

Greek movie critics in the 1990s: their part in the emergence of new media

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Introduction

The aim of this article is to highlight the cultural change during the 1990s in Greece, as described (intentionally or not) by the movie critics. The decade of the 1990s faced a big shift in the media production with the launch of private TV stations in 1989. The field grew as never before, with both TV shows and magazines being the main source of information for the public. At the same time, they held all the social, cultural and political debates. There was a tremendous production of any kind of media, journalism was thriving and, as always, there were very serious international and local events impacting Greece's political, social and cultural life.

I am going to give a background of these events that were drawing media attention and try to identify not just the movie critics' opinion on these, but also how the debates and the concerns of the era were implemented in their writing. For the purpose of this article, I'm focusing on magazines and journals on cinema or culture in general, when needed in comparison with movie critics who were writing in daily press. I am also focusing on cinematic events and new releases that gained media attention.

The end purpose is to show that shifts in history and society are related with culture; what we understand as a cultural shift it's not just part of the society or the history –although related with them – but it can be read as a whole, helping us create a better picture of a period. Change in opinion and the arts, for the better or the worse, comes slower than we understand. This idea has been expressed by Raymond Williams (1961), which is going to be the main method of reading in this article, helping us to understand the co-relation between movie critics and current events.

The Long Revolution

Raymond Williams' *Long Revolution* (1961) is an important work for understanding culture and its processes. Williams argues that cultural changes and shifts are continuous processes and not sudden. Ideas like democracy and communication are explored in this work and Williams makes the reader understand how these ideas are developed in complex ways over the centuries. He provides both a theoretical background with examples from English history and society (1961:3-125) which is going to be the main methodological tool for this article and its application in English art and culture (1961:125-355). He returns often to the conclusion that popular art and everyday culture are equally important as the works of art that are considered important by the elite (classes in power, historians, critics etc). Culture is an everyday process and it is not combined by scattered works of art. For the purpose of this article, I am going to focus on a few theoretical suggestions that he describes.

Williams narrates the history of art and the concepts with which we understand art in our times. Renaissance managed to revolutionize the way we understand art with new ideas, which were mostly questioning Christianity. This long process managed to create not just doctrines, but tradition when it comes to how we understand art. Because of the thinking of this time, we have inherited the concept that art is superior to reality, an area that only the 'creative mind' can have access to. This is the tradition in the history of art (and culture) that has inherited to the modern society the feeling of contempt for 'inferior fiction'. Although, this superiority of some thinkers or way of thinking, is questioned by his contemporary field of psychoanalysis. Culture is a lived reality but it can also re-enforce the 'creative mind', which for Williams is a shared possession. We carry interpretations because of our culture; hence reality is a human creation. We learn to see things but at the same time, the lived experience creates

culture. New realities can emerge, proving not the individuality of the lived experience, but the variety, the complexity of creating culture and the importance of human interpretation.

Following this train of thought, Williams rejects subjectivity and objectivity when it comes to understand art through lived reality. This is also why the educational system is of high importance, since this is the institution which we learn to understand culture. For Williams, art is a way of communicating this lived experience and the common feeling. The way we interpret art, is also a product of the same lived experience and the result of achieved or failed communication. With this in mind, he proposes that there is not higher/lower and good/bad art, but art that has managed to achieve the desired communication. This is also why there is constant re-evaluation of works of art for which people, the critics and/or the elite has changed their perspective over time. Creating and understanding art is a common ground, but it is also part of understanding and producing culture (Williams: 1961:3-40). It belongs to all people, since all people are responsible when creating culture and communicating in the form of societies as we know them.

Going through three general categories that define culture, he concludes that culture has been always narrowed down to the concept of the 'society', i.e. that society defines culture with specific definitions and values. These concepts make us try to find absolute values and definitions that we will look up to and try to recreate when we are studying culture. We are trying to identify the process of human perfection, but this is misleading. If we try to understand culture as process, we will be free from the idea that culture has reached perfection at a certain point. If we forget the concept of the ideal and absolute value, we can understand the cultural process as a whole. This is how we will also appreciate more the common culture. What he suggests is not to reject or to

idealize concepts and ideas that have been surfacing in our culture, but instead, treat them as the bigger picture. Culture is not a part of society, but culture, society, economy and all those aspects of human production create what he often calls as 'organization'. We can't just read a work of art as if it was just a product of its society; instead, we must see both society and the work of art as inter-related (Williams 1961:41-46). He defines the theory of culture as 'the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life' (Williams 1961:46).

It is important to understand in that concept that we cannot have full appreciation or understanding of the long past and that we could focus on recent past and today in order to be fully able to describe the 'structure of feeling' (Williams 1961:48), composed by the 'sense of life' (Williams 1961:47). These are characteristics of 'here and now' of our culture; elements that history often cannot trace and describe. It is a possession that people have in communities and this is where communication lays, which is another concept that Williams often returns to. The more we move away from 'here and now', the less information we have access to in order to understand the 'structure of feeling' of culture and the community of a specific place and time. What we left with is tradition. Williams also explains that the tradition we are left with, the tradition that we 'remember' is always subjected to power relations and interests, usually class interests. The tradition we study is different than the one lived. He suggests that we should now start looking at the area of relations between the classes of activity that have been studied separately and re-evaluate our understanding (Williams 1961:47-60).

Another concept he develops is the 'social character', which is also a concept that helps us describe the area of relations inside the cultural process. Williams describes how there is a dominant social character of a period, which is related to class

society. Such social character can be seen in legislations, in public writings etc.; people are trained in specific social virtues during their time. The more we examine the culture with different lenses, the more we can observe a variety of alternative social characters that could or have been emerged. Social character is defined by Williams as the 'abstract of a dominant group' which in the case he is describing (1840s English society) was a developed form of the morality of the industrial and commercial middle class, which was powerful at this time (Williams 1961:60-61). What Williams suggests is that this forced morality in the social character is always a result of class relations. This is something that can be applied and should be taken into consideration when studying events or narrow time periods.

This is how it can be helpful to explore today's culture or the one of the recent past. This is also why it is important to explore more selective traditions; they can give us a better understanding of the lived experience of the past. This is how Williams circles back to underscoring the importance of common culture and the importance of all aspects of cultural production. This is also helpful in the case I am covering here because we can try and understand many aspects of the rich cultural production during the 1990s in Greece, lighting not just the unforgettable historical events, but also the way the media operated during that decade, the way movie critics navigated and reshaped their profession, to question what was considered good and bad art.

Greek media in the 1990s

The cultural production of the decade was shaped because of forces that have been happening already. At the same time, there were also forces that made this decade have its own characteristics, which, if we understand, they will help us also understand later events and even current ones. This is why Williams' theory is so important; it helps understand both something that looks unique and that is also related to contemporary or

later times. It reads the culture of everyday life and the one forced by the elite or the tradition. It is safe to say that the decade of the 1990s in Greece was the decade of the media, where the popular and the ‘higher’ art was combined; when everyone started having access to diverse information. The format of the media and their characteristics are explored in this chapter.

Probably, one of the most popular magazines of the time was KLIK (ΚΛΙΚ). It started its publication in 1987 as a monthly magazine and by 1988 their editor, Petros Kostopoulos in the magazine’s first page editorial, was reporting that more and more volumes were sold to the public. KLIK was covering various lifestyle subjects, such as fashion, vacations and even sex. It was also covering political and social subjects such as students’ protests. Their writers and editors were very open to modernization. Sevastakis (2004) mentions that parody was dominant during this decade in the media. Because of the new technologies, Greece had more access than ever to the West, which was looking up to. Modernization was a concept which was always supported by the media of this time. At the same time, he notes that middle class was expanding. All these dynamics which were shaping the understanding of culture for people living in Greece, led to the will for better everyday life and to the introduction of lifestyle (Sevastakis 2004). Because of KLIK and its director, Petros Kostopoulos, the concept of ‘lifestyle’ was considered shallow and had mostly negative connotations.

Athinorama’s editor in the 1990’s and journalist Telis Samantas admitted in a recent interview that he gave to Lifo newspaper, that he had to change the format of *Athinorama* because everyone had to deal with the competition of KLIK and the era of lifestyle (Pantazopoulos 2023).

Movie magazine Cinema (Σινεμά), one of the most popular movie magazines in Greece, wrote in March 1992 in an unsigned article, that the concept of the lifestyle was

introduced to the world in 1981 with the airing of MTV (Σινεμά March 1992:21)¹. KLIK's editor Petros Kostopoulos and the later magazines he created, became a symbol of the 'lifestyle culture' and accordingly, the later bankruptcy of his media group, became also a symbol of what it considered by many journalists, the temporariness of lifestyle (Eptakoili *et al*: 2010:1). The concept of lifestyle was known to the movie critics; Mitsis (1998a) wrote that the trends of lifestyle are forcing the cinema industry to try new approaches, related to marketing.

KLIK was influencing other magazines either they liked it or not, either they knew it or not. But the launch of private TV stations changed the press and the cinema consumption, admittedly. It is important to understand that television (and radio) was controlled by the government for a very long time and by 1989, business owners and the public were more than ready to accept and embrace the private TV stations. Three university departments on culture and mass media were launched in the years 1991-1992; a huge volume of book titles on television and mass media was translated during this decade; the state channel (ERT) now had competition; journalists were moving to the private sector in order to have more freedoms and better contracts; newspaper circulation dropped dramatically during this decade (Tziovas 2021).

One can imagine how influential was such a turn for movie magazines and movie critics as well. Movie magazine *Cinema* was launched in 1989 and although its editor, Tziotzios, promoted an alternative type of movie journalism, he was sceptical about the new relationship between movie consumption and the future of cinema. In the February 1991 editorial he does admit that because of private TV stations, cinema is

¹ It is important to note that this was not a common acceptance. Koliodimos ([1991]) believed that video clips were a new approach to both music and cinema, using tools that appealed to the public, making both music and film more reachable.

more accessible. The only people who will go to the movie theatre are the ‘proper’ ones. People used to go to the movie theatre to learn about cinema and watch new releases, just for their information. By 1991 it is considered a hobby and those who visit the movie theatres call themselves ‘cinephiles’. He does believe that TV can replicate the previous ‘movie clubs’ but he is also concerned about movies being created for the TV instead of just being showed on TV. Watching movies in the theatre is no longer modern, but a ritual (Tziotzios 1991:[5]). Interestingly enough, in the same volume, the then five movie distributors in Greece talk about that relationship and how it affects their business. They do admit themselves that people used to watch pretty much everything in the movie theatre but they have become more selective because of the variety showed on TV (Liakopoulos 1991:70-74). In a similar manner, Aktsoglou in *Athinorama* writes that going to the movie theatre has changed because of the recent launch of private TV stations. It has become a ‘cultured’ event instead of an attraction for the masses. It is something that he now considers a hobby for the middle class (Aktsoglou 1990:6). Andreadakis (1999a) in his movie review for *The Truman show* describes the movie as the dark result of the era of the TV that we live in. TV lies and Truman is the innocent victim of this constant lying.

Events that shaped the decade

In order to understand where the broader society was at, it is fit to note the most important historical and cultural events that were mostly covered during this decade and that, according to bibliography, influenced the political identity. I am including both what are considered ‘historical events’; events that mattered to the media a lot and lastly; events that mattered to the movie critics or that are related to cinema and were covered a lot by the press. As Sevastakis (2004) covers, the decade of the 1990s is part of the post-modern period of Greece. Sevastakis notices that a big part of the

modernization that was taking part during this decade was dismissive of the working and the small-town class. A new, middle class appeared, forcing the small-town one to be forgotten or to change rapidly. He is also noticing that in the literature production of this decade there was a tendency in drama and a bitterness towards a past that did not fill its promises to the present. In a similar manner, Tziovas (2024) notices that the literature production of the decade was questioning the heroic past of Greece and was focused on trauma. Liakos (2008) shows how the anti-populist voices of the decade were also dismissive towards the recent past and were looking up to (economical, mostly) modernization as a solution to their problems. It is also covered by the bibliography how important was the shaping of the ethnic identity during this time (Calotychos 2013; Tziovas 2021) as an identity of forgotten ethnic promises and part of a broader cultural discourse.

Historical events

Clogg (2002:170) mentions how the Invasion of Cyprus created an anti-American sentiment at the time which forced Karamanlis to legitimize the then banned Communist Party. Lialiouti (2016) sees the Invasion of Cyprus as the event that renewed this anti-American sentiment, which shaped the cultural discourse of Metapolitefsi. She also notes how important it was for the shaping of nationalism, since many people from the Left considered themselves true patriots who tried to save Greece in multiple occasions – many times from the literal or indirect influence of the United States, against the right who did not defend the country. At the same time, the Right wing was considering itself as true patriot because it tried to save the country in many occasions from the foreign powers, including the United States.

Calotychos (2013) explains the turbulent relationship of Greece with the rest of the Balkans (and how it's seen in Theo's Angelopoulos movie *Ulysses Gaze*). Greece

was a country that never had a communist regime like the rest of the Balkans, meaning that they did not share official government ties. Greece was also the first Balkan country to enter the European Union, but at the same time had a strong and popular communist party (KKE). The borders broke in 1989 with the demise of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Iron Curtain. The will for modernization in Greece was cut because of the Balkan Crisis (the wars after the breakup of Yugoslavia). Greece faced the challenge of handling a massive immigration flow. Immigrants were tied with crime. At the same time, after the fall of Yugoslavia new nation-states were created, including the then self-titled Republic of Macedonia, current North Macedonia. This led to the dispute over the naming of Macedonia.

Political events

Calotychos (2013) also underlines the importance of the rise of nationalism during this decade, which was also combined with internal political events. The decade started with a new government in place, the one of New Democracy. PASOK, the Socialistic party won two elections during the 1980s. Because of a huge scandal in 1989 involving various people from businesses and the government (the so-called Koskotas Scandal), they lost the elections to New Democracy. The then prime minister Konstantinos Mitsotakis, applied neoliberal policies, privatizing public industries and making a lot of changes in the sector of education. This caused many students protests, which happened approximately during the time when many protests for the Gulf War were taking place.

Archbishop of Greece Christodoulos was very popular during that time and he helped in the emergence of a doctrine which was briefly titled 'Orthodoxism'. Because of the turbulence in the Balkans, many people in Greece felt that their religion was under attack. This, in comparison with the popularity of Archbishop of Greece, made

many Greek Orthodox Christians, including a part of the press, to be hostile towards anything and anyone who was offending their faith (Calotychos 2013). In a later chapter I will discuss how this sentiment was expressed through cinema and the discourse through movie critics, giving examples from the movies *The suspended step of the stork* and *The years of big heat*.

Last but not least, it is important to note that during this decade, Greece had to find its place in the European Union. The Maastrich Treaty was signed also by Greece in 1992, causing a lot of debate. In 1997 it was also announced that Greece would host the 2004 Olympics in Athens. Was Greece now a part of the Western world or a part of a globalized reality that did not understand its needs?

Cultural events

With ‘cultural events’ I am referring to events that had to do not just with movies, but events in which movie critics or people from other cultural disciplines were involved. With the appearance of more TV stations, the discussion of high and low art was once again brought up into question. Movie critics were divided; they were in accordance with the existence of more TV, but the content of the shows was problematic for them in some occasions. A few shows that were broadcasting later than the prime time were considered ‘trash’ in the consensus. On the other hand, many movie critics actually appeared on TV with their own shows or were commenting with other hosts. Unfortunately, there is no accessible archive for these shows.

Notable events that created a lot of discussion were the movie festivals. The Cannes Film Festival, Oscar, Thessaloniki International Film Festival, Berlinale and Venice. During these yearly events, movie critics were attending and did not just reported on each movie, but were trying to recreate for their readers the essence of being there, what was at stake each time, how the audiences and other critics reacted,

etc. Film festivals are very important, because their reports recreated the sentiment of being there. With the reports from those festivals, we are able to understand what was accepted, rejected, put into question when it comes to cinema, on the time it was happening. The debates are very crucial and they mostly cover the future and the present of Greek and/or European cinema towards the American, but also which type of cinema the people created and wanted. With these reviews from the festivals, we are provided with an insight of the direction of the 1990s reality.

A memorable case of culture clash which reflects the ‘structure of feeling’ about the new media was the dispute between movie critic Vasilis Rafailidis and the TV hostess/writer Malvina Karali (Charitopoulou at that time). Rafailidis and Karali were friends. The first asked the later to defend him on air on a political matter. Karali refused and Rafailidis decided to write multiple articles in *Ethnos* criticizing the structure of her TV show, *Malvina Hostess*. In those articles, Rafailidis is extremely critical towards Karali, insisting that she has become shallow and that she is not as knowledgeable as she promotes. Since both Mega Channel which was hosting *Malvina Hostess* and *Ethnos* were part of the same media group, Rafailidis supervisor called him and asked him not to publish another article. Rafailidis was about to publish the second one and he said that if he could not publish all 21 of them, he would resign. Because of this dispute, his 15 yearlong partnership with *Ethnos* ended. There are not many newspapers covering the dispute at that time and the majority of this clash is mostly covered by Rafailidis himself (Rafailidis 1998). Ironically, *Ta Nea* covered extensively the actions that journalist Someritis took against Mega Channel and Karali for implying that he works unofficially to promote the government (i.e. Loumbrinis, Iereidis 1998).

What is interesting with this event is the clash between a previous and a former generation. Karali was younger than Rafailidis and became famous through TV while

Rafailidis was already considered one of the most important movie critics of his time, writing since 1963. Rafailidis was Marxist and was exiled during the military junta. In those 21 articles he states that he is also a patriot Marxist (Rafailidis 1998).

From the movie critic's and artists' perspective

A useful guide in order to trace movie critics that are influential or just productive is probably the magazine-city guide *Athinorama* in which Aktsoglou reported the other critics' opinions. Another one is the cross references between one another (what Aktsoglou does systematically) in their articles. I am including reviews that appeared in the daily press or magazines, since the TV versions are not available for the bigger part (only the state-owned channel ERT provides some shows).

The research has been conducted in newspapers such *Ta Nea*, *Kathimerini*, *Vima*, *Rizospastis*, *Tachydromos*, *Avgi*, *Eleftherotypia*. There are also included some magazines and/or journals specialized in cinema. These are *Cinema*, *Cine7*, *Kinimatografistis*, *Anti-Kinimatografos*. It is noted that the publications vary in many ways; some were circulated daily, some weekly, some monthly etc; some were covering other subjects and some were focused on cinema as already mentioned. In all cases, these newspapers and magazines were reporting on cinema regularly and consistently.

Religion and family offenders

In 1990 while Angelopoulos was filming *The suspended step of the stock* in Florina, the Metropolitan bishop of Florina, Avgoustinos Kantiotis expressed his opposition, fearing that the director would create a bad reputation for the town and that his movie was opposing the nation. The bishop had many supporters from his church and he wanted to stop the filming. Angelopoulos set a meeting with the bishop, which Angelopoulos cancelled because he felt extremely unwelcome, as he mentioned in the press

conference. He considered it a case of censorship (Kathimerini 1990). In an interview of the bishop, he mentions that he does not care about the aesthetic or artistic criteria of the film but about the ethical. He believes that Angelopoulos hates Greece and wishes for open borders which will de-stabilize Greece's freedom and democracy. Before the excommunication of Angelopoulos and other members of his crew, Danikas wrote two articles from a different perspective. He covered the problematic relationship between the church, the state and the art. He explains that the bishop's actions are in vain, because it attracts more attention to the movie and he does mention that the industry has way more problematic films or issues to deal with instead of Angelopoulos, comparing Hollywood productions to Angelopoulos (Danikas 1990). Chryssikou, then teenage actress who was participating in the movie mentioned in an interview that the church fanatics spread rumors that she was been harassed during the filming of the movie. The intention was to create a false, extremely bad picture of Angelopoulos, a person, who according to the Bishop of Florina had no moral values and was letting such heinous acts take place (Dimokidis 2025).

In December 17 1990 the Bishop of Florina did excommunicate Angelopoulos and rang the bells all the day. Angelopoulos did not stopped filming and reportedly asked his crew if the snow, the excommunication or the church fanatics bother them and they continued filming (Kagios 1990). Stamatiou (1990) wrote an article on important figures that have been excommunicated, mainly noting that their greatness surpasses the actions of the church. A few months later, the movie premiered at Cannes Film Festival and Danikas (1991) described how important it was that this year there was a lot of Greek representation, not just because of Angelopoulos movie, but because there were other Greeks nominated in the festival. Angelopoulos was one the pioneers of the New Greek Cinema and known communist. Aktsoglou (1992a) 'had to' mention not just the

artistic aspect of the movie but also the social; 'Greece is a country where people come to die', refugees and immigrants come to Greece for a better and yet they get no answers, he writes in his review.

A few months later, a more complex yet similar in mind case of censorship and cultural dispute would take place. Frida Liappa was another director of the New Greek Cinema and participated in left groups against the military junta. She was preparing her next film *The years of big heat*. It is important to note that New Greek Cinema filmmakers in the 1990s had become the new status quo when it comes to directors and artists. The Socialist government was supporting them also through the years, even though they were not registered at PASOK party. Usually, part of their movies was also funded by the then Greek Film Center, the state center for funding and promoting Greek cinema. In both cases it is easy to understand that the newly conservative government of New Democracy would not be that friendly with the favorites of their rival party.

Aggelakos (2018), producer of the movie at that time writes a summary of the events that took place from January 1992 to May 1993. Even though the movie was already chosen for Berlinale, the cinema advisor of the Ministry of Culture and advisor for the Greek State Awards, Apostolos Doxiadis suggested to exclude the movie from the State Awards before its release since his sources informed him that a small child was being harassed during filming. This statement caused not just fierce debates across media but it was also taken into court, when in May 1993, Liappa was found not guilty for harassing the child. There was one scene in particular in which two lovers are having sex next to a crib with a baby in it.

TV show *Profil* in ERT1 (which is one of the few TV shows that are accessible) includes a debate that highlights the lengths of moral panic that this case had turned into. In this show, movie critic Vasilis Rafailidis with director Giorgos Karypidis are on

the defense of Liappa and the famous musician Dionysis Savvopoulos is on the other side. The conversation takes a quick turn about culture and freedom. Savvopoulos thinks that their generation – which shaped the culture after the fall of the military junta – is common and tired. He believes that artists do not appreciate Greece, its values (like family) and would put everything at stake in order to do what they want without facing consequences – in this case, Liappa did not have artistic or aesthetic or moral criteria when she was filming and ended up harassing a small child for art's sake. He believes that these artists, which are related with the Left, are not really sure what they are trying to do; they are pretentious. He even compares the small child to the whole country who needs to be taken good care. Rafailidis is aggressive towards Savvopoulos in his tone. He expresses his worries about freedom of speech and he does point out that this 'case' was created on purpose in order to undermine artists that are not 'convenient' for the government. He thinks that Doxiadis and people on his side are moralists. They pretend to put moral values in the front but what they are really trying to achieve is more control over art and any kind of cultural production that is not allied with their values – in this case, the moral values of Greeks. He calls the outcome of the case National Schism (Panagiotopoulos 1992). The press criticized everyone, mainly Savvopoulos and Doxiadis for prudery but Rafailidis also for over-reacting (Danikas 1992a; Kagios 1992b).

The discussion was indeed about freedom of speech and artists under the guise of protecting the family, a Greek moral value. By February already, it was reported that the accusations created a 'big issue' in the movie industry. Greek State Awards were certain that there is a scene violating human rights while the Greek Directors' Union reports the incident as an act of censorship (Katsounaki 1992). Ironically, president's Union at that time was Angelopoulos, who asked Doxiadis to quit his position (Kagios

1992b). Liappa had already explained that the filming with the small child lasted two hours and it was at the same room with the two lovers for 17 seconds (Vidos 1992).

Movie critic Dimitris Danikas was reporting regularly on the issue and the public discussion. The movie premiered in February in Berlinale and arrived in some Greek cinemas in May. So far, the comments were made based on the leaked script of the movie. Andreadakis (1992) and Aktsoglou (1992) both did not like the movie but expressed either their sympathy towards the director and they mentioned that time made many people forget about the scandal. Unlike Angelopoulos, this movie is not remembered for its artistic importance but for the scandal it caused and the issues that brought up into public discussion.

Understanding the fast-paced growth of media

How did movie critics saw themselves in this era? What new questions they had to answer for their profession? How did their taste evolve? One great example is the introduction of the star rating system in movie reviews. Another one was how they understood the future of Greek cinema. The later will also appear in the next chapter.

Samantas became chief editor in *Athinorama* in July 1992. During those years, *Athinorama* tried to compete other magazines as well. Aktsoglou was a popular movie critic and was commenting on new movies weekly in this magazine-city guide. Two weeks before Samantas became officially the chief editor, in 19-25 June 1992, Aktsoglou introduced the star rating system to describe the critics opinion in one coherent page. In October 1992 *Athinorama* announced that they will start making ratings clearer for the people (Charonitis 1992a). In the next issue they reported that the rating system they will start using was something that was missing from the other magazines (Charonitis 1992b). Aktsoglou started using the 1 to 10 rate points system for each department of the movie (directing, acting, photography, etc). In 1994 he starts

using the star rating system to rate the new movies and the movies on TV. Aktsoglou was previously an editor in *Kinimatografika Tetradia* which saw a few years prior the end of the movie magazines of their kind, those with more complicated analysis and articles; a merge of journalism and academic writing.

Kanellis (1998) wrote an article expressing his opposition to this practice. It reminded him of the school years and he thought that it was more proper for reviews of other kind, not for cinema. The star rating system made everything available and understood too soon; the reader did not have the time to go through the whole review and agree or disagree, since the star was at the beginning of each movie. He implies that *Athinorama* was the one that tried to become this kind of ‘teacher’ first; they just let you know what is bad, what is good and what is mediocre. What is even worse for him, was that movie critics, using this system, accepted that their profession became of a lesser importance. Rafailidis (Fragkoulis 1997) in an interview expressed his concerns for this system as well. He explains that comparing the stars between the reviewers does not provide you with any useful information. Movie critics used to be and should be people of culture, they should focus on explaining their opinions instead of describing them. He found this trend obscene, since it works as a ‘magic pill’ that someone can consume. It is a problematic characteristic of this time (Fragkoulis 1997). Mitsis thought otherwise. By 2001 he saw them as a reality that we have to approve. They are working as a guide for the public and that either reading a whole review or just checking how many stars it has, does not mean a thing, because in any case, people have to go the movies (Soumas 2001).

The magazine that featured this interview was *Anti-Kinimatografos*, one of the few magazines that had the same format as the movie magazines of the 1960s-1980s that started its release during the 1990s. By 2001, acclaimed movie critic of the 1960s-

1970s, Diamantis Leventakos (Soumas 2001:13-15) had expressed his disappointment with the short format of movie reviews and that a journal with in depth reviews would not last. Soumas (2001:53-55) also does not like that daily newspapers do not have enough space for movie reviews and he sees these reviews lesser than these that have been publishing in movie magazines. Kolovos (1993:216-218) insists that the movie critics moved to the daily press and the newspapers because the mass culture was asking for more entertainment and consumption.

Recently, Telis Samantas (Pantazopoulos 2023) in his interview describes how his generation of movie critics remained attached to the trends that had shaped them; auteur theory and the New Greek Cinema which emerged in the 1970s. It is Angelopoulos (1984) himself – probably the most recognizable director of this era– who questions the existence of New Greek Cinema from 1984, since he believes that these ‘waves’ should be (also social) movements. In 1984 Angelopoulos sees that the arguments against the status quo of the 1960s and the 1970s were long gone. What Angelopoulos implies is that these ‘movements’ are created in troubled periods, so New Greek Cinema does not exist anymore. Sifaki (2022) adds something to this idea; these ‘movements’ are created because of a long relationship between movie directors and the TV. They emerge partially because of this relationship after it has grown. We can today assume that the momentous growth of the TV during this decade was the beginning of a new relationship. It is true that during the 1990s movie critics were concerned about the future of Greek cinema and if people appreciated it at the same time. Kagios (1992a) describes this worry through the eyes of new directors who were concerned that people will not go to their movies and they will not get funded by the government. Rafailidis (Fragkoulis 1998) expresses his worries that the current Greek cinema focuses on movies that can only watched by Greeks and they do not have international reach.

Mitsis (1998b) who at that had become director in *Cinema*, thinks that Greek cinema is not that appealing and that awards do not attract people to the movie theatres, He writes that the movie tickets from *Eternity and a day*, which won the Palm D'Or in Cannes Film Festival, did not go well in the Greek movie theatres. In the same issue, Fragkoulis adds that the 1970s fans of Angelopoulos are not probably in Greece anymore. The same applies for movies that have won various prizes in the Greek State Awards. As for the auteur theory, Tziotzios (1991), Aktsoglou (1992), Danikas (1992b) and Timogiannakis (1993) agree that Frida Liappa and Tonia Marketaki are not 'auteurs' as they started or aimed to be during their careers. Their films are not current anymore and somehow these movie critics question the Greek auteurism overall. Acclaimed movie critic Michalis Dimopoulos believed that by then auteurs were rare and had run out of ideas (Soumas 2001:17-22). By the end of the decade though, the public was going to the movies again, but they were mostly watching foreign films (Kagios 1997; Basantis 1998).

With the end of the decade two Greek movies were released that surprised the movie critics and restored their hope in the Greek cinema. These are *Let the women wait*, released in 1998 by Stavros Tsiolis and *From the edge of the city*, released a few months later in 1999 by Konstantinos Giannaris. Tsiolis was a director with a lot of experience from his days working with directors from the Old Greek Cinema (which it ends around 1970s). Giannaris was a new director who had studied in London and this was his second film.

Fragkoulis (1998) comparing Angelopoulos (*Eternity and a day*) and Tsiolis, happily announces that Greek cinema is not just Angelopoulos. He is implying that Angelopoulos is being covered a lot by the critics and more often than others, that he is appreciated no matter what he does and that this cinematic style needs an update.

Zoumboulakis (1998), also in the same issue of *Cinema* writes the main review for the film. He sees the movie as the last romantic film in the end of the decade. Tsiolis, according to him, sees Greece with bitterness but he also has humor. The combination of these two things is what makes the movie beautiful and romantic at the same time. Tsiolis himself believed that the movies have to be simpler and more effective instead of being full of existential dread, comparing both Godard and auteurs in Greece, as worn subjects that have made people tired. Kagios (1998) considers the movie real and authentic and it appears that there is a consensus when it comes to its originality, the bittersweetness and that it is a people's movie (Kanellis 2006). It was one of the few times when all the movie critics expressed the same views and appreciated the same motives in a film. Movie critic Giorgos Tziotzios had left *Cinema* a year prior and now was the one in the distribution company that invested in this movie, which he believed in (Katsounaki 1998).

A few months later, *From the edge of the city* was released. A drama movie about Pontic Greeks from Russia living in Athens, coming across difficulties such as racism, sexual abuse and violence. Again, the movie is praised about its honesty towards social matters and it said that is also bold trying to actually show the challenges that 'foreigners' face in an unwelcoming city. For the critics, it showed how the social outcasts lived and tried to survive in a city that does not want them and pushes them further away. Again, there was a consensus for this movie, who was praised mostly for the subjects it was covering but also about its direction (Andreadakis 1999b; Blathras 1999; Fragkoulis 1999). Andreadakis (1999c) mentions that he actually agrees with *Athinorama* (Aktsoğlu) for calling the movie the "Greek Trainspotting", the famous British film released a few years prior. The only known movie critic who disagreed with the rest is Danikas (1999) who thought that the movie was lacking in plot and that the

characters were not satisfactory. The society was absent for the movie, which he would prefer to be present, since the plot was supposed to be for a social issue. In this point is crucial to point that Danikas at that time was writing in newspapers of the Left, so it was probably very important for him to show the relationship between society and its people.

Giannaris gave various interviews and movie critics praised the Ministry for awarding the movie in the Thessaloniki Film Festival. During the Festival, the first prize won Angelopoulos with his film *Eternity and a day* and Giannaris won the second. When Giannaris got on stage to receive his award, he did an ‘inappropriate’ gesture, which for Peroulis (2018) was a symbolic one. A gesture to the status quo that Angelopoulos represented. A gesture towards an institution such as the Thessaloniki Film Festival, which, through many fights, was promoting the New Greek Cinema. Giannaris had a different approach with his movie. So, with his movie and his gesture, it seemed that things were about to take a turn. Most importantly, for the purposes of this article, it proves that what was happening in Festivals and how it was interpreted, mirrored the cultural changes. Critics were always interesting in attending and reporting on them, shaping the cinematic landscape of their times.

Everyone versus Hollywood

In this chapter I am focusing on the relationship between movie critics and what they believed it was local cinema (either Greek or European) fighting against the big Hollywood industry. The way I am exploring this issue is through the reports of various movie festivals like Cannes and Oscars. There is plenty of discourse of ‘us versus them’, the high art and the low art, small industry versus big industry. This is crucial in order to understand what they saw as challenging. As it has already been mentioned, the public became more aware of the movie industry and they brought their selections to the

movie theatres. The movie critics provides us with a small piece of the fears of globalization and similar questions of where Greece belongs.

It is obvious that some critics saw the international film festivals as opportunities for the promotion of the Greek cinema or a scale on how much Greek cinema was liked or not. Critics saw Angelopoulos success at Cannes in 1990 as a win against the Church and what it represented. *Ta Nea* (1991) found it interesting that along with Angelopoulos, other directors such as Akira Kurosawa and Ridley Scott would be present but so would be Madonna. From their tone, is easy to understand that they find her a unfit for such an event. Mikelidis (1990) reports that the most popular movies in Greek movie theatres, are the American ones. The time of his reporting, *Pretty Woman* is by far the most popular movie, which makes him wonder why someone would like to see such a ‘fairy tale’ when in reality, it is the story of a sex worker and a businessman who wants to profit from her. *Pretty Woman* caused the same sentiments in other movie critics for its moral perspective².

Danikas (1994c) reporting for 1994 Cannes Festival, separates the films according to their country of origin, mentioning also the Greeks separately. He continues to prove the differences between European and American (or Hollywood) cinema, praising the Oscars in 1994 for promoting movies that were related with European history or had European aesthetic approaches (like the black and white colour) (Danikas 1994a). For next year’s Oscars, he describes the movies *Forest Gump* and *Pulp Fiction* as being the two sides of the same coin; they both try to wash out USA’s dirty history by either making it look sweet or cool; by either stating that violence never took place or by glamorizing it (Danikas 1995. Mikelidis (1992) sees the

² For example, Aktoglou (1992b) compares the main character of *The double life of Veronica* to *Pretty Woman*, stating that such a sweet woman is the ‘pretty woman’ of the thinking class.

Cannes Festival of this year as a battle between American and European cinema. European cinema faces a lot of challenges that has to overcome, while the biggest prize at Cannes Festival have been taken by Americans the last 3 years (1989-1991). Feloukatzi (1992) reported that the Cannes Festival was a mix of the thinking class and the glamour, because of the presence of both American Hollywood stars and acclaimed artists from Europe. On a similar tone, Timogiannakis (1992) notices also a decline in the quality of the festival and realizes that bad American movies are also being featured. Reporting for Cannes Festival of 1996, Danikas praised Francis Ford Coppola and Dustin Hoffman for expressing their discontent for big Hollywood companies, comparing them to fast food chains (Danikas 1996). The winner of Palme D'Or at 1994 Cannes Festival was American director Quentin Tarantino for *Pulp Fiction*. Aktsoglou (1994a) had already been writing sarcastically that the President of the festival, Gilles Jacobes, would be very pleased with just the appearance of the crew of the movie. Danikas (1994b) on the other, a week before reports that Cannes Festival will not show movies from big Hollywood industries, proving that the two industries (European and American) have taken a divorce. He mentions in a good spirit that the majority of the films come from Europe. The next week, Aktsoglou (1994b) comments that Cannes Festival turned in favour of American cinema. Similar titles, focusing on the American winners can be found also in *Kathimerini*.

Exceptions of the perspective that sees the Hollywood movies of a lesser quality or importance or as a threat are Timogiannakis and Aktsoglou. Danikas and Timogiannakis wrote two different reviews for Oscars of 1993 at the same page of the same newspaper giving two totally different insights. Timogiannakis praised the city of California and its festive mood, while Danikas describes that Hollywood has too much power and will just give the awards to their best employees, comparing the whole

situation with a butcher's shop (Timogiannakis, Danikas 1993). Timogiannakis is the only movie critic that has been invited to the Oscars. Aktsoglou (1993) explained that a cinephile is not someone who is a huge Oscars fan, but that does not mean that Oscars are not interesting enough and a big glamorous show that draws everyone's attention. He does believe that Oscars are becoming more open to new ideas every year and the only distinction he makes in national cinemas is the interesting case of the British cinema which has been blooming. Andreadakis (1993) questions not the Oscars exactly but what they represent and how they become so popular in the Greek public sphere. He thinks that this is something that has been happening for approximately 10 years now. Oscars became popular along with the decline of the prestigious movie magazines. These magazines were using methodological tools like psychoanalysis and Marxism to 'read' the movies. With a quick turn in the media – mainly the radio – a few people became journalists, commenting on the Oscars and copying articles from abroad. Then, it became so popular that the whole conversation transported on paper. He finds it very interesting following the trends and the 'award season' in order to guess how the Oscars are going to turn out. He just wishes it could have been done in a way that the movies are respected.

Conclusion(s)

The decade of the 1990s was not unique and it definitely has similarities when it comes to cultural production with other decades in Greece. But the emergence of the new media impacted the whole culture and the profession of the movie critics. From larger magazines focused only on cinema and clubs with people who were questioning the existence of Greek cinema and wanted to take action, to journalism and many different opinions. The 1990s was a decade where various generations of movie critics were existing in similar formats, either magazines or newspapers. Rafailidis and Mikelidis

were part of the previous generation, while new magazines like *Cinema* became a staple in the field very quickly.

Movie critics had a competition with the TV. They were appearing on the TV; they were trying to find new ways to appeal to the public. The pace was fast and all these people who have been considered part of the thinking class or closer to academics, came closer with journalists. At the same time, they had to face governments who had strong opinions on culture and (historical) events that were questioning their place. Immigrants, wars, fall of Communist regimes, a turn a constative political turn but also openness to the West. Movie critics were considering themselves as progressives, either being affiliated with the political Left or not. They were opiniated and focused on aesthetic or moral trends in cinema.

What is interesting, is the constant promotion of Greek cinema, or the will to get over with the status quo and create something new. Greek movie critics were also divided in those that were in favour of the popular culture and had the will to understand *why* something is happening, *why* people go to the movies or not and *why* do people like what they like and to those who wanted to promote 'true' art. While they were trying to navigate in their new role as journalists and guides, they were also trying to remain faithful to their taste and their 'upbringing', which was the theory of psychoanalysis and a huge impact that the French *Cahiers du cinema* had on them. Let us not forget that many of them had actually studied in France or have lived in France (Soumas 2001). Accepting what was popular was a challenge. People were watching Disney movies and the *Pretty Woman*. Movies that were liked by the critics were not hits in the movie theatres and vice versa.

But what is really important, is what insights this gave us for the time. Williams (1961) as already mentioned, described the 'structure of feeling' and how important it is

to be as close to an event when it actually took place; how much we lost when we are not present. He also describes how important are all aspects of culture and that everyday life creates culture. With this in mind, it is easily said that the subjects that were interesting for the movie critics, did not just mirrored, but also created discourse. The corpus that we are left with today, provides us a better understanding of the reality that was shaping. Movie critics presented their reality and their understanding of a work of art. When movie critics stood against censorship, they were standing against a darker turn in general that was taking place. When they were not sure if they liked Hollywood movies or not, they were sharing a deeper thought; that big companies just want to sell their product. At the same time, it is interesting to note that their disagreements with American and/or Hollywood films did not happen just because the industry was becoming a monopoly; they have learnt to pay attention to styles and trends from Europe. They were considering European films of a better artistic value. A 'common reality' was also shaped between movie critics of different backgrounds and those who hold power over the 'big narratives' of those times.

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