Gender Psychodynamics in Films by Contemporary Greek Female Directors

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Statement of Originality

I, Sophia Sakellis, certify that to the best of my knowledge, the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, and that all assistance received in preparing this thesis and all sources have been acknowledged. This thesis has not been submitted for a degree at The University of Sydney or any other institution, or for any other purposes. No content produced by generative AI tools has been used in the preparation of this thesis. I also acknowledge that I received Research Training Program funding for fees required during my candidature.

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Abstract

This thesis explores gender representations in three contemporary feature films – all set in Athens – by Greek female directors during the period 1973–2009. This research aims to explore the underlying intent of each film and analyse how they depict the psychodynamic dimensions of gender, the complexities of interpersonal relationships, and the construction of layered identities shaped by cultural and socioeconomic contexts. The films selected are: Tonia Marketaki's [Τώνια Μαρκετάκη] (1942–1994) *John the Violent [Ιωάννης ο Βίαιος]* (1973); Frieda Liappa's [Φρίντα Λιάππα] (1948–1994) *Love Wanders in the Night [Οι δρόμοι της Αγάπης είναι Νυχτερινοί]* (1981); and Margarita Manda's [Μαργαρίτα Μαντά] (1963–) *Gold Dust [Χρυσόσκονη]* (2009). All three films are critically acclaimed narrative dramas and offer distinct and varied approaches to their respective themes, providing a rich canvas for comparative analysis and insight into their potential impact on audiences. They are also each director's first feature-length film.

These films masterfully portray life in the Grecian capital – its historical legacy, rapid and often chaotic urban expansion, and the resulting social consequences – articulating a poetics of loneliness in which solitude and alienation are inscribed both in the lives of its inhabitants and in the very fabric of the cityscape. All three films can be seen as nostalgic elegies to an old Athens, that is vividly remembered but acutely missed, together with the generations that inhabited the city and can be no more, following its inevitable transformation by the shifting social and political tides. Beyond these disconsolate reflections, however, the films' perspectives offer glimmers of hope and a crucial counterpoint to existential stagnation, by ultimately imbuing them with a forward-looking, albeit indeterminate, vision of the future.

In my analysis, I aim to identify the filmmakers' respective motivations, approaches and goals in creating their visual depictions and linguistic utterances, against a historical backdrop of iconic films by Greek directors of earlier periods. While maintaining close ties with their counterparts around the world, especially Europe, Greek female directors have developed distinct and eclectic visual styles which constitute fresh takes on the interpretation of universal themes that are still as current today as ever. Greek female directors have often been markedly ahead of their time in their insightful explorations and depictions of personal and societal issues, and their dedication to filmmaking has been substantial, while facing challenging obstacles through lack of support, recognition or financial assistance, and even active obstruction from public or private institutions and mainstream media, with many of them having historically devoted their entire life savings to their creative craft.

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A Note on References & Translations

In this study, I adopt the Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA) Author–Date referencing system. All sources, whether print, audiovisual, or online, are cited in-text in parentheses, giving the author's surname, year of publication, and page number where relevant. Full details of every source appear in a single bibliography at the end of the work, arranged alphabetically by author. Online sources are integrated into this same list, with access details and URLs provided as required. This approach ensures accuracy, consistency, and ease of cross-reference between the text and bibliography.

Please note that the vast majority of the primary and secondary sources referenced in this thesis were originally in Greek. All translations from Greek have been carried out by me, unless otherwise stated. Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy and to preserve the original tone, meaning, register and context of the source material.

Chapter 1 – Theoretical Framework

1.1 Thesis Overview

Within the scope of my working hypothesis, this study aims to reveal significant commonalities in the cinematic representations of emotional intimacy and power dynamics within social and familial contexts in narrative cinema by women filmmakers. Through a comparative analysis, employing narrative and semiotic modes, this research proposes that the female gaze, rather than being a reaction to external pronouncements of gender ideation, consists of the internalised way experience shapes memory and perception, particularly regarding the depiction of subtle emotional cues and relational power imbalances.

The thesis offers a qualitative analysis of gender representations in three narrative drama films by Greek female directors, released in 1973, 1981, and 2009. Despite their divergent genres and plots, the films provide a focused lens for examining the distinct rationales and methodologies used in portraying male and female characters. I argue that these representations offer authentic insights into lived experience within their historical and geographical contexts, contributing to a nuanced understanding of their socio-temporal milieu. While a small sample of films precludes a broad quantitative assessment of Greek cinema, it nonetheless serves as a valuable site for exploring the interplay between cinematic gender portrayals, their psychological foundations, audiences, and social norms.

The selection of these specific films is grounded in a scholarly interest in their directors' individual political histories, as well as my personal engagement with and knowledge of their geographical and cultural milieu, together with a thematic focus on the films' treatment of resonant issues, thereby situating this study within a framework that prioritises qualitative depth over quantitative breadth. The study examines how gender psychodynamics are articulated within cinematic texts, analysing the construction of gender identities and roles as both reflective and constitutive of societal understandings. It also investigates the psychological foundations of character development and narrative architecture that shape gendered subjectivities.

Drawing on psychoanalytic and gender studies, it considers how filmmakers deploy visual and narrative strategies to elicit affective responses – desire, power, conflict – thereby highlighting cinema's role as a medium for negotiating complex psychodynamics and contributing to cultural discourses on identity, power, and representation. Cinema is understood here as a multilayered medium that weaves political, ideological, cultural, and historical dimensions into narrative form. Through close analysis, films reveal prevailing perceptions and social trends within specific temporal contexts. Their polysemous nature makes them powerful tools for interrogating stereotypes, ideological currents, and the construction of subjectivities.

Cinematic texts also possess the capacity to shape identities symbolically, offering characters with whom audiences may identify. Depictions of social inequalities, when read through dominant historical and social contexts, may reinforce, perpetuate, or contest power structures, depending on the spectator's perspective. Such representations, whether passively observed or critically engaged with, illuminate paradigms that juxtapose or synthesise traditional and contemporary elements – particularly in relation to women and feminism.

This thesis comprises six chapters. Chapter 1 opens with an overview of the thesis and a literature review that surveys key critical approaches to cinema from a feminist perspective. It then outlines the foundational concepts of feminist film theory, psychodynamics, gender, and cultural representation in cinema, and a discussion of the methodological framework employed in this study. Chapter 2 consists of a brief historical overview of Greek cinema which leads to a discussion of the first and most prolific Greek female director, Maria Plyta. Her astonishing output comprises 17 films over two decades from 1950, with her last film released in 1970. Plyta dealt with social issues, not unlike those explored by contemporary directors today, and her gender representations bring a feminine perspective to her characters, as well as a new understanding of their identities, which sets her apart from her contemporary male peers.

Chapters 3–5 provide a contextualised analysis of the selected filmmakers and their respective debut full-length films, each featuring a dynamic interplay of male and female characters. This allows for an examination of their thematic concerns, gender representations, and evolving cinematic perspectives, facilitating comparisons both within their own oeuvre and in relation to the broader directorial landscape. Despite their narrative diversity, these films share the significant characteristic

of marking each director's initial foray into feature-length filmmaking, a crucial factor in their selection. While these directors possessed prior experience in various filmic roles and short film production, these films represent their introduction to a wider audience. This exploration aims to uncover how their nascent directorial visions, informed by their experiences, manifest in their first full-length works, and how these works contribute to the broader discourse on gender representation in cinema.

The selection of Athens as a backdrop reflects my personal connection to the city where I was born and raised, while the focus on debut feature films stems from the recognition that they represent a critical juncture in a director's career. These initial full-length works signify a commitment to filmmaking as a serious creative endeavour, allowing for a more profound exploration of thematic concerns. It is argued that these early films, marked by a raw and intimate creative vision, offer a unique lens through which to examine the filmmakers' core artistic principles, a point further elaborated upon in subsequent analysis. Chapter 6 aims to synthesise the findings of this study, culminating in my concluding remarks.

In *John the Violent* (1973), Tonia Marketaki deals with a seemingly psychopathic killer whose innocence-exuding face and effeminate good looks endear him to the public. He looks harmless, even naïve at times, and does not try to hide his alleged crime. Yet he appears capable of exploiting his attractiveness to the detriment of any sense of justice being served for the murdered female victim, a hardworking and generous young woman who is repeatedly vilified in court by the false and fanciful testimonies of a number of men who may have barely known her. In *Love Wanders in the Night* (1981), Frieda Liappa explores the love triangle between two lonely sisters and their estranged male cousin, whose return to Greece from France causes the breakdown of the sisters' relationship when the cousin and the younger sister leave together, abandoning the other sister to hopeless loneliness at home and leading her to commit suicide. In *Gold Dust* (2009), Margarita Manda explores the loving but strained relationship between three siblings, a male and two females, and their eventual reconciliation after facing up to, and resolving, a family dilemma regarding the disposal of their old family home.

A common theme of the films is that they are all centred around family. Marketaki's John lives with his aunt, her mother and her daughter, and their relationships are cast under a lens when the murder

occurs. Insights into the victim's life are obtained from her own and her fiancé's family, as heard in court and reported by the newspapers, compelling the viewer to contemplate and look for the truth in the diametrically opposed accounts of her life and character. It is noteworthy that the film was inspired by a true story of a young woman's murder a few years before the film was made. Family is also the central theme in the films by Liappa and Manda, where relationships pertaining to romantic, sibling or familial love are dissected to reveal their complexity and explore a whole range of emotions, from affection and respect to hatred and contempt – and everything in between – from a psychodynamic and/or feminist viewpoint. Using the critical framework of feminist film theory outlined in the literature review, I also aim to ascertain the extent of its relevance and applicability in exploring the character motivations and interactions in these films.

1.2 Literature Review

This section comprises a brief review of classical film narrative and feminist film theory; gender psychodynamics; feminist counter-cinema and the female spectator; female subjectivity and the female gaze; sexual difference and the female voice; and masculinity in cinema, followed by my Methodology.

1.2.1 Classical Film Narrative & Feminist Film Theory

Early feminist criticism focused on issues of representation and spectatorship and considered cinema as representing myths about women and femininity, as well as about men and masculinity. These distorted and unrealistic roles were recognised by women as having a negative impact on female spectators and a change was deemed necessary in their portrayals. It was soon realised, however, that positive representations were not sufficient to effect change, as the patriarchal framework in classical narratives imbued the imagery with its own semiotics. Psychoanalysis was hence employed to offer an insight into how sexual difference could be understood and encoded in film, thus becoming a dominant approach in feminist film theory.

In *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Laura Mulvey used Freudian psychoanalysis to explain the fascination with Hollywood films and, through the drive of 'scopophilia', as 'the desire to see', explored voyeuristic aspects of spectators' visual pleasure when watching story and image unfolding on screen. She further identified the dual nature, sexual in origin, of a spectator's visual pleasure as being voyeuristic when looking at other objects, characters and situations, and narcissistic when derived from self-identification with those characters, and recognised the gendered nature of that identification. According to Mulvey, the narrative structure of classical cinema imbues the male character with power and agency and the objectified female with powerlessness and passivity (Mulvey 1989b: 201).

Following a Lacanian paradigm, Mulvey posits that the female spectator, though identifying with her own mirror image and deriving narcissistic pleasure from the perfected human figure of the gendered actor, does not achieve a clear knowledge or awareness of self from looking at the screen, and is directed to identify with the desirable traits of the strong male instead of the weak and ambiguous or

enigmatic female, whose objectified persona is not the main subject or focus of attention. The notion of the 'male gaze' then views the highly polished seductress as the mysterious fetishised persona ridden with guilt, who either deserves to die or marry into oblivion. This patriarchal narrative, most evident in classical Hollywood movies of the 1930s to 1950s, resulted in many early feminists turning away from traditional cinematic techniques, instead embracing avant-garde, experimental or counter cinema (Mulvey 1989b: 26).

1.2.2 Gender Psychodynamics

The term 'gender psychodynamics' in my thesis title is drawn from psychoanalytic theory and refers to the psychological forces which shape, and are in turn shaped by, gender within cinematic narratives. It was originally proposed by Sigmund Freud, who attributed libidinal qualities to personality formation, and held that childhood sexual urges were the determinant of gender identity, but his theory later came under intense scrutiny for its subjective and arbitrary assumptions and narrow focus. The field has since been evolving away from its original narrow psychosexual focus into later iterations which include a multidisciplinary field that studies human interactions and identity formation, and a branch of psychoanalysis employed in psychotherapy, namely 'psychodynamic psychotherapy' (Shapiro 2017: 10).

1.2.3 A Feminist Counter Cinema & the Female Spectator

Inspired by the iconic aesthetics of Sergei Eisenstein, Bertolt Brecht and the modernist approach of Jean-Luc Godard, feminist counter cinema produced films that were typical of political filmmaking in the 1970s. By deconstructing classical narratives and realist codes, and incorporating psychoanalytic and Marxist-materialist elements, some filmmakers gave additional voices to their female characters, by positioning them both inside and outside the film, as a narrator and commentator. They utilised sound effects typical of thriller and horror films, but performing different functions instead of adding suspense. Others used theatrically stylised aesthetics, slow movement, or unrealistic mirror images in frames to indicate a character's split subjectivity while invoking a sense of wholeness within them, despite the chasm in the way others viewed them externally, and this was even extended to documentaries (Smelik 2018).

The idea of using illusionism to capture reality in constructing documentaries appeared unacceptable to many 'orthodox' feminist filmmakers, who believed that documentary should not use self-reflexivity to reflect women's oppression but, instead, manufacture and construct it. This type of feminist formalism, however, was rejected by others, such as Alex Juhasz, who pointed out the importance of some stylistically traditional historical documentaries for the women's movement which had, for the first time, mobilised women into action by presenting them with a radical, politicised reinterpretation of female identification and subjectivity. In her seminal essay 'Feminist Film Theory', Smelik also pointed out the theoretical contradiction that while feminism was set on deconstructing patriarchal images of what it means to be a woman, it should also answer that very question and redefine the female subject in all its multiplicity and complexity (Cook 2007: 494).

While feminism interrogated female subjectivity, two largely antithetical camps of filmmakers have emerged since the mid-1970s: a minority of female filmmakers who produce experimental films that are highly acclaimed by the few who get to see them; and a majority who produce more accessible realist or narrative films, who tend to be criticised by the former group of pandering to the dictates of commercialism. This rift has negatively impacted the reception of contemporary popular films and is arguably also responsible for their lack of receiving any due academic attention. In *Technologies of Gender*, Teresa de Lauretis emphasises the importance of narrative and visual pleasure in feminist cinema, and further advocates that women's films should indeed define the female, feminine or feminist identifications of characters and image (De Lauretis 1987: 108, 33).

In order to understand issues of female identification and spectatorship, the feminist theoretician Mary Ann Doane considered the notion of masquerade and specifically the mask of femininity, which was suggested in clinical observations to be used as a defensive mechanism by women who found themselves in masculine positions of authority. The concept of the masquerade was further proposed as a way to address the emotional responses of female spectators to 1940s Hollywood melodramas which depicted female stereotypes afflicted by narcissism, masochism, paranoia and hysteria. The emotional investment of the female viewer then led to an overidentification with the female character, thus diminishing the distance between them, and leaving the viewer in a similarly passive predicament. Contrary to the male gaze, which involved voyeurism and distance, the female gaze could only create distance through the device of the mask (Doane 1982: 26).

1.2.4 Female Subjectivity & the Female Gaze

The concepts listed above have been fervently debated, and opposing views proposed, in tandem with generational changes in the film industry and the creation of neo-feminist Hollywood movies, some of which, however, merely reversed male and female roles while keeping intact structures of dominance and submission. The image of the vamp, or femme fatale, with its seductive moral ambiguity, developed in Europe and was readily adopted by Hollywood in roles by actresses such as Greta Garbo, Bette Davis, Marlene Dietrich and others. This is considered a positive image of a woman with agency, which provides visual pleasure to the female spectator, and, in modern horror, unlike its Hitchcockian predecessor, the potential female victim rescues herself and becomes a survivor. Some more extreme revisionist approaches currently attempted today by major film studios, such as Disney, however, appear to have limited success with audiences at large.

An important feature of subjectivity, as proposed by De Lauretis, is its fluidity, which subjects it to a constant process of transformation through narration. Female characters are coerced into conforming to patriarchal stereotypes of femininity by seducing them with idealised images of the archetypal Mother, a man's ideal for the perfect woman. This coercion uses established socio-political and cultural codes aimed at depriving women of agency and subjecting them to acts of violence that are ultimately rooted in sadism. The female spectator's response, though not singular or trivial, can oscillate between an active masculine and a passive feminine identification, or a simultaneous identification with both. Though a double identification may yield more pleasure for the female spectator, it is also the means by which the narrative attains her consent and seduces her into a feminine passivity, which, in turn, turns the female subject into a 'non-subject' (De Lauretis 1984: 18).

In her influential essay *Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema*, Claire Johnston examines the role of narrative cinema, as typified by Hollywood films, in producing what is often claimed to be an 'oppressive cultural product' in the way it stereotypes women, and she observes that the use of iconography in Hollywood genres has partially perpetuated stereotypical portrayals of women. However, the restricted range of female roles, compared to the extensive variety of male roles, suggests an underlying sexist ideology that places man inside history while it confines women to an ahistorical status (Johnston 1999: 32). She further asserts that cinema must challenge the depiction of reality, interrogating cinematic language to disrupt ideological alignment with the text, and that films

by women in Hollywood that use formal means to challenge sexism do provide instructive models for emerging women's cinema (Johnston 1999: 36).

Johnston also argues that "sexist ideology is no less present in the European art cinema because stereotyping appears less obvious", stating that manipulation of the image is ever-present in any type of filmic construction (Johnston 1999: 38). She lauds the use of entertainment films for allowing women to counter their objectification in the cinema by realising their collective fantasies. "Women's cinema must embody the working through of desire… Ideas derived from the entertainment film, then, should inform the political film, and political ideas should inform the entertainment cinema: a two-way process" (Johnston 1999: 39). This is, thus, how "art for people's sake" can be, and is indeed, ultimately achieved through the cinematic medium.

1.2.5 Sexual Difference & the Female Voice

Another feminist film critic, Kaja Silverman, argues that in Western culture, together with the gaze and the image, it is also the auditory register that renders female desire as powerless and subservient to the male subject by keeping it outside discourse, which can thus reduce the female voice to silence or babble within dominant cinema. Silverman constructs a detailed argument about the role of the maternal voice on a child throughout its infancy, later childhood and adulthood by utilising the concept of a negative Oedipus complex which, with the onset of sexual difference as she enters puberty, enters a positive Oedipal phase signifying a desire towards the father. This dichotomy splits the female desire between the father and the mother for the rest of the daughter's life and can lead to her desiring the mother in a 'homosexual-maternal fantasmatic', as opposed to a normative desire for the father. Silverman also argues that these diverse identifications are not mutually exclusive but can coexist. The daughter may identify with the mother by wishing to possess her, and be her, and may see the father as a rival; the desire for the mother is at the core of female subjectivity, as well as female collectivity, and relates to female narcissism (Silverman 1988: 76, 125, 53).

In regard to the sound component, Michel Chion points out the lack of a sonic frame in films: sounds, unlike images which cannot extend outwards from their finite frame, can extend indefinitely in terms of quantity or complexity and can also be stacked on top of each other, free from any laws of realism. Ambient sounds, sound effects and noises can mingle with words, dialogues, voice-overs and film

music in a diversity of sound that contributes to a film's meaning, adds to its narrative component and synthesises its cultural essence (Chion and Steintrager 2015: 154). When spectators hear these sounds, they may imagine them coming out of the specific parts of the image; yet, in most cases, they are artificially created and superimposed.

Some later feminists have criticised psychoanalytic feminist film theory of heterosexual bias with its focus on a 'facile' binary (male/female) identification, having placed all its emphasis on anatomical difference (sex) and ignoring its social construction (gender). These debates are still raging between researchers who are arguing over a possible homo-erotic identification in the desiring gaze of the female spectatorship, such as in films featuring the femme fatales of the 1930s. Gay and lesbian criticism has also influenced both the interpretive analysis of films throughout the history of cinema, and the films by gay and lesbian filmmakers today. A further criticism has been its lack of focus on other differences beyond homosexuality, such as race, class, sexual preference, and age. 'Black feminism', for example, has persistently criticised the lack of focus on racial difference in film theories which use psychoanalysis to explore sexual difference, and there has been extensive scholarship on the issue over the years.

1.2.6 Masculinity in Cinema

Although feminist film theory established the male-dominated terrain of cinema studies, it only later turned its attention to male subjectivity and sexuality. The commencement of this discussion is credited to Pam Cook's 1982 essay *Masculinity in Crisis?* which examined masculinity in the age of feminism in the specific case of Martin Scorsese's 1980 film *Raging Bull*. Cook turned the dominant paradigm of male gaze on its head, pointing out how the male body acts as an erotic object for the female (or homoerotic) gaze in the film. She argues that the film explores issues of class and male sexuality through Robert De Niro's physical transformation. While the actor's virtuoso performance is celebrated, she believes the actual change in his body, including a false nose and gaining a lot of weight, is key. For viewers attracted to De Niro, the 'loss' of his attractive physique is unsettling, disrupting any sadistic pleasure from seeing his character punished. This loss of the actor's pre-existing desirable image draws the audience into the tragic hero's downfall. The pain of this loss then motivates a nostalgic longing for the actor's 'perfect body' and, similarly, the film itself nostalgically

looks back to a time when masculine virility represented resistance against oppression and exploitation (Cook 1982: 42–43).

In the 1990s, masculinity studies had become an established area of feminist film theory research. Contemporary masculinity had itself been associated with hysteria and masochism, signifying a displacement of the voyeurism and fetishism that had been used before to describe male subjectivity and spectatorship. In films involving speeding trains, for example, male spectators are equally affected by hysteria, which is not the quintessential female domain anymore, but similarly affects males due to the shock and trauma produced by the realistic images achieved by modern Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI) technology. More recently, the signifiers of manliness have also lost meaning, which is welcome news for the deconstruction of masculinity and femininity, as celebrated by postmodernist queer theory, which values ambivalence and heterogeneity using irony and parody to transgress conventional concepts of gender. Sexual difference has thus further morphed from its once binary dimension, to include manifold identifications and hybrid sexualities for both actors and spectators.

Since the 1990s, the landscape of cinematic production has undergone a notable transformation, marked by a significant augmentation in the creative output of women filmmakers. This expansion spans a diverse array of genres, encompassing arthouse cinema, romantic drama, comedic narratives, and even action-oriented features, evident in both Hollywood and European filmmaking contexts. Concurrently, there has been a substantive increase in the production of ‘non-mainstream’ or ‘independent’ films authored by filmmakers from lesbian, Black, and minority communities. This confluence of factors has cultivated a ‘heterogeneity of cinematic voices’, characterised by a multiplicity of genres, perspectives, and stylistic approaches.

1.3 Methodology

1.3.1 Feminist Film Theory & Gender Psychodynamics

This thesis employs a methodological framework grounded in feminist film theory and gender psychodynamic approaches. The theoretical foundation, established through a comprehensive review of literature encompassing feminist methodologies and epistemologies relevant to cinema authorship, alongside cultural and performance studies, directly informs the analysis of films made by women. This approach facilitates an interrogation of the nuanced interplay between sex and representation within mediated portrayals of the female subject, aiming to transcend patriarchal constructs, whether essentialist or constructivist. The discursive analysis of meaning and narrative critique is informed by the distinct yet related movements of feminism and post-feminism, providing a critical lens for examining film commentaries. The exploration of auteurial aesthetic, stylistic, and thematic components, specifically constructed to represent the female subject, forms a central aspect of this investigation.

The study also investigates the concept of the female gaze within each film, juxtaposing character voices against the filmmaker's perspective to discern protagonist positioning and objective attainment. While grounded in feminist film theory, this analysis has also been informed by postfeminist literature, discourse analysis of mediated speech, and cultural theory. Feminist film theory provides a systematic analytical framework; however, its initial emphasis on sexual difference, rooted in Freudian psychoanalysis and the Oedipus complex, historically fostered a limited analytical scope (Davies 2015: 269). Although contemporary developments have broadened the field to encompass gender diversity and non-binary relationships, this expansion has, paradoxically, contributed to the critical marginalisation of narrative films in certain academic spheres, and its expanded scope is not very relevant to my analysis.

I mainly utilise a psychodynamic methodology to explore the psychological underpinnings of character behaviours, specifically focusing on identification processes and the dynamics of the gaze. This approach aims to understand how cinematic elements construct and represent gender, elucidating how these films reflect, reinforce, or challenge societal understandings of gender identity, roles, and power dynamics. Drawing upon the application of 'gender psychodynamics' within the performing arts (Karalis 2012: 95), this research integrates a psychodynamic lens with feminist film theory to

analyse intergenerational gender representations. This synthesis facilitates a nuanced and comprehensive film analysis, demonstrating the potential for feminist discourse to adopt a more inclusive and multidimensional analytical framework.

In this thesis, I endeavour to adopt a pluralistic approach to film criticism, proposing a 'simultaneity of discourse,' analogous to political contexts, to encourage hybridity in interpretation (Albrecht and Moe 2015: 2). While acknowledging potential divergence from mainstream critical trends, this framework facilitates a more constructive analysis of a film's thematic and aesthetic merit. Ultimately, this pluralistic perspective promotes broader public engagement by enabling access to richer and more diverse critical understandings of cinema.

Following the third wave and subsequent iterations of 'feminist' discourse – which could perhaps be more aptly described as 'genderist' – a notable trend emerged: women filmmakers frequently express reluctance to align themselves with strict or dogmatic interpretations of feminism or postmodern feminism. Many perceive such labels as artificial and restrictive, even when acknowledging a vested interest in gender equality. While some adopt a holistic view of feminism as part of a broader human rights agenda, others contextualise it through race, ideology, or religion. Still others consider it inherently limiting. Within the Greek context, in particular, there has always existed a profound feminist awareness among women filmmakers.

While acknowledging the intricate interplay and complexities within the human condition, filmmakers naturally possess the ability to identify shared realities experienced by women, irrespective of their diverse racial, religious, or ethnic backgrounds. An essential objective of this thesis is, hence, to examine the influence of each filmmaker's gender on their creative output and the conscious nature of their approach, exploring how they engage with both female and male viewers and articulate their communication strategies. The thesis also investigates how these filmmakers represent the female experience in relation to the male experience, whether and how they challenge the traditionally male gaze, and the extent to which they strive to de-objectify the portrayal of women, assessing how central these concerns are to their artistic practice.

A semiotic methodology has been considered throughout my analysis of the constituent textual elements – visuals, sound, and dialogue – conveyed through cinematography, mise-en-scène, and editing, facilitating interpretations of character actions. These interpretations are supplemented by critical reviews, interviews (both in Greek and English), and personal film analyses. A hermeneutic approach further aids in discerning gendered or gender-neutral aspects of the directors' work. However, acknowledging the subjectivity inherent in meaning-making, this study recognises the audience's active role in constructing filmic interpretations. Ultimately, a film's efficacy is achieved when the filmmaker's vision resonates with both intended and casual audiences, fostering a cohesive connection.

1.3.2 Discourse Theory & Mediated Speech

Theoretical approaches such as Discourse Theory, which examines the social construction of meaning through language and symbolic systems, and the study of Mediated Speech, which analyses communication through various media within a narrative, offer valuable frameworks for understanding film. Discourse Theory can illuminate how gendered identities and power relations are constructed through cinematic language and visual cues, while an analysis of Mediated Speech might reveal nuances in character psychology and relationships as conveyed through on-screen communication technologies.

Discourse Theory has been intrinsically linked to cultural studies research, principally because it treats culture like a language, thus facilitating research in the field. However, this approach has its own limitations as it needs to make the very assumptions that researchers need to question. Founded in 1980, its first major development occurred with the emergence of sociolinguistics, which followed the crisis and eventual collapse of academic Marxism, at a time which witnessed a large number of books being published, where words and phrases such as 'ideology', 'text' and 'structure of feeling' were replaced by 'discourse' (Barker 2008: 150–52).

Recent research conducted in Greece has identified a "wealth of sociolinguistic studies on gender identity construction in interpersonal settings", but noted the limited research directed to mediated contexts. The study looked at a Greek television series to gain an understanding of the contrast between 'traditional' and 'progressive women', focusing on mediated "women's speech styles and

the role of such depictions in the reproduction of hegemonic gender identities" and showed that traditional identity was linked to language used in the private sphere, while progressive identity was associated with language in the public sphere. While gendered linguistic practices are portrayed dynamically, speech styles tend to be represented monolithically, forming a continuum of masculine to feminine styles that characters navigate within fictional contexts (Stamou, Maroniti, and Dinas 2012: 38).

This and other similar studies have followed on from linguistic studies of massively popular English-language TV series, such as *Sex and the City* (Bubel 2006) and *Mad Men* (Reutler 2013). These studies incorporated Feminist Linguistic Theory and analysis of Gender Stereotypes and stereotypification in TV series. Following the introduction of Discourse Theory, and in particular a Conversation Analysis approach, gender was reconceptualised not as an intrinsic quality but as something achieved through speech. Many sociolinguistic studies have since explored the construction of gender identity in a variety of interpersonal settings. An area of strong interest by sociolinguists is the determination of 'genderlect', the variety of speech that indicates gender identity. "Using the terms 'women's' and 'men's language', early studies have compiled lists of lexico-grammatical features … and conversational phenomena … that characterise gendered talk in Anglo-Saxon culture" (Stamou, Maroniti, and Dinas 2012: 39).

Studies have found that the mediated ways men and women talk have been defined as symbolic constructs in the literature, which presupposes a patriarchal social organisation where people assume traditional gender roles, and that 'progressive' women resist the hegemonic female identity by distancing themselves from traditional feminine speech patterns. Women can also overcome their perceived inferior status to men by assuming a powerful position over them, such as when acting as interviewers. The theoretical framework of the methodology employed in that study is the 'identities in interaction' model, "which conceptualises identity from a performative perspective and permits the analysis of the way gender identity is discursively constructed" (Stamou, Maroniti, and Dinas 2012: 40–41).

A similar methodological approach – comparing the speech styles of film characters – was considered but deemed beyond the scope of this thesis, though it remains a promising avenue for future research. While theoretical frameworks such as Discourse Theory and Mediated Speech provide valuable

perspectives on meaning and communication in film, this study prioritises the internal psychological dynamics of gender, examined through psychodynamic concepts such as identification and the gaze. My analysis centres on a psychodynamic interpretation of intergenerational gender representations in the selected films, employing methodological approaches most closely aligned with the creator's intent, while treating broader sociological and communication-oriented theories as secondary and beyond the scope of this study.

While the opus has a life of its own, as the French literary critic Roland Barthes intimated in 1967 when he stated that "The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (Seymour 2018: 32), I argue that a creator's vision cannot be ignored or discounted in favour of the viewer's. An auteur, pace Barthes, is not a 'scriptor', and even though "the potentially infinite readers of a text can generate equally infinite interpretations of that text" (Seymour 2018: 5), or in the case of film though there can be as many interpretations of it as there are viewers, audiences typically seek meaning. In fact, they generally seek the intended meaning put forth by a film's creator, and indeed show interest in the assessments provided by critics, though not always agreeing with them, thereby demonstrating the fluidity inherent in subjective evaluations. In the analyses which follow, then, my objective is to decipher the intended vision of the author by concentrating on the explicit depictions and portrayals presented within their work, and have also aimed to juxtapose the interpretations offered by critics and, when discernible, examine and interpret any potential biases.

Chapter 2 – A Brief History of Greek Cinema

2.1 Historical Background & Female Directors

The advent of cinematic art officially started in December 1895 with the Lumière brothers in Paris, and women worldwide enthusiastically espoused the new medium in all its forms and manifestations. The first female director, and indeed one of the first directors of any gender, was the French woman Alice Guy-Blaché (1873–1968) with her 1896 film *La Fée aux Choux (The Cabbage Fairy)*, considered to be the first ever narrative fiction film; it was written, produced and directed by Guy-Blaché herself before May 1896, as she detailed in her memoirs, notwithstanding unclarity as to the exact timing of the film's actual release (McMahan 2014: 13). Alice Guy-Blaché, who would evidently remain the only female director in the world until around 1906, would later go on to create her own film studio, producing "more than three hundred movies between 1910 and 1914" (Barbas 2006: 38).

The new medium gradually developed into an industry, commensurate with the technological advancements in film stock, provided at the time by Kodak, with lenses provided by the German company Zeiss and the American Bausch & Lomb, and soon a great international competition developed between the USA and France, with a few other European countries then joining in (Nowell-Smith 2017: 28–29). Through the silent and early-sound eras, Alice Guy-Blaché inspired a number of other women to follow in her footsteps, such as the American Lois Weber, and the first female Swedish filmmakers Ebba Lindkvist and Anna Hofman-Uddgren who made their debut in 1910–1911 (Nowell-Smith 1996: 157). Lois Weber in 1916 would become "Universal Studio's highest-paid director before forming her own independent production company" (Barbas 2006: 38).

The devastation caused in Europe by WWI would propel American cinema to international dominance, due to the elimination of its European competition, mainly from France and Italy (Cook 2016: 33). With the creation of the Hollywood studio system in the 1920s, the American film industry experienced meteoric success, as it was based on a very commercial and indeed conventional formula. Women were naturally welcome in front of the camera but excluded from the decisive roles of production and directing, and barred from raising controversial issues like birth control and abortion that were considered strictly female concerns.

Yet, Lois Weber (1879–1939), the first American female director, did address such taboo subjects in her pioneering films. Her directorial career spanned the years 1908 to 1934 and she wrote, directed and often starred in her own films, shining a light on many difficult issues faced by society and women in particular (Slide 1996a: 6, 78, 82, 83). For her success, she generously acknowledged her association with "broadminded men" who harboured no sexist bias against her and enabled her ideas by approving them on merit. At Universal, she was noted for her thoughtful attitude in search of truth, and her deep understanding of human nature. In his cinema book *The Silent Feminists*, Anthony Slide states that Alice Guy-Blaché "was the first individual, male or female, to direct a sound motion picture – Lois Weber was the second" (Slide 1996b: 32–33). While this claim has been disputed, both filmmakers have nevertheless been among the first pioneers to do so.

Behind the camera, women's roles were typically restricted to scriptwriting, costume design or working as make-up artists, secretaries etc. Those who tackled film direction could only do so by abandoning female themes in favour of creating conventional cinema, an option which was, however, successfully employed by those who could skilfully manipulate the medium to make their gender-motivated statements in a more indirect way. An example of such a woman is the American Dorothy Arzner (1897–1979) who "directed sixteen feature films in the years between 1927 and 1943" and is credited with "inventing the boom microphone, pioneering directing feats, and 'star making' many legends including Lucille Ball, Clara Bow and Katharine Hepburn" (Bridges et al. 2017: 247). Although, by her own admission, Arzner was not a feminist per se, there are feminist themes in her films, from the subject matter of her characters' female gaze, to portraying their struggles in trying to make it in a patriarchal society while preserving their professionalism and integrity (Slide 1996a: 16).

The difficulties experienced by women directors in producing mainstream films, due in large part to sex discrimination and financial constraints, led many to experimental and avant-garde cinema, where they could advance women's empowerment themes with a much lower monetary investment. According to Mulvey, avant-garde cinema also enabled women to portray women's issues and feminism, based on their "common interest in the politics of images and problems of aesthetic language", whereas Hollywood was too conventional to allow realism and the "human experience of contradiction", thereby typically reinforcing "antirealist" and utopian themes (Mulvey 2009: 120).

Because avant-garde films by female directors tended to have relatively small audiences, they did not garner the same attention as those by their male counterparts. As a result, they received little critical recognition, but also faced little opposition. It was not until the late 1960s, with the rise of second-wave feminism, that 'dominant cinema' was challenged for its portrayals of femininity, which were seen as reinforcing women's oppression. In response, feminist filmmakers sought to deconstruct these representations by developing a feminist counter-cinema, often supported by women's collectives.

Apart from pioneering countries like France and the USA, the new medium was a very exciting opportunity for many other countries around the world. The Lumière brothers' films had reached Greece in 1896, nine months after obtaining their patent, and were first screened in Athens, then in the still Ottoman-occupied Thessaloniki[1] in 1897, and on the island of Syros in 1900 (Karalis 2012: 1). By 1912, an early flurry of feature-length films was produced in several countries, including Australia and Greece (Nowell-Smith 1996: 53).

The effects of WWI, however, were severe for many countries, and took an especially heavy toll on Greece, as it was soon followed by political instability and the 1922 Asia Minor catastrophe, which caused the displacement of many Greeks, including the Greek population of Constantinople. Many Greeks who survived the purge found refuge in an already impoverished Greece, which had to accommodate the "establishment of more than a million Greek refugees from Turkey" (Mackridge 2012: 22) with the inevitable effect of even more severely abject poverty among the Athenian population. The Metaxas fascist dictatorship that took control of the government in 1936, with its notorious political persecutions and purging of its opponents, was then succeeded by the hardships of WWII and the Greek Civil War of 1946–49. Such unrelenting upheavals proved impossible for a successful film industry to be established before the country had time to heal and repair itself, and embark on building its infrastructure (Karalis 2012: 2).

[1] Thessaloniki gained its independence from Ottoman rule on 26 October 1912.

2.2 Early Greek Directors

The first known Greek film following the arrival of 'moving pictures' in Greece was a 60-second silent documentary, *The Weavers (Οι Υφάντρες)*, made in 1905 by the Manaki Brothers (Αδελφοί Ιωάννης & Μιλτιάδης Μανάκη), showing their grandmother and aunts weaving. Later, 'journal' films made their appearance, which showed current affairs. In 1910, the first formal cinema theatres opened in Athens showing short films of comedic content or archaeological sites. The first Greek feature film was the 1914 silent film *Golfo (Γκόλφω)*, based on a pastoral play, with talking films appearing in 1932. A studio film model, following in the footsteps of Hollywood, was established in Greece by Finos Films after WWII and produced a spectacularly successful industry which featured actors who had become international stars due to their exposure in European settings, such as Melina Mercouri and Irene Papas, and the director Michael Cacoyannis, of Zorba the Greek fame (Georgakas 2002: 2–4).

One of the most significant figures in Greek cinema at her time was Maria Plyta (1915–2006), recognised as the first female director in Greece. Plyta was a novelist and playwright, born in Thessaloniki. In the mid-1940s she turned her attention to cinema and worked under a number of well-known male directors of the era, until she took on scriptwriting and direction of her own films (Rouvas and Stathakopoulos 2005a). Her prolific output of 17 feature films, directed between 1950 and 1970, achieved considerable commercial success and positioned her as a key personality in the development of early post-war Greek cinema. Plyta's films often explored melodramatic themes and were noted for their capacity to convey a distinctly feminine perspective on Greek culture, civilisation, and identity. According to Karalis, she "explored female presence as a disrupting irregularity within the continuum of traditional patriarchal representations". Interestingly, her 1953 film *Eve* was also the "first major breakthrough in gender representation in Greek cinema, with realistic dialogue, convincing characters, and rhythmic narrative, paving the way for Cacoyannis' *Stella*", a lauded 1955 film with Melina Mercouri in the leading role (Karalis 2012: 60–61).

About a generation later, Lila Kourkoulakou (1936–2015) was a pioneering Greek filmmaker who studied directing at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome, inspired by Italian neorealism and popular forms like the Karagiozis shadow theatre. In 1954, she began shooting her first and most famous film, *The Island of Silence*, which depicted the lives of leprosy patients on the island of Spinalonga with rare compassion and social consciousness. Premiering at the Venice Film

Festival in 1958, the film broke taboos by confronting disease, stigma, and love under conditions of exile, establishing Kourkoulakou as one of the earliest female voices in Greek cinema at a time when the field was still dominated by men. Among local critics, however, she was blasted as a creator of profane images that shook the foundations of Greek society, while viewers from working-class neighbourhoods refused to see the film, fearing they could catch the disease from watching it[2].

Kourkoulakou's career extended beyond feature films into a substantial body of documentaries – over thirty works exploring political history, poetry, and cultural memory. From *Halley's Comet* (1962), which screened internationally, to her 1966 film *Eleftherios Venizelos* that blended documentary, poetry, and music, Kourkoulakou consistently sought to connect art with social critique. She lived by the values she portrayed on screen, offering support to former leprosy patients even after the closure of Spinalonga, and remained committed to giving voice to the marginalised. Her legacy lies in bringing a socially engaged, poetic realism to Greek cinema, and in opening space for women filmmakers who followed (Boskoitis 2015b).

[2] "Μέσα σε όλο αυτό το ήδη 'βαρύ' θέμα για την ψυχολογία του μέσου Έλληνα θεατή, η σκηνοθέτιδα σπάει τα ταμπού, δείχνοντας ένα ζευγάρι λεπρών να κάνουν έρωτα! Από τη μια, η κριτική κατακεραυνώνει την Κουρκουλάκου ως δημιουργό βέβηλων εικόνων που ταράζουν τα θεμέλια της ελληνικής κοινωνίας του καιρού. Ο φόβος κυριαρχεί. Θεατές λαϊκών συνοικιών αρνούνται να δουν την ταινία μήπως και... κολλήσουν την αρρώστια." (Boskoitis 2015b)

2.3 The Legacy of Maria Plyta

Maria Plyta (26 November 1915–4 March 2006)

Novelist, Playwright, Songwriter, Journalist, Film Director, Writer, Editor, Producer

2.3.1 Filmography

Maria Plyta, the first female Greek director, was born during WWI in Thessaloniki. A creative talent, she first turned to literature and wrote the novels *Tied wings (Δεμένα φτερά)* (1944) and *Chains (Αλυσίδες)* (1946). She also wrote the plays *Kherson Castle (Κάστρο της Χερσώνας)* (1948), which won praise in the competition of the literary magazine 'Forms' (Μορφές), and *Mother Earth (Μάνα Γης)* (1962). Cinema quickly won her over and, following in the footsteps of her then husband, Nikos Hatzinakos, she started producing films by established male directors, such as Alekos Sakellariou in *Marina (Μαρίνα)* (1947), and Giorgos Tzavellas in *Marinos Kontaras (Μαρίνος Κοντάρας)* (1948). Unable to make a living from production, and having spent her own money during a very difficult – both politically and financially – period in post-WWII Greece, she set her sights on film direction, engaging established and popular actors of the era, with her films enjoying commercial and critical success.

Plyta is credited with directing 17 feature films (between 1950 and 1970) out of a total of 25 as producer, scriptwriter and/or artistic director. She also taught herself the art of montage to enable her to edit her own films, as she found it necessary in achieving specific details that was impossible to convince her (typically male) monteur/s to implement. In 1978 she was a founding member of the Greek Directors' Guild, which recognised her achievements by naming her an honorary member in 1986 for her services to cinema (SanSimera 2006).

Her role in the challenging post-war years of Greek cinema was highly significant for the struggling and impoverished rural and urban working classes, with her dramatic and comedic films appealing to individuals who identified with the characters in her firstly ethnographic neorealist films, and later with her more stylised melodrama, as their own financial and class status was becoming more secure due to the general improvements in their standard of living. In fact, the 1950s and 1960s were a time of great transformation in the social, cultural and economic conditions in Greece, which resulted in deep changes in traditional gender relations. That led to a 'cinematic crisis in masculinity' and the

redefining of the male identity which, however, was never dismantled, but assumed an unstable, caricature-like dominance (Hadjikyriacou, 2013, p. 175).

After the civil war which formally ended in 1949, Athens entered a period of intense "reconstruction with massive demolitions of old central districts replaced by modernist buildings and the creation of new residential areas in the centre and the suburbs". This caused a change in demographics due to an unprecedented internal migration of people who flocked to the capital to find work and escape the political persecutions that were inevitable in the periphery, where any participation in the civil war was common knowledge to local inhabitants and could be used by powerful lobbies to exact revenge to sworn enemies (Poupou 2018: 29).

In this period of flux and uncertainty, Plyta chose to make art for the people and, in the words of film director Kostas Ferris[3], "Maria Plyta chose a type of popular cinema that, through her own cultivated intellect, would serve to highlight precisely the films' humanitarian elements. It was what Greek people, the Greek public, the Greek world really needed. And she never resorted to any easy, cheap or profit-driven compromise on anything related to her themes and her directing" (Zoumboulakis 2017). By focusing her candid camera on everyday people and their plight, she would bring their life struggles, in 'gros plan', to the attention of the viewer and facilitate understanding and communication between the sexes.

She made her debut as director and scriptwriter in 1950 with *The Betrothal (T' Αρραβωνιάσματα)* with the Novak-Film Company. The film is based on a 1924 award-winning stage play by Dimitris Bogris (1890–1964), which tells the story of a pair of hapless young lovers who make plans for the future unaware they are in fact siblings. Bogris portrays the provincial life on an island with great sensitivity and depth. The film was largely shot outdoors and depicted realistic scenery, including the filming of a fishing sequence with the use of dynamite, which gave the audience the sense of having experienced a genuinely realistic scene, and established Plyta as a dynamic director who was not

[3] «Μόνη της η Μαρία Πλυτά επέλεξε έναν λαϊκό κινηματογράφο που μέσα από τη δική της καλλιέργεια εξυπηρέτησε για να αναδείξει ακριβώς τα ανθρωπιστικά στοιχεία των ταινιών. Αυτά που πραγματικά χρειαζόταν ο ελληνικός λαός, το ελληνικό κοινό, ο ελληνικός κόσμος. Και δεν κατέφυγε σε καμία ευκολία, σε καμία φτήνια, σε καμία κερδοσκοπική υποχώρηση σε οτιδήποτε αφορούσε τα θέματά της και τη σκηνοθεσία της» (Zoumboulakis 2017).

lacking in any of the skills of her most accomplished male counterparts. She also brought operettas to the big screen, making this type of art more accessible to the general public (Tzavalas 2012: 65).

Her other films came in quick succession: *The She-Wolf (Η Λύκαινα)* (1951), *The Godson (Ο Βαφτιστικός)* (1952), *Eve (Η Εύα)* (1953), *The Neighbourhood Girl (Το Κορίτσι της Γειτονιάς)* (1954), *The Duchess of Placentia (Η Δούκισσα της Πλακεντίας)* (1956), *Jeep, Kiosk and Love (Τζιπ, Περίπτερο και Αγάπη)* (1957), *Only for One Night (Μόνο για Μια Νύχτα)* (1958), *The Shipwreck of Life (Τα Ναυάγια της Ζωής)* (1959), *I am a Man and I Will Do Whatever I Want (Άντρας Είμαι και το Κέφι μου θα Κάνω)* (1960), *You Came Late (Ήρθες Αργά)* (1961), *The Shoeshine (Ο Λουστράκος)* (1962), *The Prodigal (Ο Άσωτος)* (1963), *The Uphill Road (Ο Ανήφορος)* (1964), *The Winner (Ο Νικητής)* (1965), *The Little Merchant (Ο Εμποράκος)* (1967), *The Unknown Woman of the Night (Η άγνωστη της νύχτας)* (1970) (Mitropoulou 2006: 452).

For her 1965 film *The Winner*, again displaying her literary talent this time for poetry, Plyta wrote the lyrics of the featured song, *Where are you, my love? (Αγάπη μου πού είσαι)* which were set to music by internationally renowned multi-award-winning composer and pianist Mimis Plessas. This was sung by popular Greek singer Jenny Vanou (Agiannidis 2018), and became one of the singer's signature songs, available now on YouTube in a video from the relevant scene of the film[4]. *The Winner* is also acknowledged by Jane Sloan in her book *Reel Women* who summarises it thus: "Against her family's wishes, a wealthy younger sister waits for an opportunity to marry the chauffeur's son, her true love" (Sloan 2007: 289).

In her films, Plyta used the same safe and dominant narrative tradition of melodrama as her contemporary male colleagues, but added her own stamp of subversive emotional intensity that does not inevitably rely on a happy ending. Like her male colleagues, she also utilised the appeal of established and well-loved actors for her protagonists. Actors such as Dinos Iliopoulos, Aimilios Veakis, Mimis Fotopoulos, Alekos Alexandrakis, Manos Katrakis, Giorgos Foundas, Lambros Konstantaras, Kostas Hatzichristos, Nikos Rizos, Giannis Gionakis, Thanasis Vengos, Christoforos

[4] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mnR8erZM-lY&list=RDmnR8erZM-lY&start_radio=1

Nezer, Andreas Barkoulis, and others, and actresses such as Aleka Katseli, Sappho Notara, Despo Diamantidou, Smaroula Giouli, Jenny Karezi, Rena Vlachopoulou, and others (Kathimerini 2006).

Plyta's humanism in the way she dealt with her characters' traumatic experiences, which authentically mirrored those of real people in her society, was also inspirational to other emerging women directors, and in particular the actress Rena Galani who is acknowledged as the second Greek female director. Galani focused her themes on the wounds of childhood, orphaned heroines and young children in the films she directed, which delve deeply into her characters in order to reveal and ease their suffering (Kassaveti 2020: 74). Like Galani and her motto "Η τέχνη για τον άνθρωπο" (Art in the Service of the People) (Kassaveti, 2020, p. 79), Plyta's emphasis on female characters reflected their gender and social status and provided realistic depictions and critique, never resorting to the moralistic imperatives of some of her male colleagues, who sacrificed women and children in the pursuit of romantic and utopian notions of idealised inter-class relationships and unrealistically happy endings, thus demonstrating the dramatic difference in women's narratives in the filmic medium.

Despite their initial success, Plyta's films have now been largely forgotten. Some of them had a quasi-revival when they were broadcast on television in the 1980s, but others have fallen into deep obscurity (Karalis 2013–2014: 45). Some of the old Greek movies are now finding a new life on video-screening media such as YouTube, but Plyta's films remain hard to find. In 2006, the year of her death, the 47th Thessaloniki Film Festival event in her honour revealed a significant lack of research into the first few Greek female filmmakers, in contrast to their male counterparts. While there has been relatively high interest in the charismatic leading actresses of the era who starred in the genres of comedy and melodrama, such as Zoe Laskari, Aliki Vougiouklaki and Rena Vlachopoulou, the women who worked behind the scenes in this male-dominated industry have been overlooked and forgotten (Kassaveti 2020: 71). It is frequently observed that women's films, and especially those of the narrative variety, do not often make it into 'best of' genre or time-period lists. When compiling such lists, most professional critics tend to privilege art-house movies at the expense of 'commercial cinema'. "Every commercially successful film was, according to the dominant perception, by definition bad" (Karalis 2016: 20).

In her book *Young People in Greek Cinema Comedies 1948–1974 (Οι Νέοι στις Κωμωδίες του Ελληνικού Κινηματογράφου 1948–1974)*, Eliza Anna Delveroudi corroborates the conditions under

which working women were forced to perform their duties in the presence of their intimidating male bosses, or experience harassment even when disguised as a young man on the dance floor, as in Plyta's romantic comedy *I am a Man and I Will Do Whatever I Want*. The humorous scene is contextually suggestive, daringly so for its time, with a stereotypically masculine older moustached man attracted to what appears to be an effeminate boy of soft features dancing on a night out with his boss and friends, but who is in fact a young female secretary in disguise on the dance floor, who could only find a job by pretending to be a man (Delveroudi 2004: 238–39). In *Jeep, Kiosk and Love*, Plyta also outlines the dire employment conditions experienced by small business owners in a 1957 Greece (Delveroudi 2004: 278).

A significant insight into the world of Plyta is fortuitously granted by the director herself, from an interview she gave to Gay Angeli, a younger Greek female director, for the Greek cinema magazine 'Film' (Angeli 1979: 137–45). In the interview, conducted in Greek, Plyta reveals the circumstances that changed her relationship to cinema from being a casual viewer to eventually becoming a filmmaker. As she describes in her story, her husband was engaged in film production soon after the end of WWII and the German occupation of Greece, a time when Greeks were excited to hear their language spoken freely on screen again. The success of the films he had produced provided the impetus for Plyta to get involved in film production herself, when she was "left alone", as she says, presumably as a result of her husband's death. She continues by lamenting the fact that, contrary to rumours circulating at the time, she was left with "very little money" and was forced to find new ways to make a living, as from the sale of her books, all she ever gained was enough to buy "one pen". She considered cinema, however, as an opportunity to bring her book characters to life and see them take shape on screen (Angeli 1979: 138).

Her forays into production would lead her to also become the first Greek female producer. The way producers worked at the time was that when they finished a film, they handed it over to a distributor who channelled it through to the domestic and international markets. "At that time, the movies were going to Turkey, Egypt, America … [and] later to other countries in Europe". The distributor would then take his cut, which was originally 8% but gradually "increased to 10%, 12%, 15% and 20%". The first film she produced, *Marina*, was with Filopimin Finos (Φιλοποίμην Φίνος), founder of Finos Films, and directed by Giorgos Tzavellas. She was later forced by her mounting debts which , as she reveals, almost drove her to suicide, to give up production and concentrate on direction as it was

impossible to compete against the two major film production companies *Finos* and *Zervos* which had the duopoly at the time (Angeli 1979: 141).

The first film she directed, while still producing other films, was *The Betrothal* in 1948, which took one year to complete and was released in 1950. Among the many difficulties she faced during its filming was that one of her actresses was three months pregnant and had not told Plyta, so she had to shoot close-ups to avoid body shots. Shortly afterwards, the male protagonist was drafted into the army and had to leave, which meant that she had to film his scenes out of order. Another male actor was then struck down with peritonitis and spent five months in hospital, which forced her to find another actor to do back shots. Throughout the early years, she reveals that she was constantly asking questions and always learning, and had to keep borrowing money, with each one of the loans taking her the next three films to pay off, as all the takings from the first screenings were apparently shared between the studio, the movie theatre and tax (Angeli 1979: 139). Those realities may not be unheard of in the cinema industry today, but there was an extra burden that women had to bear then, as there was implicit and explicit sexism when trying to raise funding, not only for making but also promoting a film. The big-name filmmakers who could readily guarantee funding were all men and they ruled the industry. Women were unknown quantities in film direction and production, and could only achieve high status as actors.

Plyta also reveals that she had to learn how to be assertive and fight to keep control over the final product in order to overcome her cinematographer's naysaying. To achieve this, she had to prepare every single detail, from designing the décor on paper, to finding the space, and then waiting long hours for the sun to shine on the outdoor scenes in order to get the desired illumination and hue effect for the mise-en-scène, as natural light was how outdoor scenes were shot at the time. While working with only a reflector and a camera dolly on rails, which, as she discloses, was never possible to get to fit securely, she was constantly at the mercy of unfavourable weather conditions.

She also had to work long hours, forty-eight hours straight on several occasions, hitting a record forty-nine hours during Christmas 1953 when she had to get everything ready for a midnight shoot. It was in later years that the eight-hour workday would be introduced, as she says in the interview. After her eighth film, Plyta was compelled to start doing her own editing to ensure the montage was done to her exact specifications. As she was unable to work effectively with a Moviola, she had to check the

film with a magnifying glass, read the dialogues and manually make a cut at the appropriate place (Angeli 1979: 140). For all these difficulties Greek filmmakers experienced at the time, this period is considered a Golden Age of Greek cinema, with a very prolific output of around two hundred films produced each year by a studio system similar to that of Hollywood.

During her ethnographic film period, Plyta produced her work independently under the name of El Film, and during her melodrama film period from 1951 onwards, she worked with various production companies. Despite the commercial success of her films, she admits that she still encountered open discrimination from producers, with the striking example of Finos who openly claimed that "a woman should not be a director". This later proved to be a major setback for her, and became her outstanding regret, as she was unable to ever find a producer for *Humanity Time Zero (Ανθρωπότητα Ώρα Μηδέν)*, a film for which she had written the script. Yet, Finos later acknowledged her accomplishments and congratulated her for the quality of her work. Her generosity of spirit was also abundantly evident when she was later asked what she thought of the 'New Greek Cinema' that followed the neorealist period in the late 1960s. Plyta was very supportive, and said she was impressed by the 'New Wave', but also sounded a warning to producers to "not get carried away by sporadic successes" (Angeli 1979: 143).

2.3.2 Overview & Assessment

In his aptly-named 2016 essay *From the archives of Oblivion: the first female Greek director Maria Plyta (1915–2006)*, Vrasidas Karalis positions Plyta's films within a rigorous feminist framework established by Mulvey in her essay *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Mulvey 2009: 13,26). His in-depth historical, sociological and artistic study of Plyta's films highlights her significant departures from dominant male narratives in the matters of character creations and relationships. He proceeds to a thorough analysis of her female characters, and praises her early films for their strong heroines who fought against the social structures embedded in their rigid rural and urban environment, and her later melodramas for realistically depicting working women who had to constantly combat sexual stereotyping, harassment and assaults by male colleagues and bosses. He also credits Plyta with being the first Greek filmmaker to present women as thinking, feeling and desiring human beings that transformed "the screen into the site of a unique and radical revelation that needs to be revisited" (Karalis 2013–2014: 67).

Karalis further critiques the lack of interest into the Greek female film pioneer, exhibited by researchers and writers who arguably dismiss the subtle and nuanced subversive subtexts that combat female stereotyping and victimhood in her movies, and laments the unfortunate neglect of the physical films which nowadays "circulate in bad and incomplete versions". Though he acknowledges their parochial and now rather dated feel, he touts her films for shining a light on "a woman's desire to speak in the first person", and likens her contribution to those of her trailblazing contemporaries "Lois Weber, Dorothy Arzner, Germaine Dulac and … Ida Lupino". An interesting viewpoint on Plyta's two distinct directorial periods is expressed by a younger filmmaker, Tonia Marketaki, who admired Plyta's work and is one of the three filmmakers I am examining in this thesis. Marketaki points out that Plyta used long shots in her ethnographic films, typical of the social realist films in the 1950s, and close-ups in her melodramas, in line with the dominant trends of the 1960s (Karalis 2013–2014: 45, 47). This point is explored later in this thesis.

In her film *I am a Man and I Will Do Whatever I Want*, Plyta set the record straight and got back at the male chauvinist attitudes she had personally endured, as exemplified by the male pronouncement "Only men should work", so reminiscent of what she was herself subjected to by Finos. Plyta, with her audacious and provocative personified images of womanhood, posed a threat to the traditional female roles Finos aimed to reproduce on screen, which appealed to the social hierarchies and expectations of his movie-goers. Her strong-willed and passionate women in *The She-Wolf* and *The Unknown Woman of the Night*, and the unabashed female gaze of *Eve* who reinvents herself with her sexualised and confronting femininity never seen before in Greek cinema, paved the way for Cacoyannis' celebrated 1955 film *Stella*. And when, later on, male directors were dealing with sophisticated urban middle-class melodrama, she focused on the working classes, drawing her characters from among the marginalised and dispossessed, striving to invent a female mythography that would visually represent and reflect the aspirations and potential of her female audience, a work that would later be continued and expanded by her successors (Karalis 2013–2014: 58).

A closer look at her early films reveals that Plyta's heroines are unlike those portrayed by contemporary male filmmakers, most notably Giorgos Tzavellas' 'feminine' women, Nikos Koundouros' powerless ones and Michael Cacoyannis' femmes fatales, as outlined below. Notwithstanding the film's flaws which were due to technical and financial issues, the protagonist of

Plyta's *Eve* is true to life, seductive, ethically ambivalent, with a powerful sense of self-determination verging on emotional cruelty. She is more 'flesh and blood' than a male fantasy of acquiescent femininity, and the self-loathing evident in her tormented husband's pleas of eternal love, and her young suitor's insecurity, present an affront to patriarchy by reversing the male and female roles, making Plyta the first to challenge the traditional gender narratives in Greek cinema (Karalis 2012: 61).

In his best and most popular 1955 film *The Counterfeit Coin* – with original title *The Story of a Counterfeit Coin (Ιστορία μιας Κάλπικης Λίρας)* – Tzavellas' main focus is the married couple and the emotional relationships between its members. His compassionate style creates women who are either moral middle-class housewives playing their traditional roles, or fallen angels who were forced into prostitution but redeem themselves through marriage to a good man, thus transforming their life into a morally desirable domesticity (Karalis 2013–2014: 46). His character creations, capable of displaying a broad range of emotions, encourage the viewer's empathy for the alienation their sprawling urban reality imposes on them within the confines of their dwindling interior settings.

The central figure in Koundouros' films is a heterosexual "solitary man in a lonely crowd". Inspired by epic themes, Koundouros fights "against the predatory structures of social depersonalisation" created by a capitalist power dynamic, where his characters become pawns in a system they are unable to escape from (Karalis 2016: 118). In his 1956 film, *The Ogre of Athens (Ο Δράκος)*, a satirical noir crime drama whose main character is an unremarkable bank employee who looks like a known criminal, Koundouros seizes the opportunity to delve into the claustrophobic Athenian underworld, where fear and suspicion lurk in the bleak and dark corners, and expose the role of the state machinery and its police, highlighting the ever-present murky forces of totalitarianism and oppression that no one seems able to overcome (Karalis 2012: 73).

In Koundouros' 1963 film *Young Aphrodites (Μικρές Αφροδίτες)*, considered to be based on the story of *Daphnis and Chloe* written by Greek romance novelist Longus in the second century AD, the focus turns to women, but the power still lies in the hands of men. In the original Longus story, two young shepherds, abandoned at birth, are brought up together by foster parents and, as they are isolated from their human community, without the requisite upbringing that would introduce them to human relationships, they fall in love unable to realise what is happening to them. In Koundouros' film, their

names are never mentioned, and the only identity marker is their age and sex. While in Longus' original text love ultimately triumphs, in *Young Aphrodites* the male employs verbal or physical force to win the female, and the more aggressive male will be the winner (Delveroudi 2008: 233).

Michael Cacoyannis' quintessentially Greek film *Stella* is a name with a considerable cinematic history[5] and a masterful and indeed literal portrayal of a 'femme fatale' – though it is she who falls victim to the fatal knifing – or 'femme libre' as its French title advertised it by. The film was a celebrated international success within the art circles of the Cannes Film Festival and at the Golden Globes where it received the Best Foreign Film award (Kourelou 2016: 60). Stella was played by the renowned actress and subsequently political activist Melina Mercouri (1920–1994), who would later live in exile in France during the military dictatorship of 1967–1974. Her outspokenness against the regime resulted in the loss of her citizenship, only to make her an international symbol of resistance and secure her a triumphant return to Greece, where she became Culture Minister in the socialist Andreas Papandreou government in 1981. A tall, lithe and blond beauty[6] with a deep voice and the good education her upper-class upbringing endowed her with, she embodied a natural sophistication and appeal, very convincing attributes for the film's protagonist.

Stella was based on a play by Iakovos Kambanellis who also co-wrote the script for the film with Cacoyannis. The character of Stella is a free-spirited rebetiko singer who values her independence and is averse to marriage, which she views as undermining her freedom, in what amounts to a complete reversal of traditional roles. When men offer to marry her, she warns them that this will lead to the end of their relationship and when they insist, she feels compelled to turn them down, leaving everyone around her perplexed and mystified. Her refusal to comply with the dictates of convention, or yield to the strong pressure on her from both men and women in her circle to abandon

[5] The series of *Stella* films began with the problematic 1937 King Vidor heroine, based on the 1923 novel *Stella Dallas* by Olive Higgins Prouty which had numerous cinematic adaptations. The Claude Binyon 1950 *Stella* comedy was the most recent iteration of the character which could have influenced the selection of the name for Kambanellis, in his retelling of Georges Bizet's opera *Carmen*.

[6] Although Mercouri was in her thirties at the time, and, according to Donald Zec, journalist with the Daily Mirror, not a classical beauty in the style of Lana Turner, Julie Christie, Brigitte Bardot, Marilyn Monroe or Jane Fonda he was often photographed with, or Grace Kelly that he described her as unlike to in a 1964 article, he did acknowledge her as an 'enchanting, absolutely magnificent specimen of a female' (Kourelou 2016: 67).

her career and become domesticated, will lead her boyfriend, who was stood up by her at the altar, to fatally stab her when she keeps walking towards him in spite of his warning her to stay away because he is carrying a knife. The Greek bouzouki music and Manos Hadjidakis' musical direction play a very crucial diegetic role in the overall pathos (Georgakas 2005: 24–25).

It is indicative to note that, domestically, *Stella* and Mercouri received glowing reviews from journalists in the intelligentsia of the broadsheet liberal newspaper circles, but were strongly criticised on ideological grounds by left-wing journalists who went so far as to call the titular character a whore for pursuing independence and sexual freedom (Kourelou 2016: 60–61). According to them, the film "gave a debased representation of Greek social reality, and it set a dangerous precedent for young Greek women who would be victimized if they were to emulate the unrealistic character of Stella" (Komninos 2011: 82). This betrays a deeply reactionary and utopian position strongly held within a left-wing leadership that ideologically viewed gender equality as a non-issue within the framework of a future socialist system, where equality would become the miraculously established panacea that would be instantly enjoyed by all.

In contrast to her male counterparts above, when Plyta constructs her women, she gives them the screen space to communicate their feelings and emotions to the viewer by experimenting with a range of camera angles and techniques, the editing of scenes and sequences, as well as the use of sound, and she may return to or zoom into a scene if it is warranted in order to highlight an important emotion. Although her lens was firmly fixed on the woman's gaze, with a self-confidence that is uncharacteristic of most of the women of her generation, and unlike the feminist movement's fixation on a need to wage war on patriarchy and male privilege, Plyta battled patriarchy by becoming a director who presented another view on melodrama to those of her male colleagues, while adopting "their own weapons". Although her "era demanded sentimentality, love for children, in a neo-realist fashion", Plyta's women are strong role-models who fight against inequality with confidence, creativity and assertiveness, unlike her male colleagues who resort to basing their melodrama on the inferior status of the opposite sex (Mitropoulou 2006: 358).

From a critical viewpoint, however, while using "their weapons", Plyta creates her characters with unsettling emotional subtexts which manifest "as over-inflated sentimentality … [and] look more like fantasies or suppressed male desires and less like believable or probable characters". She "objectifies

the male body" in *Eve*, and desexualises it in her melodramas of the 1960s. She imposes a new order in melodrama by stripping the male of his power and rendering him impotent in dealing with society's demands. And in using the same actors as her male colleagues, she sends the latter a message by inverting her actors' prior typecasting as strong male cinematic personas, and feminises them, rendering them harmless, weak and inoffensive (Karalis 2013–2014: 52). Apart from making her films more appealing to the audience by presenting them with their beloved actors, she urges viewers to question the source of that appeal by stripping her actors of any preconceived ideas attained from previous roles, and to focus their attention exclusively on the characters these actors impersonate in her movies. She, therefore, provides new opportunities for the actors who, free from any prior typecasting, can explore and display their acting range in bringing her characters to life. She also invites her audience to question notions of masculinity by subverting and questioning familiar images.

Indeed, Eve's forwardness when introducing herself to the dashing young swimmer played by Alekos Alexandrakis, whom she spots frolicking like a dolphin in the sea from the secluded little island cove beach she has chosen as her vantage point, is only conceivable as a reversal of roles, especially for the era. Attired in the latest early 1950s fashion, in a stylish cocktail dress with asymmetrical off-the-shoulder cut, she is the antithesis of every woman who lives on the island, from the old women dressed in black from head to toe, mourning the death of relatives perhaps, to the middle-aged women in their conservative dress, to even the local young girl tending to the chicken coop. Eve, played by Nina Sgouridou, is a beautiful, wealthy, modern, sophisticated and emancipated young woman, who typically smokes, pays little attention to polite formalities when she is greeted by village women, and never engages with them in any casual address or conversation; in turn, they consider her a she-devil, though the reason is not readily clear. Eve, arguably named after the first female to represent Woman, with all her biblical assets and flaws, is a mysterious and enigmatic character, not unlike her namesake played by Anne Baxter in the 1950 Hollywood classic *All About Eve*.

Bored with her married life in the claustrophobic environment of the traditional setting of her holiday home, presumed to be in one of the Ionian Islands, she has nothing to do but swim and lounge around all day long. Around her, all women are busy executing with precision a series of domestic duties without question, calling every visiting man a 'boss' (αφέντη) – a subtle irony as a show of respect to a superior, even though those women in traditional garb are the only ones running the village, the local taverns and coffee shops. They are working women – a central theme in all Plyta's films – whose husbands appear to have never returned from the war, and now have to run their shops and raise their

families on their own, and be both mother and father to their children. Though not a traditional life in the 1950s, it is a typical one, with many men having lost their lives during the war and, later, the civil war. In contrast, Eve's life is idle, empty and unproductive, with meaningless relationships that leave her unfulfilled, as we are led to believe: a woman who attracts any man she wants with her beauty and sexuality, and then controls them with emotional manipulation and indifference. When her provocative gaze intrigues the dashing young man, she disarms him by behaving like an impatient and impulsive child – in a scene not lacking in humour – dragging him along to her home in what he assumes, and possibly fears, is an invitation to her bed.

Plyta composes the interior scene in an authentically appointed modern island home with elegant style and convincing décor, representative of the era. When Eve ushers her conquest into her room, her licentious behaviour – happy, excited and inviting – is intriguing to the viewer, as well as to the young man; she behaves as a naïve being who has just descended from another planet and has no knowledge of earthly convention and propriety. His embarrassment is palpable, not unlike that which would be felt by a hypothetically innocent girl who had been invited to the bedroom of a man she had only just met. The director paints his bewildered shame by focusing on his body language, his nervously clutching hands and his gaze which avoids eye contact with Eve. His gesture of wiping his sweat off his forehead is ironically and manipulatively attributed by her, with a hint of false self-deception, to the hot summer temperature, a metaphor for the temperature rise induced by an emotional crescendo. When undressing, she asks him to look away, but invites him to help her put on her dress and is, rather provocatively, annoyed by his attempt to kiss her. This may provide an unbiased witness with a reason for her bad reputation among the local women, when judged by behavioural norms within a patriarchal and conservative society which bases its moral judgment on historical gender expectations.

Apart from any moralistic imperatives on behalf of the island's seemingly simple and unsophisticated women, however, there is a distinct feminist dichotomy that lies at the heart of their judgments and perceptions, one which hinges on the women's work status. Work has historically been a significant aspiration in the struggle for women's liberation, and it is a central theme in all of Plyta's films, including *Eve*. Her focus on the lives and struggles of working women is reinforced by her own outlook, which reflects a deep conviction that labour beyond the domestic sphere is central to a woman's emancipation and her pursuit of equality and fulfilment. In contrast to Eve's idle, urban

form of emancipation stands the recognition that the island's poor working women running their own shops appear more reconciled to, and at ease with, the hardships of their lives.

Eve's idleness, therefore, hints at one possible reason for her lack of satisfaction with her life: the absence of professional engagement, which cannot be fulfilled by a wealthy lifestyle and an attentive, loving husband. Her feeling of being stifled and trapped in a traditional matrimonial setting is only presumed by the viewer, who is provided with no window into her past or her character in order to comprehend it, and has no access point as to the reason for her marriage or her motives; it could have been for want of stability or a new or different lifestyle, or as a result of family pressure, as often happens in real life. The filmmaker deliberately does not tell us, and we are each left to extrapolate for ourselves or deduce that the reason may perhaps be of no consequence.

Eve's pursuit of assertiveness and self-fulfilment through her erratic attempts at controlling or abandoning her casual male companions is manifestly temporary and ultimately unfulfilling. Our inability to comprehend or empathise with her character may not necessarily lead us to feel pity for her as such, an emotion typically associated with melodramas, but we cannot fail to acknowledge the pathos of the "complex tension between different emotions", so characteristic of the genre (Hanich, Menninghaus, and Wilder 2017: 78).

In what is a striking analogy with the biblical Eve, she will always be a fallen angel in a repressive society, a sinful woman who was expelled from paradise for seeking knowledge, and condemned to eternal shame and damnation for falling short of discovering meaningful answers to her unrealistic expectations; and this is what differentiates Plyta's Eve from Hollywood's quintessential noir femme fatale. Although she has the power of seduction over men, and her mysterious personality can traumatise and disempower them, she lacks a hidden purpose and agenda that would render her more lethal to her victims than to herself. Her childlike misconduct and improprieties are just spasmodic attempts at breaking free of her inescapable predicament and prove futile, time and again. Even in comparison to her later incarnation in Cacoyannis' *Stella*, she lacks the strength and obstinacy of character that is so characteristic of the slain heroine, and fails to draw empathy from the female spectator and the identification and pleasure that a powerful femme fatale would have achieved (Smelik 2018).

Stella is a femme fatale to the extent that she is a "blonde, tall, and sexy" independent woman (Komninos 2011: 81), who refuses the suffocating reins of marriage which will inevitably confine her into assuming a traditional female role by being subservient to her husband. She thus rejects her lover's proposal who, in an interesting twist is played by Alekos Alexandrakis, the same actor who plays Eve's suitor, setting in motion her untimely demise. Her bold independence is manifested in her actions as she provokes the tragedy that will befall her but, even in death, remains a powerful symbol of an uncompromising free spirit in Greek cinema (Stavrinides 2011: 121).

Yet, Stella's femme fatale status is also strongly disputed not only by the fact that she is, in fact, the victim, but also by her preference for sun and the outdoors over the traditional mysterious dark places. Her death by stabbing at the hand of her new lover was never intended as punishment to allay the male spectators' fear of castration, but to draw empathy to a heroine who abhors petit bourgeois hypocrisy and "wants to control her own sexuality". Despite her first lover's premature death "the plot suggests that it is his oppressive family, not Stella that must be blamed for driving this young man to despair". When Stella, weakened by his death, yields to the pressure and accepts her new lover's proposal of marriage, she sings that love has become a double-edged sword (Αγάπη που 'γινες δίκοπο μαχαίρι). Dressed in black, the colour of mourning, it is evident that her new lover has entrapped her, which "is the exact opposite of a femme fatale who typically entraps her man" (Komninos 2011: 81).

Through Eve's journey, we are able to follow the trajectory and architecture of her emotions, as well as those of all the other characters, and try to make sense of them in exactly the same way as we would with real people who are directly or indirectly familiar to us (Tan 2013: 156). The key to Eve's drama centres on herself, as well as her husband. While he – and the local residents – know about her extramarital affairs, she can never leave him. She is a lonely woman in a loveless marriage, with a husband who will never give her up, which will always ultimately scare any young lover who gets close to her, only to eventually realise he will end up unloved by her, just like her husband is now. Even while she cares for her husband and looks for him when he goes missing in his boat during a dark stormy night, Eve's only real but ambiguous desire is for her freedom, an elusive freedom which will never be achieved while society places barriers in her path, and in the path of those women who seek agency and self-determination.

Plyta's Eve inarguably embodies all the biblical connotations that have made it the quintessential woman's name through to today. She is the incarnation of the dichotomy between morality and desire; seductive, ambivalent and fallible; "the ultimate insult to the patriarchal establishment" (Karalis 2012: 61). In her character, as in all Plyta's female characters, we see the distinct effort to establish "a feminine perspective which was not necessarily a feminist one: the stereotypes of dominant representations and the censorship of the industry made impossible the establishment of a totalising perception of womanhood" (Karalis 2013–2014: 64).

Examined from a feminist critical perspective, the scope of the female gaze in Plyta's *Eve* in the scene at the beach, for example, is not aimed at the fetishisation of the male body through the camera but its effect on the female gaze. By remaining static, as a neutral observer, the camera captures the reality of Eve's gaze and any feelings of deprivation or longing it may create, without turning the male body into an object of voyeurism, thereby de-eroticising the male body and rendering invalid any scopophilia that would normally be expected following such a reversal of roles. In this way, Plyta can examine the interaction between the male and female gaze of her characters, its construction, extent and failure. "This omnipotence of the gaze not only pervades the female and the male, but also sinks them into an eternal swamp. It is this immorality that lurks in the eye that makes the film original and ground-breaking at the same time" (Ntellis 2020).

Another noteworthy aspect of Plyta's broad range of interests has been history, a theme not always prominently featured, in fact often deliberately avoided by other filmmakers. In her 1956 film *The Duchess of Placentia* she brings to life a true story that had touched nineteenth-century Athenians at the time of King Otto's reign. The film had moderate success in its first screenings, becoming the tenth most popular film in cinemas at the time. It is about the loving relationship between a mother, French aristocrat Duchess Sophie de Marbois-Lebrun, and her dying daughter. On losing her daughter, the mother is completely transformed into an eccentric and obsessive old woman, odd and difficult to understand or deal with, who is criticised for loving dogs (of which she possessed fourteen at one time) more than people. Plyta focuses on the strong, independent character of a woman who left her home country and husband to travel extensively for the sake of her daughter's failing health, only to end up in Attica where she decides to live out her remaining years of life (Delveroudi 2009: 344, 50–52).

Plyta does not create a sensationalist story of vice and madness to attract an audience. She studies the authors who wrote about the Duchess after obtaining and collecting personal testimonies from people who had worked for her, occasionally adding their own judgements and usually portraying her with the negativity their lack of understanding would render inevitable. Plyta goes beyond other people's judgments and very carefully analyses all the available sources, accurately conveying incidents and circumstances. She does not omit the mother's idiosyncrasies, yet always shines an empathetic and thoughtful light on her character, in another sign of her ability to gaze deeply and insightfully into the personalities of her characters.

If the Duchess appears mad at times to other people, Plyta reveals her as having a full grasp of reality and only resorting to delusions to overcome the harsh reality of life's brutal blows. In so doing, Plyta also shines a light on her own life, for the independent and determined woman that she has been, working in a male-dominated workplace with only herself to draw support from in order to deal with everyday difficulties in her life (Delveroudi 2009: 352–253). Working up to 18 hours in the traditional model of filmmaking which is only beginning to change with the sheer number of women filmmakers now making the rules, these pioneers worked with basic equipment, without the multiple stationary cameras, and those moving on long tracks, or huge mobile cranes in an effort to create a dynamic and immersive viewing experience that facilitates layers of emotion to be built, as such equipment would be too expensive and indeed unavailable at the time.

In her films, Plyta endeavoured to represent with humanity and empathy the oppressed and those marginalised within a precariously unstable social fabric, by paying careful attention to every detail within each frame of her films. She exhibited a rare natural ability in creating effective scenery with interior lighting, and succeeded in producing unique and challenging films. Yet, although she was commercially successful during her active years, she has never received the attention she deserved since. This has sadly been a rather common occurrence with women film pioneers, not only in Greece. In fact, early path-beaters such as Alice Guy-Blaché, Lois Weber and Germaine Dulac, had to be rediscovered as well, after falling into oblivion.

2.4 Afterword

Lamenting the lack of interest in the early women pioneers, in his 1996 book *Lois Weber: The Director who Lost Her Way in History*, Anthony Slide, who also compiled Alice Guy-Blaché's American filmography while editing her memoirs (Blaché 1996: 163), was critical of the fact that Lois Weber had largely been forgotten and ignored (Slide 1996a: 16), and in his book *Silent Feminists* of the same year, he characteristically commented "I have the distinct impression that many contemporary women filmmakers simply do not want to acknowledge a debt to an earlier generation and have no desire for the record to show that other women were active in the field long before they were even born" (Slide 1996b: xiii).

However, lack of camaraderie may not always manifest itself intergenerationally, but also within the very generation of the early women film pioneers, due to an inherent antagonism about who came first, as evidenced, for example, in the way Alice Guy-Blaché mentions Lois Weber in her memoirs:

> "Herbert Blaché [Alice Guy-Blaché's husband] had directed, in the little Gaumont studio at Fort Lee, a singer named Lois Weber who recorded several songs for the chronophone. She had watched me direct the first little films and doubtless thought it was not difficult. She got a directing job and certain Americans pretend that she was the first woman director. My first film, of which I speak in the first part of these memoirs, dated 1896" (Blaché 1996: 79).

It is interesting in this context to draw a distinction between the above comment, which may indeed be justified if there was in fact misinformation propagated by 'certain Americans' as mentioned above, and Plyta's very generous and unselfish response when asked for her opinion about a subsequent generation of women directors, about whom she expressed unreserved admiration and approval, as previously mentioned in this section.

It is heartening to note, however, that the effort of recovering the work of early women pioneers once more, after their wilful neglect in the 1970s and 1980s, is now finding a new revival among feminist historians of early cinema, as historical research is rediscovering that "before the coming of sound and the institutionalization of the film industry, women were present in key creative roles in far greater numbers than feminist film scholars had previously supposed" (Donald & Renov, 2008, p. 398). And although some of these women may not necessarily have considered themselves feminists

then, they had an enormous impact on women's lives and consequently on the women's movement itself, and their work should be sought, rediscovered and adequately studied.

In the Greek setting, Plyta has been an undisputed pioneer of the film industry, who worked hard under adverse conditions and showed that not only can women – and indeed Greek women – direct, but they can also do so successfully. For this alone, she is owed a debt of gratitude by future generations of filmmakers, especially those of the female persuasion, whose hitherto neglect in acknowledging the value of her contribution has been manifestly unwarranted. Although, as Plyta herself acknowledged, she had to fight in order to enforce her directorial vision on her reluctant male technical crew who, in turn, universally considered her a dynamic director (Angeli 1979: 140), she did succeed in becoming a dominant and inspiring presence for those who followed in her footsteps. Yet, her example could not be replicated by other women before a historic shift could be achieved in the prevailing conditions of an exclusive male-dominated workplace some decades later, and in her time she was an exception rather than a rule that others could readily follow (Delveroudi 2009: 353).

The significance of Maria Plyta for the next generation lies in the way her work opened a space for what can be called the female gaze. At a time when women's voices were often silenced or relegated to the margins, Plyta's films placed female experience at the centre, not as a decorative element but as a lens through which to question society, desire and identity. Although we do not have concrete evidence of direct contact between her and younger women directors, it is undeniable that her presence shaped their cinematic imagination. Her themes, her careful observation of women's inner lives, and her willingness to challenge conventions offered models of courage and originality. Even indirectly, Plyta's work created a cultural and artistic environment in which new filmmakers could see themselves reflected and inspired, thereby affirming the enduring importance of women's perspectives in cinema.

Among the filmmakers that followed in Plyta's footsteps almost thirty years later, Tonia Marketaki, the first filmmaker I am studying in this thesis and an admirer of Plyta, has assumed a prominent position. In her 1984 historical drama *The Price of Love (Η τιμή της αγάπης)*, about a Greek family living in Corfu at the start of the twentieth century, Marketaki is not dealing with the same subject matter or the same mother–daughter relationship as Plyta in the *Duchess of Placentia*, as the inferior class of her subjects in society leaves them unable to exhibit the same degree of warmth and

sensitivity that the Duchess can bestow on her daughter. A rich, foreign, aristocratic woman could live independently in Athens in mid-nineteenth century, not bound by convention or tradition, or the restrictions that made life very different for poor Greek families on the periphery fifty years later. And though the smaller community of Corfu was not devoid of an overbearing class system, even when the local aristocrats were defunct and penniless, male chauvinism ensured men had a higher status and more freedom than women, no matter how dynamic and hardworking those women may have been or how efficiently they had replaced the weak, incompetent and parasitic men in their lives.

2.5 The 1970s Generation & Beyond

Though not quite as 'roaring' as the post-WWI 1920s period of reconstruction, the 1970s marked an era of great technological advancements in human connectivity, with global news available to an ever-growing number of individuals on their personal television sets, and the advent of personal computers and their ever-increasing affordability. Politically, there was now a new world order emerging, with Mao's regime in China experiencing a secretive leadership transition to its eventual successors, the enormously unpopular US involvement in the Vietnam War, the 1973 OPEC oil embargo and the increasing violence in the Middle East during Egypt and Syria's war on Israel. Africa was also experiencing further decolonisation as a result of Portugal's restoration of democracy, but was plagued by famines, military coups and civil wars.

By the late 1970s, while some of these conflicts had subsided, with the US withdrawing from Vietnam in 1975 and the easing of tensions in the Middle East following the signing of the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, others were taking off, with the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the establishment of Ayatollah Khomeini's authoritarian Islamic Republic. In China, the Gang of Four was finally defeated, and Afghanistan was invaded by Russia at the request of the Afghan communist government in its civil war with anti-Communist Islamic guerrillas. The developing world continued its steady economic progress, going through periods of booms and busts, largely caused by ongoing oil crises. In spite of the general progress and resulting euphoria of the era, however, the Cold War between USA and the Soviet Union aroused fears of a looming WWIII, which was keenly felt around the world and especially in Europe, positioned as it was as a potential battleground between the two superpowers.

Owing to its precarious geopolitical location at the crossroads between East and West, and its ongoing political instabilities, Greece has always been especially affected by any event that causes political tension between the superpowers and those countries under their respective spheres of influence. The overthrowing of the dictatorial regime of the Colonels' junta in 1974 allowed Greek citizens, both within Greece and in exile or self-exile in Europe, to finally breathe a big sigh of relief. However, the consequences of the coup are still felt today with the continuing occupation of Cyprus by Turkish troops – carried out in breach of every international law and treaty – and the precipitous, unilateral division of the island, which have inflicted a heavy toll on its citizens. Political divisions among Greek citizens are, indeed, still evident today, with those with left-wing leanings, communists and

sympathisers placing the blame squarely on the USA and Europe, while those on the right blaming Russia and its allies.

In this climate, Greek intellectuals regularly find themselves in ideological strife. Aware of the dangers lurking from all sides, friends and foes, but unable to muster the numbers or goodwill from their allies to assert any political legitimacy that would render their status effective, they are often racked by hopelessness, desperation and a sense of futility over repeated cycles of crises, impending catastrophes and inescapable doom, armed with only the tools of tragedy which are never far from their consciousness. These aspects of lived experience are familiar to every Greek, caught in successive political conflicts during tumultuous periods which tend to last for generations. Almost every prominent politician, philosopher, artist, writer or scientist has made a career overseas before returning to Greece hoping to make a contribution to the modernisation of the country, and most aspiring students have always had to navigate their own path overseas in their quest to succeed in their chosen field. Some have sought to return as soon as they have finished their studies and, others have turned their education sojourn into a permanent migration. An endless cycle of guilt and regret is a common theme in both cohorts, which serves to introduce the psychological aspects of being Greek in the current climate.

2.5.1 The New Greek Cinema

Long before the fall of the junta dictatorship in 1974, a significant shift occurred in Greek cinema with the emergence of the so-called *New Greek Cinema*. This movement explicitly rejected what it perceived as the commercially oriented filmmaking of the past, embracing instead the principles of auteurship and art cinema, with Theo Angelopoulos becoming its most prominent and internationally acclaimed proponent, garnering numerous awards from prestigious European film festivals. This pivotal moment, while signalling a new beginning for Greek cinematic expression, also inadvertently contributed to the relative obscurity of notable examples of progressive filmmaking that had emerged during the preceding, more commercial era, such as Maria Plyta, despite her contemporary popularity and pioneering status. However, recent scholarship and retrospectives are actively working to re-evaluate and celebrate Plyta's important role in shaping the nation's cinematic landscape and paving the way for future generations of female filmmakers.

Near the end of the twentieth century, the era of the *New Greek Cinema* had, in turn, lost its momentum, due to directorial excesses that often "tried to pass as style and individual vision", and the Greek audience started moving away from Greek language films, and towards American and international productions. Older Greek studio films started appearing on TV screens however, drawing considerable viewership from a younger generation not born when these films were made. Within the first years of the new century, Greek cinema was "in a state of flux, trying to retain its national character while seeking to increase its regional and international impact", with a variety of approaches taken by Greek filmmakers, often by utilising technology for low-budget filmmaking, independent productions, political cinema and outrageous comedy, some with a gay subtext, dubbed Weird Wave or, more correctly *Greek New Wave*, which attracted a national and international cult following, and unexpectedly high ticket sales (Georgakas 2002: 4–6).

2.5.2 Chosen Films

The three films chosen in this study span the period 1973–2009, with the first two released during the *New Greek Cinema* period of auteurship. Tonia Marketaki and Frieda Liappa were two of the women filmmakers who worked on innovating radical approaches to filmmaking, both having gained domestic and international recognition. In *John the Violent*, labelled the "strangest political film noir of the period", Marketaki has constructed a disruptive image of an almost genderless subjectivity; a sexual identity that was not addressed at the time by other directors, yet would subsequently dominate representations of masculinity for more than a decade. It is the story of a young man in search of an identity, which he gains through criminality and the killing of a young woman. The film has "paved the way for a completely novel field of visual exploration" culminating in subsequent experimental films (Karalis 2016: 49, 143).

According to Karalis, *John the Violent* offered a profound exploration of the 'problematic hero' and the intertwined nature of power and insanity. Set within a dark and psychologically unsettling and delusional mind, the film portrays an individual's self-alienation from his surroundings, driven to violence as a desperate response to feelings of insignificance. Marketaki innovatively fused the visual language of film noir with elements of documentary realism, anticipating new aesthetic directions in television. Employing a deliberate pace and striking black-and-white imagery, the film moved beyond a superficial depiction of criminal psychology to examine how societal forces inflict violence upon

the individual's psyche. As both a political and psychoanalytic commentary, the film dissected the mechanisms of control utilised by a repressive society. The protagonist's violent mindset became a symbol of a society saturated with violence, frustration, and deeply ingrained fear. His existential anomie stemmed not just from external conflict but from an internal struggle to reconcile his perceived failures with societal expectations within a desolate and impersonal urban setting (Karalis 2012: 152).

In line with feminist film criticism research, in the 1980s Greek films manifested a crisis of masculinity that questioned the male-dominated paradigm and presented masculinity as an unstable and self-destructive social force with ambiguous sexual desire and psychopathological behaviours. In Marketaki's film, the protagonist exhibits signs of an ambivalent sexual nature, with feelings of inferiority and inadequacy, whose impotence signifies a failure to adapt to societal norms rather than a physical affliction (Karalis 2012: 201).

Frieda Liappa's *Love Wanders in the Night* "was probably one of the best and most interesting attempts to reclaim the primacy of the individual adventure against the grand collective narratives that dominated the populist aesthetic of the period. Liappa's female gaze searched for what constituted emotional truth in the desperate existential quest for fulfillment and reciprocity" (Karalis 2012: 199).

By the 1990s, there were more female filmmakers producing feature films with a variety of compelling female characters (Komninos 2011: 76). A number of women filmmakers, including Margarita Manda, have recently "renewed narrative cinema with an impressive number of stylistic and thematic innovations based on a trans-generic fusion of various visual approaches and representational codes" (Karalis 2012: 249). Recent productions often follow transnational and transcultural trends, with actors and technical crews from different countries, multiple languages and locales and global distribution networks. They transcend national borders and compete in international film festivals, thus redefining notions of what 'national film' is actually all about (Karalis 2016: 193).

My three films were chosen because their insightful portrayals of Athens deeply resonated with me, evoking vivid childhood memories and experiences of the city, its people and its history, aligning with my personal imagery of its character and nuances. All three are 'literate' films by 'literate' filmmakers who, listed in chronological order, are Tonia Marketaki (28 July 1942–26 July 1994), Frieda Liappa (10 February 1948–28 November 1994) and Margarita Manda (26 May 1963–). Due to the differences between the Greek and Latin alphabets, their names, as well as those of their films, are transliterated into English in a variety of ways.

In the following, I aim to elucidate and explicate the criteria I employed in my selection of filmmakers and films; nevertheless, my personal leanings towards their worldviews, personalities, and the subject matter of their films have undoubtedly influenced my selection process. The choice of filmmakers is rooted in my firm belief that they demonstrate analogous sensitivities, world perspectives, and visions that reflect the ethos of their respective generations, despite their substantially diverse upbringings and paths they traversed in their lifetimes. Although their films draw inspiration from disparate historical events and reverberate with diverse emotions and realities, they distinctly concentrate on unique facets of life and the consequential impact on the psychological makeup of their characters.

The first two filmmakers, Marketaki and Liappa, born during or a few years after WWII, in 1942 and 1948 respectively, bear the burden of a youth marred by civil war and political instability during a turbulent period which culminated in a military coup on 21 April 1967. Their deaths, coincidentally in the same year, 1994, at the ages of 51 and 46, respectively, have ultimately been attributed to the challenging conditions they had faced throughout, and especially the latter part of their lives. The third director, Margarita Manda, is still very much active in shaping her diverse creative career in an environment not devoid of possibilities yet still hampered by political and financial crises which tend to be an ongoing affliction for Greece over the years. In spite of multiple and continuing difficulties, cinematic auteurs have sought their own unique narrative style and guiding visions, whether from within Greece, or from a hospitable European metropolis, with the three filmmakers in this study being no exception.

In a privately compiled (by 'minalex' on 25 Jun 2011) IMDb list of the Top 100 Greek (and Cypriot) Directors, Marketaki occupies the 33rd position, with Frieda Liappa at No. 44, Eleni Alexandraki at No. 76, Konstantina Voulgari at No. 78, Athina Rachel Tsangari at No. 91, Elina Psykou at No. 93

and Dora Masklavanou at No. 94, among a cohort of 93 men[7]. Interestingly, the first female Greek director, Maria Plyta, does not even get a mention. In a similarly compiled (by 'minalex' on 04 Sep 2011) IMDb list of the Top 100 Female Directors, Marketaki comes up at No. 4, overshadowing luminaries such as Lina Wertmüller, Margarethe von Trotta, Chantal Akerman, Marguerite Duras, Gillian Armstrong, Agnès Varda, Sally Potter, Jane Campion, Sofia Coppola, Kathryn Bigelow, and others. Frieda Liappa comes up at No. 12, and there are a number of other Greek directors included but, again, not Plyta[8]. Margarita Manda, I suspect, is too young to be included in those lists.

In reference to my choice of films, as previously mentioned, they represent each filmmaker's first feature film. First feature films were chosen on account of their well-documented significance, marking a filmmaker's first venture into the great unknown, a strong yearning to express that which is foremost in one's mind, one's most urgent message to communicate. As the most highly acclaimed Greek auteur and director Theo Angelopoulos (1935–2012) relates in 1999 during an interview with Dan Fainaru, the significance of the first feature is instrumental and cannot be underestimated.

Referring to his own first feature, the 1970 film *Reconstruction (Αναπαράσταση)*, while describing the scene of the small, deserted village where the story is unfolding, he reminisces that:

> "This image has probably imprinted itself in my subconscious, the matrix for all the films to follow. This is the reason I believe the first film is the original seed. Everything that comes later is either a variation, a development, or an elaboration evolving from that first theme. For me, *Reconstruction* contains all the themes I later developed. I really think one always does the same film, over and over again. Lately I watched again a number of Bergman films, and this is true for him as well" (Angelopoulos et al. 2001: 123–24).

[7] https://www.imdb.com/list/ls000967844/?ref_=nm_rls_5

[8] https://www.imdb.com/list/ls003532091/?ref_=nm_rls_4

Chapter 3 – Tonia Marketaki

Tonia Marketaki (28 July 1942 – 26 July 1994)

Novelist, Journalist, Film Director, Writer, Editor, Producer, Actress

3.1.1 Introduction

> *"I am a feminist, I am a filmmaker, I am a woman. That does not make me a feminist woman filmmaker. Filmmaking is specific work. I do it. I try to do it well. But it includes the fact that my opinions as a woman, as a feminist, sometimes show up, sometimes are explicit, sometimes are implicit ... But filmmaking is filmmaking. Do you ask a man who does not have hair if he considers himself a bald filmmaker? He's a man with no hair, and he's a filmmaker" (Acker 2012: 268).*
>
> *Agnès Varda, Belgian-born French Director of Greek and French descent, whose work was a significant influence on Marketaki.*

To understand the context and growing significance of Marketaki's works, we will first briefly delve into her background, which provides ample insights into her personality, motivations, and challenges. Tonia Marketaki (Τώνια[9] Μαρκετάκη) was born in the midst of WWII on 28 July 1942 in Andravida[10], Greece, and died suddenly of myocardial infarction in Athens on 26 July 1994, aged 51. In her formative years she lived in Piraeus, the port city of Athens, and then in the vibrant Athens inner-city suburb of Zografou, named after Greek politician and academic Ioannis Zografos; it is a densely populated, lively locale, nearly 4km east of the Athens CBD, near Mount Hymettus, which now hosts the campuses of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, and the National Technical University of Athens. Her maternal origins were from Kardamyla, Chios. The 1960s marked the start of her multifaceted career as a journalist, translator and film critic, with her focus soon turning to filmmaking where she first worked in montage and then directed short films and

[9] Τώνια is the spelling as it appears in her film credits, a shortened version of the female name Αντωνία (Antonia). In other references the name also appears as per the Anglicised form, Τόνια.

[10] Andravida, Ileia, Peloponnese, Greece, as shown in a passing glimpse of her passport in a video from the ERT Parascenium program, and from a reference in Mitropoulou's book (Mitropoulou 2006: 445). According to most other online sources, place of birth is quoted as Piraeus, where she grew up, or Athens, her place of residence.

contributed in multiple capacities to other directors' films, until the next decade where she made her own debut into her directorial feature film career.

Marketaki left a wealth of material from her years in journalism, her literary translations and film criticism. Unfortunately, most of her regular columns, articles on important subjects, and book translations are either out of print, or not currently in open circulation, though some are available online, as listed in the appendix, while a few of her Dimokratiki Allagi articles have been quoted by scholars (Chalkou 2008). These provide a window into her worldview and creativity, gauging not only her ideas but also her erudite thinking underscoring them. Besides a small number of interviews that she gave to other film critics and fellow directors during her lifetime, much of the information gathered here comes from scholars who are studying her life and works, and from newspaper articles sourced online. In fact, beyond the scope of this thesis, it would be of great scholarly interest to access her detailed archive of notes kept in Greece but also access all her regular newspaper articles. It must be also mentioned here that, due to the immense scope of her works – including social, political, ideological, psychological, cultural, historical, economic, ethical, aesthetic and philosophical dimensions – her reputation has been growing among scholars in recent years, which is inevitably reflected in the relative length of the current chapter.

3.1.2 Writer, Translator & Filmmaker

Prior to her foray into filmmaking, Marketaki, like a number of other filmmakers, including all three filmmakers studied here, was a writer and translator. That is often because, whether it involves screenplays, scripts or narratives, the act of writing requires a deep understanding of storytelling principles and structures, which enhances an innate ability to conceive compelling characters, develop intricate plotlines, construct coherent narratives that can translate ideas effectively onto the screen, and also create engaging linguistic content for narration, monologues and dialogues, which are critical skills for successful filmmaking. By articulating emotions and evoking vivid imagery through words, a filmmaker envisions and communicates cinematic aesthetics to their cast and crew and, by employing literary sensibilities, writers can infuse their films with substance, depth, and thematic coherence, resulting in narratives that can be thought-provoking and resonate with audiences.

The symbiotic relationship between creative writing and filmmaking allows for unique storytelling perspectives, enriching the overall cinematic experience and elevating visual content to artistic expression. Despite their being different mediums, the similarities in plot development between fiction and film drive their narratives by helping to create a cohesive and engaging storyline that captivates the audience through the general stages of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. The empathy required for realistic character development can also lead to more nuanced and emotionally resonant films. The arcs or transformations characters undergo throughout a film's storyline, and the challenges they face while experiencing growth or change within a larger narrative add depth to the overall plot (Ribó 2019: 31).

Conflict is a key element in both writing and filmmaking, driving the story and creating tension, both within a character and between characters. Themes and motifs add depth to the narrative through plot, character development, symbolism, and style. Pacing is important in both novels and films to keep the audience engaged. While writers use paragraphs, chapters, and sentence structure to control rhythm, filmmakers use editing, shot choices, and timing. Both forms also use storytelling tools like flashbacks, foreshadowing, parallel plots, and non-linear timelines. When writing their own scripts, filmmakers can also exercise more creative control over the film and help with effective budgeting.

While novels and films share fundamental elements in storytelling, they also have distinct differences, as filmmaking relies heavily on visual and aural elements like cinematography, set design, costumes, lighting, sound effects, music, and editing to create a sensory experience. In contrast, novels depend solely on written words to stimulate the reader's imagination. Films are time-bound, requiring concise storytelling due to limited screen time, while novels can delve deeper into plot intricacies and character development with no such constraints. The mediums also differ in their handling of point of view. Novels often provide access to characters' inner thoughts through narration, while films rely on visual cues and actors' performances. The process of adapting novels into films often involves condensing and altering the story to fit the visual medium. The experience on the audience also differs, with novels able to offer a more intimate and individualistic experience, while films tend to provide a more collective and rigid one. Non-linear storytelling techniques are often employed in both mediums but are executed differently in each. A deeper understanding of these differences can help writers and filmmakers effectively translate stories across formats or create narratives that best suit a certain medium.

Marketaki's training and practical experience as a translator gave her a deep appreciation for language and communication, as well as a keen attention to detail. This is very evident in the films she directed. The intricate crafting of precise and clear narratives with a sound understanding of linguistic nuances, idioms, and cultural subtleties in her films convey ideas very effectively; an invaluable skill in the creation of authentic characters and resonant dialogue, with an acute sensitivity for the rhythm and flow of language, influencing the pacing and structure of the narrative in different media, including scriptwriting and screenplay adaptation. Her meticulous approach to language and her ability to linguistically scrutinise her characters has produced films of unmatched historical, emotional and psychological quality, coherence, and accuracy, traits that have translated seamlessly into the crafting of her cinematic narratives.

In her 'self-presentation' article for the Greek magazine 'Film' (Marketaki 1979: 152–55), Marketaki relates what it was that first attracted her, as a spectator, to cinema. "Cinema is a window that you open and get transported elsewhere; where you draw things that help you continue; a public benefit; a film is valuable even solely by virtue of its mere existence". Although she credits this as her inspiration, it was ultimately also an artform that enabled her to integrate within it all her other creative pursuits. She reveals that the 1952 French drama *Forbidden Games* by René Clément, that she saw at a very young age, was an early inspiration and a major influence for having taught her how to make films and also for its "expressive and elegiac narrative style". Interestingly, she further acknowledges the role of American cinema as the foundation of a filmmaker's education. The following quote, in translation, sums up Marketaki's artistic method: "I search through my senses like a polar explorer. As soon as I discover a little emotion, just a tiny one, even a memory of that plethora from my old times, I place it carefully in the treasure chest and write it down as a gold digger in the collection..."[11] (Tabaki 2017: 1).

[11] "Ψάχνω τις αισθήσεις μου σαν εξερευνητής των πόλων. Μόλις ανακαλύψω μια μικρή συγκίνηση, μια τόση δα, έστω και ανάμνηση από την πληθώρα εκείνη του παλιού μου καιρού, τη βάζω στο σεντούκι με προσοχή και την καταγράφω σαν χρυσοθήρας στο αρχείο". It should be noted that this quote appears in many online sources with the source unacknowledged, only mentioning that it is from her 'last writings'. The word πόλων (poles) also appears as πόλεων (cities) in some online sources which would seem contextually incorrect (Rizospastis 2009).

From 1960–1963, Marketaki studied (on a scholarship[12]) – along with other notable contemporary Greek directors – at the Paris Institute of Higher Cinematographic Studies, IDHEC (Institut des hautes études cinématographiques). While there, she was acquainted with films by Antonioni, Fellini and Buñuel, but, perhaps surprisingly, acknowledges no influence from Nouvelle Vague, the iconoclastic French New Wave film movement of the late 1950s, with some exceptions being Alain Resnais' 1959 film *Hiroshima Mon Amour* and François Truffaut's 1962 film *Jules and Jim*, and later Jean Luc Godard's 1966 film *Masculin Féminin* (Marketaki 1979: 152). While working in post-production, she felt that she was not naturally endowed with the necessary skills for film editing. Being the only woman in a room with seventeen male editors who were "giving [her] a hard time" was challenging, as she notes, though it also taught her to become more independent and ignore opinions aimed at stopping her from experimenting and finding new ways to do things.

Her difficulties with montage, a "conflict between a male modus operandi and your femaleness" as she explains (Marketaki 1979: 152) turned her towards film editing studies, thereby gaining her an *Opérateur* degree, and on completion of her studies in 1963 she returned to Greece, having no connections to a film industry dominated by Finos Films ("I never regarded Finos films as cinema. Koundouros and Cacoyannis, yes."). She first had to find work as a typist and then journalist and film critic at the newspaper Dimokratiki Allagi (Δημοκρατική Αλλαγή / Democratic Change), describing her relationship with Greek films as "painful". As a consummate professional, Marketaki was always keen to collaborate with, and help her fellow filmmakers in any way she could when they needed her assistance. Her friendship with the iconic and celebrated Greek director Theo Angelopoulos is a case in point.

On his return to Greece from Paris, while walking in Athens in 1964, Angelopoulos was involved in an incident during a demonstration that he was not a participant in. He was struck by a police officer in an unprovoked attack, which affected him deeply and became a turning point that changed his plans and the course of his life, as he stated himself. Marketaki, who was already working in

[12] Unverifiable detail, only found in two sources (Damaskinos 2017), (Nikoletta Dania 2011a).

newspapers as a film critic, encouraged him to work as a critic in the newspaper Dimokratiki Allagi[13]. This is how he stayed in Greece against all odds, instead of returning to France as he had planned (Antonakakis 2021). Greater detail about Angelopoulos' arrest is provided by the filmmaker himself:

> "It was the summer of 1964. I had finished my studies in France and returned to Greece to see my family. The bus from the airport dropped me off at Syntagma [square]. I headed home with a sack on my shoulder. I stumbled upon a student demonstration. The police had swamped on the students, beating them. I had nothing to do with what was happening, so I continued on my way. Well, I was beaten up. They broke my glasses. I returned home very upset. I felt like I was facing a dilemma: "are you interested in this place or not?" I had told my friend, Tonia Marketaki – who had suggested that I write film reviews for the Allagi newspaper – that I had come to Greece intending to leave again. The next day I called her and told her I would stay. And I stayed. In order to understand. I made my first films *Reconstruction (Αναπαράσταση)*, *Days of '36 (Μέρες του '36)*, *The Travelling Players (Θίασος)*, to understand Greece..." (Angelopoulos 2014).

It is worth noting the different focus of these two filmmakers: while Angelopoulos was concerned about "what falls outside of national frames of belonging" (Murphet 2015: 171), Marketaki was concerned about what falls within.

3.1.3 Politics & Creative Pursuits

Still working as a film critic in 1966, Marketaki detected signs of filmic 'renaissance' in Alexis Damianos' film *Until the Ship Sails (Μέχρι το Πλοίο)*. In 1967 she completed her short film *John and the Road (Ο Γιάννης και ο Δρόμος / O Giannis kai o Dromos)* and vowed never to delve into film criticism again: "Να μου κοπεί το χέρι αν το ξανακάνω" (Marketaki 1979: 152), thus intimating a shift towards more creative pursuits. The same year, the Colonels' junta organised a military coup in Greece, which established the dictatorial regime that put an end to freedom of speech and imprisoned her for her socialist ideals. This brought her, and others, before a dilemma between the pursuit of

[13] Evening daily newspaper published by the Greek United Democratic Left party EDA (Ενιαία Δημοκρατική Αριστερά (ΕΔΑ)) between September 1964 and April 1967, when the junta seized power and the media came under the jurisdiction of the dictatorship.

quality and aesthetics, versus survival; an ideological position that can inevitably lead to compromise and the ensuing unavoidable guilt for being cornered into silence.

Her moral conflict was tangible. “Dictatorship crisis: Politics, a criminal space. Anything you say in public hurts. Whatever image you set up, you are speaking in public, you are expressing opinions. Being useful means working with productivity in mind. To teach people to live without quality, to sacrifice aesthetics for material survival. A whole ideological position. It was overcome too late”[14]. Resolution of the dilemma would inevitably lead her to a form of notional compromise. “Liberation in compromise: Why should I carry more responsibility than others? I agree to contribute to the perpetuation of the world as it is by participating in it. I accept that I have to lose the vision of making the world a better place. I accept that I cannot offer anything but to my peers”[15] (Marketaki 1979: 153).

Upon her release, Marketaki fled to the UK, where she worked as an assistant film editor, and then to Algeria, where she directed “educational films for illiterate farmers” for the Algerian Agriculture Department, films that presumably never reached their intended target for unknown reasons. On her 1971 return to Greece, 3 years before the collapse of the junta, she continued her film work. Overall she directed 3 feature films, a number of theatrical plays and the 1978 TV series *Lemonodasos (Λεμονόδασος / Lemon Grove)* (Marketaki 1978*)*, referencing the Lemon Grove on the Greek island of Poros, the subject of a 1930 novel about a tragic love story by Kosmas Politis (Mackridge 1979: 77). She also worked in Greek state television and radio, while continuing to write poetry, prose, and translations, and also ventured into children’s theatre and directed plays, such as *Macaronia with ketchup (Μακαρόνια με κέτσαπ)* in 1978 and *The Murderer (Ο Φονιάς)* by Mitsos Efthymiadis (Μήτσος Ευθυμιάδης) in 1979. Her 3 full-length films in chronological order were each developed almost ten years apart; they are *John the Violent (Ιωάννης ο Βίαιος / Ioannis o Viaios)* in 1973, *The*

[14] “Κρίση δικτατορίας: Η πολιτική ένας χώρος εγκληματικός. Οτιδήποτε κι αν λες δημόσια κάνει κακό. Όποια εικόνα και να στήσεις, μιλάς δημόσια, εκφράζεις απόψεις. Να είσαι χρήσιμος, σημαίνει να εργάζεσαι με στόχο την παραγωγικότητα. Να μαθαίνεις τους ανθρώπους να ζουν χωρίς ποιότητα, να θυσιάζουν την αισθητική στην υλική επιβίωση. Μια ολόκληρη ιδεολογική θέση. Ξεπεράστηκε πολύ αργά.” (Marketaki 1979: 153)

[15] “Απελευθέρωση στον συμβιβασμό: Για ποιο λόγο εγώ θα σέρνω περισσότερες ευθύνες από τους άλλους; Δέχομαι να συμβάλλω στη διαιώνιση του κόσμου όπως είναι, συμμετέχοντας. Δέχομαι να απωλέσω τ’ όραμα να κάνω τον κόσμο καλύτερο. Δέχομαι πως δεν μπορώ να προσφέρω παρά μόνο στους ομοίους μου.“ (Marketaki 1979: 153)

Price of Love (Η Τιμή της Αγάπης / I Timi tis Agapis) in 1983, and *Crystal Nights (Κρυστάλλινες Νύχτες / Krystallines Nyhtes)* in 1992, which was screened at the 1992 Cannes Film Festival.

3.1.4 Marketaki's 3 Feature Films

In 1973 Marketaki completed her first feature, *John the Violent*, a black and white film she intriguingly described as 'deeply autobiographical', though perhaps not in the sense of a roman-à-clef – where real people's identities have been concealed. By the term 'autobiographical', she may have been implying her personal familiarity with the situations she describes, or that she had known the victim that inspired the film or that, as a newspaper critic, in her own professional life she had encountered these behaviours in the journalists she depicts during the trial's press coverage. It is a film that, as she puts it, "With very few exceptions, was overlooked by Greek critics, as if there was a wall between us, as if it did not concern them. I was very impressed by the impact it had on the Germans, even though their lived experiences are different; perhaps even for that exact reason".

While discussing her conceptual reference in constructing her characters, she highlights their distinct male and female attributes, referring to the male protagonist as the 'hero' and insightfully noting that "When a person on the screen wears dresses, they are laden with specific conditions. A woman is not representative of all humans. She has special problems. What concerns a man, also concerns a woman; the reverse is not a necessary condition; a woman is a special category of human; a human plus something; and this 'plus' can be an obstacle to depicting a woman as the symbol of humanity" (Marketaki 1979: 154).

In her second feature, the 1983 film *The Price of Love (Η Τιμή της Αγάπης)*, based on the 1914 novella *Honour and Money (Η Τιμή και το Χρήμα)* by Konstantinos Theotokis, Marketaki centres the action on the two women in the novella, a mother and a daughter, intriguingly named *sióra Episteme* (σιόρα Επιστήμη – 'episteme' meaning 'science'[16] in Greek) and *Rini* (Ρήνη, short for Irene – 'ειρήνη' meaning 'peace' in Greek) respectively, exposing social conventions, class, and the role of money in relationships. The film's title can also be translated as *The Honour of Love*, with the double meaning

[16] Perhaps indicating the mother's rational decision-making process.

of the word *Τιμή* alluding to the ethical parameters of the characters' moral standards. As Karalis observes, the film "represents the consummation of quality cinema in the tradition of Jean Renoir and Max Ophüls. The fact that it appeared many decades after their works adds to its significance: it resurrected and re-established a lost tradition of translating literary stories to cinematic images" (Karalis 2016: 21).

The main protagonist, Irene, a young woman on the island of Corfu at the start of the twentieth century, falls for the opportunistic and avaricious son of a local aristocratic family whose fortunes are in decline and is heavily indebted. Through the important character of Irene's mother, Theotokis and Marketaki expose the struggle of a strong and emancipated woman who works in a factory, looks after the house, her children and her typically drunken husband, makes all the family's important decisions, but is still kept in a subordinate position by the dictates of a patriarchal society. It is the tragedy of a woman who attempts to hold her own in an adversarial world, while upholding society's traditional values: a heroic but inevitably doomed struggle, with a heavy price to pay for resisting insurmountable oppression (Alexandraki 2014a).

It is about the struggle of a mother who loves her children individually but must also collectively balance the needs of all of them; if she gives away the dowry her prospective son-in-law threateningly demands in order to pay his debtors, it will be at her younger children's expense. Instrumental in this decision is the older daughter's incautious relationship, which has breached the honour commands that girls must abide by in the conservative and claustrophobic local society at a time that does not avail them of equal rights; where a pregnant girl must get married at any price to maintain her honour and avoid society's scorn, and a mother is legitimately blackmailed into paying a dowry, that is really a 'ransom' for saving one daughter, while condemning her younger children to abject poverty and a life of servitude.

Her stern refusal to yield to blackmail, which renders her liable to be judged as greedy, stubborn and lacking in empathy, reveals a strong but, perhaps for some, controversial persona, who is none-the-less motivated by love and fairness for all her children. Her stance is also a harsh lesson for a girl in love to learn, but one which will in fact be the key to her eventual emancipation. In a 1993 autobiographical note, Marketaki notes that the screenplay for *The Price of Love* was rejected twice by the Hellenic Film Centre and, once it was finally approved, it was filmed in 1983. It went on to

receive seven State Awards, including for the screenplay; the Best Mediterranean Film Award; and it is listed in the International Film Guide as one of the ten best Greek films since 1960 (Damaskinos 2017).

A markedly different evaluating approach is offered by highly esteemed cinema critic and author Nikos Kolovos (1938–2005) in his article *The price of love by Tonia Marketaki (Τώνιας Μαρκετάκη: Η τιμή της αγάπης)* under the heading *The Crisis of Cinema* (Kolovos 1990). In his brief analysis of Marketaki's film, Kolovos discusses her adaptation of Theotokis' novella and how she incorporates a social perspective on human behaviour. He insightfully remarks on the fundamentally hermeneutic approach that Marketaki adopted in that film – in contrast to her theoretical and distinctive approach in her first feature – and praises the film for its nuanced yet clear ideological viewpoint – rather modernist for its start of the twentieth century period setting – in favour of women's economic liberation (Kolovos 1990: 456).

Kolovos also highlights the visual beauty employed by Marketaki and the film's photographer, Stavros Hasapis, in representing the landscape. The selection of scenery, people's attire, body language and movement are characterised by "undeniable fidelity, but also calligraphic exaggeration" which never descends to the level of a "vulgar" melodrama, as he says. Through the considered use of built spaces as signifiers to define the people inhabiting them, these devices reveal the cultural practices of the people of Corfu at the beginning of the century, a depiction bordering on "representational romanticism or embellished realism", where "the surface of the signifier image envelopes" or covers the signified and "repels or blurs" the image with its bewitching and dazzling quality (Kolovos 1990: 456).

Kolovos then goes on to critique what he identifies as the film's shortcomings in terms of its ethnographic representation which, as he points out, is admittedly not an easy process to reproduce on film, or even in literature, as one cannot represent a culture by simply retelling a simplistic story; it requires "a narration based upon, and through, the ethos of that story; not just the description of a human personality but also the representation of a character's moral-social behaviour" and "it is perhaps in the latter that lies the interest and the difficulty of ethnography in cinema". According to Kolovos, Marketaki has focused more "on a narrative description and to a lesser extent on an ethnographic representation" due in parts to what he considers as inadequate acting, misdirection, and

a lack of emphasis on moral-social behaviour, "the rhythm and static (even theatrical) organisation of the frames, the wavering between realism and romance" (Kolovos 1990: 456).

Despite these perceived flaws, he assesses the film positively on account of its clear ideological favour towards the economic liberation of women, and specifically the two protagonists, the young Rini and her hard-working mother, Episteme. "The woman does not need sexual liberation but economic liberation. The woman can refuse the man because she does not necessarily have any need of him, as a body, but for his love and tenderness as another human being". He further emphasises that his critical reservations do not negate the film's value and asserts that popular ethnographic-realism cinema with a correct ideological point of view has a place and purpose in an ailing film industry, such as that of Greece at the time, in contributing to the representation of social realism in Greek cinema. He also commends the film for its economy of speech and time which holds the narrative back from 'vulgar' melodrama, while the limited effort to outline the political climate of the time does not detract from its message, and clarifies that filmic ethnography is not meant to pour scorn or disdain on a "swarm of simple peasants", but to also comment on the "social reality of our time" (Kolovos 1990: 457).

Marketaki's third and final feature film *Crystal Nights (Κρυστάλλινες Νύχτες)* was completed in 1992. It is a Cabalistic and mystical story of a woman's love which transcends race, life, and even time, and takes place in Athens, in 1936, on the eve of WWII. A German woman, Isabella, who has in the past been introduced to mysticism, is married to a Greek officer during dictator Ioannis Metaxa's fascist government which ruled Greece between 1936 and 1941. She falls in love with a Jewish teenager, Albert, who carries ice to the homes of those who can afford an icebox – the predecessor of the electric refrigerator in use at the time. Their relationship is intoxicating, yet unviable, due to their racial, class and age incompatibility. After their union, he disappears and, distraught, she invokes magic to bring him back, a seemingly successful but actually failed attempt that brings back to her a lifeless creature instead of the young man she loves. Her unfulfilled passion drives her to suicide in the hope of pursuing her dream of joining up with him after being reborn. As a new person now, Anna, a girl living under German occupation in the Jewish quarter of Athens in the same yard as Albert, now a twenty-five-year-old man, still in love with him, she betrays the Jews to the Gestapo, so that she can be alone with him, and ten years later, while Athens is in its massive postwar reconstruction phase, she tries unsuccessfully to conquer him anew.

It is a story of magical realism, a supernatural love story in the midst of historical events that normally define destinies. In this film however, destiny is defied by unravelling time and reshaping the future, averting it from its inevitable course; where the interplay of love and death yields inspirational, yet uncertain and ultimately tragic outcomes. It is a film of great directorial vision, where magic is employed by a woman who commits suicide to reincarnate herself and be reborn, so that she can live with the man she loves. In the same 1993 autobiographical note mentioned above, Marketaki, a politically engaged intellectual and by now well-respected director, describes the difficulties she faced trying to get approval for *Crystal Nights*, stating epigrammatically that the script had been "rejected, approved, re-rejected, re-approved and finally receives a State Award in January 1992, only to be panned by critics in November of the same year" (Damaskinos 2017).

For film critic Yannis Bakoyannopoulos, the film is very ambitious in taking on psychological, historical and universal themes. He points out the significance of the title *Crystal Nights*, Kristallnacht in German, "the infamous nights of attacks against Jews in Nazi Germany". The film traces the rise and fall of Nazism and the Holocaust, but Marketaki is more compelled by an inner axis: love and passion, in all their psychological, metaphysical, and transcendental force. For her, love is a universal power – obsessive, consuming, creative. A woman seeks to merge with her beloved, to possess him entirely. Love becomes attraction between opposites, a force of domination, even a path into witchcraft and Satanism to overcome any barrier. It reincarnates through female bodies, carrying itself across time. In this sense, love can also manifest as fascism, as the Holocaust itself – a form of black magic with its own rites and symbols. Marketaki tackles this vast terrain with intensity and precision. Her direction is mature, ritualistic, and fearless, using stark contrasts in both black-and-white and colour hues, to push beyond realism into a poetic vision (Bakoyannopoulos 2010).

In a video tribute to Marketaki, while introducing the film to the audience before its screening on 8 December 2014, film critic Manolis Kranakis singles out an iconic quote from the film. It is what Isabella's lover, Albert, replies to her when she tells him "Θέλω να σου μάθω ό,τι ξέρω, να σου δώσω ό,τι έχω" (I want to teach you what I know, give you what I have). His reply: "Δεν μπορείς να δώσεις σ' αυτόν που δεν μπορεί να πάρει" (You cannot give to him who cannot take). For Kranakis, the film is about everything: a story unfolding in time, a capital-H History, time itself. It is a meditation on the two sexes, on Greek society and its buried guilt, on mysticism, augury, feminism, fascism, and

death. Yet Marketaki does not ask the audience to decode symbols – from cinema, literature, or scripture. Her cinema is a labyrinth, inviting the viewer not to interpret but to feel pain, pleasure, love, guilt – emotions suspended in time, or erased by it. They are the emotions of all the Isabellas and Annas, those who changed from one to the other or stayed the same; women who loved deeply and had to walk the terrain of history. Because love, for Marketaki, is something living: seductive, inexplicable, and destined to die (Kranakis 2014).

In fact, for Marketaki, love may be conceived as a triptych composed of destruction, transmutation, and the emergence of a new universe. As she points out in a video excerpt, love is bound by mortality just as human beings are, though forever in pursuit of the elixir of life. If we accept love as a living force, then its eventual death is inevitable, for only that which has never lived can evade death[17] (Damianos 1997). This notion finds expression in the same video (0:42:42), where Marketaki's school friend, film director Stavros Konstantarakos, remarks that *Crystal Nights* also serves as Marketaki's premonitory announcement of her own death.

A later scene evokes this theme visually and narratively: Isabella returns to haunt Albert in a nighttime sequence evocative of Cathy's spectral visitation to Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*. As she appears behind the shuttered window, a dialogue unfolds in which Isabella accuses Albert of desiring her only as a ghost – a shadow of her former physical self. He responds by affirming that he cannot fulfill her desire to become his entire universe, thus underscoring the impossibility of sustaining love in its totality beyond the boundaries of life.

A comprehensive review of *Crystal Nights* appears in the article *The historical panorama in post-1974 Greek cinema* by Panayiota Mini, who largely bases her analysis on Marketaki's handwritten notes that she found in her original archival material. She places the film between the 1930s and 1950s and identifies its original aim as being the interpretation of history through the lens of psychoanalysis, emphasising the instinct for survival and dominance as a major motivation. She also discusses Marketaki's 'female viewpoint' in her original concept of having a Greek Jew as

[17] "Όπως όλα τα ζωντανά πράγματα, ο έρωτας είναι εξαρχής καταδικασμένος να πεθάνει. Το μόνο πράγμα που δεν πεθαίνει είναι αυτό που δεν έχει ζήσει ποτέ. Αν λοιπόν δεχθούμε ότι ο έρωτας είναι μια μορφή ζωής, τότε είναι καταδικασμένος να πεθάνει." – at time signature 0:0:05 of the above video (Damianos 1997).

protagonist and of "interpreting the genocide through psychoanalysis" and even "collaborating in the script with a controversial female Greek Jewish writer and journalist, Malvina Karali". She poignantly also reflects on the fact that "although the extermination rate of Greek Jews was one of the highest in Europe, it was only in the 1980s that Greek historiography showed some interest in the subject" (Mini 2016: 142–45).

Although these films, and others, are still available and occasionally shown in festivals and retrospectives, it is important to note that the reels and recordings available are generally not in great condition. The recordings I managed to obtain online have low resolution and no subtitles, and those I sourced directly from the archives of the Greek Film Centre (Ελληνικό Κέντρο Κινηματογράφου – ΕΚΚ) are, as expected, in better condition but still without subtitles, with the audio component not clearly audible throughout. A concerning report was indeed published about the archive at the Greek Film Centre, housed at 53 Chios Street in Metaxourgeio, Athens, where the reels were at risk from a toxic cloud leak at the Finos Film premises, which led to the relocation of the negatives to a warehouse. This was reported in an article ironically quoting the then President of the Film Centre, Markos Holevas, stating that *All is going… well at the Film Centre ("Μάρκος Χολέβας / Όλα βαίνουν... καλώς στο Κέντρο Κινηματογράφου")*. It was also reported that negatives from Tonia Marketaki's *Crystal Nights* were found, but it was yet to be determined whether the material discovered related to the whole film or parts thereof (Krimnioti 2021).

It is reassuring to know that the Greek Film Centre is not the only film archive in Greece. The Film Archive of Greece (Ταινιοθήκη της Ελλάδος – ΤΤΕ) currently boasts "over 7,500 foreign titles (full length feature films, documentaries and short films)… [and] over 2,500 Greek titles (full length feature films, documentaries and short films)". It is unclear whether this number includes all, most, or only a fraction of Greek feature films produced to date. Judging by the physical condition of the films available online, earlier works – especially those made during times of political and social upheaval – have suffered greatly from neglect. Many are poorly preserved, lost, or irreparably damaged (Tainiothiki 2023). The condition of film reels is crucial to preserving cultural heritage and tracing the historical evolution of Greek cinema. They hold invaluable visual records that illuminate different eras, local societies, and artistic movements.

As a result, the maintenance and restoration of film archives are essential for preserving cinematic history and ensuring their accessibility for future generations. They allow us to trace the evolution of filmmaking techniques, storytelling, and cultural representation, and serve as vital primary sources for researchers, scholars, and filmmakers. Restoring deteriorating films not only rescues lost or damaged works and revives forgotten masterpieces but also reconnects us with the artistic visions of the past. In doing so, it fosters innovation by deepening our understanding of cinema's roots and traditions. Unfortunately, film archiving in Greece was long neglected due to decades of political crises and social upheaval. Only recently has meaningful attention begun to be paid to this vital aspect of cultural preservation.

3.1.5 Evaluations & Critiques

Marketaki's oeuvres have gained an array of glittering reviews, both during her lifetime and increasingly posthumously. In 2014, on the twentieth anniversary of Marketaki's death, the Hellenic Film Academy organised a tribute to her work and the indelible mark she left on Greek cinema. Over 3 consecutive nights, between December 6 and 8, they screened her feature films in chronological order, each one presented by notable figures in Marketaki's career. Director George Korras introduced *John the Violent* which was also his first experience as editor. He shared that Marketaki had a particular interest in this crime due to a personal connection to the victim, Maria Bavea, who had once been her schoolmate. Korras emphasised the film's remarkable precision and depth, a masterful reconstruction based on detailed research and a careful dissection of the court proceedings. In the actual case, the perpetrator's guilt was proven, though his aunt continued to believe in his innocence, with near certainty. In contrast, the film resists resolution, leaving the audience in a deliberate state of uncertainty (Korras 2014). Marketaki's *The Price of Love* was introduced by its director of photography Stavros Hasapis and actress Annie Loulou, with film critic Manolis Kranakis, who introduced *Crystal Nights* as previously mentioned.

Film director Eleni Alexandraki, who directed a 39-minute documentary on Tonia Marketaki in 1994, also posted an article on the cinema website Flix.gr, giving insights into Marketaki's films, starting with *John the Violent*. In the article, Alexandraki states that without a trace of political correctness, Tonia speaks to the tension between the individual's need to belong and the urge to break free from a society that is oppressive, voyeuristic, and ultimately driven by complacency. Yet through her

immense talent, directorial precision, and documentary style, she renders each character with nuance and compassion – even when exposing their pettiness or malice. None are one-dimensional; each embodies a society riddled with contradictions and flaws; from John and his relatives to the press, police, prosecution witnesses, psychiatrists, judges, and the murdered woman's family and friends. It is a fragile world, one without clear moral divisions, only shades of weakness and complexity (Alexandraki 2014a).

In another article, uploaded by editor 'vgiannoul' to online women's forum Fylo Sykis (Φύλο Συκής meaning Fig Gender/Sex – a play on words on Φύλλο Συκής meaning Fig Leaf – with its metaphorical connotations), Alexandraki explains how she made up Marketaki's portrait in her documentary. Alexandraki was scheduled to interview Marketaki for her documentary, impressed by what she points out as her masculine side ("αντρίκια της πλευρά"), noting that while her psychological makeup was totally feminine, her anger welling up from within had something masculine about it, evidently a result of her enormous efforts to keep putting her creativity into practice[18]. Alexandraki had sent Marketaki all the materials she had prepared, and they spent a day at Marketaki's Pangrati home in Telesilis Street (Οδός Τελεσίλης, Αθήνα 11635), where she describes Marketaki's generosity as 'unique and unparalleled' in helping out with the material and feedback. Sadly, before the actual interview could be filmed, Marketaki passed away and the documentary was later approved by the then ERT program director and musician Giorgos Papadakis, as a posthumous portrait of the filmmaker (Alexandraki 2013).

In an article published on the anniversary of Marketaki's death, filmmaker Eleni Giokari (Ελένη Γιόκαρη), credited as script supervisor in Marketaki's *The Price of Love*, reveals[19] that Marketaki was raised by her mother and grandmother, both from Chios, after losing her father at a very young age. While studying in Paris at IDHEC, she was attending Theatre National Populaire (TNP), under the direction of Georges Wilson (see Appendix 2), and the year after shooting the 1975 documentary

[18] "Ενώ είχε απόλυτα γυναικείο ψυχισμό έβλεπα το στήθος της να πάλλεται και έναν θυμό να αναβλύζει από μέσα που μου θύμιζε κάτι το αντρικό. Ένιωθα πως αυτή η γυναίκα είχε γίνει σχεδόν άνδρας μέσα από τις τεράστιες προσπάθειες που έκανε για να αντιμετωπίσει την ζωή και βάζοντας συνεχώς σε πράξη την δημιουργικότητά της." (Alexandraki 2013)

[19] This is one of the sources that lists Piraeus as Marketaki's place of birth.

Nisyros, she planned a science fiction film called *The Lost Man (Ο άνθρωπος που χάθηκε)*, inspired by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, that never eventuated. Another detail – not listed in the Appendix – is her translation of Werner Gerson's *Le nazisme société secrète* in 1981. Giokari concludes that despite all her achievements and accolades, it was still exceedingly difficult for Marketaki to raise funding for her films, and reaffirms Marketaki's quote that the script for her filmic swan song *Crystal Nights* had been "rejected, approved, re-rejected and re-approved" and finally shot in 1992, ending up winning a great number of awards (Giokari 2015).

The Greek film director, editor and producer Maria Kourkouta, born in Greece in 1982, lists Marketaki among the filmmakers she admires, drawing inspiration from images and works she has deeply loved. She characteristically states "when I re-watched Marketaki's *Crystal Nights* after many years, and saw a frame where the protagonist is looking out the window at the young ice seller, there is a very specific slowing down at that point, with images simultaneously superimposed. I was surprised to realise that I had almost copied the frame in a close-up [...] and I had literally forgotten" (Kranakis 2022).

Writing about 1960s Greece, Kourkouta criticises the absence of an avant-garde or modern cinema in a country cinematically uneducated and plagued by political instability, censorship, exclusion, and ultimately dictatorship – conditions that stifled the emergence of a contemporary cinematic language rooted in historical awareness and cultural specificity. Instead of developing a cinema grounded in its own foundations, Greece often resorted to classicist formalism or recycled formulas from folk traditions and ancient myths. She questions why, with few exceptions – Marketaki among them – Greek filmmakers failed to embrace modern cinematic language or explore alternative artistic directions, unlike their European counterparts. Instead, they leaned on simple musical scores by composers like Manos Hadjidakis, literal adaptations of literary works, performances by celebrated theatre actors who often seemed out of place on screen, and, at best, set and costume contributions from artists like Yannis Tsarouchis.

She also wonders why Greek poets like Giorgos Seferis, Odysseas Elytis, Andreas Embirikos, Nikos Engonopoulos and others were not tapped as a source for new narratives and forms, as poets from other European countries were, from cinema's earliest days. And she explicates that among the very few exceptions are "some films that, although not 'experimental' – in the strictest sense of the term

– certainly experimented with their medium and articulated, during the difficult decade of the ’60s, a discourse that is both cinematic and political – ultimately connecting [...] the art of cinema with politics, not through their narratives, but through their very form” (Kourkouta 2010).

As an example of such experimentation, Kourkouta mentions Tonia Marketaki’s first short film *John and the Road* (1967). She then highlights a short single-shot sequence where the camera wanders through the dark, deserted streets of Athens at night, lit only by streetlights, while a male voice recites the poem *Tonight (Απόψε)*, from the short story by Menelaos Loudemis (Μενέλαος Λουντέμης) which inspired the film. With no guide or visible figures, the scene uses darkness, instability, and poetic narration to evoke a deep, collective melancholy and capture the unspeakable social, political, and emotional atmosphere of the era. By merging poetic language with stark realism in one continuous shot, Marketaki achieves, according to Kourkouta, an experimental moment that even surpasses a similar scene in Marguerite Duras’[20] *Les Mains Négatives*. In this way, Marketaki’s experiment lies in merging a poetic utterance with a realistic image into a single, though brief, shot. Through its abstraction, it did not aim to recreate the era but to allow us to experience the feel of it (Kourkouta 2010).

For film critic Yannis Fragoulis, Marketaki’s *John and the Road* is not merely the story of a man wandering through Athens, reflecting on the tragic end to his relationship, but a story of political struggles, the persecution of communists, clashes with the police, and popular resistance. It points to oppression and severe financial strain, which forces people to favour financial security over love. As the film progresses, it reveals that John does not blame the woman for leaving him, blaming instead the social conditions in Greece at the time. “Through this, we recognize that Tonia Marketaki possessed the poetic sensibility that allowed her to create masterful films in Greek cinema” (Fragoulis 2007). Stavros Konstantarakos, who contributed to the film as a Unit Production Manager (Διευθυντής Παραγωγής), in a wide-ranging interview speaks about the film, the conditions under which it was made, the political climate at the time, the collaborative working conditions among the filmmakers, actors and contributors, and Marketaki’s overall significance for Greek cinema (Konstantarakos 2018).

[20]Marguerite Duras (1914–1996), experimental filmmaker, screenwriter, novelist, playwright and essayist; full name: Marguerite Germaine Marie Donnadieu.

Talking about *John and the Road*, Marketaki herself said that she did not exactly remember her motivation and original intention behind that first film, but a significant feeling she had from that time was of someone swimming adrift among objects. She poetically described an atmosphere suspended between drowning and pregnancy, shaped by political stagnation and the isolating uncertainty of post-adolescence. Attempts at belonging through groups only intensified disconnection for her, turning the streets into sites of aimless drifting where reverie blurred with reality. Yet beneath the confusion, a strange clarity endured not from conscious thought but from the unconscious, which absorbed unspoken signs and responded with both alarm and stoic acceptance. In this tension, the sense of an undefined but vast future emerged, and she began moving towards it. The following Friday was 21 April 1967[21] – Tonia Marketaki c.1980 (Kyriakidis 1994: 33).

An interesting analysis of this short film has been contributed by Georgia Archonti who states that it offers a nuanced portrayal of masculinity, eschewing stereotypical displays of power for a more grounded, human experience. The film diverges from traditional themes such as social events, landscapes, local celebrations, historical figures, or the burgeoning urban landscape of Athens, industrialisation, recent historical traumas, and the impending political crisis. Instead, it delves into the impact of these factors on masculinity. Employing a fragmented narrative structure and stark contrasts in mise-en-scène and editing, the film portrays the male subject as vulnerable, introspective, and desperate. John is portrayed as a character grappling with the crushing weight of societal pressures, the isolating sting of loneliness, the ache of unrequited love, and the suffocating grip of despair. This confluence of negative experiences, Archonti argues, precipitates a descent into self-rejection and shame, marking a period of profound vulnerability (Archonti 2024a).

However, the narrative arc does not conclude with this depiction of weakness but underscores his ultimate capacity to transcend these hardships, gaining strength and maturity that allow him to overcome past mistakes, by using his experiences as a springboard for growth and transformation. John is not depicted as a dominant force, but as an individual navigating a complex web of historical, romantic, and social pressures, a typical example of human resilience. His transformation is not a triumphant display of traditional machismo, but a quiet, personal victory, suggesting a redefinition of

[21] The date of the coup d'état that marked the end of the democratic regime in Greece for the next seven years.

masculinity that embraces vulnerability and resilience. By showcasing a masculinity defined by ordinary struggles and hard-won self-possession, Archonti rightly points out that Marketaki invites viewers to reconsider the limitations of conventional masculine ideals, offering a more realistic and relatable depiction of male experience (Archonti 2024a).

In her article *Η 'ελευθερία' της λογοτεχνίας και ο 'φασισμός' του θεάματος (The 'freedom' of literature and the 'fascism' of the spectacle)* Marketaki reveals her unique insights about cinema as Art, and draws a distinction between the 'translation', or transfer, of a literary work to cinema and the process of its translation from one language to another. As a translator herself, Marketaki's ideas echo those of the great polymath and translation theorist George Steiner in his assertion that a translator starts from an obligation to respect the text, whereas the filmmaker's objective is to create another, standalone project from scratch. When filming *Lemonodasos (Lemon Grove)* or *The Price of Love*, she says, "I did not attempt to translate Politis and Theotokis", the two authors who wrote the literary works her respective films are based on.

> "Like when you create a painting inspired by a face, so does a novel inspire you to make a film. The end result, the film, is the work of the filmmaker, just as the painting is the work of the painter … The book can give you the basic stimulus, the feeling of a deeper kinship and the satisfaction that it expresses exactly what you would like to say. I have a feeling, for example, about Kira Kiralina by Panait Istrati, whom I consider my spiritual brother and I will be happy if I ever manage to transfer this work of his to the screen" [22] (Marketaki 1990: 520–21).

She expresses her frequent disappointment with film adaptations of books she loves, though there are notable exceptions, such as Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Knut Hamsun's *Hunger*, Sidney Lumet's *Twelve Angry Men*, and Akira Kurosawa's *Ran* (based on *King Lear* and other Shakespeare works). She critiques the common practice in films of altering endings for dramatic effect, citing examples like *Jamaica Inn*, based on Daphne Du Maurier's novel. She argues that literature engages the imagination of the reader, while cinema both transcends and confines the viewer's imagination. Whether we like it or not, she continues, cinema is a "fascist" art as it imposes a fixed perspective, restricting the viewer's creative participation in the process of communication. A text invites the reader to construct images in their imagination, drawing on personal associations

[22] Panait Istrati (Παναγής Βαλσάμης), nicknamed The Maxim Gorky of the Balkans, was a Greek-Romanian writer.

and experiences. A novel allows the author to insert commentary that frames how the reader interprets earlier or later passages, whereas cinema delivers pre-shaped visuals that define much of the viewer's perception[23].

She states that both the writer and the reader are free to create and interpret a story in their own way. Readers can imagine faces and places as they wish, set their own pace, pause, re-read, or reinterpret scenes. Unlike filmmakers, authors have the luxury of revising and rewriting their work until it is right. In cinema, however, once shooting is completed, correcting a problematic scene is extremely difficult, if not impossible, due to time and budget constraints. This limitation has led many to question whether cinema is truly an art form. Yet, she believes it is, because the success of a film ultimately relies on a kind of divine presence. While the director is responsible for the outcome, there's a knowledge beneath knowledge, a metaphysical impulse – a "divine presence" – that is essential to cinema, just as it is in literature and other forms of art (Marketaki 1990: 520–21).

3.1.6 Legacy & Tributes

Tonia Marketaki is now considered, though posthumously, to have made a significant contribution as a film director and screenwriter, leaving an important legacy in Greek cinema for the quality, if not the quantity, of her work. Since her first feature, she has received numerous tributes, with mentions in newspapers and film publications, both contemporary and recent. However, much of the biographical information about Marketaki comes from tribute articles written by friends, colleagues, and reviewers, as well as journalists with unverifiable sources, leading to occasional inaccuracies, such as her place of birth. More reliable details are found in a brief glimpse of her passport in an ERT Parascenium program about her life and works (referenced below), where it is shown as Andravida, Ileia (aka Ilia, or Elis, or Elida).

A number of newspaper tributes listed below are from the left-wing newspaper Η Αυγή (I Avgi – The Dawn), referred below simply without the article as Avgi, affiliated with Eurocommunism and first

[23] "Ο αναγνώστης της λογοτεχνίας είναι περισσότερο ελεύθερος, καθώς δε δεσμεύεται η φαντασία του, απ' ό,τι είναι ο θεατής μιας ταινίας, που αναγκαστικά εγκλωβίζεται στις εικόνες που ο κινηματογραφιστής έχει επιλέξει".

established in 1952. An article in Avgi reporting on the first Greek film festival 'Hellas Filmbox Berlin' held in Berlin between 18-22 January 2017, showcased the challenges faced by "Women Creators in Film – New Wave" and was curated by Rafika Saouis, Nefeli Myrodia and Ina Koutoula. They note that

> "despite being a minority compared to their male colleagues, women have undoubtedly shaped part of the art of cinema, with trailblazers of the likes of Tonia Marketaki and Frieda Liappa paving the way for future generations. Hoping that one day there will no longer be a distinction between a 'director' and a 'female director', we present this tribute to the women who are part of the film industry"[24].

This is not the first time that Marketaki and Liappa are mentioned together in a film tribute. Other tributes include the Tonia Marketaki Cinema Room in film festivals around Greece (Avgi 2018b), with other indicative cinema rooms named after landmarks and cinema luminaries, e.g. Olympion, Paul Zannas, John Kassavetes, Stavros Tornes, Frieda Liappa (Avgi 2019b). There is also the *Tonia Marketaki Directing Award* for "the most promising emerging female director" (Avgi 2018a). In another tribute to Tonia Marketaki and Frieda Liappa by the Thessaloniki Film Festival, the Thessaloniki Film Archive organised an event entitled *Strength of Freedom* in 2016, screening two of Marketaki's feature films, *John the Violent* and *The Price of Love*, and four Liappa films, the shorts *After Forty Days* (1974), *I Remember You Leaving All the Time* (1977) and *Apetaxamin* (1980), and the feature film *Love Wanders in the Night* (1981) (Avgi 2016).

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[24] "Φόρο τιμής σε γυναίκες επαγγελματίες του χώρου του κινηματογράφου, που βρίσκονται σε διαφορετικά πόστα πίσω από τις κάμερες, αποτελεί το αφιέρωμα που πραγματοποιεί με επτά αντιπροσωπευτικές ταινίες το Hellas Filmbox Berlin 2017, το πρώτο ελληνικό φεστιβάλ κινηματογράφου στο Βερολίνο, από τις 18 έως τις 22 Ιανουαρίου. Το αφιέρωμα, που είναι και μια αφορμή για την παρουσίαση των δυσκολιών και του αγώνα μέσα από τον κινηματογράφο, αφορά τους τομείς της σκηνοθεσίας, της παραγωγής, του σεναρίου και της διεύθυνσης φωτογραφίας. Το αφιέρωμα με τίτλο «Γυναίκες δημιουργοί στον κινηματογράφο - Νέο κύμα» επιμελούνται οι Ραφίκα Σαουίς, Νεφέλη Μυρωδιά και Ίνα Κούτουλα, οι οποίες σημειώνουν μεταξύ άλλων πως "παρά το γεγονός ότι οι γυναίκες αποτελούν μειονότητα σε σχέση με τους άνδρες συναδέλφους τους, έχουν αναμφίβολα διαμορφώσει μέρος της τέχνης του σινεμά, με σταυροφόρους την Τόνια Μαρκετάκη και τη Φρίντα Λιάππα, που χάραξαν τον δρόμο για τις επόμενες γενιές. Ελπίζοντας πως μια μέρα δεν θα υπάρχει διαχωρισμός του 'σκηνοθέτη' από τη 'γυναίκα σκηνοθέτη', πραγματοποιούμε αυτό το αφιέρωμα στις γυναίκες που αποτελούν μέρος του νέου κύματος του ελληνικού σινεμά" (https://www.avgi.gr/tehnes/286680_gia-toys-peismatarides-dimioyrgikoys-mikromikades).

The Avgi article above remarks that Tonia Marketaki's first feature became a benchmark of the New Greek Cinema and was based on real events in 1960s Greece; it also summarises her journey as a filmmaker, including her arrest along with other notable writers, musicians and intellectuals by security police on 22 August 1967, the day she was due to check the final cut of her short film. After a four-month imprisonment without charges by the dictatorship, her eventual trial led to a conviction with a suspended sentence, and she then fled to Italy, then Paris in May 1968, and then London where she stayed for one and a half years and worked as a third assistant director ("I made thousands of coffees" as she said) and assistant editor, with her 1969 stint in Algeria, directing three educational documentaries about farmers; she eventually returned to Greece in May 1971 (Avgi 2016).

For fellow film director Eleni Alexandraki, who wrote a tribute to Marketaki in the Athens 2014 Film Factory Festival Program (Alexandraki 2014b), Marketaki was a visionary director, and her films transcended their era. She posits that Marketaki crafted authentic characters by exploring the nuanced tension between strength and vulnerability, driven by a relentless rejection of conventional narratives. Her "inspired soul", subtly woven into her films, signified a unique artistic brilliance – her ability to transform personal experience into profound art; an artist Alexandraki "swears by" (Alexandraki 2014a).

On the 25th anniversary of Marketaki's death, another Avgi newsroom article provided a short bio, and reported that, in honour of her memory, the ERT Archive would be presenting the digitised Parascenium TV program which was filmed by Kostas Machairas (Κώστας Μαχαίρας) in 2005 and featured the film critic Achilleas Kyriakidis detailing her life and work. He summarised his thoughts of her saying (in translation): "She managed to achieve the great oxymoron, to convince of her deep doubt regarding the persuasiveness of phenomena and to convey with surprising confidence to the viewer the demonic mortification of a director who recreates the world with the indecision of an untested minor god."[25]

[25] "Μια τρίωρη, ασπρόμαυρη ταινία πέφτει σαν κεραυνός εν αιθρία την τελευταία μέρα του Φεστιβάλ Ελληνικού Κινηματογράφου Θεσσαλονίκης του 1973. Ο Ιωάννης ο Βίαιος κερδίζει τα βραβεία σκηνοθεσίας, σεναρίου και πρώτου ανδρικού ρόλου. Με τη σχεδόν απόκοσμα ψυχρή διαλεκτική του Εν ψυχρώ του Brooks, η Τώνια Μαρκετάκη κατορθώνει να πραγματοποιήσει το μέγα οξύμωρον: να πείσει για τη βαθιά αμφιβολία της ως προς την πειστικότητα

It also included audio of Marketaki who quoted some of her thoughts (in translation)[26]:

> Instinct is innocent. It is not the desire for profiteering or filth… I do not believe in filth and in all accusations of immorality. I believe that everything is an expression of a profound instinct for survival and domination… I live among worms, and they trample me… Power has begun to poison me… Power is like semen: it must find an outlet, or else it turns toxic… Only the pleasure of guilt, only the pleasure of the acknowledgment of guilt by others can offer him the pleasure of redemption… The director offers her silence as testimony… She remains an observer … but does not intervene.

The program also featured interviews covering her childhood experiences and familial influences; her work as an arts reporter and film critic in the newspaper To Vima (Το Βήμα/The Tribune) in the 1960s, then on Greek TV, and later in the 1980s her career as a theatre director. It also discussed the importance she placed on the Greek language in her work (Avgi 2019a), so evident in the linguistic fluency and accuracy of her films.

The ERT Archive article entitled (in translation) *ERT Archive honours the memory of Tonia Marketaki (26.07.1994)* (Machairas 2019a), dated 25 July 2019, introduced another ERT article entitled *Tonia Marketaki – 26 July 1994*, written by its presenter Konstantina Tasiopoulou (Κωνσταντίνα Τασιοπούλου) (Tasiopoulou 2021), which provides further details about Marketaki's personality, political affiliations and intellectual pursuits. It also includes the link to the above-mentioned Parascenium TV documentary, with highlights from Marketaki's speech at an event held

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των φαινομένων και να περάσει με εκπληκτική σιγουριά στο θεατή τη "δαιμόνια αμηχανία" ενός σκηνοθέτη που ανα-πλάθει τον κόσμο με την αποφασιστικότητα ενός αδόκιμου, ελάσσονος θεού."
(https://www.shortfromthepast.gr/review.asp?id=1&reviewID=10&lang=)

[26] Το ένστικτο είναι αθώο. Δεν είναι η επιθυμία της κερδοσκοπίας ή της βρομιάς. Δεν πιστεύω στη βρομιά και σ' όλες τις κατηγορίες για ανηθικότητα. Πιστεύω ότι όλα είναι έκφραση ενός βαθύτατου ενστίκτου επιβίωσης και κυριαρχίας… Ζω ανάμεσα σε σκουλήκια, και με ποδοπατούν… Η δύναμη έχει αρχίσει να με δηλητηριάζει... Η δύναμη είναι σαν το σπέρμα: πρέπει να βρίσκει διέξοδο αλλιώς γίνεται δηλητήριο… Μόνο η ηδονή της ενοχής, μόνο η ηδονή της παραδοχής της ενοχής από τους άλλους θα του χαρίσει και την ηδονή της εξιλέωσης... Η σκηνοθέτις καταθέτει τη σιωπή της... Μένει παρατηρητής … αλλά δεν επεμβαίνει. (Machairas 2019b)

in her honour at the Aetopoulio Cultural Centre of the Municipality of Chalandri, a suburb of Athens, on 4 March 1992, in which Achilleas Kyriakidis also talked about her career (Machairas 2019b).

The ERT Parascenium program is, in fact, a most illuminating documentary on Marketaki, where she explains her inspirations, aspirations and motivations. We see the words quoted by Tabaki being keyed on the typewriter "Ψάχνω τις αισθήσεις μου σαν εξερευνητής των πόλων…" We learn that the first novel she was given as a child at the age of seven was *Tom Sawyer* and then *Robin Hood* who both ended up being the most significant male figures in her life, as she puts it.

> "All philosophy, black humour and bitterness of *John the Violent* are rooted here. A whole scene of *John the Violent* is stolen from *Tom Sawyer*. His relationship with his aunt and the cat to which Tom himself was alike – although I discovered that theft after the fact, when I watched the completed film. As for the style of the fairy tale, it too is to be found in whatever I do. The fairy tale is the only narrative that interests me. It speaks to me, responds to me and I find it meaningful. I believe however that the real truth for this preference of mine lies elsewhere. In that enchanting figure of a grandmother who knew how to tell stories" (Machairas 2019b).

By this, she is referring to her grandmother who had five children and fifteen grandchildren and later became a nun, as she mentions earlier on in the video. She later explains her love of fairy tales of the past, such as *A Thousand and One Nights*, or of the future, like science fiction tales, and comments that though fairy tales are undeniably fictions, they hold profound, often hidden, truths: "The fairy tale is an absolutely admitted lie; a very-very deep truth". She also speaks about her love of 'logos', the meaning of language, and expresses her love for the Greek language and her sorrow for its decline, because a decline of nuance in the use of language does not come solely at the expense of its enchantment, as she fittingly posits, but brings along with it a decline in thinking, as language and thought are so closely bound together (Machairas 2019b).

In respect to her relationship with religion, she recalls prayers that she did not fully understand as a child. She had noticed that talking to God involved using singular imperatives like 'give', 'forgive', and 'come'. At the same time, God required respect and love. To her, God felt like a watchful presence, observing everything, even people's thoughts – controlling, forbidding, and imposing rules, much like a "giant policeman". This relationship fostered fear rather than love, and it was this fear that shaped her behaviour, turning her into what society labels a 'good kid'. A 'good kid' is often

someone who has been deeply afraid, she states. It was this fear, she reveals, that turned into a criticism of the "giant policeman", that explains the scene in the *Price of Love* where a little boy, with a dose of black humour, talks about a scripture class he attended, where he learned that God cut in half a man that he had created to make a woman, so that he did not feel lonely (Machairas 2019b).

She also reveals the identity of the chorale heard in *John the Violent*, as being the hymn Άγιος, άγιος, Κύριος Σαβαώθ, Ευλογημένος ο ερχόμενος (Holy, holy, Lord Sabaoth, Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord) and the "person who is coming is John himself disguised, with great theatricality". Significantly, as previously indicated, the video also scans her passport[27] which shows her father's name, 'Panayotes', and her place of birth as Andravida, Ileia – or Elide as it appears in her French student card shown in the same documentary. Interestingly, she also reveals that she does not feel any nostalgia for the past, the years of innocence and naiveté, and that she hates war and upheavals, longing for a peaceful existence. Yet, she recognised that peace was not an idealised state. Instead, it was found not in heroic gestures but in the daily rhythm, where moments of wonder and transcendence resided within the present values of health and love; a tangible paradise that exists in the here and now, with its inherent imperfections; a true paradise embodied in the simple act of a neighbour's smile, a present reality rather than a future aspiration (Machairas 2019b).

She expresses her dislike of being in the news; "the scandals, gossip, tributes, low-brow commentary, trends. All these opportunistic, ephemeral and random things that feed newspapers become front-page stories for a few days in the midst of more important things and are forgotten straight after". Towards the end of the documentary, composed but clearly distraught, she speaks about the trauma of having had to interrupt the shooting of her last film four times, owing a debt of 55 million drachmas, and all the difficulties she had faced as a result. The tribute closes with Marketaki talking about the people who influenced her and mentions first and foremost her storyteller grandmother, and then Sigmund Freud to whom she attributes the quote "δεν μαθαίνει κανείς παρά μόνο αυτό που ήδη γνωρίζει" (one only learns what one already knows).

[27] Time code 00:19:20

Pre-empting the viewers' question of how one then learns what they already know, she refers to Angelopoulos' film *Landscape in the Mist*. "We will always be some children lost in an unknown world, searching for God, Father, Omnipotent Creator, and He will be a hand coming out of a helicopter, a train that never comes, according to Kurosawa's version. But we, as children of fortune, will persevere in our belief of His existence, and we will be looking for Him… and will be marching on". A Cretan mantinada composed for her in memoriam in 1994 by the band *Χαΐνηδες* (*Chainides* or *Hainides*) (from an Arabic word meaning 'rebel', 'fugitive' or 'outcast'), entitled *Love and Death*, is performed in the closing scenes (Machairas 2019b).

A tribute from fellow director Fotos Lambrinos, entitled *Memory of Tonia Marketaki*, relates his friendship with her, as well as his personal experience during the screening of *John the Violent* at the Thessaloniki film festival.

> "Tonia, who was arrested in 1967 because she participated in PAM (Πανελλήνιο Αντιδικτατορικό Μέτωπο – Panhellenic Anti-dictatorship Front), after her release, left for London, where she did not stay long, returning to Greece in the middle of the junta years. We have known each other since 1963, after returning from her studies at IDHEC. We were friends, and before I left for my studies in Moscow, I introduced her to the (newspaper) Dimokratiki Allagi, where she took on the Arts page, which was managed by myself until then" (Lambrinos 2019).

After an eight-year absence, Lambrinos had returned permanently to Greece in May 1973, almost a year before the end of the dictatorship, and was attending the autumn festival for the first time with many of his friends from Athens. He had found it strange that the new Greek cinema was born during the junta, in the years of the great oppression, but was enjoying the pleasant atmosphere while eagerly awaiting the new directors' films, which were both plentiful and interesting.

> "When the lights came on, the festival hall erupted in applause. The screening of the film *John the Violent* had just ended and Tonia, completely stunned, greets the crowd. A little later, she leans on my arm, and we go down the stairs and out into the street. Everyone around continues to applaud. Tonia is beaming with joy. The culmination comes with four awards: screenplay, direction, best male actor, photography" (Lambrinos 2019).

On the question of why Marketaki had chosen to portray the murder of an innocent young woman, his view was that Marketaki wanted to show the lack of innocence of all "those involved in the case: police officers, investigators, lawyers, judges, military leadership and finally the public opinion itself. This is Tonia's theme. Who can be innocent in a violent regime of a military dictatorship..." (Lambrinos 2019).

Spyros Pagiatakis, newspaper Kathimerini's theatre critic, adds another interesting story in a LiFO magazine article entitled *Kathimerini's theatre critic Spyros Pagiatakis remembers (Ο κριτικός θεάτρου της Καθημερινής Σπύρος Παγιατάκης θυμάται)*. In the 1960s he admits that he disliked Marketaki, and the feeling was mutual. But when he saw *John the Violent* at the San Remo film festival, he was impressed, and they then became friends until her death in 1994. Post-dictatorship, Marketaki was called along with eleven others to reform the state television station, but she did not accept the position, because "I do not want to sit behind a desk. After all, I'm preparing a film", she answered. And she continued: "But here is a friend who has just returned from Rome, where he worked at RAI and [Rome's production company] Unitelefilm. I recommend him to you!" And that was how Pagiatakis found himself at EIRT[28] in charge of cultural programs; because Marketaki had introduced and suggested him (Pagiatakis 2012).

The prominent film Director and Marketaki's friend Nikos Koundouros, talking in a 2010 interview about his own distinguished career in the film industry, reveals the sacrifices filmmakers need to make in Greece and the suffering they must endure in the service of their art. He asserts that they have had to spend all their own money and even sell their homes because it is "an expensive art form" and "it exerts an enormous pull on those who engage with it", citing his friend as a prime example of the plight of filmmakers: "Tonia Marketaki died as a result of her despair and her debts"[29] (Koundouros 2010).

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[28] Εθνικό Ίδρυμα Ραδιοφωνίας Τηλεοράσεως (National Radio Television Foundation) was the Greek state broadcast service that was founded during the dictatorship in 1970 and converted to ERT (Ελληνική Ραδιοφωνία Τηλεόραση – Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation) in 1975.

[29] "Η Τόνια Μαρκετάκη πέθανε από τον καημό κι από τα χρέη. Θυσιάστηκε για να κάνει αυτό που πίστευε. Ο κινηματογράφος, επειδή ασκεί μια έλξη τρομερή σ' αυτούς που καταπιάνονται με το υλικό αυτό, δεν έχει μέτρο.

In an Avgi article, under the general heading *Resistance by Political Means: Female Perspective on Political Cinema* and entitled *The Case of Tonia Marketaki*, we find more detail about Marketaki's upbringing. She was raised in a female-dominated environment with a religious grandmother. She was only ten years old when she watched René Clément's *Forbidden Games* in 1952, a film that made her fall in love with cinema and, by her admission, "changed her life". She drew inspiration from texts that investigated the "structures of society", as well as the need to "render the absolute in a world of incessant fluidity and change". Using her diverse kaleidoscope of experiences obtained during her student years in Paris as a foundation, she managed to realise her vision of "cinematic wandering", within the context of insurmountable political pressures, thereby achieving a delicate balance between patriarchal prejudice and the struggle for survival in her endeavour to address and transcend these limitations, and navigate effectively the complexities of societal norms and the challenging circumstances of the domination of Finos Films. Her films, "whether regarded as examples of cinema des auteurs, or as neorealist cinema, have produced problematisation and reflection on the articulation of the political with the social, causing semiotic cracks in the dominant ideology, both during the oppressive modernisation period, and during the dictatorship" (Nikoletta Dania 2011b).

3.1.7 Feminism & Women's Films

On the question of feminism, Marketaki interestingly posits that Art is the medium that expresses the subconscious mind. "Jung says that every person's subconscious belongs to the opposite sex", as exemplified by the heroines of "Fellini, Antonioni, Godard, Bergman … For thousands of years of human history, women had a strictly defined role within a social structure that, with all its negatives, has allowed humanity to survive, multiply and dominate"[30]. In a far-reaching critique of the century-

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Κάνουν κάθε θυσία, πουλάνε τα σπίτια τους… Είναι πολυέξοδη τέχνη. Είναι καταπληκτικό αυτό που γίνεται. Αναλώνουνε ό,τι έχουν και δεν έχουν για να υπηρετήσουν και να υπηρετηθούν από μια τέχνη τόσο δυναμική."

[30]"Ο Γιούνγκ λέει ότι το υποσυνείδητο κάθε ανθρώπου ανήκει στο αντίθετο φύλο. (Φελίνι, Αντονιόνι, Γκοντάρ, Μπέργκμαν: ηρωίδες γυναίκες). Στην τέχνη αυτό που εκφράζεται είναι το υποσυνείδητο. Κάποιες χιλιάδες χρόνια ανθρώπινης ιστορίας, η γυναίκα είχε ένα ρόλο αυστηρά προσδιορισμένο μέσα σε μια κοινωνική συγκρότηση που, με όλα τα αρνητικά της, επέτρεψε στον άνθρωποι να επιβιώσει, να πολλαπλασιαστεί και να κυριαρχήσει. Εδώ κι εκατό μόνο χρόνια, μες από συγκεκριμένες κοινωνικές ανακατατάξεις οι ρόλοι των φύλων αμφισβητούνται κι αυτό οδηγεί σε προβλήματα πιο σημαντικά από το να παραπονιόμαστε ότι δεν μας αναγνωρίζουν. Μέσα σ' αυτές τις

old history of the contemporary feminist movement, she observes that questioning the roles of the sexes has led to "more important problems than complaining that they do not recognise us", and asserts that disputing everything has led to confusion and lack of clarity for all "males, females and non-binaries" (Marketaki 1979: 154).

She challenges the notion that 'women's cinema' is inherently good or bad, pointing out that just as not all men's films are good, the same applies to women's. Recalling a personal experience at the 1974 Berlin Film Festival, she notes that her film was included in the main competition as a film by a director – not specifically as a 'woman's film'. Yet when she viewed the films in the women's section, she found most of them poor in quality, not because women lack talent, but due to some of the abovementioned systemic issues, such as family roles, education, the demanding nature of directing, and especially the deep insecurity of the profession, which discourage most women from entering the field. Unlike men, who can pursue directing without sacrificing other aspects of their lives, women often must make significant personal sacrifices (Argyriou 1983: 43).

She argues that women have always possessed immense creative potential, but historically it was channelled into childbearing and domestic life, as society limited their roles. As birth rates fall in first-world countries, women are having smaller families and their creative energy demands new outlets, through work, productivity, and artistic expression. This shift is not driven by competition with men, but by necessity: unspent creative energy can turn inward and become self-destructive. However, the path for women in creative fields, like filmmaking, remains far more difficult than for men. A male director only needs to prove he is talented; a woman must first prove she can be a director at all, and then prove she is good at it. And while a man can compartmentalise love and work, a woman often integrates them – and is expected to invest much more time and emotional labour in relationships. This imbalance is not presented with bitterness but as a clear-eyed observation of how the world functions. Within those constraints, she has strived to live with dignity and make thoughtful choices about what to keep and what to let go (Argyriou 1983: 44).

αμφισβητήσεις των πάντων, όλοι χτυπιούνται και τα 'χουν χαμένα: αρσενικοί, θηλυκοί κι ουδέτεροι." (Marketaki 1979: 154)

Further to the construction of the gendered characters in the films discussed above, one of Marketaki's keen observations is the difference between Greece and other countries when it comes to male chauvinism and women's oppression. Often regarded as backward compared to the advanced European countries, the Greek reality Marketaki witnesses and talks about would sound rather counterintuitive for people in the Anglophone world. On her return to Greece after IDHEC, she notes that she did not face any particular problems as a woman. "In the West, there is a patriarchal structure; they give you the rights but question your ability. In Greece, they do not question your ability, just your rights (remnants of matriarchy[31]). A film that is 'good for a woman' does not interest me. I either make films or I do not" (Marketaki 1979: 154–55). This brave stance that challenges the 'ghettoisation' of female filmmakers, and which is shared by many serious filmmakers of her generation, though perhaps not as boldly stated, is an issue which is perhaps less pertinent today, as Jane Campion reflects in a recent interview: "Women's film also used to be a category of its own – a kind of ghetto – but that's not the case anymore, and that's where really heartening change has occurred" (Marshall 2023).

Yet, regardless of others' notions and expectations, Marketaki's mission remained to make movies for all, not just for women, staying faithful to freedom of expression, which she recognised as something "unimaginably difficult". With great foresight, she had already foretold, well before the media revolution of the last few decades, that an increase in the media of communication would lead to a proportional increase in all kinds of censorship (Marketaki 1979: 154–55). She could see that unless individuals were able to fully express themselves and speak from their own perspectives, the problems they faced risked being reduced to abstract theories, ideologies, or institutional guidelines detached from lived experience and therefore ineffective. She had realised that the future of cinema in Greece, and the role of women within it, would likely be shaped by a complex interplay between the structural challenges of the industry and the personal histories of those involved. It now seems clearer that when feminism becomes a popular trend, it can paradoxically make it harder to articulate women's real struggles, as public discourse becomes dominated by rigid expectations and prescriptive norms. Indeed, the broader cultural environment remains a difficult one, posing challenges not only for filmmakers or women specifically, but across many aspects of life.

[31] Some areas in Greece have traditionally retained a female-dominant social structure.

In a further articulation of her argument, Marketaki discusses the cultural bias in how we appreciate cinema. She asserts that we've been culturally conditioned to value films made by male directors, while films by women often feel unfamiliar or are deemed less artistically significant, not due to any inherent lack of talent in women, but because we lack the framework to recognise their cinematic expression as artistically and aesthetically important. Acknowledging that historically, many films labelled as 'women's cinema' were seen as subpar due to systemic inequality. She explains that far fewer women have the opportunity to become directors, and those who do often come from a limited pool of those able to make that choice. In contrast, many men can pursue directing without the same social or structural obstacles. Women face more challenges, including family expectations, education, the emotional and financial instability of the profession, and the fact that women are not raised to embrace such insecurity. Therefore, the few women who become directors are not necessarily the most talented or inspired, but just the ones who managed to reach that point despite the odds (Argyriou 1983: 43).

In the interview, she passionately rejects the labelling that separates 'women directors' from simply 'directors', highlighting a broader issue where men are seen as the default and women as the exception. She recalls how, when she began her career twenty years before, no one referred to her as a 'woman director' – she was simply a director. But over time, she noticed a shift where her gender began to precede her profession, a categorisation she deeply resents. She insists on her identity as both a director and a woman, but not a 'woman director', rejecting the implication that her work is somehow different or secondary because of her gender. She firmly rejects participating in women's film festivals, not out of disinterest in cinema, but because she opposes the categorisation that treats women directors as a minority needing special support. She compares this to other marginalised groups being treated with excessive leniency, suggesting that such festivals risk lowering standards out of pity or tokenism. She refuses to be included or judged based on her gender rather than her work's merit, asserting that she does not want equal footing as she already *is* on equal footing, and has never needed the 'alibi' of femininity to succeed. Her stance is not only personal but a call for all women to be recognised as professionals in their own right, without qualifiers (Argyriou 1983: 43).

She also highlights the hypocrisy and double standards within the film industry. When a woman accepts the label of 'women's cinema', she may benefit from softer, more lenient criteria. But if she

refuses that categorisation and competes on equal footing with men, the system becomes harsh and unforgiving. She shares a personal example where male colleagues actively sabotaged her film *The Price of Love* from entering the Thessaloniki Film Festival and blocked support from the Greek Film Centre – not because of her work's quality, but out of fear and competitiveness, their hostility stemming from a wounded masculinity, as they could not bear the idea of a woman competing directly with them and potentially winning, arguing that this organised resistance reveals how equality in theory is often met with aggression in practice (Argyriou 1983: 44).

She reflects on the backlash she faced not despite her professional recognition, but because of it. Her male colleagues did not question her talent – they could not – but they still opposed her receiving support, fearing it would set a precedent and force them to demand more funding too, even if they did not need it. Her film, *The Price of Love*, was expensive by Greek standards, and her insistence on quality – doing ten takes instead of settling for five and using one hundred extras instead of fifteen – was seen as overstepping. Her refusal to compromise triggered resentment, especially because she was a woman asserting the same professional standards as men. When she ran out of funds mid-production and sought help, she encountered organised resistance rooted in envy and discomfort over a woman demanding and receiving resources typically reserved for men (Argyriou 1983: 44).

On the question of the ten-year gap between her two films, *John the Violent* and *The Price of Love*, she attributes it to the intense personal and professional fallout she experienced after her initial success. Despite the acclaim her first film received, it led to the collapse of her close-knit support network. Friends who had once offered help, now turned away, revealing how success can breed resentment. In Greece, where filmmaking relies heavily on personal funds, producers, or the unpaid labour of friends, she found herself without any viable options. She had no money, producers were scarce due to a wider industry crisis, and the collaborative goodwill that had supported her first film had vanished. Her story highlights a broader cultural issue: a society riddled with emotional deprivation, where lack of freedom and deep-seated frustrations often manifest as competition, jealousy, and hostility, especially toward a woman asserting her place in the creative field (Argyriou 1983: 45).

On being asked whether she contributed in some way to the ten-year silence between her two films by placing obstacles on herself, she reflects on the "metaphysical" obstacles beyond the practical

challenges. The unexpected "shock" of success – not just the loss of friends but also the overwhelming public enthusiasm – left her psychologically unprepared. This intense recognition forced her to reassess her identity, triggering fears and internal conflict. Success became a trauma, not just a triumph. She introduces the idea of a cosmic "permission" – a moment granted by a convergence of self, history, and the universe – during which one is truly ready to create. For her, that moment did not come again for a decade. Still, she did not view those years as lost, as they were rich with personal experiences that she valued too deeply to have traded for more films. She challenges the assumption that productivity must always be visible or quantifiable, suggesting instead that her time was filled with emotional growth that shaped her as an artist (Argyriou 1983: 45).

She also refers to her television work on *Lemonodasos* and her theatre work, as well as her second feature film, *The Price of Love*, and the interview ends with a question about creativity. In her reply, she demystifies creativity without intellectualising it, by seeing it as something organic and necessary, like breathing. She does not claim deep awareness or mastery of what it is; rather, she experiences it instinctively, without self-consciousness. It is simply how she exists and makes sense of the world, a natural function of being alive (Argyriou 1983: 49).

Of her filmmaker's role, she asserts that cinema is a way of life and means of communication with the world, not something separate from her being. "Cinema is my way of life, the medium through which I communicate with things, filter them and live them. My living space. I cannot see it as something separate and judge or define it". Juxtaposing her films with her world, she hints that *John* and the dictatorship are facets of the same reality; and so are the *Lemon Grove* and the Karamanlis democracy. "The wretchedness of Greek television is not unrelated to the wretchedness of the Greek state. The apartment block that is being torn down, the sewer that is breaking. How can we talk about the future of cinema and women? Let's talk about the future of Greece..." (Marketaki 1979: 155).

3.2 John the Violent (1973)

3.2.1 Synopsis & Plot

John the Violent is a black and white film of 180-minute duration. It opens with a murder *in medias res*, while the story unfolds later, when the facts are being established and recorded. The film explores complex themes including crime, investigation, social dynamics, mental health, and media influence. It delves into the complexities of human behaviour, societal expectations, and the impact of historical, cultural and political contexts, and sheds light on the subjective nature of memory and perspective, as the same events are perceived and interpreted differently by various characters. It presents a compelling narrative that probes into the human psyche and societal norms, and challenges viewers to question their preconceptions, empathise with the characters, and reflect on the multifaceted nature of truth and justice. The film was awarded the three top prizes on its release at the 14th Thessaloniki film festival in 1973, namely for Best Director and Best Screenplay to Tonia Marketaki, and Best Male Leading Role for Manolis Logiadis in the role of John.

As a cinematic portrayal of real events, the film serves as a study of social psychology, criminal justice, and the power of storytelling by the media in shaping public perceptions and opinions. Multiple online sources offer summaries of the film, ranging in length from a few lines to several paragraphs, but the most complete and authoritative synopsis is offered by Marketaki herself, and it has been listed here in its entirety because of the deeper insights it offers (in translation):

> In an Athenian street, shortly before midnight, a young woman is stabbed by a stranger who disappears running into the darkness. During the ensuing police investigation, each 'eyewitness' gives their own version of events.
>
> The Press undertakes the task of 'informing' the public, and the woman's life is put under a microscope, which ultimately teaches us almost nothing about her, but reveals the social context of the era – Greece in the 1960s – the prevailing morals and those that are beginning to emerge, the psychological issues – remnants of the war and the disruption it caused to the economic structure of the country and to its people's interpersonal relationships. It is a general era of petit bourgeoisie, an era without poetry, that comes after a heroic one.
>
> On the margins of this society, John lives in his own imaginary and poetic world. A mentally burdened individual, intellectual from birth (though not by his social or educational upbringing – as he has not even finished primary school), he lives out his erotic, adolescent fantasies in a

vision of cathartic violence: He dreams of killing a young and beautiful woman, to assert his masculinity and fantasies of power, authority and dominance in life.

John confesses that he has committed the crime, to the great relief of the police that's been accused of inefficiency, of the press and its readers. With several contradictions, John reconstructs the details of the murder, as he's previously read them in the papers, thus captivating the public, journalists, police officers and psychiatrists; because the marginalised, isolated and wronged-by-nature individual happens to also be endowed not only with intelligence, but also with charm and grace, while his 'selfless' motivation to confess a futile act of violence for the sake of relieving a trapped soul, literally fascinates the youth of the day, who see in his person a genuine exponent of their deepest needs.

During the trial that follows, two eternal 'adversaries' come face to face: the individual and society. An agonising and sincere effort is made by all parties – judges, jurors, psychiatrists, police officers – in search of the truth. The search remains at a dead end, and general relief is achieved thanks to John's 'acquittal', who escapes prison, only to be locked up, for life, in a mental asylum (Kyriakidis 1994: 26).

3.2.2 The Real Story

As already mentioned, Marketaki's 'murder mystery' was inspired by a real murder, though it deviates from the facts of that murder in some significant ways. Even in works of fiction, filmmakers often draw inspiration from real crimes, historical contexts, or societal issues to create compelling narratives. While the film does not claim to be based on real events, understanding what happened in real life can still provide valuable insights into the filmmaker's objective and intent. Knowledge of the real events may allow viewers to appreciate any references, allusions, or social commentary embedded within the film, which could offer a broader perspective on the themes and issues explored in it. It may also allow viewers to reflect on how the portrayal of violence, motives, or consequences aligns with or deviates from reality, thereby enhancing their appreciation and interpretation of the film's content and thematic elements.

The film depicts a young man by the name of Ioannis Zachos[32], later revealed to be a psychopath, accused, tried and convicted, of murdering a young woman in Athens in the 1960s. In the real story, however, the murder, which sparked a media frenzy at the time similar to that depicted in the film, took place in 1963 and the victim was Maria Bavea (Μαρία Μπαβέα). Insights into the murder were gleaned from a recent blog dedicated to historic murders in Greece, by journalist, author and TV series scriptwriter Nikos Mouratidis, in a Greek article with the (translated) title *The 19-year-old killer with the knife* (Mouratidis 2023). According to the blog, Dimitris Zagas (Δημήτρης Ζάγκας) was a weak and antisocial 19-year-old schizophrenic murderer in Athens, who had dropped out of school, believing he was mocked by classmates for his difficulty in pronouncing the letter 'r'. Growing up, he developed an obsession with the stories of Jack the Ripper and the Roman Emperor Caligula. At the age of 16, he faced rejection from a girl due to his sexual impotence, which had resulted from surgery at age 13.

On the evening of April 23, 1964, he left his house with the intent to kill, and murdered Maria Bavea, in the Athens suburb of Pangrati. The police initially suspected the victim's fiancé, and his mother, but they could not find any evidence or motives against them. Following three weeks of rumours, inuendo and inconclusive investigations, Zagas' aunt, Koula Agagiotou (Κούλα Αγαγιώτου), an established and well-known character actress, turned in the murder weapon to the police on 12 May 1964. A search of his home discovered another two knives, a disused revolver and a cleaver, as well as the bloodied shirt he wore on the night of the murder, which he used to wipe the murder weapon on. He confessed to the stabbing and disclosed his plan to kill Bavea as he took off from nearby Syntagma Square.

Zagas was raised by his aunt as his parents separated after six months of marriage, and his mother was confined to a psychiatric hospital due to her schizophrenia. He had harboured hatred towards women, even despising his own mother whom he blamed for his (imagined rather than actual) unattractive appearance, and desired to undergo surgery in order to look like the fictional Don Juan, the legendary and irresistibly handsome seducer of women. His aunt testified that he had just three

[32] Greek name: Ιωάννης Ζάχος. Ιωάννης, and its common oral form Γιάννης, translate into English as Ioannis, or more commonly John. The female equivalent is Ιωάννα which translates into English as Joanna. Ζάχος can be transcribed as Zachos or Zahos.

friends, whom she described as “a lame person, a dwarf, and a mentally disturbed individual”. On June 13, 1965, the court ruled that “the defendant was insane and dangerous” and convicted him of murder but with the extenuating factor that he was in a state of complete confusion, hence, instead of sending him to prison, committed him to a mental institution (Mouratidis 2023).

3.2.3 Film Reviews

In Marketaki’s film, John’ insecurities, rooted in years of childhood bullying and reinforced by his gentle, almost effeminate appearance and disposition, fuel a desperate need to bolster his fragile ego and assert a brittle masculinity through a twisted obsession with dominating beautiful young women. In his fantasy world, played out on filmic scenes which could be real or imagined, he prowls the deserted streets of Athens during the night hours, searching for a target. He turns into a secluded alley, encounters a young woman, Eleni Chalikia, and stabs her. After committing the murder, he slips into the shadows and disappears from view. The subsequent police investigation, marred by controversies due to its ineffectual outcome, finally leads to his capture, much to the relief of the detectives. In John, they have found the perfect culprit who will freely confess during questioning, though his testimony appears sketchy and full of contradictions. During the criminal trial, his seemingly gentle nature, intelligence and charisma win the sympathy of the audience, the judges and the media who cover the case.

The media, utterly captivated by him, keep him firmly in the public eye, turning him into an icon by publishing detailed front-page reports on the trial each day. He reads the reports closely, crafting his testimony as if he had never been at the scene of the crime, passively awaiting the journalists to supply him with his next narrative. He eloquently frames his motives and sadistic tendencies in broad, abstract terms, blaming an indifferent society in which he feels trapped; a world where violence, through an unwarranted and meaningless murder, offers him a perverse sense of relief from the pressures of everyday life, as if guilt itself were a legitimate form of catharsis, validated by both his confession and society’s acceptance of his crime. And yet, this type of explanation does resonate with the youth of the day, who feel empathy for him and share in his sense of frustration and alienation that they believe can lead lonely and mentally disturbed young people in modern cities to seek fulfilment in violent crime (Rouvas and Stathakopoulos 2005b: 84).

As for the victim's relatives and friends, they appear more interested in gaining the attention of the media than in finding out the real perpetrator of the crime or preserving the dignity of the victim. On closer examination, spectators are faced with a quandary on at least two fronts. The title, by way of the epithet 'violent' for one, is either ironical, or indicates the accused's guilt. The scenes of stalking and walking the dark streets also suggest tendencies and motives. But John's handsome face transpires innocence to even the most suspicious onlooker, as was undoubtedly the intention of the director who chose the actor for the role. The irony is also not lost on fellow author, actress, artist and film director Lena Kitsopoulou. In her six-page introduction to the film in the book *The Lost Highway of Greek Cinema*, she characterises him as the least violent of all: "Ο Ιωάννης, ο λιγότερο βίαιος από όλους τους άλλους" (Kitsopoulou 2019: 38).

In her article, Kitsopoulou embarks on a succinct but thorough analysis of the film's main points. As she poignantly notes, from the opening frame to the final scene, the Greece depicted in the film feels strikingly familiar, almost indistinguishable from the Greece of today. As the film ends as abruptly as it begins, it becomes clear that this sense of familiarity stems from the reality it mirrors: it is the very Greece the viewer inhabits, be it in the 1960s or today. Through a script of exceptional craftsmanship, the audience is steadily provided with fragments of information and carefully planted details. Yet, true to the nature of a finely constructed narrative, each revelation raises more questions than it answers, gradually leading the viewer away from any clear resolution or simple identification of the killer. As the investigation deepens, so too does the portrait of Greek society.

The characters emerge one by one: the victim, her fiancé, his mother, his sister and brother-in-law, Eleni's parents, her coworker. Each carries secrets, assumptions about one another, and hidden truths about who they truly are. Their faces, once serene, begin to betray self-interest, fear, and panic as personal weaknesses and hidden resentments rise to the surface. Love is exposed as fragile and conditional, eroded by fear, ambition, patriarchy, poverty, and desperation. In this stifling petit-bourgeois world, individuals are trapped in endless, inherited roles shaped by social expectations, family pressures, and emotional deprivation, each struggling to maintain appearances in a society that demands sacrifice at the expense of authenticity (Kitsopoulou 2019: 40).

In a flashback to WWII and its aftermath in the film, where a man pushes a cart to collect corpses from the street, Marketaki clearly creates a powerful juxtaposition between the present-day murder

and the mass killings carried out in the name of ideology during the civil war. This contrast raises a disturbing question: are those old killings, legitimised by political or ideological causes, any less sick or reprehensible than the brutal act of a psychopathic murderer today? As the film unfolds, Kitsopoulou reiterates what we have already discussed about John and his background. His schizophrenic mother has abandoned him, and he lives isolated in his aunt's house, marginalised, emasculated and phobic, an abused young man searching for the strength to destroy what has destroyed him. He becomes obsessed with reading about the murder of Eleni Chalikia in the newspaper and identifies with the role of the killer he feels destined to play, though he lacks the courage to act. Kitsopoulou then categorically concludes that, at last, John takes a decisive step: confessing to Eleni's murder and, by confronting violence with violence, finally becoming the murderer he had long imagined himself to be (Kitsopoulou 2019: 41).

In taking for granted John's theoretical guilt by his identifying with the killer he reads about in the newspapers, Kitsopoulou clearly considers the murder as secondary to what she argues to be the film's objectives. She intimates that his trial is an indictment on the society, the system and the Greek family, all those guilty parties being the true perpetrators of crimes that are never put on trial and never convicted. Those who society calls mad are its victims, and the nature of madness is in dispute. Those that are judging John's guilt may be mad themselves. Kitsopoulou's analysis is largely based on a scene during the trial when Marketaki shows a prison cell where John's cellmate looks at the moon through the cell's bars and says: "The way the bars are between us and the moon, you do not know if we are inside and the moon outside or vice versa". In another scene that Kitsopoulou references, when John is asked by the Investigator whether he wanted to kill his own mother, John answers "Yes. Because she ridiculed me". The Investigator then replies "What can we do … We do not choose our parents", to which John agrees saying "Yes. It is a pity though" (Kitsopoulou 2019: 42).

At the film' conclusion, when John is sent to a mental hospital and we are shown his room, Kitsopoulou describes the two photographs seen glued on the wall: John's and the victim's. "Looking one last time at the perpetrator and the victim, John and Eleni, side by side, I understand that there is no victim and perpetrator. In the murder both people are victims. What is certain is that the one who kills cannot do otherwise", she asserts, suggesting that murder and violence are in everything we do without realising it, the way it has been in the past and will be in the future, in love and in hate, in anything conventional and unconventional. She continues: "If we want a rape-free society, then

millions of people must be prohibited by law from having children". She states that she appreciates the absence of a conclusive answer as to who the actual culprit is, but enjoys "the right to be sick, bipolar, tripolar, violent, unhappy, alone, overjoyed and whatever I like, in a society that rapes what does not resemble it". And ends with a short conversation taken from the film: "*Lawyer:* Do you understand why the defendant killed? *Judge:* Because he's abnormal. *Lawyer:* So, you have not understood" (Kitsopoulou 2019: 43). I personally find Kitsopoulou's analysis incisive, but her assessment extreme, in that it deprives the perpetrator of agency and the victim of the right to live.

A more nuanced assessment is offered by the acclaimed film director, writer, actor and critic Achilleas Kyriakidis (or Kyriakides), who states that Marketaki presents her film like a puzzle whose pieces fit in a larger mosaic that never reveals the entire picture, with the film ending abruptly, as if by suicide, after falling out of her control[33]. He comments with a pun that Marketaki's movie is a crime drama and quite literally "αστυνομική ταινία … για το άστυ και για τους νόμους του άστεος" (a "police" film … about "polis" and about the laws of the "polis"). Marketaki's lens wonders at the start of the film in a disquieting darkness which contrasts with the claustrophobic second part where the action unfolds in flashbacks between interrogation offices, prison cells, courts and psychiatric wards. Her techniques evoke those of Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* where "truths are aplenty, but the Truth is absent" and to the "cold dialectic" of Richard Brooks' 1967 film *In Cold Blood*, in the way she portrays the disturbing and dehumanising nature of the murder, where the killer is both victim and perpetrator in a bleak and nihilistic world (Kyriakidis 1994: 21–22).

In the second edition[34] of her pioneering tome *Ελληνικός Κινηματογράφος (Greek Cinema)* in 2006, Aglaia Mitropoulou includes a paragraph on Marketaki stating that "she is considered one of the most significant women directors of the new Greek cinema" (Mitropoulou 2006: 445). In her six columns on Marketaki's works until 1980, she focuses her gaze on the protagonist, John, not only presuming his actual guilt, but also looking for societal reasons as forcing his hand. She describes him as a son of a broken family with financial problems, who can only connect with women, though unable to

[33] "Το φιλμ, σαν να 'χει ξεφύγει από τον έλεγχό της, θαρρείς κι αυτοχειριάζεται, βάζει μια βίαιη τελεία στον εαυτό του". (Kyriakidis 1994: 21-22)

[34] The first edition was published in 1980, which allowed time for a review of Marketaki's first feature film of 1973, but not her 1984 and 1992 features. Unfortunately, they only just get a simple mention in the 2nd edition of 2006.

have intimate relations with them. He fulfils all the elements, she argues, that can justify a sociological explanation of criminality for turning him into a murderer: because according to modern sociology, all these issues can justify his lack of willpower, weakness of character, and lack of self-control – a point that is also highlighted by an unnamed editor in the left-wing Eurocommunist-leaning Athens newspaper Avgi when quoting Mitropoulou's review. This reading seems at odds with Marketaki's intent, as she is at pains, throughout the film, to avoid a factual interpretation of the murder, and any certainty about the perpetrator's identity. We are then left to ponder why a viewer may dismiss such critical parts of a film but take others for granted, and whether the 'truth' is in fact in the eye of the beholder.

The newspaper summarises Mitropoulou's assessment of the film by stating that rather than using the crime as a mere plot device, Marketaki undertakes a comprehensive analysis and examination of the broader social context and underlying factors that led to it. It also argues that it is a film "about the theatricality of the law, the psychology of the absurd in the social field of the '60s". The article's author, Aliki Kosyfologou, also quotes Marketaki scholar Ioulia Mermigka, who states that Marketaki is considered controversial as she never took part in the feminist movement, yet as a "socially active intellectual and artist had adopted a very advanced and radical political stance in her art and life"[35] (Kosyfologou 2011).

Interestingly, the official communist party newspaper Rizospastis, in its 2009 article by the title of *Walking precariously towards the ... absurd (Ακροβατώντας στο ... παράλογο)*, takes a more traditional stance in its introductory paragraph to the film by reporting that it is "based on real events of the '60s, where the investigation into the murder of a young woman results in an insult to her memory, as all the witnesses are interested in self-promotion in the mass media, while the man who has confessed to her murder becomes a social icon through the pages of the newspapers" (Rizospastis 2009).

[35] "Είναι γεγονός ότι η Μαρκετάκη δε συντάχθηκε ποτέ με το γυναικείο κίνημα και γι' αυτόν τον λόγο το έργο της αντιμετωπίζεται ως αμφιλεγόμενο από φεμινιστική σκοπιά, ωστόσο, κατά τη γνώμη μου, η ίδια ως κοινωνικά δραστήρια διανοούμενη και καλλιτέχνης είχε υιοθετήσει μία πολύ προωθημένη και ριζοσπαστική πολιτική στάση στην τέχνη και στη ζωή της." (Kosyfologou 2011)

Returning to her book, Mitropoulou argues against a biological explanation of criminality, stating that "η θεωρία του παπα-Λαμπρόζο (sic)[36] με τη βιολογική εξήγηση της εγκληματικότητας, έχει πια από καιρό μπει στα ράφια των αρχειοθηκών, και μόνο κάποιος εκκεντρικός δικαστής οπισθοδρομικής χώρας την ανασύρει για να αιτιολογήσει μιαν αδικαιολόγητη καταδίκη" (Mitropoulou 2006: 304–05). She thus argues that any biological explanation of criminality has long been set aside by modern criminological research. Alluding to Cesare Lombroso, commonly referred to as the 'Father of Criminology', she claims that his biological theory of criminology belongs to the past and is occasionally invoked only in isolated or misguided judicial contexts by "some eccentric judge of a backward country" in order to justify an "indefensible" conviction.

Yet her reference is somewhat imprecise: beyond the misspelling of his name, she appears to use the term 'Father' in a literal rather than metaphorical sense, as though Lombroso were a clerical figure, rather than recognising it as a marker of his status in the field, thereby reducing Lombroso's theory to an outdated religious dogma espoused by a backward cleric. In her reading, the film is not framed as a crime drama but rather as an exploration into the social conditioning that produces criminal behaviour. She raises the question of how a jury – well-meaning but largely uninformed – could condemn to a mental institution a psychologically fragile young man, whose sense of inferiority, compounded by impotence, has shaped his disturbed state.

And at this point, she invites us to consider a psychiatrist she agrees with, Ronald Laing, celebrated Scottish psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, author of the 1960 book *The Divided Self*, and his followers who, as she claims, are growing in number daily. But this assertion raises another point of contention. RD Laing had indeed rejected traditional views about mental illness having a biological or genetic cause, i.e. as a disease or malfunction of the brain, and argued instead that madness is a social construct used against individuals who did not conform to conventional norms of thought and behaviour. He believed that everyone had the potential to experience overwhelming psychological instability and distress, and that mental illness was a way for people to communicate their dissatisfaction with the oppressive structures of society, rather than a physical disorder: a "sane response to an insane world", according to the slogan his theories were later popularised under.

[36] The correct name is Lombroso – not Lambroso.

Laing's anti-establishment ideas about the causes of mental illness were rooted in his belief that dysfunctional family upbringings could lead to profound psychological distress and anxiety and that those who grew up in families affected by emotional and/or physical abuse, neglect, or other forms of trauma, were more likely to develop mental health problems. Laing further believed that traditional psychiatry and mental health institutions were part of a larger social and political establishment that sought to control and marginalise those who did not conform to societal norms.

Whether Mitropoulou's assertion about Laing's increasing influence is meritorious or not, his ideas have been criticised for their lack of empirical evidence and their potential to undermine the importance of effective mental health treatment. It would be fair to say that his own flawed example, as a self-absorbed, alcoholic and abusive father of six children, suffering from clinical depression himself, has undeniably been less than helpful to the current reception of his theories. In fact, as quoted in a 2008 Guardian article, "The general view of Laing's theories within psychiatry is that they are the product of a wild, utopian, romantic imagination – or interesting as museum artefacts but of no contemporary relevance" – a quote attributed to RD Laing scholar Daniel Burston (Keeley 2008) though not to be found in his book *The Wing of Madness: The Life and Work of R.D. Laing*, (Burston 1998) quoted in the article.

And, indeed, the evidence suggests that criminality cannot be reduced to the binary opposition of nature versus nurture. Neither biological determinism nor social disadvantage alone can adequately explain its occurrence. In fact, criminal behaviour is relatively rare across both privileged and underprivileged social groups. This rarity underscores the significance of human agency: individuals, regardless of circumstance, are capable of making choices that resist deterministic explanations and complicate simplistic causal models of crime.

The point here is not to argue the merits or shortcomings of any particular psychological theory, but to highlight how ideological bias can cloud the interpretation and evaluation of a work of art. Mitropoulou does not only assume the guilt of the perpetrator; she also presumes that Marketaki's intention in making the film has been for the film to serve as a sociological analysis and not as a police drama. The latter assertion is self-evident and not a matter of dispute, but the former one requires some investigation in regard to what exactly constitutes sociological analysis according to

Mitropoulou's reading. That point becomes evident from the films she quotes as examples, without offering any details beyond their names.

She contends that the film's objectives are like those in Claude Chabrol's 1978 film *Violette Nozière* and Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, appearing to somehow be lumping them together into the filmmaker category. In order to assess this view, we need to examine a few relevant details. Chabrol's film is actually based on the true story of a young French woman who killed her father in the 1930s. A psychological drama, it explores the complex motivations behind Violette's crime and the societal pressures that contributed to her actions. In terms of *In Cold Blood*, Truman Capote was not the filmmaker, but the author of the 1965 bestseller non-fiction novel, that was in fact adapted by Richard Brooks into his 1967 American neo-noir crime film of the same name.

Mitropoulou asserts that Marketaki was the first filmmaker in Greece to analyse and look for the causes of criminality in the social sphere, as did Norman Mailer and Jean-Pierre Jeunet, as she contends. The latter two have indeed both created works that touch on the social conditions that encourage and even drive criminality in their films. Mitropoulou is correct in claiming that in his films and writings, Norman Mailer has often focused on political aspects of criminal behaviour and the relationship between violence and power in American society. He did explore the dark underbelly of American culture, and the ways in which violence and criminal behaviour are perpetuated by the social and political structures, as well as the social and psychological factors that lead people to commit crimes, and the ways in which criminal behaviour is shaped by larger social and political forces.

Using a more fantastical approach, Jean-Pierre Jeunet also explored the darker side of human nature in dystopian societies where poverty and desperation are rampant, and illustrated ways in which desperate conditions can drive people to commit horrific crimes. And yet, despite Mitropoulou's propensity to place all the blame on society for the criminal behaviour of its outcasts, she seems to draw a line at Mailer's and Jeunet's extreme sublimation of criminality, or 'sanctification' of criminals, as she puts it, by thus depriving them of agency. For Norman Mailer, Mitropoulou asserts,

"murder gives you the sense of life"[37] – a quote in Greek translation which could not be traced to Mailer. She also quotes him in a Greek translation[38] (Mitropoulou 2006: 305) of his aphorism: "whether the life is criminal or not, the decision is to encourage the psychopath in oneself", misattributing the quote to his 1979 book *The Executioner's Song*, instead of Mailer's 1957 essay *The White Negro*, in which it actually appears[39]. In the following, I argue that Marketaki's intent was not to look for any causes of criminality in the social sphere, as her film never actually identifies the murderer, and her film does not bear any resemblance to Norman Mailer's *The Executioner's Song* beyond the depiction of the media frenzy and the perspectives of the people involved, enforcement officers, lawyers, judges, witnesses, relatives, as well as the public at large.

According to Mitropoulou, Marketaki's slow narration and dynamic lens exposes the crime as being the result of the individual personality of the criminal, and his relationships with his environment. His mental instability, in conjunction with his social and "especially financial" interactions, place in his hand a boomerang, or as she describes it "a weapon that will return to destroy the person who used it". Mitropoulou concludes by pointing out the "conflicting testimonies, questionable expert opinions, almost irrational in their rationality", which create anxiety in the viewers and though designed to distance them, draw them nearer to the hero, to the point of pitying him. And she proceeds to report that "Marketaki's plain, austere, both in concept and process, film did not resonate with the general public"[40] (Mitropoulou 2006: 306). In my view, however, this would not be unexpected for an art film that demands the engagement of the viewers while unsettling their certainties and beliefs.

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[37] "η δολοφονία σού δίνει της (sic) αίσθηση της ζωής" as quoted with the inclusion of a grammatical error; it should probably read "η δολοφονία σού δίνει την αίσθηση της ζωής".

[38] "είτε είναι η ζωή εγκληματική είτε όχι, εκείνο που έχει σημασία είναι η απόφαση να ενθαρρύνεις τον ψυχοπαθή που φέρνεις μέσα σου" (Mitropoulou 2006: 305).

[39] "In short, whether the life is criminal or not, the decision is to encourage the psychopath in oneself, to explore that domain of experience where security is boredom and therefore sickness, and one exists in the present, in that enormous present which is without past or future, memory or planned intention, the life where a man must go until he is beat, where he must gamble with his energies through all those small or large crises of courage and unforeseen situations which beset his day, where he must be with it or doomed not to swing." (Mailer, Malaquais, and Polsky 1957: 277-78)

[40] "Αλληλοσυγκρουόμενες καταθέσεις, απόψεις ειδικών αμφισβητήσιμες, σχεδόν παράλογες μέσα στον ορθολογισμό τους, δημιουργούν ένα κλίμα ψυχικής αγωνίας για τον θεατή. Ο τελευταίος ακόμα – όσο και αν η Μαρκετάκη προσπαθεί, εκ πεποιθήσεως να τον αποστασιοποιήσει – έρχεται κάποια στιγμή που νιώθει οίκτο για τον ήρωα. Οι παράλληλοι δρόμοι που ακολουθεί η μέθοδος της έρευνας της Μαρκετάκη έρχεται κάποια στιγμή που συγκλίνουν σ'

In her poignant and insightful article in the communist-leaning magazine 'I Epohi', Sofia Xigaki suggests that the idea of the tribute to women's cinema in Greece after the Metapolitefsi, i.e. the transition years to democracy after the end of the dictatorship in 1974, started with the exhibition *Feminism in the Metapolitefsi years 1974–1990*, held at the Hellenic Parliament Foundation from 7 June to 17 December 2017. She also poses some pertinent questions about what it was like for a woman in Greece to "speak, write, make films", and find her own voice and personal idiom, in the echo of emblematic slogans such as "I am not my father's, I am not my husband's, I want to be myself" and "The personal is political", for female directors such as Marketaki and Liappa, who were active participants in the struggle against the dictatorship. She further questions how film critics could even ignore the female gaze, so dominant in *John the Violent* (Xigaki, 2018).

Xigaki suggests that *John the Violent* may be Marketaki's most important film and gives a brief, but very comprehensive summary of its plot and structure . She reiterates that John is a young man with a history of mental illness, who has confessed his motiveless crime to his aunt, leading to her reporting him to the police, as she becomes frightened following his creepy threats against her, and his theatrically outrageous shenanigans. Xigaki correctly points out that the film can be divided into two main parts, the first focusing on the murder and subsequent police investigation, with witnesses from the crime scene providing information through flashbacks, and family and friends including the victim's mother, fiancé, mother-in-law, colleague, and acquaintances providing character testimonials. The victim's personality is depicted through diverse perspectives, some of which are character assassinations. The same character traits are interpreted differently by different witnesses. The generosity with which the victim financially supports her fiancé's family, as described by her shop assistant colleague, is perceived as her duty and obligation by her mother-in-law, and remains completely unacknowledged by her fiancé, who even tells the police that, having doubted her chastity, had forced her to undergo a virginity test. A male witness goes further by describing her as easy and debased.

ένα συγκεκριμένο συμπέρασμα, για να ξανοιχτούν και πάλι σε καινούργια έρευνα που, τελικά, δεν καταλήγει στην κλασική ετυμηγορία. Το θέμα μένει ανοιχτό και η έρευνα συνεχίζεται διαβρωτικά στο μυαλό του θεατή, ακόμα και όταν φύγει από την αίθουσα της προβολής. Το λιτό, αυστηρό, και ως σύλληψη και ως διαδικασία, έργο της Μαρκετάκη δεν βρήκε απήχηση στο μεγάλο κοινό." (Mitropoulou 2006: 306)

The second part, as Xigaki describes it, depicts the spectacle of the trial where judicial authorities, psychiatrists and the media attempt to uncover and understand the alleged perpetrator's motives and, through flashbacks, the film presents his sexual fantasies and 'true or false' sexual humiliations he has endured throughout his life while he actively engages in discussions, particularly with journalists, by adopting the role of the 'other', the misunderstood psychopath. And here, Xigaki makes a salient observation concerning the film's reviewers: that they have all concentrated on the second part of the film, about the perpetrator, and have totally dismissed the plight of the victim. Under the subheading *Ignoring half the film (Αγνοώντας τη μισή ταινία),* she expresses astonishment at the consistent critical focus on the male protagonist and the criminal aspects of the film.

She adds that, based on the sources available, including two histories of Greek cinema, reviews, and various online sources from the film's release in 1973, critical discourse has centred almost entirely on John's character, the courtroom drama, and the psychiatric and sociological analyses of the crime, while effectively overlooking the victim. Even the photographs online and in magazines are predominantly taken from the film's second half, with the exception of the front page announcing the murder, thereby missing entirely any recognition for Marketaki's distinct feminist gaze, which, importantly, moves beyond questions of class, as the women in the urban world John inhabits are just as trapped in predetermined lives shaped by patriarchal norms as those from the victim's poorer background.

Xigaki observes that it is only in recent years that a gendered perspective has been introduced by female cinema scholars who have re-evaluated the film, and cites Ioanna Athanasatou's 2006 Avgi article (Athanasatou 2006) entitled *Frieda Liappa and Tonia Marketaki*, in which she describes the dilemmas Marketaki had expressed on the risk women directors faced of having to neutralise their female gaze in order to fulfil their auteur role. She also conveys Marketaki's bitterness about critics' misinterpretation of *John the Violent* when she stated that "with very few exceptions, nothing passed to the Greek critics, […] as if it did not concern them", a sign that she was well aware that a part of the film had been ignored, as it clearly did not fit the critics' ideological narratives.

It is an interesting point to also observe the 'dowry' problematics implied in the film's narration, which may, in fact, have served as one incentive for Marketaki in choosing the material for her second

feature film *The Price of Love* that deals with that exact issue, and how the dowry represents the 'price' of love. From *John the Violent's* court testimonials, we learn that the victim does not have a dowry, but she does work for a living. Also, her fiancé is trying to raise a dowry for his sister, to which the victim has indeed been contributing. This juxtaposition is evident by Marketaki's camera here which also demonstrates a transitional period of coexisting oppositions, where urbanised work practices bring a transformation to traditional values and a modernisation to marriage practices, as pointed out by Ioulia Mermigka (Mermigka 2015: 116–17). Xigaki notes that, though Marketaki's film shines a light on the young woman's life without actually disclosing anything about her, it does reveal the social context and prevailing morals of the time, and also those that were emerging in a 1960s Greece (Xigaki 2018).

As Mermigka also notes, Eleni's fiancé has to postpone their marriage to sell his family's old home in the country and provide a dowry for his sister, who became pregnant out of wedlock and had to marry. Although the issue of dowry, as previously mentioned, is shown to be shifting under the influence of Greece's urban modernisation and the growing economic emancipation of women, deeply ingrained cultural attitudes are shown to persist. In a critique of the causes and implications of the Greek dowry system, quoting Karapostolis[41] (Karapostolis 1983: 105–08), Mermigka argues that marital practices like the dowry operated within patriarchal and heteronormative frameworks that aligned with Greece's post-war modernisation.

These customs not only reinforced gender roles but also supported broader social shifts, including women's incorporation into the workforce, urban expansion, and the adaptive reworking of tradition under emerging capitalist conditions. In the film's flashbacks, Eleni is portrayed juggling paid employment with unpaid domestic duties for her future mother-in-law, while also saving for her own dowry – revealing the dual burden placed on women within this transitional period (Mermigka 2022: 189). Karapostolis is indeed discussing dowry in the backdrop of the economic system operating during the period of 1960–1975, and its role as an instrument of ascendancy to a higher-class substratum of the Greek society at the time, however heteronormativity is not mentioned or discussed therein, and is clearly a rationalisation on the part of Mermigka.

[41] The actual year of publication of the thesis was 1983, instead of '1993' as quoted in Mermigka's citation.

In her recent thesis, Georgia Archonti examines *John the Violent* through the lens of gender and femicide, situating the film within a broader critique of patriarchal structures. Drawing on Diana Russell and Jill Radford's argument that the history of femicide runs parallel to the history of patriarchy, she argues that the film does not simply depict an isolated act of violence but exposes the systemic and institutional frameworks that make such violence possible. Both the victim and the perpetrator are presented as entrapped by societal forces: the young man's repressed violence emerges from oppressive constructions of masculinity, while the woman's vulnerability reflects the entrenched marginalisation of female subjectivity.

By positioning both figures as products of institutional and cultural pressures, the film complicates traditional narratives of gendered violence, refusing to reduce them to stereotypes of aggressor and victim. Instead, it foregrounds the ways in which patriarchal norms and social expectations shape their trajectories and, ultimately, the fatal outcome. Archonti shows how Marketaki transforms this narrative into a feminist intervention, expanding the critical potential of New Greek Cinema by reworking gendered power relations and reframing women's experiences as central to the cultural and political discourse of modern Greek cinema (Archonti 2024b).

3.2.4 Film Analysis

When I began my study of *John the Violent*, there were no comprehensive critical analyses of the film available, though there were several diverse readings of the film, as gleaned from the brief reviews and mentions listed above. The most extensive ones were by Greek scholar Ioulia Mermigka, who has spoken and written in Greek about Marketaki and *John the Violent* in recent years. In late 2022, I became aware of a book entitled *Greek Film Noir*, an English-language volume published in hardback (July 2022) and later in paperback (May 2024), in which Ioulia Mermigka devotes an entire chapter (Chapter 9) to the film (Mermigka 2022). This discovery gave me the opportunity to revisit aspects of my own interpretation and facilitated a more profound engagement with the film, by reflecting on any similarities and differences between our approaches.

Mermigka's previous analysis of the film was based on a Deleuzian cine-image model, in an essay entitled *John the Violent and Tonia Marketaki's Cinematic Machine*, which appeared as Chapter 5 in

the Greek language book *Politics of The Image: Between Iconolatry and Iconoclasm* (Mermigka 2015). That essay highlighted Marketaki's tenacity in overcoming enormous obstacles during the critical period of the dictatorship, by creating films that desisted petit bourgeois attitudes, and accurately recorded the moral and social transformations of Greek society in the 1960s. She also applied a semiotic analysis based on a Deleuze and Guattari theoretical framework in *John the Violent*, and highlighted the new aesthetic in that analysis, as noted by author and art theorist Maria Giagiannou in her review of the book (Giagiannou 2015).

John the Violent opens with a murder, the backstory unravelling later through a nonlinear sequence of fragmented flashbacks. It has generally been characterised as a film noir, and as neo-noir by Mermigka in her recent chapter. The film's noir status is straightforward to establish at a basic level. It is shot in black and white, with a distinctly dark and dreary visual style, particularly in the night scenes, where the camera roams unidentifiable, shadowy Athenian streets and alleyways, rendering only sketchy silhouettes discernible in the darkness. Chiaroscuro lighting techniques are employed to heighten tension, mystery, puzzlement, and uncertainty.

At first glance, the noir genre's typical femme fatale figure – a totally societal creation in the sense that any woman can be seen that way regardless of whether she is or not – might seem absent. On closer inspection, I would argue however, the film incorporates this archetype, albeit inverted upon the figure of the victim: the femme fatale becomes, herself, a fatality. Although she is not the typical seductress or manipulative figure one might expect in a film of this type, traces of those characteristics emerge through certain witness testimonies, questionable though they may be.

These conflicting accounts unsettle the spectator, who, having been convinced by Eleni's angelic behaviour in earlier scenes, begins to doubt their own ability to judge character. As the trial progresses, that initial conviction gives way to confusion, cynicism, and reliance on stereotypes. By blurring the line between right and wrong both perceptually and ethically, the film evokes moral ambiguity and existential crisis, hallmarks of the genre. Eleni herself is presented in contradictory ways: at times a flawed, modern, and fashionable working woman; at others modest, traditional, selfless, and dutiful in her prospective mother-in-law's home. This contrast raises doubts about her sincerity, suggesting a potentially manipulative pursuit of marriage under the weight of social expectations.

The audience, however, is denied any reliable cues that might clarify these contradictions. In the absence of traditional markers of meaning, like clear motives, emotional signals or trustworthy perspectives, viewers must rely solely on the stark, unmediated gaze of the camera. Yet this gaze offers no reassurance: it refuses commentary, emotional framing, or moral direction, presenting only an ambiguous rendering of reality. In doing so, the film denies the comfort of certainty and forces its audience to confront the unsettling possibility that meaning itself may be inaccessible, elusive, or deliberately withheld.

In a 2012 speech[42] entitled *Becoming-Woman and the Cinematic Time of Tonia Marketaki*, Mermigka emphasises the acoustic dimension of Marketaki's last two films, *The Price of Love* and *Crystal Nights*, and asserts that while cinema is often regarded primarily as a visual art, its auditory component is frequently overlooked. Introducing the concept of the 'refrain' motif, originally from music, she applies it to any repeating rhythmic pattern that facilitates communication in cinema and other art forms including literature and painting. A refrain, marked by repetition, creates points of identification, linking them to both personal and collective subjectivity. Similarly, the chorus, rhythmic and performative, organises shared signs through which communities perceive and express reality. The refrain, therefore, operates beyond individual identity, connecting inner experience with the external world (Mermigka 2012).

Mermigka's analysis is further grounded in the concepts of 'becoming-woman' and the 'crystal of time'[43], introduced by Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, as part of their philosophical framework of 'becoming', in Greek 'γίγνεσθαι', aimed at challenging traditional gender understandings by exploring fluid aspects of femininity, regardless of one's sex. Though the concept is meant to undermine and dismantle patriarchy by emphasising that sex is a social construct and therefore supposedly freeing the oppressed, in this case women, from their essentialist roles as subservient to

[42] Speech given in Greek at the Nosotros venue (No. 66, Themistokleous Street) in the Athens suburb of Exarcheia, mentioned here because of its relevance to Mermigka's mode of analysis in *John the Violent*.

[43] A concept that represents a non-linear, non-chronological time that merges past, present, and future, forming a creative memory that reimagines the past into an unburdened, 'virginal' future, thus emphasising its ability to transcend familiar boundaries and connect with the unfamiliar, the cosmic, and also with desire.

men, it is a concept that has been critiqued for potentially overlooking concrete material realities faced by women in patriarchal societies (Sotirin 2005). Mermigka's analysis, however, does not concern itself with sexual fluidity, but examines power dynamics through Deleuze's abstract concepts of 'becoming' in history, specifically 'becoming-woman' and 'becoming-child', while also exploring the concept of 'refrain' as a 'crystal of time'. These ideas also become relevant in Mermigka's later analysis of *John the Violent*.

Mermigka notes that *The Price of Love* has been more celebrated by feminists than Marketaki's other works, because it depicts two strong women, a mother and daughter, who challenge gender roles in their early 20th-century rural society. She describes this feminist perspective as 'dry' and offers an alternative post-feminist approach, focusing on the film's historical, sociological, and aesthetic significance. She poses the question of how Marketaki could speak about the present through the past, providing a model of identification and showing that women's labour is not inherently emancipating. Rather than portraying women's liberation through factory work, the film, she claims, highlights the transformation of capitalism itself, emerging from colonial feudalism and shifting gender relations. She therefore argues that praising women's labour as emancipating risks undermining the political critique of capitalism, which commodifies not only labour but also people, nature, and intangible elements like love and history, although she acknowledges that capitalism has actually enabled feminist demands to emerge, nevertheless noting that these demands often led to female subordination within the capitalist system.

After offering historical and sociological insights, she delves into the film's musical aesthetics, asserting its relevance both for its time and for today. She views the film as a simple form of the crystal of time, capturing the transformation of capitalism and commemorating love as a force that transcends market relations and history. In contrast to a dry feminist reading, she argues the film's value lies not only in its narrative, the central female character, and female subjectivity, but in the process of 'becoming a woman' and embracing the love of cinematic musicality and rhythm. The statement offers an ambitious and layered interpretation of the film, weaving together historical, sociological, aesthetic, and feminist concerns. However, its conceptual density risks obscuring rather than clarifying Marketaki's critical position. The description of the film as a simple form of the crystal of time is evocative but risks essentialising complex historical and affective processes under a single metaphor.

The concept of love is also central to Mermigka's analysis of *Crystal Nights*, as is the crystal of time with its non-sequential time motif. Through an in-depth examination of the music, she identifies the refrain of love as representing a primordial and potential time, a becoming of desire, and likens love to death's strength, and jealousy to hell's hardness. Beyond the music, she also notes that Marketaki deliberately uses colour aesthetics, shifting from sepia to colour in scenes of intense erotic desire and women's magical abilities, and transitioning to blue in the second part with the reborn girl. She describes the film's ending, where a girl's voice reveals her new identity as Marianna, after her past lives as Anna and Isabella, saying she lived with Albert beyond time, where there were no genders, races, or ages, and that she wanted to be reborn because even a love leading to death will eventually die.

Mermigka addresses feminist criticisms of the film, which accused it of misogyny for depicting female characters, including the young girl, with flaws like jealousy and treachery, by suggesting that the film does not glorify female desire but explores guilt as a concept central to Judeo-Christian theology, and that Marketaki uses guilt not as part of Anna's experience but as a moment of becoming, linked to her desire for Albert, transcending time and place. Within the crystal of time, guilt and betrayal coexist as moments of transformation. She also addresses another feminist objection to the film, which was that it portrayed female desire as fascist and deadly, but Mermigka counters that, by opining that the history of fascism should be evaluated in relation to desire and death in history, not specifically female desire.

She argues that desire is power, and quotes Marketaki's response to love's potentially deadly nature: love, like all living things, is doomed to die from the start, but it flirts with death in its sensuality. Mermigka then concludes her analysis stating that the film's major refrain is 'Long Live Life' despite fascism's destructive historical refrain of celebrating death, as depicted in the film. She emphasises that death is merely a form of time, not an end goal and the film's value lies in its polyphony – the expression of diverse elements and its masterful rhythm (Mermigka 2012).

Returning to her recent chapter on *John the Violent*, Mermigka explores its neo-noir aesthetics by situating her analysis at the intersection of Gilles Deleuze's movement-images and time-images. She argues that the film's neo-noir sensibility lies not in a classic crime investigation but in its fascination

with the ‘powers of the false’ in crime and cinema. She demonstrates how Marketaki undermines narrative verisimilitude, by presenting *John the Violent* as a neo-noir about the existential and political processes of becoming a murderer (Mermigka 2022: 182).

She also notes that the voiceover narration, which is delivered through readings of newspaper headlines by lawyers and media representatives offering subjective commentary as the story unfolds, enhances the genre’s introspective and atmospheric tone. By presenting the facts through fragmented narratives and multiple points of view – a common strategy in noir and neo-noir films – the film immediately questions the very possibility of accessing the truth. She posits that the film should be viewed as a neo-noir rather than a straightforward crime narrative, emphasising that John’s existential transformation is not depicted solely in psychological terms, but is, instead, intricately bound to the social and cultural semiotic frameworks of late 1960s and early 1970s Greece (Mermigka 2022: 183).

John’s trajectory toward becoming a murderer is shown to intersect with a range of societal forces: the repressive policing structures and a culture of surveillance and betrayal; the role of the press in sensationalising sex crimes and fuelling moral panic; the alienating urbanisation of Athens; the sociocultural constructs of gender, marriage, and sexuality; and the “juridical” apparatuses governing truth, crime, and madness. Mermigka’s analysis proposes that although neo-noir films are conventionally produced in colour, *John the Violent* stands out in its use of black-and-white cinematography, with this visual choice evoking the darkness of John’s impulses, the murky uncertainty surrounding his confession and its reception in a public sphere at once horrified and captivated by the crime, and the faint existential glimmer of choice and transformation, set starkly against the whiteness of clinical psychiatry (Mermigka 2022: 183).

Beyond the question of genre, notwithstanding Mermigka’s discussion on the complexities of Deleuze’s “philosophical taxonomy” approach towards it (Mermigka 2022: 187), it is important to note that film noir originally emerged in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s. As Andrew Spicer suggests when invoking the words of director Mike Hodges in the introduction of *Greek Film Noir*, the film noir label is conventionally attributed to Nino Frank, who first coined the term in a 1946 article when referring to American crime films portraying ‘autopsies’ of their society, within a dark, sombre view of life that focused a critical gaze on a variety of sociopolitical issues that were magnified during the war (Spicer 2022: xix). Its influence, however, has persisted across subsequent

decades through the evolution of neo-noir – a style that retains the visual aesthetics, moral ambiguities, character archetypes, thematic concerns, complex narratives, and atmospheric depth of the classic period, while offering a more contemporary perspective on the genre.

The term can now also be applied to different art forms, like visual arts, literature, photography and even music, as well as diverse periods of time and countries. Yet, despite the shifting and elusive nature of the category since its emergence, its essential characteristics impart a particular sensibility in viewing the world, with a seductive and pervasive appeal. More recent scholarship has extended its scope to European films noir which exude specific national and cultural characteristics, influenced by local traditions within a global setting. This is also evident in Greek cinema that features an elemental 'Greekness' deriving from depictions of everyday life against a local canvas, very visible in the case of *John the Violent*, which has been acknowledged by Mermigka as a distinct 'autopsy' of its society (Mermigka 2022: xix).

Following her synopsis of the film, Mermigka again bases her analysis on Deleuze's time-image, the emergence of which has in modern cinema, as she suggests, largely surpassed the action/movement image of the conventional narrative structures of Italian neorealist movies. Following this line of analysis, she ultimately then argues that in cinema artists, particularly filmmakers, are driven less by a desire to depict objective reality or truth, and more by a creative impulse to invent their own visions of the world, their own "truths and cinematic becomings", as expressly stated, by which she suggests that cinema is not about fixed realities but about transformation, process, and subjective experience. Rather than mirroring the world, artists shape new possibilities – personal, emotional, or philosophical through their work. This aligns with traditions in modernist and avant-garde cinema, where the filmmaker is not a passive observer but an active constructor of meaning and affect.

Mermigka then sets up her tripartite analysis arguing that in the first part, Marketaki employs unconventional flashbacks, memory-images in the Deleuzian sense and layered voiceovers in testimonial form to disrupt a coherent narrative structure and weave a neo-noir cinematic tapestry that reflects the fraught sociocultural landscape of early 1970s Greece. In the second part, she employs movement-image, affection-image, and impulse-image and their dynamic qualities to effect John's transformation, while in the third part, John's confession and trial are interpreted not as matters of

factual truth or falsehood, but as a process of 'becoming murderer' in an ambiguous neo-noir style (Mermigka 2022: 187).

However, this type of elaborate argument has not always aligned comfortably with more established methodologies in film studies. Indeed, the codified and rather opaque language used in such analyses does not assist in illuminating the film's scope and the director's intent, which to me is paramount. Therefore, I do not follow a similar approach to analyse the narrative films discussed in my thesis, particularly since a more conventional framework could arrive at comparable conclusions without relying on the conceptual distinctions between action-image, time-image and the like.

As Mermigka accurately describes it, the narration is "presented through flashbacks, voiceovers and disjunctive editing of sound and image", and the scene of the crime is reproduced in its impossible darkness in the conflicting testimonies of the eyewitnesses, read in off-camera voiceovers, mixed in with their own moral and cultural perspectives, which also reveal the traditional perceptions and mores of their contemporaneous society. These devices enable Marketaki to introduce elements of uncertainty, in order to undermine our perceptions and assessments of her characters' intentions.

Mermigka also notes the different linguistic registers employed in the reports tabled by the police and the media. They do use formal 'purist' language, i.e. katharevousa, which for some may be contrived as highlighting the conservative values of the respective media, though I would argue that it is done in the name of accuracy, rather than in the service of any power dynamics, as implied by Mermigka. In fact, the formality of the language closely resembles that which is used in legal settings in other countries, including Australia, and there is little reason to object to its use or to interpret it as an exercise of power. Marketaki's portrayal of the sensationalist newspaper coverage of the investigation and trial also maintains an appropriate linguistic register, using emotional and dramatic language to capture attention, stir strong reactions, and engage a broad readership across all age groups, from the old, the middle-aged and the young. This widespread fascination reflects a collective desire to gaze at the 'Other': some seeking to understand and process, while others aiming to criticise or condemn.

In terms of the film's cinematography, Mermigka notes that through the use of chiaroscuro in the nighttime scenes of Athens, Marketaki transitions from the sharp, high-contrast realism typical of

noir to the more restrained, observational style of neo-noir. The rural landscape surrounding the old family home is captured in expansive, low-contrast shots, while the family is portrayed in quiet contemplation of the deteriorating house soon to be sold. With its documentary-style visuals, the film deepens the crime narrative by introducing anthropological insights into marriage customs and strategies (Mermigka 2022: 189).

The film then introduces the cultural expectation of female chastity, which is deeply rooted in religious and moral value systems, by a disturbing twist in Eleni's story that challenges the viewer's assumption of her unassailable moral standing. A forensic report reveals she had sexual intercourse on the day of her murder, prompting her fiancé to disclose details of their relationship, including his doubts about her virginity and his insistence on a gynaecological exam – which, to him, yielded inconclusive results. This revelation serves as a deliberate narrative device: Marketaki consistently destabilises the viewer's grasp on the characters, just as a coherent understanding seems to emerge. This may suggest that the truth is either unknowable or ultimately irrelevant, especially in regard to Eleni's sexual history, which has no bearing on the facts of her murder. Yet these details are presented precisely because they do matter, not to the logic of the crime, but to the emotional and social dynamics at play within the trial and among the audience, both on- and off-screen, tied as they are to the justification of so-called honour crimes.

Mermigka acknowledges this narrative twist by noting how traditional ideals of female purity continue to exert influence, even amid the social changes of post-war Greece. As urbanisation advanced and sexual norms began to shift, the authority of the Orthodox moral framework weakened, leaving women in increasingly precarious and contested roles. This tension surfaces in the film through the close examination of Eleni's sexuality, where questions of her virtue become central to both the legal process and the story itself. As movements toward sexual freedom emerged, they were met with intensified rhetoric around preserving moral order, as reflected in the courtroom drama and the judgmental public gaze the film so effectively captures.

What is most significant here – and a central narrative strategy employed by Marketaki – is her persistent refusal to offer the viewer stable ground from which to interpret the characters. Each time the audience begins to develop confidence in their understanding of a character, in this case Eleni, the film introduces new and often dissonant information that disrupts certainty. This deliberate

narrative destabilisation draws on a key concern of feminist film theory: the interrogation of how meaning is constructed through looking, and how spectators are implicated in systems of judgment, especially in relation to female characters. In this sense, Marketaki's use of conflicting testimonies, forensic evidence, and shifting points of view not only reflects the structural ambiguity of truth within legal and narrative systems but also foregrounds the spectator's role in reproducing – or questioning – dominant gender ideologies.

The revelation of Eleni's sexual activity before her murder, and the obsessive focus on her virginity, especially through the lens of her fiancé's controlling narrative and the inconclusive (in his eyes) gynaecological examination, illustrates how female sexuality becomes a battleground for moral judgment. His distrust of science is symptomatic of prioritising emotion over logic. From a legal-rational standpoint, these details are irrelevant to the murder itself. Yet Marketaki pointedly includes them to expose how female sexual behaviour is rendered hyper-visible and morally charged within both juridical discourse and cinematic storytelling. This dynamic echoes Laura Mulvey's seminal critique of the male gaze, wherein women in film are often reduced to objects of surveillance and interpretation, their value contingent on how they are seen and judged.

Marketaki, however, complicates this gaze by denying the viewer a coherent interpretive position. The audience, like the courtroom spectators, is made to grapple with uncertainty and with the ethical discomfort of assigning meaning to fragments of a life that can never be fully known. In doing so, the film enacts a kind of critical spectatorship, one that resists voyeuristic or reductive closure and instead draws attention to the social and ideological forces that shape our understanding of gender, morality, and violence. Eleni's sexual history may be immaterial to the crime, but the fervour with which it is dissected by characters within the film, and inevitably by the viewer, demonstrates how such irrelevancies can wield profound symbolic power, both in the courtroom and in culture at large.

This element of the trial, in which Eleni's prior sexual relationships are weaponised to undermine her moral credibility, starkly illustrates how patriarchal structures often redirect attention from the act of violence to the victim's perceived deviance. The courtroom functions not as a neutral space of justice, but as a stage for the public performance of gendered morality. The invocation of Eleni's sexual history to cast doubt on her virtue aligns with what feminist theorists have critiqued as a 'purity test' imposed on female victims, particularly in narratives of gendered violence. The implication is clear:

a woman who transgresses normative codes of sexual behaviour is somehow less innocent or less worthy of justice. This logic, rooted in religious and patriarchal value systems, recasts the murder as a reaction to dishonour, rather than a crime with its own autonomous causality.

In this way, the film exposes how the notion of 'honour' can become a narrative device that excuses or rationalises male violence. By presenting Eleni's fiancé as a caricature of patriarchal rigidity and allowing an ex-partner to reduce her to an archetype of promiscuity, Marketaki confronts the audience with the machinery through which women are socially and symbolically punished for sexual autonomy. The enduring emphasis on female modesty – measured in skirt lengths or subdued behaviour – serves as a reminder that such codes are far from obsolete. Marketaki invites viewers not only to witness the injustice of this logic within the film, but to reflect on its persistence in contemporary society, where even progressive discourses often replicate subtle forms of gender policing. Through its layered construction of testimony, memory, and judgment, the film performs a critique of both the institutional systems that fail victims and the cultural scripts that shape how we understand them.

Mermigka's anthropological analysis of crimes of honour prompts a deeper interrogation of the evolving cultural frameworks surrounding both sexuality and criminality, particularly as mediated through the press. By focusing on the sensationalist representation of crimes of passion and sexual offences, she reveals how the media's fixation on crime, and especially on its perpetrators, not only captivates public imagination but also plays a crucial role in shaping the identity of the murderer. In this case, newspaper coverage becomes instrumental in the killer's transformation from a marginal, tortured figure into a perverse form of celebrity, admired and mythologised within the very society that once excluded him.

Based on Deleuze's concepts of 'becoming' and 'time-images' with their framing versus editing duality, Mermigka draws comparisons between films such as Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941) and Theo Angelopoulos' *Αναπαράσταση* (*Reconstruction)* (1970) where the past coexists with the present, to argue that although Marketaki "scans John's psychic black hole, she does not succumb to a psychoanalytic composition of symptom-images of primordial death and sex drives. She uses the varieties of the movement-image, the affection-image and the impulse-image for the higher purpose of traversing his becoming" (Mermigka 2022: 192).

The film critiques the impact of sensationalist journalism by contrasting lively city imagery with John's growing obsessive fascination over provocative newspaper articles about himself, which he reads aloud in a voiceover. This obsession reflects a wider cultural fixation on crime and sexuality, revealing both the media's manipulative power and society's self-absorbed nihilism. Through ironic observational shots, the film exposes how the press shapes public perceptions and enforces social norms around gender, sexuality, and criminality by manipulating emotions and reinforcing surveillance practices (Mermigka 2022: 191).

In his dimly lit room, John spies on a woman across the street but quickly abandons the pursuit. Inspired by a forensic article, he sketches breasts, mutilates the drawing, and treats them like a pair of eyes looking back hauntingly at him. Dressed as Dracula, he terrifies his grandmother. Seen through his cousin's perspective, John is depicted as immersed in a world of cats, monstrous illustrations, and books on science, politics, and the occult. His dark room becomes a psychological landscape filled with images of lust and agony, slowly giving way to darker, more instinctual urges. Haunted by death and sexual repression, John fixates on knives, injures himself, smashes his reflection in the mirror, and condemns it as 'a eunuch'. His hallucinations grow more intense – he envisions himself lost in a white void that amplifies his inner darkness. Eventually, John roams the night streets of Athens, driven by a violent impulse and clutching his knife, seemingly dares himself to act on his darkest desires to kill (Mermigka 2022: 192).

In her concise but comprehensive synopsis, one of the most "insinuating" moments that Mermigka identifies in Marketaki's departure from traditional psychological realism toward the ambiguity of the "time-image" occurs when John confesses to his cousin that he committed the murder. Rather than a clear admission of guilt, the confession functions more as a performative act – a kind of imaginative role-play or fabrication of a fantasy rather than a factual account. The oddity of his statement lies in its casual, almost playful delivery. John speaks of the murder in a tone more suited to small talk, attempting to convince his cousin of his capacity for violence by attributing her disbelief to her virginity. This unsettling confession alarms the cousin, who later discusses it with John's aunt, a stage actress, suggesting a link between theatricality and fabrication. In a stylistically disorienting, neo-noir sequence, the film then follows John as he prowls the streets at night. He tries to stab a woman, but the moment is obscured by the glare of a car's headlights, leaving the act itself

ambiguous. When John returns home, he finds the police waiting for him, summoned by his concerned aunt (Mermigka 2022: 193).

Interestingly, the assertion of the falseness of John's confession, however, is ostensibly contradicted by Yannis Bakoyiannopoulos, the actor Mermigka refers to as a "renowned cineaste", who plays a forensic psychiatrist in the film and whom she was able to talk to about the film. When she suggested that Marketaki deliberately casts doubt on whether John is truly the murderer, he firmly disagreed, insisting there was no ambiguity, further claiming that his generation's interest in the film stemmed precisely from its portrayal of an actual murderer. He also argued that this interpretation is supported by the fact that Marketaki drew inspiration from a real-life crime, which, in his view, confirmed John's guilt within the narrative. Indeed, the crime featured large in the press at the time and, even after well over half a century, reports of it can be found in the journal Polar (2018), the book Εγκληματολογία: Περίβλεπτον Αλεξίφωτον in honour of Professor Giannis Panousis under the title *Based on a true crime story* (2020) and online (Ragos 2021).

Indeed, having researched the Greek Literary and Historical Archive (ELIA) files of Tonia Marketaki, Giannis Ragos, an author of several books on crime and other topics, has found evidence of extensive research conducted by Marketaki for the writing of the film's script. She had collected, in Folio 1 of her archive, valuable material from publications, forensic reports from the minutes and transcripts of the trial, and other relevant material. In his complete summary, Ragos writes (in translation):

> "On the evening of 23 April 1964, young Maria Bavea was attacked with a knife in Pangrati by a man, who disappeared soon after. Police launched a manhunt to locate him but faced the problem of no apparent motive. Three weeks later, the actress Koula Agagiotou (known, among other things, for her participation in the film *Evdokia* by Alexis Damianos), handed over to the police a bloody knife that belonged to her 19-year-old nephew Dimitris Zagas, who initially confessed to the act, but a little later recanted his confession. Zagas, who did not know Bavea, was suffering from serious psychological problems and, according to his statement, hated all women. In June 1965, the court found him guilty of the murder, recognising, however, that he was 'terminally insane and dangerous' and thus ordered his confinement in a psychiatric clinic" (Ragos 2021).

In her analysis, Mermigka shifts focus from the question of whether John is truly guilty to the distinction between the cinematic portrayal of an actual murderer and that of a becoming-murderer. She moves away from concerns about the truth of the narrative or the reality of the murder, instead highlighting what she calls "chronological anomalies in the flashbacks", the film's persistent effort to destabilise the viewer's certainty, and the deliberate refusal to reconstruct the crime scene. In response, I would argue that the crime scene is, in fact, presented at the start of the film, making its reconstruction unnecessary. What is notably absent, however, is any visual or narrative clarity regarding the identity of those present in that shadowy, foreboding moment. This ambiguity effectively collapses the binary between guilt and innocence, and blurs the line between reality and imagination, truth and falsehood.

Also, while Mermigka's application of Deleuze's concept of 'becoming' effectively illustrates John's transformation shaped by his formative years, it neglects two crucial elements: John's individual agency and the powerful influence of populism and media in shaping his identity as a murderer, both of which are central to the film. In contrast, his childhood is only briefly touched upon and, although the 'becoming-murderer' narrative may be pivotal, the parallel motif of Eleni's 'becoming-victim', which speaks to the condition of women across generations, is often disregarded. If the film were solely about the murderer's transformation, its nearly three-hour runtime could have been reduced, and the extensive scenes focusing on the victim's life omitted. However, these scenes are not only retained but deliberately structured and paced. They are integral to the narrative, lending emotional weight and clarity to the film's chronology, and making even the flashbacks feel coherent and purposeful.

In conclusion, Mermigka emphasises that the varying accounts from eyewitnesses inherently distort the truth, as their testimonies and flashbacks reflect subjective, performative realities rather than objective facts. She notes that the victim herself had fabricated her virginity to align with societal expectations of marriage, while the media sensationalises and distorts her story to provoke both fascination and moral panic. John's aunt surrenders him to the authorities, less out of conviction and more as a dutiful act within a broader culture of denunciation. The police, eager to avoid accusations of incompetence, are quick to accept John's confession as a convenient resolution. More broadly, the film depicts a transitional political and cultural landscape riddled with falsifications, all serving to enforce discipline and control. John, ironically, is surrounded by people who claim to uphold truth, yet actively participate in its manipulation (Mermigka 2022: 195).

Mermigka also stresses that the tension between ‘truth’ and the institutional powers that claim to uphold it – “judges, prosecutors, attorneys, and forensic psychiatrists” – manifests in the film through authoritative speech-acts shaped by their respective disciplinary discourses. These figures enact what Foucault might term ‘regimes of truth’, operating within the frameworks and intentions of their professional ideologies. While this juxtaposition, rich in postmodernist tone and essayistic flair, offers fertile ground for academic interpretation, attributing such a Foucauldian framework directly to Marketaki, either consciously or subconsciously, remains speculative at best.

Nonetheless, Mermigka presses this line of interpretation with conviction. She portrays the public prosecutor as a staunch defender of the “classical school of natural law”, particularly in his urging of the jury to deliver a severe sentence and his refusal to acknowledge the defendant’s potential paranoiac state. His insistence on not challenging psychiatric science – ostensibly to preserve the dignity of “the sublime and heroic Greek society, with its thousands of years of glorious and brilliant history” – is, according to Mermigka, a rhetorical gesture meant to safeguard nationalist ideology (Mermigka 2022: 196).

While Mermigka’s translation of the extract from the public prosecutor’s speech is accurate, her interpretation overlooks the full rhetorical and logical purpose of its structure. The speech, carefully crafted by Marketaki, is a tightly reasoned and compelling argument, representing the kind of rationale a prosecutor must employ to advocate effectively for the punishment of the guilty. This reflects not only a procedural necessity but also a deeper legal-philosophical logic, arguably the most rational prosecutorial stance within such a context. By reducing the speech to a mere nationalistic gesture, Mermigka underestimates both the director’s craftsmanship and the complexity of the legal reasoning portrayed. In focusing primarily on the emotional and ideological dimensions, she risks missing Marketaki’s deliberate construction of a reasoned discourse embedded within the film.

This underscores a broader issue: when interpretation detaches from authorial intent and foregrounds audience affect or critical ideology, it often leads to a distortion of the film’s actual narrative and thematic intentions. Privileging the filmmaker’s intent provides a more stable foundation for analysis, especially given the absence of a unified or ‘average’ audience. Viewer interpretation is inevitably diverse and often contradictory, which limits the value of audience response as a primary analytical

tool. A key moment in the prosecutor's speech – one that supports Marketaki's balanced approach, is when he concedes that he does not question the legitimacy of psychology as a science. However, he critiques the inconsistencies among the psychological testimonies, noting that their contradictions could lead one to the conclusion that no one is truly sane. In doing so, he raises a philosophical dilemma rather than merely reinforcing nationalist sentiment. This moment speaks to the ambiguity and complexity of the concept of truth in the legal system – an ambiguity that the film, through its narrative structure and dialogue, appears to deliberately explore rather than resolve ideologically.

A film analysis grounded in the filmmaker's intent also offers a necessary corrective to the dominant trend of ideologically driven, viewer-centred interpretations. While such approaches emphasise deconstruction and plurality of meaning, they often overlook the filmmaker's creative agency and the specific historical, personal, and artistic motivations that shaped the work. Prioritising audience-centred analysis risks foreclosing deeper critical inquiry, especially when creator-focused perspectives remain underexplored. Relying solely on post-era or interpretive relativism can lead to unstable or anachronistic readings, imposing present-day values onto historical works and obscuring the filmmaker's original intentions. In contrast, a creator-centred analysis aims to reconstruct the creative process, shedding light on the complex interplay between individual vision and broader cultural conditions. It recognises that films are not created in a vacuum but emerge from distinct personal and collective experiences. By attending to the filmmaker's objectives, this approach avoids reductive interpretations and fosters a more grounded and nuanced understanding of the film's meaning and significance.

A closer look at the scene during the trial may serve to highlight these points. Rising from his seat the public prosecutor calling for the attribution of agency to a criminal, posits (in translation):

> "There is no doubt! John has committed this dreadful crime. This young man, who has so evidently won the sympathy and compassion of all of us, had the power to take this knife in his hands and plunge it into the back of an innocent and unsuspecting young woman. A criminal hides behind this blank, childlike face. Perhaps this criminal is paranoid. A victim of his own diseased soul. What is, however, your foremost duty, your foremost duty, members of the jury, as representatives and defenders of society? To cure John, or to protect the sane and innocent members of society from the results of his illness? Perhaps truly, a mental hospital is the proper place for a mentally ill person. From a mental hospital, though, it is possible that any doctor, at

any time, thinking that Zachos has been cured will send him home and from there directly to his next victim or victims.

Ladies and gentlemen, members of the jury. Although I am a representative of the Law, I ask you to not stick to the letter of the Law but to recognise that Zachos is accountable for his actions and put him under restraint in the safety of the prison. I feel sorry for John too, but I feel more pity for the young woman who paid with her own blood for his morbid hatred against society. The time has come for society to, at last, take care of its own safety and not only of John's happiness. Because let us not fool ourselves, there is only one way to keep John happy... To let him kill, let him shed human blood on the asphalt".

The prosecution attorney then continues:

"His Honour spoke of mercy. All reasonable people should be offended upon hearing this word, when we demand this divine feeling not for the sinner who is filled with remorse but for the most unrepentant criminal ever brought before the court. Zachos is not paranoid! He is an accomplished actor who inherited his aunt's dramatic talent and now comes here to deceive everyone.

We listened to the psychiatrists saying a whole lot of incomprehensible and contradictory things. Each one of them had his own theory. They agreed only on one thing. That Zachos is schizophrenic. I'm not questioning science. But, as we have seen, they almost pronounced all of us lunatics! Woe betide us letting psychiatrists influence our judgment! Nothing would be left standing! No institution! No justice! No light in the human darkness! Our society would turn into a prehistoric chaos, into a pack of beasts... in the name of psychology! If Zachos is not accountable for his perversions, then none of us can be! Every one of us has our own illnesses and anxieties. But we do not react to them by slaughtering people! You must have a criminal mind to do that and that is indeed what Zachos' mind is.

The public sentiment about justice and security depends on your decision. I ask you to act on it, fully aware of your responsibility and duty towards public opinion and the Greek society. This distinguished and heroic society having thousands of years of honourable and brilliant history to which this bloodthirsty beast before your eyes is an exception".

As anticipated, the defence counsel aligns with the psychologists' assessments and argues that John should be found not guilty by reason of mental illness, recommending his confinement to a psychiatric institution. This verdict appears to appease the broad spectrum of John's newly emerged supporters. Following the trial, the crowd quietly disperses. John is escorted to the vehicle that will take him to the asylum, and a female admirer waves him off as it drives away. The film then cuts to the stark grounds of the institution, where a few solitary figures drift through a bleak, grey yard. This scene transitions to John's room, where he sits alone, staring at two photographs pinned to a plain white wall: one of himself and one of his victim. The camera lingers on his face – a close-up reveals an unreadable, emotionless expression – before slowly pulling back to show him in profile, seated motionless on his bed. This final image captures a haunting ambiguity, suspending any clear moral resolution. Marketaki's final message appears on the screen: "I thank those who helped in the making of this film".

The close-up shot of John's silent, expressionless face in one of the film's final scenes is a striking example of deliberate cinematic technique. By filling the entire frame with his blank stare, Marketaki creates an intimate visual encounter between the audience and the alleged perpetrator, drawing us into a complex emotional space. This is not a moment of revelation, but one of deep ambiguity; a study in character that invites us to interpret what remains unspoken. The shot serves to expose John's isolation and psychological vulnerability, suggesting feelings of loneliness, sadness, or internal conflict that follow the intense public spectacle of his trial. Throughout the film, such close-ups function as windows into John's emotional and mental state, even when that state is elusive or contradictory. In this final instance, the audience, primed by narrative buildup, may expect clarity or emotional catharsis, but instead encounters a mask of inscrutability.

This resistance to resolution intensifies the sense of mystery, pointing perhaps to John's unresolved search for self-understanding or the futility of assigning clear motives to his actions. Set in the stark confines of the asylum, this closing image reverses the drama of the courtroom; rather than theatrical declarations of guilt or innocence, we are left with a silent image, rich in symbolic meaning. John's blank face in *gros plan* becomes a canvas onto which the audience projects their own interpretations, empathies, and discomforts. In doing so, the film powerfully evokes the psychological torment of confinement, not just physical imprisonment, but an existential entrapment. It is a haunting end that reframes the narrative not as a conclusion, but as an open question about human consciousness, accountability, and the cost of alienation.

Although Marketaki's use of flashbacks and her deliberate pacing are clearly designed to shift viewers' perceptions of the main characters – particularly the victim and the perpetrator – I argue that an analysis guided by Occam's razor, focusing on what the filmmaker explicitly presents, is more relevant and appropriate than overly complex or speculative interpretations. Marketaki's meticulous attention to detail, which often rewards repeat viewings, risks being overlooked by readings that privilege subjective or ideologically driven frameworks over close engagement with the film's actual construction. A single viewing, especially one filtered through the viewer's preconceived notions or interpretive expectations, tends to favour superficial conclusions rather than an appreciation of the director's carefully staged intentions.

This makes a filmmaker-focused approach even more pressing, particularly in the case of Marketaki, whose craftsmanship is evident in every frame. Although the film is inspired by a real crime, as already discussed, she deliberately alters all identifying names of people, streets, and neighbourhoods, not merely for legal anonymity, but as part of a broader strategy to abstract the narrative and focus attention on the social and psychological dimensions. Her realism is exacting: from the shadowy Athens nightscape to the victim's workplace in the city's commercial centre, and culminating in the procedural accuracy of the courtroom scenes. Every element – the police investigation, the calling of witnesses, the structure of the Greek criminal court, including the three professional judges, the public prosecutor (εισαγγελέας) positioned to their right (the viewers' left), and the trial's oratorical choreography – is depicted with remarkable authenticity. The strict observance of real-life conventions in the attire and demeanour of legal representatives recalls the vivid detail of Dostoevsky's account of Dmitri Karamazov's trial. Such rigor cannot be dismissed as incidental; rather, it underlines Marketaki's intent to ground the film in a heightened form of realism that invites the viewer not to speculate abstractly, but to observe and interpret attentively.

It is a fact that, despite the film's initial appearance as a true crime mystery rooted in a real-life case, it operates on multiple thematic levels. On a 1950s film noir register, as previously noted, it draws upon and reconfigures many of the genre's key conventions. These include its dark, shadow-laden cinematography – particularly evident in the 'reconstruction' of the crime scene – the archetype of the femme fatale, refracted through the haunting absence of the victim, and the portrayal of a dangerous, seemingly unstoppable male figure in John. The film also interrogates the dubious moral

stance of both the media and the trial audience, whose voyeuristic consumption of courtroom drama mirrors their fascination with mental illness as spectacle. The film crafts what can be described as an 'askew vision' – a visual and narrative strategy that distorts perception and compels the viewer to reassess familiar subjects through unfamiliar, and often polarised, lenses. It draws us into the hidden interiority of a mentally disturbed protagonist, presenting his pathology not with moral condemnation but with a degree of empathy. This empathetic gaze, however, does not excuse his actions; rather, it complicates the binary of good and evil, sanity and madness.

Working as an arts journalist herself, Marketaki's depictions of journalists are remarkably self-reflective of the profession, and eye-opening in her portrayal of their impact on creating sensationalism by conniving and manipulating the perpetrator to create a story that is bigger than a mere murder. From the opening scene, she introduces the fictional device of the unreliable narrators, brilliantly highlighting the contradictions in the witnesses' testimonies. Entangled in an unexpected murder investigation, they must navigate their fragmented recollections from the night of the brutal crime, where their own prejudices cannot but play a part. The narrative unfolds methodically, though in a flashback fashion, blending elements of suspense with psychological drama, with intrigue and ever-present twists, in an effort to solve the case. Visually, its atmospheric cinematography enhances its tense noirish tone. The film's compelling structure ensures that a sense of suspense is maintained throughout with emotional depth that builds tension and doubt with each witness's recollections.

The witnesses seem intent on trying to portray her as a promiscuous woman, an arriviste bête noire, whose raison d'être is to find a husband and solve her marital situation, whether this is in fact relevant or not to the murder case. In their primitive mind, an unaccompanied woman at night is fair game to a malevolent predator. In a civilised society, however, morality, be it religiously or philosophically motivated, has changed our perceptions of what is allowable behaviour according to our moral codes. Hence the need for punishment of human deviants who breach those codes. And though most people would never contemplate attacking another human in a vulnerable situation unless provoked, our reptilian brains seem to preserve an animalistic tendency to find excuses for aberrant individuals who perpetrate crimes upon others. From the victims and their families' point of view, the authorities seem to prioritise the rights of any perpetrator deemed mentally ill over the safety of the people in the community, exactly as the prosecution stated during the trial. Without a criminal conviction, even when incarcerated in mental institutions, they can eventually be released into normal life incognito, to further torment victims' families who, gagged by legal restrictions on what they can say or do, are

often powerless and manipulated into submission, with perpetrators working the system, then occasionally abscond, and face no consequences in a system which seems to favour the offender.

At this point, it is interesting to note the reaction of journalists to the film in our domestic violence-sensitive era. In a Greek article of 5 April 2024, entitled (in translation) *John the Violent: The most tragically timely film of Greek cinema*, John Kantea-Papadopoulos notes that Marketaki's remarkable debut, *John the Violent* stands as a rare exception in Greek cinema, which has produced only a handful of works that not only withstand the test of time but, in fact, grow more powerful with age. He points out that, apart from its cinematic brilliance, its relevance today is in the film's political resonance and haunting relevance to contemporary issues that make it an unsettling and eery experience for modern audiences who feel as if it were created in the present day despite its release half a century ago (Kantea-Papadopoulos 2024).

Kantea-Papadopoulos insightfully remarks that although the director was inspired by an actual murder, she made innovative changes in its narration in the mosaic of testimonies with the realism of a "docufiction and a Forensic Architecture science video". After a brief summary of the plot, he focuses on the "orgy of disrespect" shown to the victim by the penchants of a press who are in the business of sensationalising stories. "Marketaki turns femicide into a mirror of Greek society, magnifying the deep roots of patriarchy and misogyny that accompanies it", he remarks; and points out Marketaki's clear intention to underline that the murder is the result of gender-based violence which thrives within patriarchy rather than an isolated incident (Kantea-Papadopoulos 2024).

He then turns his attention to the question of what compels a man to stab and kill a woman. John is depicted as someone with no future prospects – emotionally stunted and psychologically cornered – who perceives himself as not just powerless, but symbolically castrated. More troublingly, he believes he has the right to act on his violent impulses. His fantasies, steeped in rejection and misogyny, evolve into a symbolic revenge against women as a whole, drawing parallels to the pathology of contemporary "incel" culture. Yet, his actions are not impulsive. With chilling calmness and method, he operates on two fronts: first, cultivating the image of a psychologically unstable figure, and second, timing his confession for maximum effect. By the time he admits guilt, the victim's reputation has already been tarnished by moralistic slander, and he has successfully positioned himself as a figure of psychological vulnerability deserving of sympathy (Kantea-Papadopoulos 2024).

The film's chilling conclusion underscores the systemic biases embedded in a patriarchal society, where the victim is erased while the perpetrator is subtly exonerated by male-dominated institutions. It delivers a damning critique of enduring societal attitudes: the young man, fully conscious of the system's flaws, exploits the 'mental illness' narrative to frame his crime as a momentary lapse, a crime of passion. The epilogue reveals the bitter irony – its 'triumph' lies in the complete dismissal of the victim. Public opinion now sides with the perpetrator, bolstered by male judges and journalists who not only sympathise with him but even share jokes with him during the trial. The final shot is gut-wrenching, a stark visual echo of a world where blame is subtly shifted onto the victim, and the abuser is reframed as merely 'the troubled boy next door'. In this world, the victim's fate becomes a tragic matter of being in the wrong place at the wrong time – her personhood lost in the machinery of patriarchal leniency and media complicity (Kantea-Papadopoulos 2024).

Astonishingly, no verifiable details about the real-life perpetrator the film is based on seem to exist. His identity, whereabouts, and the duration or conditions of his supposed lifelong detainment remain undisclosed. In the film's final scene, the implication is that John will never be released, though the question of release becomes irrelevant – he appears equally imprisoned by his inner world, whether inside or outside the asylum. The film, intentionally or not, exposes the stark contrast in how the system treats perpetrators and victims: the former are often granted empathy and rehabilitation by mental health services, while the latter and their families are left to endure ongoing grief and trauma, frequently re-victimised by a sensationalist press that searches for mitigating circumstances for the killer rather than justice or dignity for the dead.

Marketaki demonstrates meticulous precision behind the camera, capturing the finest details of setting, mise-en-scène, and costume with an immaculate eye. Her characters' polished appearances and speech are matched by a penetrating exploration of their psychological dimensions and the pursuit of artistic truth. Her deft use of camera pans enhances the authenticity of each scene, affirming her stature as both a director-auteur and dramaturg. Her profound command of language and narrative structure is evident in the evocative and articulate way she constructs her story. With finely attuned dialogue tailored to each social cohort and situation, she forges an emotional and intellectual bond with her audience, immersing them in a rich and textured cinematic experience. Through a psychologically incisive approach, she reveals the complex inner lives of her characters, unravelling

their biases, motivations, and contradictions with precision and sensitivity. These multifaceted figures, shaped by both conscious and unconscious drives, are portrayed with rare nuance and authenticity. In mapping their internal landscapes, Marketaki prompts reflection on the universal dimensions of human experience and the entangled relationship between individual identity and the wider social fabric.

Marketaki's camera pans across carefully constructed settings, highlighting significant details and animating the visual landscape. This fusion of literary and cinematic language deepens the viewer's immersion in the narrative while asserting her unmistakable authorial presence. Wide shots position John at a distance, maintaining emotional detachment and reinforcing his alienation. In contrast, recurring close-ups, especially the gros plan of his expressionless face, function as a leitmotif that simultaneously draws the audience into an intimate space and withholds emotional access. His unreadable features frustrate the desire for insight, forcing us to confront ambiguity and the limits of interpretation. Marketaki's high-angle shots of the courtroom further reduce attendees to diminished figures, subtly undermining the authority of the institutions they embody and offering a visual critique of systemic power. The slow zoom into John's face denies conclusive resolution, transforming the image into a meditation on perception itself. This aesthetic choice is both symbolically rich and narratively strategic: it elicits discomfort, curiosity, and even empathy, without granting clarity, preserving the opacity that lies at the heart of both the character and the film.

The stunning black-and-white cinematography – crystal-clear and masterfully composed – renders deep-focus images with such precision that it evokes both curiosity and unexpected sympathy for the protagonist. The audience finds itself wondering, and perhaps even hoping, that he is not the murderer, or if he is, that mitigating factors might spare him from incarceration. Victims populate the film, both among central and peripheral characters, forming a sombre mosaic of individuals trapped in lives of quiet desperation. The women, in particular, emerge as the principal sufferers: consigned to monotonous existences in which each day echoes the last, their identities confined within narrow, banal visions of womanhood. The men, by contrast, move through the background with their masculinity intact, each playing his role in the bleak theatre surrounding an innocent's death. While they may know, deep down, that no woman deserves to die – no matter how her morality is judged – they lack the courage to confront this truth openly, distracting themselves and appeasing their consciences through offhand jokes shared with the perpetrator.

The young women in the courtroom are mesmerised, staring in awe at the handsome perpetrator, who remains unfazed, cool, and charismatic, almost as though in a trance of collective delusion. They are reluctant to accept what their minds tell them – that he is culpable. Each of them harbours a maternal instinct to excuse his crimes and protect him from himself, intertwined with a deep curiosity to understand the 'castrated male other'. This same complex of curiosity and sympathy is not confined to the younger generation but is shared by older women as well, even today, in the phenomenon of hybristophilia – an attraction to incarcerated violent criminals. Such individuals often form romantic relationships with their captors, a psychological condition in which one is sexually or emotionally drawn to those who have committed heinous acts, such as murder. This behaviour, sometimes colloquially referred to as the 'Bonnie and Clyde Syndrome', reveals how women (and occasionally men) romanticise violent crimes, perceiving the perpetrators as misunderstood or deriving a sense of power from a relationship with someone deemed dangerous to society but harmless within the confines of a prison cell.

Although the court attendees are convinced of John's guilt, acknowledging that he never tries to hide it, they still attempt to find mitigating factors for his actions. Meanwhile, the audience is left confused, confronted with contradictory information delivered through the film's meticulously crafted scenes. Our instinct is to believe that John is accepting responsibility for a crime he might not have committed – or perhaps, one he could not have committed. But if John is indeed guilty, the question of his agency becomes central: is he a conscious killer, or is he someone driven to kill because he cannot control his actions? Does he act out of uncontrollable impulses, unable to stop himself? For answers, we can only rely on the sparse details Marketaki reveals about his backstory and past trauma.

His psychological profile suggests signs of mental illness, compulsions, and other factors that impair his ability to control himself. He is not driven by a rational desire for revenge but by irrational, uncontrollable emotional impulses. In terms of his decision-making process, there is an element of premeditation, but his planning is not methodical or intentional – it is impulsive, spontaneous, and erratic. His actions do not demonstrate a calculated attempt to weigh the consequences or moral implications. There is no recurring or ritualistic pattern to his behaviour, indicating that his actions are not the result of a conscious, deliberate choice.

On the other hand, the film's visual and auditory cues suggest that John displays emotional detachment, or even a sense of satisfaction following the murder, with no apparent remorse. He shows no visible signs of guilt, and the occasional confusion he exhibits appears to stem more from apathy and nihilism than from any moral reckoning. Yet, in the solitude of his room, in its oppressive silence and isolation, a more complex psychological portrait emerges. His chaotic inner world marked by disturbed dreams, obsessive drawings, and his compulsive surveillance of the woman across the street, betrays a mind in turmoil. His recurrent gazes into the mirror are especially symbolic: they suggest an ongoing, perhaps futile, attempt at self-understanding, as if he is trying to locate himself within his fractured identity. This is particularly evident when he shatters the mirror and glares at the non-specular, randomly arranged mosaic of his disassembled face – mirror opposites, reversed, multiplied, and broken; the illusion of symmetry gone, exposing the disorder of his shattered personality beneath the surface.

Despite his inner chaos, John maintains remarkable composure in the courtroom. He demonstrates a chilling ability to manipulate everyone around him – not only because they are susceptible, but because he possesses the charisma and intelligence to rationalise his actions with disarming clarity. He crafts a narrative in which his 'madness' becomes not a liability but a shield: a means of framing his crime as the inevitable outcome of social coercion, marginalisation, and suppressed rage. In doing so, he blurs the boundaries between compulsion and agency, presenting himself as both victim and perpetrator, as someone driven by psychological instability but also guided by a conscious, if twisted, logic. But it is clear he relishes the power bestowed on him by the focus shown on his person and agency, though the film refuses to offer a clear verdict, leaving us in an unsettling space where guilt, justification, and identity collapse into ambiguity.

In a sense, John's guilt is never really in doubt, if not for the murder, then for wishing it. The story is not a courtroom drama about the potential miscarriage of justice, but rather a chilling portrait of a justice system that fails to deliver true accountability. His crime goes effectively unpunished. While his institutionalisation may seem restrictive, it becomes, paradoxically, a form of victory. John's confinement is his refuge; it grants him protection from the society he both loathes and fears, under the guise of protecting that society from him. This inversion of justice – the perpetrator safeguarded, the victim forgotten – reveals the bitter irony at the core of the narrative. The victim, meanwhile, is dismissed as collateral damage. Her death is absorbed into a broader cultural numbness, a collective fatigue toward the familiar tragedy of female victimhood. She is abandoned not only by the justice

system but also by the film's characters and spectators, both in the courtroom and beyond. Her life and its brutal erasure elicit little outrage, dismissed with the all-too-familiar phrase: 'wrong place, wrong time'. In that moment, the film exposes not ambiguity but apathy – an indictment not just of one man's actions, but of a society that finds them unremarkable.

Ultimately, the film resists narrative closure or psychological certainty, locating its power in the ambiguity surrounding John's guilt, his mental illness, and his status as both a victim and perpetrator. By immersing the audience in an alternate moral universe – one where inhumanity intersects with a progressive ideology of care – Marketaki invites us to see 'through a glass darkly'. We are not asked to resolve John's psyche, but to inhabit the murky space between responsibility and illness, monstrosity and fragility, punishment and protection. The film offers no verdict – only the silent, staring face in close-up, daring us to fill in what it withholds. The poetics of loneliness underpin this ambiguity. Through minimal dialogue and long, isolating shots, the film meditates on solitude, not only as John's emotional condition, but also as a wider existential affliction – shared by the victim, the trial attendees, and the city itself. The haunting mise-en-scène of closed rooms, narrow corridors, and dispassionate institutions becomes a metaphor for inner detachment. Loneliness, in this reading, is not a symptom but a structure – of patriarchy, of urban alienation, of a society more ready to explain violence than confront it.

At the same time, the film probes the boundaries of masculinity and gendered identity, offering a chilling portrait of androgynous masculinity in crisis. John oscillates between fragility, sexual confusion, emotional manipulation, and explosive violence – a grotesque figure whose charisma evokes both maternal instinct and erotic fascination, particularly among the women in the courtroom. This hybristophilic projection, in which empathy and desire become entangled with dangerous allure, reflects a broader cultural confusion: the inability to distinguish compassion from complicity, care from enablement. Here, the line between healthy and toxic masculinity is not just blurred – it is redrawn entirely, challenging conventional binaries and unsettling assumptions about gender, power, and moral agency. In this way, Marketaki pushes the boundaries of both form and ethics, offering not resolution but disquiet – gifting us with more questions than answers about justice, representation, and the self.

The film's speculative character, marked by its refusal of moral closure and its immersion in narcissistic and institutional gazes, confronts us with our own voyeurism and passivity. It is not merely a psychological drama or a true crime retelling, but a philosophical provocation about what it means to watch, to feel, and to fail to act. The result is a masterwork that withholds certainty, and, in doing so, demands a more troubling and profound form of engagement, and while the film has understandably attracted postmodern readings for its ambiguity and resistance to moral absolutes, such interpretations should be approached with a degree of caution. These frameworks, while often illuminating, can often carry a tendency toward interpretive detachment or a reluctance to confront uncomfortable ethical questions. Marketaki's work does not reject interpretation, but it does seem to caution against over-intellectualisation or the impulse to abstract meaning at the cost of emotional and moral clarity. Her cinema does not revel in ambiguity for its own sake; rather, it uses ambiguity to challenge the viewer to remain engaged, morally and emotionally, with the consequences of violence and complicity.

John the Violent stands as a rare and enduring achievement in Greek cinema, a film that gains more emotional and intellectual power with time. Though inspired by a real crime, Marketaki's work transcends the genre of true crime mystery, offering a complex psychological and sociopolitical portrait that unfolds with cinematic precision and moral ambiguity. While postmodern readings and viewer-centred analyses open up multiple interpretive avenues, they risk sidelining the filmmaker's own meticulous intent and formal construction. Marketaki's deliberate narrative pacing, precise shot compositions, and faithful recreation of legal and urban detail all point toward a creator deeply engaged in shaping meaning – not merely reflecting it. The film resists easy conclusions about guilt or innocence, truth or fabrication, instead immersing us in a world of conflicting testimonies, media distortions, and institutional bias. John's inscrutable final close-up speaks volumes without offering resolution, emblematic of a justice system that fails its victims while pathologising, even empathising with, its perpetrators. In doing so, the film exposes a chilling continuity between past and present: a world where victims are erased, while perpetrators are humanised, even mythologised.

In a landscape where modern criticism often prioritises ideological projection over artistic intention, returning to the filmmaker's vision is not reductive but necessary. It honours the creative act and the rigorous craftsmanship involved, and allows us to understand the film not only as a cultural product but as a deeply considered moral and cinematic inquiry into crime, gender, mental illness, and justice. Postmodern analysis, particularly in its literary and cultural theory expressions, is marked by a deep

scepticism toward stable meaning, authorial intent, and the existence of aesthetic or moral universals. While this critical position emerged as a response to the perceived rigidities of structuralism and the ideological blind spots of canonical traditions, its legacy has often been one of interpretive excess and theoretical insularity, which, by dissolving the distinction between fiction and reality, signifier and referent, collapses the possibility of genuine communication into an infinite play of signs, where texts do not convey truths but merely defer them.

A central weakness in this framework lies in its refusal to distinguish between the internal logic of a literary work and the sociopolitical systems in which it circulates. The tendency to treat every textual irregularity as a revelation of some broader societal pathology turns criticism into a kind of symbolic anthropology, where the critic wields interpretation less as inquiry than as imposition. This practice often assumes a diagnostic certainty unmoored from the affective, historical, or aesthetic stakes of the work itself. The result is a critical stance in which irony supplants conviction, and where interpretive authority resides more in theoretical fluency than in sustained engagement with form, context, or sensibility. Indeed, the broader cultural effects of this relativism are not confined to literary criticism. When all discourses are treated as texts open to deconstruction, and when meaning is equated with subjective belief rather than intersubjective coherence, the conditions for public reason and ethical responsibility begin to erode. In such a climate, the boundary between imaginative speculation and epistemological nihilism blurs; what once served as the tools of literary play become dangerously destabilising when transposed into law, policy, or political rhetoric.

Against this, one might reassert the value of criticism that seeks to clarify rather than obscure; that believes literature can reflect, refract, and even redeem human experience, not merely reproduce its contradictions. Interpretation should be an act of care, not domination. To deny that a work can have meaning beyond our theoretical lenses is to risk making literature – and by extension, culture itself – irrelevant. A defining feature of postmodern theory was its delight in collapsing the distinction between text and world – treating linguistic ambiguity, irony, or contradiction not as literary features, but as symptomatic fissures in social or political structures. In its more indulgent forms, this critical posture reimagined interpretive instability as evidence of cultural pathology, as though a metaphorical inconsistency could be read as a literal fault line in the foundations of society. The pleasure of postmodernism, then, often lay in its capacity to transmute a formal irregularity into a political revelation – transforming close reading into a kind of symbolic sorcery.

But this theoretical impulse, when unmoored from epistemological caution, risks importing speculative and even irrational modes of thinking – borrowings from the domains of magical thought or psychological projection – into spaces that demand a higher threshold of rigor, such as legal reasoning, public policy, or institutional governance. If every utterance becomes a floating signifier, untethered from shared criteria of meaning or intent, then the coherence of public discourse is at stake. In such a climate, the authority of interpretation is limited not by reason or evidence, but by the interpreter's own subjective investments. When cultural critique blurs into performative suspicion, and when the distinction between representation and reality is treated as an illusion, then the grounds for ethical judgment, democratic deliberation, or aesthetic evaluation grow unstable, which is at the centre of *John the Violent's* drama. "What would happen if such fanciful borrowings from the realm of magic and mental illness began seeping into law, public policy, or political culture? Turning everything into a text that meant only what the interpreter believed it meant" (Rosen 2023: 121).

Chapter 4 – Frieda Liappa

Frieda Liappa (10 February 1948–28 November 1994)

Writer, Poet, Film Director

4.1.1 Introduction

The writer and film director Frieda Liappa was born on 10 February 1948, in Messini, Peloponnese, and died at the young age of 46, on 28 November 1994. Her parents were Eleni Liappa, née Kostopoulou, and Evangelos Liappas, a merchant who suffered from chronic bronchial asthma and died in his daughter's arms when she was only 16 in 1964[44]. After graduating from high school in 1965, Liappa moved to Athens and, after successful matriculation exams, studied at the University of Athens' School of Philosophy, became active in political and cultural movements, and published poetry and theatre critiques.

While at University, Liappa became a member of the editorial committee of the student magazine 'Argo', in which she published her own poems, a review of Peter Weiss' theatre play *The Death of Marat* and an article on theatre director and producer Erwin Piscator, who revolutionised epic theatre and is considered a predecessor of Bertold Brecht. She also joined the left-wing Lambrakis Democratic Youth, having taken part in the student resistance during the 1965 'Ιουλιανά' (July events), occasionally later labelled as the 'Greek May 68' in reference to the 1968 Paris student uprising.

Details about Liappa's life and work are obtained from a number of interviews and tributes in film magazines, newspapers and online media, as well as a book of tributes dedicated to her life and career, commissioned by the 36th Thessaloniki Film Festival (3–12 November 1995) following her death. Liappa's filmography, compiled by writer and translator Claire Mitsotaki (Κλαίρη Μητσοτάκη / Klairi Mitsotaki), details Liappa's personal and professional bio-filmography from her birth in Messini in 1948, to her untimely death (Mitsotaki 1995: 7–14).

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[44] Childhood details included in her (out of print) book of short stories *The Mysterious Disease (Η μυστηριώδης ασθένεια)*.

The Greek political crisis had resulted from the resignation of the then Centre Union government of Georgios Papandreou and the intervention of King Constantine II who appointed a series of Prime Ministers from Papandreou's party, branded Apostates by the outgoing government, with the ensuing political instability eventually leading to the military coup of 21 April 1967. As part of the student underground resistance movement which was soon mobilised, Liappa engaged in activism against the dictatorship and was arrested on 20 May 1968, and jailed in the notorious Averof Prison on 30 May 1968. During her November 1968 trial she was convicted for her membership in the *Rigas Feraios* left-wing student organisation and given a six-year prison sentence with a five-year suspension. On her 25 November 1968 release, she was expelled from the university and stripped of her passport (Mitsotaki 1995).

In 1972, she was involved as a scriptwriter in Pantelis Voulgaris' outstanding film *Anna's Engagement (Το προξενιό της Άννας)*, and having managed to obtain a passport, left Greece in 1973 to continue her studies at the London Film School. She subsequently travelled to Paris, Berlin and Lisbon, in the last of which she witnessed the 'Carnation Revolution'. Like many of her self-exiled compatriots, she returned to Greece after the fall of the dictatorship in 1974, precipitated by the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. On her return, she released the 20-minute 1974 short film *After Forty Days (Μετά σαράντα μέρες)*, and translated E. H. Carr's *What Is History*, a book on historiography which draws on philosophy to argue for a contemporary understanding of history, not as a collection of facts but as an "unending dialogue between the present and the past". She joined the editorial board of the magazine 'Modern Cinema' (Σύγχρονος Κινηματογράφος) for two years, and re-enrolled and completed her Philosophy Degree with Distinction, graduating on 16 March 1974.

She published poetry collections, film magazine articles, and directed award-winning short films, including the 45-minute short *I Remember You Leaving All the Time (Μια ζωή σε θυμάμαι να φεύγεις)* in 1977, and in 1980 the 25-minute short *Apetaxamin (Απεταξάμην / Renounced)*, a horror story and tribute to cinema itself, which explored teenage sexuality and the fear of its unknown consequences, transitioning from realism to fantasy through a girl's eyes, which received awards by critics and audiences at the film festivals of Thessaloniki and (the northern Greek city of) Drama. This short film was experimental in that it was created without a preconceived plan, as its protagonist, Maritina Passari, explains in a video interview (Passari 2018). Alongside her own filmmaking, Liappa worked

as assistant director in other films and wrote for magazines 'Anti' (Αντί / Against) and 'Modern Cinema' (Σύγχρονος Κινηματογράφος); published the poetry collections *Lyrical Epilogue of Patision Street (Λυρικός επίλογος της οδού Πατησίων)* and *The Quiet Poems and The Hunting Dogs (Τα ήσυχα ποιήματα και τα κυνηγετικά σκυλιά)* (1980).

4.1.2 Reviews & Tributes

In an Avgi article reporting on a 2014 event organised by the Greek Film Archive to honour Liappa's legacy as part of the 8th Avant-Garde Film Festival, Greek cinema theoretician and critic Ifigenia Kalantzi provides brief but incisive overviews of Liappa's main films, starting from the short film *Apetaxamin* (1980). The film focuses on two contrasting cousins: Electra, the cynical, spoiled city girl, and Lucia, the innocent provincial niece staying there for her university exams. Kalantzi sees the film as immersing the viewers in the unsettling 'violent interruption' of a young girl's adolescence, positioning them as witnesses to the abrupt and violent end of childhood. Employing elements drawn from the thriller genre, the film constructs a symbolic framework through which the emergence of sexuality is articulated. Intrusive images of cats and owls that burrow into the apartment invade the domestic space, evoking anxieties surrounding bodily violation, while shattered glass and a bloodied hand mark the protagonist's passage into womanhood. In the film's final scene which takes place during a party, the protagonist marks a symbolic step into adulthood, autonomy and sexual awareness by unburdening her naked body of any feelings of guilt, fear, or repression associated with her physical self (Kalantzi 2014).

In his review of *Apetaxamin*, the well-known film director Lefteris Xanthopoulos highlights several of its key aspects. The film opens with a symbolic act of 'blood sacrifice' – a broken glass and the father cutting his hand – a ritualistic invocation to ensure the film's success, akin to ancient foundation sacrifices. This 'blood act' also introduces the central narrative, a ghost story of sorts. Liappa skilfully establishes the two cousins' distinct characters early on, using them as instruments for her artistic purposes. Lucia, left alone in the heightened state of adolescence and exam stress, experiences a surreal descent into a 'wonderland' of her own making, filled with magnified fears and hallucinations, where historical figures transform into animals and sounds. These fantasies blur the lines between reality and imagination, creating a disquieting atmosphere within a seemingly ordinary urban setting.

Liappa employs fluctuating action and tension to convey Lucia's anxiety and create an immersive experience for the viewer. The protagonist engages in ritualistic movements, embodying the sensory overload, eroticism, and longing she feels, moving between darkness and light, and ultimately becoming statue-like. Lucia, a surrogate for Liappa herself in that role, transforms into a priestess figure traversing the film to summon phantoms and demonstrate her devotion to the cinematic elements: the camera lens, the film's colours, the chiaroscuro lighting, and the overall cinematography. This self-aware exploration allows Liappa to discover her own artistic identity and the expressive capabilities of the medium. The film's creation is presented as a ritualistic declaration of faith in cinema and its idols, with explicit dedication to Rudolph Valentino and references to Hitchcock, Polanski, and Buñuel serving as homage to cinematic masters, as Xanthopoulos suggests. The film, viewed from a female perspective, is Liappa's heartfelt student contribution to her teachers. In return, Liappa seeks the audience's engagement and hopes to dispel inner and outer turmoil, embarking on a metaphorical journey through time and dreams. The film's open ending, symbolised by the open history book and the girl's disappearance into a dark hallway, offers no definitive conclusion, leaving the narrative open for both the audience and Liappa herself (Xanthopoulos 1980: 33–34).

In 1981, Liappa directed her first feature film, *Love Wanders in the Night (Οι δρόμοι της αγάπης είναι νυχτερινοί)*, one of my three chief case studies in this thesis, which won multiple awards at a number of international film festivals. Described by UK critic Ian Christie as a "remarkable internal view of female sexuality", it explores the nature of female physicality, presence, and desire by juxtaposing parallel lives across three distinct settings: an alienating metropolis, a provincial coastal town, and Paris – evoked through memories during her self-imposed exile under the dictatorship.

Facing financial struggles, Liappa also directed documentaries and TV films, including *The Rainwater* (1983). In 1983, she married her colleague, film director Kyriakos Angelakos, and in 1985 published the book *The Mysterious Disease (Η μυστηριώδης ασθένεια)*. Her next two feature films came in five-year intervals after *Love Wanders in the Night*. Her second feature, *A Quiet Death (Ήταν ένας ήσυχος θάνατος)*, was released in 1986 and won multiple awards. In 1990, she began filming her third and final feature, *The Years of the Big Heat (Τα Χρόνια της Μεγάλης Ζέστης)*, which was released in 1991. This film was tainted by unsubstantiated child abuse allegations during filming, which emerged in 1992. Although she was later acquitted, the 'scandal' – to be discussed in a later section – would turn out to be a major blow for her life and career.

Despite setbacks, she remained dedicated to cinema and literature, publishing the novel *Erotiidos Martyros (Ερωτηίδος μάρτυρος)* in 1990, and her *Poetry Collection 1964–1988* in 1991. Notwithstanding her health struggles, she continued working and developing new projects such as the unfinished film *Agnieszka*, the poetry collection *The Stammer of Time (Το τραύλισμα του χρόνου)*, and "short documentaries about Athens, mosaics from the city's palimpsest" (Nikolakopoulou 1981). In late 1992, she was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumour and underwent surgery in New York. With declining health, she continued revising *Erotiidos Martyros*. After months in hospital, she passed away on 28 November 1994. A detailed biography, translated into English, is included in the Appendix.

The articles in her 1995 tribute book, written by film critics, cinematographers, friends, and colleagues, offer invaluable insights into her character, artistic vision, and contributions. The book includes a detailed chronology of her works along with excerpts from interviews, critiques, and analyses, as well as générique sections listing the full credits of her films. In the publication's prologue, film critic Michalis Dimopoulos (1949–2023) describes the daunting task of planning a tribute to Liappa, who embodied a profound passion for both cinema and politics – the very forces that had brought them together. Their friendship, as he describes it, meant both disagreements and deep loyalty, with late-night calls and endless discussions over glasses of wine. He asserts that she was not an 'easy' person, but one of unwavering dedication to poetry and cinema with uniquely uncompromising standards, capable of both sharp criticism, and generous praise which would never descend into flattery, as she possessed a rare balance between honesty and warmth (Dimopoulos 1995: 16).

From Claire Mitsotaki's own tribute to Liappa, entitled *The Thread of Life (Το Νήμα της Ζωής)*, we gain unique insights into Liappa's personality, which was shaped by the weight of history and a restless pursuit of freedom, no doubt fuelled by the absence of liberty and self-determination during times of upheaval, such as the dictatorial regime, as well as by the inward-looking nature of rural society. Born in the southern Peloponnese, Liappa came of age amid the silent dramas of post–Civil War Greece, torn between memory and rebellion. Tried by a military court at the age of twenty, she survived both imprisonment and a suicide attempt, her life already poised on the edge. Drawn more to the radical magic of cinema than to academic philosophy, she devoted two decades to filmmaking,

immersing herself in its struggles, obsessions, and artistic intensity. Her journey wove the fantastical world of cinema into the deeply personal realm of individuality, forging a singular creative path.

She never sought social status, pursuing cinema instead as a way to interrogate life through narrative, ideology, and aesthetics. Caught between capturing reality and internalising it, she fused filmmaking, writing, and theatre into a unique artistic vision. Wrestling with the essence of time, she found solace in her work, committed to honesty and uninterested in superficial beauty, drawn instead to what she called "the anti-calligraphic depths of things". Her lyricism embraced both violence and restraint, always seeking emotional and intellectual depth. When illness came, she saw her life's thread with clarity – reconciled with her creations, her work no longer a mystery. In the end, her calm, knowing smile revealed the quiet triumph of sensitivity over mere survival (Mitsotaki 1995: 16).

In another tribute, entitled *The Deliberate Divide (Ο Ηθελημένος Διχασμός)*, writer, journalist and film critic Giorgos Bramos provides an overview of Liappa's films, and discusses her approach to cinema as emerging through the intertwined forces of poetry and politics, aligning with the spirit of the 'new cinema' movement, which sought to transcend both formalism and ideological slogans. Influenced by Miklós Jancsó's ritualism, Brazilian "experiential, raging, pagan explosion" of 'cinema novo', Angelopoulos' readings of history, and Jean-Marie Straub's "philosophical geometry", she embraced an era redefining cinematic ethics. This movement aimed to reconnect with audiences while challenging traditional storytelling, emphasising social, political, and aesthetic boldness.

Brechtian distancing influenced her work, evident in her first film, the 1972 20-minute short film *After Forty Days* where she juxtaposed anti-naturalistic cinematography with a rejection of ethnographic clichés to disrupt the viewer's emotional engagement and encourage critical reflection. Echoing Pasolini's *Accattone* and *Mamma Roma*, her early films laid the groundwork for her enduring exploration of cinema as a poetic-political act (Bramos 1995: 17). *After Forty Days* describes a soldier wandering through the Athenian streets. While walking down Panepistimiou Street, a rebetiko is heard in the background. The scene is reminiscent of Marketaki's short film *John and the Road*. One can only wonder about the influence these two contemporary filmmakers would have had on each other while moving in the same general circles or visiting local and international festivals, as any potential interactions between them have not been documented.

Referring to Liappa's 1977 short *I Remember You Leaving All the Time*, based on the title of a hit song by Dimitris Mitropanos, Bramos states that it emerged amidst a climate of political optimism, yet it subtly undermined the era's verbalism and ideological rigidity. Instead of glorifying history's grand narratives, her characters grappled with it through personal struggles, exhaustion, and disillusionment. This delicate interplay between collective memory and individual experience becomes central to her cinematic language. Her short film *Apetaxamin* signals a shift – an introspective experiment where she detaches herself from realist narrative conventions. By placing a teenage girl alone in the mysteries of the night, Liappa explores film as a medium of personal expression rather than social documentation. This pursuit of autonomy culminates in her first feature, *Love Wanders in the Night*, a meditation on melodrama infused with visceral imagery – blood, the body, night, and death. Here, she refines a cinema that acknowledges its social and aesthetic lineage while embracing poetic and existential urgency (Bramos 1995: 18).

In his 1978 review entitled *Towards the Creation of Fiction (Προς τη μυθοπλασία)*, film director Christos Vakalopoulos, referring to Liappa's *I Remember you Leaving All the Time*, points out that Liappa's filmic exploration is characterised by a lack of fiction, not as a mere absence but as a central presence that shapes the narrative and its relationships. This absence of fictional construction is not an abstract or theoretical device; it is woven into the fabric of the film's storytelling, becoming a palpable, intense force that informs the emotional and thematic landscape. The film challenges the conventional boundaries of narrative, offering not just a story but an exploration of the difficulty, as well as the desire, to tell a story. Liappa engages with the idea that narrating one's own desire to narrate – an inherently paradoxical undertaking – is a complex, fraught process. The film becomes an exercise in vulnerability, where the act of storytelling becomes part of the story. The characters' struggles are not just emotional or psychological; they are meta-cinematic struggles, grappling with the limitations and risks of cinematic expression. This kind of self-reflection is a hallmark of post-Hollywood cinema, especially the works of cinephile filmmakers who continuously transform their love for cinema (Vakalopoulos 1978: 88).

In *I Remember you Leaving All the Time*, described as "a love story in Athens in 1977 between a left-wing female journalist and an actor who has abandoned the theatre", Liappa's cinephilia does not remain static but evolves throughout the narrative. Each shot and sequence reflects a shift in her relationship with the cinematic form, with the boundaries of fiction and reality constantly blurred. The tension between these forces – cinematic tradition, personal desire, and the authenticity of self-

expression – creates a rich, layered film that is not just about a story but about the very process of trying to tell that story. It is an exercise in cinematic honesty, capturing the challenges of conveying inner turmoil while also grappling with the limitations of the medium itself. An extensive interview and discussion between Frieda Liappa and fellow director Antoinetta Angelidi and their interviewers explores the realities of filmmaking, ways of communicating their ideas to the actors and cinematographers, as well as a number of other issues facing the directors in bringing to life their respective visions (Vakalopoulos 1978: 89–98).

Liappa's next film, *Rainwater (Το Νερό της Βροχής)*, was based on a similarly titled short story by M. Karagatsis; it was 65 minutes long and produced in 1983 for TV, masterfully reconfiguring the conventions of television drama. While rooted in the ethnographic themes typical of Greek television – family tensions, rural landscapes, and hidden desires – Liappa subverted the genre's limitations through pacing, cinematography, and nuanced performances. Rather than imposing cinematic grandeur onto the small screen, she embraced television's visual constraints, crafting an intimate yet profound work that resisted the self-indulgence of some auteur-driven TV projects (Bramos 1995: 19).

It dealt with intense psychological and emotional themes, where passion, love, and violence become inextricably intertwined. It presents a confined world in which a complex web of relationships between four characters – a father, his daughter, a pharmacist and his wife – spirals toward a tragic conclusion. The film explores destructive desires, the suffocating nature of a small-town or close-knit society, and the inevitable eruption of violence as a means of liberation or final condemnation. Liappa's own reflections in a letter to film critic Yannis Bakoyannopoulos reveal her desire to create a sense of inescapability within the narrative, with characters trapped in their desires and circumstances. The rhythm and the emotional disarray of the film are key aspects of her vision, as she emphasises the lack of beauty in the direction, acting, and photography. Her wish to avoid aestheticising the material underscores her focus on raw, emotional truth, and the brutal reality of the characters' lives (Liappa 1983: 32).

In Liappa's own powerful vision, the only way for her protagonist to free herself – or face her doom – is through the murder of her father. Her relationship with the pharmacist, her desire to escape her class, her wounded pride, and her need for femininity all lead to this act. The snowball scene

symbolises the destructive nature of her asocial, violent relationship with her father, as an archetypal couple, which makes way for the survival of the sterile, possessive bourgeois couple, and ultimately the bourgeoisie. She also reveals that the image of the 'little girl with the rope' in the film's final scene stands as a symbol of both closure and unresolved tension. Liappa acknowledges the personal significance of this choice in shaping her approach to filmmaking and her understanding of the world around her, suggesting that the work represents both personal and artistic growth. This also reveals Liappa's reflective nature, as she questions the outcomes of her artistic intentions but also recognises the impact this work has had on her creative and personal evolution. The notion of growth and change is crucial in this context, with Liappa acknowledging that her work is not just a static creation but something that shapes her vision for future projects (Liappa 1983: 32).

In a tribute entitled *The Dimension of Internal Agony (Η Διάσταση της Εσωτερικής Αγωνίας)*, writer and poet Giorgos Markopoulos reflects on Liappa's profound impact on him. He describes her as a vibrant and intense figure from his youth, whose loss is deeply felt. Liappa's literary debut in 1980 with *Lyrical Epilogue of Patision Street* showcased emotionally direct and exuberant writing, hinting at a self-destructive yet valuable passionate nature rooted in personal pain. Her 1981 collection, *The Quiet Poems and the Hunting Dogs*, revealed a shift between youthful energy and a subtle mourning for what was lost and what would not return, blending contemporary elements with personal changes in tender tones. Yet, neither collection foreshadowed the significant shift in *The Mysterious Illness* (1985), where strict poetic boundaries blurred with more analytical writing. This allowed Liappa to explore broader themes as her introspection deepened and her expressive needs became more complex. Her "asthmatic" prose in this work evokes deep memories, connecting their discontinuities while revealing the intense anxieties of a consciousness grappling with self-definition, drawing from childhood, loss, and a growing disconnect ("illness") between herself and the world's rigid rhythms (Markopoulos 1995: 37).

This alienation culminates in *Erotiidos Martyros* (1990), considered her best work, where Liappa seems to observe events from behind the soundproof glass of isolation, amidst a landscape of emotional burnout. Recurring figures, obsessions, the elusive erotic 'Alexander', and the mother as an irreparable absence revolve within a strange narrative bridged by glimpses of a schizophrenic everyday life, with her later works, particularly *The Mysterious Illness* and *The Years of the Big Heat*, highlighting their relentless, internal rhythm that effectively conveys a sense of suffocation. Liappa employs repetition and deliberately vague imagery, prioritising details that amplify inner anguish.

This ‘inner anguish’ is identified as an intensified version of the previously noted disconnect, now reaching the terror of confinement. The central character’s actions reflect someone consumed by paranoia and dark mood swings, trapped by metaphysical questions that underscore the pervasive nightmarish element (Markopoulos 1995: 38).

Liappa’s friend and colleague Maria Nikolakopoulou extols her friend’s personality and character in a superbly detailed elegy of their friendship and camaraderie. We learn that they met for the first time on the set of Liappa’s debut film, *After Forty Days*. During the dictatorship they met at the “εβγατζίδικα (evgatzidika) της γειτονιάς” – the local milk bars selling the then popular ΕΒΓΑ ice-creams – and she provides many other fascinating details about their meetings, both social and professional. After the junta, when returning ‘exiles’ came back with fresh ideas, life took on a rosy shade with many projects, great friendships and high hopes. As Nikolakopoulou further states, “But ‘Oh, these young fanatic communists’ quickly cashed in on the clean slate with positions of power, something Frieda never did. [...] She cashed in on nothing, exercised no power, kept quiet about her heroic past”[45] (Nikolakopoulou 2016).

In an online ‘portrait’ of the filmmaker, entitled *Who was Frieda Liappa*, the writer Argyro Bozoni, reveals details about Liappa’s character and her determination, borne out of her ‘inherent antithesis’. She reveals that Liappa was sensitive and vulnerable but also very dynamic and ‘stubborn’ in everything she did, from the way she made films to the way she dressed in a male-dominated industry. She was known for her poetic perspective on realism, but also her dedication in her relentless pursuit of her cinematic passion, often at great personal cost. Nothing had ever been gifted to her, everything she achieved was through her own dogged determination. She was inspired by a phrase she had attributed to the American film director, screenwriter, and actor Nicholas Ray (1911–1979), described as ‘Hollywood’s last romantic’, whose bon mot was to never do anything he was not in love with, a motto Liappa adhered to throughout her life. A commitment only to engage in projects one loves, however, can lead to financial strain. As a result, she never had a life of financial freedom, and after her last film, she sold the only asset she ever had, a house in Kareas, a southern

[45] “Αλλά οι «Αχ, αυτοί οι νεαροί φανατισμένοι κομμουνιστές» εξαργύρωσαν βιαστικά το καθαρό αεράκι με θέσεις εξουσίας, κάτι που η Φρίντα ποτέ δεν έκανε. [...] Τίποτα δεν εξαργύρωσε, καμιά εξουσία δεν άσκησε, αποσιωπούσε το ηρωικό παρελθόν της.” (Nikolakopoulou 2016).

suburb of Athens, to pay off her debts, which reflects her unwavering dedication to her principles (Bozoni 2014).

Liappa had a unique poetic perspective on realism and used everyday scenes to elevate them into high art. Inspired by a popular song title, *Μια ζωή σε θυμάμαι να φεύγεις (I Remember You Leaving All the Time)*, by Dimitris Mitropanos, she built a film in which she combined "all the elements of her personal mythology structured in a different way", merging disparate components from Greek music to American novels, her relationship with the Left, as well as interpersonal relationships between men and women of her generation. Her film endings were often open-ended, as well as open to interpretation, a characteristic of Marketaki's films as well. Interestingly, Bozoni remarks on the importance of these two women and their significant contributions to the arts: "The two women at the time were Tonia Marketaki and Frieda. I think they are among the most passionate people I have seen around art" (Bozoni 2014).

Liappa's next feature film in 1986, *A Quiet Death*, deepens her exploration of personal and collective memory. The protagonist, Martha, a writer paralysed by creative stagnation, oscillates between two symbolic figures: Anna, the nurturing psychiatrist, and Markos, the domineering lover. The film contrasts two realms – one of introspection and nostalgia, the other of raw, external reality. Here, Liappa's cinema reaches a turning point, moving beyond utopian ideals and into a realm where art's moral and aesthetic justification lies in exposing the creator's deepest anxieties, where the stylistic legacies of Antonioni, Cukor, Bergman, and the poetic realism of Tarkovsky on her begin to fade, giving way to a cinema that reconstructs myths – nostalgic, sorrowful, and tender (Bramos 1995: 19).

Frieda Liappa's work in cinema was marked by a search for profound emotional truths and an exploration of the boundaries between personal and collective memory. In her 1991 feature film *The Years of the Big Heat*, she crafts a cinematic world filled with existential pessimism and social decay. The film explores the tension between image and speech, with characters trapped in personal histories and doomed by societal pressures. Love is suffocated, the future seems unreachable, and the backdrop is a society caught in the grip of despair. This film stands as an expression of the challenges she faced in her career – her relentless pursuit of truth within the framework of cinema's limitations. The imagery and the dialogue push against the confines of conventional narrative, reflecting the artist's own frustrations with the direction of the new cinema. The tragic realism in the film speaks of a world

where even the most basic human experiences, like love and survival, are crushed by external and internal forces (Bramos 1995: 20).

Bramos also reveals details about a film Liappa and he had started planning, entitled *Agnieszka (Άγκνιεσκα)*. This would have focussed on a tavern owner in the countryside, who leaves his wife and child and runs away with a Polish flower girl. It was a poignant attempt to capture a fleeting moment of joy and rebellion, as two lovers abandon their responsibilities in pursuit of excitement. Tragically, the film was never completed, as Liappa fell ill. The news of her declining health and subsequent surgery in New York came as a shock to her friends and colleagues. For Bramos, Liappa's enduring legacy lies in the complexity and depth of the films she created, which defied simple categorisation and consistently sought to unveil the raw, unembellished truths of human existence (Bramos 1995: 20–21).

4.1.3 About Love Wanders in the Night

Liappa's own description of *Love Wanders in the Night* (1981) reads:

> "My starting point was a small newspaper item I read four years ago about the double suicide of two sisters in their late thirties. Their bodies, found some time later, were hastily buried. What impressed me most in this item was the extreme loneliness of these women plus their absolute isolation from their social environment. A simple storyline: the two sisters have left their village some time ago and moved into a flat in Athens. Their only relative is a cousin, a painter who lives in Paris. Bound to each other by an almost pathological affection, they also share a secret infatuation for their cousin. On his return to Athens the drama reaches a climax. The older sister commits suicide while the younger one goes abroad with him. The characters, both realistic and poetical, try to fulfill their desires in an impossible relation on the borderline of melodrama."[46]

Describing Liappa's debut feature film, Kalantzi notes the divergent trajectories of two sisters traced by the narrative, the elder retreating into the confines of their home, gradually withering in isolation,

[46] From the now defunct website: http://www.altcine.com/movie.php?id=570

while the younger pursues a romantic connection with her cousin, a painter recently returned from Paris. Though grounded in a realist framework, the film begins to reveal early traces of symbolic expression that Kalantzi likens to Chekhov, which lends the story a wistful, romantic tone, while the cinematography – marked by interior settings and a dark, rain-soaked palette – evokes the austere elegance that Kalantzi associates with the early paintings of the celebrated Greek artist Yiannis Moralis. The political unrest of the outside world, heard through the echoes of street demonstrations, breaks into the emotional stasis of the characters, hinting at broader social tensions (Kalantzi 2014).

In a tribute entitled *The Quality of Dreams (Η Ποιότητα των Ονείρων)*, Achilleas Kyriakidis (Αχιλλέας Κυριακίδης), writer, translator, film director and actor, provides a brief, but insightful analysis of Liappa's first feature film about the two lonely and loveless sisters whose apartment overlooks the glowing screen of an open-air cinema. He highlights that the arrival of their cousin from Paris which disrupts their quiet, stifled existence is an archetypal dramaturgical catalyst which awakens repressed desires and accelerates the unfolding of long-suppressed tensions toward resolution. In the film, Frieda Liappa creates an atmosphere of lingering tension and unresolved desire, harnessing the interplay of light and darkness to shape the emotional trajectory of the narrative. The use of half-light, which feels both elusive and oppressive, mirrors the suffocating lives of the sisters, particularly the older one, Irene. The slow extinction of desire within her soul parallels the diminishing light, suggesting that the film's true climax lies not in a dramatic peak, but in the quiet, inevitable fadeout that underscores the tragedy of their lives. The ringing phone in the house of the dead sister, the escape of the cousin, and Irene's suicide are poignant symbols of the futility of their struggles, which seem to echo Shostakovich's moving 15th Symphony, where the tension builds and never resolves (Kyriakidis 1995: 23).

Liappa's heroes, trapped within the confines of their environments, are portrayed as suffocated by the very boundaries that define their world – the walls of their house, the frame of the screen, and the confines of their relationships. The relationship dynamics – complicated and triangular – are as rigid and confined as the structure of the film itself, whose geometric framing – "square of the walls, rectangle of the screen, triangle of relationships" – is deliberate, emphasising the inescapable nature of their existences. The physical space is mirrored in their emotional stagnation, as their interactions never culminate in the release of eroticism, which acquires an almost volcanic pressure, simmering beneath the surface. Liappa's directorial style here reflects her deep understanding of the power of space and light, using them not just to set the mood but to shape the emotional truth of the narrative.

The film does not crescendo with a dramatic climax but instead dissolves into a quiet, unspoken tragedy, revealing the deeper sorrow of lives constrained by invisible forces (Kyriakidis 1995: 23).

The open-air cinema functions as a symbolic site where collective emotions are magnified and publicly enacted, standing in deliberate contrast to the intimate, emotionally charged space of the adjacent drama. This spatial juxtaposition of real and projected life emphasises the theatrical dimension of both film and everyday human behaviour, suggesting that private emotions are often shaped, mediated, or exposed through performative gestures. The intrusion of sound and imagery from the cinema into the private realm blurs the boundary between personal experience and public spectacle, reinforcing themes such as emotional isolation, the tension between inner conflict and external expression, and the shaping power of collective cultural narratives on the individual psyche (Mitropoulou 2006: 360).

In her 1981 interview to filmmaker Maria Nikolakopoulou for the magazine 'Modern Cinema', Liappa discussed *Love Wanders in the Night*, highlighting her exploration of the contrast between the socially constructed and the desired body in her depiction of both male and female characters within the film. The conversation also touched upon the complexities of translating literary concepts and imagery into the cinematic medium, particularly in establishing the film's overall atmosphere, and emphasised the significance of the film's visual language, including the nuanced use of body language, movement, and the interplay between light and shadow to convey meaning. She offered insights into her approach to directing, stressing the necessity for a director to possess both a firm artistic vision and the flexibility to adapt to the realities of filmmaking, alongside the crucial role of collaboration and the director's dynamic relationship with the entire film crew.

Liappa describes her themes as revolving around "memory, desire, pleasure, cinema, world". She aims to create a familiar story, whose characters exhibit inconsistencies that produce a vague, ambivalent and unsettling feeling on the audience. She starts her script as per the original newspaper story, where both sisters commit suicide. She then changes the ending, with Irene, the oldest sister, committing suicide, while Stella is shown by her side contemplating whether she should too, following Stefanos' final departure. The final decision to have Stella leave with their cousin aims at creating a false 'happy end', which is also in keeping with the younger sister's character, in a sarcastic reference to Hollywood melodramas which have been very popular with Greek audiences. In

discussing the concept of a happy end, Liappa states that it is a problem when it glosses over the real issues, that is, the human drama, and only concerns itself with appearances and not the hidden reality. She also reveals the book that Irene was reading in the final scene as she is lying dead in bed to be *Voyage autour du monde (Travel Around the World)* by the eighteenth-century French traveller, Louis Antoine de Bougainville.

The original title Liappa was contemplating was *Persecuted Love*, but she wished to include the three words Eros, Love, Night in the title, to represent a triptych of themes on love, death and escape. Her quest came to fruition when she encountered the verse *Ο δρόμος προς την αγάπη είναι νυχτερινός (The road towards love is nocturnal)* in the poem *Στα Όρη της Μυουπόλεως (On the Mountains of Myoupolis)* by Nikos Engonopoulos, a modern Greek painter and poet, major figure of the Greek surrealist movement and one of the most important members of the 1930s Generation. Night provides ambiguity and represents fear but also hidden desire and hence serves as an antidote to the socialised male. Near the end of the film, every scene is nocturnal (Nikolakopoulou 1981: 30).

Summarising Liappa's process, Nikolakopoulou reveals how she embarked on her projects: several ideas took shape over many years, usually after discussions with a variety of people and a lot of soul searching before an idea finally could take shape. Once it did, the reality of the shooting in situ, getting the actors and scenery right, introduced a lot of unknowns and involved a lot of experimentation, adjustment and change from the original plan. She established rapport with the actors, trying to remind them to be true to their roles while knowing that the final decision rested with the director. And then came the uncertainty of whether what was planned in one's head had been achieved and correctly conveyed to the audience. Ultimately, each filmmaker's work expresses a composite of their memories, but also the films they have watched and were influenced by. Her films were 'anthropocentric' and she was interested in creating experimental or iconoclastic cinema, where the male and female body, as portrayed, maintained their mutual sexual attractiveness and desirability, but the socialised male had lost its traditional masculine power and dominance.

In an interview with journalist and actor Telis Samantas, published in Avgi on 6 November 1981, Liappa's reflections on *Love Wanders in the Night* reveal her dissatisfaction with the state of Greek cinema, particularly its tendency to avoid confronting uncomfortable truths. She acknowledges that while professional scriptwriters are essential to the film industry, the deeper issue lies within Greek

society itself, which practises a form of social censorship. This censorship, she suggests, prevents the darker, more complex aspects of human nature and experience from being depicted honestly on screen. Instead, the cinematic landscape is often filled with superficial embellishments, symbols, and overly optimistic conclusions that do not reflect the true essence of life. For Liappa, an 'interesting story' is not bound by genre conventions or historical significance but rather by its ability to reveal the complexities of the human condition (Samantas 1981).

Whether, she continues, it is a deeply introspective moment, as in a Bresson film where a character merely faces a wall, or a grand historical event, the core of an engaging narrative is human drama – the struggle, the inner conflict, and the raw emotions that define people's lives. She argues that a compelling narrative does not have to adhere to traditional storytelling structures or be 'plausible' in the conventional sense. What matters is the truth behind a situation, the authenticity of the emotions and experiences that drive the characters, as well as the way these elements are conveyed. Liappa emphasises the importance of exploring the inner workings of a character, going beyond surface-level representation to capture the essence of what makes them human. She suggests that cinema should embrace the complexity of life and human behaviour, unafraid to expose the messiness, contradictions, and struggles that people face.

As she succinctly puts it, "μ' ενδιαφέρει η αλήθεια μιας κατάστασης κι όχι η αληθοφάνειά της, η μοίρα ενός προσώπου και όχι η ωραιοποίησή του, η σύγκρουση των δυνάμεων που λειτουργούν μέσα σε μια υπόθεση και όχι η παράστασή τους" (I am interested in the truth of a situation and not its seeming truthfulness, the fate of a person and not its embellishment, the conflict of the forces operating within a case and not their representation). Storytelling is about delving into the real stories that have always existed within society, those that are often hidden or overlooked, and presenting them with honesty and depth, without shying away from life's darker or more uncomfortable aspects, seeking instead to illuminate them with authenticity and insight (Samantas 1981).

4.1.4 A Quiet Death

Introducing *A Quiet Death* (1986), cinema theoretician and critic Ifigenia Kalantzi centres it on an alcoholic writer who, overcome by creative stagnation and emotional detachment from her husband who is also her psychiatrist, descends into depression, confined within the sterile modernity of her

apartment. In a moment of despair, she flees into the night under pouring rain. Departing from linear storytelling, Liappa constructs a fragmented narrative, weaving together memories, abstract visual sequences, and stylistic interventions that align with the modernist sensibility of the 1980s. Rich in symbolism, the film embodies a striking avant-garde aesthetic, marked by vivid colour palettes and neon lighting. Among its most memorable visual elements are tableau vivant scenes during a river journey – a metaphorical, timeless space – alongside a postmodern library and imagery evocative of Achilleas Drougas' photorealistic, pop-classical compositions. These references resonate with the visual culture of Greece's 1990s petit bourgeoisie. In one striking scene beneath a bridge, the columns are framed in a perspective reminiscent of Greek artist Opy Zouni's abstract painting, further embedding fine art references into the film's visual language (Kalantzi 2014).

The folk song "Now the Birds", reprised from Liappa's earlier work, serves a similar purpose to the traditional musical motifs found in the films of the Taviani brothers or Spanish director Víctor Erice – grounding the poetic narrative in cultural memory. Off-screen, poetic verses such as "The mind is crushed, the body is spying" are heard, articulating the protagonist's creative and existential crisis, and giving dimension to a poetic discourse that is deliriously repeated like a slogan by a director who is primarily a poet. In the inspired single shot in a popular tavern, during the heroine's evening wandering, the song Gülbahar (Γκιουλμπαχάρ) by Vasilis Tsitsanis dominates, while a pre-classical sonata by Handel seals the beginning and end, uniquely dramatising death in an Athens drenched by rain (Kalantzi 2014).

In the film, Liappa delves deeply into the psychological and emotional terrain of her protagonist, Martha, who is struggling to recall (or invent) her story. The film's exploration of *memory* versus *lethe* is framed through Martha's obsessive desire to reconnect with a unified past, embodied in the spectral figure of her grandfather. Her journey through a distorted and melancholic childhood world is marked by mourning, guilt, and strange hedonism – a world simultaneously destroyed and mythologised. This inner conflict propels her through an existential struggle, where the past blurs with the present, creating a liminal space of uncertainty and pain.

Liappa's choice to use night as a central thematic element is striking. Unlike mere darkness, night in this film represents a complex, multi-dimensional space where contrasts coexist. The night is not only literal – casting shadows and obscuring details – but also metaphorical. It is a space for internal

reflection, emotional turmoil, and fractured communication. The boundaries between inner and outer worlds blur as Liappa orchestrates a layered sense of time and space, offering a cinematic experience of night in its many forms. The transition from light to dark, from clarity to confusion, marks Martha's internal journey, where memory, desire, and trauma interweave (Kyriakidis 1995: 24).

Kyriakidis further points out that the use of light, or the absence of it, is essential in shaping the emotional and psychological landscape of the film. Liappa plays with the dichotomy of light and dark, where the night becomes a space of revelation and eventual redemption. Interestingly, the film's daytime scenes – dreamlike and delirious – are imbued with an almost surreal quality. In these sequences, the light takes on an eerie, nocturnal quality, blurring the line between reality and dream. These moments, where the actors seem to move in a trance, underscore the film's thematic focus on memory, the surreal quality of inner life, and the distance between perception and truth. In this work, Liappa does not just use the traditional motifs of night and light; she manipulates them to explore the complexities of the psyche, allowing for a nuanced, layered examination of the human condition. The night, both literal and metaphorical, becomes a powerful tool to express the film's existential themes, culminating in a cathartic redemptive fire – perhaps suggesting that through the dark night of the soul, one can find a kind of painful clarity or release (Kyriakidis 1995: 24).

The film's visual storytelling is both subtle and profound, offering viewers a unique exploration of Martha's emotional and psychological journey. The scene where Martha, after emerging from the bathroom, engages in a delicate act of self-reflection, is a masterclass in visual ambiguity. As she quickly gathers her belongings and approaches the curtain, the camera lingers on her movements before her reflection confronts her in the window. This moment, charged with visual and emotional significance, speaks to Martha's internal shift: from the cold, sterile space of reason (represented by the bathroom, bathed in a clinical blue light) to the emotional warmth of her room (where the colour red envelopes her).

The act of pulling back the curtain and confronting her own image in the glass seems to symbolise a fleeting but powerful moment of self-awareness or recognition, where Martha is momentarily reborn, finding courage in her reflection before stepping out into the freedom of the rainy night. Liappa's filmmaking here resists the temptation of overt directorial guidance, allowing the scene to unfold with visual clarity yet remain open to multiple interpretations. There is a delightful sense of surprise, as if

both the character and the filmmakers are discovering something new each time the scene is played. The beauty lies in how the scene balances between being immediately accessible and still leaving room for personal interpretation, drawing the viewers into Martha's transformative moment without forcing meaning upon them (Kyriakidis 1995: 25).

The geometric discipline in Liappa's approach to Martha's psyche becomes even more apparent in the broader structure of the film. The familiar shapes of linear narrative are juxtaposed with more complex forms, such as the infinite straight line and the spiral. Martha's introspection unfolds as a journey that seems both purgative and meandering. Her flight from a defined starting point toward an unknown destination symbolises a kind of emotional purging, a quest for clarity that never fully resolves. The spiral structure of the film reflects Martha's regressive memory, spiralling back on itself as she revisits moments of trauma, confusion, and longing. This spiral, representing the chaotic and imperfect nature of memory, allows Liappa to explore Martha's inner turmoil and the complexities of the human soul. Through this approach, Liappa's anguish as a director becomes evident: her desire to capture the depths of human experience with purity and tenderness. The film's refusal to offer easy answers or resolutions speaks to a profound respect for the messiness of the human condition, where every moment is both fleeting and deeply significant. In the end, *A Quiet Death* is not just about a journey through memory and identity, but about embracing the ongoing, sometimes circular, nature of self-discovery (Kyriakidis 1995: 25–26).

In another review of Liappa's *A Quiet Death*, Christos Lazos, writer, translator and artist, delves into the philosophical and existential dimensions of Liappa's approach to storytelling, particularly in her exploration of wandering as both a thematic and structural principle. In Lazos' analysis, the film reflects a fragmented experience of time and space, where orientation has been lost, leading to a state where multiple paths exist but none are ultimately more valid than others. This version of wandering is not a mere narrative device, but a profound reflection of the loss of coherence in human existence. The inability to form a synthetical narrative mirrors the breakdown of traditional storytelling, where memory, fantasy, and perception blur together, making it impossible to distinguish between what is past, present, and imagined. This experience of ontological disintegration points to a crisis of identity and existence, leading to madness, or what might be seen as a confrontation with the void. The "unbearable anguish" that arises from this experience of nothingness can only be resolved through the finality of death (Lazos 1986: 33).

Liappa's epigram "There are no more stories, there are only facts" echoes the thematic core of the film. It implies a world where traditional narratives no longer hold sway, and only the raw, factual existence of events remains. However, in Liappa's hands, this idea becomes not a rejection of meaning, but a representation of its very collapse – a wandering through events without purpose, identity, or closure. Liappa's technique does not offer wandering as a metaphor for a longing or search for truth. Instead, it becomes the very experience of the impossibility of having a story at all. The film's structure, then, does not invite resolution or synthesis, but rather emphasises the fleeting nature of events and their ephemeral impact on the protagonist's consciousness. As Lazos further intimates, the image of a raindrop on a river's surface, where events momentarily leave a trace before fading away, serves as a perfect visual metaphor for this kind of narrative – where things happen without meaning, and yet leave traces of their passage on the film's heroine (Lazos 1986: 33).

In Liappa's representation, the wandering does not suggest a journey with a clear beginning or end, but a drifting through a meaningless void. Through this existential disintegration, Liappa forces the viewer to confront a world where stories – and the meanings they provide – have evaporated, leaving only fleeting moments of sensation. This approach reflects a deep engagement with the fragility and uncertainty of human existence, where the search for coherence and truth ultimately dissolves into the fluidity of experience itself. It is a description that summarises the core themes of a narrative centred around a woman's descent into madness and her search for meaning in a world that feels increasingly alienating. Her inability to create or find her voice becomes symbolic of her inner turmoil, as she is disconnected from both her husband and the psychiatrist, two figures who would traditionally anchor her into reality. Her wandering through the storm and the deserted city streets serves as a metaphor for her disconnection from society and self, embodying the isolation that comes with mental collapse.

Her search for her "lost world of early youth" suggests a longing for a simpler time before the complexity of life overwhelmed her, a theme often tied to nostalgia or a desire to reclaim something pure and untouched. However, this search leads her deeper into madness, blurring the lines between reality and delusion. The references to 'madness' and 'death' underscore the existential stakes of her journey, while 'catharsis' hints at the possibility of a transformative release, whether through acceptance, understanding, or complete destruction. The narrative structure allows for an exploration

of the fragility of the mind, especially under emotional or existential duress, and invites the viewer to witness the unravelling of a character in search of a lost connection to the world. The city, typically a symbol of modernity, here becomes an empty and indifferent backdrop, amplifying the themes of isolation, alienation, and the quest for a deeper understanding of existence.

In a 1986 interview about the film, given to Soula Alexandropoulou for the newspaper Eleftherotypia (Ελευθεροτυπία/Free Press), Liappa also offers insight into her background and her deep bond with cinema, which began at age four at a cinema owned by a family friend where she had the opportunity to watch multiple times all kinds of films, including Greek films and classics such as *The Bicycle Thief*, *Rififi*, *Ivanhoe*, and films starring Yvonne Sanson and Amedeo Nazzari. This early exposure instilled in her a 'cinephilia' that replaced traditional childhood experiences derived from fairy tales in favour of cinematic wonder that led her to filmmaking. Without having books available in her childhood, it was newspapers and popular magazines that served as a form of early education, sparking her original interest in journalism. Formal education came later in adolescence, making personal discovery a key aspect of her learning (Alexandropoulou 1986: 35).

Liappa's writing goal in *A Quiet Death* was to move beyond the 'crutches' of cinephilia and realism in order to express a very personal poetic vision, on the strong influence of the mother figure in rural society. Being a woman allowed her to feel closer to female experiences, although influential male directors like Bergman, Godard, and Antonioni often featured women as central characters. However, their films did not simply depict women but explored triangular relationships that could echo the classic psychoanalytic triangle. She also disclosed that she conducted extensive rehearsals before filming, primarily to establish a rapport with the actors, employing a somewhat theatrical approach, avoiding 'prima vista' and on-set rehearsals, except for technical aspects. The film still presented challenges in achieving stylised performances without sacrificing emotional depth, emphasising that stylisation should contain the essence of realistic detail to avoid appearing lifeless (Alexandropoulou 1986: 35).

4.1.5 The Years of the Big Heat

According to Kyriakidis' reading of Liappa's final film *The Years of the Big Heat* (1991), Liappa explores a dramatic shift from the introspective exploration of night in her earlier films to a stark,

blinding study of natural light. Set on a beach at the end of summer, the film is suffused with oppressive sunlight that, much like the heat wave it depicts, strips away the façade of its characters, exposing their vulnerabilities. Electra, a woman with a mysterious past, lives alone, awaiting something undefined. When Pavlos arrives, his memory wiped out by a heat-induced virus, the two share an inevitable connection that seems both foreign and familiar. As their relationship deepens, it becomes intertwined with crime and passion, driven by the disorienting effects of the relentless heat. The shift from dusk and night to blinding daylight represents a dramatic transition in Liappa's cinematic exploration of human nature. Whereas night in her previous works represented a space of introspection, uncertainty, and mystery, here light becomes a disorienting force, erasing memory and clarity (Kyriakidis 1995: 26).

In Kalantzi's account of the film, Liappa's inspiration was the onset of Greece's first intense heat waves in the late 1980s. The young woman protagonist is the hotel's owner, who rekindles a romance with a man from her past – an encounter that reawakens buried childhood trauma. Departing from the enclosed, urban interiors of her earlier work, Liappa shifts to the luminous, open landscapes of Milos, infusing the film with a fatalistic sensuality. Underlying the narrative is a subtle political commentary: the fear of a virus that erodes memory functions as a metaphor for the sociopolitical climate of Greece in 1989. Embracing a circular cinematic form, Liappa interlaces scenes of intense physicality with images of caves and ancient ruins – landscapes dominated by stone, reminiscent of the textured, timeworn surfaces in the paintings of Sotiris Sorogas (Kalantzi 2014).

The film's score, composed by Thanos Mikroutsikos, heightens its atmosphere with atonal clarinet motifs influenced by Hanns Eisler, creating a mood of suspense and psychological tension. The lyrics for the featured popular songs were penned by Lina Nikolakopoulou, adding a layer of lyrical commentary to the unfolding drama. Whereas Liappa's debut film might be classified as romantic drama and her second feature as modernist film noir, *The Years of the Big Heat* – unjustly criticised at the time for its bold eroticism – emerges as an erotic thriller bathed in the piercing light of the Greek summer. Through this film, Liappa continued to refine her distinctive cinematic language, one that fearlessly blends symbolism, genre experimentation, and emotional depth. Though her work may not have been fully appreciated upon release, the passage of time has allowed for a deeper recognition of her nuanced vision and her pioneering contribution to a modernist film poetics in Greek cinema (Kalantzi 2014).

Cinematographer Nikos Smaragdis, Liappa's trusted collaborator in all her films, uses the harsh natural light to expose the inner turmoil of the characters. Faces, previously obscured or softened by the shadowy depths of the night, are now laid bare, capturing the characters in moments of raw vulnerability. The light, instead of offering clarity, seems to accentuate their suffering and confusion. This exposure serves not only to highlight their inner struggles but also to amplify the physical and emotional tension caused by the heat wave, which alters their perceptions of time, place, and self. Despite the open, expansive setting – where the sea and horizon offer a sense of freedom – Liappa's characters remain trapped. The metaphor of the heat wave, which disrupts memory and orientation, serves as a catalyst for their inevitable, tragic release. There is a sense of suffocation despite the geographical freedom around them. The environment is both open and oppressive, a paradox that mirrors the inner constraints of the characters.

Kyriakidis also draws an astute connection between the evolution of Liappa's characters through her three feature films. In *Love Wanders in the Night*, he argues, the characters were bound by an unseen force, caught in a perpetual loop of emotional turmoil; the characters in *The Years of the Big Heat* also exist in symbolically charged spaces where external freedom contrasts with inner stasis, reflecting their existential entrapment. Confined by forces larger than themselves, their memories and identities are distorted by external conditions: they suffocate not in confinement but within total spatial freedom – open horizons and a calm, navigable sea – yet remain motionless with inner paralysis. The heatwave, a metaphor for suppressed memory and emotional inertia, erases the past and triggers a final release, echoing the ruptured bond between the sisters in Liappa's first feature. The amnesiac Pavlos signifies the return of Martha-Iphigenia, the quietly sacrificed heroine of Liappa's second film – now reimagined as a mythic presence adrift in a landscape shaped by oblivion and loss (Kyriakidis 1995: 27).

Writer and poet Giorgos Markopoulos describes *The Years of the Big Heat* as a novel–screenplay that effectively uses elements of ancient tragedy to present a stark depiction of the human drama, through interwoven chapters, merging past and present, individuals and generations, focusing on the plight of uprooted refugees searching for identity and lost authenticity. The aim is to transcend the limitations of the physical body and internal conflicts to reach a profound truth through genuine connection and love.

Markopoulos emphasises the pervasive presence of poetry in Liappa's entire body of work. This poetry manifests as an underlying music that strives to express the ineffable. To truly appreciate these works, the reader must seek this music and recognise Liappa's persistent inward focus, constantly challenged by the intense and subtly concealed conflict between the individual, love, and death, with the latter holding a precarious advantage, a conflict which leads to a reinterpretation of memories and a fluctuating emotional landscape. The seamless transitions between reality and transcendence, terror and desire, her skilful blurring of boundaries between the real and the magically suspended, and the undeniable sense that her entire oeuvre is deeply lived is evidence that Liappa masterfully transformed life into art, or art into life, imbuing her experiences with the dimensions of a dream, even a nightmarish one (Markopoulos 1995: 37–38).

Film critic Michalis Dimopoulos reiterates the film's themes of obsession, forbidden love, and the psychological toll of intense emotional bonds, and highlights the existential tragedy that unfolds as the characters' inner turmoil becomes inextricably linked to the external environment. The story evokes a surreal and atmospheric narrative, where the oppressive heat acts as both a literal and metaphorical force, affecting the characters' memories, identities, and relationships. The setting, a beach where Electra was born and lives in isolation, serves as a timeless place where the past, present, and future intertwine. The arrival of Pavlos, whose memory has been altered by the intense heat, creates a sense of disorientation and loss, as both characters grapple with the fading boundaries between the known and unknown (Dimopoulos 1995: 34).

The escalating heat, which increasingly impacts the lives of the vacationers, symbolises a distortion of reality and perception. As their daily lives become more unbearable and tensions rise, the relationship between Electra and Pavlos intensifies, driven by an inevitable force of attraction and shared dislocation. The arrival of the sirocco, a hot, dry wind, introduces a change in the environment, signalling a shift in their inner worlds as well. The narrative's final moments – where Electra and Pavlos engage in a ritual that connects them to a forgotten community and its mysteries – suggests themes of memory, ancestral connection, and the cyclical nature of time. Their immersion in this primordial ceremony and the mystery of the blood that unites them points to a deeper, more existential connection between the characters, as they transcend the linear passage of time. The conclusion,

where they "slip out of time", reflects a spiritual and emotional release, where they find harmony in a world transformed by heat, memory, and ritual (Dimopoulos 1995: 34).

For Liappa herself, the film is a deep exploration of themes of identity, loss, and the connection between individuals and their pasts, set against the backdrop of an oppressive, transformative environment. The intense heat and the altered memory offer a metaphor for the blurring of reality, where personal histories dissolve and merge with a collective, primordial past, leading to a moment of catharsis or transcendence for the characters. In an interview Liappa gave to the newspaper Αναγνώστης (Anagnostis/Reader) published on 5 July 1991, she reflects on the demanding and proactive nature of filmmaking. She highlights the importance of engaging with the industry, taking personal risks, and asserting one's own production terms in order to make the films one truly wants, even in the face of industry envy. She champions instinct, passion, and inspiration against challenges and mediocrity, viewing this as essential for a liberating and educational filmmaking process.

She emphasises that technique – sharpened through careful observation and self-reflection – is essential for articulating intense emotions with precision. The screenplay undergoes continuous scrutiny to identify and correct any weaknesses, particularly where aesthetic, narrative, or literary elements might undermine the cinematic intent. The period between completing the script and beginning production is marked by profound loneliness and anxiety; however, she insists that embracing this solitude is necessary for those committed to making films that demand an engaged and complicit audience (Liappa 1991: 36).

4.1.6 The 'Scandal'

An incident that escalated into a major scandal following the film's release offers insight into the cultural and political climate in Greece at the time, revealing the failure of institutions to resist or prevent capitulating to baseless and absurd accusations made by a man against a female colleague. Apostolos Doxiadis, a Greek Australian, born in Brisbane and living in Greece, had burst into the filmmaking stage with his 1983 production *Underground Passage (Υπόγεια Διαδρομή)*, a film characterised by many as a 'complete failure'. Having subsequently ascended to the position of Director of Cinematography at the Greek Ministry of Culture, in January 1992 he demanded Liappa's film *The Years of the Big Heat*, to be excluded from the state awards, alleging child abuse during

production of her film. He claimed that during filming, an underage child (18 months of age) was abused by being present during a sex scene, as though he was ignorant of the well-established technique of montage in the production of a film, where scenes can overlap without being shot at the same time. His deliberate act, representing a significant abuse of power within the context of state-sponsored cultural institutions, raised critical questions about the potential for institutional authority to be weaponised for personal or ideological ends.

The scandal was also reported internationally, including in the UK magazine 'Screen International' of 7 February 1992 in a news article under the title *Film rejection triggers Greek protests.* In summary, it reported that in 1991, the Greek state film awards sparked controversy when jury president Apostolos Doxiadis vetoed Frieda Liappa's *The Years of The Big Heat* due to a scene depicting child violence. His decision led to protests from filmmakers and media, as well as Theo Angelopoulos' decision to step down from the presidency of the Greek Film Directors' Union (Σωματείο Ελλήνων Σκηνοθετών Κινηματογράφου – ΣΕΣΚ) in protest over its board of directors' backing of Doxiadis. Doxiadis' act also prompted an Athens district attorney to order an investigation into alleged ill-treatment and violence against a minor by both Liappa, and the child's mother. The same UK magazine report stated that the film, "a co-production between the state-subsidised Greek Film Centre, public-TV channel ET-1 and Liappa, will be presented in Berlin's Panorama section. Liappa has said that she will protest at the festival about the treatment her film has received in Greece". The report incidentally included that major awards had been awarded to Pantelis Voulgaris for *Quiet Days In August*, Theo Angelopoulos for *Landscape In The Mist*, and Tonia Marketaki for *Crystal Nights* (Grivas 1992).

This episode, though undoubtedly not unique in the annals of literary and/or artistic history, offers a compelling case study in the complexities of cultural influence, ethical responsibility, and the interplay between artistic, political, and social spheres. The impact of this event and the subsequent public outcry against Liappa was akin to a physical assault. Her work was suddenly and viciously dragged through the mire by an abhorrent accusation; a profound betrayal, not only of herself but also of the child involved, as well as his mother who was involved in the planning; it also hit hard the very integrity of filmmaking as an art form. The story became front page news for many days, both in the press and on TV with Liappa's film inextricably linked to something deeply repugnant. A heavy cloud of presumed guilt had descended, fuelled by the pronouncements of an individual wielding institutional authority. A relentless anxiety pervaded her experience, as she was forced to defend

herself and her colleagues against a fabricated accusation born of apparent opportunistic malice – an ordeal that underscored the ethical boundaries violated by his actions.

The unwavering support from her peers – figures of significant cultural weight within the artistic community – provided a crucial lifeline. Their public declarations of condemnation of the slander offered a fragile shield against the relentless public scrutiny that lasted more than a year. Prominent artists such as Melina Mercouri, Theo Angelopoulos, Jules Dassin, Thanos Mikroutsikos, Nikos Koundouros and many others sided with Liappa, but – incredibly – a few others, such as the singer and songwriter Dionysis Savvopoulos, sided against her. The legal proceedings that ensued, while ultimately delivering vindication, were an agonising ordeal. The intense questioning, relentless scrutiny, a feeling of being perpetually under suspicion for a truly heinous act, had undoubtedly left a deep scar. Her body, already weakened by the immense stress and emotional turmoil of the preceding months, began to fail. The diagnosis of a malignant brain tumour felt like yet another blow, a further injustice layered upon the first.

In early 1993, the Athens Court examined all the material gathered, and found that no child abuse charge could be brought against Liappa, the child's mother or the film's producers. The legal exoneration of Liappa and her coworkers solidified the assessment of these accusations as unfounded and damaging. The ensuing political ramifications included calls for her accuser's dismissal, which led to his resignation. This episode highlights the interconnectedness of cultural and political spheres and sadly demonstrates the potential for ethical breaches within cultural institutions which can trigger tangible political consequences, particularly when they involve allegations of serious misconduct. The personal hardship endured by Liappa during this period, culminating in a severe health crisis, further underscores the human impact of such actions, even if a direct causal link remains speculative. With her health continuously deteriorating, however, Liappa passed away on 28 November 1994, at the age of 46 (Themeli 2017: 5).

Apart from demonstrating ill-treatment of a fellow artist, this episode is noteworthy for its irrefutable display of resistance to change exhibited by the powerful elite of art office holders when it comes to their entrenched attitudes even after the 'Metapolitefsi' – the restoration of democracy after the dictatorial regime. In the closing remarks of her 2017 paper *Frieda Liappa: the creator facing censorship* for the proceedings of the 30th Panhellenic Conference of the Federation of Greek Cinema

Clubs, held in June 2017 in Heraklion, Crete, on the topic "The female creator in Greek cinema", Evangelia Themeli concludes that the end of pre-emptive censorship under the new democratic regime did not eliminate censorship altogether; instead, it shifted into more indirect forms, exercised by individuals in positions of power who may act out of ideological, aesthetic, or financial motivations. In this case, the controversy quickly acquired political dimensions, as the scandal served as a catalyst for broader debates over state cultural policy, the boundaries of artistic freedom, and whether censorship efforts were warranted. Although the film was vindicated twenty-four years ago, the scandal left an indelible mark, surrounding the film with persistent prejudice (Themeli 2017).

In the aftermath, Doxiadis went through a widely publicised divorce from his wife less than two years later, in 1996, after accusing her of being unfaithful with an untold number of men, and getting private investigators to follow her around and monitor her mobile phone – even involving his daughter in the fracas on TV interviews and press releases. Despite being subjected to ridicule in Greece at the time, he later resurfaced through appointments to influential positions, revealing both an institutional memory marked by selective amnesia and the persistent power dynamics of certain networks. His subsequent questionable forays into politics are indicative of opportunistic tendencies prevalent in the governing bodies of the art scene in Greece, and probably further afield. A sanitised and anodyne account of his career – conspicuously omitting any reference to past scandals – now appears on his Wikipedia page.

4.1.7 Liappa on Liappa

According to her close friend and colleague Claire Mitsotaki, Liappa "was not an easy person. She was a person of absolute loyalty and devotion. She judged with severity and praised with generosity. She was a person condemned to honesty, she knew how to respect, to refuse, to abstain. She was not sacrilegious"[47] (Mitsotaki 1995: 16). We can gauge more information about her character and personality, however, from the words of Liappa herself. In a self-presentation article in 'Film' magazine from July 1979, Liappa speaks about the fundamental existential questions she had been

[47] "... δεν ανήκε στους εύκολους ανθρώπους. Ήταν πρόσωπο απόλυτης πίστης και αφοσίωσης. Έκρινε με αυστηρότητα και επαινούσε με γενναιοδωρία. Ήταν ένα άτομο καταδικασμένο στην εντιμότητα, ήξερε να σέβεται, να αρνιέται, να απέχει. Δεν ήταν βέβηλη." (Mitsotaki 1995: 16)

contemplating since her adolescence: these ranged from broad concepts like the female body, love, homosexuality, rebellion, consciousness, desire, and writing, to more specific inquiries about the Greek versions of these concepts. In a prescient article, she expresses a sense of being overwhelmed by the plurality of cultural and feminist movements which interfere instead of aiding in resolving these questions. She ultimately concludes that everyone, regardless of background, engages with their own personal 'myth' or 'fairy tale', while dismissing grand feminist rhetoric, sociological simplifications, and the consolations of groupthink as ultimately reductive and insufficient to account for the irreducible complexity of individual experience (Liappa 1979).

For Liappa, an interesting story is not bound by genre conventions or historical significance, but rather by its ability to reveal the complexities of the human condition and uncover, in the quietest gestures or the most charged encounters, the contradictions, desires, fears, and ambiguities that define what it means to be alive. It is not spectacle or setting that gives a narrative its weight, but the emotional and psychological depth with which it engages its characters and, by extension, its audience. A film does not need to be grand in scale or situated within a culturally monumental moment to be meaningful; what matters is whether it can illuminate some hidden corner of our shared interior lives, whether it dares to ask uncomfortable questions or linger in moments others might overlook. In this view, the story becomes a vehicle for investigation – not of external events, but of inner truth, of memory, of contradiction, of presence and absence, of what is said and what is withheld. That is where its value lies: not in conformity or cultural capital, but in its capacity to expose, with clarity or with tenderness, the fragile and volatile core of being human.

In an article Liappa wrote for the magazine 'Modern Cinema' in 1980, entitled *Who Terrorises Whom*, she argues against prevalent and unproductive divisions within the discourse surrounding Greek cinema. She criticises the creation of simplistic and false oppositions, such as 'commercial' versus 'artistic', 'committed' versus 'entertaining' or 'popular' versus 'hermetic' – the latter indicating films that are 'closed off' and difficult to access, or intellectually dense and abstract, possibly requiring specialised knowledge or repeated viewings to understand – asserting that these labels obscure the fundamental criterion of good versus bad filmmaking. She contends that these labels and the resulting debates serve as distractions from the core issue of film quality and are often used as intimidation tactics against filmmakers and critics. Labels like 'commercial', 'arty', 'popular', etc., are evasive categories used to cover up a more fundamental crisis: a decline in meaningful, high-quality filmmaking.

The resulting ‘panic’ arises because the creative or intellectual vitality of cinema is faltering. In response, some people become defensive and shift blame – often pointing fingers at audiences for being unsophisticated or uninterested, rather than confronting the industry’s own artistic stagnation or failure to evolve. She also challenges the common tendency to blame the audience for any perceived shortcomings of Greek cinema. Instead of focusing on hysterically trying to appease or accusing the public, she suggests that filmmakers should prioritise the craft and strive to create better films, and advocates for a more inclusive cinematic landscape that embraces a diversity of filmmakers and styles, rejecting the idea that only one particular type of cinema holds value, giving many examples of films from commercial and popular to artistic and avant-garde genres, and providing attendance figures in support of her argument.

She cautions against those with a cursory understanding of cinema who often reject serious filmmakers like Godard, while populist figures conflate all films – good and bad – under catchall categories. Citing box office data from 1980 she shows that Greek comedies such as *O Kotsos stin EOK* dramatically outperformed foreign films like Woody Allen’s 1979 film *Manhattan* or Japanese director Kenji Mizoguchi’s classics – though she cautions against comparing audience expectations across such different contexts. At the same time, major works of Greek cinema, like Theo Angelopoulos’ films, managed to reach substantial audiences, while other ‘popular’ films had only moderate success, proving that both artistic and commercial films can resonate with viewers. Lasting cinematic value, she argues, is not always evident in initial box office numbers anyway: films like Michael Cacoyannis’ *Stella* (1955), Nikos Koundouros’ *O Drakos* (1956), and Alexis Damianos’ *Evdokia* (1971) were not immediate commercial hits but have remained culturally vital, just as Theo Angelopoulos’ *O Megalexandros* (1980) and classic works by Godard or American auteurs endure despite experimental missteps or production challenges.

She also rejects the idea of a critical elite manipulating audience tastes, and dismisses the frequent claim that filmmakers need to ‘win back’ their viewers, asserting that audiences will return when filmmakers stop obsessively chasing them, and instead concentrate on making better films. She makes it clear that it is not the audiences who terrorise filmmakers. To suggest otherwise would mean taking

André Breton's provocative remark literally[48]: "It is absolutely essential to keep the public from entering if one wishes to avoid confusion". Rather than blaming the public, she implies that the real pressure comes from within the film community itself – through reductive labels, false binaries, and the erosion of rigorous standards (Liappa 1980: 44–45). The invocation of Breton is clearly not a call to shut out the audience, but a warning about the dangers of allowing confusion and defensiveness to dictate the terms of cultural dialogue.

Ultimately, her central argument is that the focus should shift from divisive labelling and audience scapegoating towards a genuine commitment to production quality and artistic merit. By concentrating on making compelling films, the issue of audience engagement will naturally resolve itself. Liappa's legacy continues today with presentations of her short and feature films, most prominently by the Greek Film Archive – Tainiothiki tis Ellados (Ταινιοθήκη της Ελλάδος), with its active presence on YouTube, Facebook and other social media, aided by introductions to her works and presentations at their screenings by her life partner and film director, Kyriakos Angelakos, such as those featured in newspapers (Avgi 2016) and other media more recently.

[48] Breton was referring to surrealism which, in his view, needed to be kept exclusive to preserve its authenticity.

4.2 Love Wanders in the Night (1981)

4.2.1 Synopsis & Plot

As with many Greek 'art' films of the period, accessing this work proved challenging. As I began my research, it was not publicly available, though it has since appeared online. A physical copy was ultimately acquired from the Greek Film Centre in Athens, with the assistance of a relative who retrieved the DVD in person – a task made more difficult by logistical complications related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The film centres on two sisters, Irene and Stella, both in their late thirties or early forties, who have relocated from a provincial town to Athens. Depicted as attractive and coquettish, the sisters live constrained, monotonous lives within an urban environment marked by emotional detachment and alienation. Their only familial connection is their cousin Stefanos, a successful visual artist based in Paris. His return to Greece precipitates a romantic entanglement, culminating in his elopement with Stella and Irene's subsequent suicide.

The film opens in a hospital, where the two sisters are visiting their terminally ill uncle. In this scene, he discusses a piece of rural property he owns, and urges them to contact their cousin, Stefanos, who lives in Paris. As the last surviving male in the family, Stefanos is seen as the one who must decide the fate of the estate. The uncle laments the failures of the other male relatives, who have squandered their inheritances and neglected the land. Despite his awareness of his imminent death, he expresses a longing to leave the hospital and return to the countryside. In a moment of gentle denial, the elder sister reassures him that he will be well enough by the next harvest season to tend the garden himself. This emotionally charged exchange is accompanied by a traditional folk song, in which the singer pleads with the northern wind to blow gently on a small bitter orange tree so that ships may safely sail from the island of Spetses. The song, with its invocation of fragile nature and distant journeys, mirrors the themes of loss, transition, and displacement. Before the sisters depart, the uncle entrusts them with a gun, instructing them to keep it safe and give it to Stefanos upon his return – a gesture that introduces an undercurrent of latent violence and foreshadows the dramatic tensions to come.

Back at home, the film shifts to a more intimate and psychologically revealing scene. During the night, Stella, the younger sister, is disturbed by a nightmare. Irene tries to soothe her. The dream evokes fragmented memories of their childhood: their mother slaughtering a rooster while they wore their nightgowns, and their father holding them in his arms – a moment of domestic intensity that

blends innocence with violence. The sisters also reminisce about their cousin Stefanos, recalling a moment when he played with a large needle, a detail charged with subtle menace or ambiguity. In the quiet aftermath, Irene is seen writing a letter to Stefanos in response to a postcard he had sent. She thanks him and provides an update on their lives, which she describes as uneventful and withdrawn. Irene mentions that she rarely goes out due to recurring episodes of vertigo, which dominate her physical and emotional state. She also shares news about Stella, noting that her jewellery is now being sold in upscale stores and that she has recently taken up working with clay – an activity that may symbolise a search for tactile, creative expression within the confines of their otherwise stifled existence.

In her letter, Irene asks Stefanos to share more news from his life, expressing the sisters' eagerness to hear from him, and longing for his return. She writes that they have many things to tell him and wish to see him again soon. Notably, however, she omits any mention of their uncle's death, presumably to spare Stefanos the emotional burden. The tone of the letter reflects a mix of affection, restraint, and quiet dependency, underscoring the sisters' emotional investment in their cousin. In conversation, Stella speculates on whether Stefanos and his partner have separated, noting that he never mentions his relationship in his letters. Yet, out of a sense of propriety, she resists asking directly. This uncertainty gives rise to a minor argument between the sisters, with Stella becoming agitated and Irene calmly asserting that she never quarrels. The exchange reveals a growing tension between them, subtly anchored in their unspoken rivalry or conflicting emotions regarding Stefanos. His absence thus becomes a focal point for their frustrations, desires, and unresolved familial dynamics.

The narrative introduces a new dynamic with the arrival of Daphne, a fashionable teenage girl, accompanied by her mother Evangelia, the concierge of the apartment building where Stella and Irene reside. Daphne aspires to become an actress, a career choice that provokes concern and disapproval from her mother, who voices scepticism about the instability and uncertainty of such a path. Their exchange is marked by humorous banter, but beneath the surface lies a deeper anxiety about their precarious socio-economic situation. Evangelia pointedly questions why her daughter cannot pursue a more stable profession, such as teaching, which offers the security of a monthly state salary. In a moment of adolescent defiance, Daphne threatens to move in with her boyfriend, a remark that prompts Irene to intervene. She advises the girl to prioritise gaining admission to drama school before considering such a decision, gently reminding her of her mother's vulnerability as someone who has

no other family support. As their conversation continues, Daphne lights a cigarette just as her mother returns with the laundry, lamenting her struggle with asthma and the oppressive city smog. Her complaints culminate in a moment of irony as she announces her need to see a doctor, while noting sarcastically that Daphne, too, must smoke – presumably because she aspires to be an actress. This scene subtly contrasts generational tensions, economic fragility, and the romanticisation of artistic ambition within a constrained reality.

Stella is next seen visiting a boutique where she sells her highly sought after handmade jewellery. She promises to bring additional pieces on her next visit, affirming the modest but steady success of her creative enterprise. While the sisters are out, Stefanos calls their apartment for the first time. In their absence, Daphne answers the phone and records his contact number, marking the beginning of his re-entry into their lives. Meanwhile, Stefanos has already returned to Greece and is reconnecting with old friends. Their conversation reveals the ideological and generational fractures that shaped their early adulthood. Stefanos explains that he left Greece because, in his words, "they were only left-wing", implying a sense of disillusionment or marginalisation within a politically narrow or oppressive cultural climate. His departure, then, was both personal and political – a decision made in pursuit of broader horizons. When asked why he has returned, Stefanos confesses that he recently experienced a profound crisis in Paris, one that left him uncertain about his direction in life. He describes an unexpected sense of estrangement that overtook him in the city, prompting a desire to return to Greece – despite his fear that he might feel equally alienated upon his return. This tension between belonging and displacement underscores the psychological and existential dimensions of his character, situating him as both a product of and a stranger to his cultural origins.

When Stefanos visits the sisters, their reunion unfolds over a quiet dinner, filled with personal recollections and delicate enquiries. Irene shares an intimate piece of family history, reminding him that his mother once breastfed Stella when their own mother's milk had dried up – a gesture that symbolically reinforces the familial closeness between the cousins while also foreshadowing the blurred boundaries of their later entanglement. The conversation then turns to his past relationship with Claire, his French partner. Irene pointedly asks why they never had children. Stefanos replies that he never wanted children, though Claire did – and still does. This revelation prompts Stella to ask whether they have since separated, but the topic is quickly dropped, hinting at an undercurrent of discomfort and unresolved emotion.

As the conversation continues, it becomes apparent that Irene had suffered a personal disappointment in her youth: a relationship with one of Stefanos's friends that failed to lead to marriage. The man believed she was not a virgin, an assumption rooted in patriarchal expectations and medical ignorance. "The doctor called it hymen elasticity", she remarks wryly, encapsulating both the absurdity and cruelty of the judgment. Her comment is tinged with regret as she reflects on their innocence and naivety: "We were so young, inexperienced". She then contrasts their past with the apparent confidence and sexual awareness of today's youth: "Now look at Daphne, they seem to know everything". This generational comparison subtly underscores the shifting social mores around femininity, sexuality, and agency, while also revealing Irene's lingering sense of loss and quiet resentment.

Following dinner, Irene experiences another bout of dizziness and retires to bed, leaving Stella and Stefanos alone to quietly rekindle their bond. Their conversation turns nostalgic as Stella asks whether he has kept any of their childhood drawings. The moment is infused with tenderness but also reveals subtle emotional undercurrents. Stella expresses concern for Irene's deteriorating health, complaining that her sister neglects her medication and fails to take proper care of herself. She urges Stefanos to speak with her, suggesting that Irene might listen to him – implying both her deference to male authority and her own sense of helplessness. Stefanos responds with a rational dismissal, arguing that treating Irene like a chronically ill person is unhelpful and that conditions such as vertigo or nervous migraines are not life-threatening. His pragmatic tone provokes a bitter retort from Stella, who accuses him of speaking from ignorance. He, after all, left Greece and did not stay to witness the decline and death of their relatives.

Her response is not merely about medical advice; it surfaces as a quiet indictment of his absence and detachment from the family's lived experience. In a poignant closing remark, Stella admits that she kept all of his drawings but discarded her own – an act that quietly articulates her self-effacement, emotional dependency, and perhaps a deep sense of unfulfilled creative identity. The film is an exploration of behaviour, the male-female dynamic, female emotional reciprocity, attraction and repulsion, joy and deprivation, and the different forms of friendship and love, and describes its thematic focus as 'memory–desire–pleasure–cinema–world', alluding to the poetic style of Greek surrealist poet Andreas Embirikos. The two sisters, in spite of their different personalities and

outlooks on life, find common ground in their shared gender and intimate gestures. However, their inherent desire to escape forces the younger sister to choose between her sister and her cousin. Her decision will lead to her older sister's suicide and her guilt-ridden escape.

4.2.2 Film Critiques

In a short introduction to the film in a 'Toutestin' magazine article, critic and author Yiannis Kantea-Papadopoulos provides a positive critical appraisal of the film, its apt choice of actors and depiction of the impasse created by repressed and unfulfilled love. A break in the monotony of their lives is provided by their adolescent neighbour's occasional visits. This film narrative intricately weaves together personal struggles and broader socio-political contexts, mirroring the director's own life. The central conflict revolves around the existential dissatisfaction of characters, particularly the cousin, for whom professional success proves insufficient. The narrative posits a fundamental human yearning for meaningful connection and reciprocation from a specific 'other'. The film's central mystery – the reason for the cousin's return – is rooted in this very need for interpersonal validation. The introduction of two women into this dynamic creates a complex emotional landscape, where the resulting distribution of affection can be neither equitable nor partial, but rather a complete and absolute alignment towards one individual.

It is a scenario that can be analysed by considering the intertwining of existentialism and political realities. The narrative's conflation of existential angst with politics invites analysis through the framework of existentialist philosophy as it intersects with social and political realities. The characters' search for meaning and authenticity is set against a backdrop of potentially significant political circumstances (implied by the reference to the director's life), suggesting a critique of societal structures and their impact on individual fulfilment. The exploration of the cousin's motivations for returning, and the subsequent emotional triangle, provides a rich ground for character-driven narrative analysis. The fact that professional success cannot fulfil the need for connection with a 'specific other' touches upon existential themes of alienation and the limitations of material achievement in providing existential satisfaction, and the broader sociological and psychological human needs for belonging and recognition within a politically aware context, driven by character motivations and intricate relational dynamics (Kantea-Papadopoulos 2014).

In another mostly positive critical review entitled *Love Wanders in the Night – The Reign of the buzzword*, Sotiris Zikos critically examines the tension between artistic creation and institutional recognition, using the film as a case study to explore broader concerns within film culture and the politics of festivals. He posits that the film uses the dialectic and conflict between inner and outer worlds, poetic nocturnal shots, emotionally charged scenes of love in nature and masturbation in the bathroom, and exaggeration of movements and expressions. The camera's movement towards or away from faces serves to either illuminate their aspects, or acknowledge the inability to interpret them. The sisters, 'excluded' from the outside world and mainly interacting with the apartments' female concierge and her daughter, have their isolated world invaded by a man, their cousin, whose relationship with the past is 'crippled' by his long-term absence. His presence disrupts the sisters' bond, revealing that Liappa's interest lies not in the dynamic of the relationship itself, but in how it illuminates the connection between the two women.

Zikos argues that by highlighting the 'absence-presence' of the male figure, Liappa constructs a closed world inhabited by women, where descriptive rhetoric and concrete details, fluidity and poetry, along with the ideological and schematic, personal voice and awkward artifice coexist. She ultimately "creates the theme in her film to showcase it". The actors function as visual elements within the frame, contributing to the image's composition. They portray characters who will gather, clash, re-examine their relationships, make decisions, and ultimately flee: the concierge, who has also moved to Athens from the province leaves the metropolis due to her worsening asthma in the unclean air of the sprawling metropolis; her daughter leaves the tormenting silence or call of the telephone for her chosen life and her lover's studio apartment; Irene escapes into death, abandoning the book she is reading, the travel diary of Louis Antoine de Bougainville from his 1766–1769 expedition around the world, *Voyage autour du monde*, that kept her fixated on exotic fantasies; and Stella flees abroad with Stefanos, escaping the "socialised body that abolishes pleasure". Liappa's fervent cinephilia evokes cinema's inextricably linked triad: Love–Death–Flight.

Zikos suggests that Liappa's ambivalence toward the film's participation in the festival is telling. While she acknowledges the necessity of engaging with the system by accepting the award, she simultaneously distances herself from its implications, asserting that such judgments ultimately contribute to the "death of aesthetics". This statement underscores a deep scepticism toward the evaluative frameworks imposed by festival circuits, where aesthetic value is often conflated with marketability, ideology, or networking influence. Meanwhile, the Greek Film Critics Association

(Πανελλήνια Ένωση Κριτικών Κινηματογράφου – ΠΕΚΚ) offers a seemingly more substantive form of validation, praising the film for its creative renewal of a traditional model and for articulating an existential anguish through its dramatic structure. This language situates the film within a lineage of art cinema that draws on familiar forms only to subvert or deepen them, suggesting a more layered and introspective aesthetic that resists commodification.

Zikos, however, remains critical of both the celebratory and cynical responses to such markers of institutional recognition. By noting that awards are a consequence of various agendas and compromises, he implies that festival prizes, far from being purely artistic acknowledgments, are entangled in broader socio-political negotiations. The reference to 'dark' paths of distribution and exploitation further emphasises the uncertain, even murky, terrain that filmmakers must navigate after production – one that is dictated more by power structures than by the merits of the work itself. His final remark – "ridiculous pronouncements and indignant statements stumble blindly in the darkness" – functions as both a critique of the self-righteousness sometimes found in public reactions to awards and a warning about the futility of placing too much faith in institutional validation. This statement aligns with the director's position: that while participation in such systems may be unavoidable, true aesthetic judgment lies elsewhere – beyond the applause, the prizes, and the 'show' (Zikos 1982).

In an insightful critical analysis of the film, Manolis Koukios examines its ambitions, execution, and its place within the context of the 'new' Greek cinema, from different aspects. On the question of how its intentions have been realised, he acknowledges that the ambitious thematic scope of the film, described by Liappa as revolving around "memory, desire, pleasure, cinema, world" is clearly presented, strongly referencing the contrast between life in Athens, a provincial town, and Paris. The dark evening scenes and accompanying sounds of the movies screened at the open-air cinema next door make a frequent appearance when we view the sisters' apartment. But we have an opportunity to see what some of these films are when Daphne, daughter of the building's concierge, attends the cinema herself. Cinema is ever-present also through the references to cinema, personal memories, desire as a driving force, and the pursuit of pleasure.

Addressing the film's potential symbolic failures, Koukios focuses on the film's attempt to use symbolism, specifically in a reference to the goddess Artemis and the significance of a gun. The author points out that while the Artemis reference hints at a critique of provincial narrow-mindedness,

its symbolic potential is not fully realised. The transformation of the character of Stefanos from an object of desire to someone possessing knowledge about women and virginity feels underdeveloped. Similarly, the journey of the gun, passing between uncle and niece, lacks the symbolic weight needed to establish it as a central signifier linked to the desires of the female characters. The analysis extends this criticism to other aspects of the screenplay, such as the theme of artistic success/failure and staying in Greece versus pursuing a career abroad, suggesting a general weakness in building a 'text of overdetermination' within the narrative.

In a section entitled *The Revenge of the Body*, Koukios explores the film's preoccupation with physicality, evident in Stella's dream, Irene's dead body, and various scenes depicting hysteria, headaches, nudity, and sexual rituals. The camera work is noted for its role in creating these impressions. However, he argues that the presence of the actors' own bodies ultimately hinders the articulation of these 'bodily' impressions and the creation of corresponding meanings. This is attributed to problems with casting and, more fundamentally, to a prevailing theatrical acting technique in Greece that either excludes the body from performance or embraces it in a psychologically charged way. He suggests that by focusing on other aspects of actor direction (like speech), directors inadvertently allowed this theatrical style to dominate, undermining the film's attempt to address the body. In the concluding section of his critique, entitled *Misery, Charm, and Weaknesses: Greek Cinema*, Koukios reflects on what remains of the film beyond its ambitious intentions, and finds value in the film's struggle with its signifying material, evident in the treatment of the film's 'body'. This is seen as a positive trait for a cinema that has long been constrained by perceived economic and technical limitations, an atmosphere of ideological and aesthetic 'misery', and a desperate rejection of the charm of classic American (and older Greek) narrative cinema by 'new' Greek filmmakers (Koukios 1982: 21–22).

Liappa's friend and fellow filmmaker Maria Nikolakopoulou offers a rich narrative on the evolution of Liappa's films, blending personal recollections with a critique of the changes in the industry. She begins by evoking the setting of the film, emphasising the magnetic allure of the location for Liappa, described with poetic imagery: the ivy-covered stream that swallowed stone houses, the train station flanked by poplars, and the summer cinema. The image of the central café, populated by men in heavy jackets even in the summer heat, playing cards, captures the melancholic, timeless atmosphere of the place. The setting becomes not just a backdrop for the film, but a character in itself, influencing both the narrative and the aesthetic choices in the filmmaking process.

Nikolakopoulou then shifts to a discussion of the filmmaking process at the time, which was marked by a high degree of control and precision. The film's production adhered strictly to a pre-determined script and storyboard and every detail was planned, from the position of the camera to the angle of the shot and the sound design. This approach to filmmaking, referred as 'complete decoupage', is a form of cinematic craftsmanship where the artist has ultimate control over the final product, and reflects the era's emphasis on meticulous planning and a rejection of spontaneous, uncontrolled production. This focus on detailed planning contrasts sharply with contemporary filmmaking practices. Nikolakopoulou further critiques the modern approach to cinema, which is often defined by speed and efficiency. "Everything in, and we'll fix it in editing", becomes the watchword of contemporary filmmaking, in which post-production plays a far more prominent role than in any earlier era. Her reflection on television further illustrates this shift, suggesting that even the medium of television, which once adhered to cinematic principles, has now devolved into something more easily produced, relying on less rigorous methods and 'intangible materials'.

She also touches on the economic and institutional changes that affected filmmaking. The 'era of creators' is described as a time when filmmakers had greater freedom, unencumbered by the influence of market forces, sponsors, and private television channels. This reflects her nostalgic yearning for a time when cinema was more of an art form, as opposed to an industry driven by commercial imperatives. The quote from Liappa about the rise of private television channels – "You will have 10 channels, and it will be like one" – encapsulates the impending homogenisation of media, as well as a broader loss of distinctiveness and quality in the face of technological and economic change. It is a critical reflection on the shift in Greek cinema from a period of artistic control and creative autonomy to an era increasingly shaped by commercial forces, technological advancements, and the demands of the marketplace, offering a nostalgic yet critical view of the past, emphasising the tension between artistic integrity and the pressures of modern filmmaking practices (Nikolakopoulou 1981).

The significance of *Love Wanders in the Night*, forty years after it was first screened, highlights, for veteran journalist Vena Georgakopoulou, the importance and quality of the New Greek Cinema, a movement that, despite initial praise, had also faced criticism for being too intellectual. She contrasts this older generation of filmmakers, including Liappa and Marketaki, with the currently celebrated new wave of Greek cinema, suggesting that Liappa and her contemporaries, possessed a profound

ability to connect with audiences. Rewatching Liappa's debut film, considered her best and most famous work, was a revelation for her: it revealed its timeless quality despite its difficult subject matter. The article emphasises that Liappa, a politically engaged feminist filmmaker with a poetic, theoretical sensibility, belonged to a generation that fought against the junta to express life, pleasure, and creativity through their art. She notes that Liappa's age, 33 at the time of the film's creation, mirrored the young age and attractiveness of her protagonists, Irene and Stella (played by Mirka Papakonstantinou and Maria Skountzou).

The film portrays these two sisters as pathologically codependent, withdrawn, and already defeated by life, grappling with neurosis and grief over their lost dreams, particularly romantic ones, centred around their cousin Stefanos. The surrounding environment is depicted as a stagnant 'swamp' where family, land, and traditions stifle the younger generation. The film's raw scenes tackle sensitive topics such as female virginity and sexual self-harm, contrasting the characters' sensuality with the concealing, elegant robes designed by Damianos Zarifis. The character of Irene struggles with her fears and flirts with death, while Stella ultimately breaks free by embracing love with their cousin. While inspired by the story of the suicide of both sisters and struck by their youthful, vibrant appearance in photographs, Liappa stated that she sought to create a meaningful yet accessible story that, despite its heavy themes and altered ending, imbues its characters with lightness, colour, and humour (Georgakopoulou 2018).

4.2.3 Film Analysis

Having left their provincial home, the two attractive sisters live in Athens, where they rely heavily on each other for support and company, with only occasional visits from the young daughter of the building's concierge, who embodies modernity with her liberated beliefs and actions. When their artist cousin returns temporarily from Paris due to his father's death, burdened by his own troubles and latent nostalgia, he finds solace in a budding relationship with the younger sister, who goes away with him leaving the older sister to confront her existential struggles. There is an underlying and undeclared eroticism operating between the sisters on both sides, when Stella lightly caresses Irene's breasts with her fingers while she is asleep, but also when Irene kisses the napkin that has Stella's lipstick on it, revealing a repressed homoerotic bond of desire between them.

In allegorical terms, the story of the sisters – Irene who gives up on life and Stella who leaves in order to live – can be seen as an exploration of inner conflict, emotional dependence, and the painful necessity of self-liberation. The sisters are not only individuals but representations of two opposing impulses within a single psyche. By giving up, Irene reflects a part of the self that has succumbed to despair, ennui, or fear – a part too wounded or too resigned to imagine change. In that sense, she symbolises the comfort of familiarity, even when it breeds sadness or diminishment, the desire to remain enclosed in shared suffering, or a refusal to confront the world outside. Her constant headaches – likely due to her subconsciously or deliberately inventing or exaggerating her illness – deepen the allegorical reading significantly. Her sickness becomes more than just a physical condition; it transforms into a metaphor for emotional paralysis, fear, and the self-deceptions one may use to avoid living. Rather than facing the painful uncertainty of change, she retreats into a posture of fragility. Illness, in this case, is not just a symptom, but a shield – a way to justify inaction, to anchor herself in the known, even if it is suffocating.

Allegorically, she represents the part of the self – or of society – that chooses victimhood as a form of control. By appearing ill, she draws attention, sympathy, and perhaps even a moral high ground, positioning herself as the one who cannot leave, who must be cared for, who is bound to the home by necessity rather than choice. This 'invented sickness' is not a lie in the ordinary sense but a psychological mechanism, a way of shaping her reality so as not to have to confront her own powerlessness or agency. Stella, by contrast, embodies the instinct for life, transformation, and escape. Her departure is not an act of cruelty, but of painful clarity: she recognises that to survive, she must break from the grip of misery and emotional fusion. Her choice is allegorical for a kind of rebirth – it costs her something dear, but allows her to reclaim her agency, identity, and future. The fact that the sisters are lonely also suggests that their bond is forged not in joy, but in shared isolation, perhaps even in trauma. In that sense, the story becomes a meditation on how intimacy can sometimes become entrapment, and how true love may require the courage to let go.

Stella's decision to walk away, however, becomes all the more difficult, because it is no longer just about choosing life over death – but about refusing to be trapped in someone else's narrative of helplessness. Her departure becomes an act of refusal: she will not be held hostage by guilt, nor will she enable the illusion that staying is the only moral or caring choice, even though she does feel the full force of guilt over the abandonment of her sister. Together, their story becomes a stark allegory for the emotional bargains one makes with themselves and others: how one can sometimes feign

weakness to avoid responsibility, and how love can become a quiet prison unless someone is willing to break free. In the end, Stella, by abandoning her sister, is rejecting the terms of a life defined by illusion, stagnation, and self-erasure. Her act is not betrayal, but a kind of existential clarity: that to truly live, one must sometimes walk away from the people who refuse to.

On a broader scale, this also reflects a distinctly feminine allegory, touching on how women – especially those in close domestic or familial roles – may feel torn between loyalty and the necessity of self-actualisation. Irene, being the older, represents the weight of duty or internalised expectations, while Stella's relative youth affords her greater flexibility to challenge those roles, choosing instead the unknown path of independence to the alternative of a slow and torturous death. Her decision is also a rational one. If she had decided to stay, she might have comforted her sister, but only superficially, and only for a time. By remaining, she would likely reinforce Irene's self-deception, feeding into her illness, validating the idea that withdrawal from life is acceptable or even virtuous if it is cloaked in fragility. Her presence could become enabling rather than supportive. She would not be offering care – at least not in any transformative or liberating way; she would be offering collusion.

The challenging idea at the centre of the story suggests that real help sometimes looks like abandonment, especially when someone is using their suffering to anchor others in place. Her staying might prolong the illusion that Irene's life is being 'lived', when in fact it is merely being preserved in a kind of emotional stupor. Indeed, Stella's decision could have had a positive effect on Irene's state of mind, and the shock of Stella's absence could have forced Irene to confront the void and change her future path. Stella could not know a priori that Irene's decision would be to end her life. Stella makes a choice not based on certainty, but on integrity. She cannot predict what her sister will do in the aftermath of her absence, and yet that uncertainty is not a reason to stay. To assume that staying would guarantee safety is itself a kind of illusion – a false belief that we can control or rescue someone simply by being near them. But proximity is not presence, and love is not rescue.

Her departure, though painful, becomes an act of faith – not in her sister's strength necessarily, but in the necessity of truth. She refuses to participate in a shared fantasy where one life supports another's delusion. And in doing so, she allows a moment of rupture: a void where Irene must finally confront the emptiness beneath her invented illness, beneath her need to be needed. Stella accepts that she may be blamed, that tragedy may follow – but she also knows that staying would not prevent

that tragedy, only delay it. Allegorically, this is the story of a person who chooses the unknown over the illusion of safety, who understands that to help someone change, you cannot protect them from the pain of change. The sister's suicide, if it comes, is not the fault of the one who left, but the final expression of a path that had long ago turned inward. And if she chooses instead to live, it will be because she decided to break the self-imposed chains she had built to protect herself from life itself.

The film operates as a sophisticated meditation on the human condition, examining gender dynamics, emotional reciprocity among women, and the intricate intersections of attraction, repulsion, joy, and deprivation. It contemplates various forms of love and friendship, primarily through a feminine lens, and navigates the delicate balance between solidarity and desire. Its conceptual framework through the lens of 'memory–desire–pleasure–cinema–world' invites a reflective, almost lyrical exploration of the self within the cinematic world, positioning the film within a larger discourse on memory and the complexities of female subjectivity. The relationship between the two sisters, despite their differing personalities and outlooks on life, is grounded in shared gendered experience and intimate, often tender gestures. Their bond, however, is far from static. The inherent desire to escape, both emotionally and existentially, becomes a central tension, particularly for the younger sister. This desire forces her to confront a painful choice between familial loyalty and the romantic allure of her lover. Her decision encapsulates the struggle between the comfort of the familiar and the intoxicating potential of new identity and experience.

In this context, the film also engages deeply with nostalgia and the female gaze. The sisters' interactions, particularly the shared memories and emotional exchanges, act as both a refuge and a prison. Their relationship reveals the inherent tensions between female solidarity and the pull of heteronormative desire. The younger sister's eventual choice, torn between her sisterly bond and her romantic aspirations, underscores the fragility and resilience inherent in both familial and romantic love. In this way, the film subtly critiques the societal pressures placed on women, navigating the conflicting demands of emotional loyalty, societal expectations, and personal fulfilment.

Liappa's approach in this film has existentialist undertones as the sisters' confinement – physical, social, and psychological – functions as a metaphor for the condition of human existence itself. Existentialist thought, from Kierkegaard to Camus, Sartre and Beauvoir, concerns itself with the tension between freedom and constraint, the search for meaning in a world that appears indifferent,

and the responsibility individuals bear for shaping their own lives. The sisters' confinement – to their household, family, and their rigid roles – becomes the stage upon which existential themes are played out. Their world is reduced, yet within this reduction lies the sharp confrontation with their own being. Like Sartre's 1944 play *No Exit*, the limitation of space forces them to face each other and themselves, unable to escape the weight of their choices. Their daily lives take on the qualities of what Camus calls the absurd: repetition, futility, and the confrontation with silence.

The sisters' awareness of their situation will lead one sister to a type of rebellion, and the other to further withdrawal into herself, which will drastically redefine their relationship and sense of self. Resistance to change, passivity, and persistence in choosing confinement are existential gestures – modes of responding to a condition in which meaning is not given but somehow wrested from circumstance. The claustrophobic setting underlines the philosophical point that the limits imposed by their environment are not unlike the limits imposed by the human condition itself. Their confinement is gendered – determined by family expectations and patriarchal norms – which resonates with Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminism. The sisters' struggle for subjectivity against their prescribed roles demonstrates an existential emphasis on their individual self-definition, while acknowledging the historical and social structures that weigh upon their freedom. The existential and phenomenological core of their situation lies in the totality of their life experience; on how they navigate the tension between freedom and constraint, endure the repetitive rhythms of daily life, face the pain of choice, and search for meaning within the real and symbolic walls that choke their existence. Every aspect of their confined world – its routines, relational dynamics, spatial and temporal pressures – blends into a perception of their being and how they understand themselves.

The departure from the original story's ending that inspired Liappa – from both sisters committing suicide in reality to one sister escaping in the film – reshapes the existential and phenomenological gestalt of the narrative. In reality, the double suicide signifies total entrapment: the sisters' lived experience is wholly circumscribed, leaving no room for agency or survival. Their world is one of unbroken constraint, repetition, and despair; the search for meaning collapses under the weight of impossibility. By contrast, the film introduces a rupture in this gestalt. The sister who escapes embodies the potential for freedom, however partial, while the sister who remains and dies still represents the crushing force of confinement. This juxtaposition allows the audience to perceive the coexistence of despair and resilience, underscoring that human responses to oppressive circumstances are diverse and that freedom, even if only glimpsed, remains a central existential concern.

The change also illuminates the filmmaker's purpose and philosophical engagement. By modifying the historical outcome, the film moves beyond documentary fidelity to explore broader questions of agency, choice, and ethical responsibility. The escape functions not as mere plot convenience but as a thematic device that dramatises the tension between constraint and possibility, inviting reflection on the ways individuals navigate suffocating conditions. At the same time, the sister who succumbs emphasises the consequences of insurmountable limitation, preserving the weight of tragedy while opening space for meditation on resistance, subjectivity, and survival. In doing so, the film not only conveys the phenomenological texture of confined existence but also transforms it into a vehicle for existential inquiry, revealing how oppressive circumstances shape consciousness, choice, and the pursuit of meaning, perhaps adding an optimistic dimension into the otherwise overwhelming existential darkness.

Chapter 5 – Margarita Manda

Margarita Manda (Athens 1963–)

Novelist, Journalist, Film Director, Writer, Editor, Producer, Actress

5.1.1 Introduction

Margarita Manda is a prominent Greek film director and writer, born and raised in Athens, where she still lives. She has studied Political Science, French Literature and Film Direction, and over the course of her career, she has established herself as a versatile filmmaker, writing and directing short and feature-length fiction films, medium- and feature-length documentaries, as well as video works for theatrical productions and corporate presentations. She attributes her early and enduring fascination with cinema to both familial influence and the urban environment of her childhood. Her father, a journalist and passionate cinephile, frequently attended multiple daily screenings, bringing Manda and her brother to the cinema on weekends, to watch films like Charlie Chaplin comedies and Citizen Kane at an early age. The summer open-air cinema Erechtheion, located just across from her family home in Koukaki, offered an additional formative space where she would watch films from the rooftop with her grandmother, fostering an intimate, sensory connection to the medium.

A decisive moment in Manda's cinematic awakening occurred at age fifteen, when she impulsively attended a screening of Antonioni's *Red Desert*. Initially anticipating a conventional genre film, she was instead confronted with a complex and disorienting cinematic experience that left her in a state of trance upon leaving the theatre. Despite later pursuing studies in political science and French literature, Manda identified this encounter as pivotal, cementing her vocation. By age twenty, she formally entered the Stavrakos Film School, setting her on the professional path that would ultimately define her career (Kontos 2015). A creative and dynamic force with impressive credentials, she first entered the field of literary translation with *Αντίο Βολόντια,* her translation of the celebrated French actress Simone Signoret's novel *Adieu Volodya*, first published in the year of Signoret's death (Signoret 1985). It was shortly followed in 1986 by her translation of Salvador Dali's autobiography, *La vie secrète*, first published in 1942, under the Greek title *Η απόκρυφη ζωή μου* (Dali 1986).

A significant chapter of her professional trajectory includes her 19-year collaboration with director Theo Angelopoulos, contributing as assistant director to four of his acclaimed films, *Ulysses' Gaze*

[Το βλέμμα του Οδυσσέα] (1995), *Eternity and a Day [Μια αιωνιότητα και μια μέρα]* (1998), *The Weeping Meadow [Το λιβάδι που δακρύζει]* (2004) and *The Dust of Time [Η Σκόνη του Χρόνου]* (2008). In 1995, she wrote the Greek essay for internationally acclaimed photographer Josef Koudelka's book *Περιπλανήσεις (Wanderings)* (Koudelka and Manda 1996), published by the Thessaloniki Film Festival, which was based on their common experiences during the filming of Theo Angelopoulos' *Ulysses' Gaze* across the Balkans. She also contributed to the exhibition *Periplous – 12 Magnum Photographers Capture Contemporary Greece (Περίπλους – 12 Φωτογράφοι του Magnum φωτογραφίζουν τη σύγχρονη Ελλάδα)*, that was published to accompany exhibitions in Thessaloniki, London, and in Athens at the Benaki Museum in June 2004.

Following Angelopoulos' sudden death on 24 January 2012, in a road accident while making his film *The Other Sea*, she decided to turn the diary she had kept during the filming of *Ulysses' Gaze* into a book, entitled *Το πρώτο πράγμα που 'κανε ο θεός είναι το ταξίδι: Το βλέμμα του Οδυσσέα – Ημερολόγιο γυρισμάτων (The First Thing God Created Was Travel: Ulysses' Gaze – Filming Diary)*, published in 2013. In it, Manda credits Angelopoulos as her mentor and thanks him "for everything", and in particular for teaching her how to stick to her own identity, draw strength from poetry and seek the impossible; "for the incredible places he took me to, for all the incredible moments of the day he taught me to read the sky... [...] for all our disagreements, all our fights, all our wonderful conversations, all the phone calls at the crack of dawn to share a poem or a moment in the script, all the experiences that strengthened me, and for the day I started shooting my first film and he called me cheering like a child: 'Do not listen to anyone. Follow your instinct' " (Manda 2013b: 11).

Beyond her work with Angelopoulos, Manda has established herself as a versatile director, working across both fiction and documentary genres. In addition to her collaborations with other notable directors, her career encompasses literary writing and stage direction, all of which reflect her distinctive approach to storytelling, characterised by a careful weaving of character interactions and intimate human drama. She belongs to a generation of female directors who have "renewed narrative cinema" with their distinct "stylistic and thematic innovations" (Karalis 2012: 249). After *Gold Dust*, Manda's next feature film was *Forever [Για πάντα]* (2014), a tribute, as she relates in an interview with Christos Paridis to the five filmmakers she considers as her spiritual teachers: Carl Theodor Dreyer, Robert Bresson, Michelangelo Antonioni, Wim Wenders and Theo Angelopoulos (Paridis 2015). Her next film was the feature-length documentary *Alki's Long Walk [Ο μεγάλος περίπατος της*

Άλκης] (2017) about the life of prolific Greek female author Alki Zei (Άλκη Ζέη), which also casts a poetic gaze at Athens and its vistas.

In addition to her film work, she has also ventured into writing, producing literary works such as her novel *Still Memory (Η μνήμη ακίνητη)* (Manda 2002), and the autobiographical book *The Materials of Time (Τα υλικά του χρόνου)*, published in 2021. In this tender yet profoundly moving novel, Manda situates at its core the labyrinth of time, the stirrings of first love, the forces of affection and care, and the existential struggle to transcend death. This transcendence, she suggests, is possible only through love and through a gradual descent into the depths of memory. The work posits that self-discovery becomes attainable only by turning back to recover the formative moment that once defined the individual but has since been obscured – whether through fear, ignorance, or the relentless passage of time – submerged in the waters of forgetfulness and covered by the dust of everyday life.

Stylistically, Manda employs a polyphonic narration, characterised by sensitivity and precision, while also drawing on techniques reminiscent of cinematic montage. The rhythm of her prose, imbued with a musicality in the interplay of words, reinforces the aesthetic richness of the text. The novel functions as both a personal and philosophical inquiry and invites readers to interrogate the trajectories that have led them to their present state, to reflect critically on the construction of their own identity, and to recover the obscured centre of their existence as a means of reasserting a deeper sense of humanity and authenticity (Babasakis 2002). Through her contributions to both cinema and literature, Margarita Manda has solidified her position as a significant figure in contemporary Greek culture, celebrated for her artistic vision and keen sensitivity.

5.1.2 About Gold Dust

A large part of Manda's creative impetus stems from her deep affection for Athens, manifesting as both a homage to its historical grandeur and an elegiac reflection on contemporary urban alienation (Zoumboulakis 2015). She is a filmmaker of notable precision and achievement who documents the profound urban metamorphosis of her native Athens, transitioning from a city characterised by neoclassical elegance to a sprawling, impersonal megalopolis. This transformation, particularly accelerated by post-1960s development, is marked by haphazard and aesthetically discordant urban expansion. Her naturally evolving story-telling ability, aided by her creative technical expertise in

dealing with her skilfully chosen mise-en-scène, provides the ideal setting for her debut feature film *Gold Dust* (2009) in which she laments the rampant rate of change marring the city and its living spaces, and causing ongoing unease and frustration to its residents.

Her film critically examines the lived experience of Athenians within this rapidly evolving urban environment. Her characters, in both leading and in supporting roles, are rendered with a nuanced realism, achieving relatability through their ordinariness while maintaining a compelling narrative presence. Employing a lens of respectful observation, punctuated by subtle humour, Manda constructs these characters as symbolic representations of tradition and gender dynamics within early twenty-first-century Greece. Her subtle, nuanced style dissolves boundaries between film and audience, and its rich texture becomes more apparent with multiple viewings.

5.1.3 Ulysses' Gaze Diary

In an interview with Katerina Papadopoulou, following publication of her book based on her *Ulysses' Gaze Filming Diary* in 2013, Manda explains that although she had always been in the habit of writing, she had never previously kept a diary, not even during adolescence, as she had disliked the process. The decision to begin a diary emerged unexpectedly, without conscious intent, and was prompted by the intensity of her collaboration with Theo Angelopoulos and the profound impact of that film project. The strength of this experience created an almost compulsive need to document events in detail, out of fear that otherwise they would be lost. She recalls writing constantly and indiscriminately on scraps of paper, cigarette packets or napkins, driven by an urgency to preserve her memories (Manda 2013a).

Initially, the diary was conceived solely as a private endeavour, never intended for publication. She regarded the writing process as a form of self-therapy. Only later did she copy the scattered notes into three notebooks, which she then presented to Angelopoulos, albeit with the apprehension that he might react negatively to her critical remarks about him contained in the text. Instead, Angelopoulos expressed enthusiasm for its publication and actively sought to bring it to print, though this ultimately failed. The notebooks, she reveals, remained close to him until the end of his life. The decision to publish the diary was made after his death, motivated by her reluctance to leave projects incomplete. With the encouragement of Angelopoulos' family and colleagues, she pursued publication, framing

it as both a personal and collective act of remembrance. Reflecting retrospectively on what initially compelled her to keep a diary, she suggests that her instinct stemmed from an unconscious awareness that the film would prove transformative. Indeed, she identifies the experience as a turning point in her life, shaping her worldview, her understanding of people, and her relationship to cinema.

Unlike other projects with Angelopoulos, this film alone induced her to record her experiences, a fact she interprets as evidence of its unique and lasting significance. She characterises her bond with Angelopoulos as deeply personal and 'familial', recounting how he considered her his 'fourth child'. Their relationship extended far beyond the professional, encompassing intimate existential conversations and spontaneous exchanges of poetry or ideas. With the passage of time, his absence became increasingly painful to her, an irreparable sense of loss, not only personally but also politically. She laments the scarcity of intellectual figures in Greece willing to speak publicly on pressing national issues, positioning Angelopoulos as one of the last to do so, alongside Manos Hadjidakis. Ultimately, she frames her grief within a broader reflection on absence, acknowledging that to go on living, one must endure the absence of those they have lost. Yet she also describes her relationship with Angelopoulos as a source of enduring strength – a breakwater ("κυματοθραύστης") that continues to sustain her. The intellectual, emotional, and spiritual legacy of their collaboration, she concludes, has shaped her profoundly, and acknowledges that she has been exceptionally lucky to have had such a person in her life.

5.1.4 Forever

As she revealed in an interview with Katerina Papadopoulou when she finished shooting the film in 2013 and before the film's release in 2014, Manda's second feature film *Forever* was once again made possible only through the support of her collaborators, just as her first had been, highlighting that in Greece cinema can only be produced through such collective solidarity. She situates this within a broader cultural critique, noting that at a time when the country was widely discredited abroad, cinema remained the sole sphere through which Greece would project a vital and creative image. Yet this achievement, she argues, emerged under conditions of extreme scarcity – "with nothing", as she puts it – sustained by the personal sacrifices of Greek filmmakers and in spite of what she characterises as the state's 'criminal', even vulgar, disregard for culture and education. In her view,

this contradiction highlights both the resilience of filmmakers and the structural indifference of public institutions to cultural production (Manda 2013a).

In *Forever*, she stages the encounter of two solitary figures within the decaying landscape of Athens and Piraeus. The film unfolds as a melancholic yet tender meditation on solitude and does not simply narrate a romance; rather, it reclaims urban space as a terrain of possibility, where silence, repetition, and routine are disrupted by the emergence of human connection. Through long, static shots and minimal dialogue, Manda resists conventional storytelling in order to reveal the latent narratives already embedded in the city's spaces. Silence here is not emptiness but a medium through which time and memory can be inscribed, and through which the possibility of love and hope can be reasserted against the background of urban decline.

The narrative follows the parallel lives of Kostas, a train driver on the Athens–Piraeus line, and Anna, a ticket seller at the port, both of whom live in isolation and adhere to rigidly structured routines. Their daily trajectories – Kostas traversing the buried traces of Athens' ancient rivers and Anna working where those rivers once flowed into the sea – become metaphors for historical continuity and erasure, as well as for the characters' own submerged desires. The film's narrative movement hinges on the gradual 'awakening' of Kostas, who begins to observe Anna from the window of his train and, after an unexpected event disrupts his routine, resolves to break free from his isolation and approach her. His persistence transforms the story into an exploration of the right to love and to be loved, framed against the backdrop of a city depicted as deserted and decaying.

Manda herself characterises the film as an "elegy on Silence, on Time defined by Silence", situating it within a cinematic tradition that privileges images for the latent stories they hold, rather than the direct illustration of narrative. She deliberately returns to what she calls the "structural materials" of cinema: a fixed camera, rooted in the origins of the medium, capturing human beings as they look at one another and communicate through silence; the train, evoking cinema's very first images and its inaugural travelling shot; and sound, conceived not as subordinate to image but as an autonomous element integrated into the film's texture. In so doing, she resists contemporary tendencies toward narrative over-determination, instead foregrounding cinema as an art of suggestion, mystery, and ontological inquiry. Ultimately, *Forever* functions both as a love story and as a reflection on the existential struggle for connection in a dehumanised urban environment. By intertwining formal

austerity with emotional intensity, Manda reclaims the cinematic image as a site of reflection on time, space, and human presence, offering an aesthetic that is at once minimalist and profoundly humanistic (Roussos 2015).

In a LiFO magazine article, the reviewer, Antonis Boskoitis, writing under the alias Bosko, presents *Forever* as an exemplary instance of poetic, human-centred cinema. He emphasises the film's ability to combine visual lyricism with profound emotional depth, portraying not only the lives of its protagonists but also the intimate spaces in which their experiences unfold. The film's black-and-white cinematography, punctuated by subtle colour tones, is highlighted as a key feature that cultivates a languid, melancholic, and minimalist atmosphere, creating a cinematic space that feels both suspended and emotionally resonant. Bosko draws attention to Manda's sensitive depiction of human solitude and the yearning for connection, noting that the narrative conveys this through quiet, meticulously composed images rather than overt dialogue or action. Particular emphasis is placed on the final shot of the film, where the two protagonists appear together on the train platform. Bosko describes this moment as a visual tableau that is both striking and deeply moving, a culmination of the film's careful attention to rhythm, space, and gesture.

Bosko also situates the film within a broader cinematic lineage, noting affinities with the work of Michelangelo Antonioni and Theo Angelopoulos, whose films similarly explore existential isolation, urban spaces, and the poetics of time. He adds that *Forever* has been screened at international festivals, including Cairo and Rotterdam, where it garnered acclaim for its aesthetic rigor and emotional subtlety. Through this lens, he presents Manda's work as both deeply personal and emblematic of the artistic potential of contemporary Greek cinema, a potential masterpiece celebrating her ability to evoke the interior lives of her characters while simultaneously engaging with the textures and rhythms of the urban environment (Boskoitis 2015a).

5.1.5 Alki's Long Walk

> "Όταν λέω έζησα την Ιστορία κι εγώ κι ολόκληρη η γενιά μου, εννοώ πως η ζωή μας ήτανε ο πόλεμος, η κατοχή και η αντίσταση. Η πείνα, ο φόβος, το μίσος για τον κατακτητή

ανακατεύονταν μέσα στα παιχνίδια μας, στα διαβάσματά μας, στους έρωτές μας, μαζί με τον πόθο για ζωή και ελευθερία[49]". – Άλκη Ζέη

In her 2017 interview with Errietta Belekou of 'CultureNow' magazine, Margarita Manda reflects on the making of her 2017 documentary *Alki's Long Walk (Ο μεγάλος περίπατος της Άλκης)*, a film devoted to the life and legacy of the renowned Greek writer Alki Zei. Manda positions the project as both an artistic endeavour and an intimate personal journey, shaped equally by the demands of documentary filmmaking and by the profound human encounter with its subject. From the outset, Manda points out the decisive role of collaboration. She acknowledges the trust placed in her by fellow filmmakers Petros Sevastikoglou, Stella Theodoraki, and Thanos Anastopoulos, identifying their support as the precondition for her undertaking. The preparation of the documentary itself extended over seven months of intensive research, script development, and conceptual work, much of it conducted in close dialogue with Alki Zei. Such a process, Manda suggests, was essential in order to render faithfully both the cinematic and historical dimensions of the narrative (Manda 2017).

Significantly, Manda chose not to focus primarily on Zei's literary oeuvre, but rather on her life's experience as a woman whose life intersected with some of the most turbulent events of twentieth-century Greek history. By foregrounding biography rather than bibliography, she highlights the testimonial force of a life "lived in her own skin". This decision reflects a conviction that history is not merely to be studied through abstract accounts but is most powerfully communicated through personal narratives that embody its consequences. In Manda's formulation, the film functions simultaneously as historical testimony, cultural memory, and personal portrait. Equally important is the affective dimension of the project. Manda describes the collaboration with Zei not only as an artistic undertaking but as "a wonderful walk that culminated in a beautiful friendship". Such language underscores the extent to which the filmmaking process itself became transformative, producing relational bonds that exceeded the boundaries of professional collaboration. The film, therefore, can be read as a double gesture: it offers audiences a narrative of Zei's life while also testifying to the ethical and emotional commitments of the filmmaker herself.

[49] "When I say I lived History and so did my entire generation, I mean that our life was war, occupation and resistance. Hunger, fear, hatred for the occupier were mixed into our games, our readings, our loves, along with the desire for life and freedom." Alki Zei (Zei 2017)

Manda further situates the documentary within a broader cultural and political frame. She suggests that Alki Zei's testimonies, alongside those of other figures such as film director Manos Zacharias and poet Titos Patrikios, provide a matrix through which contemporary audiences might re-examine their own historical consciousness. By engaging with stories of exile, resistance, and survival, viewers are encouraged to measure the present against the struggles of the past, thereby placing current crises within a continuum of historical endurance. The film then aspires not only to commemorate but also to provoke reflection on the conditions of the present.

Manda also highlights the paradoxical position of contemporary Greek cinema, praising the vitality and international recognition of recent filmmaking, which has managed to produce outward-looking and thematically diverse works despite enduring financial and institutional constraints. At the same time, she underscores the contradiction between international acclaim and domestic neglect: while Greek audiences frequently celebrate these achievements in digital and social media spaces, they seldom translate this enthusiasm into actual theatre attendance. This observation highlights a recurring theme in Manda's discourse: the resilience of Greek filmmakers in the face of structural indifference, and the tension between cinema's global reception and its precarious national standing.

Taken as a whole, the interview articulates Manda's dual understanding of cinema as both an artistic and ethical practice. On the one hand, it requires technical precision, collaborative trust, and aesthetic innovation; on the other, it functions as an act of cultural memory and civic engagement, preserving individual voices against the erasures of time and institutional neglect. *Alki's Long Walk* thus becomes emblematic of Manda's broader vision: cinema as an encounter between personal testimony and collective history, capable of reshaping both artistic practice and cultural self-understanding.

5.1.6 The Materials of Time

On the back page of Manda's autobiographical book *The Materials of Time (Τα υλικά του χρόνου)* published in 2021, the publisher's presentation notes that Manda's recollections move beyond personal testimony. While memory is by nature individual, her writing elevates it "from the partial to the general, from lived experience to the art of language, from private remembrance to microhistory". In this sense, her work is not only an archive of a vanished Greece but also an act of transformation,

where the innocent gaze of the child is re-articulated through the craftsmanship of the filmmaker-author. The result, as the short introduction suggests, is both a 'festival of the senses' and a 'reflection of cinematic mastery', an intertwining of memory and art that testifies to her broader conception of literature and cinema as forms of cultural preservation and critical re-engagement with history. It is also an attempt to reclaim the memory of personal experiences through fragments of childhood recollections into a tapestry that functions simultaneously as autobiography and memoir.

Manda recalls with particular vividness her childhood fascination with the newsreels ('Επίκαιρα') that preceded films in the local cinema. She describes the sensory and visual experience of these black-and-white sequences – images of kings, politicians, priests, soldiers, parades, children in hospitals, festive rituals, flags, and public figures such as Onassis – all narrated by an unseen voice with a resonant, authoritative tone. For the child-observer, these fragments of mediated reality were absorbed not as abstract information but as a kaleidoscope of impressions, a condensation of national and global events into images both spectacular and mundane. These recollections belong to what Manda herself identifies as her "memories of the child I once was in the late 1960s through the mid-1970s": memories not only of images and sounds but also of silences, smells, tactile sensations – memories that, as she insists, do not return as nostalgia but endure as constitutive material of her life trajectory. In her formulation, they are less souvenirs of the past than structural elements of identity, shaping her artistic sensibility and the way she interprets experience.

While deeply personal, these memories transcend nostalgia, becoming an act of collective remembrance, situating individual experience within the cultural and historical transformations of late twentieth-century Greece. The act of writing, like her filmmaking, becomes a form of resistance to erasure: an effort to salvage what has been lost, and to reconstruct a centre of meaning amid the dispersal of time. What unites these different strands of Manda's work is her insistence that art must respond to the fractures of contemporary existence, not by offering consoling illusions, but by staging encounters that reawaken human sensibility. Her vision of Athens as a city deserted of affection, her cinematic meditations on silence and human connection, and her literary archives of memory all converge on a single imperative: to invite the spectator and the reader to reconsider how they arrived at their present condition, to reflect on who they are, and to seek the lost centre of their being in order to become once more fully human and authentically alive.

In her interview with LiFO's Vena Georgakopoulou, on the occasion of the publishing of *The Materials of Time* in 2021, Manda situates her book within a broader meditation on the role of memory in shaping identity and artistic expression. She frames memory as both a creative resource and an existential burden: while her unusually rich recollections allow her to reconstruct the textures of childhood with photographic precision, she simultaneously acknowledges their oppressive force, describing memory as 'tyrannical'. This ambivalence underpins her conviction that one cannot escape the past but must instead reconfigure it into a constructive element of life. Growing up in Athens during the late 1960s and early 1970s, Manda spent her summers on the island of Spetses. Her book transports readers to these two distinct settings, vividly recalling her childhood (Georgakopoulou 2021).

Through her young eyes, we experience two contrasting worlds: the urban life of Athens, centred around the Acropolis, and the idyllic summers in Spetses, brimming with natural beauty and close human connections. In possessing a 'photographic' memory, as she acknowledges, Manda paints a vivid picture of a bygone era, bringing its sights, sounds, and even smells and tastes to life – reminiscent of Marcel Proust's madeleines – which awaken memories long thought forgotten. Through her descriptions, the atmosphere of a changing Greece emerges, resonating with those who remember their own childhoods. Her book is an invitation to rediscover the child within, to find beauty in simple moments, and to allow memory to guide us on a journey through time (Georgakopoulou 2021).

Better known for her profound and dramatic films, Manda surprised readers with her autobiographical book, with its direct and simple writing style. In it she also describes the process of its writing, and reveals that over a period of approximately eight years, she intermittently returned to her initial text, gradually adding incidents and experiences that had shaped her life. As the manuscript began to take form, she came to recognise it as a project of homage – both to the people and circumstances that had established her identity and to a world and a country that, as she observes, have long since disappeared. While sharing the work initially with close friends, she received responses that confirmed a sense of shared recognition, suggesting that the text carried resonance beyond her individual history. This affirmation encouraged her to extend its reach to a broader audience. The manuscript was completed only shortly before the onset of the first COVID-19 lockdown in Greece in March 2020, a moment that marked the transition of her private recollections into a public narrative.

In this way, the work emerges not solely as personal testimony, but also as a gesture of collective memory and cultural preservation.

She notes that each of her works, whether film or book, is shaped by the demands of the subject matter and her chosen perspective. In this instance, she chose to write from the vantage point of the child she once was, rather than to analyse and judge events through adult eyes. Her starting point was a dream, she recounts, of her grandmother, a significant figure in her life, as she appeared on the day when, as a child, she had injured her head while playing on Philopappos Hill – an incident that would later serve as the opening passage of her book. Although the memory of that episode had always remained vividly etched in her memory, the dream seemed to endow it with a particular force, transforming what had long been an internal image into something that demanded to be externalised. She interprets this experience as more than the simple resurfacing of a recollection. The dream functioned as a catalytic moment that invested the past with a pressing urgency, compelling her to record it in writing.

In this way, the encounter exemplifies her broader understanding of memory – not as a static archive of images, but as a dynamic and insistent force that can impose itself upon consciousness and, at critical junctures, generate artistic creation. The texts, as she notes, assumed the form of school essays, unfolding with a natural flow, fulfilling her need to write them down from a desire for 'the consolation of beauty' in the face of the ugliness of the modern world. An attempt to preserve and share the beauty of a past world, as experienced by a child. Manda's method of narration deliberately rejects adult hindsight in favour of inhabiting the voice and perceptual world of her childhood self. By doing so, she therefore resists both nostalgia and retrospective judgment, instead producing what she describes as an organic continuity of recollection. This choice echoes a broader argument about authenticity in autobiographical writing: the past should be rendered as lived, not as retrospectively explained. Her stylistic preference for simplicity – reminiscent of early school essays – therefore becomes a strategy for preserving immediacy and resisting interpretive distortion.

The interview also reveals Manda's understanding of memory as inseparable from place. Her recollections of late-1960s and early-1970s Athens and Spetses are not merely descriptive but constitutive of the self she reconstructs. The physical and sensory environments of her youth function as mnemonic anchors that mediate between personal history and collective cultural experience. While

this was a period overshadowed by dictatorship, Manda's recollections emphasise the warmth, cohesion, and everyday rhythms of a world that has since eclipsed. Her memoir functions both as a personal testimony and as an act of cultural preservation. For her, the very act of writing becomes a tribute – to her family, her neighbourhood, and the vanished world of her childhood.

The book, though deeply private in origin, aspires to a broader communicative function, offering contemporary readers – both those who lived through that era and those who did not – an experiential entry point into a bygone Greece. But while her book paints a picture of a wonderful world, it was not without its hardships, particularly during the politically turbulent years of the junta. However, she emphasises that it was a simpler, more humane world than today's, as remembered by her younger self, aged 5 to 11. Her detailed recall of names, places, and events, attributed to her exceptionally strong memory – both a blessing and a burden – allowed her to vividly relive both positive and negative experiences, sometimes hindering her ability to move forward. Yet, she recognises that her memory is an integral part of her being, and she strives to harness it as a positive force in her life.

Regarding the possibility of adapting the book into a film, Manda states that if she wanted to translate her childhood memories to the big screen, she would have to do it herself, but believes the book lacks the scope to become a 'childhood period' film, as many films with similar themes have already been made, citing Federico Fellini's *Amarcord* as an example. *The Materials of Time* is based on the images, smells, sounds, and sensations that now only exist on paper, and that is where she prefers them to remain (Georgakopoulou 2021).

In his review for Diastixo.gr, literary critic Christos Papageorgiou assesses Margarita Manda's *The Materials of Time* as a compelling and meticulously rendered autobiographical narrative. He suggests that her exploration of childhood memories – particularly those experienced under the shadow of the Greek dictatorship – resonates broadly across generational and socio-economic lines. He argues that Manda's childhood observations, whether shaped by middle-class comfort or material scarcity, evoke universal experiences of familial dynamics, childhood rituals, sibling relationships, and the cultural imprints of political upheaval. He highlights that Manda's written voice is confessional yet evocative: it simultaneously evokes the simplicity of youthful perception and operates with the precision of a filmmaker. He notes that the narrative's strength lies not in photorealistic representation but in its allegiance to truth, preserving authentic details – names, places, people – as experienced rather than

‘polished’. He also notes that a particularly salient characteristic of Manda’s style is her extraordinary memory: she recounts minutiae with such clarity that readers can ‘feel’ the narrative while they read it. This cinematic sensibility imbues the prose with visual immediacy, merging literary expression with director-like vision, and it is this intermedial quality – word becoming image, text becoming film – that positions Manda within a unique creative category of artistically hybrid producers, according to Papageorgiou (Manda 2021).

5.1.7 Athens, Memory, and the Poetics of Silence

Margarita Manda’s artistic work – both cinematic and literary – unfolds around a series of recurring preoccupations: memory as a structuring force of identity, silence as an expressive language, and Athens as both a lived and imagined landscape. Across her films and writings, Manda negotiates the tension between personal recollection and collective history, while simultaneously confronting the alienation produced by contemporary urban life.

In her reflections on Athens, Manda articulates an image of the city that is strikingly paradoxical: outwardly vibrant and densely inhabited, yet inwardly deserted and emotionally barren. She describes Athens as “abysmally lonely”, a metropolis that functions as a transit zone rather than a beloved homeland. The absence of care from both its inhabitants and its administrators, she argues, has led to a progressive violation of its cultural and emotional substance. Neglect of architecture, historical erasure, and the erosion of urban sensorial memory collectively produce a city that is physically crowded yet existentially hollow. This critique resonates deeply with Manda’s broader artistic vision: the search for lost centres of belonging, the fragility of human connection, and the role of art in restoring meaning to spaces marked by absence.

5.2 Gold Dust

Parts of this section draw upon an earlier conference paper prepared by the author for a presentation at the Modern Greek Studies Association of Australia and New Zealand (MGSAANZ) Conference held at the University of Sydney in 2018 (Sakellis 2020). That material has been thoroughly revised and expanded for inclusion here.

5.2.1 Synopsis & Plot

In Manda's own description, *Gold Dust* (2009) is about:

> "Athens, today. Three siblings face the prospect of selling their family home. The potential buyers will tear it down and erect a modern building in its place. Alexis defends the sale, documenting his position with the financial benefits that this will bring. Anna reacts negatively. For her, their family home is the memory of her childhood. Amalia hesitates in making a decision, trapped between her emotional reservations and the practical needs. The heroes are in conflict with themselves in a city that is in conflict with the memory of its history. The sale of the family home functions as a pretext for the heroes to bring to light their interpersonal relations. The image they have of each other in absentia, the "non dit" that characterises family ties and reveals raw wounds when the surface of childhood is scratched. A surface sprinkled with gold dust, like a fairy tale. But the fairy tale is weakened by a chance occurrence. A message from the past functions as a catalyst, prompting the heroes to make their own mark in their own age. To find a balance between the debt of memory and the debt of forgetfulness. To come of age, taking the present of their own lives in their hands" (Manda 2018).

5.2.2 Introduction

As detailed in the above synopsis, Manda's 2009 award-winning feature film *Gold Dust*[50] *(Χρυσόσκονη)* is about three siblings who must decide what to do with their family home which lies idle and vacant after the death of their mother. The siblings all live in Athens and are as close to each other as their busy modern lifestyle will allow. Alexis, a lawyer who wanted to be a pilot, with an ex-wife and a young son; Anna, a professional pianist and single woman; and Amalia, the youngest, a

[50] The film also appears with the spelling *Hrysoskoni* on IMDb (Manda 2018)

bank employee, married and living with her husband and son. Sibling relationships play a crucial role in the drama Manda brings to life. Insights into these relationships are glimpsed in flashbacks from the time of their childhood, and from the present time, when, now in their forties, the same age as Manda's when making the film, they communicate over the phone during and after work, and in person. Through flashbacks and present-day conversations, the film reveals how circumstances and gender shape their roles and responses to life's challenges.

The film exemplifies Manda's distinctive approach to filmmaking, situating her among a growing number of accomplished contemporary Greek female directors. Her nuanced cinematic narrative style, with its realistic portrayal of contemporary Athens and its inhabitants, provides a framework for exploring the themes of childhood, city and home. These themes are represented through the everyday lives of three adult siblings navigating their relationships and identities in the aftermath of their parents' death. Adopting a psychodynamic perspective, *Gold Dust* reflects on how unconscious thoughts, emotions, and childhood memories shape the characters' personalities, motivations, and drives. It also highlights the ways in which gender informs their subjectivities and relationships, as well as their collective and individual quests to find a sense of 'home' that will in turn reveal the essence of their being. The film is an emotional portrayal of present-day Athens, the city where she was born and has always lived. It has won the 2009 Athens Panorama of European Cinema Audience Award, with Anna Mascha (Amalia) winning the 2010 Hellenic Film Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress.

Manda spent four and a half years making the film, as she reveals in an interview conducted in English, and it was made thanks to everyone's generosity and trust "almost with nothing … all the people that worked for this film worked with no money; zero; all the people…" (Festival 2011). The fact that her cast and crew worked pro bono is all the more remarkable considering they are all distinguished actors. The sibling roles are portrayed by three performers with established careers in both theatrical and cinematic arts. Anna is played by actor and director Mania Papadimitriou, Alexis by actor and director Argyris Xafis, and Amalia by acclaimed actress Anna Mascha. Yet, in spite of the appeal of the film's actors, and its technical quality and festival successes, it is neither widely available nor well known by the public at large. Limited distribution and unavailability to stream or purchase in accessible formats or on DVD are common obstacles for Greek films in the genre of narrative drama. The film is, however, available to view online (Agrotikon 2011), but without Greek or English subtitles, which restricts its potential audience to mainly native Greek speakers. The film

has had a scant list of reviews in a limited number of Greek cinema journals and books, as well as a few newspapers and online media articles.

5.2.3 Manda on Gold Dust

In articulating the motivations behind *Gold Dust*, Manda situates her work within a wider exploration of the tensions between loss, memory, and lived reality. Rather than attempting to resolve these tensions, she builds the film around their persistence, embracing questions over answers and resisting the narrative closure that resolution would imply. For her, cinema is not a space for didactic answers but a medium through which pain may be negotiated and the rift between absence and growth momentarily narrowed. Central to her conception of human experience is the idea that adulthood is not a fixed threshold reached at a conventional age but an ongoing process marked by moments of rupture. She identifies the first true encounter with adulthood in the confrontation with mortality – the first experience of irrevocable loss. In this sense, adulthood emerges less as a legal or social designation at a specific numerical age and more as a phenomenological condition, defined by an awareness of impermanence grounded in the consciousness of human transience.

Equally formative, in her perspective, is the notion of 'place'. She argues that identity is inseparable from the sensory and affective landscapes of childhood: the initial sounds, sights, and fragments of language that inscribe themselves onto memory. What she terms 'genetic memory' is not nostalgia but an embodied continuity between self and environment. By explicitly rejecting nostalgia and 'museum-like' remembrance, she distances her work from sentimental modes of memory and instead emphasises the structuring force of early experiences. Her critique of Athens further illustrates this perspective. While she acknowledges that cities inevitably evolve and change in response to historical and demographic forces, she laments the fact that Athens undergoes transformation without coherence, aesthetic care, or cultural investment.

She characterises the relationship between Athenians and their city as exploitative, marked by a lack of genuine attachment. For many, she suggests, Athens functions less as a home than as a transitory site of economic aspiration, perpetually imagined as a place to prosper temporarily while nurturing continual dreams of departure – even though most will never leave. Through these reflections, Manda situates *Gold Dust* within a discourse of loss, memory, and belonging, while simultaneously offering

a critique of urban life and cultural identity. The film becomes less an attempt to answer existential questions than an exploration of the instability of adulthood, the foundational role of childhood, and the precariousness of place.

5.2.4 Film Criticism & Reviews

The film makes scant epigrammatic appearances in academic papers, and the only references currently found online are mainly from a few domestic but mostly international film festivals which screened the film soon after it was released. In *Gold Dust*, Manda is not simply a director, or even writer-director, but the *auteur* of her film. Her designation as an auteur transcends her multifaceted involvement in the film's creation and dissemination. Her ability to transform a commonplace narrative into a multi-layered exploration, akin to the construction of a complex fictional work, is pivotal. The film's resonance with the viewer stems from her nuanced character development and compelling narrative structure. Contrary to persistent historical associations, auteurship is not an exclusively male domain. Manda's auteurial identity is not predicated on a relinquishment of her gender, a notion posited by some critical theorists. The persistent association of auteurship with an androcentric perspective is largely attributable to the historical underrepresentation of female directors, although the concept may still suggest a propensity to favour filmmakers with counter-narrative leanings (Slobodian 2012: 162).

This erroneous ideation is perhaps reflected in the few relatively short reviews by Greek male critics and reviewers which had appeared online for a short period of time but are not available anymore. Though most had acknowledged that the film accurately reflects the rapid changes in the city's daily life and highlights the emotional nostalgia of its inhabitants for a more 'human' past, some then erected artificial standards to judge it by. One such reviewer found the film's scenes to be self-contained but ultimately disconnected, and presenting an idealised resolution which aims exclusively at emotional redemption but that "behind the apparent innocence of the 'gold dust', lies the camouflaged guilt of resignation and easy vindication"; he then continued that "*Gold Dust* is based on the viewer's good intentions, without any deep sociopolitical grounding … a film opposed strictly emotionally, and in essence somewhat anaemically, to the bourgeois comings and goings of Western civilisation".

Another reviewer, critical of Manda's aesthetic, had found her approach 'infuriating', criticising the film for being anachronistic, with sloppy rhythms, misplaced 'repérage' (location scouting), and problematic photography; yet he gave no explanation for his narrow-minded view. In another, rather sarcastic review, Petros Kalogeras regards the film's intent as an attack on Athens and its people. What appears to have provoked his ire is Manda's anguish over the city's decline, which he wilfully misreads as a polemic against Athens and its residents, rather than as a lament for a city whose older generations may still remember in its better days (Kalogeras 2010). Konstantinos Aivaliotis takes a curious perspective in finding the plot and characters stereotypical, criticising the film for having left us at its halfway mark with good intentions but never quite reaching a final climax (Aivaliotis 2010).

Thodoris Koutsogiannopoulos, whose critique has been published in LiFO, even gets the first name of the director wrong, consistently referring to her as Katerina (instead of Margarita) in his review that awards the film just 2.5 stars out of 5. His patronising assessment is entirely off the mark, though he concedes a few more positive notes about the film. For him, "The key to the film is the character of the dead mother, a rather depressive personality who haunts her three children with different burdens" (Koutsogiannopoulos 2010). From such reviews, it is evident that the film's vision has been misconstrued and critiqued against arbitrary parameters, with the critics overlooking the subtlety and nuance of Manda's art, which has been subordinated to a perceived lack of political agenda. This overlooks the fact that the film's aim is not to conduct a philosophical study or advance a politico-ideological agenda, but rather to offer a psychological exploration of the emotions and behaviours of familiar characters among Athens' everyday inhabitants.

In contrast, the only female reviewer whose review could be found online, Xeni Mouhimoglou, journalist and theatre critic, is an insightful observer of the film's subtleties, and in her astute analysis gives it a detailed, calm and positive review, with clarity and poignancy. She praises the film for its clear, cohesive storytelling and authentic voice that avoids unnecessary stylistic excess. Through the emotionally fraught decision of whether to sell their family home in a rapidly changing Athens, she finds that the film tenderly explores themes of alienation, memory, and generational disconnect. Mouhimoglou notes that Manda subtly evokes her admiration for Michelangelo Antonioni, notably through a fleeting scene of Monica Vitti on-screen in his *Red Desert*, and the film culminates in a poignant rediscovery of childhood innocence via a keepsake album, uniting the siblings in a shimmering moment of shared vulnerability (Mouhimoglou 2009).

5.2.5 Milieu

The film's visual directness and depth have a familiar and enduring quality. Although the subject matter pertaining to its trio of siblings (a brother and two sisters) is neither exceptional nor unique, there being a host of Greek films featuring family dynamics between siblings[51], its treatment of the habitus and locus of its characters rings uncommonly true and honest. The depictions of Athens in its inner city, as well as its leafier suburbs, are handled in meticulous detail over its temporal transformation in the years leading up to the twenty-first century, and bring up vivid recollections of the city in those viewers who have witnessed it firsthand. It is a quality that reverberates with the audience for its aesthetic and visual mastery as manifested by its award-winning festival reception.

Despite initial recognition during the international film festival circuit, the film's subsequent distribution, both domestically and internationally, has largely conformed to established patterns of limited visibility. Internationally, Greek cinema, burdened by persistent economic challenges and stereotypical representations of Southern Europe, frequently encounters a form of geographic marginalisation, relegating it to niche audiences. This categorisation, however, lacks substantive justification, as "Greek media and culture is not, and should not be seen as, a set of insular practices relevant only to those living within the geographical boundaries of the Greek nation state, or accessible only to those who speak the Greek language" (Papadimitriou 2015: 3).

Another misattribution at play, especially in the domestic sphere, is potentially the status of 'narrative genre'[52] which has not been adequately represented in an era where more symbolic genres, such as the *Greek Weird Wave*[53], have come into prominence in recent years. With its dynamic minority support among the urban elites, the new genre has captured the imagination of many disenfranchised

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[51] Some notable examples are the two sisters and their male cousin in Frieda Liappa's 1981 film *Love Wanders in the Night (Οι δρόμοι της αγάπης είναι νυχτερινοί)*, and the two half-sisters in Vasilis Georgiadis' 1962 film *Rage (Οργή)*.

[52] In the sense of a genre that can be a vehicle for exploring tragedy (Olivero 2018: 43)

[53] A disparate and not well-defined subcategory of contemporary 'festival films', known collectively as 'Greek New Wave', which tends to attribute common characteristics to films of quite distinct aesthetics.

film critics and has gained a lot of traction with international film festival audiences (Nikolaidou 2014: 21). Its abstract symbolism, though challenging for regular audiences, dominates recent aesthetic paradigms which reflect current disillusionment with a mainstream reading of a global identification disconnected from real world problems. Manda's narrative approach, with its pronounced focus on familial and domestic themes, arguably subverts prevailing cinematic trends. Nevertheless, the film's accessible stylistic choices and its resonance with universal individual experiences afford it the potential for broader demographic appeal.

Manda's work engages with a complex tapestry of themes, including the juxtaposition of intergenerational gender representations and feminist issues. From a psychodynamic perspective, the film reveals the psychological origins of the adult characters' actions that are rooted in childhood recollections, the gendered behaviours of their parents, and their social interactions with peers during a period of significant societal change and upheaval. As already mentioned, feminist film theory, often narrowly focused on sexual difference, draws from Freudian psychoanalysis to explain cinematic representation through unconscious sexual drives and the impact of childhood parental attachments. One of its key concepts has been the *male gaze* with its objectification of women as sexual objects for the gratification of the male, thus depriving women of agency (Mulvey and Rogers 2015: 23).

Although there is a well-established gender identity in each of Manda's characters, it is neither the primary nor predominant one. Sexism does not take centre stage in the depiction of relationships between the adult characters. It is but an intergenerational afterthought when comparing their parents' lives to their own. The male protagonists' advocacy for the sale of the family home, though presented with subtle justifications, highlights a tension between immediate self-interest and a longer-term sense of responsibility towards the next generation. This desire for financial security, while ostensibly aimed at improving the future prospects of their descendants, ultimately manifests as a materialistic drive, underscoring the complexities inherent in their decision-making. Anna, who is childless and older than her sister, Amalia, appears to be more emotionally attached to her late mother and the family home.

Manda's realistically drawn protagonists unveil lingering legacies of patriarchy in their career choices, as well as the traditionality of their domestic lives. After working in an office full of women,

Amalia has to cook in her kitchen with the frustration of mundanity painted all over her face. Her worries and frustrations do not end with her return home. Though the family unit has shrunk from a generation ago, children remain a major priority for women; her parents' three-children family paradigm is now down to one child for her and her brother – or none in the case of Anna; another aspect of the reality of low birth rates in Greece today.

From a cinematic point of view, Manda rewards the careful observer with a rich semiotic texture; the deeper a viewer delves, the more symbolism they discover, even in the etymology of the siblings' names, all starting with A, just like their city, Athens[54]. The characters' dress codes, makeup and general attire follow the conventions of the spaces they inhabit, at work in a bank, at the office, or at home respectively. No random or extraneous imagery ever litters the scenery with irrelevancies. The siblings' strained relationships mirror those within their respective families, providing fertile ground for exploring each character's perspective. It is Manda's deliberate focus on family dynamics that produces a deep identification of the viewer with her characters and their daily lives. A highly skilled observer of the human condition, her cinematic character creations are frank, credible, authentic, and multidimensional. Through their interplay, she delves deeply into their psychological makeup to reveal their inner thoughts and struggles, never dismissing or trivialising them, and always treating them with intelligence and deference.

The film also deals with the effects of alienation and loneliness that rampant change in one's living environment can have on the individual. The transformation of Athens into a concrete jungle, the selling of neighbours' properties to developers in exchange for apartments in the new building [55], bears the same heavy burden on Anna today as on her mother's psyche a generation before. Manda's narrative style, which parallels that of her mentor, Theo Angelopoulos, is a deliberate choice that allows her to reach her audience and is by no means an indication of old-fashioned conformism. It is,

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[54] Alexis from Alexander: Greek – meaning defender of men; e.g. Alexander the Great
Anna: Hebrew Hannah – meaning gracious, merciful; e.g. mother of Virgin Mary
Amalia: Germanic word 'amal' meaning work, activity; e.g. Queen Amalia, wife of King Otto of Greece
Representing perhaps 3 ages of Greece: Antiquity–Christianity–Modern Era

[55] A popular method of selling properties in Greek cities, termed 'με αντιπαροχή', where instead of monetary payment, the vendor, following negotiations with the developer, receives a number of units in the block when it is built.

instead, a search for meaning in everyday situations where change becomes a catalyst for exploring familial conflict and ways to resolve it. In this context a lack of adequate academic scholarship into Greek narrative cinema is lamentable and leaves a gap in the literature that inhibits and undervalues women's cinematic contribution and disadvantages their potential audience.

5.2.6 Childhood

The relationship between the siblings is loving and close. Theirs was a happy family, living in an urban, middle-class environment in the Greek capital; their cultural values were traditional, yet liberal and not antiquated. As a good eldest son, Alexis was expected to excel at school, get a highly coveted law degree, and follow in his father's footsteps by taking over his legal practice. He had no choice; his father had warned him he would not support him financially had he not done what was expected of him, as dictated by pragmatism, convention, tradition and patriarchy. Being a girl, Anna had been allowed to choose her future vocation and her father had no designs to pressure her, or meddle in her choice of profession. Indeed, she had been free to pursue a fulfilling artistic career which provided her with a meaningful alternative to a tedious job, unlike that of her sister's at the bank.

In her sophisticated ability for introspection and honesty, Manda has moulded her characters to reflect her own sincere internal dialogue. Her characters represent different perspectives which are never trivialised; she recognises the validity of their differing points of view. Her male characters are not devalued, nor do they exhibit any negative stereotypical qualities; they retain their authentic voices and are neither caricatures, nor contrived or castrated. The narrative device of deliberating the fate of the old family home serves to elucidate the underlying dynamics within the family.

Alexis wishes to sell the family home, Anna opposes the sale, and Amalia remains hesitant. A mutual lack of trust emerges among the siblings, with accusations of self-interest at its core. Their positions are sharply opposed: Alexis frames his sense of duty around his young family, while Anna is devoted to their parents and to preserving the past. Alexis interprets Anna's refusal to sell as self-indulgent and childish, whereas Anna perceives his eagerness to sell as driven by monetary greed. While there is friction between the siblings due to the impending decision that divides them, there is evident fondness in their interactions, which would contradict any residual Freudian 'primal hatred' between

siblings due to rivalry for the attention of the parents. Indeed, as the film progresses, the deep love sensed between the siblings is not unlike others to be found in classic literature (Coles 2018: 2, 92).

Manda's representations of gender are consistently authentic across all characters. The three female figures – two sisters and their mother – are crafted to constitute an imagined cultural portrayal of womanhood within a Greek context. They represent three distinct, strong personalities with a few common characteristics, evident even diachronically in the respective socio-historical specificities of their generations; they possess 'agency and self-determination' (De Lauretis 1987: 9). They are not a passive spectacle, nor do they elicit passivity in their spectators; the binary opposition linking masculinity to activity and femininity to passivity is largely irrelevant within this contemporary context.

The daughters' personalities speak with authority and assertiveness, and the maternal voice, far from being silenced, plays a dominant and defining role, portrayed in a compelling and powerful manner. Although her generation may not have been allowed to live a fully self-actualising life, she has remained aware of its boundaries and the choices available within them, and though her absence places her in a position of exteriority and detaches her voice from her corporeal body, she remains central to the unfolding narrative and is by no means disembodied (Chaudhuri 2006: 55). Narrative is a central feature of Manda's film, engaging the audience with the real issues affecting each character. While these problems are rooted in local contexts and shaped by the film's distinctive mise-en-scène, they possess global dimensions, manifesting differently across settings yet remaining relevant to audiences worldwide (De Lauretis 1990: 17).

Although Manda speaks through the daughters from a contemporary female perspective, her analysis of power relations encompasses the respective dynamics of both her own and her parents' generation, and her film is neither only about women, nor against men (Chaudhuri 2006: 4). Her film is not made 'by a woman for women'; it addresses all points of identification in its narrative strategies. Amalia's domestic duties as a wife do not prevent her from exercising agency in deciding when to respond to her husband's phone calls, though feelings of guilt are perceptibly present – similar to many working women today, who fear neglecting their children, whether they attribute this to their careers or to societal expectations of femininity (Friedan and Quindlen 2001: 18).

The alienation among family members, due to long hours of work or disaffection with one's lifestyle, has also created a lonely experience of living, with or without a partner, that is typical of this century. A psychoanalytic description of the 'negative Oedipus complex' (Davies 2015: 268) as a result of separation from the mother – in this case by her death – would seem to be present in both female protagonists, perhaps slightly more so in Anna, where Mother has retained her status as an object of adoration past childhood, due to unresolved tensions through to maturity. The need to adapt to a rapidly changing environment may have further delayed their separation from the mother, fostering a tendency to cling to past stability, although the siblings' judgments of their parents remain largely unexplored. It is only through rare references that we can gauge the role of the parents, such as in Alexis' choice of career, and only when this is essential and conducive to understanding a particular character's personality.

Manda imbues her characters with nuanced sensitivities, avoiding unrealistic generalisations and broad classifications. The humour reflected in their occasionally mocking expressions further conveys authentic human reactions, providing a subtle, light-hearted touch. Viewers can identify with the characters across age, gender, space, and time, and notably, there are no objectified female figures subjected to a scopophilic gaze – the Freudian concept of 'pleasure in looking' (Mulvey 1989a: 18). Although males retain some traditional masculine characteristics in the scenes depicting workplace engagement and occasional absence from the general running of the household or child-rearing, they have a certain willingness to share in those duties when the need arises, though perhaps somewhat reluctantly at first.

In this incarnation, the female is a much more complex and subtle entity than a principally Freudian construct. Though the masculine is evident in the three main male characters – the unseen father, his son and his son-in-law – whose materialistic outlook would stereotypically be considered at odds with feminine emotionality, other facets of their masculinity have undergone a substantial transformation through the generations. Indeed, societal and technological change has empowered both genders to be less bound by convention, and more flexible in their lifestyle choices, enabling them to cross the proverbial divide between male breadwinning roles and female domesticity.

5.2.7 The City

A ‘city film’, encapsulating experiences within the urban landscape, *Gold Dust* is a reference to the ‘golden dust’ of things past, distant memories hallowed by the passage of time and the nostalgia of an idealised and innocent life. A film that “dives into the Athenian negative … [and is] imbued with nostalgia for the ideal home, in which by now only death and absence exist” (Karalis 2012: 274). It is also an elegy to Athens, and a lament for a chaotic pace of change that has overturned its finely balanced familial relationships and overpowered the city without resolving, or even tackling, any of its longstanding externally imposed challenges in its struggle to adapt.

The film juxtaposes the old and the new, contrasting the ‘everyday dust of life’ in the Athenian urban landscape – both outdoor and indoor – where time is scarce and mobile phones dominate. This contrast is further evident in the stillness of empty apartments, shuttered as soon as their inhabitants return from work, rushing to fulfil domestic duties against the relentless ticking of the clock. Meetings are hurried, frequently interrupted by the lighting of a cigarette, a persistent pastime for many of the city’s inhabitants. Commonplace intolerance emerges as a chosen response to life’s enduring hardships, which everyone may either experience or display themselves. Alienation between family members turns them from sources of support for each other to sources of angst and animosity. The city is constantly at war with its citizens and its own decay, alienating its inhabitants through its rapid transformation from familiar to unfamiliar space. The pace of modern life grinds to a halt behind the wheel amid the relentless congestion of traffic. Human contact is marred by friction with an exasperated taxi driver, an antagonistic co-worker, an intolerant neighbour, a careless fellow pedestrian.

5.2.8 Life & the City

Within the first few minutes of the film, a prearranged meeting of the siblings at the brother’s office is taking place, to decide the fate of the family home. If they decide to sell it, the house, like any remaining single dwelling in Athens, is sure to be sold to a developer who will erect yet another apartment block in its place, among a sea of similarly impersonal residential monstrosities. Another haphazardly constructed building, the result of the modernisation project that saw a rural exodus and internal migration into the city, characterised by rapid urban reconstruction and uneven development

of the capital, which resulted in unprecedented centralisation, more than doubling the population of Athens in just 30 years from the 1950s to the 1980s (Poupou 2012: 264).

The ensuing camera shots construct a compellingly symbolic mosaic of modern urban life. Anna navigates the noisy and congested streetscape of Athens, a constant reminder of the city's transformation and its impact on her daily routine and wellbeing. Amalia returns late, yet again, to her desk at the bank, attributing her delay to traffic, only to be met with her colleague's condescending remark that such delays are an everyday occurrence. Meanwhile, Alexis resumes his routine duties. In an effort to reconnect with her past, Anna visits a local park, where a boy plays 'houses' with stones, prompting her to recall playing the same game as a child. The sequence conveys a sense of continuity and change: everything, and yet nothing, has altered.

Back from work, the siblings experience domesticity in their different ways, dictated by their married, divorced or single status, though their sense of frustration and alienation is similarly palpable. In her home, Amalia is cooking dinner on her own, with her son in the loungeroom totally absorbed in his computer soccer game. Her husband returns home, busily talking to a colleague on his mobile. He scoffs when he learns that Anna does not want to sell the house and accuses her of being self-centred and living in a utopian romantic fantasy.

Having separated from his wife, Alexis returns to an empty house. A message waiting for him from his ex-wife reminds him that he has forgotten to arrange their son's swimming lessons. He listens disinterestedly to the newsreader on TV, and the self-important but meaningless drivel of the political leaders' speeches. A sense of nihilism pervades any interest in politics and civics. The camera cuts to Anna practising the piano alone in her flat, amidst an annoyed female neighbour's reproofs banging on the walls for Anna to stop playing. She opens her front door and the echo of her neighbour's verbal abuse intensifies. With no other choice, she escapes to the balcony to hum a tune and gaze at the repeated pattern of the neighbouring units, like stacked matchboxes, some occupied by tenants who are similarly out on their balconies. At her spacious family home, she could play her piano unimpeded, but modern apartment living does not afford her similar freedoms – yet another loss to her quality of life.

Art, this time in the form of cinema, provides Anna with a source of perspective when, looking for inspiration, she goes to the movies, still alone in a virtually empty cinema. In a hint of autobiographical gesture, she watches Michelangelo Antonioni's *Red Desert*, the 1964 film that marked Manda's cinematic awakening, and a tribute to one of her favourite directors – a bleak vision of a forbidding industrial landscape. Her sense of frustration continues unabated for Anna in a taxi the next day. The perpetually agitated taxi driver, confronted on a constant basis by the heavy and relentless traffic, vents his frustrations on passengers, incessantly complaining in a rude and racist manner. Weary of his angry tirades, Anna demands that he stops the taxi, and gets out exasperated. Aggravated by the insult and the lost fare, he responds with another tirade, lashing out at the surrounding drivers, who, equally frustrated, honk to urge him forward. Arriving late at her quartet's rehearsal, Anna apologises, only to make a mistake while playing the insufficiently rehearsed piece.

In comical scenes at the bank, though astonishingly realistic for anyone who has had firsthand experience of similar situations in Athens, Amalia is not faring better. The long queue is getting restless and her brother is asking her on the phone to mediate with Anna, who is not answering his calls. The customer at the head of the queue takes his seat, asking for a loan. Under pressure, Amalia angrily puts an end to her brother's call by shouting out at him that she is busy: if Alexis wants to talk to Anna, he should call her himself, she says; she cannot always be the mediator. She turns to her stunned customer and apologises profusely. Heeding Amalia's advice, Alexis calls Anna, leaving her messages that she keeps ignoring.

The episodic scenery, even when depicting frustration, is never devoid of humour in the dialogues, soliloquies, mutterings and body language of the characters: when Alexis' takeaway coffee is accidentally spilled by the café's owner; when Michalis – Anna's ex-boyfriend and violinist in the quartet – asks her to go for a coffee at the end of their rehearsal and she declines on account of a lesson that she claims she has; when Amalia is returning home with her hands full of shopping, unable to answer her incessantly ringing mobile that is still blaring as she opens the door, and on hearing her husband's message that he will be home late, she mocks: "Yes; because you come home early any other day".

Manda continues to alternate her focus in scenes of frustration, loneliness and alienation between the siblings. Everyone is slowly reaching their tipping point. Alexis sits on a bench outside a shop

observing the traffic. Elsewhere, on another bench, the camera shows Anna waiting for her bus. The man next to her is holding a bunch of flowers and complains about the lack of state polity – a major grievance for Greeks, that regularly pervades daily conversations. Back in her kitchen, washing up, Amalia calls out to her son to stop playing his car-chase video game and get ready for sleep; a scene typical of many homes with children now addicted to games. He is not compliant, and she comically parrots his standard "Yeah, OK" response.

In another taxi, a common mode of transport for Athenians, due to their overabundance and affordability, Anna listens to the news on the taxi's radio about the new Acropolis Museum; the old museum's exhibits are gradually being transferred to the new museum nearby. In typical fashion, though portrayed with irony, the taxi driver, like every Greek resident, has strong opinions about everything, regardless of how superficially they tend to be formed. While acknowledging his lack of expertise, and his having only ever visited the Acropolis once – at the age of 20–22 as he admits – he declares that he enjoys seeing it from down below every day and does not approve of 'them' moving 'it' to protect 'it' from pollution. "When the time comes, the Acropolis should be allowed to fall on its own rock; not to be moved like a mummy to a museum", he contends.

5.2.9 Athens in History

The relationship between an ancient city like Athens and its modern inhabitants embodies a deep-rooted quandary, revealing an unresolved individual identity crisis, with the taxi driver serving as a counterpoint. A city must be liveable for all the different sections of society that have to coexist, and history cannot be the sole arbiter of its worth, regardless of the value it represents for a universal humanity. From a distance, the Acropolis is a treasured museum of a revered monument to democracy and freedom. An emblematic ideal that needs to be preserved for future generations. But a never-ending series of financial crises, amid Athens' chequered history, has caused rampant change, along with the ensuing chaos, hard for its inhabitants to contend with. Yet, fundamentally, looking up from street level, the Acropolis cuts a lithe and elegant aesthetic for any one of its diverse observers.

The aesthetic of the landmark, with its reputation around the globe, is a powerful presence in a city of restricted building heights which ensure that the monument is prominent enough and can always remind its citizens of its glorious past – though its history has remained largely unknown to them.

Having endured four centuries of Ottoman rule and numerous foreign invasions, Greece's Acropolis remains a potent symbol of endurance and continuity, even in its present ruinous state. For all the adoration of their classical past, however, little understanding of its philosophical and political foundations has registered on its inhabitants' perceptions since their independence – over two hundred years ago. The contrasting forces of Greek antiquity and biblical monotheism have created in them a confusing ideation of a homogeneous entity.

This fixation with antiquity and ruins, though, does not end at the Greek borders. The 2009 Greek financial crisis revealed itself to be a great source of 'inspiration' for mockery, with foreign editorial cartoons depicting mythological and historical themes juxtaposed with scenes of tragedy or comedy, with various captions conveying their creators' intended messages (Hamilakis 2016: 234). Classical ruins, surviving in their currently fragmentary form, lose their meaning and connotations with the past in these depictions, and are typically employed to render a sinister message of decline and irreversible damage, highlighting the perceived negligence of their current stewards by depicting Modern Greece as "a nation apart" (Hamilakis 2016: 237).

In an interview on the occasion of the release of her second feature film *Forever*, Manda reveals that like in *Gold Dust*, her motivation stemmed from a profound desire to portray Athens cinematically. She views Athens as a city profoundly isolated, subjected to the indignities of its residents and authorities alike. This lack of affection, in their perspective, renders the city internally desolate. Though its streets are filled with noise, this cacophony does not equate to genuine vitality. Yet, paradoxically, Athens maintains a poignant dignity within its solitude. As Athens holds a place akin to her ancestral home, this perceived decay inflicts considerable emotional pain to her and it is her weariness of the contemporary inundation of images that led her to seek in *Forever* a return to the foundational elements of cinema: a static camera and two actors. Her aim was to craft an elegy on silence, a lament for Athens, in which the narrative arises not from explicit depictions of history, but from the evocative power of the cinematic images themselves, an approach that can arguably be said to apply equally to *Gold Dust*; a cinematic requiem for a city perceived as lost, highlighting its silent, enduring grace amidst its perceived abandonment (Kontos 2015).

5.2.10 Finding Home

Anna and her siblings represent three distinct points of view. Anna emerges as the main character, as indicated by the use of 'point-of-view' camera shots aligned with her perspective. Her character mirrors the filmmaker in many ways: a dominant personality, she advocates not for tradition per se, but for safeguarding what she considers worthwhile from the past. Anna is dynamic and articulate, full of nostalgia for her childhood home, which she wants to keep in the family, hoping that in retaining ownership of it, she may honour the memory of her mother, her childhood, and a revered bygone era. For her, it is the quintessential family home, embodying the sacred memories of a blissful, carefree childhood; she cannot relinquish it without first mourning its loss – a process she expects, even demands, her siblings to undertake as well.

For Anna, family still retains its central position as an image of unity, forming "the traditional model for the construction of all other collective identities (community, town, nation)" (Silverman 2017: 41–42). She feels a debt of existence to the ancestors which becomes an "infinite debt" in a historical and cultural sense (Hamilakis 2016: 239). On a micro level, it is an identity which bonds her to the home as 'place', constructed along similar lines to the way national identity is created on the strength of cultural factors on a macro level (Ehala 2017: 9). In spite of Manda's own self-identification with Anna, however, she has imbued Amalia's conciliatory character with a pivotal role within the triumvirate of the siblings' perspectives, as Amalia is the one to patiently uncover the diary which will become the catalyst in helping them to 'cross the Rubicon' and overcome the self-imposed and exaggerated, yet ultimately surmountable, impasse. Far from irrational, it is she who has had the resolve, "with rationality and transcendence of body", to methodically explore and discover a way to unravel the complex and impenetrable emotions that were preventing them from understanding their intangible compulsion of preserving the past (Chaudhuri 2006: 16).

The new era has invested the sisters with agency and an ability to exercise their own voice by speaking up – or choosing to remain silent. Man has not remained the all-dominant paradigm he once was, and gender is but one attribute through which to interrogate the film's characters. Even the maternal voice of the diary, which had kept silent while the mother was still alive, has now been heard and established as a discursive agent, in opposition to when she was alive but voiceless (Smelik 1998: 19). The siblings have emphatically decided to resume their familial bond and end their separatism.

The obstacle of separatism between the siblings has been at the heart of the drama, whose goal has been to achieve reconciliation. The mother's diary serves as the narrative device that brings the siblings back together, the "message from the past" that Manda is referring to in her synopsis. With the discovery and sharing of the diary comes the realisation of the repeating cycle of life which opens the way to a new understanding between the siblings that will allow them to acknowledge their feelings for one another and grieve for the loss of the past, but live for the hope of the future. The past has reshaped the present in a way their mother would have doubtless wished for but could never have imagined. The reading of the diary has shone a light on the 'gold dust' of their childhood memories, that can now be lifted.

Manda's camera angles and close-ups, taken by cinematographer Kostas Gikas[56], add a visual intimacy to the moments shared by the sisters while reading the diary in a closeup shot of bonding, and the lighting varies from the muted and dark golden yellow hues of the family home, to the whitewashed, grey at times, rhythmically synchronised Athenian cityscape and skyline rolling in the background. Bustling urban scenes alternate with familial moments linked to the mother's diary, portraying each sibling as she speaks of them. The music the sisters play on the piano, and the tunes they hum, heighten the viewer's emotional attachment to the characters, and awaken deep-seated memories from songs of the era, weaving together seamlessly the two timelines.

The mother's narration is enriched with an ethnographic history of technological innovation when she describes her 'contact' with the world at large in the form of cinema newsreels and, later, television. The three-dimensional world beckoned through the two-dimensional cinema or television screen, but she was confined within the walls of her home. Technology was bringing the faraway world closer together. The unfolding world events filled her alternately with awe and sorrow. Like most others, she was deeply saddened by the Kennedy assassinations, but the moon landing had given her hope for the next generation and for the whole of humanity. Yet, the variability of the human condition was ever-present. Her children's blossoming into adulthood was a bittersweet realisation, as it heralded a permanent change in her life, with the impending emptiness brought on by their

[56] Considered to be among the ten best Greek cinematographers, his credits include the 1993 short *A Strange Film (Μια περίεργη ταινία)* written and directed by himself, the 2002 feature *The Loser Takes All (Ο χαμένος τα παίρνει όλα)* written and directed by Nikos Nikolaidis, and Manda's 2014 feature *Forever (Για πάντα)*.

inevitable departure. She confided her deepest thoughts in her diary, but when a young Amalia once saw her writing in it, she felt exposed and ashamed. She could not, then, have anticipated the cathartic impact of this very diary on her children at the present time.

Ultimately, the themes of childhood, place and home in *Gold Dust* combine to build a cohesive image of 'family' and 'polis' that resonates with the viewer. The film's components come together to complement each other; lighting, colours, camera angles, music, exterior and interior spaces all unite to a flawless whole. Dialogue and body language are meticulously constructed and judiciously employed so as not to aggrandise the realism. The plot is masterfully constructed for exploring issues and themes of contemporary living, not only in the conception of the characters, but also the depiction of Athens, the fourth protagonist, as Manda has referred to the city in interviews: an overpopulated, neurotic city, whose inhabitants' exasperation places them on edge and fills them with anxiety.

Near the end of the film, the drama reaches its climax when Anna visits Alexis at his office, ready for the conversation they never had. She shows him the diary and tells him "Everything we have failed to speak about is in here. Mother had to die for us to grow up". She then breaks the ice and starts playing with his tie; they engage in a mock tug-of-war just like when they were children; it is a scene dominated by the manifestations of trust, security, intimacy and mutuality that have re-emerged to seal their newfound sibling bond. While the diary's epilogue is read, Manos Hadjidakis is heard singing his song *Kyrie*, sealing within it the emotion of loss, when the screen goes dark.

5.2.11 Concluding Remarks

Manda's film brings the sensitivity of a woman's perspective into a serious exploration of family relationships. It is a soulful reminiscence of childhood and a poignant portrayal of the loss of innocence into adulthood. It is also an authentic, sincere and frank depiction of a contemporary Athenian reality, as witnessed by many of its current inhabitants. It is a complex synthesis of its history, politics, economics, social conditions, class and aesthetics, accurately communicated by a woman born and bred in the city; it is intelligently devised and impeccably executed; a film that speaks the voice of its creator, its auteur. As such, it goes beyond the boundaries of its plot, and encompasses the concerns and anxieties of an entire population for their future.

Despite the fracturing and contraction of the nuclear family and the dispersion of the extended one, the family continues to play a pivotal role in addressing enduring interpersonal issues. The family unit remains both the site where many of society's problems originate and the arena in which solutions can be sought. Notably, although the sisters inhabit a patriarchal political world, they are never directly engaged in its politics – a stance some critics may have construed as a weakness, but has clearly been deemed a strength by those who bestowed on Manda the 2009 Athens Panorama of European Cinema Audience Award.

The film's greatest assets are its nuance, attention to detail and complexity. Each of the main characters, consistent with, but not bound by, gender stereotypes, is eventually compelled to undergo a substantial transformation, ultimately motivated from within, but also informed by sibling and familial love. It is a meditation on what is invariably lost on the altar of an instantly gratifying quest for change that sweeps away humanity with a perpetually unfulfilled promise of a utopian ideation and, ultimately, demonstrates the value of quiet introspection in looking for answers that lie within. The need for connectedness, so richly documented in the mother's diary, reflects and mirrors our own.

As exemplified by Manda's *Gold Dust*, women's films are diverse, proving the well-known adage that "gender is not a genre". And yet, there are important convergences when women tell their own stories – whether as filmmakers, cinematographers, screenwriters, producers or actors. By addressing female representation and spectatorship, the film resists rigid psychoanalytic categorisation, endowing its characters with depth and authenticity. The nuanced feminine perspective subtly woven into the narrative facilitates the resolution of the siblings' impasse and the restoration of their strong bonds, as powerfully implied in the conclusion. The film testifies to the complexity of human emotions, portraying them with both veracity and imaginative vitality, rather than reducing them to abstract concepts devoid of essence.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

6.1 Discussion & Concluding Remarks

The aim of this thesis was to investigate and reveal significant commonalities in the cinematic representations of emotional intimacy and power dynamics within social and familial contexts in narrative features by women filmmakers. The hypothesis posits that the female gaze is not merely a counter-narrative to the objectification of the male gaze, or a reaction to external pronouncements of gender ideation, but consists of the internalised ways in which experience shapes memory and perception, particularly regarding the depiction of subtle emotional cues and relational power imbalances. It is a distinct mode of seeing, remembering, and interpreting the world rooted in the unique experiences of being born female. This perspective begins to form within the 'internalised prism' of the family, where early interactions, observations, and emotional imprints shape a child's understanding of relationships, power dynamics, and self-perception. For females, this familial prism often involves navigating gendered expectations, observing female roles, and internalising the emotional landscape associated with womanhood. These experiences, often subtle and deeply personal, contribute to a unique perceptual framework that influences how they perceive and remember the world.

Through a comparative analysis, employing narrative and semiotic modes, the study has confirmed my working hypothesis by identifying recurring patterns in the depiction of female characters. Specifically, I have found a consistent tendency for these films to portray women as prioritising the wellbeing and needs of their family members over their own individual aspirations and desires. The study has also revealed a prevalent portrayal of women exhibiting altruistic qualities, characterised by selflessness and compassion. In Marketaki's *John the Violent*, this nurturing role was extended by the victim to her fiancé's family at her own expense. This self-sacrifice, on the other hand, is turned on its head when we witness the support and compassion shown by female audience members towards the perpetrator during and after the trial. By refusing to acknowledge the horror and senseless murder of the female victim, they expose a deeply troubling dynamic that privileges empathy for the perpetrator at the expense of their own sex.

In Liappa's *Love Wanders in the Night*, the older sister sacrifices herself for the happiness of her younger sibling, though the younger woman does not embark on her new life unencumbered and

guiltless. The younger sister also sacrifices her artistic skills by not pursuing a career in the Arts, unlike her male cousin who established his in Paris, but conforming to tradition when it comes to the expectations placed on females. In Manda's *Gold Dust*, despite their different life stages, the siblings' respect for the memory of their parents, as reflected by the difficult decision to dispose of the family home, brings them together and allows them to move forward in unity. But the catalyst that finally resolves the standoff in the conflict between the two older siblings, a brother and a sister, is brought about by the younger sister's loving support which brokers the rapport with the aid of their mother's diary, highlighting the fact that love and identity are rooted in memory and time.

6.1.1 Female Representation

A simple test of female representation in films is often measured by the key criterion of the so-called Bechdel Test, introduced in 1985 by American cartoonist Alison Bechdel. The test assesses whether the film features at least two named female characters who engage in dialogue that extends beyond discussions centred on male figures. The test highlights gender disparities in a generic way, but it has limitations, as a film can pass the test while still portraying women in minor or stereotypical roles, or fail despite featuring complex female characters (Song, Olivo, and Lancaster 2023: 4). Content analysis, on the other hand, provides a more substantial and detailed examination by analysing aspects such as dialogue, screen time, character traits, and narrative function. It allows for both qualitative and quantitative assessments of how women are represented. When used together, the Bechdel Test offers a basic measure of female presence, while content analysis provides deeper insights into the nature of that representation. It is clear that all three films under consideration do fulfil both sets of criteria.

As expected, films by female directors tend to positively adhere to these principles, but without neglecting a deep understanding of both genders, whose interactions often revolve around existential concerns, familial dynamics, professional aspirations, or shared emotional experiences, contributing to the films' thematic richness. Such moments not only affirm the autonomy and interiority of the female characters but also reflect a narrative commitment to representing women as complex agents within their own right, rather than as mere extensions of male narratives. Thematic interiority refers to the nuanced exploration of characters' inner lives – their desires, conflicts, perceptions, and emotional landscapes. In the case of female characters, this interiority becomes a powerful narrative

tool, challenging reductive representations and allowing for a deeper engagement with the complexities of womanhood. Rather than positioning women solely in relation to others, especially male figures, these films centre female subjectivity, making visible the private, often unspoken dimensions of their experiences. Through this lens, cinema becomes not only a medium of storytelling but also a space for introspection, where the personal and the political converge in subtle, resonant ways.

Women's personal experiences often cultivate a deeper sense of introspection, particularly in their depiction of loneliness and emotional isolation. Historically, women have been conditioned to engage in self-reflection more than men, due to their cohesive roles within their domestic and social spheres, making them more attuned to the subtleties of human relationships. This tendency influences their approach to storytelling, where personal experience or inherited narratives of female solitude, social expectations, emotional labour, emotional undercurrents and internal conflicts take precedence over external action or dramatic resolution, resulting in a more nuanced portrayal of loneliness and existential struggle. Unlike mainstream narratives, which frequently adhere to market-driven trends, female filmmakers tend to resist these conventions, instead favouring a more organic and contemplative exploration of women's coping mechanisms.

In their explorations of loneliness, women directors frequently attend to the subtle, mundane, and unarticulated dimensions of emotional alienation, rather than to grand existential gestures. While mainstream cinema, often shaped by male perspectives, may aestheticise or romanticise loneliness, female filmmakers frequently ground it in the realities of societal expectations, domestic routines, and the quiet passage of time. Films like the ones studied in this thesis exemplify this approach, where isolation is depicted not through overt narrative devices but through small, individual reactions and restrained emotional expression. Female filmmakers often also display a resistance to idealisation and market-driven representations of women's struggles. Rather than resolving loneliness through conventional narrative arcs such as romance or redemption, they present it as a sustained, ambiguous state, allowing for a more profound psychological exploration. The introspection found in female-directed films is also a response to historical marginalisation, where women have had to carve out their own space, often prioritising personal truth over commercial viability.

As a result, women directors tend to depict the struggles of women with greater emotional depth and authenticity, shaped less by passing cinematic fashions or ideology-driven tropes. Their work arises from necessity rather than market conformity, drawing on a longstanding tradition of challenging dominant storytelling through a sustained focus on interiority and the difficulties women face in navigating a world structured by external forces beyond their control. Within this approach, moral certainties are often unsettled, as the narratives unfold in liminal spaces that resist fixed definitions and expose the fragility of accepted codes of conduct. In doing so, these films not only illuminate the complexities of individual and collective experience but also reshape the moral terrain within which female subjectivity is portrayed.

Unlike interpretations rooted in objectification, this female gaze is not defined in opposition to the male gaze but stands independently as a mode of seeing that prioritises emotional resonance, psychological nuance, and embodied experience. Interpretations of these works, therefore, should be grounded in the dynamics of this gaze, which reorients the viewer's attention toward relational depth, interiority, and the lived realities of women beyond reductive visual consumption. This approach challenges the assumption that the disruption of equality in viewing is rooted solely in objectification. Instead, these films propose a mode of spectatorship that resists reductive consumption and fosters a relational way of seeing that is attentive to the complexity of subjectivity rather than its visual commodification. In fact, any action that reduces an individual to their physical attributes or perceived usefulness establishes a power imbalance that perpetuates stereotypes which undermine equality and people's agency.

Conversely, the classification of a female director's film as a 'chick-flick', or of a female writer's work as 'chick-lit', often sparks objections due to the inherent limitations and negative connotations embedded within these terms. Primarily, such labels tend to trivialise the work, implying a lack of substance and dismissing any complex themes, emotional depth, or social commentary present. This categorisation suggests that the work is just an inherently less serious or important film – purely for entertainment – than other productions intended for a 'general audience'. Such labels impose a gendered limitation, confining the work to a specific, and often narrow, audience, i.e. women, thereby discouraging male engagement and reinforcing the notion that women's stories are niche rather than universal. The stereotypes perpetuated by these labels, which simplify the diverse range of female experiences and perspectives to a limited set of tropes revolving around romance, shopping, and

relationships, often receive less critical attention and appreciation and hinder their ability to reach a wider audience.

In fact, the use of the word ‘chick’ itself can be demeaning, patronising and reductive, implying a condescending tone towards the audience. An indication of this is the number of women who have historically assumed a male nom de plume or use only their initials instead of their given names to avoid categorisation, in order to ensure their work can be judged on its merits, free from the pre-judgment imposed by limiting and often inaccurate gendered labels. All artists generally seek recognition for their work as relevant and valuable to a broad audience, aiming to transcend reductive classifications that limit both interpretation and reach. Rather than being confined to stereotypical categories – such as ‘women’s cinema’, ‘ethnic film’, or other identity-based labels that often carry implicit assumptions – they advocate for their work to be engaged with on its own terms, as complex, multifaceted contributions to the cultural and artistic landscape. Such labels risk marginalising the work and obscuring the intricacies of its themes, aesthetics, and social and political dimensions.

By resisting these limiting frames or narrow expectations, filmmakers assert the universality and depth of their narratives, engaging with a wider range of audiences and contributing to broader sociopolitical discussions. In doing so, they not only claim space within the mainstream but also challenge the boundaries of what is deemed central or peripheral in contemporary cultural production. Yet even creative decisions that resonate with audiences remain fluid, shaped by personal perception and changing circumstances. Through these narratives, the filmmaker articulates her own impressions and anxieties, continually interrogating how she might respond if placed in the same situations as her characters. Filmmaking thus becomes an act of self-exploration: a means of knowing oneself through the construction of others.

Labels such as feminism – especially when confined to specific ‘waves’ or reduced to slogans such as ‘the personal is political’ – do not necessarily aid in fostering genuine progress or mutual understanding across genders. They are potential oversimplifications with unintended consequences in blurring crucial distinctions between the public and private spheres. By politicising every aspect of personal life, they risk diminishing the space for individual autonomy and choice. Not all personal experiences are directly attributable to systemic oppression, and some aspects of life should arguably remain within the realm of personal preference. Over-politicising the personal can be detrimental to

social interaction and lead to a form of moral absolutism, where differing personal choices are viewed as inherently political and therefore morally charged, thus stifling nuanced discussions and creating an environment where individuals feel constantly judged for their personal decisions.

What distinguishes the work of my chosen filmmakers is not adherence to ideological catchphrases, but a deep, perceptive engagement with human dynamics and existential questions. Their films and characters are constructed with narrative aims rooted in emotional complexity and psychological truth rather than ideological prescription. Ambivalence in their storytelling is deliberate, mirroring the contradictions and uncertainties of real life. There are no definitive solutions – what appears progressive in one context may yield regressive consequences in another. In one such narrative, Marketaki's John will find his sense of home and rest in the security of his confinement in the asylum. Liappa's younger sister will find her fulfilment with her cousin, while her older sister will find hers in death. Manda's siblings will find a sense of belonging in their togetherness, whatever decision they may eventually come to as a unit. And as for the legacy of these filmmakers, to paraphrase George Eliot in *Middlemarch*, … the effect of them on those around and those following them has been "incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs" (Eliot and Hornback 2000: 515).

6.1.2 Interpretation of Findings

All three filmmakers are intellectually formidable women whose feminism is grounded in substance, conviction, and quiet strength rather than performative declarations. Their films are marked by clarity, emotional and psychological depth, and are devoid of superficial or reductive narratives. Engaging with feminism as a lived experience rather than dogma, they use cinema as a space for reflection and inquiry, approaching complex human issues with truth and subtlety. Rather than preaching or offering simplistic answers, they explore universal themes through nuanced storytelling and authentic character portrayals. By eschewing didacticism, they create films that invite contemplation and encourage engagement with ambiguity and even contradiction. This approach not only respects the audience's intelligence but also affirms the intricacy of real-life relationships and offer compelling representations of the evolving sociocultural roles of contemporary Greek women. And although the selection of these films was initially predicated on some preconceived logical connections, deeper

analysis revealed a more profound and nuanced interconnectedness, by uncovering subtle thematic echoes, stylistic resonances, and narrative parallels, that not only enhanced comprehension of their nuances but also validated my initial selection process.

While Marketaki and Liappa's political commitments have been well-documented, as they played an active part in the struggle against the dictatorship and were jailed as a consequence of it, their films invite serious analysis precisely because they resist ideological simplification and instead present layered, thought-provoking narratives. Within this complexity, the presence of the female gaze is unmistakable: shaping perspective, framing experience, and offering intimate insight. Frivolous interpretations, therefore, of the type that ignores the victim and focuses all its attention on society's treatment of a disadvantaged man who commits a crime, as has been the case with some interpretations of Marketaki's film, are missing the point the filmmaker is trying to make. Marketaki does not ignore the plight of the perpetrator, but devotes a great amount of time and depth to the victim and her treatment by all parties: by society, by the perpetrator and by the parties involved in the trial, including the police, the media, witnesses, attendees and the public at large who consume the newspapers' sensationalist coverage of the trial on a daily basis and presumes to be well informed and able to form a judgment on the case.

The female gaze in all three films is shown to originate from internalised experiences shaped initially by a familial prism and evolves through continuous interaction with broader societal constructs. It embodies a dynamic interplay between personal perception and external influence, shaping understanding from within rather than merely responding to imposed gender stereotypes; a complex, internalised process, rather than a reactive stance against dominant norms. While societal discourses and media representations undoubtedly inform perception, they do not solely define how women view the world. Perception is fundamentally subjective. Individuals filter the world through personal histories, emotional dispositions, and stored memories. For women, this process is especially pronounced due to the often-heightened awareness of spatial relationships, social dynamics, and emotional undercurrents cultivated through lived experience. A woman's perception of a public space is shaped not only by societal narratives about safety or vulnerability but also by her own past experiences within such spaces as encoded into memory, thus influencing how future encounters are interpreted. This complexity of internalisation determines how external messages are absorbed, processed, and interpreted through a deeply personal lens.

Memory, particularly emotionally charged memory, plays a crucial role in shaping perception. A past experience of objectification may sensitise a woman to subtle cues in future interactions, reinforcing an embodied awareness of power dynamics. This perceptual sensitivity enables her to navigate real, often charged, social environments, though this is not to imply a universal female experience: the female gaze is inherently diverse, varying across individuals, cultures, and historical contexts. Its variability highlights the primacy of individual internal processes in shaping perception. It reflects a rich constellation of personal experiences, memories, and subjective interpretations. It is this internal processing of external realities – rather than passive reception – that defines the female gaze as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon deeply rooted in the specific, embodied lives of women.

The fact that society is constructed by individuals encapsulates a fundamental human journey: the transition from understanding the world through the intimate, often unquestioned lens of one's family, to navigating and interpreting it through the broader, more complex framework of society. This transition involves a significant shift in perspective, a gradual process of externalising ingrained familial values and beliefs and confronting them with the diverse, often conflicting, norms and expectations of the wider world. The internalised prism of family represents the initial, foundational stage of individual development. Within this sphere, individuals are shaped by the specific values, beliefs, and behaviours of their family unit. This prism acts as a filter through which they perceive and understand the world, creating a sense of normalcy and familiarity. Early experiences within the family establish a framework for understanding relationships, social roles, and acceptable behaviour. This internalised process is often characterised by emotional intensity, implicit assumptions, and a limited exposure to alternative perspectives.

As individuals mature and begin to interact with the broader world, they encounter the externalised prism of society which represents the collective norms, values, and expectations of the community at large. It encompasses diverse social institutions, cultural practices, and ideological systems that shape individual behaviour and interaction. This externalised prism is characterised by its complexity, diversity, and often impersonal nature. It demands that individuals negotiate and reconcile their internalised familial values with the external expectations of society. Moving between these two prisms involves a continuous process of negotiation, adaptation, and re-evaluation. Individuals may experience cognitive dissonance as they encounter perspectives that challenge their ingrained beliefs.

They may struggle to reconcile familial loyalty with societal expectations. This journey can lead to personal growth, as individuals develop a more nuanced understanding of themselves and their place in the world. It can also lead to conflict and alienation, as individuals struggle to reconcile their internal and external realities. The impact of this transition shapes individual identity, social behaviour, and worldview. The degree to which individuals successfully navigate this transition can influence their social integration, personal well-being, and overall sense of belonging, which impacts individual development, social dynamics, and the complex interplay between personal experience and social context.

The influence of family on society constitutes a dynamic, interwoven relationship. Families are the primary agents of socialisation. They are the initial environments where individuals learn the fundamental norms, values, and behaviours that underpin societal functioning. This process of socialisation extends beyond basic manners; it encompasses the transmission of cultural heritage, moral codes, and even political ideologies. The family, therefore, acts as a microcosm of society, instilling the building blocks of social order within its members and shaping its demographic landscape. The political sphere is also deeply affected by family dynamics. In essence, families are the foundational units that contribute to the ongoing construction and reconstruction of society. The values, behaviours, and demographics shaped within the family ripple outwards, influencing the broader social, economic, and political reality. While society shapes families through its laws, institutions, and cultural norms, the family, in turn, shapes society by producing the individuals who will ultimately participate in and perpetuate it.

The delicate balance of a thriving society rests, to a significant degree, upon the stability and functionality of its constituent families. When the family, as a foundational unit, fractures, its repercussions ripple outwards, contributing to the fragmentation of society. The family serves as the initial training ground for social interaction, instilling the values of trust, cooperation, and mutual support that are essential for a cohesive community. When families are disrupted by conflict, abuse, or neglect, the very bedrock of social capital begins to erode. Individuals who have experienced such instability may struggle to form healthy relationships, leading to increased social isolation and a pervasive sense of distrust. Children raised in unstable or dysfunctional family environments are at a

heightened risk of developing emotional and behavioural problems, as is the case with Marketaki's John.

Conversely, family is where girls also learn about society's expectations upon them. In a conventional setting, societal expectations and the presence of others act as external regulators, reinforcing moral boundaries. Women are often socially conditioned to prioritise the approval and affirmation of others, a tendency rooted in both cultural expectations and the fear of causing disappointment. This conditioning often produces heightened self-monitoring and a deliberate management of self-presentation, culminating in forms of self-regulation that surpass those typically expected of men. While the desire for social acceptance is a fundamental aspect of human nature, women are disproportionately encouraged to seek validation through accommodation and agreeableness, reflecting broader gendered norms that shape interpersonal dynamics and self-presentation.

However, dark streets, empty parking lots, and transitional periods that define liminality lack these stabilising influences. This absence creates a vacuum where the perceived universality of moral principles weakens, allowing for a more subjective interpretation of right and wrong. The lack of clear social stewardship can foster a sense of anonymity, potentially emboldening individuals to explore behaviours they might otherwise suppress. The liminal space of the empty road in the middle of the night evokes a sense of disorientation, blurring the lines between reality and abstraction and causing a perceptual shift that destabilises moral certainty. The unsettling atmosphere, characterised by an absence of typical sensory input and a feeling of being adrift, can create a psychological state where established moral codes seem less relevant. In this altered state, the rigid distinctions between permissible and forbidden become fluid and malleable, and the complexities of human behaviour are laid bare.

6.1.3 Character Symbolism

Just as is the case with fiction, characters in cinema are more than just vessels for plot – they often carry symbolic weight that extends far beyond their literal roles. Through character symbolism, filmmakers encode abstract ideas, social critiques or emotional truths into the people who inhabit their narratives, reflecting the complexities of identity, history, and the human condition. A character might represent a nation, a psychological state, a moral conflict, or even a philosophical idea. This

symbolic function does not always announce itself overtly but is woven subtly into the character's behaviour, relationships or environment. Other times, it is made explicit through dialogue or visual metaphors. In either case, symbolic characters serve to deepen a film's resonance, offering viewers a layered experience where meaning unfolds over time. Symbolism does not need to be intentional on the part of the filmmaker, and its interpretation by the viewer is subjective.

In my reading of the three films in this study, each of the characters have made specific impressions on me that related to a familiar class of individuals within society. Marketaki's John is the archetypal young, handsome male – intelligent, witty, and disarmingly charming. On the surface, he seems effortlessly confident, even seductive, but beneath that charisma lies deep psychological unrest rooted in a fractured upbringing. Raised in an emotionally neglectful household by a schizophrenic mother – thereby lacking a sense of secure attachment to her – and subjected to ridicule and alienation during his school years, his formative experiences have left him with a simmering sense of inadequacy and distrust. Unable to seek healing, he turns inward, crafting a protective persona defined by cynicism and manipulation. Over time, his worldview becomes opportunistic and nihilistic – he rejects moral frameworks as hypocritical constructs, using his insight into human behaviour to exploit those around him. He may possess a keen understanding of social dynamics, but uses it not to connect, but to dominate and evade vulnerability. And he gains power through his hatred for those young women, who are more vulnerable than himself.

John's archetype is compelling because he hovers between victimhood and culpability. He becomes a mirror for societal failures – how neglect and cruelty can forge not just isolation, but a dangerous kind of intelligence stripped of empathy. His victim is the archetype of a young woman whose life is shaped by the forced resilience imposed on all young women of her era. Modern by the standards of the time, she works and commutes between work, her fiancé's and her parents' homes. She becomes a victim not through weakness or naivety, but through the fundamental cruelty of a world that punishes women who walk alone at night – in her case, because she had run out of money to take the bus, having given all her money to her fiancé, she had run out of money to take the bus. And as if death was not enough punishment, her reputation is then left in tatters by the men who supposedly knew her, including her fiancé, who challenges her morality based on the status of her virginity, even disbelieving the doctor's opinion. The rest of the characters are depicting stereotypical roles: the distraught mother, the opportunistic media, the eager police, the self-assured judges, the hesitant jurors, the superficial witnesses, the easily-led audience.

Liappa's sisters are not essentially dissimilar to Marketaki's victim, except that they're now more than ten years older than she was at the time of her death. They have each other but are removed from their natural environment in the countryside. The rural exodus of 'astyphilia' that occurred in Greece at the time, with its movement from the countryside to urban centres, became a source of both opportunity and profound dislocation. While cities promise economic mobility, access to education, cultural vibrancy, and a sense of independence from the confines of traditional rural life, they can also foster a sharp sense of alienation in those uprooted from their former environment – paradoxically limiting, rather than expanding, their freedom and independence. For the sisters, the country was not simply a geographic reality but a cultural one – rooted in community, identity, and routine. The transition to the city has stripped away these certainties. In Athens, they became lost in anonymity, displaced by the speed and impersonality of modern life. While the younger sister found an appreciative market for the artistry she channels into her handmade jewellery, the older one was burdened by a growing sense of alienation, expressed through persistent headaches and bouts of vertigo. She avoided going out, unsettled by the relentless traffic that clogs Athens' narrow streets and the notorious smog that once choked the city's air, making people ill.

It is the smog that is blamed for their asthmatic concierge's worsening condition, eventually forcing her to return to the provincial town she once left behind. The city may have promised her greater opportunities, but it robbed her of the clean air vital to her survival. In her mother's absence, the daughter – a stereotypical young aspiring actress, modern and self-assured who never considers that her smoking may have contributed to her mother's condition – seizes the freedom she craved. Unburdened by parental oversight, though she does love her mother, she begins to chase her dreams and embrace a carefree, unanchored life in the city. As for the male cousin, the epitome of the charismatic 'Apollonian' artist, his relocation to Paris seems to have been prompted by political circumstances, but ended up becoming a turning point, allowing him to pursue his artistic ambitions and ultimately find the success he sought. His younger cousin, equally talented, was not afforded the same liberties. As a woman, she stayed behind, unable to carve out a similar path abroad, and is now instead channelling her creative energies into the intricate jewellery she crafts by hand. He has had freedom of movement and relationships, whereas she has missed out on both. Yet, he is back, clearly not having found the bliss he had been craving in the life he carved out for himself in Paris, still pining for her, just as she seems to be pining for him.

Manda's siblings also fall into distinct archetypal roles that reflect not only their personalities but also the deeper tensions within their family and cultural context. The older brother, pragmatic and composed, represents the voice of reason – grounded in logic, shaped by a modern, outward-facing worldview. He has a family and a son, and his concern is firmly focused on his family responsibilities. In contrast, the older sister embodies the voice of tradition, holding firmly to the customs, memories, and the unspoken rules of their upbringing. Without progeny of her own, she is emotionally anchored in the past, resistant to change, and fiercely protective of their shared history. Between them stands the younger sister, a quiet but powerful catalyst. With a child of her own, and a job full of drudgery and office politics, she may appear passive at first, but her presence – and the way she moves between the perspectives of her siblings – gradually fosters a space where dialogue becomes feasible. It is not through confrontation, but through quiet persistence and emotional intelligence, that she brings about the possibility of reconciliation. Together, they form a symbolic triangle: pragmatic reasoning, traditional values, and the bridge rooted in the secure attachment they once shared as a family, allowing them to heal and reconcile.

6.2 Assessment of Film Quality

In assessing a film's quality, one must consider whether the filmmaker's vision has produced the required effect in the finished work – a judgment that emerges from a complex and ongoing dialogue shaped by aesthetics, culture, personal taste, and evolving cinematic language. This assessment is further articulated through attention to the film's narrative coherence, visual innovation, emotional impact, technical execution, and its capacity to resonate across space and time. The criteria used in film evaluation depend on many factors, such as the influence of context and reception, the shifting boundaries between art and entertainment, whether the film is a tightly constructed entertainment blockbuster or a fragmented, introspective art piece. However, the way we measure its value reveals just as much about our own perspectives as it does about the film itself. Therefore, subjectivity cannot be eliminated, though overall the quality of a film tends to be recognised by a majority of critics, even if they disagree over the specifics of its content, structure or other aspects.

Everyone's vision is different, but critics tend to base their criticism on particular aspects – like auteur theory, audience reception, or cinematic technique. Projecting one's expectations onto another's vision, however, is a presumptuous way of reviewing their work. In the context of cinema, where a director or screenwriter embarks on a deeply personal journey of artistic expression, criticism that prioritises the critic's preferences over the filmmaker's intent may even undermine the integrity of the work. True achievement in assessing the result of a film lies in the critic's ability to discern and engage with the filmmaker's intention, and not in measuring it against an extraneous standard. This approach does not deny the inherently subjective nature of art appreciation, of course. Individual appeal is inevitably shaped by personal experience, taste, and cultural background. Yet, subjectivity should not eclipse the effort to understand a film on its own terms. The critic's role is not to impose but to interpret. It involves a shift from judgment to inquiry: What is the filmmaker attempting to communicate? What strategies and techniques are employed to convey this vision? How consistent and compelling is the film within the parameters it sets for itself?

When critics fail to engage with the filmmaker's intentions, they risk flattening the film into a reflection of their own biases. This diminishes the value of both the critique and the artform itself. Cinema, like all serious artistic endeavours, demands to be met with a kind of rigorous empathy – an openness to unfamiliar modes of storytelling, pacing, tone, and worldview. To assess another's work, one needs to suspend one's own cinematic expectations. Evaluating a film through the lens of

intention also respects the medium's complexity. A film is not merely a product but a convergence of vision, labour, and often, limitation. Technical choices, narrative decisions, and stylistic preferences are rarely arbitrary; they are solutions to problems, expressions of ideas, or negotiations with practical constraints. Understanding these choices within the context of intention allows for a richer, more nuanced appreciation.

While many frameworks exist to assess the quality of a film – ranging from narrative structure and thematic depth to cinematography and performance – it is impossible to separate these evaluations entirely from the critic's personal preferences, cultural background, expectations, and ideological leanings. Too often, what gets praised as a 'masterpiece' or dismissed as 'incoherent' reflects not only the film itself but the critic's predilections – sometimes even their resistance to unfamiliar forms or voices. This does not mean that all criticism is invalid, but it does highlight the need for a more pluralistic approach to film evaluation – one that acknowledges subjectivity while still striving for thoughtful, rigorous analysis.

In fact, narrative films by women have historically been marginalised or dismissed not because of a lack of craft or depth, but because they often explore emotional, domestic, or psychological terrains that dominant critical frameworks have undervalued. Critics – many of whom were and still are shaped by male-centric notions of what makes a film 'important' – have tended to privilege narratives centred on external conflict, grand gestures, or male transformation arcs. By contrast, films that focus on interiority, relational dynamics, or female subjectivity have often been labelled as too sentimental and dismissed as lacking seriousness or artistic merit. When women filmmakers break from linear narratives, embrace ambiguity, or explore intuitive rhythms, their work may be dismissed as formless or self-indulgent, while similar qualities in the work of men are celebrated as visionary. The critical language itself often changes depending on who is behind the camera. Historically, women have not had the same access to resources or distribution channels, and when they do gain visibility, they are frequently judged by arbitrary standards.

Overall, all three of my chosen films position themselves within the realm of critical humanity, concerned with one of the most elemental conditions of human existence: the sense of disconnection from others and from the social fabric. They do not treat their themes merely as a psychological state but as a lens through which to interrogate the fractures of the modern world. Their characters,

rendered in quiet gestures and pauses rather than in grand declarations, embody an ethic that respects the complexity of their solitude. In doing so, they highlight the dignity of human experience, however marginal or painful, and gesture towards cinema's capacity to re-humanise lives that risk being rendered invisible. The exploration of their themes is not confined to a single cultural or national context, but participates in global cinema, resonating across borders. Global cinema here functions not as an exotic showcase of difference, but as a dialogue of shared conditions – displacement, urban alienation, erosion of traditional communities and family supports.

The films acknowledge cultural specificity while simultaneously reaching toward an international audience capable of recognising the universality of alienation. Their global dimension is deeply rooted in a local reality as well as wider human concerns. Rather than reproducing commercial formulas designed for mass consumption, these directors' choices constitute a political and ethical stance. Their work is not merely a stylistic exercise but a lived engagement with dominant modes of production and storytelling. By refusing to aestheticise alienation into spectacle, they enact a form of praxis: form and content converge to reveal its structural causes – economic, social, or historical. In doing so, the films translate theory into lived practice, demonstrating how cinema can resist commodification through an empathetic mode of seeing. By foregrounding these dynamics, they do more than represent alienation; they expose the social conditions that produce it while resisting the ideological tendency to naturalise it as inevitable.

The narratives refuse the reassuring arc of resolution, leaving the protagonists' struggles unresolved, and thereby challenging dominant expectations of cinematic closure. The use of space – empty rooms, urban landscapes, or crowded streets that nonetheless isolate the individual – structures the viewers' perception of solitude. Even the sound design, with its interplay of ambient noise and silence, functions as a structural device that articulates alienation. Beyond aesthetics, the films' structure is also determined by the conditions of their production and circulation: independently financed work that struggles to find distribution outside film festivals, a reminder of the systemic marginalisation of films that confront rather than appease. Through critical humanity, the films affirm the dignity of solitude as worthy of representation and can serve as a site where ethics, aesthetics, politics, and global cultural exchange converge. Through their place in global cinema, they speak across borders, revealing the invisible forces that shape the most intimate aspects of human life and interrogating the world through cinema.

6.2.1 The Cultural Capital Paradox

Films that refuse easy resolution or conventional storytelling, such as the three studied above, accrue value not through commercial success but through recognition within festival circuits, critical discourse, and academic contexts. Their aesthetic strategies – long takes, silences, unresolved endings – function as markers of distinction that both demand and cultivate a certain cultural literacy in spectatorship. For some audiences, engaging with these strategies is an act of accumulating cultural capital, positioning them within networks of taste and intellectual legitimacy. Yet the films' contribution lies not merely in reinforcing hierarchies of appreciation but by dignifying marginal experiences and unfamiliar perspectives, thus opening access to ways of seeing and feeling that challenge dominant sensibilities. In this sense, the films transform alienation into a shared site of reflection, elevating what is often dismissed as private pain into a form of symbolic value that resonates globally.

These films hold particular merit in that they expand the cultural capital of cinema. By resisting formulaic conventions and engaging with themes of social, historical, or psychological depth, they elevate cinema beyond entertainment into a form of cultural discourse. Their contribution lies not only in the originality of their artistic vision but also in the ways they challenge audiences to reflect on broader human experiences. In this sense, they affirm cinema's capacity to function as both an aesthetic practice and a cultural institution, one that generates meaning, fosters dialogue, and enriches the collective imagination. Yet despite these contributions, they have been marginalised – overlooked by mainstream distribution channels, sidelined in critical discourse, and undervalued in a marketplace that privileges commercial viability over cultural significance. Their marginalisation reveals the persistent tension between cinema as an art form and cinema as an industry, a tension that shapes both the visibility of these works and their place within cultural memory.

Another contributing factor is that they are frequently overshadowed by more celebrated auteurs, whose reputations and visibility dominate critical and institutional attention. This imbalance not only limits the recognition these films receive but also reinforces hierarchies within cinematic culture that privilege certain voices while silencing others. The presence of great directors is normally assumed to enrich cultural capital, since their achievements draw international attention, anchor academic

discourse, and provide touchstones for festivals and cinephile culture. Yet their very elevation into the pantheon of greatness can paradoxically diminish cultural capital by narrowing the scope of what is valued and how it circulates. When prestige is concentrated in a small number of figures, symbolic capital becomes monopolised, allowing less recognition for other filmmakers. This is particularly true when those figures build their careers abroad, drawing on foreign funding and international infrastructures. In such cases, their symbolic capital circulates internationally but not domestically, leaving the local cinematic field hollowed out and deprived of resources that might sustain broader cultural growth.

Theo Angelopoulos provides one example of this paradox. His films, though profoundly Greek in their themes – drawing on history, myth, and memory – were almost always dependent on European co-productions, particularly from France and Italy. His monumental reputation was secured through Cannes, Venice, and Berlin, where his works became synonymous with serious auteur cinema. Within Greece, however, Angelopoulos' status as the singular 'great' director, through no fault of his own concentrated cultural value into his figure alone, overshadowing contemporaries and younger filmmakers who lacked access to the international co-production networks that sustained him. His symbolic capital was immense, but it was largely accrued abroad, and his co-productions tied him more closely to European cultural circuits than to local infrastructure.

Yorgos Lanthimos represents a more contemporary iteration of this same dynamic. His early films emerged from the 'Greek Weird Wave', a movement marked by its resourcefulness during a period of austerity and crisis. Yet as his reputation grew, Lanthimos shifted decisively into international production. His later works are in English, financed by UK, Irish, and US producers, and populated with global stars. While this has elevated him to the very summit of world cinema – with Academy Award nominations and wins – his symbolic capital circulates almost exclusively in international art and commercial markets. Although Greece is celebrated internationally for producing such figures, their success contributes little to the development of local infrastructure, employment, or prestige among emerging Greek filmmakers, with the local film culture remaining precarious, underfunded, and overshadowed by their reputations created abroad.

6.2.2 Significance of the Research

This type of research advances feminist film and art theory by shifting the concept of the gaze from a reactive, externally defined phenomenon to one rooted in women's internalised memories and lived experiences. By foregrounding the interplay between personal history and perception, it offers a richer, more nuanced vocabulary for understanding how subjectivity is visually constructed on screen. This conceptual reframing allows reviewers to move beyond reductive binaries and consider how interiority shapes the very act of visual engagement. Methodologically, the study bridges film criticism with cognitive psychology and memory studies, suggesting innovative ways to trace the imprint of past experiences on present perception. By proposing empirical approaches – such as narrative analysis informed by autobiographical memory frameworks – it opens new avenues for comparative research across different cultural and historical contexts, enriching qualitative inquiries into the gaze.

These insights carry practical implications: recognising the female gaze as an embodied, affective mode of seeing encourages more authentic representation of subtle emotional resonances that emerge when characters, and by extension audiences, process their environments through the prism of memory and relational dynamics. In educational settings, such research can foster deeper media literacy by challenging researchers to question how their own personal histories inform their interpretation of film and art, moving beyond simplistic 'male versus female gaze' models, in order to develop critical awareness of how narratives and images interact with individual subjectivities, and engage with visual culture in more intellectually informed ways. By emphasising variability across individuals, cultures, and periods, the study points toward a vibrant agenda for future scholarship. Comparative investigations – whether examining age, ethnicity, socio-economic background, or media form – can map the diverse manifestations of the female gaze, revealing how internalised perceptions evolve and how they might shape, and be shaped by, changing social landscapes. But in terms of academic research, a scholar should always respect, instead of ignoring, the intent and agency of a filmmaker, much like George Steiner's assertion that a translator must respect the source text instead of distorting or misinterpreting it, no matter how much they agree or disagree with its content.

6.2.3 Implications of the Study

The reconceptualisation of the gaze as an internally mediated process challenges existing theoretical paradigms within film and cultural studies. By situating perception at the nexus of memory, emotion, and experience, this study aims to encourage readers to rethink the binary oppositions – male versus female, subject versus object – that have long underpinned analyses of visual culture. In doing so, it opens space for more fluid and layered approaches to spectatorship, where identity is neither fixed nor solely imposed by external ideologies. Methodologically, the study's integration of cognitive psychology and memory research into film criticism suggests new modes of inquiry that bridge qualitative and quantitative traditions. Narrative analysis can be enriched by psychometric measures of memory encoding, while audience reception studies might employ longitudinal designs to track how past experiences reshape interpretive strategies over time. These interdisciplinary pathways not only broaden the evidentiary base of film scholarship but also invite collaboration across the humanities and social sciences.

Despite their narrative differences, the three films examined in this study share profound thematic and existential concerns. Each centres on characters operating within tightly bounded environments, where physical, psychological, or social constraints limit the possibilities for action. In Marketaki's film, John's repression constrains his engagement with the world, culminating in the killing of an innocent young woman. In Liappa's, the two sisters' lives are physically and socially confined, creating a claustrophobic existence in which daily routines and relationships take on heightened significance. In Manda's, the three adult siblings are confined by the inherited family home, which becomes a locus for deliberation and moral reflection. In all cases, the shared temporal and spatial setting reinforces the sense of limitation, shaping the characters' experiences and highlighting how external and internal forces govern their choices.

Solitude emerges as another unifying element across the three films. The young man's repression isolates him emotionally and morally; the sisters' confinement amplifies both their interdependence and their internal loneliness; and the siblings, though physically together, have to confront the solitude of adulthood, mortality, and familial legacy. In each narrative, solitude functions not merely as a condition but as a lens through which the audience perceives consciousness, ethical tension, and the existential weight of decision-making. The films emphasise the friction between freedom and

limitation, exploring how characters navigate constraints imposed by psychology, society, and circumstance, and how such constraints shape both identity and action.

The poetics of loneliness is a central aesthetic through which these films communicate existential meaning. In each narrative, isolation is rendered not only as a psychological or social condition but as an expressive experience, using space, routine, and relational dynamics to evoke reflection, melancholy, and heightened awareness of human fragility. Loneliness becomes poetic when it shapes the rhythm of scenes, the framing of interiors, and the silences between characters, turning confinement into a medium through which the films explore the depth and texture of lived experience. The domestic sphere, the family home, or shared urban environments are charged with symbolic and ethical significance. By foregrounding interior life, moral struggle, and the consequences of small but consequential decisions, the films create a gestalt of human vulnerability, ethical tension, and the search for meaning under constraint. Across narratives that are otherwise diverse, they collectively dramatise the experience of living in a confined world, confronted with all the demands of our existence.

6.3 Suggestions for Future Research

One promising avenue for future research lies in comparative, cross-cultural explorations of the female gaze. While scholarship has largely centred on cinema by male directors, examining how internalised, memory-driven modes of perception are articulated in Greek films by female directors could illuminate gender-specific dimensions of spectatorship. Such research might consider how familial structures, social rituals, and collective memories shape women's visual subjectivities across different Greek cities and towns, thereby enriching our understanding of processes of internalisation.

Another direction building on research could involve conducting empirical audience studies that integrate narrative analysis with psychometric and neurocognitive methods. Researchers might employ memory-priming tasks or eye-tracking experiments to measure how viewers' prior experiences influence their attention to particular visual elements, character interactions, or spatial configurations. Longitudinal designs could track how repeated exposure to certain narrative themes reshapes memory encoding and alters perceptual biases over time, providing quantitative support for theories of interiority in spectatorship.

Relational analyses constitute a further critical frontier. Future work could investigate how race, class, sexuality, disability, and age intersect with gender to produce multiple, overlapping gazes. By tracing how women from diverse social backgrounds negotiate memory-and-experience frameworks, researchers could avoid homogenising assumptions and foreground the heterogeneous nature of visual subjectivity. This could involve case studies of marginalised filmmakers whose work challenges dominant narratives and offers alternative modes of perception.

The rise of immersive and interactive media – such as virtual reality, augmented reality, and interactive web-based narratives – opens new possibilities for researching the female gaze in environments that actively engage the viewer's body and memory. Future studies might examine how embodied interactions within virtual reality spaces trigger autobiographical recall, or how branching narrative structures allow women to project their own histories onto digital avatars. Such research would extend the concept of the gaze beyond the flat screen, situating it within multisensory, participatory contexts.

Finally, archival and historiographical work could trace the evolution of internalised perceptual frameworks across film history. By examining production archives, personal journals, and oral histories of female directors and cinematographers, scholars can map how internal and external influences have shifted over time. This diachronic perspective would not only document the changing contours of the female gaze but also reveal how broader social transformations – such as feminist movements, technological innovations, and geopolitical upheavals – have reconfigured women's processes of internalisation and visual narration. In fact, accessing the archives of the filmmakers within this thesis, including their out-of-print books and newspaper and magazine articles would be of great benefit that could provide further insights into their work.

In conclusion, the continued production and appreciation of narrative art cinema underscore its enduring cultural and aesthetic significance within contemporary film discourse. Asimina Proedrou, who broke into the scene in 2013 with her award-winning first short film *Red Hulk* that I studied for my MA thesis (Sakellis 2016) and wrote a paper on (Sakellis 2018), made her feature-film debut in 2022 with *Behind the Haystacks (Πίσω από τις θημωνιές)*. The film was shown at a number of film festivals around the world, including the Sydney Film Festival in 2023 where she introduced it herself, and it was also selected as Greece's official submission for the Best International Feature Film category at the 96th Academy Awards. While migration formed its backdrop, the film focused on how everyday people can become entangled in corrupt systems. Avoiding clichés, she instead explores existential questions and symbolic aspects of complicity and institutional structures.

In her films, she deliberately includes her own experiences, even when they are not required by the narrative, prioritising authenticity over plot-driven choices: "Αισθάνομαι την ανάγκη να εντάσσω στις ταινίες μου διάφορα στοιχεία με βιωματική διάσταση, χωρίς να χρειάζεται να υπάρχουν από αφηγηματικής άποψης"[57]. Although her films foreground pressing social and political themes, she does not regard herself as a political filmmaker and believes that honest communication with the audience is more important than technical perfection. She also critiques the lack of integrity that can characterise the relationship between filmmakers and audiences, as well as the risk-averse tendencies of distribution companies, which often deter directors from pursuing innovative or unconventional

[57] "I feel the need to incorporate various elements with an experiential dimension into my films, without them needing to exist from a narrative point of view."

creative paths. Notably, despite the passage of time, the financial challenges inherent to filmmaking remain pronounced: "ποτέ δεν έχεις τα λεφτά που χρειάζεσαι για να κάνεις την ταινία όπως πρέπει"[58]. Like many women before her, she was compelled to take a leave of absence from her primary employment in finance, in order to complete the film (Kontos 2023) – an enduring reminder that these obstacles continue to shape not only which stories are told, but also who is afforded the opportunity to tell them.

And while the latest feminist waves often grapple with theoretical frameworks or envision extravagant scenarios that may never materialise in the lived experience of most women, one must question the ethics behind the stark dissonance between such speculative ideals of current research on 'posthuman fashion' trends and the brutal reality women face on a daily basis today, with the ever-present threat of violence and death at the hands of partners and strangers alike. There is something far more urgent and grounded in the narrative films made by women who do not explicitly wave the feminist banner, but whose works, grounded in reality rather than rhetoric, capture complexities that can sometimes be lost in more overtly ideological expressions, offering a deeper, more resonant engagement with the conditions of womanhood. In this way, their work quietly speaks to the realities of our time, often with more resonance than any new feminist virtue-signalling – and self-defeating – declarations that, while appearing well-intentioned, can seem disconnected from the very realities they claim to address. It is in quiet, insightful stories that the true feminist pulse beats most vividly, and their creators, often unsung, are the true heroes of the feminist project, offering powerful narratives without packaging them as political manifestos.

[58] "you never have the money you need to make the movie properly"

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Appendix 1

Maria Plyta (Thessaloniki 26 November 1915–4 March 2006)

Novelist; Playwright; Songwriter; Journalist; Film Director, Writer, Editor, Producer

Filmography as Director

1950: Τ' Αρραβωνιάσματα – The Engagement (as Maria Plyta-Hatzinakou)

1951: Η Λύκαινα – The She-Wolf (as Maria Plyta-Hatzinakou)

1952: Ο Βαφτιστικός – The Godson (as Maria Plyta-Hatzinakou)

1953: Εύα – Eva (as Maria Plyta-Hatzinakou)

1954: Κορίτσι της Γειτονιάς – The Girl of the Neighbourhood

1956: Η Δούκισσα της Πλακεντίας – The Duchess of Plakendia

1957: Τζιπ Περίπτερο κι Αγάπη – Jeep Kiosk and Love

1958: Μόνο για Μια Νύχτα – Only for One Night

1959: Ναυάγια της Ζωής – Moment of Passion

1960: Άντρας Είμαι και… το Κέφι Μου Θα Κάνω! – I Am a Man and... I Will Do As I Please!

1961: Ήρθες Αργά – You Came Too Late

1962: Ο Λουστράκος – The Shoeshine Boy

1963: Άσωτος – The Prodigal Son

1964: Ανήφορος – Uphill

1965: Ο Νικητής – The Victor

1967: Ο Εμποράκος – The Poor Merchant

1970: Η Άγνωστη της Νύχτας – Unknown Woman of the Night

Appendix 2

Tonia Marketaki's Filmography

Marketaki's filmography on the IMDb database lists seven credits of her as director, four as writer, two as editor, two as producer and one as actor, as well as miscellaneous acknowledgments for other contributions such as sound editing:

1. Ο Γιάννης και ο Δρόμος / O Giannis kai o Dromos / John and the Road (Short, 20:30min), Director, Writer, Editor, Producer, 1967
2. Κιέριον – Kierion[59] (feature film directed by Dimos Theos), Actor, 1968, https://archive.ert.gr/6657/ Time: 26:00 & 28:40
3. **Ιωάννης ο Βίαιος / Ioannis o Viaios / John the Violent** (feature film), Director, Writer, Producer, 1973
4. Αλδεβαράν / Aldevaran (feature film directed by Andreas Thomopoulos), Editor, Production Manager, 1975
5. Το Λεμονόδασος / To Lemonodasos / The Lemon Grove (TV Series), Director, 1978
6. Εδώ Γεννήθηκε η Ευρώπη / Edo Gennithike i Evropi / Europe Was Born Here (TV Documentary Series), Director, 1980
7. Η Τιμή της Αγάπης / I Timi tis Agapis / The Price of Love (feature film), Director, Screenplay, 1984
8. Μισό-Μισό / Miso-miso / Half-Half (TV Series), Director, 1985
9. Κρυστάλλινες Νύχτες / Krystallines Nyhtes / Crystal Nights (feature film), Director, Writer, Sound Editor, 1992

Itemised chronology of Marketaki's life and works[60]

[59] Filming interrupted and continued clandestinely during the repressive dictatorial regime of the 'colonels' and was completed after the junta's defeat in 1974 (Marketaki).

[60] Greek source: http://4greatwomen.blogspot.com/2016/07/blog-post_26.html

1967-1971: London-Paris-Algiers: Assistant director and assistant editor on Jean-Luc Godard's *One plus one* and *What?* by Nicholas Ray[61]. Three educational documentaries for farmers, on behalf of the Algerian Ministry of Agriculture, never shown.

1973: *John the Violent*: Production, Screenplay, Direction. Thessaloniki Festival: 3 Awards: First Prizes for direction, screenplay and best actor. Film represents Greece at the Berlin and San Remo Festivals.

1974: *Nisyros*: Documentary.

1975: Working as Assistant General Manager of Television.

1976–1980: Collaboration with the Parascenium[62] TV program.

1977: *Lemon Grove*: 9-episode TV series. Screenplay, Direction. Based on novel by Kosmas Politis.

1978: *Epidaurus*: Documentary.

1979: Published translation of Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*.

1980: *The End* by G. Christofilakis, at K.Θ.B.E.[63] *A Strange Afternoon* by A. Doriadis, at K.Θ.B.E. Translation of *Oedipus Rex*.

1981: *Macaronia with ketchup*, Theatre Workshop, Thessaloniki.

1982: Translation: *Seven on Thebes*.

1983: Translation: *Οι κυβιστές ζωγράφοι: αισθητικοί στοχασμοί (Cubist Painters: Aesthetic Reflections)* by Guillaume Apollinaire and Jean-Claude Chevalier (Apollinaire, Μαρκετάκη, and Chevalier 1983).

1983: *The Price of Love*: Produced, Screenplay, Directed. Ministry of Culture State Awards 1983: 8 First Prizes for script, direction, best film, photography, music, leading actress, make-up and costumes.

1984: *The Price of Love* represents Greece at the International Festivals of Munich, Los Angeles, Rio, Corsica. Best Mediterranean Film Award (Golden Olive Branch), Bastia Festival (Corsica).

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[61] Later titled Wha-a-at?, never completed, about young people in an age of rebellion and dissent.

[62] Παρασκήνιο – Backstage (TV Series 1978–2013)

[63] Κ.Θ.Β.Ε.: Κρατικό Θέατρο Βορείου Ελλάδος – State Theatre of Northern Greece.

Mention at the International Film Guide as one of the ten best Greek films from 1960 onwards.

1987: *Ο φονιάς – The Murderer* by M. Efthimiadis, Polichni Municipal Theatre, Thessaloniki.

Translation: *Antigone*.

1989: Translation of *Antigone* staged by ΔΗ.ΠΕ.ΘΕ. (Municipal and Regional Theatre) of Veria, directed by Panos panned.

1992: *Crystal Nights*: Production, Screenplay, Direction. Ministry of Culture 5 State Awards; First Prize for script, best film, direction, photography, costumes. Thessaloniki Festival; 2 Awards; 2 First Prizes for first female role (Tania Tripi) and costumes.

1993: *Crystal Nights* represents Greece at 20 International Festivals, including: Cannes, Chicago, New York, Bastia, Delhi, Constantinople, etc. Second Prize (Silver Olive Branch) for Best Mediterranean Film, International Federation of Art Galleries and Essay Award, Best Music Mediterranean Film Award.

1994: Translation: *Orphic Hymns* [incomplete] (Damaskinos 2017).

Tribute pages

https://www.facebook.com/toniamarketaki

https://www.facebook.com/notes/454457428852522/

http://dimitrisdamaskinos.blogspot.com/2017/06/blog-post.html

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emnL7wnOsFg&t=0s

Marketaki's ERT (Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation) videos of interviews and mentions

https://archive.ert.gr/68873/

https://archive.ert.gr/36078/

https://archive.ert.gr/20598/

https://archive.ert.gr/7038/

https://archive.ert.gr/7040/

https://archive.ert.gr/6533/

Newspaper articles written by Marketaki currently available online

https://library.nationalgallery.gr/el/cifiopoiimena_ar8ra_efimeridon/index.html

https://library.nationalgallery.gr/el/cifiopoiimena_ar8ra_efimeridon/el_1966279_00004_0001.html

https://library.nationalgallery.gr/el/cifiopoiimena_ar8ra_efimeridon/el_1965289_00003_0001.html

https://library.nationalgallery.gr/el/cifiopoiimena_ar8ra_efimeridon/el_1966196771_00001_0001.html

https://library.nationalgallery.gr/el/cifiopoiimena_ar8ra_efimeridon/el_19561966209_00006_0001.html

https://library.nationalgallery.gr/el/cifiopoiimena_ar8ra_efimeridon/el_19652106_00011_0001.html

https://library.nationalgallery.gr/el/cifiopoiimena_ar8ra_efimeridon/el_19561966141_00001_0001.html

https://library.nationalgallery.gr/el/cifiopoiimena_ar8ra_efimeridon/el_19652104_00006_0001.html

Marketaki's miscellaneous poems currently available online[64]

Είμαστε τα παιδιά (ποίημα)

Είμαστε τα παιδιά του μεταπολέμου

είμαστε οι καρποί της θύελλας,

της πείνας, του τρόμου, της κούρασης,

της πρώτης επαφής με την ατομική φρίκη.

Είμαστε οι σπόροι της οργής

έμβρυα ενός καινούριου κόσμου

μιας νέας εποχής.

Γεννηθήκαμε στο σύνορο του χρόνου,

γεννηθήκαμε πάνω στην άβυσσο,

στο χάσμα ανάμεσα

στο αμετάκλητα περασμένο

και το αμετάκλητα μελλοντικό.

Γεννηθήκαμε στο κενό.

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[64] http://www.shortfromthepast.gr/dirPoems.asp?id=1&la

Είμαστε τα σπέρματα της οργής,

τα έμβρυα ενός καινούριου κόσμου.

Μας άρπαξε ο άνεμος της δίψας,

και μας έφερε στη σκοτεινή τούτη πόλη,

την πάντα παλιά και πάντα καινούρια,

στην υγρή τούτη γης,

να ωριμάσουμε.

είμαστε απ' όλες τις γωνιές της γης.

οι περισσότεροι είμαστε

από τις χώρες του ήλιου

δεν το ξεχνάμε αυτό

δε μπορούμε, δεν πρέπει,

δε μας αφήνει να το ξεχάσουμε.

Μας άρπαξε ο άνεμος της δίψας

και της φυγής

και μας έφερε εδώ να ωριμάσουμε.

Έχουμε όλα τα πρόσωπα,

όλα τα χρώματα,

όλα τα παρελθόντα.

μα σμίγουμε όλοι στην ίδια γλώσσα

και στην ίδια

αμείλικτη σφραγίδα: του πολέμου

που μας γέννησε, του κενού που μας βύζαξε.

είμαστε η διεθνής γενιά

του διεθνούς μεταπολέμου.

Γεννηθήκαμε στο κενό.

Το πηγάδι του φόβου (ποίημα)

Βουλιάζοντας στο πηγάδι του φόβου

στο φόβο του θανάτου

στο θάνατο του πηγαδιού

παίζεις ηδονικά με τη ζωή

που φωσφορίζει στα βλέφαρά σου.

Κατ' εικόνα (ποίημα)

Πώς να δεχτείς πως ο κόσμος

είναι όλος πλασμένος κατ' εικόνα

και καθ΄ ομοίωσή σου;

Άτιτλο 1 (ποίημα)

Έρωτας, είναι η σχέση του ανθρώπου

με τον εαυτό του και το Σύμπαν.

Με το σώμα του, την ψυχή του

και τον τρόπο πού αυτά συναλλάσσονται

μ' ό,τι έχουν ανάγκη πάνω απ' όλα: την επαφή.

Άτιτλο 2

Ο έρωτας και ο θάνατος

ίδια σπαθιά βαστούνε.

Και οι δυο με τρόπο ξαφνικό

και ύπουλα χτυπούνε.

Άτιτλο 3

–Είναι δύσκολο

–Δεν πειράζει

–Είναι ακριβό

–Δεν με νοιάζει

–Είναι σπάνιο

–Τόσο το καλύτερο

–Είναι επικίνδυνο

–Δεν φοβάμαι

Ιωάννης ο Βίαιος – John the Violent, 1973, Running Time: 180 minutes (Marketaki 1973b)

Full Film (Marketaki 1973a); also: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzK6eUpYmFE

Cast: Manolis Logiadis (as Ioannis Zahos), Mika Flora (as Eleni Chalikia), Vangelis Kazan (Captain Giannopoulos), Nikos Glavas, Malaina Anousaki (Mrs. Chalikia), Kostas Arzoglou (Christos Christoforidis), Nikitas Tsakiroglou, Lida Protopsalti, Mary Metaxa (as grandmother), Zozo Zarpa (as Kontantina Stavrianou), Giorgos Partsalakis, Dimitris Bikiropoulos, Minas Hatzisavvas (as Dr. Pannopoulos), Costas Messaris, Kostas Tsakonas, Kostas Ziogas, Takis Doukakos (as T. Doukakos), Thanassis Valtinos

Cinematography: Giorgos Arvanitis, Giorgos Panousopoulos

Editing: Giorgos Korras

Set Decoration: Anastasia Arseni, Lefteris Haronitis

Production Management: Lefteris Haronitis

Assistant Directors: Maria Gavala, Nikos Kanakis, Giannis Kaspiris, Takis Papagiannidis

Sound Processing/Restoration: Hristos Gartaganis, Panos Panousopoulos, Kostas Varympopiotis

Camera Assistants: Vasilis Hristomoglou, Danny Kalavros

Electricians/Gaffers: P. Halkidis, Giannis Hougias, Andreas Markou, Ilias Panagiotopoulos

Editorial Department: Dimitris Ariotis (color grading: restoration), Takis Kardasis (restoration)

Music: Nitsa Theodoraki (singer)

Production Assistants: P. Chrisanthou, Lambros Papadimitrakis

Awards: Winner, Best Director & Best Screenplay for Tonia Marketaki, and Manolis Logiadis for Male Leading Role, 14th Thessaloniki Film Festival, 24–30/9/1973

Appendix 3

Frieda Liappa Detailed Filmography / Biography[65]

Frieda Liappa was born in Messini on 10 February 1948. Her father, Evangelos Liappas, merchant; mother, Eleni Liappa, née Kostopoulou, housewife. (Snapshots of her childhood are recorded in her book *The Mysterious Disease*)

1964: Her father, who suffers from chronic attacks of bronchial asthma, dies in her arms.

1965: She graduates from Messini high school and comes to Athens. She passes the entrance exams to the University and enrols in the Athens School of Philosophy. She lives the summer of Iouliana (July events) and joins the Lambrakis Democratic Youth.

1966: She becomes a university student union activist from the first year and participates in the editorial committee of the magazine 'Argo', published by the Philosophy students. In the short-lived magazine (only 3 issues) she publishes her first poems, a presentation of Peter Weiss on the occasion of the staging of his play The Death of Marat by the Art Theatre and a text entitled: "Erwin Piscator. The revolutionary of the theatre".

1967: She is elected to the office of the students of Philosophy of the Lambrakis Democratic Youth and, after April, she becomes an active member of the underground resistance against the dictatorship. "My student years passed like all youth: Dictatorship. Security. Prison. Lovers".

1968: She is arrested on May 20 and interrogated at the Security by Karapanagiotis. She is taken to the Averof prison on May 30. On November 20, begins the trial of the first cohort of 'Rigas Feraios' which was dismantled by the Security Service. FRIEDA is sentenced to 6 years in prison with a five-year suspension. She is released on November 25. She is expelled from the University of Athens by decision of the disciplinary department, and her passport is taken away.

1972: She works on the script for the film Anna's Engagement by Pantelis Voulgaris. She shoots her first short film, entitled *After Forty Days*, produced by the magazine 'Modern Cinema'.

1973: She manages to obtain a passport and settles in London, where she studies at the London Film School. She travels to Paris, Berlin and Lisbon, where she witnesses the 'Carnation' Revolution

[65] From Claire Mitsotaki's entry into the 36th Thessaloniki Film Festival tribute book (Dimopoulos 1995: 7-14) (translated here into English)

firsthand. 1974: She returns to Greece. She translates E. H. Carr's book *What is History*, published by Planetes Publications. For two years she is a member of the editorial board of the magazine 'Modern Cinema'. She re-enrols at the Athens School of Philosophy and graduates on March 16 with 'Distinction'.

1977: She directs her second film, entitled *I Remember You Leaving All the Time*, and receives the Second Prize at the Thessaloniki Festival and the award from the Panhellenic Union of Film Critics (PEKK). She begins to direct for the television series 'Parascenium' (Backstage) (her first pieces were for the Free Theatre and Dimitris Mitropanos). She writes film criticism for the magazines 'Anti' and 'Modern Cinema', and this collaboration will last until 1980.

1978: She directs 'Parascenium' episodes for Zoe Laskari and Mary Linda.

1979: She works as an assistant director on Dimitris Mavrikios' first feature film *On the Road to Lamore*. She directs 'Parascenium' episodes for Ioanna Georgakopoulou, Dimitra Galani, the Rebetiki Compania and the theatrical performance of Minos Volanakis Ekklisiazouses (Ecclesiazusae / Assemblywomen). She begins working on her first feature-length script.

1980: She directs the 'Parascenium' episodes *Music in Cinema* and *Summer Cinema*. She directs her third short film, entitled *Apetaxamin (I renounce)*, and receives the 2nd prize at the Thessaloniki Festival, the PEKK award, the best film award and the audience award at the 3rd Festival of (the northern Greece city of) Drama. She publishes her first poetry collection, entitled *Lyrical Epilogue of Patision Street*.

1981: *Love Wanders in the Night* – first feature-length film. The film was awarded at the Thessaloniki Film Festival with the awards for first-time director, female performance, photography, editing, as well as the PEKK award. She participated in the festivals of Berlin (Panorama), London, Montreal, Amsterdam, Valencia, Saint-Etienne, Munich, Istanbul Festivals, the International Women's Film Festival and the Greek Film Weeks in Annecy, Bastia, Bologna, Geneva and Locarno.

She publishes the poetry collection *The Quiet Poems* and the *Hunting Dogs*.

1982: Directs two television pieces for Kostas Karyotakis and Maria Polydouri. Pressured by her film's heavy financial debts, she is forced to direct a documentary for the Ministry of Agriculture, as well as two documentaries about Chios and Mytilene.

1983: Directs the one-hour TV film *The Rainwater*, based on the short story of the same name by M. Karagatsis, for ERT. Marries Kyriakos Angelakos.

1984: Writes with Rhea Galanaki the script for the film adaptation of Euripides' tragedy Bacchae. Directs a television piece for the poet Matsi Hatzilazarou.

1985: Publishes her first collection of short stories, entitled *The Mysterious Disease*. She directs a television documentary about the writer Alki Zei. She begins filming her second feature film, *It Was a Quiet Death*.

1986: She completes the production of the film. The film is simultaneously selected by the Locarno and San Sebastian International Film Festivals, and Frieda chooses to go to the latter. The film wins the CIGA award (the first prize of the Festival's parallel competition program ZONA ABIERTA), participates in the Thessaloniki Film Festival and is awarded the awards for female performance, photography, editing, sound and special effects. She participates in the Valencia, Ankara, Vichy Festivals, DONNE E MEDIA in Milan, the Montreal Women's Festival, the Barcelona Film Archive's tribute to European women directors and the Greek Cinema Weeks in Sweden, Cuba, Venezuela and Argentina.

1987: She writes the script for a TV movie entitled *Father of an Unknown Person*, based on the short story of the same name by Vaso Sinopoulou, which will be directed a little later by Dinos Mavroidis.

1988: Her mother dies on April 19. In September, Frieda settles in Paris for 7 months.

1989: After extensive research, she submits a proposal to ET1 entitled *Nikos Poulantzas, 10 years later*. While waiting for ERT's response, she films Nikos Svoronos' last interview, where the historian talks about Nikos Poulantzas. She never received a response from ERT.

1990: Summer, the shooting of her last movie begins in Milos, entitled *The Years of the Big Heat*. The novel Erotiidos Martyros is published.

1991: She publishes her poetry collection 1964-1988. She sells her house in Kareas (her only asset) to pay off the debt for the film. She refuses to take part in the competition section of the Thessaloniki Film Festival and suggests that her film be screened out of competition. Her proposal is not accepted.

1992: January. The then cinematography advisor to the Ministry of Culture, Apostolos Doxiadis, requests the exclusion of the film from state awards, complaining that, during the filming, a minor child was abused for the needs of a scene. A terrible scandal breaks out and for a number of days it becomes the front page of newspapers and the first topic of television news bulletins. Frieda refutes the vile slanders and denounces the advisor to the Ministry of Culture for reviving censorship. Melina Mercouri, Theodoros Angelopoulos, Jules Dassin, Thanos Mikroutsikos, Nikos Koundouros and

others side with her. The public prosecutor initiates an ex officio prosecution, and Frieda, the child's mother and the film's producers are summoned to the interrogation room.

February. The film is screened as the official Greek entry at the 42nd Berlin International Film Festival. Renowned foreign critics, members of FIPRESCI, support Frieda by their resolution. The film's script is released in a literary transcription.

May. The film is released in cinemas. Frieda writes a new script with Giorgos Bramos, entitled Agnieszka. At the end of October, she is admitted to hospital, in poor physical condition. Tests reveal a large brain tumour. In November, she undergoes surgery in New York, and the biopsy shows that the tumour is malignant.

1993: The Athens Council of Criminal Courts, after examining the investigative material, decides by issuing an acquittal (2826/93), that no charges can be brought against Frieda Liappa, the child's mother and the film's producers for abuse of a minor.

Frieda reworks Erotiidos Martyros (the revised book is published by Livanis Publications) and, at the same time, prepares a new poetry collection, entitled *The Stuttering of Time*.

Late 1993, her health begins to deteriorate rapidly.

1994: She submits a proposal to the Greek Film Centre to write a screenplay, entitled *Margarita's Dreams and Reality*. The proposal is approved, and Frieda begins writing the screenplay. Her hospitalisation interrupts her writing, Frieda asks the president of the Greek Film Centre to release her, and suggests that the fee she would receive be given to a young filmmaker.

After a three-month stay in the hospital, she takes her last breath on 28 November 1994.

Liappa's interviews and mentions

http://cinemalab.eu.org/sygxronos-kinimatografos/details/1/44-sygxronos-kinimatografos-82
https://flix.gr/articles/kyriakos-aggelakos-interview-liappa-shorts.html
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https://www.lifo.gr/culture/cinema/poia-itan-i-frinta-liappa
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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmyOHuipdhk&t=232s
https://www.filmfestival.gr/el/movie/movie/6788
https://flix.gr/articles/kyriakos-aggelakos-interview-liappa-shorts.html
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQ7dIDEu2LQ
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5XZJhErLlQ

Appendix 4

Margarita Manda Filmography[66]

1984: Χειμώνας / Winter '84, short, 10'

Award at the Athens Student Film Festival, 1985

1986: Συνάντηση / Meeting, short, 5'

Official participation in the Munich Student Film Festival, 1987

1991: Αναδρομές / Recollections, short, 5', 1990

Official participation in the Thessaloniki Film Festival, 1990

2002: Φύλακες του χρόνου / Guardians of Time, feature-length documentary, 62'

Official participation in the Thessaloniki International Documentary Festival.

Fipresci Award at the 4th Thessaloniki International Documentary Film Festival

Special Mention of the International Federation of Film Critics (Fipresci), 2002

2004: Νέα Οδησσός: Το Χωριό του Νερού / New Odessa: The Village of the Lake, documentary, 52', Official participation in the Thessaloniki International Documentary Festival and the Montpellier International Film Festival (Cinemed), 2004

2005: Ζερέλια – το πρώτο βήμα / Zerelia – The First Step, short documentary

Production of the University of Thessaly

2009: Χρυσόσκονη / Gold Dust, feature film

Audience Award at the *Panorama of European Cinema*, Athens, October 2009

Best Supporting Actress Award to Anna Masha, Hellenic Film Academy, Athens, May 2010

Best Feature Film Award, Patras International Film Festival, October 2010

Participations in the Greek Film Festival in London (November 2010), the Greek Film Festival in Munich (November 2010), the Competition Section of the Cairo International Film Festival (December 2010), at the 1st Greek Film Festival Chicago (September 2011)

2009: Θόδωρος Αγγελόπουλος – Ταξίδι στην Αναπαράσταση / Theo Angelopoulos – Journey into Representation, TV documentary for the series Τοπία της Σιωπής / Landscapes of Silence, ERT Digital 2009–2010

2014: Για Πάντα / Forever, feature film (Silver Pyramid (Best Director) Cairo International Film Festival, 2014

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[66] https://www.clproductions.gr/directors/manda