



GREEK WEIRD WAVE

A CINEMA OF BIOPOLITICS

DIMITRIS PAPANIKOLAOU



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Preface and Acknowledgements

A few pages later, you will find a scene that, I have come to realise, could be used as a key to understand this book as a whole. In 2016, Yorgos Zois, a young Greek director, gave an interview to ARTE, the French/German art TV channel in 2016: ‘The new Wave of Greek Cinema produces films that are as absurd as the financial crisis that has hit the country’, begins the journalist. ‘Welcome to Athens, the capital of Greece, the supposed weakest link of Europe’. As Zois’s work came to international attention for its relationship to the socio-political situation that in recent years has come to be known as the ‘Greek Crisis’ all over the world, he is asked to speak about a controversial scene that he has directed, in which a young man is seen throwing a Molotov cocktail in an almost choreographed manner. While they were shooting, so Zois says, ‘there was a real demonstration happening in the background’,

- You used a real Molotov cocktail ?
[He stops for a moment and looks at the camera, then laughs. He seems to have found the question awkward – which it is.]
- No, of course it was fake . . . When we are shooting something, it is a fake Molotov cocktail [that we use] . . .

So much in this scene – including the absurdity of the question ‘you used a real Molotov cocktail?’ – speaks to the questions that serve as a starting point for this book. What did an international and national audience expect from Greek Cinema during this recent turbulent period? How did it deliver? How can you make films with such expectations, but also *in* that socio-political context? How *real* should you be? How *realist*? And also, how strange, how weird is it to be thrown into a predefined role and then to try, like the Greek director in this interview, to both stay on script, but also to showcase the levels of absurdity that that script has already reached?

The ‘Greek Weird Wave’, celebrated internationally after 2010, has been a national cinema movement that is not so much defined by the answers it might give to these questions, but by the questions themselves. From the outset, it was seen as the cinematic response to the Greek Crisis, sometimes in spite of the films themselves. It offered international circulation and production

options to many Greek fiction films, although it has not altered the financial and institutional precarity of Greek Cinema as a whole. It became an easy reference point internationally; yet, it also remained contested. All its films were seen and treated as a closely related group, judging by their national and international reception, but what unites them remains difficult to pin-point.

One thing that surely brings these films together, so this book argues, is a culture of late capitalism, biopolitics and crisis neoliberalism in which they participate and which they often thematise. The analytical insights into biopolitics, as reformulated by Michel Foucault, become crucial for the argument in this book, as they focus on the management of human life from the large scale of a population – its categorisation, health, livability and/or proscription – to the minutiae of a human body, its functions and the ways in which it interiorises power and knowledge. Accordingly, a framework of *biopolitical realism* not only shows how the films of the Greek Weird Wave relate to each other, but it also allows viewers – and, of course, critical interventions, this book included – to appreciate and work with their political potential. The Greek Weird Wave today is not the only cinema of biopolitics, but it is certainly a paradigmatic one, and this is what the following sections and chapters will set out to show.

The final draft of this book was being reread while the whole world entered the biopolitically most acute period in recent history, with the global COVID-19 emergency, the lockdowns and the world health and economic challenges that ensued. Suddenly everyone started talking about biopolitics. To the researcher in Modern Greek Studies, this might feel like *déjà vu* – there was a time after 2010 when, in a similar way, you could find the word biopolitics everywhere in Greece.

Of course, the repercussions of the 2020 health crisis cannot be underestimated, and it will certainly take time for them to be fully apprehended. Until the very moment of completing this manuscript, I am not even sure whether this prolonged emergency will mark the end of what I describe here as biopolitical realism, only to introduce instead something much more radical and cruel, or whether it will lead to its mutation, further expansion and different critical openings.

This book has been a very long time in the making. I trace its first ideas back to a conversation I had with Dimitris Eleftheriotis in 2010 and then to a paper I gave at the University of Glasgow on his invitation. To Dimitris and his encouragement, therefore, I owe this book the most, as well as an apology that it was not finished earlier. The same gratitude and apology I extend to Gillian Leslie and the editorial team at Edinburgh University Press, for their amazing support at all stages and their trust.

As the reader will realise, this book has evolved alongside its subject-

matter and while I was engaged in a number of different projects directly or indirectly related to the Greek Crisis – some of them academic, others political and activist. In many ways, *Greek Weird Wave* is as much about films as it is about that context, as well as the immense energy, the sense of potential, frustration and loss that the last decade has brought to many of us.

In the book's long period of development, I was fortunate to share my ideas on Greek Cinema and the Weird Wave with my students and colleagues at Oxford, and with audiences at the following universities: King's College London, Glasgow, NYU, Princeton, Columbia, UCLA, Rome La Sapienza, Geneva, Athens, Volos, Amsterdam, Sydney and Utrecht; and also at the Greek Médiathèque and the Greek Short Film Festival. Even though everything here has been written or rewritten specifically for this book, ideas and different versions of short sections from Chapters 1, 4, 5, 6 and 7 have appeared in Papanikolaou 2012; 2018a; 2018b; 2019a; 2019b; 2020. I am grateful to all editors and publishers for the permission to use this material and to Konstantinos Matsoukas, who allowed me to consult his English version of Papanikolaou 2019a before rewriting Chapter 1.

Research support has been provided first and foremost by the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages at the University of Oxford, the Oxford University Fell Fund and the Oxford Strategic REF Fund, as well as a 2012 Remarque Fellowship at NYU.

The amazing Kristina Gedgaudaite has been an ideal research assistant and my teaching *alter ego* while I was on leave. Afrodití Nikolaidou has been the most ardent and crucial supporter of the project overall. Spyros Chairetis, Elliot Koubis and Geli Mademli have provided crucial research, translation and editing support, as well as important advice when my ideas became too awkward.

Previous drafts of the book were read by Maria Boletsi, Janna Houwen, Athena Athanasiou, Dimitris Eleftheriotis, Vaskos Demou, Kyveli Short, Reidar Due, Dimitris Plantzos, Sotiris Paraschas, Grigoris Gougousis. I offer them my sincere thanks for their generosity and note that their comments have had a significant impact on the final outcome. Konstantina Kotzamani has kindly given me permission to use a screen capture from *Washingtonia* on the cover. And Nina Macaraig was the copy-editor I could hope for: caring, insightful, engaged.

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Note on Transliteration

Transliterations from the Greek language follow the conventions of the *Journal of Greek Media and Culture*.

Introduction

WHAT'S IN A NAME:

THE GREEK WEIRD WAVE AND THE CONTOURS OF INTERPELLATION

‘*Attenberg*, *Dogtooth* and the weird wave of Greek cinema’ – this was the unassuming title of the two-page spread published in *The Guardian* to coincide with the British release of Athina Rachel Tsangari’s *Attenberg* in August 2011. Written by the critic Steve Rose (2011), it started by asking: ‘Are the brilliantly strange films of Yorgos Lanthimos and Athina Rachel Tsangari a product of Greece’s economic turmoil? And will they continue to make films in the troubled country?’

This is how the Greek Weird Wave gained momentum, as a name and as a concept: From the beginning, it was related to the question of how the socio-economic crisis was affecting recent Greek Cinema, and whether the latter would survive ‘in the troubled country’. As a matter of fact, in the years after Rose’s article, Greeks did, indeed, continue to make films; the country continued to be troubled; and the term Greek Weird Wave somehow stuck, to denote for world cinema, a full-fledged cinematic movement.

In 2011, when this *Guardian* article was published, Yorgos Lanthimos’s film *Dogtooth* (2009) had just completed an impressively successful international run that included a nomination for the Oscar for Best Foreign Film, the Un Certain Regard prize at Cannes (billed as ‘the true Cannes discovery of the year’),¹ various other accolades and, most importantly, distribution in more than twenty countries around the world. Lanthimos’s subsequent film, *Alps*, was to follow suit in the winter of 2011; in the meantime, his close collaborator Athina Rachel Tsangari’s second feature film, *Attenberg* (2010), won two awards at the Venice Film Festival and was also receiving distribution in many European and American countries, to very positive reviews. A number of other films had also received coverage in the international press, among them Panos Koutras’s *Strella: A Woman’s Way* (2009), Filippos Tsitos’s *Unfair World* (2009), Yannis Economides’s *The Knifer* (2010) and Syllas Tzoumerkas’s *Homeland* (2010), frequently inviting comments about how they all seemed to belong to the same ‘wave’ of Greek filmmaking.

Apart from the fact that suddenly and in quick succession Greek films were catching the eye of international critics, film festival juries and publications, something virtually unheard of for decades in the context of this national cinema, also noteworthy was the close affinity that some of these films and many of these filmmakers seemed to have with one another. Lanthimos starred in and co-produced Tsangari's *Attenberg*; conversely, Tsangari had co-produced his *Dogtooth* and *Alps*. Actress Arianne Laped (soon to be Lanthimos's wife) starred in both *Attenberg* and *Alps*, and she had been a key member of the Athenian avant-garde performance scene which also featured Angeliki Papouliou, the protagonist of *Dogtooth* and *Alps*, Christos Passalis, the protagonist of *Dogtooth* and *Homeland*, and Mary Tsoni, the third protagonist of *Dogtooth*, for whom the main role of *Attenberg* was originally written.² A host of other actors, producers, screenwriters and directors similarly were in close contact, sharing platforms, publications and sometimes also creative choices. Something was going on – even though, admittedly, international critics told their audiences that they did not understand what exactly it was.

In recent years, Greece's global image has been jolted from Mediterranean holiday idyll and home of big fat weddings to fractious trouble spot. And not just in economic terms; let's not forget Greece had its own street riots in 2008. So perhaps it's to be expected that the country's cinema is changing, too. The growing number of independent, and inexplicably strange, new Greek films being made has led trend-spotters to herald the arrival of a new Greek wave, or as some have called it, the 'Greek Weird Wave'. [...] Is it just coincidence that the world's most messed-up country is making the world's most messed-up cinema? (Rose 2011)

A 'messed up country', a 'messed up cinema' and 'a scale of strangeness' catch the eye here.³ The *Guardian* article undeniably uses phrases that conjure up a certain orientalist viewpoint (cf. Nikolaidou 2020; Kourelou et al. 2014; Galt 2017). Yet, it also tries to point to an undeniable convergence of factors. The period when new Greek films started receiving notice in international fora in the late 2000s coincided with socio-economic turmoil in the country itself. As I will explain in more detail below, in May 2010 Greece officially agreed to its first Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with creditors, one of several to follow. The country had become synonymous with the international financial crisis that hit interrelated world economies after the 2008 collapse of the American bank Lehmann Brothers. The massive demonstrations, police mobilisation and images of destruction that hit world screens in December 2008, when the Greek capital was rocked by weeks of civil unrest following the police killing of teenager Alexandros Grigoropoulos, were repeated time and again after 2010, making the earlier events look more like a preamble. Demonstrators regularly took to the streets of Athens and other

big cities, as new austerity measures were being announced and presented as non-negotiable. In the summer of 2011, the period just before Rose's article in the *Guardian*, demonstrators occupied Athens' Syntagma Square and eventually other central squares of the country, in an exercise of direct democracy, sit-ins and new political mobilisations that has since been both mythologised and deconstructed (cf. Dalakoglou and Angelopoulos 2018; Douzinas 2013b; Butler and Athanasiou 2013; Gourgouris 2011; Kioupkiolis and Katsambekis 2014; Papapavlou 2015; Stavrides 2016). The Greek indignados movement – which would see similar events spread around the countries of the Mediterranean South and in itself was reminiscent of the Arab Spring and the Occupy movements – became a reference point for Greece, creating a rallying point for the symbolic imagery of the resistance to the Greek Crisis (Dalakoglou and Vradis 2011; Panourgia 2011; Papanikolaou 2014).

By 2011, the Greek Crisis had, therefore, already developed its own visual economy; it had become iconic, iconoclastic and ethnographic all at once (Basa 2016). A palimpsest of images of demonstrations, the burning of public buildings, people's assemblies and the sudden impoverishment visible in the big Greek cities constructed a rich iconography which circulated across international media and often found its way into Greek cultural expression, in art photography, installations, theatre and sometimes in cinema, too. Films such as *Wasted Youth* (Argyris Papadimitropoulos, 2011), *Congratulations to the Optimists* (Konstantina Voulgari, 2013), *Homeland* (Syllas Tzoumerkas, 2010; analysed in Chapter 6), *Xenia* (Panos H. Koutras, 2014), Thanos Anastopoulos's *The Daughter* (2012) and Alexis Alexiou's *Wednesday 4'45"* (2015) all incorporate this visual iconography of crisis, as do the commercially successful melodramas by Christophoros Papakaliatis, *If* (2012) and *Worlds Apart* (2015).

I start this introduction with this *Guardian* article because it named a local movement and, in the process, ended up performatively shaping it, at least at an international level. But I do so also as a reminder that the term 'Greek Weird Wave' was from the very beginning used to describe different styles and political strategies for representing the Greek Crisis.⁴ For many critics who adopted it immediately, the reality of the Greek Crisis was already cinematic, and its 'weird' realism seemed to be engulfing everything, from documentary footage to complicated allegory. It might all have started with Lanthimos's largely allegorical films and their impact on international audiences and critics. Yet, even in its first appearances, the term 'Weird Wave' was much less about Lanthimos's *mise-en-scène*, and much more about the feeling of unease provoked by the Greek Crisis and the ways in which diverse Greek cinematic productions captured that unease. Even in its first use as a new term in the world cinema lexicon, 'weird' seemed malleable, pointing the

discussion to audience and critical response, to different directors ‘somehow’ working with each other, and to the terms of recognizability and recognition that the cinema of a small nation was reinventing for itself. Of course, ‘weird’ is a very problematic term. Yet, it is also a term that is able to unlock the very social, cultural and power dynamics that put it in use in the first place. The rest of this introduction aims to explain why and how.⁵

THE TIMING OF A NEW WAVE

Soon the ‘Greek Weird Wave’ became a tag, an easy reference, a bibliographical entry, a festival genre, a bandwagon for new productions, a keyword for script-optioning and a world cinema analytical concept.⁶ It also became highly contested; after all, Greek directors had not created a manifesto (as, for instance, the Dogme directors had done in Denmark in 1995),⁷ nor did they have one collective publication around which they clustered (as in the case of the French Nouvelle Vague and their connection with the *Cahiers du Cinéma*). And crucially, as many critics have pointed out since, they kept creating extremely diverse films.⁸

The Greek Weird Wave was received in the context of what we are used to calling world cinema – a diverse body of films mainly produced outside the big film industries, defined by its presence on the international film circuit and at festivals, mingling national reference with transnational aspirations, often with small budgets and inventive production and release strategies, as well as constantly open to new (and cheaper) technologies (Elsaesser 2009; Nagib et al. 2011). As a world cinema movement, then, the Weird Wave is not the first that was named, if not performatively shaped, by curatorial work at international festivals and by a couple of journalistic articles. Other recent examples include New Queer Cinema (Rich 2013; Aaron 2004) and New French Extremity (Quandt 2004; Horeck and Kendall 2011). In all those cases, the initial text that popularised the name in question was a somewhat descriptive account of recent filmmaking or of specific films, and the films mentioned were very different from each other and certainly did not emerge from any concrete movement or school.

Such ‘labels’ perform not only the work of classification, but have a wider cultural impact: They steer the production of certain films but not others, creating access to markets otherwise closed to representatives of world cinema, and they certainly provoke debates, both in the country of origin and in international sites such as film festivals and specialised media (Elsaesser 2018). They create a certain framework that suddenly turns a local, world cinema production, into a paradigmatic moment of wider cinematic movements, their production and consumption. Suddenly, for instance, Yorgos

Lanthimos's *Dogtooth* and its 'weirdness' became a (post-)identificatory space for a new type of cinema. During the research for this book, I often saw stills from this film used to promote new art channels, new magazines on media and culture in Greece and abroad, new art film streaming websites and so on.⁹ That identificatory space of weirdness was not merely a defining moment for Greek Cinema; it also pointed towards a larger cultural momentum.

It is not surprising, therefore, that in subsequent years the term *Weird Wave* eventually stuck – even though not without problems, surprises, or protests by the interested community of artists, critics, academics and cinema-goers, some of whom prefer the term 'Greek New Wave' instead. Still, even in Greece the term 'weird' started to be used, also for a cultural production beyond the cinematic: Novels, plays and music albums were now identified as part of a general Greek *Weird Wave* (Dimadi 2013; Hulot 2014).

This book, as have done others in the past (Calotycho, Papadimitriou and Tzioumakis 2016; Psaras 2016), engages with the challenge of the *Weird Wave*, while it also holds on to the debatable term. It is not a full, close, or even adequate description of the filmmaking that has emerged from Greece in recent years. The problems with the term are clear: The most iconic of the films of the Greek *Weird Wave* were planned (and some even produced) before the Greek Crisis became evident (Chalkou 2012); 'weird' seems to apply to and describe only some films, mainly those by Tsangari, Lanthimos and Makridis (Karalis 2012); and that the very word 'weird' smacks of a somewhat patronising, even orientalist, framing – weird, after all, is an adjective often used to describe acts simply misunderstood by those who feel they are privileged to know better (Galt 2017). Finally, names such as these always run the risk of becoming a form of self-exoticisation as well (Kourelou et al. 2014; Nikolaidou 2020; Panagiotopoulos 2020).¹⁰

At the same time, I see the analytical benefits of the term 'weird', and I treat it also as a reminder, an opening to review precisely those diverse challenges inherent in the production, distribution and global circulation, as well as in the sharing, watching and analysis of more than a decade of Greek Cinema. As Afroditi Nikolaidou and Anna Poupou remind us in a recent article titled 'Post-Weird Notes on the New Wave of Greek Cinema' . . .

The fact that the term *weird wave* was coined by international critics and festival programmers, as well as the subsequent involvement of Greek directors and producers in the cross-national processes of the European film market, pose the question of self-determination, self-representation or even self-exoticism. Nowadays, new waves or movements, such as *Dogme 95* or the Romanian new wave, are created more by extra-cinematic processes (such as the production, promotion, and reception conditions of these films), by the performative capabilities of the directors/filmmakers themselves, and less by

shared morphological and thematic elements. However, the fact that these processes are linked to the history and culture of each country is the reason why each movement ultimately draws on the specific pools of aesthetic tools: Greek new-wave films do not have affinities with each other – what they share is a common political and cultural stance. (Nikolaidou and Poupou 2017: 91)

In line with this, rather than speaking about common features (or even thinking of them as weird), what I am setting out to do is to talk about a cinematic wave based on the contemporaneity of its engagement. I use ‘contemporaneity of engagement’ as a concept able to question the politics of the image together with the politics and politicisation of viewing, thereby facilitating an investigation of the context towards which a film gestures, as well as of the context into which it is thrown. Engagement also points to the fact that a new generation of films and filmmakers from Greece during a difficult period had to measure up to an extraordinarily complex and often hilarious set of expectations. One needs to be able to see also this as a weird setting, so as to be able to engage with its deconstruction.

WEIRD RECOGNITIONS: *CASUS BELLI*

One of the most celebrated short films to emerge as the term ‘Weird Wave’ started to circulate is the eleven-minute *Casus Belli* by Yorgos Zois. Made in 2010, it premiered in Venice in 2011 and then was presented for years at festivals and in TV specials on Greece around the world.¹¹ I draw attention to it because it takes the expectation of a ‘weird Greek film on the Crisis’ as its main *raison d’être* and playfully responds to it. It is not coincidental that, in order to do so, the film weaves together realism, direct reference to social context, image manipulation, allegory and iconicity. In many ways, *Casus Belli* is an extended comment, on living under austerity in contemporary Greece, as well as on the visual and cinematic economy that this context produces. Like most of its director’s other work, *Casus Belli* exemplifies the dialectic that developed between Greek filmmaking and the international expectations from ‘a country in crisis’.

The film starts by following a queue in a supermarket. As the camera pans from left to right, we slowly pass by all the people standing in this queue. Once we reach the person standing first in the queue and paying at the till, we follow them as they move on and join the next queue, now in a nightclub. This queue will then lead to another in a church and so on. In the next series of long tracking shots – which are digitally edited to give the impression that we are seeing actually one single, very long, continuous take – more queues are collated, one after the other. Each queue weaves into the next, with the



Figure I.1-3 The queue in front of the Panathinaikon stadium and a trolley falling on the staircases of Parliament Square, Athens, digital stills from *Casus Belli* (Yorgos Zois, 2010).

movement of the camera linking them together. It is an aesthetics that, for good reason, reminds the viewer of TV commercials, while at the same time perhaps referencing the old credo originally employed by the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critic Luc Moullet (1959: 14): ‘Morality is a question of tracking shots’, famously rephrased by Jean-Luc Godard as ‘the tracking shot is a question of morals’.¹²

We follow this digitally ‘enhanced’ continuous sequence of tracking shots until we reach the last queue, at a soup kitchen in front of the Panathinaikon Stadium in Athens (known for hosting the whole of the 1896 and a small but significant part of the 2004 Olympic Games). There, a lonely old man, who is denied access to the soup kitchen when it is his moment to be served, turns abruptly to the queue behind him and violently pushes it back. Now the camera starts panning right to left, as all the queues we have seen so far start collapsing in a domino effect, with every person falling backwards. When we reach the very first queue in the supermarket, a supermarket trolley full of products joins the camera’s fast back-travelling. It now starts to travel throughout Athens. It hits the steps of Syntagma Square, and fruit and vegetables scatter as the trolley rolls down the stairs, in an amusing reference to the famous pram scene in Eisenstein’s *Battleship Pottemkin*. As it leaves the city for the countryside, the trolley stops in an empty landscape, where it is awkwardly reunited with the old man who had started the domino effect. He approaches it, looks at it, then looks at the camera. End of film.

We have here a very straightforward mix of realism (soup kitchens, people waiting in queues to pay at the tax office), metonymic referentiality (each queue stands for a larger social issue: the soup kitchen for poverty, the supermarket for the world of consumption, the church for religion and so on) and allegorical potential (the very image of the queue, the domino effect, the final scenes, the trolley falling down the stairs). There is also a very readable effort to capitalise on this mix in terms of film form: Digital editing, shot construction, rhythm and camera movement, as well as the occasional reference to film history seem to underline both the realistic/indexical and the analogic/allegorical planes of reference.

Zois himself was often asked to explain these conjunctions to international audiences during the numerous times the film was shown in theatres and on TV channels around the world, often accompanying special events on the Greek Crisis, or programmes on the ‘Greek Weird Wave’. The following extract comes from one of these interviews:

[In recent years] if you were walking on the streets of Athens or reading the news, you would have the feeling that a crisis was about to happen. [. . .]

As I was watching all these things, I was smelling it in the air, in the atmosphere, that something huge was about to happen. [I thus decided to make

Casus Belli], I thought it was the most direct way to show the whole of society in those seven queues. My point was to show that we are all connected. If one falls, everyone falls. It is like in Europe at the moment. We are all connected. If one collapses, everyone will collapse. Every queue has someone who walks from it to the next – they are the pure survivor. But even that person will fall at some point.

[In Greece], it is very difficult not to be influenced by the violent images that are multiplying every day. So, this is my way of expressing myself. And sometimes I feel this is my way of personal resistance. Until we get to a point where a massive resistance comes, this is my way of doing things. (Zois in Arte 2011)

A similar take (and an aesthetics that self-consciously references music videos and advertising) was adopted by Zois in the advert that he directed for the Third Biennale Art Exhibition in Athens. It shows a masked man, almost in choreographed slow motion, throwing a molotov cocktail in front of the neoclassical buildings of the Academy of Athens and the old Greek National Library. Made in 2011, the Biennale promotional video became the talk of the town in the Greek capital and further afield. In an interview for French television in 2016, Zois was filmed in the same location as the choreographed man throwing the Molotov cocktail in the video five years earlier. While also discussing his first feature-length film *Interruption* (2015) – which is about a stage performance interrupted by a group of terrorists who hold the audience hostage – Zois was eager to expand on the issue of ‘interruption’ more broadly. His generation, he said, had wanted to underline how art is interrupted in Greece and elsewhere. ‘The new Wave of Greek Cinema produces films that are as absurd as the financial crisis that has hit the country’, says the journalist in voice-over, as an introduction to the interview. ‘Welcome to Athens, the capital of Greece, the supposed weakest link of Europe’. He then calls on Zois to talk about his notorious Biennale video. ‘When we were shooting the scene, there was a real demonstration happening in the background’, he responds.

– You used a real Molotov cocktail?

[Zois stops for a moment and looks at the camera, then laughs, as he seems to have found the question awkward – which it is.]

– No, of course, it was fake . . . When we are shooting something, it is a fake Molotov cocktail [that we use] . . .

[He turns and points to a demonstration passing by on the other side of the street while the interview happens.]

Ah, you see now, these are demonstrators, they are marching.

It is a typical situation in Greece, life interrupts art, art interrupts life, and the two are really mixed. (Zois interviewed in Arte 2012)¹³

As he points to the group of activists passing by with an enormous banner from the other side of the street, the camera performs a 180-degree turn and we see the banner and the activists moving, while the interview continues and Zois discusses cinema. He is on script: A young Greek filmmaker, in 2016, years after his first short films gave him peer and international festival recognition, explains how the Crisis has entered his films (and how they, subsequently, reached the international market). We have a filmmaker wanting to be indexical – here I use the term in the sense of ‘deictic’ (Doane 2007) – and eager to point out and show, to give form and semantic presence to a specific reality. But then there is also the unexpected, that most awkward moment of all: Not the presence of the demonstrators while the interview is taking place (*that* is quite an expected part of such an interview), but the French journalist’s question, whether they had used real Molotov cocktails while shooting the 2011 video.

What makes this moment so striking is that the international media crew are treating Zois and his own team (and, synecdochically, the films they make) not just as agents of representation, but also as dynamic participants in the ecology of social unrest and protest that an international audience, perhaps with a degree of exoticisation, observes in ‘the weakest link of Europe’. Are the directors not ‘producing films as absurd as the Crisis that hit the country’ with themselves as observers of the ‘messed-up country’? How much part of ‘all this’ are they? What and how do *they* demonstrate?

A moment of silence, a look back in disbelief, a little laugh – then, regaining composure, the realisation that both are true: The Greek director is an active agent of representation, but s/he is also responding to a predefined role, a prepackaged system of signification. And finally, the answer: ‘No . . . you know . . . when Greeks make films about demonstrations, even *they* need to use props’.

All of *that*, I call weird. Weird, as in a shared feeling produced by (and producing) awkward questions such as: Are these brilliantly strange films a product of Greece’s economic turmoil? Will they continue to make films in the troubled country? Weird, as in a shared feeling produced by the awkward ways in which Greeks (including Greek directors) are trying to provide answers. But also, weird as in that moment of disbelief, and that awkward moment of realisation that agency is both predefined and subtly reconfigured, that sense of ill-fitting that ends up being played with and assumed as a position.

As Mark Fisher so aptly says, ‘the weird is that which does not belong. The weird brings to the familiar something which ordinarily lies beyond it, and which cannot be reconciled with the “homely” (even as its negation)’ (Fisher 2017: 10–11).

In other words, the term ‘weird’ may have started as a critical misrecognition of what was happening in Greek cinema *circa* 2011; yet, it still has the potential to unlock moments such as the one in Zois’s interview. It has the potential to help us think through the weirdness in those moments of (mis)recognition and non-belonging where you realise that you adhere to the script while also being somewhat out of line. It is for this reason that I want to reclaim such weirdness, not as a tag, but first as an analytical position; not as any sort of answer, but as a starting point for questioning the thematic and stylistic traits that developed in Greek narrative cinema during the first decade of the Greek Crisis.

WEIRDING ALLEGORY

In the previous pages I have broached the two main questions with which I started collecting material for this book. On one hand, I had wanted to discuss the films made in Greece during a difficult decade and to assess them, as much as possible, as a group. How did this period (and the discourses) coinciding with what was globally referred to as the Greek Crisis influence Greek cinema?

On the other hand, the purchase of the term ‘weird’, as it named and framed the reinvigorated international interest in Greek Cinema, seemed symptomatic of larger movements in world cinema during a period of rapid economic, cultural, social, as well as audiovisual change. How far can the concept of ‘weird’, *pace* its initial use, serve as a sensor alerting us to the shifts and movements in a larger socio-cultural setting? For the period I had set out to review, weirdness became something akin to what Raymond Williams (1961) has called a ‘structure of feeling’, an expansive affect that alerts to the existence of an emergent culture.

Two further interrelated issues emerged as my inquiry continued. The first was that of national allegory. From the ancient Greek for ‘speaking in public otherwise’ (*allos agoreuein*), allegory bridges the personal and the public, the individual and the collective, as a rhetorical trope in which one set of references stands for another. To put it more simply, one story is presented while another is inferred. Allegory, thus, produces two orders of signification: one ‘literal’ and the other to be deciphered – and, hence, largely dependent for its impact on the act of allegorical reading, the allegoresis.

In that manner, I could see how critics, especially those outside Greece, were eager to read an allegory of the contemporary nation (and of *the* Crisis, by that time widely written with a capital C) in most Greek films of the period. As is evident from the discussions that shaped the Weird Wave (see Chapter 1), national allegory became a useful motor for the international circulation

of these films, the individual/family narratives in the films being read as allegories of the very public and recurring story of a people and a nation (cf. Larkin 2009: 165).

Some films, to be sure, were more susceptible to these readings than others, and some directors were more eager to encourage this discussion, while others felt extremely constrained by the national allegory placed upon them.¹⁴ This should not come as a surprise. From its popularisation in Fredric Jameson's essay on 'third world literature', it has become evident that the dynamics of (reading for) *national allegory* are themselves caught up in networks of power and ring-fencing, bound to be controversial but also critically productive (Jameson 1986; Ahmad 1987; Szeman 2001; Jameson 2019; Larkin 2009). The term has been vehemently criticised, especially in Film Studies, even when it was widely used and when scholars engaged with it (Xavier 1999; Tambling 2003: 9–21; Shohat and Stam 2014).

In his original essay, Jameson argued that 'third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private [. . .] necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory. *The story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*' (1984: 69). The sweeping and prescriptive force of the argument immediately invites its deconstruction. All texts (and, in our case, all films)? 'Always'? Only from 'third-world countries'? All genres? All types of stories? Is this a fact, or a recipe for well-wrought revolutionary 'third-world' cultural texts? And where exactly is this 'third world'? Who defines it, and how prescriptively? Last, but not least, what if we read oppositionally: not for the allegorical, but for the affective intensity of the literal in the text (cf. Attridge 2004: 32–64; Van Alphen 2008; Boletsi 2018) – how radical and how political can *that* be?

That said, as Joanna Page reminds us, one cannot underestimate how much allegory still 'stages the relationship between personal and political, private and public, which is often central to the production of political meaning in art' (2009: 182). Certainly, it is equally productive to think of the term beyond the confines and definitions of a 'third world'. Let us not forget that in countries such as 1990s Argentina (Page's example) as well as in Crisis-Greece an oxymoronic classification develops in any case. While their cultural products, especially 'their films and their success on international screens, become fully associated with [the country's] "First World aspirations"', there is a lot in their financial situation that makes critics think of them as close to "third world status" (Page 2009: 199).

Even though the term 'third-world(ing)' was used for Greece in the years of the Crisis (cf. Rajagopal 2015), I certainly do not want to engage in such a discussion, as I find it counter-productive. I prefer to reread Jameson's

argument as an incitement to see the workings of allegory in critical times/ places and historico-political settings. To do so does not signal an easy way out of the intricacies of cultural texts and their specific materialist relation to the society whence they come, but a reminder of how present allegory is in the everyday reality of the social, in the everyday experience of the political, the psychosocial and (of course) the national.

Take a brief example from Greece and from a previous ‘critical moment’ in its history: The most celebrated case of literary resistance to the Greek dictatorship of 1967–74 was an allegory titled *The Plaster Cast*, published by author Thanassis Valtinos in 1970. It is the story of a hospitalised patient being put in a plaster cast until he suffocates, and this was read as a powerful denunciation of the regime’s oppressive policies and widespread torture. The allegory was so transparent and readable by its target audience precisely because it was based on the regime’s own cautionary discourse. Indeed, the dictator himself had made a habit of referring in his speeches to Greece as a patient in need of urgent hospitalisation (and also a plaster cast). This was not simply the case of an individual’s travails standing for the country’s embattled situation. The allegory had already been part of a system of policing and abusing; it had been part of the battle already (see Van Dyck 1998: 16–17.).

In a very similar fashion, what became characteristic in the case of the Weird Wave – much like national allegory, a term immediately garnering resistance, even though also widely used – was not the question of whether these films were allegories and of what exactly. It was, instead, the playful way in which they included, played with and deconstructed the allegories already circulating in and about the nation.

In some of the films I analyse in this book, such as *Suntan* (Chapter 1) or *Pity* (Chapter 4), it is precisely the impulse to national allegory that is being ironically revisited and undermined. Others, such as *Attenberg* (Chapter 4) or *Third Kind* (Chapter 2), reconfigure allegory’s visual politics by revisiting the empty sites that have represented the imaginary space of the nation: a modernist industrial town in the former, a national airport in the latter. Last, but not least, in the films of Lanthimos, which play a recurrent role in this book, allegory is present as a disciplinary tool, notably in *Dogtooth* (see Chapter 5), and as a diffuse disposition that engulfs the viewer.

A theme common to Lanthimos and most other directors of the Weird Wave – that is, the oppressive or dysfunctional family (see Chapters 1, 5 and 6) – was also bound to confront the spectator with the porous boundaries of allegory. Why did these stories of locked-down families suddenly start filling the storyboards of Greek Cinema? Why were they so affective? Were they realist representations of family/gender violence rife in Greek society, or allegories for a nation in crisis? What is the family in the end: a small molecule

of the nation, a workshop of its ideologies and disciplinary tactics, its most transparent form of allegory, or all of these together?

Early on I noticed the extent to which the allegorical reception of such films was not necessarily positioned against a possible affective/literal reading. Somehow, as I go on to analyse in Chapters 1, 2 and 5, the literal, the affective and the allegorical can all work together in these films. This is the case, even if it entails, as I will explain, a somewhat different understanding of allegory, one that exploits metonymic displacement within the allegorical and undermines the view of allegory simply as an extended metaphor.

As I return to discuss often in this book, and especially in Chapter 3, there was not one but many allegories that developed in, around and with the Greek Weird Wave. The most peculiar of them is a form of reverse allegory: It was the Greek Crisis that in the end became an allegory for the world – an allegory of lost agency, of late capitalist disempowerment of polity, of undermined sovereignty, of the undoing of the demos. Greek films were caught up in that process. For them, allegory became an inescapable context – but not, as Jameson would have it, because their protagonists' hazards necessarily stood for the national travails. Instead, the films were seen as part of a national situation that was becoming a global allegory for the new way of the world. In Chapter 3, I dedicate a lengthy analysis to a 2011 special French/German TV programme on Greece, with Lanthimos as its main guest. In that programme, the tropes of national allegory are exposed from start to finish, and so are the efforts of artists to both exploit and deconstruct them, offering their everyday reality as an alternative platform from which one can think through the cultural expression of a small nation in financial and social crisis. While interviewed, these artists have to act within a context and an allegory placed upon them; what they offer in response is a persistently renegotiated (and thus weird) realism. This distinct realism that emerged in Greece during the period in question – a realism that among others also engaged with allegory, its negotiation and sometimes its playful unravelling – I will call here a *biopolitical realism*. As I will explain below, among the other things it targets, biopolitical realism also questions, displaces and reconfigures the impulse to allegorical reading. It uses the 'not quite rightness' of weird affect to problematise the transitions between the real and the allegorical. I will now briefly turn to this term to explain why and then expand on it in Chapter 4.

WEIRD BIOPOLITICS

Asked to provide the main characteristic of the films made by him and his peers, Yorgos Lanthimos during an interview came up with the sentence that will serve as focal point in my third chapter: 'What interested us were the ways

in which a family or a group is governed and what kind of impact this has on every member of the group’.

This phrase introduces (after allegory) the second issue I had to tackle as my inquiry grew larger. What I could see in all the films under study was their particularly persistent engagement with a certain type of *governing life*, of *politics over life*. Films such as *Dogtooth*, *Alps*, *The Lobster*, *Miss Violence*, *Attenberg*, *Suntan*, *Homeland*, *A Blast*, *Oiktos (Pity)*, *Boy Eating the Bird's Food*, *Strella*, *Xenia*, *The Knifer*, *Washingtonia* and others mentioned briefly or analysed in this book were part of a broader arena of cultural production that registered a deep unease with the modern politics of surveillance, austerity management, control over life, state of exception and moral panic. To be sure, while this is a politics that characterises much of the contemporary world, it was particularly intensely felt in Greece and became the main topic of discussion there from 2008 onwards. During that long decade, one word kept cropping up in the Greek public debate to describe all this. It was a concept much debated after Michel Foucault had reintroduced it in the 1970s, and it has now become almost a household term (helped by the fact that it is based on two Greek words): *βιοπολιτική*, or biopolitics.

Foucault’s understanding of the difference between a classical *sovereign power* and those forms of power that become more dominant in modernity (that is, the *disciplinary and the biopolitical power*) underlines how the latter two take hold of life in new and innovative ways: ‘In the classical theory of sovereignty, the right of life and death was one of sovereignty’s basic attributes [. . .] The right of sovereignty was the right to take life or let live. And then this new right is established: the right to make live and to let die’ (2003: 240–1). This very modern conceptualisation of *biopower* – that form of power whose aim is no longer the sovereign’s ‘take life or let live’ [*faire mourir ou laisser vivre*] but, on the contrary, ‘to foster life or disallow it to the point of death’ [*faire vivre ou laisser mourir*] (Foucault [1976] 1998: 138) – does not merely describe the intensification of power’s concern with the health of the population as a whole and as a result also of the individual (Taylor 2011: 41–54). Rather, it points to a change by which politics over life *becomes* politics, redefines the political and reassesses its scope (Prozorov 2017: 328). Biopolitics describes a set of social and political practices that focus ‘on disciplining the living being, on optimising its capabilities and extorting its forces so as to integrate corporeal life into systems of efficient and economic controls’ (Väliaho 2014b: 105). It is actually this productive over-controlling of human life – and thus of diversifying the types of control in order to taxonomise, to marketise, to place within borders, frames and systems of reference, and to optimise it – that today has reached such a point of intensification that it might be said to characterise the historical period in which we live and perhaps even the very

‘cultural logic of contemporary capitalism’ (cf. Baumbach, Young and Yue 2016). This does not mean that there is a clear root, an announced rationale, an identifiable centre of biopolitical control: Instead, there is an archipelago of measures, points of incitement, control and calculation, systems of prediction and normativity. Contemporary biopolitics is not a global localisable power of oppression; it is an over-expansive and dominant logic of governance.

Most of the films I analyse in this book address the diffuse biopolitical nexus of power and thus do not aim to confront it directly as a localisable centre of control. Instead, they offer the opportunity to reflect on what develops (as a reaction, as a mode of address, as an ethics of relation and as a form of representation) when biopolitics entirely becomes the general context, the permanent background, the only way. This is how, I will argue, the Greek Weird Wave became a spectacular world example of a *cinema of biopolitics*. This is a type of cinema that we can see at the moment emerging also elsewhere – in Latin America, for instance, or in Southern Europe – adopting similar or different patterns, but certainly engaging as a cultural product of *our biopolitical present*.¹⁵

A cinema of biopolitics can undoubtedly be a term that covers not only other examples and types of world cinema, but also areas of cinema production beyond the fiction film – the documentary or the film essay are obvious examples. Even though I will briefly point to such examples as well (for instance, the documentary series *Microcities*, in Chapters 2 and 3), I mainly confine myself to an analysis of fiction films. I do so, first, for the sake of consistency and, more importantly, in order to follow the particular story of the Greek Weird Wave, which was identified as a new wave of fiction films. Nevertheless, it is my conviction that the triangulation allegory/biopolitics/weird has the potential to tell us something more, not only about the Greek Weird Wave, but also about the concept of Crisis and the larger cultural expression of our intense biopolitical present.

Biopolitics – in its various definitions, pathways and iterations – is a toolkit that will allow me to enter a new dialogue with the films in question, as well as their creative and cultural context. Yet, I also consider the biopolitical more broadly a dynamic constituting the political today and inflecting political art. This is what I will call throughout (and analyse in Chapter 4 as) the expansive socio-cultural modality of *biopolitical realism*.

Even though my use of the terms ‘intense biopolitical present’ and ‘biopolitical realism’ might seem like a sweeping attempt at periodisation, my description of a certain biopolitical present is intended to be heuristic. Rather than nominating a genre, a period and a specific chronology, I start from a very specific cultural example and specific time-span for one country. The biopolitical aspect of power has not only been intensely felt in this time and

place, but it also seems to relate it to the world and provide its major cultural logic. In Chapter 2, I will relate this discussion to more specific debates about culture, politics and critique in our contemporary world of constantly mutating neo-capitalism and forms of control.

However, equally important for my discussion is what I have already tried to describe as a logic of counter-conduct: a much more diffuse, yet also much more pervasive, affective, playful and pensive reaction to an ill-fitting context. It is that feeling, after all, that draws me to a term such as ‘weirdness’. As the anecdote about director Zois makes clear, I hope, I want to claim ‘weirdness’ as the very (affective, situational, experiential) state that results from the fact that one is very much governed by a script, yet also finds oneself somewhat lagging behind, being a little off-kilter, while at the same time being in constant and multiple frames, delimited, constrained and contained. I also claim ‘weirdness’ as the necessary emotional and affective outcome of the effort to interact with and speak about a biopolitical present.

As was the case with the framing of national allegory, weirdness as a counter-conduct in biopolitics should not be thought of as a denial of the historical moment or an escape from it. History makes a spectacular entry in the frames I am discussing, often unexpectedly, and often spectrally. The films of the Greek Weird Wave are not only found in an intense biopolitical present; they are also registered in a political, social and historical archive which is thrust upon them, even when they try to avoid it. I see this as the ‘inescapable political and historical context’ of the Greek Weird Wave and will thus analyse it in Chapter 3, where I also assess how this latest wave of Greek films performatively rearranges the existing narratives of Greek film history.

Throughout this study, my efforts are towards providing a close analysis of films, together with an exploration of their cultural context and their theoretical ramifications. Film Studies, Cultural Studies, as well as a style of participatory cultural observation that one could characterise as auto-ethnographic – these all play a methodological role in the book, which also owes a lot to specific debates in cultural, gender and social theory conducted in Greece and beyond over the past few decades.

DOING THE LAUNDRY: EMBODIMENT, METONYMY, ASSEMBLAGE

Since 2015, the national daily *Efimerida ton Sintakton* (*Newspaper of the Journalists*) publishes in its Saturday edition a cartoon under the banner ‘The Dictionary of the Crisis’. According to the editors, it is an effort to ‘dispel with cartoons those words which bombard our everyday life as a result of the Crisis’ (Koukoulas 2015).¹⁶ Every week, signed by a different cartoonist, the ‘dictionary’ is expanded by a visual take on a new word from contemporary Crisis

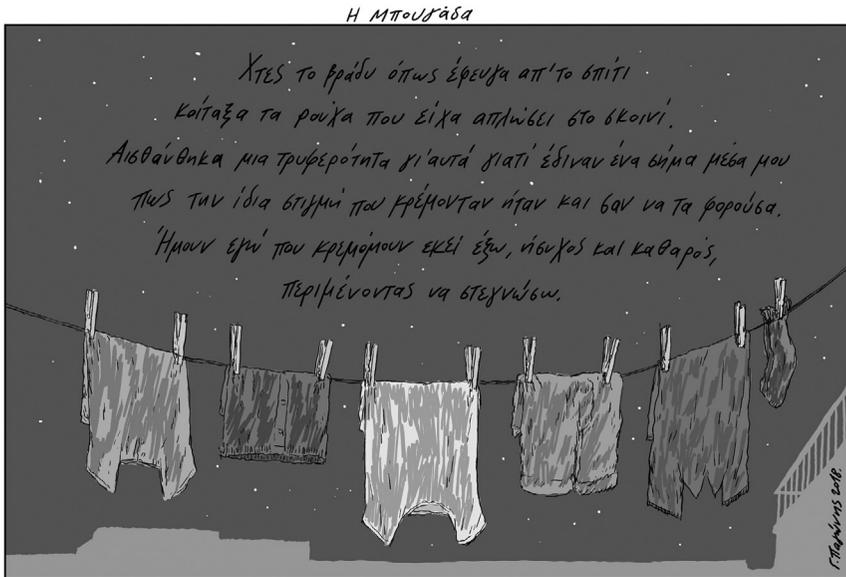


Figure 1.4 Gavriel Pagonis, 'The Laundry'. Copyright Gavriel Pagonis and Efimerida ton Sintakton.

politics: 'Privatisation', 'foreign investment', 'banking', 'European values', 'exit', 'anxiety', 'memory', 'waiting' and so on. On 7 July 2018, the word of the week was 'The Laundry' (Η μπουγάδα). The one-panel cartoon, signed by Gavriel Pagonis, showed a line of T-shirts and shorts hanging on a rooftop. There was one long caption in the frame, which read:

Yesterday evening, as I was leaving my house, I looked at the clothes I had hung on the washing line. I felt a tenderness for them; they were giving out a sign of life; as they were hanging it was almost as if I was still wearing them. It was me hanging out there, docile and clean, waiting to dry. (Pagonis 2018)

The humorous effect first rests on the over-appropriation of a metaphor widely used during the financial crisis: Cleaning, clearing, sorting out and tidying up have been central to the vocabulary of the Greek Crisis, as they are also central to global neoliberal governmentality more generally. Yet, this cartoon is extremely powerful in that we see in the picture and read in the caption not merely a distanced visual metaphor. Somehow, a connection of proximity, an experienced situation, one's body has entered the picture. There is a disquieting suggestion that an impact on bodies and people has been the aim of doing this type of 'laundry' all along. When new 'Crisis policies' talk about cleaning, they ultimately manage lives, create docile subjects and hang bodies to dry.

The trope that helps this cartoon make a powerful point about the contemporary biopolitics of crisis is no longer a metaphor; rather, it is metonymy. The clothes lying ‘out there’, able to recall the body they contained, as well as the feeling of hanging, pending, being in suspension, create what a semiotician would call a long metonymical sequence, a chain of references that relate to each other through their proximity, their contiguous placement.

In the course of putting this book together, I realised that this move towards metonymy is much more extensive and plays a much more crucial role in my case-studies than I had first thought. As the following chapters will show, what emerges as a link between crisis, weirdness, allegory, biopolitics and biopolitical realism is a certain tendency towards metonymy that follows a pattern very similar to the one described in the newspaper cartoon: It becomes an expansive impulse. More precisely, it becomes a metonymical impulse towards assembling and collating references, reactions, gestures, embodiments and representations on the basis of their proximity, their seriality, their experience and their touch.

One of the tropes of ancient rhetoric – discussed in some ways by Aristotle, formalised by Quintilian and given a new life in modern theory after Roman Jakobson used it as the centre of his analysis of aphasia – metonymy is the rhetorical sibling of metaphor (Jakobson and Halle 1956: 90–96; Jakobson 1971; Matzner 2016). We tend to think of metaphor as a rhetorical and signifying trope where substitution (of a word, a concept, or an image) is based on analogy; something stands *for* something else on the basis of some sort of likeness. As many theorists have reminded us, the word comes from the Greek verb ‘μεταφέρω’, to carry over, and metaphor (μεταφορά) in contemporary Greek also means ‘transfer’.

However, we tend to think of metonymy as based on contiguity and seriality; something stands *next to* something else in a signifying chain, on the basis of some form of proximity (cf. Jakobson and Halle 1956; Lodge 1977). As Barbara Johnson (2014) explains, ‘in metonymy, substitution is based on a relation or association other than that of similarity (cause and effect, container and contained, proper name and qualities or works associated with it, place and event or institution, instrument and user, etc.)’ (108). The word in Greek roughly translates as ‘giving another (related) name’.

Of course, as happens in the laundry newspaper cartoon, metaphor and metonymy are seldom pure. They relate to each other on a continuum (cf. Dirven and Pörings 2002), which means that for the most part they come to be entangled and intertwined (cf. Genette 1972: 41–63; Culler 2001). Nevertheless, a push towards the metonymical side of this continuum often belies a radical historical and political possibility (Laclau 2014: 53–78; Greenfield 1998: 113–24).

As Brenda Machosky points out, within the hermeneutic process, ‘metonymy is not primarily about “finding meaning” (by interpreting words); it is about understanding the structure of meaning (by focusing on words themselves)’ (Machosky 2009: 194). In its wider cultural ramifications, this means that metonymy exposes and exploits differential meaning, networks, associations and the work of signification as it happens and is experienced; it also promotes non-resolution, process and chains of association, rather than a stable map of signification. A metonymical positioning and point of view often seems weird, precisely because it so very much foregrounds the frames and structures of meaning, as well as of the meaningful, of life and the livable. By showing the way in which they are imposed and standing at an (ironic) angle to them, it ends up destabilising them, too. Nevertheless, the structure of meaning and of sorting out is not the only thing foregrounded in this process. As the chapters of this book progress, another element will also become evident. Metonymy not only foregrounds signifying chains, but it also works *on* bodies and lives, *in* the biopolitical present. We as viewers are touched by the metonymies on screen; we are touched by a trope that functions by way of touch/proximity/adjacency. Furthermore, in the workings of the biopolitical present, the body, the population and the territory are (among other things) continuous and contiguous, yet (partly) in purely physical, non-figurative ways; we can say, for instance, that borders affect and mark bodies in literal, material and physical ways.

Most, if not all, of the film scenes that I will analyse in the following chapters employ metonymy at different levels – from the story to the *mise-en-scène*. They represent and invite metonymical readings. They are positioned in metonymical chains and focus on characters who find themselves in similar positionalities. At the centre of these films often appear characters for whom metonymy is, weirdly, the most political reaction that they can articulate, as they find themselves on stand-by, stranded, wandering, waving and exploring lines, (empty) structures, paths, walks and connections. This is exactly what the two characters played by Makis Papadimitriou do in *Letter to Yorgos Lanthimos* and *Suntan*, in the examples that I use in the opening chapter. It equally happens with the protagonists of the two films that close the book, *The Distance between Us and the Sky* and *Winona*. I use them as triggers to first tell the story of a biopolitical cinema in a linear fashion (background, emergence, first films and reactions) and then reposition the Weird Wave as a recurring question and continuing, unfinished process. The films on which I focus in the second chapter are the medium-length *Washingtonia* and *Third Kind* (again, with their characters stranded, wandering and exploring metonymical connections, as does the films’ editing). They allow me to provide a lengthier analysis of biopolitics and the analytical possibilities that it offers for

contemporary (Greek) cinema. Chapter 3 opens with a scene from *The Lobster* and then continues with a scene of Yorgos Lanthimos being interviewed for TV under the Parthenon. He finds himself in a position similar to that of Yorgos Zois in the interview I described in the previous section: a little lost and having to account for the Weird Wave's relationship to the socio-political context. He equally opts for a turn to metonymy, pointing to unexpected links and structures: not only to films hanging on the line, but also to people, to a community of artists and filmmakers who operate in Greece, making do with what is available and reflecting on this as a cultural practice. The chapter follows Lanthimos's cue and retells the story of *The Lost Highway of Greek Cinema*, an Athenian cinema collective that can be seen as exemplary of the groups and activities that supported the Weird Wave in its emergence and development.

If the first three chapters aim to tell (and retell) the story of the Weird Wave as a cinema of biopolitics, the remaining four propose keywords for further analysis: biopolitical realism (Chapter 4, with a focus on the films *Pity*, *Attenberg* and *Alps*); discipline and allegory (Chapter 5, with a focus on *Miss Violence* and *Dogtooth*); archive trouble (Chapter 6, with a focus on the stage multimedia production *The City-State* and the film *Homeland*); and assemblage (Chapter 7; on the films *Mum*, *I'm Back* and *Strella*). The way in which these keywords are presented is not coincidental. In the earlier chapters, the world of biopolitical realism looks impossible to break, and a metonymical impulse seems to be either a cry of desperation or an (equally desperate) ironic reflex. Yet, in the later chapters, metonymy becomes the trope for the more productive poetics described as 'archive trouble' and 'assemblage'.

All these keywords reflect on a world of biopolitical realism and thematise the impulse towards framing and reframing, collecting, collating and assembling. If biopolitical realism looks weird, it is precisely because of its unexpected touch, its sudden push-back against the endless metonymies constituting the real. This goes some way towards explaining why metonymy itself is not given a chapter of its own – simply because, like biopolitics and the concept of the weird, metonymy is everywhere.

I have started my inquiry by following the weird as an analytical, conceptual and largely cultural challenge that a type of filmmaking in biopolitics produces. As the first chapters will explain, this means that the main argument develops processually. Metonymy emerged as an overarching mode, and even as a mode of writing and movement from one theme to another. Therefore, one of the last questions binding this book together became the following: How does metonymy relate to the weird and the allegorical, and why is this important in a culture of biopolitics?

‘WHY DO YOU TOUCH ME?’ METONYMIC INTIMACY

In the next chapters I repeatedly underline a personal question that I have always had while watching these films: Why do they affect me so much? Why do even their most absurd, idiosyncratic, unexpected and intellectually difficult gestures move me? How do they touch me?

I soon realised that this was a question shared by many around me. Why and how did these films draw us in? My tentative answer, and one that slowly developed as an argument over the course of this book, is that their metonymic chains, especially as they are often weird and hard to make sense of, foreground principles of continuity for the spectator. This leads to a sense of (or questions about) contiguity/continuity between the film/viewer/biopolitical life, a feeling of being inside that triangulation.

‘This is not a scene I have ever experienced; this is too far from my own life; yet, why does it touch me?’ This question, which I often repeated while watching these films and which I will also repeat in this book (see, for instance, Chapter 5), is another way of saying that there exists a certain metonymic relation, that I am becoming alert to the fact that the world on screen, the world outside, and the viewer in time and space in front of the screen all touch each other.

Classic film semiotics, starting from a point made by Jakobson, has often associated metonymy with (some types of) montage and, eventually, with the film narrative, the way in which the story is propelled forward on a syntagmatic horizontal axis along which shots are combined (Jakobson and Halle 1956: 92; Metz 1977: 197–206; Andrew 1984: 164–71). Interestingly, theorist Mark Fisher has also associated montage with the weird as a concept. ‘The form that is perhaps most appropriate to the weird is montage’, he maintains, ‘the conjoining of *two or more things which do not belong together*’ (Fisher 2017: 11). There is, certainly, something weird and powerful in collating – as classic semiotic analysis of surrealist film or of assemblage art would underline. But I consider the point as having a more general value. There is a sense of the weird when conceptual and/or visual montage is underlined as such, or when contiguous relations are emphasised, and even more so when they are proposed as possibly rearrangeable. In this study I underline films where weird metonymies come to play a major role through cinematic montage (such as *Washingtonia*, in Chapter 2, or *Country of Origin* in Chapter 6). However, I am also following metonymy as it works on other levels (and not necessarily based on montage): in shot construction (as in *Dogtooth*, in Chapter 5, or *The Distance Between Us and the Sky* in the Epilogue), in the way in which characters place their body in space (as in *Attenberg*, in Chapter 4), in the way in which sites are being used (as in *Third Kind*, in Chapter 3), in the way in which framing oper-

ates in the films (for instance, in *Oiktos/Pity*, in Chapter 4, and *Miss Violence*, in Chapter 5)¹⁷ and in the way in which the family dynamic is positioned as a synecdoche of the social and the national (in *Miss Violence*, *Country of Origin*, *Mum*, *I'm back* and *Strella*, in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, respectively). Last, but not least, I follow it in the way in which metonymic poetics replicate strategies of governmentality in a biopolitical world, inviting the viewer to contemplate these connections, as I suggest more prominently in the last chapters. Weird poetics is not simply a *mise-en-abyme* of weird biopolitics (the film thus reproducing *in vitro* the power structures of the world whence it comes), but a more complex entanglement also based on contiguity.

To put it in another way, there is something in the biopolitical world that makes weird engagement a productive position. There is something in the biopolitical that turns forms of metonymic positioning into a productive arrangement: from cinematic montage to assemblage as an artistic or as a post-identitarian or critical practice; and from rearranging an archive to reperforming assembly in public space. With 'productive arrangement' I describe a survival tactic, a form of making do, a way for one to be realistic about biopolitics, as well as a survival tactic to do realism in biopolitics, to do biopolitical realism. This might come as a surprise to the remaining few followers of classic models of cinematic realism (for example, Andre Bazin's) which tend to see montage-driven narratives (for instance, the early Soviet films or Hollywood action films) in some ways as the opposite of a cinematic realism exemplified in Bazin's reading of Rossellini and Italian neo-realism (see Nagib and Mello 2009: xiv–xxvi, for a brilliant explanation of how complicated the picture is). Yet, this is exactly the point I am making in Chapter 3, where I introduce the concept of biopolitical realism – playing, as I have already done here, with the idea of 'being realistic' with an intense biopolitical present, as well as proposing it as a different attitude towards both the concept and the doing of realism.

In biopolitical realism, it is easy to see why metonymy is associated with montage and framing, with the weird, with allegory, with biopolitics. This is what I am trying to foreground in my last two chapters. The cultural poetics of *archive trouble* that I discuss in Chapter 6 is a metonymic poetics that engages creatively with the biopolitical present. This is also the case with *assemblage*, with which I conclude my analysis in Chapter 7. Following a discussion that I can only briefly indicate here, I introduce assemblage as a cultural poetics in/for/of biopolitics which, precisely because of its metonymic dynamic, can also offer unsettling, potentially radical positionalities.

Even though every chapter analyses one or two well-known films from the Weird Wave, it does not rest solely on them (nor does it aim to offer their full analysis). It often counterposes the analysis of other, lesser-known or -circulated

films and videos. Nevertheless, the structure is not determined by these case-studies. Instead, I often return to the same films or move the discussion to other types of material, including theoretical works, other cultural and social trends, as well as types of cultural text of the past or present. Metonymy as a mode, and the cultural/social practices analysed in the last chapters as archive trouble and assemblage, might perhaps also offer a way of reading how this book has been put together: in the effort to show not only connections, but also to underline how these cultural texts are contiguously related, how they touch each other, how they are touched and touching, how an affective contiguity binds this material together. This is a very personal, very idiosyncratic, very weird history of the Weird Wave. It does, therefore, propose itself as standing in a symbiotic relation with other studies that in recent years have appeared on the same or other important Greek films of the twenty-first century.

Last, but not least, my present approach goes against understandings of the Weird Wave as too intellectual, dissociated, or even heartless and ‘unloving’, as a comment I quote in Chapter 1 suggests. I beg to differ. Biopolitical realism means that metonymic chains such as those I will trace in the following pages are not only the ones already organising ‘reality’; they also unlock, as they weirdly develop, a much-needed intimacy. Even though not yet a full-fledged revolutionary affect, this is an intimacy able to exploit the fact that it overflows from (and thus can stand as something more than) a (bio) political project.

Notes

1. Available at <https://www.thewrap.com/dogtooth-drama-takes-cannes-prize-un-certain-regard-3270/> (last accessed 16 June 2020).
2. A piece of information that was lost, at least initially, in the international reception of the Weird Wave was that many of the actors who played a prominent role in its first films were also key figures in a newly emerging physical and avant-garde theatre scene in Athens after 2004. Arianne Labeled was a co-founder of the theatre group Vasistas (and the screenwriter Efthimis Filippou was a frequent collaborator), while Angeliki Papoulia and Christos Passalis were key members of the group Blitz, and Mary Tsoni was one half of the avant-garde performance duo Mary and the Boy, the other half being Alexandros Voulgaris, whose cinematic work I will discuss in the Epilogue of this book.
3. Rose’s article is an impressive piece of journalistic writing, but several of its assertions do not survive critical scrutiny –for instance, the matter-of-fact mention of Panos Koutras’s new queer films as high up on ‘the strangeness scale’. It is clear from the way in which I discuss this article that I do not share its views. What I find worth pursuing is the ‘weird feeling’ it describes as the critic’s response to these films, as well as the article’s own, plentiful awkward moments.

4. Apart from *Dogtooth*, *Alps* and *Attenberg*, Rose mentions in his article a series of completely diverse films: *Wasted Youth*, *Homeland*, *The Knifer* and *Strella*.
5. Marios Psaras in his accomplished *The Queer Greek Weird Wave* (2016) does something similar, by exploring the semantic affinities of the concepts 'queer' and 'weird' – an opening that allows him to pursue a valuable exploration of the films of the Greek Weird Wave through the optics of Queer Theory.
6. There already exists an entry on Greek Weird Wave in the IMDB list (<https://www.imdb.com/list/ls025579433/>), countless lists of 'Top Greek Weird Films' online (see, for instance, <http://www.tasteofcinema.com/2016/the-10-best-movies-of-the-greek-weird-wave/>), international festival retrospectives (see, for instance, <http://www.mumbaifilmfestival.com/blogs/getting-to-grips-with-the-greek-weird-wave/>) and a number of focused university syllabi. For a precise mapping of the use of the term 'weird wave' in criticism and the media, see Sifaki and Stamou 2020.
7. Available at <http://www.dogme95.dk/the-vow-of-chastity/> (last accessed 16 June 2020).
8. Nikolaidou and Poupou (2018: 19–20) have recently developed a persuasive counter-argument. They point out specific formative moments that allow us to talk about a cinematic movement in this case, too: the founding of the group 'Filmmakers in the FOG' which I discuss in Chapter 1; the collective text 'Who is Fucking Greek Cinema?' distributed by the Greek Film Directors and Producers Guild in the 58th Thessaloniki Film Festival (2017); and the establishment of new international journals that focus on Greek cinema and put together early special issues on the New/Weird Wave, such as *Filmicon* and the *Journal of Greek Media and Culture*. Last, but not least, 'the various texts and interviews of a number of directors (such as Syllas Tzoumerkas, Babis Makridis, Alexandros Voulgaris) can be seen as parts of an informal manifesto, whose shaping is processual and happens mainly online and in the social networks' (20).
9. A good example is the streaming channel MUBI, which in 2018 ran for several months its own promotional campaign with a still from *Dogtooth* as its central image. A major supporter of recent Greek Cinema, MUBI tends to call almost all the new Greek films it distributes 'Greek Weird Wave examples'.
10. Olga Kourelou rightfully claims that in the 1960s, another period when Greek Cinema became international, it eventually faced the accusation that it promoted an exoticised version of Greece (with films such as Michael Cacoyannis's *Zorba the Greek* and Jules Dassin's *Never on Sunday* with Melina Mercouri). The Greek directors of the 2010s run a similar risk – that is, 'the danger of fetishising a post-industrial primitivism, embodied by the corrupt and abusive patriarchs that populate their films' (Kourelou et al. 2014: 142).
11. The global distribution of *Casus Belli* after 2011 very clearly shows the level of expectation for that type of a 'cinema of the Crisis' from Greece. The film was shown at numerous festivals, and its broadcasting rights were bought by TV channels around the world. In the period between April and December 2012, *Casus Belli* was shown on the French-German channel ARTE no fewer than five times.

12. Originally a phrase to describe Sam Fuller's filming of the concentration camps (see Nagib 2011: 10 and 28–29, on the origin and history of both Moullet's and Godard's phrases).
13. The French-German channel ARTE has been one of the most consistent supporters of the Greek Weird Wave in terms of production and promotion, and it can be considered one of the shaping forces for its European reception. This is one of the reasons why I often quote from its programmes and interviews with Greek directors.
14. As Ismail Xavier has memorably described, 'allegories usually rise from controversies' and moments of crisis (1999: 334). Even though it is possible to distinguish between an allegorical work (where the allegory is integrated in the structure, provoked, anticipated) and allegorical readings of works 'that do not specifically encourage such decipherment' (343), more often the line between the two cannot be easily drawn. This will be the case with most of the examples in this book (see, for instance, the discussion of *Washingtonia* in Chapter 2, *Pity* and *Attenberg* in Chapter 4, or *Dogtooth* in Chapter 5): In their case the chain of allegorical 'intention-utterance-interpretation is so complex', that one cannot discuss allegory 'without dealing with both the structure of texts and their reception within specific cultural and social contexts' (337, 335).
15. I reread these paragraphs while observing the global reaction to the COVID-19 emergency and the novel forms of social life and politics over life that the new management of populations brought about in 2020. The phrase 'our intense biopolitical present' no longer seems in need of further explanation. Yet, what happened globally in 2020 also felt like a *déjà vu*, a scenario for which we were already prepared by a wide and diverse cultural engagement with the biopolitical aspects of our societies over the last few decades.
16. In the special supplement on comics and the graphic novel, which the *Newspaper of the Journalists* publishes every Saturday, the Crisis has been an ongoing major focus. Between 2013 and 2015, for instance, a special page was devoted to documenting the *Μέρα της Κρίσεως*, a phrase that in Greek can mean both 'Judgement Day' and 'The Day of the Crisis'.
17. I mention framing specifically because it sits awkwardly with a post-Metzian semiotic analysis that tends to see this level of the film – shot composition, *mise-en-scène* and so on – as the domain of the metaphorical. Of course, there already exist numerous different approaches to framing and the axis of metaphor/metonymy, starting with Metz's own diverse positions.