

Greek Economic Crisis In Cinema

In the wake of the GFC, world-wide media attention has been brought to the Greece because of its economic state and its many resulting moments have been considered historic. Commonly referred to as 'the crisis'; news agencies around the world have been reporting daily on the adoption of increasingly harsh austerity measures, political crisis, on the causes and roots of the crisis, on the violent demonstrations and civil unrest, and on the social consequences (Triantafyllidou 2013).

Of course for Greece, this means major funding deficits to the cinema industry and a decline in support from key stakeholders as well as audiences as they face financial instability (Papadimitriou 2014). It has not however, meant the total demise of these industries. In fact, Greek director Babis Makridis, while at MIFF remarked that before the debt crisis, Greek films had serious problems being accepted into international film festivals. But as soon as the so-called debt crisis became front page news and images of mass demonstrations and troubled people became the dominant images of the country, Greek films are now readily accepted and acclaimed at film festivals around the world (Kakafidas 2012).

Aside from the economic and political documentaries reflecting this theme of crisis, this period in Greek Cinema has seen the release of a number of film-festival-premiering, surrealist films which has been dubbed by critics as Greece's 'weird wave'.

The Crisis in Documentary:

1) **The Lost Signal Of Democracy (2014)**

<http://edutv.informit.com.au/watch-screen.php?videoID=787860>

Yorgos Avgeropoulos documentary explores the events leading up to the 2013 government shut down of the Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation (ERT), Greece's public broadcaster and the discourse it provoked surrounding democracy. It includes archival footage, graphics, recent footage of protests, events and civilians and various interview footage of politicians (from different ends of the political spectrum), insiders, analysts, businesspeople and citizens giving a very well rounded perspective. (Avgeropoulos 2014).

Though many of these interviews are spoken in Greek, the narrative voice in British English poses an almost politically neutral undertone throughout the documentary. Juxtaposition between interviewees of political orientations and their points of view effectively presents the various conflicting arguments of the entire situation. For example, footage of the physical shut down of the broadcaster by RIOT police is preceded by the deputy minister (who states he speaks on behalf of his party and the government) saying that nobody wishes to send riot police out but they were left with no other choice.

The opening sequence displays hand-held footage of the day the government announced the shut down. This highlights the broadcaster's employees state of disarray as they silence and yell at each other while watching the televised government broadcast which determines their fate. The government spokesperson is seen attributing the decision to the ideas that ERT has been 'a waste of money' and that 'bold and radical cuts are needed for change and this act is a result of government proving its political determination' (Lost Signal of Democracy 2014). ERT's news anchor's subsequent broadcast relays this information to their audience and says that tuning in to ERT channels will lead to seeing a 'black screen'.

This becomes an ongoing motif throughout the film and is displayed via a visual graphic of the transmission signals over a map of Greece being cut off; each part of Greece becoming blackened. This enhances the idea of national importance to the issue and the scope of lives affected as it gives a visual representation of where the 2600 laid off employees were located.

Footage of the prime minister himself, unveils a controversial argument about political motives. At 31 minutes running time, he says that a belief of ERT broadcasting only leftist content was the 'heart of the matter' in deciding to shut it down. This is an important moment as it is evidence of the government condemning ERT for not supporting austerity and that the reasoning behind shutdown was political rather than economic. This perspective reigns as the most dominant in the documentary as ex ERT employees and citizens are seen protesting against government-controlled media and making accusations that this is an attempt to 'dumb down' the people of Greece. It is also enhanced by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) whose spokespeople in footage of a conference, describe the event as anti-democratic and unprofessional. Their reasoning is that this government decision dismisses contractual obligations with the EBU and that within this union provisions to avoid a lost signal exist even if a broadcaster were bankrupt (Lost Signal of Democracy 2014).

This general narrative consensus of Greece being a state whose economic consequences have led to political intervention of the media progresses to the end of the documentary. It concludes with footage shown of the physical, forced shut-down of ERT's radio production team who continued to broadcast voluntarily by Riot police. The final broadcast plays over the footage; the presenter is detailing the listeners on the situation, farewells them and announces 'the voice of ERT is being silenced'.

The Crisis in Documentary:

2) Love In The Time Of The Crisis (2014)

This crowdfunded, small budget feature illustrates a different thematic concern of Greece's socioeconomic situation; love and cultural affects of the crisis. It's focus is on relationships and the institution of the family. Commentary throughout it comprises of interview material from sex workers, a counselling psychologist, journalists, various couples as well as academics.

Narrative intervals are separated by animations depicting definitions of different Greek terms for love. There is also a large emphasis on the street art that's come out of the crisis shown in montages. This romantic aesthetic is also evident through the documentary's

consistent use of music; popular songs such as a cover of KISS hit 'I Was Made For Loving You' feature on the soundtrack and also diegetic music from protesters and musical displays such as a performance and interview from Athenian band called Agape Re Maggiore (Love, you Major) who had performed at Athens' Syntagma Square in solidarity with the people who made up the Greek Indignant Movement.

A strong emphasis on the Indignant Movement which is outlined by text and voice over as a 2011 event that 500 000 people participated in. In journalist Anastasia Glamali's words; the movement is described as a result of the belief that the Greek ethos could defeat these hard times and was a display of people's hope for change. These calls for hope from the people in the film along with the romanticism in the audiovisual aesthetics, representing Glamali's Greek ethos or 'authenticity' are representative of a populist culture which permeates Greece's society and economy. This culture is an idea originally described by Nikos Mouzelis (1995) and supported by the socialist party (PASOK) especially in its ascendance to power since the 1980s. It is a form of rhetoric used as a basis for legitimizing the alternative path of Greece to modernity by promoting a romantic search for a 'third road to development' (anti-Western but also anti-Communist) and an anti-Western rhetoric through a glorification of the 'Greek people' (Triandafyllidou 2013 p.4) This glorification as analysed by Constantine Tsoukalas (1993; 1995) through references to an adaptable 'authenticity' specific to 'the Greek people' is considered a supreme cultural norm that was offered to the Greeks by history. (Triandafyllidou 2013 p.5)

This populist culture in some ways threatens the conservative and more traditionalistic perspectives, in particular the importance of the Greek Orthodox Church and its national role. This threat is explicitly portrayed in the film emphasis, through interviews with young adults and couples on how the institution of marriage and family is changing. This is supported by doctors and wedding planners who comment on a decline in births and weddings and a rise in abortions.

2200 words

The Crisis & Fictional Drama: The Greek Weird Wave

3) Dogtooth (2009)

<http://tv.pubfilmhd.com/2015/01/dogtooth-2009-full-hd.html>

Yorgos Lanthimos' *Dogtooth* is described as a surreal, black comedy in which a family of 2 parents and 3 adult children live in isolation to the outside world. The parents exercise complete control over the lives of their children who although are adult, behave almost infantile as they are taught the wrong definitions to words and have a very warped view of realism and the outside world.

This feature focuses on the institution of family and power relations. Both parents maintain control over their children's behaviour with indirect control over information and resort to violent means when their behaviour reaches beyond the limits they set. These acts could easily be likened to those of Neo-Nazi association Golden Dawn who for an extensive period in Greece repeated older patterns of direct repression and violence as a means of enforcing boundaries around political thought and action. Despite their committing of criminal and fascist acts they managed to gain recognition and seats in parliament in Greece. The parental authority and means of control in *Dogtooth* could also be seen as representations of the nation, and especially of authority, of the Greek State and ruling class who increasingly use police intervention against public backlash and protests (Kafakikas 2012).

The protection-based (but heavily warped) views of the parental characters towards their children may be a form of recognition against a good intentioned but overstated institutions; the role of traditionalist cultures such as the Greek Orthodox Church in society. The church claims itself the guardian of Greek national identity, often adopting an introverted protective nationalistic discourse, and demanding preferential treatment on the part of the state in recognition of, and in return for, its contribution to the nation (Mouzelis 2002 as cited in Triantafillidou 2013). Today however, it seems to hinder contemporary Greece from progressing (this topic is further explored in the next screen text Attenberg). The characters of the 'children' in this film and their strange behaviours as a result of their parent's peculiar reasoning is established as early as the first 3 minutes into *Dogtooth's*

running time. This speculation of the church's role is also heavily implied in *Love In The Time of The Crisis* (2014) when a legal brothel owner states that she's had to reject married women looking to work for her to provide for their families due to legal reasons wherein religious consideration prohibits married women from working in prostitution. She further comments that this means these family women's lives are endangered as they often resort to prostituting illegally (*Love In The Time Of The Crisis* 2014).

The Crisis & Fictional Drama: The Greek Weird Wave

4) Attenberg (2010)

Animals clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUGAUIQ1EeU>

Attenberg is directed by Athina Tsangaris, the producer of *Dogtooth* and is similar in the way that family is its main focus. It honours the wildlife documentaries of Sir. David Attenborough in more ways than its mispronunciation of his name as its title. Inspired by the BBC series studying the behaviour of animals the film tries to do something similar, only with people.

Tsangaros' minimalistic style i.e minimal sound effects or music, neutral colour palette, even minimal amount of characters and locations, minimal camera movement and heavy use of stills; takes on the anthropological qualities of Attenborough's documentaries in its almost observational way of portraying the characters. In particular, Marina the 23 year old protagonist, who is seen coming to terms with sexuality through experimenting with her best friend and an unnamed engineer. There is no development or conclusion to this process however and the character doesn't seem to be fulfilling any personal desires or motives other than conforming to a societal norm. In the opening sequence she expresses that she doesn't particularly enjoy kissing and even tells her best friend in the process that having someone's tongue in her mouth makes her feel like vomiting. Similar when she's with the engineer, the film doesn't shy away from nudity but doesn't eroticise it (almost like the mating rituals in wildlife); apart from expressing she is comfortable around them, there is no lust, confusion or anything remotely familiar to the traditional dating facade one would typically expect from a young protagonist.

There are no profound developments in her 'coming to terms' process of her father's death, Marina is never seen crying, her struggle is only in understanding the rituals

surrounding death when her father discusses his wish to have his body cremated overseas. The explanation as to why, is given immediately. The father, an atheist retired architect, explains how cremation is not illegal in Greece but is frowned upon by the church and therefore a large part of society. This sparks a comment about Greece in comparison to the rest of Europe skipping modernity.

Marina's father coming to terms with his mortality, represents a rather more contemporary aspect of Greek political life; the fall from grace of the generation who resisted and emerged from the Junta (military rule) in the early 1970s and now face austerity. They oversaw social reform and the normalisation of aspects of the political left in Greek life wherein two major parties PASOK and New Democracy were formed (Scott 2012).

The lack of character development and narrative progression in the execution of this film, lead to the characters being viewed simply going through life, death, sex as processes similar to animals in wildlife documentaries. The elaborate dances and animal impersonations throughout the film are the only scenes that aren't complete linear continuations of the characters lives. Against the backdrop of Greece's economic crisis and austerity this style could be reflective of the national mood. It depicts a reality in which religious and secular structures of meaning (such as romance) have collapsed but in which life must nonetheless go on.

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