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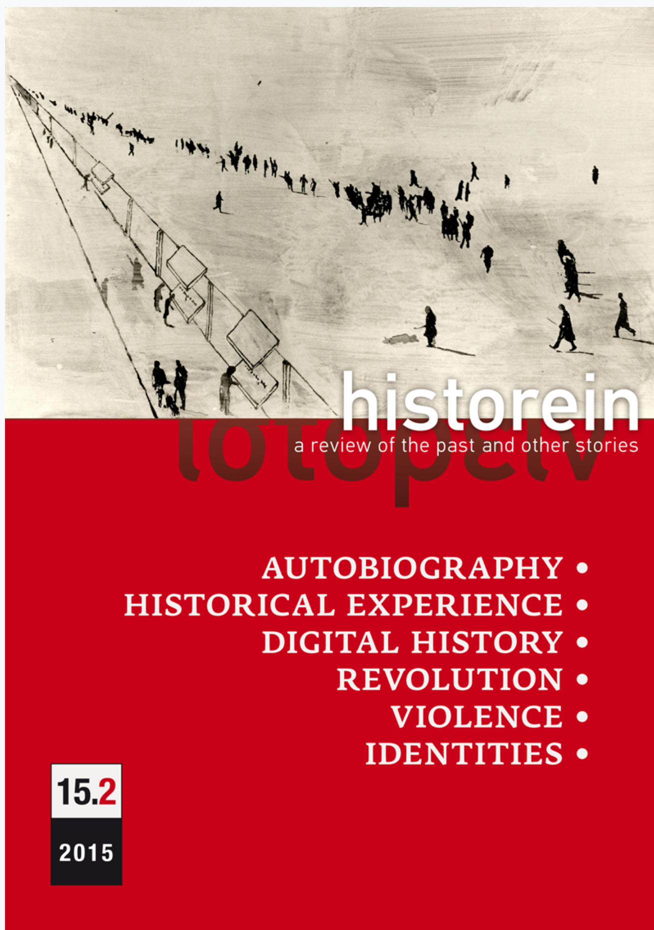

Review of Vassilios Bogiatzis', Μετέωρος μοντερνισμός: τεχνολογία, ιδεολογία της επιστήμης και πολιτική στην Ελλάδα του Μεσοπολέμου, 1922-1940 [Suspending modernism: technology, the ideology of science and politics in interwar Greece, 1922–1940]

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dle East, ed. M. A. Cook (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 207–18; İbrahim Metin Kunt, "Derviş Mehmed Paşa, vezir and entrepreneur: a study in Ottoman political-economic theory and practice," *Turcica* 9 (1977): 197–214. Surprisingly, the latter is missing from the bibliography of the book under review.

2 Ermiş cites an anonymous *Nasihatname* ("advice book") from the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. or. oct. 1598. See n. 2, 72; on this text cf. Rhoads Murphey, "Solakzade's treatise of 1652: a glimpse at operational principles guiding the Ottoman state during times of crisis," *Beşinci Milletlerarası Türkiye Sosyal ve İktisat Tarihi Kongresi Tebliğleri*, vol. 1 (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1990), 27–32; repr. in Rhoads Murphey, *Essays on Ottoman historians and historiography* (Istanbul: Eren, 2009), 43–48.

3 Linda T. Darling, *A history of social justice and political power in the Middle East: the circle of justice from Mesopotamia to globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

4 Cf. Marinos Sariyannis, "The princely virtues as presented in Ottoman political and moral literature," *Turcica* 43 (2011): 121–44.

Vassilios Bogiatzis

Μετέωρος μοντερνισμός: τεχνολογία, ιδεολογία της επιστήμης και πολιτική στην Ελλάδα του Μεσοπολέμου (1922–1940)

[Suspending modernism: technology, the ideology of science and politics in interwar Greece, 1922–1940]

Athens: Eurasia. 2012. 496 pp.

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Modernism and modernity sometimes occur in the same phrase in Vassilios Bogiatzis' work. For those unfamiliar with the interwar period, this may be a bit confusing. However, understanding the difference between the two terms is necessary for the reader to follow the rich exposition of one of the most tense periods in modern Greek history. Modernism, notwithstanding the impossibility of an incontestable definition, is the reaction to the first crisis of modernity. Bogiatzis mostly follows Wagner in describing the first crisis of modernity as the reaction to the second Industrial Revolution (1870–1918).[1] Already from the mid-nineteenth century, a critical discourse had emerged that targeted "out-of-control technology". Despite the romantic origins of this discourse, over the course of time the social, economic and political consequences of the second Industrial Revolution combined with pervasive feelings of insecurity and social disorientation. The interwar period witnessed the culmination of the crisis, a development that gradually led from the "restricted" to "organised" modernity.

One important outcome of this sequence was the gradual realisation on the part of both the

dominant bourgeoisie and the workers movement that the much-sought solution lay in the same context: technology was able to provide the social organisation and technical expertise that would reduce contingency and insecurity and increase predictability and control. This realisation was at the heart of a novel assessment of technology, a *reappropriation* of technology, which characterised interwar attempts towards the construction of an organised version of modernity.

Modernism developed on this basis. It was fed by aesthetic investments, theoretical quests, technocratic ideals and hygienic projects, all inspired by the Promethean power of technology and seeking "a new beginning" (*Aufbruch*) that would banish chaos, ambiguity and the lack of meaning – the long period of "liminoidality". However, the search for "a new beginning" did not prefigure the political character of "organised" modernity: the whole spectrum of solutions from the liberal to the authoritarian end, often crowded in the discourse of a single person, or within the limits of a single political programme, were called into play.

Bogiatzis places 1930s Greece within this context not as an exception or a watered-down version of modernity, but as a local case from which the overall study of modernity could profit. Equally important is his attempt to bring forward the inherent contradictions of the modernist "projects" of the period by emphatically underlining the dynamic and ambivalent coexistence of liberal and authoritarian elements in the political agendas of his actors.

The key concepts in Bogiatzis' account are modernisation (*εκσυγχρονισμός*) and progress, on the one hand, and tradition and Hellenism/Hellenicity (*ελληνισμός/ελληνικότητα*), on the other. At the same time, the notion of technology expands to include social practices and institutions destined to handle the consequences of the crisis – "the unbearable contingency of the interwar condition" (29).

The main body of the book is divided into four sections, in which the author deals with the modernist "projects" of some key figures of the interwar period. The first section, devoted to prime minister Eleftherios Venizelos, "focuses on the appropriation of scientific ideology and technology" both "in the actual form of infrastructure and in the immaterial form of the technologies of institutions" (101). Venizelos was motivated by the conviction that the necessary rationalisation of Greek political life could be achieved through a "science of politics". This rationalisation would pave the way to technologies of institutions that would form the necessary background for the development of actual technological infrastructure. According to the author, the overall idea governing Venizelos' choices was that safeguarding the endangered social stability involved, on the one hand, the empowerment of the administration with scientific (technocratic) bodies that would overcome the inability of parliament to regulate the class struggle; and, on the other, the establishment of technological infrastructures that would provide the basis for the reconstruction of production and redistribution of social wealth. In this regard, science and technology, both in their literal and symbolic forms, served to bridge the desire for social "regulation" with centralised practices, often wavering on the edge of the traditional liberal parliamentarianism.

In the second section, Bogiatzis traces the path of Ioannis Metaxas to dictatorship by exploring the construction of his ideological toolbox, which drew heavily on interwar fascist and Nazi public discourses. As was the case with those regimes in Italy and Germany, Metaxas envisioned the overcoming of the "dead end"

of liberal parliamentary democracy through the investment in the notion of the "national". At the political level, this investment called for the upgrading the corporatist pattern of political representation to the detriment of the "paralytic" representation of conflicting class interests. At the ideological (but also practical) level, it aimed at coupling scientific and technological attainments with the national spirit and tradition. The materialist rationalism that characterised the "decadent" science and technology of the liberal condition was now exorcised through the submission of these faculties to the utmost value of (the irrational) faith in the ideals of the race. And this was eventually the context within which the appropriation of science and technology took place in Metaxas' fascist regime. As a result, the enthusiasm for large public works, the expansion of transportation and communication networks, as well as the mainstream technologies of radio, telephone, and the automobile, went hand in hand with authoritarian regulations in the political sphere aiming to expel the class struggle and communist threat. In this sense, Bogiatzis boldly (and correctly, in my opinion) claims that "the 4th of August [regime] was not a break with the previous political situation, but rather its culmination" (264).

The third section concerns George Theotokas, the most representative figure of the so-called Generation of the '30s. Despite the extended exchange about whether this generation really existed, who belonged to it, what its intellectual profile was, and what its impact on postwar cultural life was,[2] there is a general consensus that Theotokas' essays record the intellectual quests of a broad spectrum of people during the decade. Theotokas was a modernist and the kind of technological enthusiast who associated technology with the search for new aesthetic patterns. According to his view, the appropriation of technology at the national level involved a radical break with tradition and the elaboration of a new aesthetic index that would redefine the place of Greece on Europe's cultural map. In fact, it was in Theotokas' account that Europe acquired such a prominent position for the first time: it was described as a multifaceted assemblage, permeated by infinite discrepancies, but leading to a higher level of synthesis that marked a distinct cultural ideal. The question for Theotokas (and for the Generation of the '30s, in general) was how Greece could break with its Balkan (and, more recent, Ottoman) context and become part of this cultural entity. This was the framework wherein Theotokas placed his own version of the appropriation of technology. However, as his conceptualisation and admiration of technology gradually became impregnated with fears of dehumanisation and loss of meaning (echoing the prewar fears of out-of-control technology), Theotokas turned to the primacy of human values as a means to counterbalance scientism, technocracy and the dominance of "the mechanism", which narrowed down human life. This led him to a new conceptualisation of Greek history and tradition, not as a departure from the modernist vision but as a particular way to enact it. In this context, he combined the pro-European disposition with a critique of the west, the appreciation of tradition with the rejection of communism, the subscription to technological optimism with the defence of Greek physiognomy and the praise of fascist vigour with the values of the new literature and Christian Orthodoxy (376–7).

Perhaps the only unwavering proponent of science and technology among Bogiatzis' heroes was the leftwing intellectual (and later Communist Party member) Dimitris Glinos. Glinos engaged in a public debate with two philosophers representing the right, Panagiotis Kanellopoulos and Konstantinos Tsatsos. The stake of the debate was the extent to which

science could determine human action and social progress. As part of an intellectual tradition which considered itself "scientific" (dialectical materialism), Glinos readily defended science at large as a social power destined to abolish social repression and emancipate human creativity. The inherent determinism of this perception activated the idealist reflexes of the rightwing thinkers, who undertook the task to raise human freedom and creativity above the assumed metaphysical necessity of scientific laws. Although in different ways, both Kanellopoulos and Tsatsos supported the idea that human history was a continuous struggle for the realisation of moral purposes and an unceasing attempt for the subordination of nature to freedom. Their discourses reflected the contemporary discussion about the antithesis between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*: the putative neutrality of technical civilisation (and thus the uncontrolled social consequences of blind technological advancement) called for an active intervention on the part of the human intellect with a view to shaping technology through moral values. In this sense, the appropriation of contemporary scientific and technological attainments required an authoritarian state that would act as a mentor and pedagogue to safeguard the proper national character of the whole enterprise.

Bogiatzis' detailed inquiry into the original material and his careful reconstruction of the discourses of the main interwar actors illuminates the troubled transition of Greece to the framework of "organised" modernity. His major and important conclusion is that all different versions of modernity elaborated in the interwar period through the appropriation of technology resulted in political solutions that flirted with the limits of liberal democracy and were variously attracted by the possibility of authoritarian and/or totalitarian social "arrangements".

One problem with Bogiatzis' book is its somewhat indeterminate character. *Suspending Modernism* could be (and actually is) an excellent study in the sociology of modernity. However, the author seems to place his undertaking in the context of science, technology and social studies. Science and technology have been his main concern throughout, and the perspective from which he analyses the discourses of his actors primarily focuses on the way they perceived science and technology as driving forces of social change. This approach, however, requires a series of elaborations and distinctions, which I believe are not properly addressed in the context of the present study.

To start with, as a historian of science I would be happier if Bogiatzis had delved deeper into the *ideological complex* of science and technology: How and why did his actors come to combine science and technology in the context of their social, intellectual and political agendas? How did they use the "ideology of science" to provide justification for their technological determinism? How did they *instrumentalise* science and *politicise* technology in order to make them fit their political visions? Historians of science no longer believe that technology equals applied science. Neither does Bogiatzis, I believe, but he takes too literally and somehow uncritically the word of his actors.

Another problematic issue has to do with the "technologies of institutions". Bogiatzis seems, first, to place the technologies of institutions at the same analytical level as technology and, second, to somehow limit his research to this kind of technological "implementation". Political institutions, constitutional drafts, bills, acts and programmatic declarations are subjected to much more deliberation than "actual" technological attainments (which are practically absent from the book). It should be mentioned, though, that the history of the word "technol-

ogy" is long and particularly enlightening. The term was first used in grammar and subsequently became associated with social issues, the pursuit of progress and, only lately, with technical innovation. This story took place in different ways in a variety of localities – so, it is in fact a bundle of stories – and it would be truly interesting for it to be told, in the sense that illuminates the way a certain conceptualisation of technology encouraged and was encouraged by a certain (capitalist) arrangement of social life around the values of progress, innovation and consumption. I think that Bogiatzis misses the chance to contribute to this storyline by taking advantage of the conceptual ambiguities inherent in his case studies. By simply confining the study of technology to its institutional framework, he fails to appreciate its deep metamorphoses, which are responsible for the new cultural forms of the twentieth century.

One final issue has to do with the way Bogiatzis employs the concept of "appropriation" to account for the way his actors perceived science and technology. Nowhere does he explain the particular meaning he assigns to the term. Why should he? Because the term has a long story in the history of art, imperialism and postcolonial studies, and in the history of science. A variety of practices and attitudes have been associated with appropriation and no two instances are identical. In the last decade, the discussion around such issues has been quite intense and, although it did not lead to a general consensus, it succeeded in contrasting appropriation with other modes of transmission (such as transfer, dissemination, adaptation, etc) and in singling out the active and creative role of the "receiving" localities in shaping "established" science and technology. Bogiatzis not only fails to take these elaborations into account, but he also fails to explain how exactly his actors *appropriated* technology, that is, how they intervened in or creatively transformed the nature of the received ideas and practices. I believe that an important reason for this is that both science and technology remain highly abstract and mystified throughout this book.

Although such issues could have been better addressed had the book kept in tandem with contemporary discussions in science, technology and social studies, *Suspending Modernism* as a whole is a well-documented book that sheds new light on the ideological ferment of interwar Greece. More importantly, the appeal to science and technology, even at the level of the institutional framework and the intellectual atmosphere, opens up the discussion about how historians of science and technology could contribute to recasting the dominant narrative of modernity.

NOTES

1 Peter Wagner, *A sociology of modernity: liberty and discipline* (London: Routledge, 1993).

2 Dimitris Tziovas, *Ο μύθος της γενιάς του τριάντα: νεοτερικότητα, ελληνικότητα και πολιτισμική ιδεολογία* [The myth of the Generation of the '30s: modernity, Hellenism and cultural ideology] (Athens: Polis, 2011).