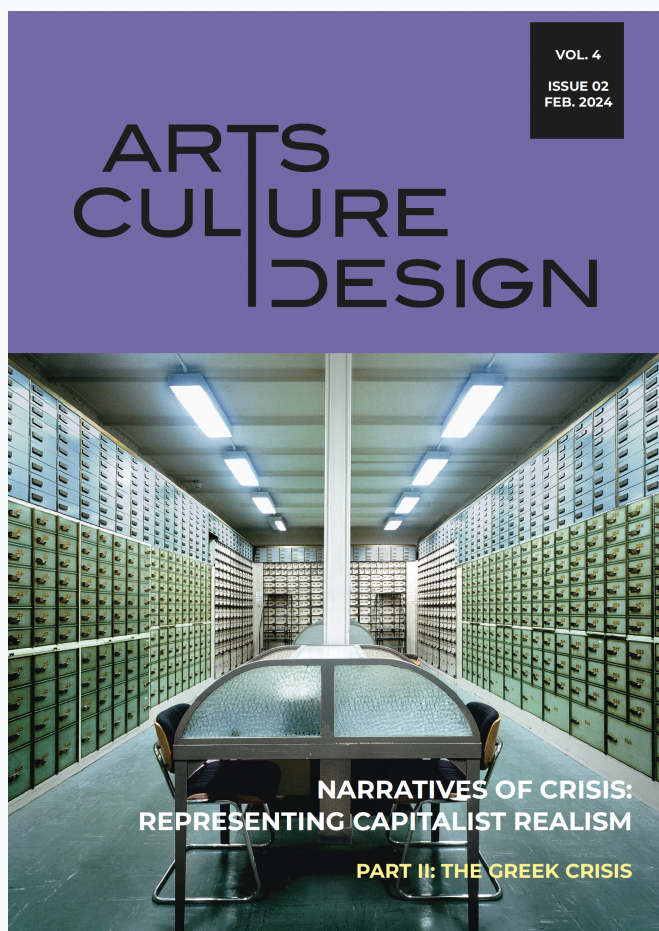


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NARRATIVES OF CRISIS: REPRESENTING CAPITALIST REALISM PART II: THE GREEK CRISIS



### WEIRD SPACES, IN BETWEEN

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# SPACES OF CAPITALIST REALISM: REPRESENTING THE NORMALISATION OF THE CRISIS IN CONTEMPORARY GREEK CINEMA

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## ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Greek cinema

Weird Wave

Representations of crisis

Neo-realism

Urban spaces in cinema

Taking as a starting point the idea of capitalist realism as formulated by Mark Fisher and associated with the power, or the inabilities of contemporary cinema to imagine alternative realities, this paper explores the representations of crisis through the elements of space and class in contemporary Greek films that were produced within the context of the Weird Wave and reveal the process of “normalization” of the crisis.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary cinema of the era of 'late capitalism' becomes for Mark Fisher the perfect tool in order to visualize his thoughts about Capitalist Realism: drawing examples from sci-fi fiction films that depict dystopias, totalitarian structures and ominous visions of a future in which nothing new, radical and subversive cannot be imagined anymore, he supports his main argument that "it's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism". If speculative film fiction is no longer able for utopian thinking, what then about realist, down-to-earth, small scale, and low budget art cinema in a contemporary multi-crisis context? Within the discussion about capitalist realism and the TINA doctrine, Fisher ironically describes 'realism' as "the deflationary perspective of a depressive who believes that any positive state, any hope, is a dangerous illusion" (2009:5). Fisher in this framework gives to the word an alternative reading closer to "pragmatism" than the one we usually associate in film discourse with 'realism' and realist cinema, meaning a cinema focused on social reality and real locations, inscribed to a tradition that goes back to Italian neo-realism and covers a wide breadth from Marxist militant filmmaking processes to the Bazinian concept of a cinema that not only records, but reveals, reality. What happens, however, when this neo-realist film strand collides with capitalist pragmatism?

Looking back from a distance, the official outburst of the post-2009 crisis seemed like the year zero for Greek cinema: young filmmakers started to participate frequently in international film festivals, iconic films were discussed in relationship to the crisis, its symptoms and meanings, while the theoretical framework of film studies in Greece begun to strengthen. At the same time, expectations and hopes for a radical change in the way the films are financed, produced and distributed were raised. In the cinematic field there were vivid discussions about alternative 'guerilla' modes of production, based on the extremely low budget, the volunteer participation of professionals and alternative ways of financing, such as the crowd funding (Chalkou 2012, Nikolaidou & Poupou 2017, Sifaki 2020,

Papanikolaou 2021). One decade later, with the state financial support system for the cinema still very fragile, the contemporary film production has moved towards an even more monopolized landscape, with only a handful of Greek producers still capable and willing to finance an art-house project; subsidies and residencies by prestigious art foundations, or festival film labs appear today as the only path for the funding of a film. Even for awarded filmmakers, with an impressive presence in major film festivals, it remains difficult to assure financing for their next project (c.f. Kokkini 2019). While the reception of this art-house new wave films by festivals and reviewers was warm, the theatrical admissions in Greece were misappropriate and the response of the spectators disappointing, bringing in the surface controversies not only about film cultures in Greece but also about practices of the local distribution and exhibition circuits.

At the end of the decade, and just before the pandemic crisis, one of the major and positive changes was that it showed the possibility for an opening of Greek cinema to transnational procedures and co-productions: almost all films of this new wave did not rely exclusively to Greek funding, on the contrary they participate more than ever to international practices of the art film market, something that was not the case for the Greek cinema of the previous decades (Papadimitriou 2018). Even if the hopes for a more emancipated and independent film production were suspended, what happened during the economic crisis gave the chance to the film community not only to imagine other ways of filmmaking, associating and collaborating, but also to affirm a new cinematic wave, born in a period of trouble. However, the lockdown and its repercussions brought immense obstacles in Greek film market, as international collaborations and production procedures became more complex, cinema theatres closed down in a definite way, while new practices such as online streaming Greek platforms (for example Cinobo), emerged dynamically. At the end of the pandemic crisis international productions shot in Greek locations took the lead in the local film market, and together with an emerging interest for mainstream television fiction series, and the transmutation of traditional TV channels to digital streaming platforms, brought arthouse film production to the background, in relation to the audiovisual landscape during the crisis.

## 2. GREEK CINEMA: BETWEEN DEPRESSION AND CONFIDENCE

Commenting on Deleuze and Guattari's seminal idea that schizophrenia is the condition that delineates capitalism, Fisher adds that bi-polar disorder is the mental state proper to the 'interior' of capitalism:

With its ceaseless boom and bust cycles, capitalism is fundamentally and irreducibly bi-polar, periodically lurching between hyped-up mania and depressive come down (the term 'economic depression is no accident, of course). To a degree unprecedented in any other social system, capitalism both feeds on and reproduces the moods of populations. Without delirium and confidence, capital could not function. (2009: p.35).

Retrospectively looking at the last 15 years in the Greek cinematic landscape as described above, one can diagnose this bi-polar cycle between phases of depression and lack of financial support for cinema, to triumphs in international film festivals, from a celebration for new and radical crowdfunding and collective filmmaking practices, to mourning about lamentable ticket admissions, from a delirium of institutional strategies for attracting international production through cash rebate and location advertising, to expressions of anger and grief about endangered cinema theatres in the cities centers<sup>2</sup>.

As many researchers of Greek cinema has shown until today, the films of the weird wave were political in multiple ways: in the way they used irony, cynicism and black humor to attack institutions and authorities, to discuss the dysfunctional family and the family archive, in the way they try to capture the immediate effects of the crisis and the possibilities that opened to question capitalism and neoliberalism, in the way they focused on sexuality and gender through disturbing narratives, or in the way they made use of the affect or aggression towards the spectator (Papanikolaou 2018, Psaras 2016, Nikolaidou & Poupou 2017). Dimitris Papanikolaou in his monograph on the Weird Wave highlights the political aspects of these films through the lenses of biopolitics, capturing a universal feeling that became more and more dominant and tangible during the Covid-19 cri-

sis, the lockdown and the pandemic measures. Furthermore, this new wave generated an interest for older cinematic forms, especially those of the New Greek Cinema of the 1970s, as it was clear that the young filmmakers sought in the work of the generation of the struggle against the junta an aesthetic armory that could be used in the films that were made during the crisis. Elements such as the performativity, the distancing effect, the irony, the overturn of the generic conventions, the de-dramatization and the serialization, had immediate references to the political art-house of the 1960s and 1970s. In this context, a group of filmmakers initiated in 2017 a two year film retrospective that was called *The Lost Highway of Greek Cinema*, that screened the less known art films from the 1960s to the 1980s that had stay in the margins of the canon of Greek film history. In these screenings, that took the form of a film club, issues about the preservation of these films, about the politics of film heritage, about the concept of the film archive and about the cinephilic culture in Greece were discussed and made this retrospective a kind of emancipative gesture towards official film institutions. The next step of this initiative took a more official form of screenings and film restorations under the name "Motherland I See You", organized by the Hellenic Film Academy (Nikolaidou & Papanikolaou 2022). If the activist movement of the *Filmmakers in the Mist*<sup>3</sup> (FOG, that stands for Filmmakers of Greece) in 2008 initiated the new weird wave, the Lost Highway ten years later proved that the film community was more mature and effective in terms of collective initiations, and re-oriented its focus from the way that the films were produced to the way that they reach the spectator.

The first form of this paper was written in 2019, so it examined three recent – at that time-examples, trying to trace the political discourse of these films focusing on the elements of space, class and social representations, three features that are associated with the heritage of neo-realism. The year 2019 marked a double shift in the political and financial situation of the country: the elections of this year put an end to the left government of Syriza and put forth the conservative party of Nea Dimokratia, reversing the political landscape. Previously, at the end of 2018, the PM had announced the ending of the Memorandum of Agreement, that officially put an end of the long period of the financial crisis. At

that time, I perceived these films as examples of a transition, from a state of emergency related to the conditions of the financial crisis and the memorandum era, to a state where emergency has taken the form of the new normality. Today, after the pandemic crisis, the unstable international geopolitical situation and the perspectives of new debt crisis, the concept of “normality” cannot be perceived but in an ironic way. From a present point of view, the year 2019 seems as the appropriate year for examining the bipolarity of the system, appearing as a threshold that could describe the end of radicalism and the return to more conservative ideological mind-sets. Thus, these three films examined through the point of view of space and class representations, described not only this kind of “in-between” transitional spaces, but also featured this mood of contradiction, ambiguity and bi-polar energy from pessimism to delirium, that merges a neo-realist view with “capital realism”. This bi-polarity is also expressed in terms of style and mise-en-scene, that waves from documentary practices of intense participation and immersive qualities to the austere, blank, still and minimalist compositions attributed to the ‘weird wave’. Finally, it is evident that in films produced after 2021 one can trace different spatial patterns, that are turning to more intimate and personal spaces: at the end of this article I will briefly refer to these examples, in order to compare them with these transitional cases, shot at the end of the period of the financial crisis, or the end of radicalism in *Weird Wave*.

The concept of the ‘return to normality’ that predicted, or even celebrated, the end of the crisis has been used as a political slogan in the last years of the 2010’s, mainly from the conservative government of Nea Dimokratia<sup>4</sup>; at the same time, this idea of ‘normality’ is currently used as an anti-slogan, in an ironic way, to describe a wave of ideological conservatism, ultra-nationalism and intolerance that emerges after a decade of crisis and radicalism, and it is evident in many forms of popular culture and media. Expressions of this retrograde shift can be felt in a multitude of aspects of everyday life after 2019 with an extreme right-wing agenda emerging in public and mediatic discourses; increase of femicides and gender violence, attack to immigrant rights, police violence and control, gentrification and speculation on public space are just a few examples of this shift; in the same vein, this use of

the ‘normalization’ process is not devoid of nostalgia, as it indirectly refers to a fictional, even abstract, past of imaginary ‘normality’ before the crisis. Papanikolaou points out that that the Greek word “kanonikotita” in this context means not only “normality” but mainly “normative”. As Papanikolaou asserts, “the discourse of ‘normality’ as well as the discourse of ‘return to normality’ is precisely what Fisher called capitalist realism. An all-enveloping sphere, an episteme of the now, that make everything look connected and warns everyone to keep labouring so that it can also keep posing as real” (Papanikolaou 2020: 127)

In this perspective, I will focus on three films that take place in an in-between time and space, and in my opinion show the dialectics between crisis and normality. These films, in more cynical or ironical way, illustrate what Fisher describes: ‘the normalization of crisis produces a situation in which the repealing of measures brought in to deal with an emergency becomes unimaginable’ (2009:1), and indicate not only that crisis is a constructive feature of capitalism, but essentially that the capitalist normality is based on a sequence of crisis and emergencies.

### 3. A LONG TAKE ON PATISSION AVENUE

*Patission Avenue* (2018) is a short film directed by Thanassis Neofotistos and Yannis Fotou as director of photography, that participated in the official selection of Venice Festival in 2018 and was awarded in Clermont Ferrand film festival. The particularity of the film is that it is was shot in one long take of thirteen minutes; this feature gives to the film the status of a technical achievement, as it follows a difficulty trajectory of the main character walking on the busy Patission Avenue in one sequence shot, without any possibility of correcting or adjusting the image in editing or post-production. The film was shot in a very precise time slot – during sunset – so in these thirteen minutes the action starts with daylight and finishes in early night lighting conditions. The film was rehearsed on location for three months, until it was finally shot in one and only take.

The long take is used here not only for aesthetic reasons, but also for narrative purposes, as it efficiently helps to built up the intensity, the sus-



Figure 1: *Patission Avenue*

pense and the identification with the situation: this sense of emergency has a striking affective power for the spectator, something noticed in all the film reviews (Boyce 2018). Once associated with slow, modernist arthouse filmmaking of a neo-realist descent, nowadays the long take, especially from an immersive first person's point of view brings to mind the aesthetics of digital games and VR artworks, in a sense that completes Bazin's theory about a total reproduction and a simulated lived experience of reality (Wolf 2015). A young actress is walking in a fast pace in a full of people Patission Avenue, talking at the phone; we never see her face, or hear her name, we only follow her as she walks or run. She is going to an audition for a part in a Shakespeare performance. The spectators understand progressively that her six-years old son is left alone in the house as the baby sitter had to leave because of an emergency. She tries to reach friends, her sister, her mother, her partner, in order to take care of the child as she continues her way to Exarhia. The phone does not stop ringing, and her son calls to tell her that he started cooking. At this moment she accidentally finds herself at a clash between the police (MAT – the Units for the Restoration of Order) and a group of protestors while she shouts at her son in order to prevent the accident. An explosion near her makes her run through the tear gazes, and the film finishes as she runs away together with the other protestors, having lost the phone that keeps ringing.

The filming features of *Patission Avenue* can be found in many films of the last decade, that could be described as films of 'social observa-

tion'. In these films (such as *Homeland*, *Wasted Youth*, *A Blast*, *The Daughter*) the construction of space and the mise-en-scène differ widely from the branch of the «weird» films that base their aesthetics on minimalism (motionless camera, long shots, deadpan acting). In the above-mentioned films a handheld camera follows the characters through the city streets and real locations, building a tight frame around the body of the actors, who are often filmed from the back, creating an «immersive» impression for the spectator, a framework that borrows its techniques from the observation documentary. This kind of cinematography and use of the setting, capture a raw image of everyday life in Athens, with excessive use of motion, out-of-focus images, shallow depth of field, noises, elliptical and fragmented views of the cityscape. Syntagma square, Patission Avenue, Athens University and the Polytechnic University become *chronotopes* in the Bakhtinian sense, as temporal and spatial indicators fused into one concrete whole – «spaces become charged and responsive to the movements of plot, time and history» (1981:84) – as they usually, in the first years of the crisis, appeared mainly in times of social unrest within specific narratives. The starting point of this climaxing plot starts from a point of the everyday life of the character, a common routine, a so-called normality: she is anxiously looking for her new job. However professional precarity and flexibility is not presented as something exceptional or out of normal, for an actress: she was prepared for one part, and then she is asked to present another part, from long hair she transforms her looks to short her, as she is walking – but that's the spirit of a performer, a

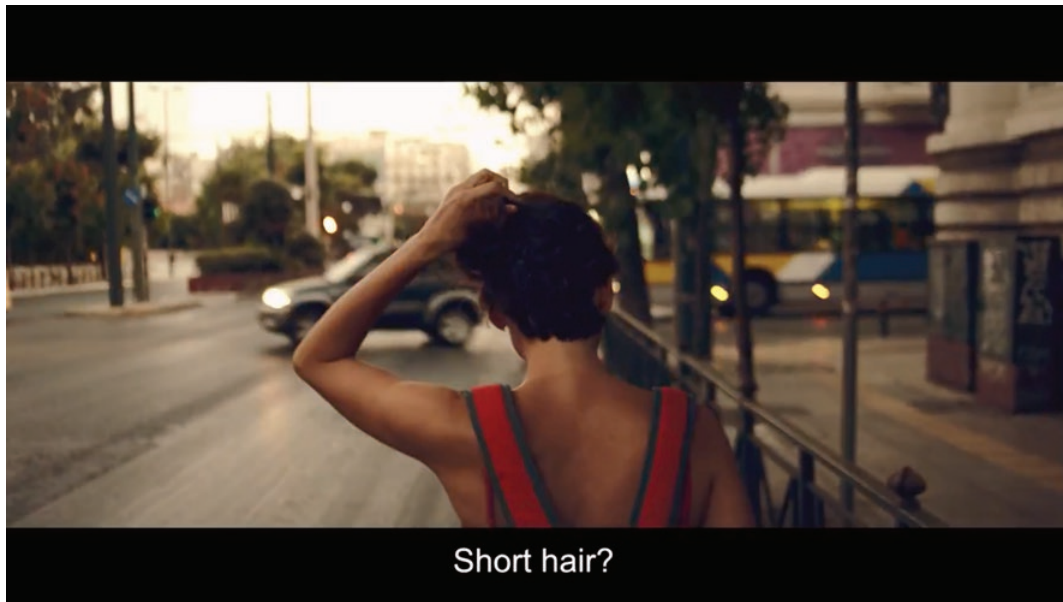


Figure 2: *Patission Avenue*

part of the job. At the same time the problem of who takes care of her son during her absence is presented also in a context of instability: the baby sitter leaves unexpectedly, the friends and family who usually help are not available, however these improvisations and last-minute arrangements also seem as a normality. As she crosses the avenue and directs towards Exarhia, she sees the first signs of a riot, a few tear gazes and the police in alert, however she continues her path, because this tension is also a kind of normality in the district. When she realizes that an accident of her son is very possible, and when a simple riot turns very fast into a streetfight and she is found in the middle, chased by the police, the feeling we get is how this sense of unstable 'normality' is so close to an almost predictable sense of emergency. The long take that unifies the real and the filmic time and space achieves this merging of the personal event with the public space and this short distance between 'normality' and crisis. .

#### **4. WEST OF THE RIVER: HER JOB (2018)**

A dominant feature in the films of this last decade was a turn towards new representations of the working class; many films focused on the working conditions and environments of characters who deal with precarity, insecurity, instability and unemployment during the crisis. While in the films of the 1990s there was a preference for middle class characters and liberal professions – many examples with journalists, artists, architects, university professors and doctors – the films of the Greek

wave seem to recreate an iconography of the Greek working class and the precariat. Kassaveti and Nikolaidou in their meticulous quantitative methodological approach have shown that in a significant percentage (72.3%) of the films of the new wave use work and unemployment as a part of their main theme, either as a core thematic element or as a 'free motif'. They present a useful taxonomy of four categories: allegories of work, representation of small business and self-employed workers, representations of in-work poverty and privation and representation of youth unemployment (Kassaveti & Nikolaidou 2019: 164-165). They also highlight the visibility of the figure of the professional female cleaner or domestic help after 2009 and the criminal attack against Konstantina Kouneva, member of the Greek Trade Union of Cleaners and Housekeepers, and discuss it in relationship with the films *At Home* (2014) by Athanassios Karanikolas and *Unfair World* (2013) by Filippos Tsitos (Kassaveti & Nikolaidou 2019: 165-166).

The figure of the cleaner appears as well in the recent, awarded film *Her Job* by Nikos Labôt (2018). It presents the story of Panayiota, a woman in her 30s, an oppressed housewife and mother, who had never worked outside home. The plot is loosely set in the middle of the crisis, during the memorandum years – presumably in 2012-3 – as in the first part of the film we hear information from the radio about the levels of unemployment in Greece, austerity measures and workers strikes. Her husband is unemployed and he is presented as having lost any hope to find a job that would be not too dangerous, too precarious or decently paid. When Panayiota learns from a neighbor that



Figure 3: Her Job

a new shopping mall is opening in the district, she decides to apply for a work as a cleaner. At first shy and insecure, she starts to enjoy her job, she becomes a model of employee and gains confidence, despite the low wages, the short-term contracts and the extra hours of work; she opens her first bank account, she learns how to drive and makes new friends. At home, her husband undertakes all the domestic duties, while she gains respect from her kids. After a few weeks of work, together with her other co-workers she will be fired brutally from this job, as she will be tricked to sign her resignation without any compensation. While she's shocked by this unexpected turn, the film will end at this exact point: it will not show her win again her job, or fighting back with the other fired cleaners. In the last scene, at the same day of her dismissal she's going to the birthday party of a colleague, she meets the other co-workers and they will try to dance and have fun despite their distress. The film's awkward and open ending implies that Panayiota and her friends they will find a new, similar and precarious job somewhere else; The film's end brings to mind the frustrating closure in the film *Anna's matchmaking*, (Pantelis Voulgaris 1972), where the heroine, after a failed revolt, is obliged to make patience with her job as a maid, in order to support her family in the village. Eva Stefani notes about this film "Made in 1972, one year before the Polytechnio events, the film by Voulgaris can be read as a call for an awakening, an apprising, a revolution. But nothing in this film shouts, nothing exceeds the measure of an impressively solid internal pace. This awareness, Voulgaris suggests, is firstly an internal case." She further cites a

review by Vincent Canby stating "No one in this film doesn't suspect a revolution, but the film shouts for a revolution with a voice so gentle, that the real anger of the words can be heard only afterwards" (Stefani 2007:88).

The film could be seen as an example of a cynical depiction of capitalist realism (in the sense of 'pragmatism'): when Panayiota and her co-workers are exploited, tricked and fired, the story tells us that there is not alternative. Her female colleagues, that represent all ages and nationalities, express various attitudes: others are organized to the labour's union, one of them threatens to go to the Labour Inspectorate, others are against collective action and believe they will be spared. The development of this story, while it starts in a context of crisis, doesn't not stay anchored to it: the working conditions it describes are not presented as an exceptional situation, but as normality. The responsible employee announces the dismissal without any reason: it is not because of the crisis, but because they don't need extra personnel after the inauguration and the opening of the mall. The co-workers deal with this dismissal as it was a usual, almost expected situation and not as an emergency, showing that strategies of exploitation that were used during the crisis, end up as a permanent situation and become 'normality'. The film doesn't show any of these attitudes of the colleagues having an immediate result: it gives however the feeling of a progressive maturing of the heroine, an awareness of her working rights as well as the forging of solidarity between her colleagues. It lets us imagine that she made the first steps and that in the future, she will not permit to be exploited.

Figure 4: *Her Job*

The film's image, in terms of cinematography and style, make use of a discreet and realist approach inscribed to the tradition of social realism that brings to mind Ken Loach's style. The cinematography purposely avoids any excessive or eccentric stylistic virtuosity, keeping a down to earth imagery and constructing a "normal" and "ordinary" image of everyday life, that stresses once more the concept of normality. Most of the scenes are shot with a handheld camera, but in contrast to the previous pattern described above, here we don't have excessive, delirious movement or immersive intensity by following the main character. A recurrent iconographical pattern of the film are the close-ups to the characters face, and close-ups of her working tools, such as the vacuum cleaner. The camerawork stresses the acting of Marisha Triantafyllidou that plays Panayiota with an ageless face, an empty gaze, a hunched posture and a tired figure that slowly changes towards a belated emancipation.

The film starts in a low-income neighborhood of Athens that remains unidentified: in the first act we follow the characters in this district, at the supermarket, the school (that is located in Zografou) and the street outside the house. In one of the first scenes we see Panayiotas husband Kostas in a pawn shop that is located in an urban arcade, a passage lined with other gold market stores, pawn shops and jewelry dealers. Kostas, after leaving the pawn shop enters a lottery retailer shop, that is situated in the same passage, just opposite the pawn shop. The passage is at the number 4 of Sofokleous street, near the old Stoke Exchange of Athens, but the way that it is filmed doesn't

make this place recognizable, and doesn't intentionally highlight the semiotics the stock exchange and its relation to the pawn shop and the lottery retailer: however, the reality of the place is there, even if it is captured in a discreet way. In scenes set in iconic urban landmarks (in Omonia and Panepistimiou for example), the director uses shallow depth of field and in this way he transforms them to unrecognizable ordinary places. One more passage of the center of Athens appears a few scenes later: Panayiota goes at her first interview for the job, at the office that is situated at the Stoa Fix, at Omonia. In one shot we see the old sign with the name of the passage, while in the street a scrap gatherer finishes his work, wearing a shirt with the logo "Life is fantastic". Such compositions that express an ironic vision on capitalist realism can be found all over the film, but in a more subtle and unobtrusive way than the one we found in the films made in the first years of the crisis.

From the urban passages of the center of Athens, as predecessors of the commercial center, now in decay, we transit into the new ordinary location of commercial activity, the mega-mall. While in the first act of the film there is a variety of everyday life places, in the following two acts the plot is firmly set in the commercial mall where most of the action unfolds. "Le Marché" is a new mall inaugurated despite the crisis in the western districts of Athens: the real location was the Mall River West in Kifissos Avenue that marks a social frontier between the city-center and the working-class western suburbs. All action is framed by the impersonate and glass surfaces of the mall,

surrounded by low-cost stores of international brands, a representation of a banal, familiar and accessible consumerism.

In this part of the film the *mise-en-scene* shifts slightly as it adapts to the new settings, we have more long shots, empty frames and more abstract compositions of non-places – parking lots, highways, halls, basements, locker rooms – that bring the aesthetics closer to the “weird” films of 2010s. Panayiota is usually framed in wide shots, in transition inside elevators, escalators, or her sweeping vehicle. One of the most spectacular shots of the film – the one that was used also for the promotional poster – is a vertical overhead frame, in which we see Panayiota from above vacuuming a red carpet, giving an abstract quality that breaks for a moment the monotony of the this ordinary *mise-en-place*, probably suggesting a change into how the character perceive herself and her new working identity. Always in a subtle way, the film marks a transition, from the vernacular iconography of everyday life urban locations in decay and crisis to new spaces, consumerist practices and working conditions that become the new normality.

## 5. THIS FAMILIAR STRANGENESS: *PITY* (2018)

Babis Makridis' directorial debut, *L*, penned by Efthymis Filippou in 2011, emerged as one of the pioneering films, alongside *Dogtooth*, *Alps* and *Attenberg*, that triggered the label ‘weird’ from critics. Makridis' work was from the beginning in the core of what was called the weird wave as he shared common features and also the same collaborators with Yiorgos Lanthimos and Athina Rachel Tsangari. *L* had all the features attributed to the ‘weird’ aesthetics, such as deadpan acting, absurdism, lack of emotional expression, minimalistic looks, natural lighting and geometrical organization of the space, and it stressed to extremes the de-dramatization of the plot and the inexpressive theatricality. Makridis second feature film *Pity* came out in 2018, almost a decade after the outburst of the ‘weird wave’. What was then shocking, unexpected and new in terms of style and narration, in *Pity* has a quality of ‘strange familiarity, or familiar strangeness’ as the reviewers had noticed (Lodge 2018, Linden

2018, Martinez 2019). I don't stress this as a negative aspect of the film, or as a sign of non-effectiveness, on the contrary I believe that is a good example of the transformative process that affected artistic forms and creative and expressive patterns that were born in a ‘state of emergency’ and their mutation into the era of the so-called ‘normalization’.

The main character of *Pity* is a Lawyer – we don't know his name. His wife had an accident and is in a state of coma. He and their son go on with their lives, while friends and people they know express their condolences, giving them gifts and treats. Every morning a neighbor bakes a cake and offers it to the Lawyer, with wishes for the fast recovery of her wife. The Lawyer cannot cry; he is unable to express his sorrow and grief, so he feels fulfilled by the pity of the others, and even enjoys it. When the wife is unexpectedly resurrected, he tries to find again this strange routine of the pity of others, who now don't care about him. Desperate of having lost this affection, he stages the murders of his wife, kid and father-in-law, so as to be again the object of pity. Only the dog survives from the bloodbath.

In terms of style the film bears all the features of the weird wave: planimetric space and geometrical composition, an austerity to camera movements and framing. The iconographical motif of the empty space is one of the most characteristic aesthetic choices of the ‘weird wave’. Filmmakers of this trend express this need to leave naked their locations, to devoid them from their social dimension, giving the impression of a laboratory, as Athina Rachel Tsangari does in *Attenberg*. For example, the screenwriter Efthymis Filippou says in an interview that when he writes a script with Yiorgos Lanthimos he's never interested about where the action will be situated: whether it will take place in Larissa or in Mexico City is their last decision. This non-locality, as well as the feeling of replicability of the national space is characteristic of these films that can be read as a comment about the standard image of the urban spaces of globalization. Another ironic feature of these films is their portrayal of the preferences for spaces and characters of the middle class. During the initial years of the crisis, while media imagery often focused on images of poverty and victimhood, these films instead emphasized the enclosed

Figure 5: *Pity*

spaces of the middle class. This choice sparked reactions that viewed the films of the weird wave as a reflection of society. However, by the 2019 elections, the concept of the 'middle class' had become central to the political agenda of both governmental parties, instrumental to the rhetoric of the 'return to normality' (c.f. Panayiotopoulos 2021: 308-312, 350-351). Thus, the class representations of these films, which highlight exactly this performance between conformism and exuberance, seriousness and the ridiculous, the normal and the weird, become even more ironic and political.

The film takes place in urban spaces of the upper middle class, in privileged and beautiful locations situated in the sea front of Athens. The Lawyer lives in a minimalistic apartment at the Faliro Coast looking at the sea and the Poseidonos Avenue, his wife is cured at the Onasseio Hospital and from the windows we see the Niarchos Foundation, the Hellenicon area and the sea at the background. He spends his free time at the Vouliagmeni beach, and he visits his father-in-law at his villa at Sounio, overlooking the island of Makronissos at the background. These are all locations that in the last years had become a major topic in the political discourse, spaces in transition to gentrification, locations waiting for the investors; the case of the 'Athenian Riviera' as the flagship of the national tourism and the only hope for the financial resurrection of the country, was one of the priorities in the media discourse and the agenda of the election of 2019.

Inevitably, once again, the weird calls for

allegorical readings, despite the fact that the intention of the filmmakers and the scriptwriter do not reveal any sociopolitical nuances. *Pity* is a film about a past crisis - a wife in coma - but the Lawyer realizes all the benefits he can get from the pity of others, and even the pleasure that he feels from the sentiments of grief and mourning. *Pity* is also a film about an unwanted resurrection, that will deprive the Lawyer from his benefits: How he will ensure that this cycle of death and pity will continue? These transitions seem as an ironic comment on the bi-polar cycles of capitalism that are based on recurrent crisis, phases of depression and the rhetoric of recovery, resurrection and boom. Finally, one has the feeling that Makridis in this hilarious black comedy makes a self-parody of the weird wave, of its basic features - such as the performativity, deadpan acting and lack of affect - and of the attention that the Greek films enjoyed in international film festival circuit during the crisis. Now that the particularities of Greek society in crisis are not under the microscope of the global media, and other regions of the planet become the center of attention, will these films continue to have a privileged place in the art film market?

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is noteworthy to highlight the contrasting spatial perceptions observed in these recent films compared to those of the previous generation, particularly films from the 1990s and early 2000s, in which the main topics were the journey, the itinerary, the borders, the limits and the exploration of national or nomadic identities, with the road movie genre prominently embraced by filmmakers as Angelopoulos, Panayiotopoulos, Tsiolis, Voulgaris, Goritsas and many others. This wide explorative geography has given way to a typology of spaces that revolve around the concepts of stability, seriality, replicability and delocalisation, offering insights to this 'invisible political geography' of capitalism (Petsini 2018:14). Nonetheless, in recent post-pandemic films we see new typologies of spaces, this time more associated with personal and intimate geographies exploring topics of memory, time, materiality and identity, such as the films *Magnetic Fields*, (Gousis 2021) *Bella* (Th. Petraki 2020) *Moon 66 questions* (J. Lentzou 2021), *Iota Period Omega*, (Alexiou 2022), *Broadway* (Massalas 2022), *Animal* (Exarhou, 2023). While during the crisis the concept of exoticism, crisis voyeurism and discourses of Greek exceptionalism prevailed in the discussions about Greek weird cinema, in the post-pandemic era a need to take a closer look to 'normality', the familiar or the ordinary (in an extraordinary situation) became more evident: this tendency calls for a re-examination of the empiric, realist and familiar space during the cycles of permanent crisis, emergencies and normalization processes.

## NOTES

- [1] See for example the petition letter signed by 673 professionals of the film industry and the audiovisual sector against recent legislation and institutional measures announced in 2021. The open letter highlights all the crucial problems issued from the governmental policies and funding procedures involving ERT (Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation), EKOME (National Center of Audiovisual Media and Communication, and the Ministry of Culture. As described, the professionals warn that these actions will weaken the industry further leading to monopolistic practices. They demand the reinforcement of the Center for Greek Cinema as the lead institution supporting the film industry and ask for the design of a national strategy for the cinema. (Flix team 2021)
- [2] Many cinema theatres in Athens closed during the Covid-19 lockdown (such as Oscar), but the most disturbing news were the discussions in 2022 about the closing down of three iconic cinema theatres in the city-center, Ideal, Astor and Aello (see Flix team 2022). For the moment, in 2024, only Ideal faces a direct threat as its building will be restructured as a hotel, raising concerns about the survival of other endangered cinemas in Athens. During 2022 and 2023 this issue was also connected with intense public discussions about urban gentrification and the impact of overtourism in Greece.
- [3] Filmmakers in the Mist (FOG – Filmmakers of Greece) was a movement initiated by 45 film professionals that in 2009 boycotted the Thessaloniki International Film Festival as a protest against governmental strategies and lack of support of the audiovisual sector in the beginning of the financial crisis. This movement resulted to the creation of the Hellenic Film Academy, an institution with the aim to support initiatives regarding the development of Greek film production. See also Karalis (2012: 278, Papanikolaou 2021: 37-39, Sifaki 2020: 29-30)
- [4] During 2018 and 2019 the slogan of the "return to normality" that would mean the prevailing of the conservative party and the ending of SYRIZA government could be found in all liberal and right-wing media. Indicative of this discourse is a recent article in *Kathimerini* in which the journalist makes an overview of the elections after 2015, and reinforces the narrative of a "demand for normality": "the Greeks voted for a return to normality" one can read under the photo of Tsipras leaving the Maximou mansion, the official seat of the Prime Minister. (*Kathimerini* 15/5/2023). However, after 2020 this journalistic slogan took other significations, in the context of the post Covid-19 lockdown period, until it lost any meaning at all in a multi-crisis environment.
- [5] Indicative is the project of Thessaloniki Film Festival *Spaces* that in 2020 called several directors to shoot a short film entirely made in one indoor location, during the lockdown. The project was inspired by *Species of Spaces* by Georges Perec in which the author calls us to question not the extraordinary event, but the most common and unnoticed things, object and habits of our everyday life (c.f. Poupou 2020).

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