which make it possible to manipulate the audience toward comprehending the film primarily through specific frames. Here, I focus on the social life of the main characters by exploring where and with whom they negotiate their own problems in order to reflect on the distinctive approach that a LGBTQ film depicts the life and the concerns of this group.

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[110] D. Papanikolaou, 'Στρέλλα: Μια ταινία για όλη την οικογένεια' / 'Strella: A film for/ about the whole family', in P. Koutras, and P. Evaggelidis (eds.), *Strella*, Athens, Polychromos Planitis, 2010, pp. 24.
[111] Rose, 2007, pp.101.

An examination of the supportive characters of the film would reveal how they promote the storyline by incarnating the social eye and reaction towards LGBTQ people and issues. Hence, we come to see what kind of representations construct the 'looking' among the protagonists. In other words, what is the social status of LGBTQ people within these fictional 'worlds'? At the same time, apart from analyzing the supporting characters focusing on the degree of their involvement in the lives of the protagonists, we may also pay attention to the social parties they incarnate. That is, to whom are the LGBTQ people of the film exposed? Therefore, what is the looking that the filmmakers construct for the viewers?

Beginning with *Strella*, the friends and the outsiders who appear in the sphere of the protagonists' life are mainly LGBTQ or LGBTQ-friendly. In *Girls Lost*, too, the close friends who embody the outsiders to whom Momo performs and negotiates her current gender state have something in common with the struggles she goes through, since they experience the same transition as she does. Finally, in *The Danish girl*, the loving wife and a childhood friend are those who construct the closest social surroundings for Lili. Their decision to support her are mostly illustrated as being motivated by an endless love they feel for her. On the other hand, Lili is also exposed to non-friendly social contexts; in one scene she is attacked by two passersby on the street (figure 12). Other than the latter incident, we may observe a common tactic in all three films which tends to depict the life and struggles of transgender persons through caring relationships, and through people who may be the closest to understanding them. In other words, the social surroundings of the transgender people in the three films consists of those who have either experienced similar conditions or those who have been related with these people through bonds (family member, childhood friend). As a result, the transgender identities are negotiated within, what could be considered as, 'secure spheres' in which the pre-established loving and caring feelings almost manipulate the people as to how should feel and act towards the others.

At the same time, the spatial surroundings, also become indicators of the dynamics between the social context and the individual's personal space. *Strella* is set in the capital city of Greece and plays with the domestic and public sphere as the characters appear in both areas; we see them walking at the streets at night (figure 13) or crossing by the crowded city center in the morning, but we also follow them within Strella's apartment (figure 14), a hotel room, and the drag show night club where Strella performs. The scenes in public areas constitute an image of the city of Athens and its current pace and atmosphere, while at the same time emphasizing the social context that surrounds the plot. Although the public aspect sets the social grounds on which the film is developed, the key events of the plot mainly take

place within secure, closed spaces; Strella revealing her gender identity to Yorgos in a hotel room (verbally), the former exposing her naked body to the latter in her apartment (figure 15), Yorgos and Strella discussing for the first time about the father-child relationship that connects them in Strella's apartment.

Similarly, *The Danish girl* and *Girls Lost* although their stories are set in different contexts (*The Danish girl* involves three European countries, whereas *Girls Lost* takes place in the Swedish countryside), in all of these films, decisions, intimate negotiations, and gender identity transformations happen within domestic spaces (figure 16) while tested or enacted in public areas (figure 17). The choice of the filmmakers to construct this kind of dynamic between the closed and public spaces is part of what establishes, in my view, their approach toward the themes they negotiate. In other words, it is part of the 'looking' they try to establish within their films. The looking, in this case, promotes sustaining a balance between the individuality of the person and their right to decide freely and securely (within their own personal sphere) about how they want to be, on one hand, and the way their social surroundings accept or react towards them, on the other; a realization all the more apparent in the way the supportive characters, although take part in the concerns of the protagonists, they always leave the decision to lie on the one who is responsible.

Concluding this section, my analysis of Koutras' *Strella* attempted to construct a corpus of fiction films which feed the illustration of LGBTQ gender identities in the medium of cinema through common characteristics as well as distinct approaches proposed by each film. My discussion in this section did not attempt to examine as to whether and to which degree these films belong to the so-called *Queer cinema*, as this inquiry does not constitute part of what I am concerned in my study. Rather, I only draw on LGBTQ characters of the three films as a way to shift the point of attention from a national-based towards a gender-based understanding of the cultural markers of Panos Koutras's 2009 film *Strella*. In other words, I argued that topical issues often serve as a vehicle in order to interpret the films.

However, beyond the dead-end question of where the topical issues are to be found (in the film or in the interpretations of it), my study aspires to draw our attention to the fact that it is a matter of choice as to how one comes to approach a film. That is, I choose to draw on one topical issue (negotiation of gender identities in the contemporary social context) rather than another (Greek economic crisis is a departure point for a further examination of the norms in the society) and this choice played an important role to consider what is relevant or not in the interpretations I provide. This final remark attempts to contribute toward realizing that the cultural markers one reads in a fiction film are conditionally assumed depending on from

whom, when, and from what standpoint the material is interpreted. At the same time, by no means do these interpretations constitute exhaustive or holistic accounts of the cultural relevance of a fiction film.

A Meta-Discussion regarding the study of the cultural markers of fiction film

What I have tried to illuminate by exposing three different disciplines' encounters with the study of the cultural markers of fiction film is the potential, but also the frivolity that often characterizes the state of one discipline getting into another's turf. This is not to say that each discipline should stick to its own field; on the contrary, what I suggest here is that the study of complex matters, such as the clarification of the cultural basis of cinematic products, can only benefit from the productive collaboration of theoretical, analytical and methodological tools developed from a number of different disciplines. However, I stand behind the view that research should move away from a state that could be described as 'unintentionally interdisciplinary', characterized by a selective and unjustified borrowing of concepts and methods, and should instead learn about, acknowledge, and benefit from the attention that each discipline has paid to the discussion of central concepts, as is culture for anthropology, film for film studies, and visuality for visual studies.

To take this one step further, it is important to go deeper into what each of these disciplines discussed in this study may contribute to the central topic of this thesis, that is, the cultural markers of fiction film. As it has already been stressed, anthropology is acknowledged in this thesis as the discipline principally concerned with the study of culture. What is even more relevant for this study though, is to reiterate anthropology's insistence in admitting a certain level of complexity when it comes to analyzing culture. The concept of positionality as a means to realize 'where one stands in relation to ''the other'' […], a position that can shift',[112] emerges as a frame through which this complexity is sustained or solved (depending on one's point of view), suggesting that for the analysis of culture, one has to come to terms with the fact that 'culture is more than a monolithic entity to which someone

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[112] S. Merriam, J. Johnson-Bailey, M. Lee, Y. Kee, G. Ntseane & M. Muhamad, 'Power and positionality: negotiating insider/outsider status within and across cultures', International Journal of Lifelong Education, vol. 20, no. 5, 2001, pp.411.

belongs'.[113] Along the same lines, the cultural meanings supposedly inscribed in fiction films should, also, be treated as complex rather than self-evidentiary ones.

In a similar way, the term subjectivity sheds light into the modes of perception through which people come in contact with the visually constructed world. This assertion is corroborated when Nicholas Mirzoeff admits that visuality nowadays is characterized as a dialectical notion, therefore, visual studies constitute a 'comparative mode of critical practice'.[114] Mirzoeff introduces the 'contemporary' as a mode of comparison, among others, which he describes as '[…] the people with whom we are contemporary and the politics of that relation'.[115] He, then, suggests that the interpretation of visual culture is always a matter of comparison in a sense that its constitutive elements construct networks; points connected in space and time and circulate ideas, and information, among others. Therefore, the analysis of fiction film as a visual object must not turn a blind eye to the subjective processes of perception and interpretation, neither to the networks surrounding one's subjectivity.

Last but not least, when it comes to the study of film, it could be considered a great omission to neglect the value of specific analytical tools and the use of specific models as these have been developed through film studies. For example, in my research I have drawn on a film analysis model introduced by Bordwell and Thompson.[116] This choice can be considered one out of many, in a sense that, regardless of whether one draws on one theoretical school rather than another (e.g., auteur theory or formalist school), or one analytical model instead of others (e.g., aesthetic analysis or reception studies), the major contribution of the models provided by film studies is that they make a systematic study of the material possible. In other words, the discipline provides the means through which the study of fiction film is based on specific guidelines and directions, which allows for one to tame the complexity and multiplicity of an object that involves numerous and diverse interpretations.

The above lead us to one of the key contributions that this study aspires to make, which at this point requires and deserves a more complete elaboration: the argument that within an intentional and conscious interdisciplinary study of fiction film, culture should be treated as *context* rather than as concept. What I mean by that is that, instead of accepting, adopting and reproducing an automatic and unproblematic relationship between fiction film and a certain 'culture', scholars should remain open to the multiplicity of understandings of what this 'culture' might refer to. Thus, instead of addressing culture as an essentialized and

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[113] Ibid.
[114] N. Mirzoeff, *An introduction to Visual Culture*, London and New York, Routledge, 1999, pp. 9.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Bordwell and Thompson, 1997.

singular concept, I suggest that we should begin to see and use the term in a contextualized manner, one that could allow, or even, necessitate definitions grounded on the specific study, and more specifically to questions about when and how this 'culture' is defined, as well as by whom.

I can elaborate further on how this different approach on culture as context rather than concept can be realized in a study by drawing on my own analysis. Throughout the first chapter I argued that culture is closely associated with a national connotation, one that dominates other interpretations and accompanies the readings of Greek fiction films. In other words, economic crisis, as a condition specified and experienced time-, space- and culture-wise, serves as, what I call, a centripetal force, a lens to conceptualize the films as products of their direct (temporal, geographic, and cultural) surroundings. On the other hand, throughout the second chapter I utilized a centrifugal perspective by employing broader notions to interpret the cultural meanings of the films, other than the Greek one. Drawing on this approach, I proposed the connections of the films with broader spheres, apart from a national one, an argument that reinforces the acknowledgement that any interpretation is one among many, and that there is not such thing as 'more accurate' readings of the film than others.

Although both analyses make use of topical issues in order to interpret the meanings of the film (Greek crisis, LGBTQ identities), what distinguishes the two approaches is this: in the first case, the cultural references of the films with regards to trendy issues are handled beyond the point of doubt, therefore the analysis itself becomes a windfall of its topicality. On the contrary, the latter approach embraces the fact that the analysis is informed by specific trends, rather than others, therefore the topicality is part of the overall argumentation, and especially one that elevates the arguments. To put it simply, the first approach disregards the complexity and plurality of the interpretations of the films as objects and the culture as notion, whereas the other is formulated on the exact grounds that regard fiction film as a *culturally complex* object.

The possibility to have the cultural traits of fiction film open for any interpretation, inevitably shifts the weight to attribute possibilities and limitations in the respective study on the shoulders of the researcher rather than the film itself. In other words, the films communicate 'universal images' in a sense that they can be seen and understood by diverse audiences, drawing on, for example, one's personal connection to what is depicted (it happened to me) or broader connections (it can happen in general). Therefore, when we study fiction films and analyze them from a scholarly point of view the distinct approaches (personal, cultural, or else) entering our analyses should constitute a topic to reflect upon.

Having said that, I find it particularly important to reflect on the methodology that I followed in this project, one that has been, indeed, fed by my own intimacy with the specific case study. To begin with, my familiarity in the context of this research - as I was born and raised in Greece- is one that allows me to follow trends and see how they evolve in Greek society or how they are discussed among Greek people and media. The fact that the Greek weird wave appeared a few years ago, when Greece started to enter a deep declining period due to the economic crisis, is what makes this case study a contemporary one. At the same time, I as a subject have a first-hand experience of how society has been transformed in the course of the last years due to the financial conditions. These factors make it possible for me to trace a number of different aspects regarding the evolution of the Greek weird wave and to challenge those which I have experienced differently from what the discourse of the wave proposes. My familiarity with the proposed material, then, in terms of the aspect of time and culture is what enabled me to locate and negotiate theoretical and conceptual wrong-doings and biases on behalf of scholars and film critics when it comes to conceptualizing films through national-based cultural terms.

In addition to that, the ease to navigate within familiar research contexts is what makes me able to trace the way these films incorporate or contrast the current state of Greek mentality and society. As a result, this allows me to decide what I shall incorporate in my study based on an examination of what I consider relevant or not. This condition inspired me to seek for possible propositions of methodological tools in order to remedy the problem of predominant elaborations regarding the cultural relevance of the Greek weird wave. In this respect, I proposed an individual film analysis, and a comparison with other films of the cinematic movement, as well as with films of similar thematics beyond the national context of the wave. Last but not least, reflexivity has been a significant recurring aspect in my study, not only in the way I treated the review of the wave and the film analyses, but also in the way I handled and pursuit the overall study. These propositions regarding my standpoint as a researcher in the study also serve as a clear elaboration on the idea that, similarly to the subject of the research (the cultural markers of fiction film), the research itself constitutes a contextual product.

In other words, the methodological and analytical tools employed in a study consist of what is available to the researchers' eyes. An example of this remark could be found within the context of a study in which the researcher attempts to find the cultural resonances of a visual material without being culturally familiar with the specific context the material is

supposedly referring to.[117] In this case, rather than constructing a methodological approach informed by the material, methodology becomes the means to enter the field and organize the analysis of the material. That is to say, in the former case the relationship between the material and methodology is shaped through interaction, whereas in the latter this relationship is primarily understood through the prism of application. Although different in their conceptual framework, both methodologies require a constant reflection and reconsideration in the course of any study.

Finally, going back to the concept of unintentionally interdisciplinary studies, throughout the present thesis an effort was made to give prominence to the need for a certain degree of sensitivity when different disciplines are called to contribute to the realization of a study. As was already mentioned, each discipline is shaped by a number of factors which influence the way it is developed, as well as the concepts and methods which define it. The lack of such an understanding may actually lead to the complete opposite effect, that is the development of some kind of tension between disciplines with one identifying the approach of the other as insufficient; such is the case of Lila Abu-Lughod's criticism from an anthropological point of view on the way that media studies have approached the study of television.[118] I believe such commentary not only weakens but also hinders interdisciplinary work, since it reinstitutes certain boundaries between different fields and areas of research. What I would like to promote with this thesis is the value and potential of conscious interdisciplinarity where each discipline is assessed by taking into consideration its inner logic and history, and evoked not only on the basis of what it can give, but also what it can gain from a given study.

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[117] This is a difficulty I encountered when, within the context of the course "Gender and sexuality in Swedish society: From Swedish Sin to Queer" delivered at the School of Global Studies (University of Gothenburg) I was called to talk to students about Swedish films from 1950s until 1990s regarding gender representation.

[118] L. Abu Lughod, 'The interpretation of culture(s) after Television', *Representations*, no.59, 1997, pp. 109-134.

CONCLUSION

Reaching the conclusion of this study, I would like to synthesize my analysis by bringing to the fore the main question of the thesis in order to offer possible ways for it to be answered. The central topic which inspired my research has been the investigation of aspects of the economic crisis which have overtaken the analysis and framing of the films of the Greek weird wave. My analysis in chapter one revealed that the conceptualization of the cultural markers of the Greek weird wave films is primarily informed by a national understanding. Drawing on the works of film scholars and critics, I found that crisis is conceptualized in the Greek weird wave films as an economic aspect in the production process, and as political and social aspect through the aesthetics, content, thematic representations (e.g., by reflecting on patriarchy, oppression, the institution of family, the ancestors).

Having argued that this conceptualization proposes dominant interpretations which may preoccupy the film's distinct individuality, I turned to the artistic nature of the medium of cinema in order to examine whether the weird wave films share a common 'ideology' - in Bordwell and Thompson's terminology. My analysis of Avranas's 2013 *Miss Violence* did not invigorate strong connections between the film and the agenda of the Greek weird wave, in the sense that the films reflect on socioeconomic and political conditions in Greece. Therefore, I sought for possible cultural traits of these films from a view that incorporates a fresher, more contemporary, understanding of the concept of culture. The interpretation of Koutras' 2009 *Strella* enabled me to argue that the film can be connected with cinematic works beyond the Greek weird wave. Hence, rather than assuming culture as a nation-based entity bearing a fixed definition, I suggest that the researcher realizes the topicality of the issues they centralize in their analysis.

Apart from the delimited research question which I aspired to investigate in my thesis, I also stated that I wish to offer a theoretically and methodologically oriented study which would contribute to the general inquiry of how one can approach and interpret the cultural markers of fiction film. This discussion involved i) the identification of problematic aspects in the theorization of the concept of culture, as well as, ii) the introduction of theoretical and methodological remarks which would contribute to open new directions in the study of fiction film. In this respect, I criticized the conceptualization of culture primarily through a national point of view and proposed its theorization through more contemporary approaches to the concept drawing on positionality and contemporaneity. I also regarded as problematic the

presumption of a relationship between a fiction film and (a) cultural context(s) – for example, mirror image, cultural document- and proposed that they constitute biases in research, drawing on the artistic character of the film and exploring aspects of the film which construct a 'looking'.

As a result of the above, I attempted to introduce a new theoretical and methodological framework for the study of the cultural markers of fiction films. Drawing on my own involvement in this study, I reflected on the familiarity of the researcher in terms of cultural and temporal aspects and suggested ways that these conditions enter and affect the directions of a research project in terms of methodology. In addition to that, I proposed the broader contexts which the studied film is supposedly part of (e.g., cinematic movement) to be incorporated in the data of the research critically as it may attribute dominant interpretative qualities to the film.

Finally, by gathering all the above aspects, I drew on visual studies, anthropology, and film studies theories, from a conscious and sensitive standpoint regarding the interdisciplinary character of my research. By emphasizing the multidimensional character of culture, and the fact that films invite multiple interpretations, I proposed that the cultural markers of fiction film are endless and their theorization should reflect on this idea. By regarding, then, the term 'concept' as echoing inclusive or determinative qualities, I proposed that the cultural markers of fiction film work contextually, therefore culture should be regarded as context rather than concept.

The end of this thesis does not necessarily signal a closure in terms of all the questions, debates and aspects that reached the surface throughout these pages. On the contrary, an idea permeating the whole thesis has been the possibilities that open up by complicating the study of fiction film and by adopting a conscious interdisciplinary approach. From the many directions one could see this research taking, I am particularly drawn by three; each problematizing and enriching the overall idea developed here and illustrating its potential for further and deeper investigation. The first direction concerns the importance of making the connection between the process of interpretation and the individual who reads the film in a certain way. In this thesis, I suggested that it is important that we continuously strive to clarify the interpretative processes taking place during the analysis of a fiction film; the next step in my argument about the importance of (self) reflexivity could be a discussion about how much of an interpretation is personal or subjective. Another path for the expansion of this research could concern a further investigation of theories of cinematic movements and their role in organizing and grouping films together; such an approach could give to this

project an additional level of consideration about how film studies has dealt with movements and waves as cultural categories. Finally, I believe my research could be further inspired from and contribute to film festival studies, especially in terms of how festivals function as agents for the production and dissemination of discursive framings of fiction films; in this view, my project would focus on the ways and the processes through which film festivals present films as representatives of certain sociocultural realities.

APPENDICES

Figure 1. Still from the film Miss Violence (Avranas, 2013): Angeliki stands at the edge of the balcony while the rest of the family is ready to pose for a family photo.

Figure 2. Still from the film Miss Violence (Avranas, 2013): The father is sited in the center of the lunch table and the camera places him at the center of the screen too.

Figure 3. Still from the film Miss Violence (Avranas, 2013): Father and Myrto in the car. They park at the end of this road.

Figure 4. Still from the film Miss Violence (Avranas, 2013): (Left) Mother's look while watching TV. (Right) Mother's look while pays attention to what is happening at the house.

Figure 5. Still from the film Miss Violence (Avranas, 2013): Alkmini dancing in front of the TV and father watches her.

Figure 6. Still from the film Dogtooth (Lanthimos, 2009): The intertwining of patriarchy and sexuality in the family house is introduced by the father when he makes one of his daughters have sex with her brother in order to satisfy the latter's instincts However, the scenes are not physically violent, nor do they incorporate the phantasies of a grown- up, as Miss Violence does.

Figure 7. Still from the film Attenberg (Tsangari, 2010): One of the moments when Marina keeps company to her father in chemotherapy while continuously initiates discussions with him.

Figure 8. Still from the film Strella (Koutras, 2009): Strella, the protagonist of Koutra's film., sitting out of her house.

Figure 9. Still from the film The Danish girl (Hooper, 2015): An initial shot of the film showing Einar as a model in dress for his wife painting. Einar reacted uncomfortable in the latter's teasing about his appearance.

Figure 10. Still from the film Girls Lost (Keining, 2015): A shot of the three teen girls enjoying their company.

Figure 11. Still from the film Girls Lost (Keining, 2015): The respective shot (see figure 10a) in which the girls turn into boys after having drunk the nectar of the magic plant.

Figure 12. Stills from the film The Danish girl (Hooper, 2015): Lili is followed by two passersby who mock, hit and left her helpless.
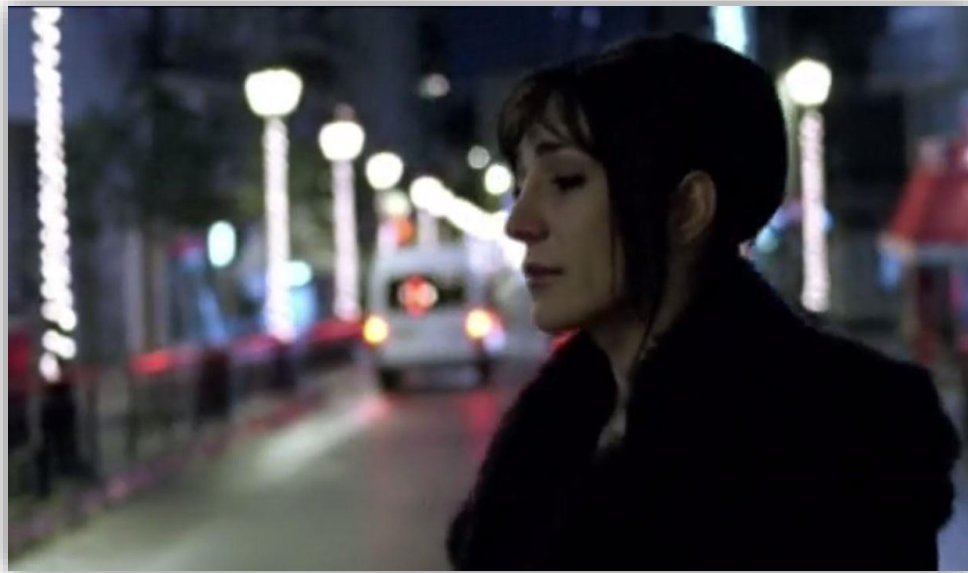
Figure 13. Still from the film Strella (Koutras, 2009): Strella walking by the crowded city center of Athens.

Figure 14. Still from the film Strella (Koutras, 2009): A characteristic staircase in Strella's apartment. This shot often accompanies the characters who enter or leave the place.

Figure 15. Still from the film Strella (Koutras, 2009): Strella reveals her naked body to Yorgos and the latter approaches her.

Figure 16. Still from the film Girls Lost (Keining, 2015): The scene when the three girlfriends stand in front of the mirror after having drinking the plant juice and watch themselves becoming boys within seconds.

Figure 17. Still from the film The Danish girl (Hooper, 2015): Lili, the female persona of Einar, is walking outside dressed in women's clothes.

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