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Women's Popular Cinema in Greece: the case of Olga Malea

PhD in Film

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Declaration

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

A version of Chapter two 'Schemes of Comedy in *The Cow's Orgasm*' appeared as an article with the same title in the *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, Volume 37, Issue 1&2, 2011, p. 61-74.

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Abstract

This thesis examines the film comedies directed by Olga Malea and released between 1997 and 2007 in Greece, in order to make a claim for the study of women's popular cinema in Greece and beyond. Women's popular cinema refers to films which are thematically associated with women's cinema while operating in popular forms, such as genre. Olga Malea and her work make for a useful case study, in that they encapsulate the relationship between these two broad categories of women's cinema and popular cinema. In addition, this thesis claims that the two categories inflect one another in interesting ways, and their intersections act as a productive framework for the analysis of women's cinema *as* popular cinema, effecting a popularisation of usually marginalised themes.

The introduction to this work primarily outlines the theoretical frameworks for the argument that follows, namely: women's cinema and feminist theory; discussions around popular cinema; and considerations about authorship. The concept of national film cultures and its possible meaning in relation to Greece is also alluded to as a contextual factor. Each subsequent chapter advances the argument for women's popular cinema through close textual analysis of the films in chronological order of their release. In particular, the analysis identifies recurrent strands and motifs in the director's oeuvre, such as tensions between tradition and modernity, and the pervasive nature of patriarchy in informing national gender discourses. Having established the argument that women's popular cinema is productive in popularising women's cinema itself, the thesis concludes that, in the work of Olga Malea, its themes are conceived of, represented and perceived as prominent in the country during the period examined – and one can finally address women's cinema as popular.

CHAPTER ONE

Introductions and methodological mapping

This thesis focuses on the film comedies directed by Olga Malea and released between 1997 and 2007 in Greece. Apart from secondary sources, work on this thesis involved archival research, own translations of sources written in Greek as well as primary research in the form of interviews with Olga Malea. However, close textual analysis has lent itself as the main methodological tool in my work, reflecting the semiotic wealth in Malea's oeuvre. Through the close examination of Malea's work, this thesis aims to make a case for the study of women's popular cinema, in Greece and elsewhere. Women's popular cinema is a term used in this thesis to describe those films made by women which utilise popular forms, such as genre, in order to explore and promote thematic preoccupations that traditionally have been associated with women's cinema. I claim that this mode of work in turn allows for the popularisation or mainstreaming of themes and tropes that have previously occupied marginal positions, because they primarily dealt with and addressed women's experiences.

One of the main theoretical frameworks informing this discussion is feminist criticism, which is closely linked to women's cinema. In addition, arguments around women's cinema are inflected through the discussion of popular cinema; and both are then analysed within the specific national framework, informed by the specific historical and social contexts. A number of other theoretical approaches at times enrich the argument posed here for the further study of women's cinema and popular cinema, and the interesting and gainful ways these categories are modulated in the work of women filmmakers operating in popular forms. For example, examining the work of one filmmaker leads to discussions of authorship; and the fact that Olga Malea is a Greek filmmaker making films for a primarily Greek audience requires taking into account discussions of national cinema, or rather national film cultures and contexts. Finally, genre is here used as a key operational system of the popular, and as such informs large parts of the textual analysis in this thesis. Inevitably, other frameworks

and discourses, although referenced, remain outside the scope of this thesis and are not pursued further, such as discussions on postmodernism and class.

The aim of this introductory chapter is to outline some of the key theoretical frameworks and contexts that support this thesis, and it is subdivided in five sections. First, Olga Malea, her comedies and the critical reception of her work are introduced in order to explain this thesis's claim that her work makes for a useful case study for exploring the association of the two broad categories of women's cinema and popular cinema. This section is followed by an outline of feminist criticism and the argument by a number of theorists for narrative or popular cinema to be utilised for the political purposes of women's cinema. Inevitably, this is a selective, rather than exhaustive account of one set of discussions relating to women's cinema, its feminist heritage and political aims seeking to be realised through popular narrative forms. The ideas of the mainstream and popular are subsequently addressed. A brief summary of critical attempts to define the category of popular cinema demonstrates the difficulty of the task, while at the same time illustrating the practicality of such a category in organising our understanding of cinematic output and its relationship to audiences and national canons. Such canons, especially of small national cinemas, mostly include the work of *auteurs*, who are almost exclusively male directors. The relationship of women's cinema and authorship, as well as Malea's status as an *auteur,* is addressed in the penultimate section of Chapter one. Women's cinema and popular cinema, as they are defined and theorised by Anglophone criticism that is primarily used in this thesis, are then placed within a Greek context. Finally, a brief overview of the history of Greek cinema helps contextualise the place of the aforementioned concepts within a national milieu with its own particularities. In addition, this section helps to further contextualise Olga Malea as a director and her work within a particular period of recent Greek (film) history, as well as within Greek film studies. Indeed, in this section of the chapter, it becomes evident that the study of popular cinema has generally been underdeveloped in Greek film studies despite some writings on genre and commercial Old Greek Cinema,[1] and

[1] Old Greek Cinema refers to genre, commercial cinema produced during the heyday of Greek cinema in the 1950s and 1960s. It is perceived in opposition to New Greek Cinema, which succeeded it in the 1970s and 1980s and which rejected 'old' forms in favour of a more personal/*auterist*, artistic cinema.

indeed that critics and scholars have on occasion been dismissive of popular cinema's artistic potentials; while women's cinema has only loosely existed as a critical framework, and the work of Greek women filmmakers, bar a few exceptions, has been largely neglected and underexplored.

Olga Malea: a critical review

This section aims to introduce Olga Malea, a contemporary Greek film director and screenwriter. Some biographical details provided help place the director within a generation of filmmakers and a certain historical context of Greek film production; while a synopsis of her comedies and the critical reception they received upon their release intends to highlight some of the problematic responses to Malea's work, which will become the backdrop to some of the analysis that will follow in subsequent chapters. At the end of this section, and contrary to much of the critical mass, I argue that Olga Malea's work deserves closer attention as a useful example of contemporary women's popular cinema in Greece, making this thesis the first extensive academic study on the director's work and its significance.

Olga Malea was born in 1960; she studied Law at the University of Athens and completed a doctorate in Psychology at Yale University. While she was finishing her doctorate, she also took classes in filmmaking in the United States and later in Greece, and gained additional experience on the job; between 1985 and 1995 she started her filmmaking career by directing a series of documentaries for Greek and Italian television, as well as educational videos and commercials.[2] At the age of 26, she travelled to Argentina, where she directed her first docudrama, *Tales of La Boca/ I Racconti della Boca: storie di Genovesi e nostalgia* (1986), a narrative on the Genovese community living in Buenos Aires, which she promoted and was acquired by the Genoa Prefecture and television channel RAI 3 in Italy. In 1990 she wrote and directed another docudrama for Greek state television channel ET 1, based on the books of a popular

[2] Malea shot four anti-smoking commercials for the Greek Association Against Cancer and a number of educational and promotional videos for Lambrakis Foundation, such as *Drinking or Driving/I Poto I Moto*, or *Venture…Agrotourism and Change Your Life!/Epiheiriste… Agrotouristika kai Allaxte zoi!*

Greek writer, *Childhood Memories: the books of Penelope Delta/Paidikes Anamniseis: ta vivlia tis Pinelopis Delta*. Although these were jobs that kept her near her chosen career as a filmmaker and provided vital training, from the early 1990s onwards she found the inspiration and encouragement she needed to direct a feature film through the increasing presence and success of women filmmakers in Greece and internationally.[3]

In 1996 she wrote and directed her first feature film, entitled *The Cow's Orgasm/O Orgasmos tis Ageladas*, which was released in 1997. Malea found the inspiration for her film while working on an educational video on the Mycenaean civilization for the Lambrakis Foundation, entitled *From the Palace to the Museum*. The Mycenaeans were the first to operate slaughterhouses, and Malea wanted to include this in her video. During her research, she encountered an expert in the artificial insemination of cows and other aspects of bovine reproduction. "This man", says Malea, "who had an exceptional sense of humour, in a strange way gave me an experience that provided me with the excuse to do a film on girls growing up and becoming more daring".[4] After finishing *From the Palace to the Museum*, Malea prepared a synopsis for *The Cow's Orgasm* and sent it to the European Script Fund, a now defunct European Commission agency, and a few months later received a subsidy that enabled her to take the time off she needed to write the script. "Without the ESF, I could not have made this film", she says. "When I didn't know where to turn once I had written my script, they even provided me with the name of my producer, Panos Papahatzis."[5] The decision to seek private funding was strengthened by the fact that the Greek Film Centre (still one of the main sponsors of Greek cinema in the 1990s) rejected the film as 'un-feminist' because it likened women to cows, betraying a rather superficial reading and understanding of the script. "They really didn't get it", Malea recalls;[6] but Papahatzis and Attika A.E. Productions did, and managed to get the project produced. *The Cow's Orgasm* was one of the films that at the time initiated a different method of production, distribution and

[3] Indicatively, Malea mentions Nora Ephron as an influence in the early 1990s, and Angeliki Antoniou and Lucia Rikaki in Greece, who had also just started successful careers as film directors. Malea, O. 'Contemporary Women's Cinema in Greece', Keynote speech, Contemporary Greek Film Cultures 2013: an international conference, London, 5-6 July 2013.
[4] Interview with me, Athens, May 2008.
[5] *Ibid*.
[6] *Ibid*.

marketing in Greece, one that was independent of interventions from the Greek Film Centre.[7]

The film tells the story of two teenagers discovering their sexual identity and growing up in rural Greece. Athanasia wants a career, Christina wants a family, but a series of events lead them to challenge these prescribed choices and eventually escape to the big city. Produced with a relatively modest budget,[8] the film went on to become an unexpected box-office hit, with ticket sales in excess of 200,000, at a time when most Greek films performed under the 10,000 ticket mark. This commercial success makes *The Cow's Orgasm* one of the first popular comedies which reignited the audience's interest in Greek cinema in the 1990s and early 2000s, as will be discussed later in this chapter. Moreover, the film did in the end receive some recognition by the state, despite the Greek Film Centre's original rejection; the two main actresses shared the National Award for Best Leading Actress, given by the Greek ministry for Culture in 1997.[9]

The Cow's Orgasm received mixed reviews upon its release. The catchy and provocative title certainly attracted attention, with most reviews – positive, negative and neutral – commenting on it; for example the reviewer in the national broadsheet newspaper *To Vima* writes: "The work by the 36-year-old Olga Malea is released this week in cinemas, with a reputation that has preceded it and an eccentric title that has ignited the audience's imagination for some time: *The Cow's Orgasm*".[10] The review focuses a lot on Malea's recounting of some production details (for instance about finding the location, the independent production credentials of the film and so on) and the female-focused plotline, and thus remains neutral towards the film overall without offering any critical engagement. The new way of independently producing and

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[7] More information about the conditions of production and the role of the Greek Film Centre are provided at a later section of Chapter one.

[8] Karolos Grohmann writing for *Variety* reports a budget of $250,000. http://www.variety.com/article/VR1117779317.html?categoryid=13&cs=1 [date accessed: 19/07/2010]

[9] http://www.tainiothiki.gr/v2/filmography/view/1/1698/ [date accessed: 13/02/2014]. Although the film itself, because of release delays, did not compete at the Thessaloniki Film Festival which was the forum for the national awards by the ministry, the main actresses still received a national award.

[10] http://www.tovima.gr/culture/article/?aid=85129 [date accessed: 13/02/2014]. My translation.

distributing a film was something that attracted attention by other critics, too. Writing in *Cinema*, Lyda Galanou comments favourably on the freshness of new independent cinema that *The Cow's Orgasm* represented at the time, and the film's humorous approach, its use of young actors alongside more well-known and liked ones, as well as its Almodóvarian take on the Greek countryside – even if also noting that the film still had some way to go before reaching the quality of Almodovár's cinema.[11] Other commentators, however, disagreed: writing for *Cine.gr,* an online film magazine, Eirini Nedelkopoulou was less neutral or kind towards the film (and certainly less interested in the film's new way of doing things), maintaining in her short review that this was "a light comedy, for one to watch rather pleasantly and without much thinking", since this "is a film of a televisual tone, with some known TV actors and no artistic merit".[12] These are rather contestable assessments that will be addressed later in the thesis. The fact that the film appears to have caught many by surprise, with a number of critics commenting that this was a film that "came out of nowhere",[13] might explain perhaps the perceived reluctance to engage more meaningfully with the film. Nonetheless, there were those few voices who, rather than dismissing the film for its commercial aspirations, instead praised it because of its conscious adoption of kitsch, comedic elements, lack of pretence at high art and unapologetic aspirations to be popular with audiences, that is, to be commercially successful.[14] What is hinted at here is a well-documented dichotomy between commercial and art house cinema and the different purpose of the two, as well as a critical preference for the latter at the expense and dismissal of the former, a problematic that is addressed at the section 'Popular cinema and genre: questions of value and the national canon' of this chapter.

There have also been references to Malea's 'female perspective' or 'feminine look' and feminist aims in selecting and portraying the female protagonists' coming-of-age,

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[11] Galanou, L. 'Cinemascope: The Cow's Orgasm/Cinemaskop: O Orgasmos tis Ageladas' in *Cinema*, Vol. 76, February 1997, p. 30.
[12] Nedelkopoulou, E. 'Review: *The Cow's Orgasm/O Orgasmos tis Ageladas*' http://cine.gr/film.asp?id=1191&page=4 [date accessed: 13/02/2014]
[13] For instance, Nedelkopoulou (ibid), Soldatos (2002) *History of Greek Cinema*, p.117 and Rouvas (2005) *Greek Cinema: History-Filmography-Biographies*, p.457.
[14] For example, Lyda Galanou, 'Cinemascope: The Cow's Orgasm/Cinemaskop: O Orgasmos tis Ageladas' *Cinema*, Vol.76, February 1997, p.30.

despite the Greek Film Centre's earlier evaluation of *The Cow's Orgasm* as 'un-feminist'. All the aforementioned reviews refer to Malea as the driving force behind this film, commenting on the fact that she is a woman director, and of a young age. However, as she recounts,[15] in spite of this 'novelty', her name did not initially appear in the marketing materials for the film (for example the poster), precisely because of its commercial aspirations. Malea was not known at the time, and it was thought that it would be best to market the film with the by-line "From the producer of *Telos Epohis* (1994)", a hugely successful and critically acclaimed film by Antonis Kokkinos and another one of those films that kick-started the audience's interest in Greek Cinema in the 1990s. After the feature's unexpected box office success, Malea's name became part of the marketing campaign and a main promotional driver for her subsequent films.

The success of her first film allowed Malea to secure financing for her second feature, *The Mating Game/I Diakritiki Goiteia ton Arsenikon* (1999). Malea continued her collaboration with Attika A.E., the production company that had overseen *The Cow's Orgasm*. The Greek Film Centre also co-produced, more convinced (it seems this time) of the film's potential merit than with the previous title. The aims for this second film were more ambitious, with a higher budget – but still not high[16] – and a marketing and distribution strategy that resembled Hollywood models. Pantelis Mitropoulos, the producer from Attika A.E. overseeing this project, noted that, for the first time perhaps for a Greek film, a set date and wide release strategy was followed; the distribution company decided to follow the same pattern of release for Malea's film that it followed for imported American films, and *The Mating Game* was released in 27 screens across Greece (17 of which were in Athens). The film targeted primarily women between the ages of 18-35, according to Mitropoulos, as well as (though to a lesser extent) a broader audience of both sexes attracted to the film's current themes and everyday,

[15] Malea, O. 'Contemporary Women's Cinema in Greece', Keynote speech, Contemporary Greek Film Cultures 2013: an international conference, London, 5-6 July 2013.
[16] The producer P. Mitropoulos emphatically stated in an interview that the company was seeking *high concept-low budget* projects, which would not – and did not – cost more that 80-100,000,000 drachmas (some €330,000 though inflation has to be taken into account); he put *The Mating Game* under this category. Interview with Eleni Rammou, for *Kinimatografistis*, Issue 7, Jan-Feb 1999, p.42-43.

recognisable characters.[17] Indeed, the film, never hiding its commercial ambitions, sold 300,000 tickets, making it one of the most successful films of the year.

The narrative revolves around three sisters who are looking for love, each in her own terms. Emilia, Laura and Helena have very different personalities, and want different things from life, but all three face a number of obstacles in their relationships with men. Only when they decide not to compromise and reject tradition, do they manage to find what they want. The film is set in contemporary Athens. The urban location is reflected by the different style and pace of the film compared to those in *The Cow's Orgasm*.

The reviews were generally more positive for this film than for Malea's previous work. The photography and sleek design of the film are the elements praised the most, as well as the film's astute observation of a modern, urban lifestyle. The popular magazine *Cinema* dedicated a 6-page spread to the film and director; setting the tone for the general reception of the film perhaps (since this is by far still the most established film publication in Greece, with a wide-ranging readership), the reviewer comments on the style, pace and plot of the film, praising its contemporary approach.[18] The interview with Malea that follows the review in the magazine presents a successful director, who has 'done it again'. Responding to a question about whether the film is a "feminist comedy", Malea answers negatively. Although the film, she claims, deals with the general problematics surrounding the roles of men and women and their relationships, which had been a feminist preoccupation, the film does not try to make any polemical feminist statements. "We live at a time when gender roles have radically changed", she says, and this is what the film responds to.[19] Indeed, the director has often resisted the association of her films with a feminist agenda, perhaps in an effort not to alienate male audience members. A reviewer from *Chicago Reader* actually criticised the film as anti-feminist, in that it "ultimately endorses the old-fashioned virtue of marriage to a sensible man".[20] However, despite the director's reluctance, and

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[17] Interview with Eleni Rammou, for *Kinimatografistis*, Issue 7, Jan-Feb 1999, p.42-43.
[18] Galanou, L. 'The Three Sisters (like Chekov never imagined them)/Oi Treis Adelfes (opos pote den tis fantastike o Tsekof)', *Cinema*, Issue 97, January 1999, p.69-72.
[19] Zoumboulakis, G. 'Olga Malea: the discreet charm of success', *Cinema*, Issue 97, January 1999, p. 73-74. My translation.
[20] Ted Shen, 1999, http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/the-mating-game/Film?oid=1066341 [date accessed: 29/03/2011]

in spite of those voices that failed to recognise the film's feminist underpinnings, this thesis claims that Malea's comedies do promote a feminist agenda, and that feminist theory is indeed a useful framework for analysing the films.

The Mating Game is the film that established Malea as a 'commercial director', a position she has maintained with all her comedies. This is a designation that she accepts and embraces, dismissing any negative connotations it might imply; "I do not belong to the generation of directors who made a film that only they liked. I feel immense joy when I see that the theatres that screen my film are full".[21] Malea decisively distances herself from a tendency associated with New Greek Cinema that in the 1970s and 1980s saw a number of films gaining great critical acclaim, but alienating audiences and driving them away from the cinema. This clarity of purpose when it comes to her films is something that has been positively identified by Yiannis Soldatos, an otherwise harsh critic of Malea's films. When comparing the box office success of *The Mating Game* to the more limited one of Konstantinos Giannaris' second film *From the Edge of the City/Apo tin Akri tis Polis* (1998), which Soldatos deems to be a film of better quality and higher artistic merit, he writes: "Why has Malea beat Giannaris? Because she knew what she wanted."[22] By the time she made her third film, Malea had been firmly established as a successful director whose films regularly attracted large audiences for Greek cinema.

Risotto was released in 2000 and repeated the success of *The Mating Game* with ticket sales around the 300,000 mark,[23] which guaranteed its place high in the top ten of the Greek box office that year (for Greek films). *Risotto* was seen by some as a more realistic view of contemporary women's life in Greece, putting the director, as the reviewer Manolis Kranakis notes, "in danger" of being characterised as "mundane", especially after such offerings as "the 'angst' about the virginal hymen [in *The Cow's*

[21] Zoumboulakis, G. 'Olga Malea: the discreet charm of success', *Cinema*, Issue 97, January 1999, p. 74. My translation.
[22] Soldatos, Y. 2002. *Greek Cinema: a century/Ellinikos Kinimatografos: enas aionas*. 2nd volume: 1970-2000. Athens: Kohlias publications. [no pagination available]
[23] Rouvas, A. and Stathakopoulos, C. 2005. *Greek Cinema: History-Filmography-Biographies/Ellinikos Kinimatografos: Istoria-Filmografia-Viografika*, 2nd Volume: 1975-2005. Athens: Ellinika Grammata. p.463.

Orgasm] and the design hyperbole [of *The Mating Game*]".[24] According to Kranakis, "Olga Malea's women (finally?) become ordinary people in a story that dares face the 'naked' truth".[25] Despite the critic's recognition of the overbearing stylisation of the film, he saw *Risotto* as the most realistic of Malea's films up to that point – and therefore the most interesting, a proposition that is indicative of a not unproblematic critical tradition and value-system that ascribes particular worth to realism (or at least a more realistic approach in this case). Kranakis continues that the film is a "damning social document" assisted by the handheld camera, the toned-down characters and grainy texture of the images.[26] Malea's third film was received with much more interest and generally enjoyed more positive reviews than her previous two films; these particularly referred to the more realistic and contemporary topic as well as the black humour used in the film to record and describe a personal reality for many modern couples, with a social dimension. Derek Elley, writing for *Variety*, also commented on the film's well-paced script and fine performances by all cast, who have brought their stereotypes to life.[27]

A sticking point, however, in some of the discussions and criticisms about the film at the time was its decidedly commercial nature, and its "light, frothy fun"[28] tone; the implication in the review is that the subject matter – modern family in crisis – is rather too serious and with wide social repercussions for the genre and tone selected by the director. Angeliki Contis makes reference to this debate when she writes: "Malea makes films to bring to the social surface issues that bother her. […] But she's also interested in box-office success. She speaks openly about the business, counting six different examples of product placement in *Risotto* (a novelty in Greek film, where ads and art usually don't mix)".[29] The binary of commercialism and artistic value is not a new topic, though it tends to appear with surprising frequency still in Greek film criticism.

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[24] Kranakis, M. '*Risotto*', *Cinema*, Issue 117, November 2000, p. 29.
[25] *Ibid.*
[26] *Ibid.*
[27] Elley, D. 'Review: *Risotto*', *Variety*, 31 March 2001, http://variety.com/2001/film/reviews/risotto-1200468028/ [date accessed: 21/07/2010]
[28] *Ibid.*
[29] Contis, A. 'Malea's Flavour of Motherhood on the Silver Screen' http://www.athensnews.gr/articles/12803/15/11/2000/7821 [date accessed: 21/07/2010]

Risotto is the most autobiographical of Malea's films; she wrote the script with Manina Zoumboulaki at a time when both were raising young children and felt exhausted. The director has talked about observing her friends and other women looking and feeling constantly tired when they all met in the sandpit where their children played.[30] In an interview, she also noted that it bothered her that employers grudgingly gave women time off to tend to their children, but it was still a taboo for men to request or be given time off for similar reasons.[31] Malea has been critical of the disparity in the roles and expectations towards men and women – her films attest to that – and the discourse used to talk about this third feature film in her career bears strong feminist overtones; this, again, despite the director's reluctance to call her films feminist, and her lead actress Dimitra Matsouka's (Vicky) outright rejection of any such claims for *Risotto* in a Special Features interview for the DVD release. The director has talked about the difficulties she had writing the script for this film; "it wasn't easy, because there isn't much of a precedent for motherhood stories. […] …you have no back up, no myths and no memories to help you on that".[32] Lack of discussion about the difficulties of motherhood has been exacerbated by "an obsessive national concern with sexuality – and especially female sexuality".[33] This is something that is made evident in the film, which is littered with images of nude women; thus the film offers an overtly feminist argument about issues high in the feminist critical agenda, and through comedy popularises them.

It took five years before Malea's next film was released in 2005. *Honey and the Pig/Loukoumades me Meli* has been perhaps the most challenging of Malea's films for critics, who invariably felt uncomfortable with the form used to handle such a sensitive issue as paedophilia. The film tells the story of a young man, Manos, who returns to his village and manages to overcome the psychological problems caused by the sexual

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[30] Interview with me, Athens, May 2008.
[31] Contis, A. 'Malea's Flavour of Motherhood on the Silver Screen' http://www.athensnews.gr/articles/12803/15/11/2000/7821 [date accessed: 21/07/2010]. This is something I have also discussed with the director, who here refers to the day-to-day needs a child might have that would require the mother to leave her work early, arrive late or skip work altogether; rather than referring to maternity or paternity leave.
[32] Quoted from Angelike Contis (*ibid.*).
[33] *Ibid.*

abuse he had suffered by his uncle; he achieves this by uncovering the truth and saving another young boy from his uncle's advances, all amidst a burial ceremony attended by the whole village.

Indeed, the choice of comedy for treating a sensitive theme such as this strikes one as rather odd. The script was initially written as a drama by Apostolos Alexopoulos, who had collaborated with Malea before as a co-screenwriter for *The Cow's Orgasm* and *The Mating Game*. Alexopoulos took the script to Malea, who reworked it as a comedy, in keeping with her predilection for the genre. Despite the critical hostility, *Honey and the Pig* achieved over 100,000 tickets at the box office, far less than the previous three films, but still the second highest-grossing Greek film that year, after Pantelis Voulgaris's *Brides/Nifes* (2004).[34] Maria Katsounaki lamented the 'state' of Greek film production and box office in 2005; in an article with the rather gloomy title 'Murky landscape, melancholic and in crisis/Topio tholo, krisimo kai melangholiko' she wrote: "From the remaining of 13 films that were released [...] only one, the worst, 'surrealist comedy', Olga Malea's *Honey and the Pig* managed over 100.000 tickets. The rest of the films amassed a limited number of viewers".[35] Katsounaki's hostility towards Malea's film was evident in her very negative review, which was also published in *Kathimerini*, a national broadsheet newspaper, where she comments on the director's failed attempt at comedy, when one might only laugh out of embarrassment. Further on she berates the film's aesthetics and ideology as something that sprung from a videocassette (a very odd comment), and continues: "The outrageous thing about Malea's fourth feature film is not that it tries to 'sweeten' a particularly sensitive social issue, but that it tries to aerify it through 'comedy'".[36] Katsounaki's review exemplifies all the objections the critical community had towards the film: its topic was too sensitive, the ideological

[34] The Greek films catalogue site greektenies.com reports 150.000 tickets for the film, coming second (out of 16 Greek films that year) in the Greek film box-office. http://www.greektenies.com/tainies/loukoumades-meli.html [date accessed 10/04/2014]
[35] Katsounaki, M. 'Murky landscape, critical and melancholic/Topio tholo, kritiko kai melangholiko' in *Kathimerini*, 25 May 2005, http://www.kathimerini.gr/218841/article/politismos/arxeio-politismoy/topio-8olo-krisimo-kai-melagxoliko [date accessed: 10/04/2014]. My translation.
[36] Katsounaki, M. '*Loukoumades me Meli*', in *Kathimerini*, 6 January 2005, available at http://www.kathimerini.gr/205594/article/politismos/arxeio-politismoy/loykoymades-me-meli-x [date accessed: 18/05/2012]. My translation.

standing of the film towards this social issue was wrong, the aesthetics of the film were sub-standard, and the choice of genre poor. This last point in particular implies once again that comedy cannot do justice to a serious subject matter, as was noted about *Risotto*, something which will be contested later in the thesis where I argue that Malea chooses comedy strategically for her aims. Furthermore, critics frequently showed astonishment at the fact that certain actors – like Pavlos Haikalis (the uncle/mayor), Dimitris Piatas (owner of funeral home) and Sophia Filipidou (double role as Antigone and Ismini, the twin sisters famous for their loukoumades – honey-glazed doughnuts) – who are highly-esteemed performers, should be involved in this project at all. For instance, the reviewer in *Rizospastis*, a left-wing national newspaper, writes that the aforementioned actors, who are "talented people and noteworthy artists", have been trapped in this "tragedy", which is this film.[37] Katsounaki did not leave this angle out of her review either, writing: "And the even sadder thing: in this shipwreck, she [Olga Malea] dragged down actors like Pavlos Haikalis or the younger Christos Loulis and Fay Xila, who are considered among the finest on the Greek stage. Shame and sadness".[38]

The objections reached their conservative climax when reviewers disapprovingly commented on the Greek Film Centre's involvement with the production of this film, which is primarily attributed to a change of course due to the then political interference that, in a nutshell, encouraged the GFC to produce more outward-looking and audience-appealing films. The critical opinion is successfully summarised in this quotation: "Ticket [sales] is the aim, rather than art". [39] The implication that (real) art is not profitable or commercial, or that commercial ventures cannot bear or maintain artistic qualities is at least problematic, though still rather established in some Greek circles of film criticism and scholarship with surprising frequency, as was noted earlier.

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[37] *Rizospastis,* Film Reviews section: '*Loukoumades me Meli*', Thursday 6 January 2005, p. 24. Also available at http://www1.rizospastis.gr/story.do?id=2658238&publDate=6/1/2005 [date accessed: 18/05/2012]. My translation.

[38] Katsounaki, M. '*Louloumades me Meli*', in *Kathimerini*, 6 January 2005, available at http://www.kathimerini.gr/205594/article/politismos/arxeio-politismoy/loykoymades-me-meli-x [date accessed: 18/05/2012]. My translation.

[39] *Ibid*. Also see the full review in *Rizospastis*, Film Reviews section *'Loukoumades me Meli',* Thursday 6 January 2005, p. 24. Also available at http://www1.rizospastis.gr/story.do?id=2658238&publDate=6/1/2005 [date accessed: 18/05/2012]. My translation.

Irrespective of what one might think of Malea's film – and I disagree with the reviewers, as will be detailed in Chapter five of the thesis – the idea that art and profit are concepts diametrically opposed stands to be challenged, especially when talking about popular art, popular culture and in this case popular cinema.

The cycle of comedies by Malea (to date) closes with the film *First Time Godfather/Proti Fora Nonos*, released in 2007. This is the first of her features which is not based on an original script, but is an adaptation of Nikos Papandreou's very successful collection of autobiographical short stories *Deka Mythoi kai Mia Istoria* (1995) published in the UK with the title *Father Dancing: an Invented Memoir* (1996) and in the USA with the title *A Crowded Heart* (1998). The film tells the story of young Alex, the son of a political leader who has recently arrived in Greece from the USA with his family. Alex is keen to spend more time with his father, who is busy with his election campaign. Alex is soon enlisted to the political effort: he has to go to Crete and be a godfather to the party's local candidate's daughter, but more importantly, he has to represent his father by reading a political speech in a language he does not speak well. References to the recent political history of Greece and the turbulent elections of 1963 are alluded to in the film, although it primarily focuses on the young boy's personal story. Some autobiographical elements and references to the Papandreou family – a well-known political family in Greece – are also prominent, with the Father (Yiorgos Kimoulis) made to resemble Andreas Papandreou with the characteristic balding hairstyle and pipe, the mother's real name, Margaret (Evelina Papoulia), maintained and the real family's villa in Kastri, Athens used as the Athens location set. These elements, among other things, make this the most overtly political of Malea's comedies as will be discussed in Chapter six.

First Time Godfather generally enjoyed better reviews than *Honey and the Pig*, though many critics also dismissed the film as mediocre, unfunny for a comedy and unsuccessful in representing effectively an important time in Greek political history. For example, Stavros Ganotis writes: "This is a light comedy of manners, with which you should not expect to roll in laughter, unless you have something against the Cretan people"; the writer, however, does praise the "air of old Greek cinema" in the film, even

if he does not believe it is as successfully comedic.[40] Alkisits Harsouli saw the performances by the cast as the saving grace of a film that often lost its narrative flow and failed to "bear the burden of a film that fully assumes the task of dealing with the country's recent political history";[41] as did *Cinema*'s reviewer Georgia Oikonomou, who juxtaposed the natural performance of the children against the director's innumerable use of clichés.[42] Yiannis Dirakis identified a number of elements, such as the mix of contemporary musical forms and traditional Cretan music, that "in the last few years, have been able to transform a generally mediocre film into a commercial hit".[43] Thodoris Koutsogiannopoulos, a prolific film critic, is more forgiving of the film's script and narrative flow qualities and praises the "cute and light" way that the story becomes more universal by focusing on the young boy's story rather than the historic and autobiographical elements of the Papandreou family. However, the reviewer raises objections to the tone Malea has imposed on the film and the way the performers try to deliver this tone, which, according to Koutsogiannopoulos, are not consistent. Ultimately, he writes: "In a comedy, especially one which is so diverse and referential, [the right] tone is everything".[44] One of the more positive reviews of the film comes from Eva Soulti, who praises the film's choice of comedic style, the sensitivity of the performances by the younger actors and the unapologetic entertainment value of the film. "Entertainment, laughter and emotion […]", she noted, "[i]t may sound 'trivial', but it is the most important [attribute]".[45]

Despite the mixed reviews, the film was once again popular with the audiences, reaching the third place at the Greek box-office in the second week of its release with

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[40] Ganotis, S. 'A small lad, kohlioi dish and a few votes/Ena mikro kopeli, oi kohlioi kai ta psifalakia' 19 June 2007, available at http://www.myfilm.gr/1430 [date accessed: 21/07/2010]. My translation.
[41] Harsouli, A. 'Review: *Honey and the Pig*', 4 October 2007 available at http://cine.gr/film.asp?id=709211&page=4 [date accessed: 21/07/2010]. My translation.
[42] Oikonomou, G. 'Review: *Proti For a Nonos*', available at http://www.e-go.gr/cinemag/moviespage.asp?catid=10455&subid=2&pubid=584801 [date accessed: 21/07/2010]
[43] Dirakis, Y. 'Review: *First Time Godfather*', 4 October 2007 available at http://cine.gr/film.asp?id=709211&page=4 [date accessed: 21/07/2010]. My translation.
[44] Koutsogiannopoulos, T. '*Proti Fora Nonos*', 4 October 2007, available at http://www.lifo.gr/guide/cinema/352 [date accessed: 21/07/2010]. My translation.
[45] Soulti, E. 'Reviews: *Proti For a Nonos'*, 14 July 2009, http://kritikestainion.blogspot.co.uk/ [date accessed: 21/07/2010]. My translation.

53,000 tickets, and an overall recorded 179,000 tickets during its run in the cinemas, making it the only other Greek film, together with *El Greco* (Yannis Smaragdis, 2007), in the top ten grossing films that year in Greece.[46] Questioned about the mixed critical reception of her films in general and *First Time Godfather* in particular, Olga Malea stated in an interview, "You obviously want everyone to enjoy your films, but that's impossible. Thankfully there are many different points of view and quite a few people who watch them."[47]

Despite the general criticism that Malea's films represent a safe type of cinema, dependent on established formulas that are popular, the director has had to take some risks as well in order to make it in the industry. "Overall, my experience as a filmmaker in Greece was positive," she says. "Despite the dirty, underhanded, cliquish behaviour of many in the industry, there are some cracks where people with a good idea and determination can squeeze in." [48] Malea is one of the most successful directors who decided early on, and when it was still rather uncommon, to have her films produced independently of the Greek Film Centre (though they did contribute some funding for *The Mating Game*, and *Honey and the Pig*). She has trusted and in turn has helped promote a system of film production and distribution dependent on private and multiple funding sources; and worked with producers who wanted to make their money back and therefore sought ways to promote and market the films following strategies that had up to that point been used primarily for Hollywood films. Instead of avoiding the title of the commercial filmmaker, Malea embraces it, believing all the while that quality does not have to be compromised because of it. As she has said on a number of occasions and repeated in an interview to me in April 2011, she always works closely with the producers and chooses to trust each professional for the job

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[46] Greek Box Office: http://www.movietalk.gr/forum/index.php?topic=80.0; and http://cine.gr/article.asp?topic=Box%20Office&id=7566 [date accessed: 21/07/2010]

[47] Quotation reproduced from Panayiotis Panagopoulos' article 'A Cretan village is turning into a mini Hollywood: *First Time Godfather* on location in Fres' in e*Kathimerini*, 25 June 2007. http://archive.ekathimerini.com/4dcgi/_w_articles_civ_2_25/06/2007_84931 [date accessed: 21/07/2010]

[48] Reilly, S. "The Cow's Orgasm". *Europe*, July 19, 2010. http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-19916794.html [date accessed: 30/10/2011]. The quotations in this paragraph are reproduced from Reilly's article, who however does not provide precise reference for her interview with the director.

they do; producers, she says, know how to invest and make their money back and a film can only benefit from such knowledge. After all, "you want your films to be watched and enjoyed by as many people as possible", she explains.[49]

Apart from her success on a national scale, Malea's work has been screened internationally in film festivals – even though the films were not made or thought of as 'festival films'. For example, *The Cow's Orgasm* participated in 21st Mostra: São Paulo International Film Festival (1997) and was also shown in Seattle and Minsk - Listapad International Film Festivals the same year.[50] *The Mating Game* was screened at the Thessaloniki International Film Festival in 1999 and was selected for the annual Greek Film Week in Munich the same year; in 2000, the film was one of those showcased at the third European Union Film Festival in Chicago, USA.[51] *Risotto* was entered in the competitive section of the Thessaloniki International Film Festival in 2000 and Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in 2001, while it was screened in a number of other venues, such as the Moscow International Film Festival 2001, the Torino Festival 2002 and formed part of the 2nd Panorama of Contemporary Greek Cinema in Paris in 2002, among others. Although *Honey and the Pig* did not compete in any festival, it was nevertheless screened at a number of them: Thessaloniki International Film Festival in 2005; Valencia International Film Festival and the 12th Kolkata Film Festival, in 2006; in the Food Film Festival in Italy and the San Francisco Greek Film Festival in 2007.[52] Finally, *First Time Godfather* has so far been one of the most internationally successful of her films, having been screened in more than twenty locations outside Greece, in film festivals, and film forums and showcases dedicated to Greek Cinema; indicatively, the film competed in the Cairo International Film Festival for Children 2008, the New York City Film Festival in 2009, where it was awarded the CelebrateGreece.com Award for best feature, as well as the Festival Internacional De Cine para la Infancia Y la

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[49] Interview with me, Athens, April 2011.
[50] http://www.mostra.org/21/english/films/cows-i.htm [date accessed: 19/07/2010]
[51] http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0182977/releaseinfo; http://www.clproductions.gr/feature-films/the-mating-game; http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/european-union-film-festival/Content?oid=901477 [date accessed: 19/07/2010]
[52] http://www.clproductions.gr/feature-films/risotto; http://www.clproductions.gr/feature-films/sugar-and-spice; http://www.filmfestival.gr/2005/index.php?box=greekl&id=56&ln=en&page=filmdetails [date accessed: 30/04/2013]

Juventud, Madrid 2008 and Moscow International Festival for Children And Youth the same year, where it received an Honorary Diploma for Best Directing; and was screened in the São Paulo International Film Festival, Los Angeles Greek Film Festival in 2008, the 20th European Union Film Festival in Singapore in 2010 and the Hong Kong European Film Festival in 2011, among many others.[53]

Although none of her films have achieved the critical and international recognition that Greek Cinema is currently witnessing – with rather more idiosyncratic art-house films such as Yorgos Lanthimos's *Dogtooth* (2009), Athena-Rachel Tsangari's *Attenberg* (2010) or more recently Alexandros Avranas's *Miss Violence* (2013) – it is interesting to note the different levels of attention received in Greece and abroad. Malea is one of a few Greek directors who, from the mid-1990s or so, rejected the inward-looking and rather restrictive patterns of filmmaking, film production and film distribution in the country, as demonstrated above. And although hers is a cinema with no obvious ambitions for the international festival scene, the director and her films have promoted Greek popular cinema beyond national borders, expanding the visibility of the country's wider film production. The director herself is included in several of *Variety*'s shortlists on European Cinema, such as 'Ten European Directors to Watch' in 2000, 'Critics' Choice: Europe Now' in 2001, 'Airlifting European Auteurs to Hollywood' and 'European Mavericks' both in 2003;[54] and commenting on the much-maligned *Honey and the Pig*, this renowned film industry publication has described Malea as "one of Europe's boldest filmmakers".[55]

Therefore, Olga Malea makes an interesting case study when considering women's cinema and its relationship to popular cinema, as she is among the few women filmmakers in Greece, and among an even smaller minority of women directors who have worked consistently with popular comedy. In addition, in this thesis I argue that thematically and formally her films capture an image of Greek reality just before the

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[53] http://www.clproductions.gr/feature-films/little-greek-godfather; http://www.beirutgreekfilmfestival.org/ [date accessed: 30/04/2013]
[54] http://www.olgamalea.com/?page_id=7 [date accessed:14/04/2014]
[55] Thomas, A. 'Waiting in the Wings: *Honey and the Pig*', http://variety.com/2004/film/features/waiting-in-the-wings-1117914489/ [date accessed: 14/04/2014]

Greek (and global) financial crisis, from an uncommon perspective. Her comedies between 1997 and 2007 portray interesting tensions present in a pseudo-affluent and pseudo-progressive Greek society, by employing a genre which popularises discourses and positions that have been traditionally marginalised by critics and conventionally overlooked by the industry: feminist and female points of view and modes of address. She is among the group of filmmakers who spearheaded the revival of Greek popular cinema in the mid-to-late 1990s, but unlike many of her colleagues' careers, hers did not start in, or coincide with, work on television. And yet, as was evident by some of the reviews quoted above, her films have often been branded as 'televisual' – lumping them together with other films of an aesthetic quality which is ill-defined and has developed into an anathema in Greek Film Studies, as discussed in the section entitled 'Greek Cinema: history and scholarship' of this chapter. Despite criticisms, Malea has been one of the most successful filmmakers at the box-office in Greece, with comedies which are significant for their politics of gender and their observation of chronic tensions between modernity and tradition in Greece around the turn of the twenty-first century. With this in mind, a number of theoretical frameworks inform the analysis of the director's work; a brief overview of some of their key tenets that enrich the textual analysis undertaken in the following chapters is important.

Feminist criticism, women's cinema and narrative film

> 'Women's Cinema' is a complex critical, theoretical and institutional construction, brought into existence by audiences, film-makers, journalists, curators and academics and maintained only by their continuing interest: a hybrid concept, arising from a number of overlapping practices and discourses, and subject to a baffling variety of definitions.[56]

This section provides an overview of some of the relevant debates within feminist film criticism, from which the category of women's cinema derives. These debates concern the relationship between women's cinema and the mainstream or narrative cinema;

[56] Butler, A. 2002. *Women's Cinema: the contested screen*. London & New York: Wallflower Press. p. 2.

and within that, the relationship between women's cinema and film authorship. Feminist writers have examined Hollywood as the archetypical locus of patriarchal discourse in commercial cinemas, but arguably one can talk about other mainstream, popular national cinemas, also as bearers of dominant patriarchal discourses. Within feminist criticism, there has been a tendency to place women's cinema in an antithetical relationship to the mainstream narrative cinema, arguing that the aims of feminist filmmaking could be better served by operating outside the established popular discourses. However, there has also been an argument for a different positioning towards narrative cinema, which proposed that women's cinema should not operate and be understood outside of, and in opposition to the mainstream, but should try to appropriate and redefine its practices. Articulated in similar terms, one of the key propositions of *la politique des auteurs* as outlined in *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the 1950s and 1960s was to break away from established hierarchies between high art and low art in relation to cinema; and that indeed an authorial voice could be heard from underneath the topographies and tropes of generic filmmaking. And while feminist critics have problematised auteur theory's inherently masculinist discourses and assumptions of a male director, operating within essentially hierarchical production systems, such propositions could be appropriated to discuss issues of female agency, subjectivity and identity within popular cinema. It is within the context of this discussion that I want to locate Olga Malea's comedies.

Generally speaking, women's cinema refers to films that are made by, feature and/or are addressed to women. As a category, women's cinema is rather expansive and difficult to define because of this mutability, as described above in Butler's statement. It can be (and has been) criticised as a category that marginalises women's creative work, a self-defeating organisational tool that places women, as producers and as audiences, if not in the margins then certainly 'off-centre', examined almost exclusively within Gender, Feminist or Women's Studies boundaries, and not as part of a wider academic discourse. However, women's cinema is a category that is useful precisely because it seeks to group together and foreground works that otherwise tend to remain unexplored, forgotten or neglected. This is a category that is therefore politically functional and ideologically important. That said, films by and for women do not

belong to it exclusively; instead, women's cinema must be considered as another category among many to which such films may or may not belong.

Despite its broad, all-encompassing nature, women's cinema has generally not been considered or examined as popular cinema. There are of course women filmmakers, producers, writers and so on, who operate within mainstream film production, and who make very profitable films indeed; but, by and large, they tend to constitute the exception rather than the rule. Within the Greek context, as is the case elsewhere, there is only a small percentage of women filmmakers, and an even smaller number of those operate within mainstream, popular film production. Although in recent years, and especially since the early 1990s, the number of women film directors has noticeably increased in Greece, their work still tends to be, also noticeably, neglected by critics and scholars and visibly absent from the national canon.

One of the reasons why women's cinema has generally not been considered as part of the popular[57] domain is perhaps because it has often strived to dissociate itself from inherently patriarchal mainstream film industries, as mentioned earlier; in that respect, its aims have been influenced by feminist film criticism, and generally by a feminist discourse. In its earlier phases, Anglophone criticism recognised Hollywood as the quintessential popular film domain that women's cinema must resist because of its patriarchal structures and ideological underpinnings. Hence the initial turn of feminist film criticism was away from popular narrative forms and towards avant-garde, experimental filmmaking, which should have the potential to challenge established film conventions and their significance.

Within other national contexts (the Greek in particular here), in whatever form it exists (when it exists at all), women's cinema is generally placed in the margins of popularity or mainstream production. Greek film criticism has by and large ignored women's cinema as a critical concept and context for film analysis. The concept exists as a method of categorisation for films made by women filmmakers, but tellingly those operating in the mainstream or the popular domain do not appear to be included. For

[57] Definitions of popular cinema are provided in the relevant section 'Popular cinema and genre' below, where the category is considered in more detail.

example, the film scholar Ioanna Athanassatou, in her research seminar 'The woman from the two sides of the camera. The woman as a creator / an object of gaze' identifies the important contributions of women filmmakers in the post junta period (1970s) and to New Greek Cinema, and notes:

> we believe that the management of the struggle for identity became a de facto personal issue of women. Women, who introduced an entirely new series of topics and views, without leaving aside their serious ventures of intervention in the artistic language (Antoinetta Angelidi, Maria Klonari, Katerina Thomadaki). [58]

This seminar also became part of the address at the 4th Avant-Garde Film Festival in Athens in 2007, dedicated to Greek Women Auteurs,[59] a category operating as a synonym there, it would appear, for women's cinema. It must be noted, however, that a number of women directors who were celebrated as auteurs at the time cross a variety of boundaries and their films can feature under a number of categories. For instance, Angeliki Antoniou's films are narrative films consciously employing established film forms and conventions (including genre), while at the same time pushing thematic boundaries of what up to that point would be considered a 'woman's film' by the wider film criticism circuit; her inclusion in an Avant-Garde festival is due not to her avant-garde filmmaking practice, therefore, but more to her being perceived as a woman *auteur*, among very few. In addition, the above statement implies a value-system of quality, seriousness and taste, which is problematic, in that it identifies women's cinema with a particular set of attributes, to the exclusion of others, even as it overlooks the realities of the filmmakers it is trying to describe. This demonstrates the difficulties of demarcating clear boundaries and establishing firm definitions of women's cinema, which inevitably crosses various lines of discourse.

More recently, a conference paper by Ursula-Helen Kassaveti considers the work of Maria Plyta, recorded as the first Greek female director in the 1950s, and whose work Kassaveti attempts to "designate […] as "women's" cinema, even in this, its earliest

[58] http://www.tainiothiki.gr/festivals/4grecen1.html [Date accessed: 03/07/2012]
[59] See 'Introduction', *ibid*.

form".[60] Plyta worked successfully within mainstream film production in Greece and is a useful case study for mapping women's popular cinema in Greece. The perplexing punctuation (quotation marks) around the word 'women's' by the author is telling, when considered in the context of the author's efforts to define a category that she claims did not exist in Greece at the time. At the same time, however, not marking the category as a binomial implies a mistrust of the term and a discomfort with women's cinema as a theoretical framework for analysis. Moreover, the idea that Plyta's is women's cinema of an "early form" is not explained in the paper, in spite of its implications of a continuity or development in women's filmmaking's thematic concerns and formal practices. Ultimately, neither of the two main categories evoked by Kassaveti in her paper – that is, women's cinema and popular cinema – is tackled in any way, demonstrating the discomfort around women's cinema in particular that was noted earlier in relation to Athanassatou's text.

However, although these problematic constructions are clearly not absent from discussions around Greek cinema and women filmmakers – indeed there are a number of scholars who write about Greek women filmmakers, such as Maria Komninos, Maria Paradeisi and the aforementioned Ioanna Athanassatou,[61] and feminist criticism is commonly employed as a theoretical framework for such scholarly work – the theorisation of the category of women's cinema as such is lacking. It is useful therefore, and necessary, to consider the theoretical framework for women's cinema as it has been articulated outside Greece; its application within a Greek context can be fruitful in expanding the field of feminist film research in the country towards more comprehensive scholarship on women's cinema. As was briefly mentioned above, from the 1970s onwards, a number of Anglophone feminist theorists re-turned their

[60] Kassaveti, U. 2011. 'Searching for Greek "women's" cinema in the 60's: the case of Maria Plyta', Doing Women's Film History Conference, University of Sunderland, Centre for Research in Media and Cultural Studies, 13-15 April 2011. Quotation marks around the word "women's" are in the original. https://www.academia.edu/7057004/Searching_for_Greek_Womens_Cinema_in_the_60s_The_Case_of_Maria_Plyta_2011_-_Abstract [date accessed: 03/08/2014]

[61] See for example Maria Komninos's (2011) work on representations of women in Greek cinema, and mass media and gender; Maria Paradeisi's (2010, 2013) work on cinematic narration and gender; and Ioanna Athanassatou's (2002, 2007) work on women and cinema more generally.

attention to narrative films and entertainment or popular cinema, and away from the avant-garde as the quintessential form for feminist cinema. An outline of some of the seminal works within this field, which sought to place women's cinema within a wider framework of study, will be useful here.

In 1973, in her essay 'Women's cinema as counter-cinema', Claire Johnston advocates that women's cinema can achieve its stated feminist aims (most prominently, disrupting a patriarchal ideological continuum in popular culture) by operating from within. In response to (radical) feminist filmmaking that rejected popular film form – at least at the time – she proposes that entertainment film can be as useful for the political articulations of/by women and feminism, as can art or avant-garde filmmaking. Focusing on the debate about women's cinema, Claire Johnston warns against distancing it from already existing, mainstream cinematic forms, and proposes that entertainment film can be as important in pronouncing feminism's political aims. Referring to Roland Barthes, she discusses ideology as pre-existing the filmic event, as opposed to various approaches which suggest that Hollywood – and by extension I would say mainstream, popular film in general – consciously constructs ideologically unfavourable, that is passive, static, stereotypical, representations of women. She disagrees, in other words, with "the idea of the intentionality of art" that elevates and emphasises artistic intent, a voluntarism that she considered "extremely misleading and retrograde".[62]

Johnston refers to Hollywood's mainstream film iconography as "shorthand for referring to ideological tradition";[63] a shorthand that can be used not only to confirm this tradition (as is often the criticism by feminist writers), but also to provide a critique of it. The use of pre-existing codes can be valuable in providing a systematic critique of ideology when examining the codes themselves; that is, an analysis of representations of women on screen is not enough, but a critique of the modes of representations, and the language (film language in this instance) used to construct such representations, is as essential and fruitful. In this respect, the use of

[62] Johnston, C. 1973. 'Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema', in Thornham, S. 1999. (ed) *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. p.32.
[63] *Ibid.* p.33.

recognisable, familiar stereotypes, when detached from their original mythic (in Barthesian[64] terms) meaning, can act as a critique of the ideological system that creates and sustains them, by drawing attention to the construction of such meanings, and thus de-familiarising and de-naturalising the sign/stereotype from its 'original' mythic qualities and meaning. This de-naturalisation process of the sign and its meaning, she argues, can be very effective in drawing attention and creating a rupture in the ideological fabric of the film itself. Such a strategy – working from within – recognises the pleasures available to women in popular cinema, while remaining critical to the conditions of production and consumption of such pleasures.

The attack against auteur theory by feminist writing was also addressed by Johnston, who saw that theory as useful, since it has marked a step forward by classifying Hollywood/mainstream cinema as being as important as art cinema. She agrees with Peter Wollen (1972), who suggests that the importance of recognising and analysing authorship in film lies not in that the director is perceived as an artist (the single one at that, in the production of film), but in helping to decode an unintended, unconscious meaning registered in the film through the director's choices and preoccupations. In terms of women's film then, this can also be a useful approach, despite the fact that contemporary criticism at that time mostly (if not only) considered male directors as authors, consciously or perhaps unthinkingly excluding female directors from such canons.

In her brief discussion of Dorothy Arzner's and Ida Lupino's work, Johnston identified some of the techniques used by these directors while they were working within the Hollywood studio system. Although the use of established stereotypes and filmic codes by both directors was acknowledged, this use was also described as critical and ambiguous, disruptive of the 'coherent' narratives Hollywood insisted upon. Crude stereotyping in the case of Arzner (specifically referring to *Dance Girl, Dance* (1940) as an example here) and, in the case of Lupino, ambiguity in her films' relationship to sexist ideology, were referred to as strategies that bring to the fore narrative and ideological contradictions operating in (popular) film. As Johnston notes, "an analysis

[64] See Barthes, R. [1957] 1970. *Mythologies.* London: Vintage.

of the workings of myth and the possibilities of subverting it in the Hollywood system could prove of use in determining a strategy for the subversion of ideology in general".[65] Ultimately, Johnston in her article calls for the development of a strategy which "embraces both the notion of film as a political tool and film as entertainment".[66] Thus, without dismissing approaches that celebrate art film and the avant-garde operating outside or counter to the established system, she emphasises how 'working from within' can be equally productive in providing oppositional routes for women's cinema. Ideally, a two way process is proposed where ideas derived from entertainment film inform the political film and political ideas inform mainstream, entertainment cinema.

Although the article was written over 30 years ago, and women have increasingly and successfully operated (as directors among other occupations) within mainstream and popular film production, Johnston's work can still open avenues for analysis of the work of female directors in contemporary Hollywood and elsewhere. Continuing lines of enquiry around women's cinema in a 'postfeminist' film industry context (within and outside popular production) can be pursued based on Johnston's notions of counter-ideological articulations in popular film in general, and when examining Malea's work in this thesis in particular.

The attention paid by feminist film criticism to sexual difference, identity and (female) subjectivity within dominant patriarchal structures has been prevalent from the earlier days of feminist theory until (often) the present,[67] and has influenced attempts at defining and/or demarcating a coherent terrain for women's cinema. However, already in the 1980s Teresa de Lauretis shifts the terms of discussion in feminist theory away from conceptualising "gender [exclusively] *as* sexual difference",[68] a practice which, she argues, limited feminist thought and 'locked' it within dominant discourses that articulated sexual difference in binary and heterosexist terms. Instead, she

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[65] Johnston, C. 1973. 'Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema', in Thornham, S. 1999. (ed) *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. p. 39.
[66] *Ibid*.
[67] For example, in Greece Ioanna Athanassatou (2002, 2005, 2007) has extensively written and talked about issues of identity, the body and female subjectivity.
[68] De Lauretis, T. 1987. 'The Technology of Gender' in *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. London: Macmillan Press. p. 1.

proposes a conception of a social subject en-gendered not only by sexual difference, but "in the experiencing of race and class, [...] a subject, therefore, not unified but rather multiple, and not so much divided as contradicted".[69] She suggests that this re-thinking and re-writing of dominant discourses, which were until then viewed and analysed exclusively as oppressive, would allow feminist thought to escape the trap of articulating Woman always in relation to Man, and thus allowing for female agency to be reclaimed. Moreover, she argues for a constant and ongoing critique of discourses, including those which are promoted as feminist, in an "effort to create new spaces of discourse, to rewrite cultural narratives, and to define the terms of another perspective – a view from "elsewhere"". This "elsewhere", she continued, is the "spaces carved in the margins of hegemonic discourses, social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparati". [70]

In this context, women's cinema is seen as a methodology that promotes women as social subjects and can provide – indeed has provided – this alternative view from "elsewhere". At the same time, feminist theory should engage in "the redefinition of aesthetic and formal knowledges, much as women's cinema has been engaged in the transformation of vision".[71] Part of this re-direction and transformation of vision in women's cinema has been affected by addressing the spectator as female, rather than always conceptualising the spectator as male according to previous feminist theorisation (e.g. Laura Mulvey[72]) – in other words, addressing the spectator as *a* woman and not as Woman, identifying the differences between women rather than insisting on a fixed construct which is the expression and projection of male desire. If the specificity and aesthetic forms of Women's Cinema are re-thought in terms of spectatorship, that is,

> in terms of address – who is making films for whom, who is looking and speaking, how, where and to whom – then what has been seen as a rift, a division, an ideological split within feminist film culture

[69] *Ibid.* p. 2.
[70] *Ibid.* p. 25.
[71] De Lauretis, T. 1987. 'Rethinking Women's Cinema' in *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. London: Macmillan Press. p. 131.
[72] Mulvey, L. 1989. *Visual and Other Pleasures (Language, Discourse, Society)*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

> between theory and practice, or between formalism and activism, may appear to be the very strength, the drive and productive heterogeneity of feminism.[73]

De Lauretis then, defines women's cinema as cinema made by and for women, and an important apparatus for feminist articulations.

In addition to the look, de Lauretis suggests that women's cinema can also be discussed in terms of narrative; narrative which she also identifies as a key technology of gender. Traditionally feminist writers have been suspicious of narrative, or have rejected it outright, as a vehicle inherently steeped in and promoting dominant (patriarchal) ideologies. However, de Lauretis recognises the appeal narrative has for female spectators and filmmakers alike. She suggests that narrative and narrativity are mechanisms of coherence and therefore mechanisms of meaning. As such, they are worth exploring for "their capacity to inscribe desire and to direct, sustain, or undercut identification (in all the senses of the term)".[74] In addition, she calls for the strategic and tactical deployment of these mechanisms "in the effort to construct other forms of coherence, to shift the terms of representation, to produce the conditions of representability of another – and gendered – social subject".[75] While in the *Technologies of Gender* women's cinema is associated mostly with the avant-garde, in a later essay, 'Guerrilla in the Midst' (1990), she proposes a conception of women's cinema that can cut across boundaries of independent and mainstream, avant-garde and narrative cinema (much like one of the prominent aims of *la politique des auteurs* as briefly mentioned above, and which will be discussed more at length in the section 'Authorship and Malea' later in the chapter). She argues that women's cinema can still provide an alternative view even from within mainstream, narrative cinema (and in this respect agreeing with Johnston) by refocusing its aims and address:

> What I would call alternative films in women's cinema are those which engage the current problems, the real issues, the things actually at stake in feminist communities on a local scale, and which, although informed by a global perspective, do not assume or aim at a universal,

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[73] De Lauretis, T. 1987. 'Rethinking Women's Cinema' in *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. London: Macmillan Press. p.135.
[74] De Lauretis, T. 1987. 'Strategies of Coherence' in *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. London: Macmillan Press. p. 108-109.
[75] *Ibid.*

> multinational audience, but address a particular one in its specific history of struggles and emergency.[76]

The mission, that is, of this guerrilla cinema, or women's cinema, is not to negate mainstream practices, but to work continuously with and against narrative, reflecting a new form of coherence founded in contradiction.[77] This process of narrativising (ideological) contradictions and thus foregrounding an alternative perspective on contemporary Greek reality has been a key component in Malea's work as will be detailed later; and rather than presented as 'proof' of badly-done or disrupted narrative flow (one of the criticisms of the director's work as was detailed in the previous section of this chapter), contradiction is rather registered here as a productive mode of a female and feminist perspective in the director's oeuvre: an instance of a view from "elsewhere".

In the late 1990s, Anneke Smelik began her book *And the Mirror Cracked*[78] with a personal account of those films important to her because they addressed her as a female, and feminist, spectator. Smelik's work continues from De Lauretis, whose definition of women's cinema proposed a move across generic boundaries and the maintenance of a political agenda at the same time. De Lauretis insisted on the necessity for women's cinema to strategically change its modes of representation in order to actively address spectators as women, placing additional emphasis on issues of spectatorship. Carrying on from this, Smelik focuses once again on female subjectivity, as this is inscribed *in and outside* of the text; in other words, female subjectivity both of characters and audience. Smelik sees subjectivity as "a process of continuing becoming rather than a state of being",[79] underlining the fluidity and malleability, rather than fixity of identity. She turns her attention onto narrative film (other than Hollywood), rather than the avant-garde, which has been disproportionately studied, she claims, by earlier feminist writers. She argues for the potential narrative cinema has in shifting established representations of women and

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[76] De Lauretis, T. 1990. 'Guerrilla in the Midst: Women's Cinema in the 80s', *Screen*, Vol. 31, p. 17.
[77] De Lauretis, T. 1987. 'Strategies of Coherence' in *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. London: Macmillan Press. p. 114.
[78] Smelik, A. 1998 *And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory*. New York: Palgrave. p. 1.
[79] *Ibid.* p. 3.

challenging long-held gender power relations (and previously perceived and critically analysed by feminist theorists). She notes that the centrality of narrative cinema within the mainstream is important and that feminist codes and conventions can effectively "combine visual pleasure, narrative tension and political integrity". Through textual analysis she identifies "ways in which feminist filmmakers use and transform conventional cinematic means for communicating their non-conventional ideas",[80] much like in Olga Malea's work, I will argue. Rather than dismissing conventions associated with the mainstream then, Smelik sees the potential for employing these codes and conventions as rhetorical devices in order to re-inscribe their meaning. More specifically she considers issues of authorship and spectatorship, the construction of (a female) cinematic point of view, visual excess in the service of foregrounding, challenging and subverting established representations of gender, and depictions of lesbian desire through strategies of abjection and humour. Throughout her work, Smelik utilises a variety of theoretical frameworks to analyse the selected films; from the tensions of desire, pleasure and politics inbuilt in feminist criticism, to methods of addressing, challenging and/or resolving such tensions, Smelik demonstrates the multiplicity of theoretical approaches available in understanding and discussing feminist filmmaking, and women's cinema more broadly.

Within a socio-historical and cultural context, the aim of the director, she writes, is to process her experiences of belonging to the gendered category of women in order to change established representations of sexual difference; equally, the spectator needs to question the kind of empowerment that can be gained by the reception of those films which fulfil such political intent. In this respect, she continues, "rhetoric negotiates between the experience of the filmmaker, represented in the film, the experience of the spectator, evoked by the film, and that of larger social and cultural codes";[81] and by "changing dominant images and representations of 'Woman' and femininity, feminist filmmakers make powerful cultural interventions".[82] In recognising the heritage of women's cinema in feminist filmmaking, Smelik helps expand the definition, output and

[80] *Ibid*. p. 2.
[81] *Ibid*. p. 5.
[82] *Ibid*. p. 6.

reach of women's cinema and feminist aims beyond previously recognised domains, thus opening up spaces for explorations such as this thesis.

In *Women's Cinema: the contested screen*, Alison Butler synthesises an array of (feminist) theorisations around women and cinema, some of which have been detailed above. Here she comments on the complex and multi-dimensional concept of women's cinema, recognising and pointing to this heterogeneity from the very beginning. It is worth reiterating the epigraph of this section here :

> 'Women's Cinema' is a complex critical, theoretical and institutional construction, brought into existence by audiences, film-makers, journalists, curators and academics and maintained only by their continuing interest: a hybrid concept, arising from a number of overlapping practices and discourses, and subject to a baffling variety of definitions.[83]

Since films by women cross generic, aesthetic, social and national boundaries, Butler argues that their study should not be restricted within a scholarly feminist studies context; rather, feminist or women's studies should acknowledge the many various frameworks and discourses, other 'cinemas', movements and genres, through which the study of women's cinema can be inflected.

Starting from Claire Johnston's 'counter-cinema', Butler reviews a number of founding debates[84] within feminist film theory (some of which are also outlined above), tracing the roots of women's cinema in feminist film-making practices. Butler, however, moves beyond "the binarism that the notion of counter or oppositional cinema implies",[85] but rather proposes that the concept of 'minor cinema' can prove more fruitful in unlocking some of the impasses in previous studies of women's cinema within an almost exclusively feminist theory context. The notion of 'minor' is borrowed from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's theorisation of Franz Kafka's work as 'minor

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[83] Butler, A. 2002. *Women's Cinema: the contested screen*. London and New York: Wallflower Press. p.2

[84] As she points out, this is inevitably not an exhaustive account of feminist film theory, but rather a selective overview of useful contributions in the attempt to navigate this complex field.

[85] Neill, N. *Senses of Cinema*, October 2002, http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/books/02/23/contested_screen.html [date accessed: 13/09/2010]

literature',[86] which referred to "the literature of a minority or marginalised group, written, not in a minor language, but in a major one".[87] In this respect, women's cinema is seen as sharing the defining features of 'minor literature': "displacement, dispossession or [...] deterritorialisation; a sense of everything as political; and a tendency for everything to take on a collective value";[88] it thus becomes a "contested screen", defined and understood in relation to or located within other types of cinema. Strategies of appropriation, re-writing and revision of recognised premises and conventions of mainstream, popular cinema are strategically employed by women filmmakers, challenging and re-defining such established forms.

Butler organises her study so that it addressed this diversity of women's cinema; the chapters in her book encompass mainstream, avant-garde and transnational cinematic practices, considering how women have negotiated the genres and genders of the mainstream, how they have employed reflexivity and autobiography in inscribing their authorial agency in avant-garde cinema, and how women's cinema has engaged with cultural geography and dis-located identities. Her study is therefore useful in identifying "that women's cinema is not 'at home' in any of the host cinematic or national discourses it inhabits, but that it is always an inflected mode, incorporating, reworking and contesting the conventions of established traditions".[89]

Butler concludes with a reminder of the fluid and unfixed quality of women's cinema, which "exists only in the eyes of its beholders, crossing boundaries between forms, periods and cultures to engender feminist communities".[90] Despite its 'elusiveness' however, women's cinema can prove a fruitful if contradictory and open category under which women's engagement with film can be explored. The concept of 'minor cinema' in particular can be especially useful when discussing the subcategory of women filmmakers who work within the popular cinema domain: articulating concerns of a 'minor' position by employing a 'major language' in the form of

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[86] Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. 1986. *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*. Trans. D. Polan. Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press.
[87] Butler, A. 2002. *Women's Cinema: the contested screen*. London and New York: Wallflower Press. p.19
[88] *Ibid.* p. 20.
[89] *Ibid.* p. 22.
[90] *Ibid.* p. 123.

established generic structures and conventions. The present thesis aims at opening this particular line of research of women and cinema within Greek Film Studies.

I claim that this subcategory of women's cinema is examined not only as operating from within popular, mainstream production, but *as* a popular cinema itself, i.e. as a way of endorsing an ideological shift, of popularising themes and forms associated with women's cinema and which are often marginalised. Within this proposed conceptualisation, rather than seeking to simply disrupt (from within) or appropriate established, largely patriarchal norms and configurations associated with the popular, 'women's popular cinema' can be examined or read as an alternative view (a view from 'elsewhere' according to De Lauretis) of what *is* popular. I have to highlight here the variable nature of popularity, and "the multiplicity of sometimes contradictory meanings"[91] of the popular; but I am proposing a more invested shift towards an approach to the study of genre films made by women filmmakers, rather than a response to various determining contextual factors of popularity, such as audience tastes, cultural, political, industrial modes and conditions and so on.

Popular cinema and genre: questions of value and the national canon

Much like women's cinema, popular cinema is a category whose definition is multi-faceted and inflected by various contexts, such as historical, social, economic, cultural and industrial; this multiplicity of meanings and contexts results in a confusion, in Dimitris Eleftheriotis's words, around the term 'popular cinema', with a "cluster of terms […] perceived and used as more or less interchangeable – crucially the terms 'commercial', 'entertainment', 'mainstream' and 'genre'".[92] Indeed, popular cinema is commonly associated with this set of ideas, by which it is generally understood, even if not clearly and adequately defined by them. This section explores some of these ideas, which help describe, if not define, the category of popular cinema, and considers their relation to value systems that tend to exclude popular films from national canons. In turn, these concepts help to further contextualise Malea's work, which has been

[91] Eleftheriotis, D. 2001. *Popular Cinemas of Europe*. New York, London: Continuum. p. 69.
[92] *Ibid*.

primarily (and often disparagingly) referred to as commercial or popular cinema as was outlined in the first section of this introductory chapter.

More specifically then, 'popular' refers to cinema of broad appeal, a cinema that is commercial and therefore primarily aims to be profitable, and operates within the realms of mainstream production; finally, a cinema that is "accessible" according to Perkins, with films "whose comprehension and enjoyment require only such skills, knowledges and understandings as are developed in the ordinary process of living in society – not those that come with economic or cultural privilege".[93] This latter designation is of course problematic, in that it assumes a position whereby certain cultural products are only accessible by an educated elite, while suggesting that popular culture is universally understood – when in fact a number of popular cultural artefacts are only consumed and understood by certain sub-cultures; moreover, meanings and nuances present in popular cultural products are often not understood by these same 'out-of-touch' elites. Still, those are qualities that are recognised of popular culture in general, which, as Dominic Strinati concludes, is "therefore a marketable commodity".[94]

In order to capitalise on the idea of cinema as a mass medium, a popular medium, from early on film production and distribution industries organised their cinematic output around types of film, or genres, yet another unfixed category in terms of its definition and uses. Genre cinema, in most, if not all, film industry contexts is generally perceived, accepted, studied and critiqued as popular cinema, meaning commercial in most cases. This is perhaps because of genre's combination of novelty and familiarity that many theorists, such as Steve Neale, David Bordwell and others, recognise, which allows genres to be profitable as they offer a link between differentiation and standardisation.[95] In addition, genre has cultural and critical dimensions, which,

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[93] Perkins, V.F. 1992. 'The Atlantic Divide' in R. Dyer & G. Vincendeau (eds) *Popular European Cinema*. London & New York: Routledge. p. 195-196.
[94] Strinati, D. 2000. *An Introduction to Studying Popular Culture*. London New York: Routledge. p. 252.
[95] Bordwell, D. *et al.* 1985. *Classical Hollywood Cinema*. London: Routledge; Buscombe, E. 1986. 'The Idea of Genre in American Cinema' in Grant, B. (ed) *Film Genre Reader*. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, p. 12-26; Neale, S. 1990. 'Questions of Genre' *Screen*, Vol. 31, No. 1, p. 45-66.

according to Christine Gledhill, allows for genre analysis to "tell us not just about kinds of films, but about the cultural work of producing and knowing them".[96] Without discarding genre's marketable qualitites, Gledhill therefore recognises genre's "triple existence as industrial mechanism, aesthetic practice, and arena of cultural-critical discursivity".[97] In this thesis, genre, and in particular comedy, is treated as a key operative mode of popular cinema, and special attention is paid to its existence as a space for discourse. Generic flexibility and perpetual updating allow for its constant dialogue with other forms and permeation of new approaches, themes, styles etc., while its formulaic qualities allow for its marketability as outlined above. It will be argued that Malea has consistently used the genre of comedy as a useful tool to address generally taboo or marginal thematic preoccupations in an accessible form; using the established formula and challenging or updating it in equal measure guaranteed, to some degree at least, a marketable product that could target a wider audience for her selected themes.

One of the main features of the established discourse around popular cinema in Greece is the dichotomy between popular/commercial and quality/art cinema. A recent blog post on *Camera Stylo* (a Greek film periodical), by its editor and film critic Giannis Karabitsos, is striking for his repeated use of the binary *emporikos/poiotikos* kinimatografos (commercial/quality cinema).[98] The writer was deliberating on the recent Hellenic Film Academy Awards 2014 and the jury choices. Admittedly, this was a blog post with no cohesion of argument as such – as the author himself noted, these were some thoughts he wished to put forward in an informal manner after the ceremony in order to initiate a discussion. Nevertheless, there is no doubt about his use of a dichotomy which has often been questioned and problematised within film scholarship, but whose hold on contemporary Greek everyday discourse is still undeniable. This framing of popular cinema in opposition to 'quality' art cinema poses an unnecessary obstacle to the further and much needed exploration of popular

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[96] Gledhill, C. 2000 'Rethinking genre' in Gledhill, C. and Williams, L. (eds) *Reinventing Film Studies*. London: Arnold. p. 222.
[97] *Ibid.* p. 223.
[98] http://camerastyloonline.wordpress.com/2014/04/17/entyposeis-skepseis-kai-paratiriseis-apo-tin-teleti-aponomis-ton-vraveion-tis-ellinikis-akadimias-kinimatografou-2014-tou-gianni-karabitsou [date accessed: 20/04/2014]

cinema and popular culture as a whole in the country. In some cases where individual popular films have been considered in relation to their audience appeal and commercial success, critics in Greece have tended to dismiss the audience as lacking film knowledge or good taste (for example, this is consistently done by Yiannis Soldatos in his multi-volume *History of Greek Cinema*),[99] reinforcing the unhelpful assumptions about cultural privilege mentioned above.

When discussing popular European cinema, Eleftheriotis has identified the binaries that had occupied the criticism of European cinema as sterile;[100] art/popular, political/commercial and so on are such binaries that have also characterised a large part of Greek film criticism, especially when discussing popular film with commercial ambitions, as was evidenced in the opening section of this Introduction in relation to Malea's work. In such cases the binary oppositions allow for the dismissal of commercial aspirations against artistic ambition or political and social aims of a film. There are of course exceptions, in efforts such as Lydia Papadimitriou's study on Greek film musical, Michalis Kokkonis's work on the Greek blockbuster, Nick Potamitis's article on the two dominant generic categories in Greece, comedy and melodrama, or Angeliki Milonakis's research on the way the modern city is mapped in popular cinema of the 1950s and 1960s, to mention but a few.[101] However, despite the existence of some critical engagement, there has hardly been comprehensive research dedicated to all aspects and phases of popular Greek cinema, nor indeed studies that seek to define the notion of the popular itself within a Greek film context, and thus (re)frame the discussion of genre cinema.

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[99] Soldatos, Y. 2002. *History of Greek Cinema*. Athens: Aigokeros.
[100] Eleftheriotis, D. 2001. *Popular Cinemas of Europe*. New York, London: Continuum. p. xii.
[101] Papadimitriou, L. 2009. *The Greek Film Musical: A Critical and Cultural History*. London: McFarland; Kokonis, M. 2012. 'Is There Such a Thing as a Greek Blockbuster? The Revival of Contemporary Greek Cinema', in Papadimitriou, L. and Tzioumakis, Y. (eds) *Greek Cinema: Texts, Histories, Identities*. Bristol, Chicago: Intellect. p. 39-53; Potamitis, N.Y. 'Comedy and Melodrama: Making Strange Genres in Greek Cinema' in *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, Vol. 37, nos. 1&2, 2011, p. 153-163; Milonaki, A. 2012. *From the courtyards to the living rooms: Representations of urban space in Greek popular cinema/Apo Tis Avles Sta Salonia: Eikones tou astikou xorou ston Elliniko dimofili kinimatografo (1950-1970)*. Thessalonki: University Studio Press. See also the Bibliography section in *Filmicon: Journal of Greek Film Studies,* for a more detailed bibliography on Greek (popular) cinema; available at http://filmiconjournal.com/journal/current [date accessed: 20/04/2014]

Considering Greece within the wider European cinema context, it becomes clear how some of the critical approaches to European cinema in general have also influenced traditions in Greek film criticism, whose attention has for a long time overwhelmingly been on art house cinema. Eleftheriotis, among many other scholars of European cinema, has noted that the "Europe/Hollywood distinction is usually translated as opposition between art cinema (perceived essentially as European) and entertainment cinema (seen as American), which is counter-productive for the study of both Hollywood and European films".[102] In addition, "this distinction implies that the only meaningful comparison for European Cinema is Hollywood, and in this sense relegates the rest of the world's film production into epistemological otherness."[103] Ginnette Vincendeau's and Richard Dyer's edited volume *European Popular Cinema* (1992) has since the early 1990s decidedly put popular cinemas of Europe on the critical map, disbanding previous associations of America and Hollywood exclusively with popular, entertainment cinema, and Europe with art cinema. As they stated then, the aim was to acknowledge an aspect of cinema which had stubbornly remained neglected: "popular entertainment cinema made by Europeans for Europeans".[104] Under this umbrella-term European, however, there exist a number of national (popular) cinemas with their own specificities of production, distribution and exhibition practices; in addition, they bear their own cultural, social and historical distinctiveness, despite all the aforementioned shared features.

This attempt to further contextualise Olga Malea's cinema in this section has thus far introduced a number of rather broad and problematic terms, such as 'popular', 'European' and 'national'. Definitions of these concepts or categories are always complex and often reductive; however, these categories are always in use because they offer a certain practicality when talking about, and seeking to organise, ideas around production and distribution of film. Eleftheriotis suggests that "one way of studying national cinemas without reducing the complex and contradictory nature of the object of study is the investigation of statements made about nationhood, national identity

[102] Eleftheriotis, D. 2001. *Popular Cinemas of Europe*. New York, London: Continuum. p. 11.
[103] *Ibid.*
[104] Dyer, R. and Vincendeau, G. (eds.) 1992. *Popular European Cinema*. Abington: Routledge. p. 1.

and national cinema in specific historical moments and in specific nation-states."[105] This way conflicting ideas about, and the constructedness of unity of, 'national' are also discussed and exposed. At the same time however, "it is important to stress the usefulness of 'the national' as *one* of the contexts within which popular films and cinemas can be analysed."[106] The outline of Greek national film production and academic film study context in the section that follows aims to do just that: help place Malea's comedies within a historically-specific moment in Greece, which is the decade 1997-2007. It is not, however, the aim of this thesis to define, question and investigate the problematic areas of the notion of 'National Cinema' or the term 'national' itself; still, a brief discussion of how this idea interacts with that of popular cinema can be useful.

Since, as was noted above, national European cinemas have by and large been conceived in opposition to Hollywood's global entertainment and commercial values, the unique identity of each national cinema has been sought in 'high' art. However, as Eleftheriotis observes, "The imposition of unity of a [usually] state-approved and constructed high culture on the nation goes against the nationalist rhetoric of acting in the name of the people and the reliance on a popular or *Volk* culture, which is invariably multiple, fragmented and local".[107] This paradoxical quality of the 'national' is evident in the ways a fixed idea of 'Greekness' (in this case) must be identified in order to establish a representative and recognisable national film canon, while the inimitability of each film is also important in order to counter formulaic qualities associated with 'low' popular productions. Indeed, industrial, mass-produced items are rarely seen as representing the heritage of a country; and in the case of cinema, popular films rarely enter national canons.

Moreover, the formation of the canon itself is not unproblematic. As Thomas Elsaesser has observed, often films make it into the national canon as worthy representatives of national cinema once they have been recognised abroad and gained international critical appreciation. But in order to do that, as he suggests, films need to

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[105] Eleftheriotis, D. 2001. *Popular Cinemas of Europe*. New York, London: Continuum. p. 35.
[106] *Ibid*. p. 36.
[107] *Ibid.* p. 27.

display a set of 'universal values' and cinema as a whole needs to be understood as a 'universal language',[108] contrary to the "search for locality, specificity and difference that construction of the 'national' demands. […] In this sense, the national canon is determined by judgements based on universal values and often pronounced outside the geographical boundaries of the nation".[109] Andrew Higson, recognising the problematic areas in this organisational category of the 'national cinema', proposed instead the study of a national film culture.[110] Undeniably, a nation's film culture, or rather cultures, includes popular cinema. The analysis of Malea's comedies, which constitutes the main body of this thesis, seeks to highlight an aspect of the country's (popular) film culture and to address, in Eleftheriotis's words "a stubborn critical reluctance to engage with directors working within a commercial national […] context".[111]

Authorship and Malea

Dealing with the oeuvre of a film director inescapably raises questions about authorship, that is, a conceptualisation of the selected director as an *auteur*. The idea of authorship has been associated with the person at the origin of a work of art, "the unifying principle in the production, interpretation, and the reception of an artwork".[112] The concept of authorship recognises intentionality and individual agency, and the author is seen as a unifying element within a body of work in terms of ideology, structure or world view. In Romanticism, art was seen as the expression of the 'individual genius', who maintains creative autonomy and originality against contextual forces such as economic, social or ideological and cultural imperatives; an idea which was highly influential later in the way a film *auteur* was conceptualised. In Film Studies, the figure of the *auteur* first appeared in French criticism in the 1950s, and was consolidated in theoretical terms in the USA by Andrew Sarris, who introduced the

[108] Elsaesser, T. 1989. *New German Cinema: A History*. London: BFI/Macmillan.
[109] Eleftheriotis, D. 2001. *Popular Cinemas of Europe*. New York, London: Continuum. p. 34.
[110] Higson, A. 1989. 'The Concept of National Cinema', *Screen*, Vol. 30, No. 4, p. 36-47.
[111] Eleftheriotis, D. 2001. *Popular Cinemas of Europe*. New York, London: Continuum. p. 135.
[112] Maule, R. 2008. *Beyond Auteurism: New Directions in Authorial Film Practices in France, Italy and Spain since the 1980s*. Bristol, UK and Chicago, USA: Intellect. p. 13.

expression 'auteur theory' in his essay 'Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962' and later produced an influential book on *auteurism*, *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929–1968*.[113] According to *la politique des auteurs,* the film director is identified as this unifying force behind a film's meaning. The *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics at the time recognised the director of a film as the equivalent of an author, who uses his camera as an author would use his pen (camera-stylo) to inscribe meaning into a film (note the gendered pronoun); thus they tried to argue further and consolidate cinema as an art form. Sarris added a series of identifying traits, which can help separate the 'true' *auteurs* from those directors who simply employ formulas (the *metteurs-en-scène*) or execute a film that is technically sound, but without that deeper meaning and personal inscription evident in a piece of art. Indeed, those directors who managed to inscribe their vision while circumventing the restrictive rules and conventions of the mainstream context, within which many operated (Hollywood is the primary example), were particularly praised as masterful *auteurs*.[114]

This analytical approach, despite all the criticisms and problematic areas that accompany it, has been one of the most influential in Film Studies, and indeed *auteur* cinema has become a distinctive category within the framework of (smaller, particularly) national cinemas, especially when it comes to culturally differentiating themselves from Hollywood and other national cinemas, as was discussed in the preceding section. This is indeed the case within a Greek cinema context, where, from the 1970s, New Greek Cinema was largely conceptualised as a distinct phase in Greek film history in terms of *auteur* theory, with the late Theo Angelopoulos as its most celebrated agent. This *auteurist* privileging is still evident in Greek criticism and much scholarship, as will be explored in the following section. However, while initially the idea of the *auteur* was envisioned from within, and indeed helped promote the study of, popular cinema, in Greece and admittedly in other European countries the film

[113] Sarris, A. "Notes On The Auteur Theory In 1962", in Braudy, L. and Cohen, M. (eds) 1999. *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. New York, NY: Oxford UP. p. 515-518; Sarris, A. 1968 (1996). *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929–1968*. Da Capo Press.

[114] Of course this is a rather reductive account of the theory and its application, and there have also been various criticisms about this analytical approach, such as the very elevation of one person, i.e. the director as the single creative force in a film, but such explorations are beyond the remit of this thesis.

author became "an emblem of [...] culturally oriented cinema, funded through public institutions and government subsidies conceived outside the economic imperatives of the film industry".[115] Indeed, from its inception and for many years after, the Greek Film Centre performed the role of the main (governmental) funder and curator of 'quality' national cinema substantiated by the figure of the (almost exclusively male) a*uteur*. The contradiction inherent in placing an emphasis on individual artistry, while at the same time claiming to purport a collective national aesthetics, seems to go unnoticed in this type of construction.

Since the 1990s in Europe, according to Maule, the film author has been promoted "as a marketing figure for niche theatrical distribution mediating between cultural and commercial interests"[116] and responding to those imperatives of the film industry for profit. The perceived conflict between the film *auteur* and the film industry, chief purveyor of popular cinema, has since been questioned and overthrown.[117] The position of the director as the author and key agent of a film has been in some respects reinstated, albeit performing primarily a marketing function, especially within a mainstream, popular cinema domain. And although in this new context, the film director is not refashioned as the figure "who establishes her/his personality against the anonymity of industrial strategies of film production and reception", all the while a key intention of *la politique des auteurs* is being reconsidered: that of assessing "cinema's aesthetic values regardless of preconceived ideas about high art".[118]

Concomitantly, this concept's persistence both in film studies and the wider film industry is perhaps why one of the key preoccupations of feminist criticism and women's cinema has been that of authorship, or the question of women (directors, primarily) as *auteurs*. It is useful, therefore, to consider some of the key notions that have framed the theorisation around women's authorial signature in film, especially

[115] Maule, R. 2008. *Beyond Auteurism: New Directions in Authorial Film Practices in France, Italy and Spain since the 1980s*. Bristol, UK and Chicago, USA: Intellect. p. 14.
[116] *Ibid.*
[117] For a more detailed discussion on this see Rosanna Maule, *ibid.*
[118] *Ibid.* p. 100-111.

when talking about popular cinema, and in order to determine Malea's position as an *auteur*.

As Judith Mayne argues, one of the main issues in feminist scholarship about authorship is that the latter is founded on western, male-centred, patriarchal models of subjectivity and aesthetic representations.[119] In response to such a problematic notion of examining women's authorship, a number of theorists relate female authorship in film to a feminist agenda, which challenges patriarchal articulations and instead proposes cinematic practices that are fundamentally alternative to those of dominant, mainstream or classical cinema/s.[120] In addition, women's authorship has been considered in terms of a new language, a new way of 'writing' or *écriture féminine*,[121] which however has also been criticised as essentialist, since the idea of a feminine aesthetic or subjectivity is seen to be conceived in opposition and in relation to male paradigms.[122]

Despite the criticisms, the importance of understanding women's subjectivity and agency within a given historical context, and how this is inscribed in film has been often noted by feminist theorists,[123] who have urged that authorship should be seen as "a function of discourse rather than individual intent".[124] In other words, there is an

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[119] Mayne, J. 1990. *The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women's Cinema*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

[120] For example, see De Lauretis, T. 1987. *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, she defined women's cinema as cinema made by and for women, and an important apparatus for feminist articulations.

[121] For example by Mayne (1990 and 1994) drawing on Hélène Cixous' [trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen] 'The Laugh of Medusa', in *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 4, Summer, 1976. pp. 875-893. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173239?origin=JSTOR-pdf [date accessed: 18/02/2014]

[122] Mayne, J. 1990. *The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women's Cinema*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. p 89-98.

[123] See for example, Johnston, C. (ed) 1975. *The Work of Dorothy Arzner: Towards a Feminist Film Criticism.* London: British Film Institute; Mayne, J. 1995. 'A Parallax View of Lesbian Authorship' in Pietropaolo, L. and Testaferri, A. (eds) *Feminisms in the Cinema*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, p. 195-205; Butler, A. 2000, 'Feminist theory and Women's Films at the turn of the Century' in *Screen,* Vol. 41 (1), p. 73-79; and Grant, C. 2000, 'www.auteur.com?' in *Screen,* Vol. 41 (1), p. 101-108.

[124] Petro, P. 2002. *Aftershocks of the New: Feminism and Film History*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, p. 36.

emphasis on "the ideological traces of the auteur in the text"[125] rather than reference to the real person directing the film. Geetha Ramanathan has advocated that examining female authorship and feminist texts together can prove very productive in addressing some of the aforementioned problematic areas when considering women directors as *auteurs*. As she explains:

> Feminist auteurship entails the impression of feminist authority, not necessarily that of the auteur herself, on screen. What is at stake here is the film's larger acknowledgement of an informing discourse that is ideological in both form and content. Whether visual, psychoanalytic, aural or narrative, this address transcends the personal; both the place and terms of address are derived from an understanding of the film's relevance to women.[126]

Establishing a (feminist) authority in women's cinema has been an important aspect of the conceptualisation of the category itself, where a female and feminist view is foregrounded and where women's experiences and world views, both in and outside the text, are the focal point. I would suggest that this is even more important within the realm of popular cinema, countering the dominance of masculinist principles and discourse. Although, of course, not all films made by women are necessarily feminist or can be categorised as women's cinema, a female director operating within a traditionally male-oriented domain (both at the level of industry as well as discourse and ideology) poses interesting questions in terms of establishing an ideological authorial presence. When discussing Malea and her work, it is precisely this renewed approach that informs my treatment of her throughout this thesis as an active agent behind her films (as a director and co-scriptwriter), rather than an intention of promoting her as an *auteur* in the more traditional sense.

Within the proposed subcategory of 'women's popular cinema', the consideration of a female and feminist ideological authority is paramount in identifying the ways in which a popular cinema discourse is employed and rearticulated, thus examining those points of convergence and mutual influence of the two broad categories informing this thesis: women's cinema and popular cinema. In the case of a Greek context, it is

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[125] Ramanathan, G. 2006. *Feminist Auteurs: Reading Women's Films*. London & New York: Wallflower Press. p. 3.
[126] *Ibid.* p. 3-4.

important to consider questions of authorial agency within popular and women's cinema contexts; particularly because questions of authorship have thus far insisted on more traditional approaches, even when discussing women *auteurs*, such as Tonia Marketaki or Antouanetta Angelidi, who have consistently been associated with art-house and experimental film.

Greek Cinema: history and scholarship

In this first chapter I have thus far set out a series of theoretical frameworks which intersect and interact with one another and provide points of access from which one can examine Malea's work. The aim of this section is not to retell Greek cinema history nor to recount the existing critical bibliography and critical study of this country's cinema, both of which have been done before;[127] but, instead, to highlight some important points in a brief overview of the history of Greek cinema and its scholarship in order to contextualise both Malea's work within the national environment, but importantly also this thesis itself within the context of Greek Film Studies. As discussed earlier in the section entitled 'Popular cinema and genre: questions of value and the national canon', notions of the national are open to challenge; one can nevertheless write about Greek film cultures (of practice and scholarship), and place an analysis of Malea's comedies within this productive landscape.

The history of Greek cinema is disrupted, reflecting the social, political and cultural upheavals that the post-Ottoman Empire modern Greek state faced since its creation in the 1800s and until the present. A series of wars (including civil conflict after World War II), dictatorship, social unrest, economic hardships, immigration and emigration, and constant changes in the cultural landscape of the country, all had an impact on the creation and sustainability of an organised and continuous national film production, i.e. the creation of a film industry. The main problems for Greek filmmakers and producers have always been funding and censorship. Lack of an organised production model supported by independent investors, as well as lack of support from the Greek state for

[127] See for example Karalis, V. 2011. *A History of Greek Cinema*. New York: Continuum; and Papadimitriou, L. 'Greek Film Studies Today: in search of identity' in *Kampos*, No. 17, 2009. p. 49-78.

most of its history left Greek cinema uncompetitive and unprotected against all other film production. In addition, censorship has stifled and suppressed creativity for the greater part of cinema history in Greece; even when censorship ceased, the state became for a while the sole funder for cinema (through the Greek Film Centre whose remit was enhanced in the 1980s when a new socialist government came to power), applying immense political and ideological influence on the films made.

Despite the numerous problems, film production persisted in the country since the early 1900s, although it has been more prolific in some decades and rather scarce in others. A rich corpus of films now constitutes Greek Cinema, in a variety of modes and styles – from short films and documentaries to popular genre, and experimental and art cinema. Of all these categories, genre cinema has always been at the forefront of film production and popularity in the country. Comedy and melodrama have been the two most prominent and successful generic categories, establishing themselves as part of the Greek film tradition; other genres, however, enjoyed success at various points in the history of Greek cinema, such as film noir, the musical, and the specifically Greek *foustanela*.[128] Although generic production has been largely influenced by other cinemas (especially Hollywood, but also French and Italian 'styles'), these genres were often adapted to better engage with Greek social and cultural life, in particular in terms of narrative and character stereotypes. Despite the continuous presence of genre cinema in the country's film history, there is comparatively little critical attention paid to such films, which have proven successful with audiences across all decades of Greek film production. In agreement with Vrasidas Karalis,[129] one of the reasons might be that there has not been in the past a tradition of criticism and theorisation *of* Greek cinema, with only a few, un-concerted efforts from a small number of film critics and reviewers. In many cases, scholarly criticism has been 'tainted' by a reviewer's personal views and tastes, and often one needs to read past these occurrences. However, a noticeable increase of critical and academic writing about Greek cinema has been observed in the

[128] The *foustanela* is type of mountain adventure that appeared and enjoyed success in the early days of Greek Cinema.
[129] Karalis, V. 2011. *A History of Greek Cinema*. London: Continuum.

last couple of decades, with a number of publications[130] written in English and many more in Greek; the introduction of a Film Studies School for the first time in a Greek University (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 2004) coincides with or has perhaps even enhanced this more organised form of film criticism and scholarship, though attention to Greek film (especially popular forms) still remains an underdeveloped area of study and research. As observed above, a strong reviewing culture still appears to dominate much writing on Greek cinema; a culture which often tends to acquire a rather elitist attitude towards popular genre films.[131]

Although Greek film criticism has been neglectful of commercial, popular cinema, in terms of production there has always been more of an interaction between art and popular film forms, rather than an antagonistic relationship. Producers, directors, crew and talent have often worked with/in both types of filmmaking, challenging notions that determine commercial film as 'bad' and art film as 'exclusive', of higher value and basically unpopular. In a country with a strong *cinéphile* audience (despite the relative

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[130] Some notable examples in English are: Chalkou, M. 'A New Cinema of 'Emancipation': Tendencies of Independence in Greek Cinema of the 2000s' in *Interactions: Studies in Communication & Culture*. Vol.3, No.2, 2012; Papadimitriou, L. & Tzioumakis, Y. (eds.) 2012. *Greek Cinema: Texts, Histories, Identities*. Bristol, UK/Chicago, USA: Intellect; Papadimitriou L. 2006. *The Greek Film Musical: a Critical and Cultural History*. Jefferson: McFarland; *Journal of Modern Greek Studies: Special Issue on Greek Cinema*. Vol. 18, No.1, 2000. Examples in Greek include: Leventakos, D. 2000. *Exploring Contemporary Greek Cinema/Anichnevontas ton Synchrono Elliniko Kinimatografo.* Optikoakoustiki Koultoura. Athens: Kentro Optikoakoustikon Meleton; Paradeisi, M. 2006. *Film Narration and Transgression in Greek Cinema(1994-2004)/Kinimatografiki Afigisi kai Paravatikotita ston Elliniko Kinimatografo (1994-2004)*. Athina: Topothito; Sifaki E., Poupou, A. & Nikolaidou, A. (eds) 2011. *City and Cinema: Theoretical and Methodological Approaches/Poli kai Kinimatografos: Theoritikes kai Methothologikes Prosengiseis*. Athens: Nisos For a recent bibliographical list on Greek cinema in English see Kourelou, O. 'English Language Bibliography on Greek Cinema (2010-2013)' in *Filmicon: Journal of Greek Film Studies*. Issue 1, September 2013, at http://filmiconjournal.com/journal/article/2013/1/13; and in Greek see Kalantidis, D. 'Greek Cinema Publications (2011-2012)/Ellinikes Ekdoseis gia ton Kinimatografo (2011-2012)', in *Filmicon: a journal of Greek film studies*. Issue 1, September 2013, at http://filmiconjournal.com/journal/article/2013/1/12 [date accessed: 06/08/2014]

[131] As always, there are exceptions to a general rule. Indicatively, see Delveroudi, EA. 1997. 'Politics in Comedies of Greek Cinema'/ 'I Politiki stis Komodies tou Ellinikou Kinimatografou' in *Istorika*, p. 14-26; Potamitis, N. 2011. 'Comedy and Melodrama: Making Strange Genres in Greek Cinema'in *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, Vol. 37, Issues 1&2, p. 153-164; Kaklamanidou, B. 2011. ''The Bells Are Ringing for Me and My Gal': Marriage and Gender in the Contemporary Greek Romantic Comedy', *Journal of Popular Romance Studies,* Issue 2.1 at http://jprstudies.org/2011/10/%E2%80%9C%E2%80%98the-bells-are-ringing-for-me-and-my-gal%E2%80%99-marriage-and-gender-in-the-contemporary-greek-romantic-comedy%E2%80%9D-by-betty-kaklamanidou/ [date accessed: 06/08/2014]

scarcity of local film production and the often uncompetitive distribution practices for Greek films, Greek audiences have had access to and been watching films from all over the world since the beginning of film history), tensions between art and popular film are often not as pronounced. However, they still exist, informing and being informed by, film reviewers and scholarly critics, and a discourse that promotes *auteur* film as 'good' and popular generic forms as less worthy. As Karalis observes already in the preface of his *History of Greek Cinema*, "For a prolonged period, the gap between the auteur and the director of popular movies only widened: a "good" movie remained a private vision while a "successful" one was considered a marketable generic commodity".[132] Within this context, one of the most under-researched areas has been the work of comedy directors and comedy genre in general. Indeed there have been some studies on the celebrated popular comedies of the Golden Era of Greek film production in the 1950s and 1960s, but these tend to focus their attention on the talented actors elevating scripts that are often considered mediocre or unimaginative – though the filmmaking is deemed brilliantly executed (by *metteurs-en-scéne* rather than *auteurs* it would seem).[133] The criticism, and sometimes dismissal, of such comedies as pure escapism from the country's problems or tough reality is still a prominent feature of many of these studies, however. In addition, few of these critical studies go beyond reviewing or analysing successful performances or effective narratives, to focus instead on the structures and functions of the genre itself, or address the continuous popularity of the genre with audiences beyond ideas of escapism and 'easy' viewing.

The journal *Contemporary Cinema/Synchronos Kinimatografos* (1969 – 1982) was one of the first publications in Greece which presented critical writing on film. These were written by directors and specialised critics who would understand the specificities

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[132] Karalis, V. 2011. *A History of Greek Cinema*. London: Continuum. p. xii.

[133] See for example Karalis's account on this, *ibid.* p. 44-136; see also Fragoulis, Y. 2006. *Comedy in Old Greek Cinema 1948-1970/I Komodia ston Palio Elliniko Kinimatografo 1948-1970*. Tripoli: Elefsis. Fragoulis does, however, recognize some powerful narratives and their social and ideological implications in his book, though the analysis of such observations is limited. Valoukos, on the other hand, argues that there were no cinematic aesthetic qualities in the Greek comedies of the 1950s and 1960s but rather strong performances by theatre-trained actors, who made the transition to film; and strong, recognizable stereotypes that appealed to broad audiences. See Valoukos, S. 2001. *Comedy/I Komodia.* Athens: Aigokeros. p. 513-544.

of the medium and would know the discourses around it. Some prominent and influential contributors were Vasilis Rafailidis, Tonia Marketaki, Frieda Liappa, Lakis Papastathis, Theodoros Angelopoulos, Mihalis Dimopopulos (among others), who had also participated in the journal's editorial board at different times. Many of these contributors were directors associated with New Greek Cinema (of the 1970s and 1980s), a political and artistic/*auteur* cinema, which might perhaps explain the journal's dismissive tone towards commercial, popular film. *Contemporary Cinema* introduced and promoted the distinction between 'commercial' and 'creative' cinema, and was significantly influenced by French theory and criticism, and *la politique des auteurs*. However, while in France auteur theory sought to legitimise and elevate the work of Hollywood/popular film directors, in Greece it seems to acquire an interesting twist, with the idea of 'creativity' removed, or at least distanced, from commercial and popular cinema. The dichotomy between popular, commercial and mostly genre cinema on the one hand, and art or *auteur* film (even when those directors recognised as *auteurs* were working in genre) on the other, was advocated by the writers of the journal, and is still one of the most lasting debates about Greek cinema. Many film reviews and film criticism have maintained an elitist stand towards popular commercial Greek films, such as the ones cited in the opening section of this chapter, even after the journal most associated with this line of thought ceased to be published. Having said that, there has occasionally been praise for 'good' popular cinema and a call for more of it; but what constitutes 'good' as opposed to 'bad' popular film is rather obscure, since commercialism does not stop being a feature even of this condoned popularity.

Other journals and magazines, like *Film* (1974),[134] *Screen/Othoni* (1979) and *Cinema Notebooks/Kinimatografika Tetradia* (1981), *Anti-cinema/Anti-kinimatografos* (1992) and *Cinema and Communication/Kinimatografos ki Epikinonia* (2000), continued the debates about film and its social dimension. The magazine *Cinema*, which was first published in 1978 and continues until today, introduced a different, more inclusive tone and content (and broader readership) in its discussion and review of film in general and Greek film in particular. More recently, film criticism has concentrated

[134] Where a Greek name or title coincides with the English version only the title in English is provided; otherwise, the English title is provided first followed by the transliterated Greek title.

online; a couple of noteworthy cases for instance are the online magazine, *(Σ)cinephilia.gr*, which hosts a number of interesting articles from film critics and scholars, features a film theory section and provides archival information and production notes for a large number of Greek films; and the recently-launched online academic Journal of Greek Film Studies, *Filmicon* which is published in English and aims to promote Greek cinema and Greek Film Studies at home and abroad, bring the work of Greek film scholars together and encourage the critical study and research of Greek cinema.[135]

Various histories of Greek cinema have been published, though many are mostly comprised of film chronologies and production data, and information sometimes based on oral accounts. Two of the most prominent histories of Greek film are written by Aglaia Mitropoulou (*Greek Cinema/Ellinikos Kinimatografos*, 1980; a second edition was reprinted in 2006, overseen by Maria Komninos) and Yiannis Soldatos (*History of Greek Cinema/Istoria tou Ellinikou Kinimatografou*, 2002, in three volumes). Like many others, they maintain a personal tone in their histories, and the writing about films is often inflected by personal taste, rather than maintaining a critical distance. Soldatos in particular is often damning about commercial cinema, dismissing any arguments about the 'quality' or 'value' of popular films. For instance, he writes about Olga Malea's debut film: "A film that came out of nowhere, with the 'dumb' title *The Cow's Orgasm*, became the most commercial film of the year. Without artistic qualities, the film, of televisual mode, with unknown actors and director, an independent production, was a dive in muddy waters";[136] further down, when discussing the year's entries to the Thessaloniki Film Festival he writes: "the viewer heard of a cow's orgasm, wondered what this was, ran to watch; it was a story of two girls in a televisual mode, with no problematisations, an everyday story – the way the viewer understood the 'everyday' – and they liked it, and told their friends to go watch it too and they all went; they had, apparently, a good time. Beyond that, nothing".[137] And about *The Mating Game*: "For a

[135] For a list of Greek film journals and periodicals (some of which have been mentioned here) see the Greek Film Archive/Tainiothiki tis Ellados, http://www.tainiothiki.gr/v2/magazine/ [date accessed: 13/02/2014].
[136] Soldatos, Y. 2002. *History of Greek Cinema/Istoria tou Ellinikou Kinimatografou*. Athens: Aigokeros. p.117. My translation.
[137] *Ibid.* p132. My translation.

second time, Olga Malea managed to pull away a couple of hundred thousand viewers off their TV screens, to watch *The Mating Game*".[138] In the second instance, an elitist and dismissive tone extends to the non-qualified TV audience who make unworthy films successful. Evaluative binaries and hierarchies run through both film criticism and scholarship. In the case of Soldatos, for instance, a set of value judgements like the ones above appear in a film history that is also part of the scholarly canon. Aglaia Mitropoulou, the other historian, organises her material differently (i.e. not chronologically) and is less polemically opposed to popular cinema; however, the directors she deems important and to whose work she dedicates numerous pages of review are invariably introduced with an auteur-theory discourse and an emphasis on their individual artistic contributions to a 'national cinema'. For instance, while she dedicates twenty-two pages to the work of Theo Angelopoulos, she devotes seven pages (of a total of 427) to 'Women Behind the Camera', 'lumping' them all together in this short section as 'women', despite the great variety of film forms they engage in and despite spanning the entire Greek film history till 1980, when the book was published. In spite of these shortcomings, both books contain meticulous research and a wealth of information about Greek cinema, with references to material that might have otherwise been lost; both writers have been known for their love of Greek film and their own extensive archives (Mitropoulou inaugurated the first Greek Film Archive in the 1960s; Soldatos is the owner of Aigokeros publications, one of the main publishers of film-related books in Greece). In 2011, *A History of Greek Cinema* was published, in English for the first time;[139] the writer, aware of the limitations of previous film histories, aims to provide a more objective approach and interpretation of facts and contexts of Greek cinema, from its inception until the present, although there are instances when common criticisms are repeated without much problematisation, as will be discussed further down.

After the Golden Era of the 1950s and 1960s, and the politically motivated 1970s, the abolition of censorship in the 1980s presented Greek filmmakers with opportunities for new thematic explorations and the introduction of new characters. Karalis observes

[138] *Ibid.* p.157. My translation.
[139] Karalis, V. 2011. *A History of Greek Cinema*. London: Continuum.

that this is the decade when filmmakers abandon political cinema and turn their attention to the societal; often a convergence of the two leads to the problematisation and criticism of both, especially concerning their central values and structures.[140] Apart from questioning historical memory as this had been 'written' and promoted by various political establishments, the attention from the mid 1980s and early 1990s onwards turns for the first time to social structures of power and dominant traditions. Gender roles are starting to be questioned more consistently in film for the first time; "and while femininity was to a certain but not sufficient degree reassessed, masculinity, with its implied codes of behaviour, forms of representation, and patterns of self-perception, [had] never [before been] interrogated seriously in any form of intellectual discussion".[141] Masculinity-in-crisis is a theme that appears in the 1980s and continues well into the 1990s; this is when an expansion of the middle class is observed and changes in the legal and political structures in the country appear to strengthen the position of women, who pursue education and career more forcefully (though certainly a development that had started already a few decades prior to that), and seek changes in traditional family and marriage structures, too. I argue that this seeming 'empowerment' of women and the quick shift into a post-feminist phase, without having fully realised or articulated a feminist political activism or discourse in Greece, is questioned in Malea's films (explicitly in the first three) all the way into the new millennium. Overall, masculinity appears to be more of an issue in a country with deeply rooted patriarchal ideologies and structures; and despite Karalis' claims that femininity had been dealt with, be it insufficiently, consistent and critical explorations of femininity and more generally women's place within a contemporary context are still lacking in Greece (and arguably elsewhere).

Interest in Greek film by audiences had been comatose during the 1970s and 1980s, decades associated with more political filmmaking, and when many of the *auteurs* of Greek cinema appeared. Many important films for Greek film history were made at that time, following a more individual approach to filmmaking and rejecting popular forms, which alienates audiences. From the early to mid-1990s and to the present however,

[140] *Ibid.* 198-212.
[141] *Ibid.* p.201.

Greek film has enjoyed renewed audience interest. Karalis notes that during this period "a distinct new way of production, tentatively called the New Greek Current, started to emerge and produce its first works, which gained international recognition".[142] Theodoros Soumas suggests that a 'Contemporary' or 'New Current' starts in 1992/3 with a young generation of filmmakers and films such as *A Time to Kill/I Epohi ton Dolofonon* (Nikos Grammatikos, 1993) and *From the Snow/Ap'to Hioni* (Sotiris Goritsas, 1993).[143] Lydia Papadimitriou identifies this same period starting from the early 1990s until the present;[144] she calls this latest phase of Greek film "Contemporary Greek Cinema" (which is the categorisation and chronology I have adopted in this thesis) and emphasises its multi-faceted character and its attempt to regain popularity with audiences.[145] Themes and characters that were largely absent, or did not necessarily enjoy a positive representation before, start to appear in films of the last couple of decades, such as the immigrant or the transvestite; a new type of active femininity also appears in response to social changes in gender roles, and generally gender becomes one of the prominent themes of contemporary films, examining both femininity and masculinity (the latter mostly in crisis) within a contemporary Greek setting. National and cultural identity/ies and a crisis of traditional social and family structures are also some of the central themes in Contemporary Greek Cinema.

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[142] *Ibid.* p.xv.

[143] Soumas, T. 2011. 'Greek Cinema: the new current'/Elliniko Cinema: to synchrono revma', http://www.cinephilia.gr/index.php/prosopa/hellas/128-2011-08-24-16-37-17 [date accessed: 15/01/2013]

[144] I consider the 'weird wave' of Greek cinema as a distinct phase (or wave) within Contemporary Greek Cinema, or New Greek Current. Papadimitriou argues that this period, characterised by a new kind of art-house film, epitomised by Lanthimos's *Dogtooth* (2009), begins in 2009 and continues till the present, which is also the year that the economic crisis in Greece is officially announced. The term 'weird', which is rather problematic, has been introduced in the English press by Steve Rose in his article '*Attenberg*, *Dogtooth* and the weird wave of Greek cinema', *The Guardian,* 27 August 2011, available at http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/aug/27/attenberg-dogtooth-greece-cinema [date accessed: 06/08/2014]). For further details about this phase of Greek cinema, which is beyond the remit of this thesis, see Papadimitriou, L. 2014. 'Locating Contemporary Greek Film Cultures: Past, Present, Future and the Crisis' in *Filmicon*, Issue 2, September 2014 (forthcoming special issue, edited by Kazakopoulou, T., Fotiou, M., Phillis, P.) http://filmiconjournal.com/journal

[145] Papadimitriou, L. 'Greek Film Studies Today: in search of identity' in *Kampos*, No. 17, 2009. p. 50.

These preoccupations are also present within and reflected upon in Malea's films. Although not thematically and narratively central, "a multinational and multicultural demography"[146] of contemporary Greece is represented. The character of the immigrant is present and noticeable, despite residing in the background (certainly in the first four of her films; in the fifth the 'foreigner' is a young member of the Greek diaspora). These characters observe and comment on the 'alien' Greek reality they are trying to become part of, ironically from an 'alien', i.e. exterior position. This gaze-from-the-outside adds another layer to the politics of the films, which already seek to subvert established structures and expectations as will be discussed in the chapters that follow; in addition, this allows for a re-contextualisation of the main characters' 'problems', which in some respects appear trivial, but the confusion and difficulties of surviving modern life also become points of convergence for Greek citizens and immigrants alike. Karalis identifies many Greek films of the period as "sites for deep structural conflicts: they depict the unwelcome stranger against the backdrop of undesired reality".[147] Indian and Pakistani labourers and Filipino maids (in *The Cow's Orgam*, *Honey and the Pig* and *The Mating Game* respectively) ground the narratives of Malea's films to reality and reveal more starkly the dissatisfaction of Greeks themselves. Cinematically, the inclusion of the immigrant character is used to subvert expectations about the source of comedy; whereas generally the foreigner would stereotypically be funny, the butt of the joke, in Malea's films it is the foreigners who observe and find the Greeks and their ways funny.

Stylistically, there is not a coherent trend that could be identified across Contemporary Greek Cinema, although Papadimitriou identifies "a return to a narrative-centred, genre-based and thematically accessible cinema since the 1990s",[148] and Karalis points towards the televisual looks[149] of many popular (mostly comedy)

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[146] Karalis, V. 2011. *A History of Greek Cinema*. London: Continuum. p. xx.
[147] *Ibid.* p. 244.
[148] Papadimitriou, L. 'Greek Film Studies Today: in search of identity' in *Kampos*, No. 17, 2009. p. 70.
[149] This *televisual* look or mode that many writers apply almost indiscriminately to a great variety of contemporary genre films, and particularly comedies, is a rather ill-defined term, and in many cases, including Malea's films, I do not think it is applicable. Although I have not found a clear definition provided by any of the writers mentioned in this thesis, I believe they refer to stylistic characteristics, such as close shots, studio-based action, episodic narrative structure and

films, noting the involvement of private television channels in the funding and production of films, but also the fact that many of the new directors work and/or have worked on television. He states,

> In many respects, the logic of television dominates most of the movies produced over the last 20 years. Indeed, the *televisual* mode was and still is the dominant way of visualizing action. Consequently, the dividing line between the camera making images for the big screen and for television, the *cinematic* and the *televisual*, became rather blurred or even totally vanished.[150]

In addition, he claims genre films generally appear to be influenced by the aesthetics of Hollywood, while art films from European film traditions.[151] However, there is also a degree of adaptation of these styles to reflect Greek reality, as well as combinations, and sometimes collisions, of stylistic registers within a film. Karalis then rightly observes that "Greek cinema was and still is a point of convergence, a space of colliding idioms, as expressed by Hollywood and European traditions".[152] These divergent or convergent choices reflect perhaps Greece's ambivalent cultural position between 'East' and 'West' as these are stereotypically understood.

A recurrent debate thus exists about whether there is a distinctly Greek cinematic language or aesthetics; in other words, where the 'Greekness' of a film could be located. There is even an argument that Greece's logocentric cultural tradition has been challenged by a primarily visual medium;[153] meanwhile (and perhaps paradoxically), Greek film, almost as a whole, has also been criticised for poor scriptwriting. Instead, I would argue that social, political and economic circumstances should not be underestimated as contributing – or rather, as most important – factors for the supposed lack of exploration of, and experimentation with, cinematic language by

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multiple characters, which are usually associated with television fiction. Televisuality has, of course, a very specific meaning in Television Studies; see Caldwell, J.T. 1995. *Televisuality.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press. Because of the lack of definition and clarity in the present context, and the problematic application of the term, I henceforth use the term in inverted commas ('televisual').

[150] Karalis, V. 2011. *A History of Greek Cinema*. London: Continuum. p. 240; italics in the original.

[151] This is a dichotomy which is problematic as was noted in the earlier section about popular cinema and national canons, although Karalis here observes a certain tendency.

[152] Karalis, V. 2011. *A History of Greek Cinema*. London: Continuum. p.xvi.

[153] In fact, Greek culture has a great pictorial and visual arts tradition from antiquity to present day.

Greek filmmakers. Interestingly, however, Theo Angelopoulos (arguably Greece's most well-known filmmaker) is recognised and celebrated precisely for his experimentation with film language and Greek film aesthetics. I believe the criticisms are concentrating on the fact that Greek cinema has not provided film history with a School, movement or stylistic tendency such as is Italian Neorealism, for instance. The closest phenomenon to this is perhaps the contemporary 'Weird Wave' of Greek cinema, though the extent of its influence at an international level is still to be determined. Although it is not the aim of this thesis to further discuss or resolve such debates, I propose that the idiosyncrasy with which a multiplicity of cinematic traditions are utilised in Greek film in general certainly offer a starting point for further exploration of what might be termed a Greek film aesthetics.

As part of the audience's renewed interest in Greek film, a revival of popular comedy is also noted from the late 1990s, with a series of comedies enjoying success at the box office, among them Olga Malea's films and the big commercial hit *Safe Sex* (1999) by Mihalis Reppas and Thanasis Papathanasiou. Independent funding through private investors and the involvement of private television channels become more established forms of film financing and production. While generally in praise of popular culture and the need for Greek criticism to recognise its importance and value, Karalis is also suspicious of this new breed of popular films in general, and comedies in particular. At various points in his book he points to the lack of experimentation with film form and to the 'televisual' aesthetics of contemporary films. He specifically says about *Safe Sex:* "Good movies sell very few tickets, whereas a comedy like Mihalis Reppas and Papathanasiou's *Safe Sex* (1999), co-produced by a television channel, sold over 1,400,000 tickets".[154] Instead of a distinction between 'good' art or *auteur* film and 'bad' popular genre or formulaic film, which had been the conventional debate, he later hints towards a differentiation between 'good' and 'bad' popular film productions, though the criteria for such dichotomies are still not entirely clear. It is true that, in every film industry with commercial ambitions, a successful formula tends to be

[154] Karalis, V. 2011. *A History of Greek Cinema*. London: Continuum. p. 245. A Greek film is generally considered commercially successful if it passes the 100,000 tickets mark, although in some cases even lower ticket sales (40,000 plus) are enough to consider a film a success in the local market.

repeated until 'tired', and Greek production is no different; however, it should be noted that *Safe Sex* is a film that has been a blueprint for imitations rather than the opposite. The dismissal of contemporary popular films, especially comedies, is pursued more forcefully by Soldatos who, together with other reviewers and critics, condemns the 'televisual' aesthetics of such films. And although Soldatos is unforgiving, Karalis resigns himself to the realisation that maybe "this is the only way to rekindle film culture and to revive the industry: the production of good popular cinema, using the most advanced technology, and based on the hybrid aesthetics of the small and big screen".[155] The prominence of 'televisuality' as a feature of most contemporary Greek films I believe is debatable, but even if this is indeed the case, I would argue that instead of qualifying such hybridity and its products as 'good' or 'bad', it would be worth exploring it as a productive phase of popular Greek cinema, which managed to resuscitate audience interest in Greek film more generally.

Comedy, then, is recognised for its importance in the revival of Greek film and cinema-going (for Greek films), "just like the good old days", of the Old Greek Cinema that is.[156] Despite this, many of the popular comedies are sectioned apart from those films (often with international appeal) discussed as Contemporary Greek Cinema, or New Greek Current in Karalis' *History of Greek Cinema*.[157] Many of those latest comedy releases, including Malea's *Risotto*, are discussed only in relation to their commercial success rather than their aesthetics or formal characteristics and interventions. Some common features are identified and commented on, though:

> most of these films were in a renewed form of erotic skin flick, titillating the senses of an audience which, despite its presumed sexual liberation, felt repressed and sexually undernourished – unless there is an indication of perpetual sexual stimulation or of a disguised sexual insecurity. As for their scripts, most of them were extended television films, which produced lots of laughs but had no real sense of humor.[158]

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[155] *Ibid.* p.245.
[156] *Ibid.* p.259.
[157] See in particular the final chapter 'The Polyphony of the Decentered Gaze: the Other as Cultural Hero' p. 239-284.
[158] *Ibid.* p.259.

The return to criticisms of 'televisuality', which implies 'bad' scripts with no "real sense humour" (whatever that might mean) reflects quite accurately the resistance in Greek Film Studies at large to engage more meaningfully with popular cinema more generally, and the genre of comedy more specifically and more thoroughly. Subjective appreciations of comedic value, dismissals of a number of films as facile products with exclusively commercial ends and assumptions about an uncritical mass audience to unworthy films have been unproductive. In response, it has become increasingly important to explore further the potential and ability of popular cinema – including those films, comedies mostly, charged with being formulaic, commercial, pure entertainment – and popular culture in general, to reflect and engage with contemporary Greek society's concerns and state of being. Although Malea's films do not often feature favourably (or at all) in scholarly criticism, or at best are mentioned with indifference precisely because of their noteworthy box office success, they make an interesting case study because they provide a critical look into the state of contemporary Greece and the tastes of contemporary Greek film audiences.

In his article titled 'Greek Cinema: the new current/Elliniko Cinema: to synchrono revma', Thodoros Soumas observes about Contemporary Greek Cinema:

> The cinema of this generation is primarily fictional and narrative, following the accepted narrative rules (usually of the American narrative cinema, classical or independent). It is mainly a cinema with films based on characters and situations. [...] The movies of the new filmmakers are open and accessible, improve the relationship between cinema and its audience, aspiring to establish a closer connection with it and to express its distinct pulse. [159]

Karalis also quotes the above passage (and whose translation I have used here) when discussing a selection of films from the 1990s and 2000s; these include a selection of comedies, though not the commercial 'televisual' ones he has dismissed and discussed separately elsewhere. I would suggest, however, that Soumas' description of

[159] Soumas, Th. 2011. 'Greek Cinema: the new current'/'Elliniko Cinema: to synchrono revma', http://www.cinephilia.gr/index.php/prosopa/hellas/128-2011-08-24-16-37-17 [date accessed: 15/01/2013]

contemporary films can be read as more inclusive than what Karalis implies, despite references to the problematic issue of 'accessibility' as was discussed in the section 'Popular cinema and genre: questions of value and the national canon'. The idiosyncratic nature of many Greek films – even when returning to established generic codes as is the case with many popular comedies – the independent method of production and the return of audiences to the film screens are processes that start from the early 1990s and acquire confidence after the turn of the millennium. Each of these contemporary films can open up the field of study and help paint a picture of contemporary Greek cinema and its audiences during an interesting period for the country. This thesis examines Malea's films during the decade 1997-2007 with this potential in mind.

The late 1990s and early-to-mid 2000s, when Malea's five comedies are released, is a period characterised by a general optimism. This will have been the longest period of financial and political stability of the modern Greek state, culminating in the country's entry to the European Monetary Union (adopting the Euro as its currency) in 2002, and the Olympic Games hosted in Athens in 2004. Malea's last comedy to date, *First Time Godfather* (2007) alludes to a particular era and family in Greek politics, though not directly or necessarily with historical accuracy. Nikos Papandreou (Malea's co-scriptwriter, as outlined above) is the son of two-time prime-minister Andreas Papandreou (1981-89 and 1993-96) and brother of the recent Greek prime-minister, George Papandreou (2009-11). Young Alex (the protagonist) has to navigate through a maze of Greek politics, where clientelist relations between citizens and politicians (favours in exchange for votes) were promoted as means to a democratic end; and when the belief in a charismatic leader for the democratic future of the country was presented with great optimism and conviction. Ironically, this film comes at a time when such beliefs have been shaken to the core and when the future of the country had started to look ever more doubtful.

Since then, a series of mismanagement and corruption scandals, the burst of the Greek Stock Exchange bubble and the financial deficit crisis have rather reversed the optimistic mood in the country. The international banking crisis has only added to Greece's problems. Within this context, film production is facing lack of funds yet again,

though Greek cinema is simultaneously undergoing a kind of rebirth. Many films reflect this state of decline in the country and the mistrust towards politicians and the state to protect its citizens. The filmmakers of the new millennium have turned once again to independent investors, but also to international funding and co-productions. A few low-budget but technically and artistically excellent films have gained international success and recognition during the last decade.

A number of films under this category of Contemporary Greek Cinema or New Greek Current "articulate a negative discourse about the capital city, which until recently was the only center for political authority and cultural legitimacy".[160] Indeed, in many cases, like in Malea's *Honey and the Pig*, the need is presented to flee from the city to the countryside (the opposite journey that Athanasia and Christina enthusiastically make in *The Cow's Orgasm* only a few years earlier), in order to resolve important existential and identity issues that drive the narrative. Even though that film was released in 2005 (and therefore before the eruption of the crisis), it already reflects a certain post-Olympics malaise and period of discontent. The city – its anonymity, modern character, style and affluence – is rendered alienating and hostile, and those positive characteristics previously sought after are now undermined by the exposure of the city's 'underbelly'. Karalis refers to anthropologist James Faubion's term "the Athenian negative" to describe this tendency of some contemporary filmmakers. Together with representations of immigrants, he notes, "the Athenian negative" is the most dominant theme: "The Athenian negative as a cultural discourse dominates the mythography of the new film-makers who frame urban reality as a space of dramatic re-enactment of the ongoing conflicts without redemption or catharsis".[161] Although Malea's films are not as pessimistic about the capital city, portrayed as a theatre of un-redemptive drama, Faubion's 'Athenian negative' discourse is evidenced when her characters find themselves trapped by the demands of modern life within a hectic and unforgiving environment (notably in *The Mating Game* and *Risotto*). However, the city as a backdrop also affords, especially for the female characters, a certain freedom of movement not available in countryside settings ridden with gossip (explicitly in *The*

[160] Karalis, V. 2011. *A History of Greek Cinema*. London: Continuum. p. 248.
[161] *Ibid* p. 249.

Cow's Orgasm and hinted at more subtly in *Honey and the Pig*). On the other hand, for Manos, the male lead character in *Honey and the Pig*, the return to the countryside is the only redemptive solution to his problem; abandoning the city and returning to his village help him unveil and unearth secrets, whose traumatic impact is ignored by the disinterested urban community.

Mostly owing to necessity after the global economic bust, Greek cinema in its latest phase is seeking international funding; and the films are characterised by individuality – demonstrating a variety of theme, form and aesthetics – and an outward looking tendency. This is evidently also facilitated by new technologies, and global production and distribution economies. In this respect, an already questionable cohesion of national identity (of and in film) is under further pressure and is rendered even more restrictive and problematic; in order to "counter such limitations, the 'transnational turn' has increasingly placed emphasis away from the unique and the exclusive of the 'national', to the shared, the common and the interchangeable".[162] Papadimitriou has argued for the transnational character demonstrated by Contemporary Greek Cinema, within this context of international co-productions and a turn towards trans/cross-national thematic preoccupations. Karalis agrees, noting that, "[f]or the first time, Greek filmmakers try to reach out and make movies for international audiences, by exploring themes and constructing stories which touch upon the wider question of national and personal identity under the new conditions of globalisation and transculturality".[163] There are a number of successful films, which are separated from this trend, however; Papadimitriou writes: "Of the films that reached the top 20 at the Greek box office during this decade [2000-2010], the vast majority are comedies addressed at the national market (as is evident through their subject matter, themes and style)...".[164] I would argue, however, that examining *precisely* those films that do not *obviously* fit within this framework – either through their international co-production status or through their thematic preoccupations, like *A Touch of Spice/Politiki Kouzina*

[162] Papadimitriou, L. 'The national and the transnational in contemporary Greek cinema' in *New Review of Film and Television Studies*. Vol. 9, No. 4, December 2011. p. 494.
[163] Karalis, V. 2011. *A History of Greek Cinema*. London: Continuum. p. 267.
[164] Papadimitriou, L. 'The national and the transnational in contemporary Greek cinema' in *New Review of Film and Television Studies*. Vol. 9, No. 4, December 2011. p. 498.

(Boulmetis, 2003), *Brides Nifes* (Voulgaris, 2004) or *El Greco* (Smaragdis, 2007) – can also prove productive in helping identify elements that are guided by this outward-looking tendency and hold a more universal stance, yet remain within the (national) borders. For instance, the case of Malea's films can be revealing in that they go beyond established representations of the National and seek a more universalising approach in the treatment of their themes, yet they are also grounded in the Greek experience of contemporary life (especially through recognisable character stereotypes). For example, although conflicts and discussions around gender roles, masculinity and femininity, or marriage, motherhood and career, in *The Mating Game* and *Risotto*, are articulated differently, more excessively pronounced perhaps, by the Greek characters and within an urban Greek setting, at the same time they are essentially universal in reflecting a discourse directed at and formulated for, and occasionally by, women, at least in the Western world; whether it is Bridget in *Bridget Jones' Diary* (Maguire, 2001) or Emilia in *The Mating Game* (Malea, 1999), the search for Mr Right is presented as the same primary concern for the young, unmarried, working woman (notwithstanding the differences in approach to the theme by the filmmakers). The pressures of motherhood and career and the gender divide in family roles and responsibilities are grounded within a Greek urban setting in *Risotto* (2000), and reflect the conflicts between modern living and Greek tradition; however, these same themes are revisited and re-examined about a decade later in a Hollywood film like *I Don't Know How She Does It* (McGrath, 2011). Moreover, Malea resists clearly locating the action in her films; Athens is never named in the city-based films, and all iconic settings are avoided, providing a generic urban (Greek) space. The countryside is represented in the same generic way in *The Cow's Orgasm* and *Honey and the Pig*, with themes that transcend national boundaries (like paedophilia in *Honey and the Pig*); the 'Greekness' of these rural settings is present, but never precisely located (with the exception of Crete in *First Time Godfather*), in a similar way that rural 'Spanishness' is discernible through stylistic and performance tropes in Almodóvar's *Volver* (2006), for example. Avoiding fixed, canonical notions of a national Greek identity allows Malea's films to open up to wider contexts, reflect on the country's global experience as this is informed by national specificities, but also helps to re-evaluate and to problematise this very idea of fixity of the national, within the borders.

In recent years, attention to popular cinema has increased within Greek Film Studies. Though this is a positive turn, at the same time this same writing is often still unable to completely shake off certain by now parochial notions, approaches under which popular comedy 'loses out' once again. This is effectively summarised in the passage below, from Karalis's history of Greek cinema, a study that by and large recognises the need to open up the field of study of Greek cinema without any exclusions.[165] On an earlier page he writes, however:

> As we have seen, a number of successful but formulaic comedies were made between 2000 and 2010 – they were the real blockbusters and money-spinners for the industry offering renewed hope for its survival. Art-house movies remained unpopular and neglected – even Angelopoulos's movies, despite their international acclaim, became grand failures at the box office. It is estimated that most Greek films sell an average of 30,000 to 40,000 tickets – and that makes them successful in the local market. Comedies sell more (Dimas' *Nisos* sold 350,000 in two weeks) and the dominance of this genre shows another strong trend in the overall production scheme, a trend that privileges well-written[166] populist films, which, although they seem to parody social maladies, are pure entertainment. [167]

I would argue that, ultimately, the continuous production and constant enthusiastic consumption of popular comedy by audiences are realities that Greek film scholarship needs to actively engage with, rather than simply recognise or resign itself to.

In identifying the subcategory of 'women's popular cinema' as a useful critical paradigm, this thesis seeks to 'unlock' Greek film scholarship from attitudes resigned to the 'unworthiness' of such texts or the inability of audiences to 'know better'. In addition, it shares the call for further audience research as essential in order to start understanding the lasting appeal of popular comedy, as well as the make-up of contemporary audiences. As Karalis himself observes, "Since the demography [of Greece] has changed significantly, who goes to the movies today?"[168] At the time of their release, Malea's comedies were addressing a Greek audience (primarily, though

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[165] Karalis, V. 2011. *A History of Greek Cinema*. London: Continuum p. 278-279.
[166] This is a first and welcome acknowledgement that there may indeed be some quality in the writing of such films.
[167] *Ibid.* p. 275-276.
[168] *Ibid.* p. 277.

some films have travelled abroad to festivals and/or to diasporic audiences, as was noted earlier, in the first section of this chapter) that was looking outwards; an audience that could be characterised as urbanised, 'Europeanised', post-modern. However, the films set in the countryside, the periphery, demonstrate closer links with tradition, and explore how much at odds traditional values, ideologies and ways of life are with modernity and modernisation, let alone post-modernity. Lydia Papadimitriou, in her book *The Greek Musical: a critical and cultural history*,[169] identifies those modernising and traditional forces as 'Hellenic' and 'Romeic' respectively, drawing on the work by the anthropologist Michael Herzfeld.[170] Papadimitriou identifies the ways in which the Greek musical, and I would argue cultural production as a whole, is caught between those contradictory forces in complex and interesting ways.[171] This thesis recognises and will go on to explore this same conflict between modernity and tradition as a key thematic preoccupation in Malea's comedies.

In many respects, what is often reflected in Greek cinema across its history are the personal, social, political and cultural conflicts born out of the perpetual modernisation of post-Ottoman Empire Greece. The country appears to be marching ahead, following on the footsteps of the Western world, but without resolving, overcoming or responding to the contradictions and challenges of modernity and postmodernity. The pace of modernisation has varied across Greek regions, with a faster pace adopted in urban centres (as is the case in other countries) and less so in the countryside, the periphery. Moreover, local idiosyncrasies and traditions have had a bearing on the assimilation of models of modernisation as dictated and followed by other Western countries; these national intricacies have at best transformed and adapted to local needs, and at worst conflicted with, corroded or by-passed key notions of modernisation in order to satisfy local (or worse, nationalist) 'interests' (such as political clientelism). This patchy and varied landscape of development is echoed in Malea's

[169] Papadimitriou, L. 2006. *The Greek Musical: a critical and cultural history*. Jefferson: McFarland
[170] Michael Herzfeld. 1982. *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology and the Making of Modern Greece*. Austin: Texas University Press, p.3-23, 122-128. Interestingly, this vocabulary appears in the dialogue of *First Time Godfather*. Chapter 5 of this thesis, which deals with this film, particularly focuses on this tension between modernity and tradition.
[171] Lydia Papadimitriou. 2006. *The Greek Musical: a critical and cultural history*. Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland, p. 3-5.

comedies, in the way the confused and pressured characters navigate through these ideological, social, political, cultural contradictions. Her work finds itself at the cross-roads between women's popular cinema and feminism; and within this critical and historical context, the discussion of Malea's authorial signature in relation to formulaic notions of popular culture and genre cinema can be interesting.

The chapters ahead

The chapters in this thesis are organised chronologically, following the release dates of the films they analyse. The dialogues and intersections of the discourses and methodologies outlined in the previous sections (including their contradictions) will be structuring and informing the analysis of each film in varying degrees. This multi-dimensional approach demonstrates the complexities of popular cinema, and its function/s and uses beyond entertainment value, and beyond the established binaries of popular/art etc., which have regularly been deemed problematic and yet continue to appear in a variety of critical contexts.

Through close textual analysis as the main methodological tool, each chapter/film serves as a springboard for the development of the overarching argument of this thesis: namely, that the study of the processes by which the proposed subcategory 'women's popular cinema' comes into being – through the conjunction of thematic preoccupations pertaining in women's cinema and the formal and generic strategies of popular cinema – in the work of Olga Malea may be productive in illuminating discursive strategies for women's cinema to be indeed conceived of *as* popular. Malea's stylistic hallmark articulates a critique that subverts established ideological hierarchies associated with a patriarchal society caught in a bind between tradition and modernity, in a moment when Greece was undergoing a period of unprecedented prosperity.

Chapter two, entitled 'Schemes of Comedy in *The Cow's Orgasm*' considers how comedic structures are employed as a strategy by the director in order to address patriarchy's ideological double standards in relation to women and sexuality. I argue that generic conventions are employed here in a subversive way in order to advance a feminist argument. Although the director did not (consciously at least) envisage her

first three films as a trilogy, I believe that read in this sequential manner the films open opportunities for an interesting analysis of the way contemporary Greek women's lives are conceived of, and gendered roles, constructed. In *The Cow's Orgasm*, the main characters are young, unmarried women from a rural location, discovering sexuality and longing for the big city.

Chapter three, '*The Mating Game*: Building sites and gendered identities', examines the way Malea organises a critique of postfeminism through the use of romantic comedy tropes, and in this way develops a feminist argument. In this second part of the trilogy, the characters are professional women in a contemporary urban setting, looking for love. I claim that, although Malea recognises a certain progress in the way Greek women's roles have changed, at the same time she reveals how such changes may still rest on underlying patriarchal structures.

The fourth chapter is titled 'Uncovered: *Risotto* and the postfeminist Greek mother'. In this last part of the trilogy, Malea's characters are married, working mothers at the turn of the 21st century. I argue that this film extends the criticism against postfeminist constructions, which present women with false choices. Formal strategies, such as image-making and intense stylisation, as well as the use of comedic conventions are put in the service of a continued feminist argument, which problematises a perceived progress in relation to contemporary Greek women's experiences, and at the same time examines the position of a model of masculinity that is no longer tenable.

In Chapter five, 'Re-mythologising Masculinities in *Honey and the Pig*', I argue that, although Malea appears to be changing direction and to be moving away from women's cinema, in fact gender and a critique of patriarchy remain key thematic preoccupations. This film stages a homecoming back to the Greek countryside, having left it behind for the city since *The Cow's Orgasm*. The male protagonist is Greece's new man in crisis. While the female characters in Malea's first film came to terms with their sexuality by moving forward (towards the city), the male character here needs to return to his roots in order to resolve his anxieties and re-claim sexual desire. Black humour and Greek cultural heritage are enlisted as strategies by the director in order to critique long-established patriarchal norms whose impact is now recognised as all-pervasive.

Chapter six, '*First Time Godfather*: Performing Gender and Democracy', deals with the most overtly political of Malea's films. Set in the 1960s (this is the director's only period piece) the film locates patriarchy at the very heart of the country's cultural heritage and socio-political systems. The comedy and critique come from a stereotyping which de-naturalises accepted behaviours. Rather than being a vague ideological construct, patriarchy is embodied in the 'father of the nation' whose presence is always felt. The director is not unkind to that character, though; simply, she shows him as representing a mode of operation that is at odds with the modernising impulses he purports to represent. Thus, Malea's critique of patriarchy is cumulative, starting with its effects on the personal lives of women (in different stages), then men, communities and ultimately the whole nation.

Indeed, it is in capturing the nation's zeitgeist that Malea's authorial voice is at its most clear. She consistently observes fragments of Greek reality during a decade of stability and affluence (and the period that laid the political foundations for those) and seems to suggest that not all problems have been solved – indeed they are structural. Her ironic stance and scepticism about progress is reflected in her characters' having to negotiate between the 'Romeic' forces of tradition, often associated with the rituals (sexual, social, political and religious) of patriarchy, and new, often imported models of modernity. Her films are popular because she is able to capture those preoccupations and anxieties in ways that audiences relate to: Malea explores themes of women's cinema in a popular format – a challenge is posed to those established, but flexible, boundaries between the sidelines and the mainstream and this bears ideological and political significance. The Conclusion of this thesis will draw these strands together: women's popular cinema re-defines what is popular and/or mainstream, challenges traditional (patriarchal) norms and conventions, and effectively re-writes its own codes, rather than simply appropriating dominant discourses. In addition, and benefitting from historical hindsight, the conclusion locates Malea's comedies in a specific time and place, establishing a sceptical position in relation to the vanities of the boom years before 2008 in Greece.

CHAPTER TWO

Schemes of Comedy in *The Cow's Orgasm*

In this chapter, structural, aesthetic and political traits of comedy are examined through the analysis of Olga Malea's first popular comedy, *The Cow's Orgasm* (1997). I argue that, although the film initially appears to be organised around a system of balance which is evident in the way the sets, the characters and their actions are arranged, gradually this 'balance' is systematically compromised and transgressed by the director. In other words, Malea creates a system in order to criticise and reject another; ultimately what surfaces, this chapter claims, is an overarching system of contradictions, which, with comedy as its means, comments on and rejects established ideological constructs. The narrative of the film takes place in a small, rural Greek community, where the older and younger generation's life outlooks clash and where life choices available to both men and women are limited and prescribed. Conflicts about gender roles and availability of choice (for both men and women), sexuality, family, career and education take centre stage in the film. Through them the director questions conventional expectations and reveals the hypocrisy, contradiction and double standards in the application of established rules. What becomes obvious, what is there to be seen and make us laugh, is exactly those double standards by which society functions. Stott observes that in comedy "the rigid insistence on inflexible systems of being or thinking is ridiculed by transformation of different kinds".[1] The "rigid insistence" on inflexible patriarchal structures by the characters in *The Cow's Orgasm* thus becomes one of the main themes and sources of jokes in the film. Firm ideological components of patriarchy dominate within the world of the film, only to be mocked by the director and defied by the two main characters, Athanasia (Eirini Balta) and Christina (Natalia Stylianou). Malea uses comedy strategically and sets up her scenes by holding a mirror up to society and by making it confront its own

[1] Stott, A. 2005. *Comedy.* New York & London: Routledge. p. 2.

inconsistencies. Here the comedy genre is significant not only because of its political engagement, but also because of its aesthetic attributes and popularity.

As an important mode of the mainstream and commercial cinema, genre films of contemporary Greek cinema have often been deemed "frivolous", and therefore not worthy of critical attention, despite their popularity. Indeed, as has been explicated in Chapter one, this popularity has often been used to devalue the aesthetic qualities of genre films. Contemporary popular comedy in particular has often been critically ignored and/or dismissed as a 'non-serious' category. Several chapters debate this point in *Exploring Contemporary Greek Cinema/Anichnevontas ton Synchrono Elliniko Kinimatografo*.[2] Leventakos, in his introductory chapter, discusses the "frivolity", apolitical and commercial nature of contemporary Greek cinema, as opposed to the concerns and aesthetic qualities of "Art" and New Greek Cinema; while Soldatos and Haritos in their respective articles in the volume also lament the deplorable surrender of contemporary Greek film to commercialism and 'televisual' aesthetics.[3] There are a number of revised views on this matter, but many still question the ability of comedy to engage audiences in meaningful debate, without running the risk of diminishing its depth.[4] Despite these various criticisms and dismissals, comedy has also been discussed in relation to its ability, its potency to ridicule rules, morals, ideological systems, the (patriarchal) Law. This transgressive quality of the comic provides opportunities to challenge, evaluate and potentially redefine well-established and normalised ideological constructs. As Andrew Stott notes, comedy has been perceived "as a potential site of social disruption, using the comic as a medium for the message of dissent".[5] In a similar way, feminism and feminist theory have sought to expose and disrupt deep social and ideological structures of patriarchy.[6] *The Cow's Orgasm*, I argue,

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[2] Leventakos, D. (ed) 2000. *Exploring Contemporary Greek Cinema/Anichnevontas ton Synchrono Elliniko Kinimatografo.* Optikoakoustiki Koultoura. Athens: Kentro Optikoakoustikon Meleton.
[3] *Ibid.* Leventakos, D. 'A Prologue: Towards a Frivolous Cinema?/Enas Prologos: Pros enan kinimatografo tin elafrotits?', p. 5-7; Soldatos, Y. 'A brief historical overview/Ena Syntomo Istoriko (1990-2002)', p. 9-40; Haritos, D. 'The Current State/H Simerini Katastasi', p. 41-50.
[4] This was the case, for example, in the reviews Malea's *Honey and the Pig* received upon its release in 2005, as was discussed in the Introduction.
[5] Stott, A. 2005. *Comedy.* New York & London: Routledge. p. 35.
[6] Chris Weedon's (1987) definition of patriarchy is employed in this thesis: "The term 'patriarchal' refers to power relations in which women's interests are subordinated to the interests of men.

does exactly that: using comedy tactically, it foregrounds rigid ideological structures associated with patriarchy only to ridicule them and ultimately reject them – rather than re-confirm societal structures with a 'tidy', happy ending. [7]

The film opens with a close-up shot of a sticker with the slogan 'a mother's blessing' ('i efchi tis manas'), which is seen backwards through the windscreen of a lorry. As the camera shot opens up, dangling alongside the sticker there is a small icon of the Virgin Mary with baby Jesus, an iconic portrayal of motherhood, surrounded by several images of naked and half-naked pinup girls that adorn the lorry all around. These images in turn are juxtaposed with the load of the lorry, cows. The film takes the viewer in and around the lorry, focusing on significant details (the images of women, the cows, the strong, masculine hands of the driver) and thus establishes a connection between the two, the objectified images of women and the cows on their way to the slaughterhouse (abattoir). The camera presents the audience with unsuspecting victims, as it pans around the moving lorry and shows the cows through the horizontal bars of the carriage, adorned throughout with irksomely familiar images of nude women. The static (or perhaps passive) representations of the women and the immobilised cows are carefully constructed iconic signs that allow the director to comment, from the very beginning, on established forms of femininity. This co-existence is made more bizarre by the further juxtaposition of the images of naked women, 'whores', with the image of Virgin Mary, 'virgin/mother'.[8] As Johnston argues, "it is possible to use icons (i.e. conventional configurations) in the face of and against the mythology usually associated with them".[9] Indeed, in a very economical, and comical, way Malea presents a series of established representations of femininity and roles ascribed to women by patriarchy; at the same time she problematises this by drawing attention to the fact that for the male driver – the representative of patriarchal

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[...] Patriarchal power rests on social meaning given to biological sexual difference" (quote cited in Gamble, S. (ed.) 2001. *Feminism and Postfeminism*. London &New York: Routledge. p.3).

[7] This reactionary function of comedy, a position with which I disagree as is clear in this thesis and exemplified by the work of Malea, has often been argued for – see for example Palmer, D.J. (ed.) 1984. *Comedy: developments in criticism.* London: Macmillan.

[8] Irigaray, L. 1985 [originally published 1977]. *This Sex Which Is Not One.* [Trans. Porter, C. with Burke, C.] Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

[9] Johnston, C. 1973. 'Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema' in Thornham, S. (ed) 1999. *Feminist Film Theory: a Reader.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. p. 32.

ideology in this scene – these images and roles are distinct and separate from one another, and do not or cannot all apply to the same woman at the same time. Although for him such an assumption is obvious and unproblematic, Malea's camera treats this character rather ironically by placing him in the middle of these contradictory representations of femininity that so visibly and easily co-exist on his truck. The song in the background is carefully chosen to provide another dimension to the sequence; the lyrics, performed by a male singer, assert a man's right not to be tied down by any woman; they explain a man's natural disposition to be 'fickle', with a free heart that cannot love or commit to one woman alone. This furthers the ironic treatment of another prevalent theme here: male virility, active male sexual desire as opposed to female passivity – even if, or rather precisely as, the driver is presented as the stereotypical representative of these male attributes. This semiotic excess in the whole imagery of the opening sequence, which also carries the comedy of the scene, provides the means for exposing the ideological double standards of patriarchy against women. In addition, and importantly for my argument, the director establishes the thematic preoccupations of the film and her stylistic approach: a carefully constructed system of signification, which to begin with is used to foreground ideological inconsistencies and contradictions, but ultimately is itself undermined as a rigid, inflexible construct, as will be discussed later on.

The small community, introduced shortly after the opening sequence described above, is used to clearly demonstrate those inconsistencies by 'baring all' in front of Malea's camera throughout the film; the characters and situations are exaggerated – one of the techniques used for comic effect – and the camera systematically affords the viewer the luxury of seeing what is meant to be concealed. For example, in one of the early scenes in the film the 'secret' signalling between Athanasia and Christina in church, waiting anxiously for Christina's boyfriend to arrive, is shown clearly with a series of medium and close-up shot-reverse-shots. This action in itself is disruptive of the reverence imposed by the environment onto the parishioners; after all, this is a place of worship. In addition, the girls' preoccupations – dating, boyfriends, and by extension sexual desire – are hardly allowed, hence the need to keep them secret, especially from the figures of authority that surround them: parents, the priest, other

adults in general, representatives of an older generation such as the gossipy neighbours. When Vangelis (Kostas Koklas) does arrive, this systematic organisation of looking relations between the characters is repeated and the camera affords a privileged view of the looks exchanged by boyfriend and girlfriend – an illegitimate relationship still at this point in the film – and by father and mother. It is clear that everyone knows what is going on, but no-one will admit it in public. A comic re-positioning of the four characters around each other further confirms this knowledge; but where the main comic effect resides, and what Malea effectively draws attention to, is not the movement of the characters itself, but the pretence that no-one notices the lousy job the characters make of trying to conceal this relationship. Fast paced editing and a series of close-ups and medium shots capture the main characters' attempts at being discreet about their actions and the parishioners' swiftly averted looks acting as if they had not noticed. The characters, of course, are playing by rules, which dictate that any hint of sexual desire between an unmarried couple – or even a married one at that, especially in church – must be suppressed and any knowledge of such a relationship denied in public; but then, it is obvious by now how ridiculous and hypocritical these rules are. Ultimately, it is the rigidity of the rule that is the joke here and that causes laughter, or as Henri Bergson put it, this rigidity (social, emotional, physical or professional) "is the comic, and laughter is its corrective";[10] and it is this comic element that helps the director comment on ideological constraints.

The actions around the illegitimate relationship take place within an inflexible, legitimising institution: a church. Comic action is the method used here again, and the joke is constructed around the firmness of the rules set by the religious institution. The transgressive behaviour of the characters while in church shows the lack of respect for those rules; Athanasia's mother and her friend Maritsa (Iro Mané) gossip about the disgusting flirtations in church, while devising schemes to lure the much-sough-after bachelor and set him up with Koula's (Eleni Gerasimidou) own daughter. The quick-paced close-ups in the previous scene match the furtive looks of the parishioners pretending not to look, while medium and medium-close-up shots linger on Koula and

[10] Bergson, H. 1921. *Laughter* [trans. Brereton, C. and Rothwell, F.]. London: Macmillan & Co. p. 18.

Maritsa; these two characters are positioned at the back of the crowd of worshipers: no one can see them, but they see all. The camera juxtaposes the respectful place with the disrespectful behaviour within it; but the joke is not on the characters and their actions, who need to find ways to circumvent the inflexible standards of behaviour. The joke is the (double) standards themselves as set by religion and the pretence around the taboo issue of desire. The revelation methods that Malea employs – exaggeration, juxtaposition of opposites, and in technical terms, a system of close camera shots of the characters whispering and looking at one another – are the aesthetic means, the building blocks that lead to the comic effect and the disruption of the ideological continuum, which supposedly exists within the community in question.

The choice of setting is not accidental, of course. The strict architecture and design of the religious space itself does not allow the characters to position themselves wherever they want within it; the priest is actually the only individual who is allowed to move around the space, and therefore in a sense control it, although his movements are also confined by the strict liturgical rites during the service. The rest of the characters take their places according to precise gender and class divisions respectively instituted and endorsed by the Greek Orthodox Church: men sit to the right (the side favoured by God) and women to the left (the side that is not so close to or favoured by God); the community members with the most economic and political power sit closest to the altar. Christina and her mother, who are closest to the altar and to the right side, owe their privileged position to Christina's father because he is a prominent businessman and the mayor of the village. Athanasia, who chants next to her father in church, trespasses into a space reserved only for men. Her conduct is noted, frowned upon, and criticised by Koula and Maritsa. The imposing setting with all its rules symbolises and reinforces the firm ideological structure imposed on the characters by the religious establishment, and society in general. As Allinson observes in relation to Almodovar's use of religious iconography, "depleting the ideological content of religion is itself a political statement";[11] similarly, Malea selects this religious setting in

[11] Allinson, M. 2001. *A Spanish Labyrinth: the films of Pedro Almodóvar*. London, New York: IB Tauris. p. 36.

order to upset its ideological potency by breaching its consistency and staging the characters' 'rebellious' acts within it.

The theme of illegitimate sexual relationships is contrasted with that of legitimate ones. Marriage is another institution that helps uphold conventionally highly valued morals in society, and "one of the primary conditions under which men and women interact".[12] It has also always been a favourite topic for comedy. There are two married couples in the film, both respectable and well-established within their community; these are Christina's and Athanasia's parents. Although still a taboo in terms of being spoken about, sexuality within marriage is accepted as a norm. Malea, however, destabilises this assumption by perverting the accepted normality of sexual intercourse within a heterosexual marriage. Christina's parents' relationship is 'tainted' by Jovanna's (Katerina Didaskalou) sadly comical self-admiration in front of the mirror, dressed in sexy lingerie, while her husband, fully dressed and adjusting his tie, throws an envelope of money on her dresser on his way out of the bedroom. The connotations of prostitution are disturbingly glaring here, and consciously irreverent towards the institution of marriage and its legitimacy; and "in thus questioning the legitimacy of marriage, the question of legitimacy of society is simultaneously raised".[13] The character is further alienated – and, to a certain extent, exoticised – by her name (a foreign version of the Greek name Ioanna), which signifies a particular social status, held by the *nouveau riche*. The name is rather incongruous to the rest of the social environment and creates an ironic distance to the character. Moreover, the distinct archetypes of mother, virgin, whore, as they were established in the opening sequence are blurred here. Malea not only highlights the roles of femininity ascribed by patriarchy, but also problematises them, and exposes inconsistencies in the application of these archetypical roles.

A more extreme joke is played on the other marriage, that of Athanasia's parents. The couple itself is more comical and visually mismatched, playing out funny stereotypes. As Laraine Porter notes, "often it is the recognition of the stereotype that

[12] Stott, A. 2005. *Comedy*. New York & London: Routledge. p. 77.
[13] Cavell, S. 1981. *Pursuits of happiness: the Hollywood comedy of remarriage*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press. p. 53.

elicits a comedic response at the outset".[14] Koula is short, fat and has a shrill voice, fulfilling the role of a stereotypical nagging, unattractive, emasculating wife; her husband is distinctly taller than her, slim, non-muscular and bald, holding the place of the poor husband, hen-pecked by a shrew. In addition to the visual comic element, Malea allows Koula, a matriarch in her household, to appropriate and use offensive, abusive language, a function otherwise reserved for the men in the film. Several times she calls her husband an incompetent cow (calf is the more accurate translation for the Greek word she is using, which is potentially even more demeaning with its patronising associations of infancy). And he gets to act out his sexual urge on a cow, in a playfully constructed scene of a cow's artificial insemination by the vet. The scene of the cow's orgasm is disturbingly and perversely comical. It is also a reminder of, and a play on, the Freudian concept of 'the Primal Scene',[15] a key moment for a child's psychosexual development, when s/he witnesses/fantasises the parents having sex. Christina and Athanasia peek through the barn window and watch in bewilderment Athanasia's father affectionately inseminate a cow. All proprieties are transgressed in this scene and humour is an effective strategy used to mock the established and morally revered institution of marriage.

The exposition of double standards and the different application of rules for men and women are most revealingly dealt with in the strip-club scene. The scene is comical and perverse at the same time, pushing the boundaries of acceptable behaviour in the public domain. Christina's father, Babis (Mihalis Mitrousis), and his son-in-law-to-be, Vangelis, sit side by side at the strip-club discussing work and family: the slaughterhouse/meat business and the daughter will happily be passed on from the father to the groom. Malea juxtaposes the two quite pointedly, commenting on the unproblematic association of topics, the meat and the women, and the commodification of women practised by the men in this scene. Luce Irigaray, in her essay 'Women on the Market', has argued that:

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[14] Porter, L. 1998. 'Tarts, Tampons and Tyrants' in *Because I Tell a Joke or Two: comedy, politics and social difference*. London & New York: Routledge. p.66.
[15] See Freud, S. [1917-1919] 1955 in Strachey, J. (ed.) *The Complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud: "An infantile neurosis" and other works*. Vol.17. London: The Hogarth Press. Also see http://nyfreudian.org/abstracts_21_17.html [date accessed: 05/05/2011]

> all the systems of exchange that organise patriarchal societies and all the modalities of productive work that are recognised, valued, and rewarded in these societies are men's business. The production of women, signs, and commodities is always referred back to men (when a man buys a girl he "pays" the father [...]), and they always pass from one man to another [...]. The work force is thus always assumed to be masculine, and "products" are objects to be used, objects of transaction among men alone.[16]

The strip-club scene is used to exemplify this system of exchange where women are or become mere commodities. The discourse between Babis and Vangelis remains the same when they are talking about the slaughterhouse and meat business, and when they are agreeing Christina's marriage to Vangelis. Meanwhile, they both enjoy a lap dance by a stripper they paid for in the club, further underlining the notion of woman as commodity to be shared and exchanged between men. A couple of drinks and a manly pat on the back seal both deals (business and marriage) satisfactorily. The disturbing congruity of these two ostensibly contradictory attitudes to women further exposes the double standards by which these two characters operate. The director successfully illustrates how unproblematic and normalised this compartmentalisation of the roles available to women is within a patriarchal system (as was seen before with the opening sequence and by following a similar method of 'building' the scene here, too, by employing a similar system of signs); for Christina's father and Vangelis the same woman does not or cannot hold the role of 'the whore' and 'the wife' or 'the virginal daughter' at the same time – despite the fact that Babis's behaviour towards his wife, as was commented upon earlier, encourages us to think otherwise. Different women hold these different roles in relation to the men that surround them; and this simplification makes their discussion and the setting irrelevant and uncomplicated. Once again the characters' denial of their own inconsistencies is something Malea highlights throughout for comic effect. The handheld camera performs a little 'dance' around the characters, who often lose sight of each other because of the naked striper in front and in-between them. The actors' performance, trying to look at each other past the stripper, supplements the camera movement. And both these elements draw attention to the constant movement juxtaposed to the dance of the stripper who is

[16] Irigaray, L. 1985 [originally published 1977]. ''Women on the Market' in *This sex which is not one.* [trans. Porter, C. with Burke, C.] Ithaca: Cornell University Press. p. 171.

rooted in the middle (of the characters and the frame). Amidst all this action and the loud music, which makes the scene even more uncomfortable, the dialogue has a father enquiring about the groom's emotions and noble intents for a treasured daughter and only child; and the groom responding earnestly about his love for Christina. The straight delivery of these lines by the actors is another ironic directorial choice and rather incongruous under the circumstances. Whether this is an exaggerated set-up in order to emphasise the absurdity of established, normalised rules, or not, the scene achieves exactly that: attitudes of patriarchy towards women and their defined roles within this system are brought to the fore, comically exposed for their contradictions. In terms of form then, this scene, like the opening sequence, is *constructed*, built, by a careful collection and accumulation of signs increasingly added together as the scene progresses to highlight the thematic preoccupations of the film. This is in contrast to the scenes dealing with the married couples, where the director works in the opposite direction: there she *deconstructs*, breaks apart, the ideological continuity proposed around the archetypical roles of women by isolating key elements with close camera shots, thus revealing inconsistencies that the characters and society would rather not acknowledge.

Consequently, the schematic of the film as a whole is itself based on contradiction. Malea appears at first to have written the two families, and their relationships to each other and additional peripheral characters, in symmetry, a balance. Each couple (mother and father/husband and wife) has a daughter; each daughter has a boyfriend. All these characters represent types or groups within a community, which occupy a predefined space of the hierarchical spectrum. Their relationships and conduct are in effect informed by this structure. Christina's family is rich, but Athanasia's is struggling to make ends meet. Christina's father is the embodiment of the strong patriarch, self-made, successful, and respectable; Athanasia's father is the local vet, who is respected for his profession but not taken seriously at a personal level, as he is weak and unsuccessful. Neither wife works, and both are defined mainly by their roles as mothers: one embodies the stereotype of the strong matriarch heavily involved in her family's affairs and particularly in her daughter's life; while the other represents the beautiful but highly dependent woman, who abnegates any decision-making

responsibilities to her husband. Athanasia wants a career, while Christina wants a family. Christina's boyfriend is the alpha-male of the community, whereas Thomas (or Murphy, as he calls himself) is the rejected, unsuccessful bum; in this case the symmetry also takes a Freudian twist with the boyfriends 'made' as copies of the fathers. Maritsa, the trusted friend, oscillates between the two families and their affiliates, 'doing their bidding' in the attempt to bring things to a desirable outcome, and eventually becoming the catalyst for change. Finally, the absent character, Athanasia's cousin Eleni, who is unmarried, has a career and lives alone in Thessaloniki, the big city, is the inspiration and the final destination for the two girls. Quite interestingly, the role of Eleni is assumed by the director herself, underlining an active authorial control previously evident through the camera work and mise-en-scéne. Eleni/Malea appears in the only photo viewers get a glimpse of in Athanasia's bedroom and next to her music sheets. Despite all this, the director creates this balanced system of relationships only to undermine it, and eventually overthrow it. The whole structure of the film, then, works as a kind of meta-commentary on double standards and contradiction.

Malea, in this respect, systematically unpicks the system she herself put in place for her characters. Through the use of comedy she reveals the ideological structures that inform and restrict the characters in the way they relate to each other and the way they behave and act, as was noted earlier. The first 'break' in the director's schematic approach is proposed by the way the older and the younger generation of characters live, think and behave. There is mistrust between them – the young treat the old as irrelevant and uninterested, and the old treat the young as irresponsible and unwise. The discussions both girls have with their parents are generally vacuous and ineffective. For example, Koula repeats her views on marriage and family as frequently as possible to Athanasia, who simply evades the conversation; at the same time, what Koula proposes is heavily undermined by the way her own marriage functions, or rather does not. Koula and her husband do not respect or like each other. When there is communication, this mostly focuses on insulting disapprovals of each other. These scenes are set in a closed, tight domestic environment, where the couple struggle to exist, physically as well as emotionally. While they desperately try to avoid touching

one another, the most they can do in the contained space is squeeze past each other with comical grimaces. The situation is aggravated by the introduction of a piano in the already limited space in the second third of the film; its incongruous existence in the middle of the entrance corridor highlights the parents' conflicting aspirations for their daughter, who is literally squeezed out of the ever-decreasing space. Equally, Athanasia is also not convinced by her father's attempts to get her a career, which again is a proposition that is treated rather ironically by the director in the scene of the cow's orgasm. Although indebted to her father's sacrifices for her future, Athanasia struggles to find 'her own voice' in this whole scheme.

Conversely, Christina is put under pressure by her mother to continue school, to study and follow an independent career, rather than jump straight into married and family life. Following the same structure as before, Malea undermines Jovanna's arguments by creating a character whose life choices contradict her words of advice. One does feel sympathetic towards Christina's mother, who is trapped in a lifestyle almost imposed on her. In contrast to Koula, who is seen to break out of her domestic space, Jovanna is always seen inside the house and mostly in her bedroom, where she paces up and down, drink and pills at hand, unable to act or effectively react to anything. Together with her daughter, the audience are encouraged to question her lack of determination to change this stagnant disposition – Christina calls it "incompetence" in a later scene.

Christina's father, on the other hand, is shown to be a decisive man, content with his choices about securing a financially and socially viable future for his daughter through marriage. This is a character who is confident about 'knowing best' about everything concerning his family and business (which, as we have seen, are interchangeable), as he reassures his wife in a dismissive and patronising tone when she dares suggest an alternative future for Christina. The director does not spare this character either, and consistently throughout the film demonstrates how his self-confidence rests on false assumptions and dangerous dismissals. For example, he dismisses a rape allegation against Vangelis by Athanasia, and backed by Christina, as a silly act of female jealousy. Although we do not doubt his love for his daughter, Malea makes this character the villain of the piece, by establishing his power within his social environment, only to

show how unreliable this is. Not only does he claim ownership of decisions as far as his family is concerned, but he does not hesitate to compromise Vangelis's position within the community when he realises that Vangelis was not as honest about his intentions and dealings with Christina. Thus, ideological contradictions within the film are uncovered through a system of contradictions with which the characters themselves are ridden.

From the younger generation, while Vangelis is endorsed and welcomed by highly esteemed religious, political, societal and institutional forces, Murphy (or Thomas) is excluded from all of them: he is seen outside the church, outside Vangelis's and Babis's offices and never inside an established domestic space. This pattern of inclusion or exclusion informs the attitudes developed by Vangelis and Thomas. Vangelis accepts his role as the alpha-male of the community, but ultimately and ironically he gets punished by the inconsistencies of the system that informs his approach, particularly towards women. Although both Koula (Athanasia's mother) and Babis (Christina's father) are keen for their daughters to get together with Vangelis, they both turn against him when he 'breaks the rules'. The irony here is that this breaking of the rules is actually an effect of following them to the letter: by attempting to have sex with both girls he asserts the very kind of masculinity corroborated by the system in which he is inscribed. In contrast to Vangelis, who gets punished for his daring choices, Murphy pays for his indecision. Although the lyrics of his songs, his dress-code, his dark and alternative rehearsal space indicate that he wants to reject the system that brands him as a failure, when the opportunity to do so arises, he regurgitates to Athanasia all the predetermined excuses and reasons for not acting out on their plan to leave. One of these reasons is because he does not want to be *responsible* for Athanasia's failure as well as his own. His attempt at 'responsibility' betrays an aspiration to masculinity and dynamism, but this desire is undermined by the fact that he is drunk: his 'courage' is bought. Although up to this point the film has encouraged sympathy towards Murphy, this changes when Athanasia reminds him that his name is actually Thomas. His Greek name acts as a reminder that despite his resistance he is ultimately a product of the same ideological setting he tries to escape. His conflicting attitude to change and his indecision mean that he gets left behind at the end. In a rather poignant scene the

director has Thomas haplessly running after the moving train, after managing to 'fight off' the obstacle of the distressed parents of the two girls, who symbolically act as the ideological constraints he is battling against. In other words, traditional notions of masculinity are in conflict with the requirements of modernity Thomas wants to embrace. The scene then also acts as a commentary by Malea on a modern masculinity in crisis, a theme developed further in her fourth film *Honey and the Pig*; and a reminder of the strong ideological hold that does a disservice to men as well as women.

The two main characters, Athanasia and Christina, are also trapped in and burdened with their own contradictions. Throughout the film Malea sets the girls apart by establishing differences between the two friends; parents, financial status and social standing, boyfriends, even dress code and make- up. These differences are put in place only to reinforce what brings the two characters together: their resistance to their parents and what they represent, their common "losses" and restrictions instigated by the established ideological frame, their need for self-discovery and attempts to feel at ease with their sexuality. Malea highlights the choices of the two through a very methodical alternation of scenes, one of Christina immediately followed by one of Athanasia and vice versa. Their supposed freedom of choice is undermined by the fact that each girl's statement of her dreams is hampered by an interest in the opposite sex. In a separate analysis of women's cinema, Ramanathan states that "women's desires [are] both complex and located in historical circumstance".[17] Malea's characters are no exception. Athanasia wants a career and is very committed to studying piano, though she is quite intrigued by the unconventional Murphy; Christina wants a family and is committed to achieve this with her current boyfriend, Vangelis, notwithstanding her natural and still unexplored talent for fashion design. Moreover, these choices are evidently influenced, and restricted, by their family's social standing in the community. For poorer Athanasia education and career are the means for a better standard of living; for more affluent Christina romance is the only thing worth occupying her mind, since a comfortable standard of living is already guaranteed. Their conflicting words

[17] Ramanathan, G. 2006. *Feminist Auteurs: Reading Women's Films*. London & New York: Wallflower. p.9.

and actions result in arguments and additional distance between the two friends. Malea constructs her characters in opposition, and in balance, only to deconstruct and undermine the validity of such a system by bringing the girls closer and closer together. They are shown together in most scenes as the film progresses towards its conclusion rather than in individual scenes. This visual arrangement confirms their common need to escape from the rigid and frustrating patriarchal establishment, and their ability to remain together and support each other despite their conflicting characters, thus inflicting the final break to Malea's system.

In this respect, apart from narrative and character structures, Malea employs carefully constructed systems of signs to question and disrupt patriarchal ideological conventions. Athanasia and Christina encounter these systems not only to disrupt them, but also to appropriate and re-signify their components. One such system involves the various representations of the cow in the film, and its association with women, as established by the opening scene. The theme is carried on throughout with cows appearing everywhere. The slaughterhouse is a prime location, and indeed one that is revisited throughout the film. The floating, but content, heads of a woman cook and a smiley cow make up the logo of the slaughterhouse where Vangelis works but which Christina's father owns. Moreover, Vangelis's office decoration is revealing. A poster of semi-naked women in sensual poses is placed right next to a poster of a cow and the various cuts of meat; and a clay ornament of a smiling cow decorates the desk on which he is seen to have sex with Christina and other women during the film. Christina, determined to keep Vangelis for herself, decides to lay claim to him by accepting to have sex with him. This naïve proposition voices a very problematic view of 'ownership' of a person related to sex, and mostly associated with men towards women, rather than the other way around. Having established by that point Vangelis's rather sleazy character, we are prepared for the symbolic slaughter of a willing victim. This scene is humorous as well as disturbing, as the camera keeps going back to the cow ornament serenely smiling despite the ominous sequence of events. Christina herself is smiling, allowing for a stronger visual connection with the cow on Vangelis's desk. Vangelis then lifts Christina so that she pushes the cow on the desk with her knee. The cow now has its back to the camera, so it cannot be seen smiling, a sign of

the impending danger Christina is in. A close-up shot of this position is followed by his placing her on the sofa, which he duly protects from her virginal blood with the white coat worn when he's in the slaughterhouse. As he lowers Christina on the sofa, the camera lingers on the sign above it that reads "Meat business" in big letters followed by her father's surname. As the couple have sex, the sound of the cows' mooing prevails in the background. What follows is a rather troubling scene with Vangelis hurting Christina, who grits her teeth in pain and disbelief, especially because it is her first time; and Christina's father arriving, forcing her to escape through the area where the slaughtered cows' split open bodies are hanging, reinforcing connotations of rape.[18] As she runs out horrified, a flock of lambs enter the slaughterhouse completing the (intentionally kitsch) set-up of the sacrifice of innocence. The whole sequence maintains a focus on the cow as significant symbolic imagery; and in this rather grotesquely comic way, the director also comments very caustically on practices and ideas condoned, indeed normalised, by a patriarchal establishment. At the same time, the consequences of female complicity with (or at least acceptance of) this discourse are exposed. The scene is rather cruel in its criticism of Christina's decisions and choices: she goes willingly to a real (and metaphorical) slaughterhouse, after having been warned about Vangelis's unsavory character. Her choice to dismiss her friend's advice in favour of a misguided romance distances and prepares the audience for the aforementioned consequences.

Confused and traumatised, Christina seeks solace from Athanasia, who forgives Christina's previous accusations of envy and betrayal. The themes of objectification of women's bodies and virginity as a determining identity attribute for young, unmarried women raised in previous scenes are carried over here when Christina herself laments the loss of her virginity. She uses words like "damaged" for "giving away the most precious thing" of hers, echoing the discourses of patriarchy that inform the societal structure Christina and Athanasia live in. The symbolic imagery of the cows' split open

[18] Carol J. Adams (1990) offers an interesting analysis of the relation between women, rape and the politics of meat from a vegetarian/ecological feminist perspective. However, this is an approach beyond the remits of this thesis and it will not be pursued further. See more specifically the section 'The Patriarchal Texts of Meat' in *The Sexual Politics of Meat*. Cambridge: Polity Press. p. 23-94.

bodies in the previous scene becomes a direct discussion of Christina's broken hymen in this one. What follows is one of the most important sequences in the film, when the director, through Athanasia's radical action, rejects outright the ideology that entraps women this way. Athanasia takes her trousers and underwear off and stands in front of her astounded friend. She breaks her hymen with her fingers, in protest to what she calls Christina's nonsense. This is a liberating act that allows the two girls to take ownership of their bodies and sexuality. In a sense, this tearing of the flesh (hymen, cows' bodies) epitomises the irreparable rupture Athanasia and Christina, and in effect the director, make in patriarchal ideology itself. Athanasia is not a virgin, but has not lost her virginity because of sex with a man.

Athanasia's previous sexual encounter with Murphy is rather less traumatising but equally disruptive of established patriarchal principles. Having escaped Vangelis's advances, she runs away from the confines of Vangelis's office at the slaughterhouse to the open fields with Murphy. The two of them make plans of leaving the village together. Malea presents a young couple in love, willing to explore their sexuality and desire for one another. The idea of fertility in nature and the association of women's sexuality with reproduction are topics introduced and acted out in this scene. As Loizos and Papataxiarchis point out, "[i]t is as if the linking of female sexuality to fertility is so powerful that there can be no perceived need for women to 'express' sexuality in contexts which cannot lead to procreation".[19] In the end, however, there is no sexual intercourse as such. Athanasia asks Murphy to stop, effectively controlling her desire, and disrupting the conventional associations of nature, motherhood and female sexuality; and although Murphy does not have the same control over his own body, resulting in semen being 'spilled', this does not fulfill its role as expected. This is another radical sequence in the film – together with Athanasia's breaking of her own hymen – which negates patriarchal doctrines about female sexuality by separating and liberating it from (the threat of, for unmarried women) reproduction. Within the constraints of the commodity system described in terms of the triad virgin/mother/whore, sexual pleasure is denied to women. Athanasia does derive some

[19] Loizos, P. and Papataxiarhis, E. (eds.) 1991. 'Gender, Sexuality, and the Person in Greek Culture' in *Contested Identities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press . p.229.

kind of pleasure from the experience, and this has a revelatory quality similar to the cow's orgasm sequence. Unlike Christina's sexual imaginings of a romantic first encounter (which, as discussed, has gone horribly wrong), Athanasia has made no plans – and yet she is free to choose how far she will go. Virginity does not define her, but neither has she become a 'whore' or a 'mother'. Athanasia takes control not only of her reproductive system, but equally importantly, of the systems of signification ascribed to her body, reflecting what Ramanathan deems "the role of the body in the woman's acquisition of authority".[20] This re-signification is also reflected in the way Athanasia and Christina use language, which encapsulates Malea's alternative approach in her characters' attempts to contest the vocabulary and its uses as these had previously been established.

Having exposed a problematic association between women and cows in the film, the director also redeems it (another knowing contradiction in the director's methodology) by allowing the two main characters to appropriate and re-signify this system. Athanasia reminds Christina that the cows did not feel sorry to lose their virginity, and they should not either. Moreover, as was noted, Athanasia and Cristina have witnessed the cow's orgasm incident, partly in horror and partly in great amusement and disbelief. What follows is a care-free play between the girls who name their body parts like those of the cow (legs = hooves, breasts = udders and the like), a reminder of the body map of the cow in Vangelis's office. In their game, Athanasia and Christina emphasise the lack of guilt and embarrassment towards (sexual) pleasure as was demonstrated by the cow. This provides a sense of freedom about their female bodies that the girls embrace. For example, Christina refuses to be embarrassed or ashamed when her period stains her trousers; her blood is transformed from a sign of shame to one of liberated acceptance of 'femaleness'. Indeed, the natural, outdoor space in which this scene occurs is representative of this freedom, as it is not burdened by the constructed and restrictive social spaces in which the girls otherwise exist. Having acquired this freedom, when back at home, Christina uses a tampon and 'moos' in enjoyment as she inserts it in her vagina, alluding playfully to the cow's orgasm

[20] Ramanathan, G. 2006. *Feminist Auteurs: Reading Women's Films*. London & New York: Wallflower. p. 168.

incident. The director has the two characters recreate images that were seen earlier with the juxtaposition of women and cows on the lorry and at the slaughterhouse. However, these are now devoid of the disturbing connotations of objectification or humiliation they carried before and allow for a naturalisation process of a different kind: the girls' bodies and sexuality are not burdened by implications imposed by patriarchy, but comedic rupture and contradiction have disturbed this system from within, leading to appropriation and revaluation. As Ramanathan observes, "female desire, as *expressed* by [...] women [...] enables them to have authority, as the self-conscious acknowledgement of desire registers a female subjectivity distinct from the patriarchal construction of the female".[21]

Once the contradictions and double standards of the rules of this community, and by extension of patriarchal ideology, have been exposed with dismissive irony, the director allows her characters to perform acts of rebellion which further challenge and undermine the establishment. A mightily charged sign (for its small size) carries part of this rebellion of the two girls: a tampon. One of the central scenes in the film is built around its phallic connotations. Its application seems to threaten the entire stability of that society. Koula's dramatic attempts to uphold the moral values of her family, which will secure a safe and honorable place within the community, seem to concentrate and heavily depend on Athanasia's virginity. The phallic shape of the tampon and its penetrative qualities pose the danger of the loss of Athanassia's defining identity attribute within the family context; more worryingly, it represents the possibility that this loss has already occurred (no virgin would wear such a dangerous object). This is ironic, considering that Koula insists that Athanasia delivers homemade sweet treats to Vangelis regularly, effectively putting her under the same danger Koula keenly tries to avoid. This immense fear and over-determination of the sign is thus ridiculed by the director, who, having exposed the contradiction in the mother's behaviour, foregrounds the symbolic power of the tampon and places it where it does not belong. The scene unfolds in a systematic way, as before. First, the box of tampons is smuggled into the house by Athanasia, which establishes its status as a forbidden, and so rebellious, object. The girls are then seen comfortably talking about its use. This is

[21] *Ibid*. p. 9. My emphasis.

juxtaposed with the grandmother's lack of knowledge of the item and its purpose: having found the box, she enquires about it and is told they are a new type of tissues. Inevitably, the genre demands that we next see a tampon inserted up the grandmother's nostril (her attempt at being 'modern' is hindered by the fact she cannot breathe). Finally, Koula's shrill demands of 'the truth' dressed in a panic about the irreparable mistake made by Athanasia only become more comical after having seen her retrieve the potent tampon from the grandmother's nose. In addition, her over-dramatic reaction becomes more hysterically funny when she waves the tiny tampon around in her hand; the focus Malea encourages on the tampon's size disappearing into Koula's hand further undermines its avowed phallic potency.

The scene carries on with its commentary on ideological constructions of patriarchy, through an over-determination of insignificant objects – a recurring trope in the film. The diminutive tampon coexists in the same frame as the large piano, which has just been delivered by two Indian migrant workers who look on and comment on the scene incredulously.[22] The director literally disrupts the moral framework of the household, interjecting these misplaced objects, which in their turn help expose the random nature of signification processes, whilst simultaneously alluding to Athanasia's own sense of displacement. This is the comedic climax of the film, encapsulating in one sequence the problems and contradictions that the film brings together – virginity, career aspirations and family values are seen to be both prescriptive and contradictory in their coexistence. It operates therefore as a breaking point for Athanasia, after which she decides to leave; not unlike Vangelis, there is no viable way to function within these prescribed rules.

With their new-found liberation, but with no other solution available, the two main characters plan their escape. While Thomas/Murphy had missed his opportunity to leave yet again, the film finishes on a high note with Athanasia and Christina on the train. This finale is pointedly in contrast to the previous sequence with Thomas running after the train as was described earlier. However, the girls have to overcome various obstacles themselves before they make it. First, they have to 'smuggle out' their

[22] The position of the foreigner as gazing into the Greek reality was explicated in the Introduction.

luggage and leave their houses unnoticed, not only by their parents but by nosey neighbours and the ever-present Maritsa. They spend the night hiding in the stables with their newfound allies, the cows, acting as their protective shield. The juxtaposition of the passivity of the cows and the two girls' decisive action is striking, and in stark contrast to the connotations of the opening sequence. The animals have become the empowering symbol and, in this scene, accomplices to the two friends. Ironically, by remaining passive, or rather 'actively' calm and still, the cows allow Athanasia and Christina to go undetected throughout the night. The next day, more obstacles are on their way: they hide behind the station platform to avoid being seen by their parents and the police; they run through the tracks to board the train and as if all this was not enough, they have to hide in the toilet of the carriage until the train departs, forcing the police officer to abandon his search. As they are about to make a run for it, another unlikely ally assists their escape: Maritsa, who had gone through the film spying on the two friends, and especially Athanasia, and has been called a "stupid old cow" numerous times by Vangelis, who has employed her services as a 'spy'. Her role as a woman who got widowed rather young and who has had to live vicariously since then, provides many of the comedic moments in the film. Her stereotypical addiction to chocolate acts as a playful reminder of an active desire that has to be suppressed. At this crucial point in the narrative, Malea's camera, typically, leaves the main event of the scene and focuses on the detail of Maritsa, who now accepts that, if the community turns a blind eye, this may also benefit her: she entertains the possibility of romance with one of the employees at the train station, and is pleased that this goes unnoticed by the other members of the community. Still, the audience are given a privileged view of the glances she exchanges with the train station attendant, in a reminder of earlier scenes, and Malea's strategy of drawing attention to that which must remain concealed. When she in turn deliberately turns her back so that Athanasia and Christina can escape at the station, her stance provides another rupture in the now faint ideological fabric of the community she lives in. In the repositioning of this minor character in such a pivotal moment, the director highlights "women's desires in the narrative [...] motivat[ing]

narrative movement and resolution".[23] Once again, Malea brings her audience full circle with the subverted re-enactment of an early theme of the film: the active 'looking the other way' which had been seen in church as supportive of the patriarchal establishment is now re-signified as enabling an escape from that very system. As was noted in the first chapter of the thesis, Claire Johnston suggested that women's cinema can disrupt a system of signification as established by patriarchal institutions from within. In *The Cow's Orgasm*, Malea does precisely that: without changing the systems, attitudes and roles, she shows how these schemas are themselves contradictory and unreliable.

This is achieved within and making use of the conventions of the comedy genre. Altman has written about genre criticism:

> Perhaps the most significant accomplishment of genre criticism is the fact that the study of specific formal characteristics of films (for example narrative structures, themes and patterns, editing, soundtrack, *mise-en-scéne*) is usually accompanied with detailed references to history/ideology (through the examination of iconography, the cultural/historical referent or the myth-making processes in genre).[24]

In discussing genre and its applications in popular cinema, at the same time a discussion of ideology and society at a given historical moment is initiated. Identifying Malea's application of comedic modes in *The Cow's Orgasm* can help unveil the ideological make-up of the Greek community in question and comment on its cultural and historical specificities. Moreover, the director, in employing familiar elements of popular culture, succeeds in also popularising thematic preoccupations that usually operate in the margins. However, this familiarity is also subverted and provides an alternative perspective to the proposed 'happy ending'. In this sense, much as we are glad to see the girls escaping at the end, we are also not allowed to forget that very little has actually changed in that particular rural community. The cynical 'solution' offered to the grip of contradictions of patriarchal ideology is to just leave; a pessimistic

[23] Ramanathan, G. 2006. *Feminist Auteurs: Reading Women's Films*. London & New York: Wallflower. p. 142.
[24] Altman, R. 1999. *Film/Genre*. London: BFI. p. 14-15.

and optimistic ending at the same time, it acts only as a final affirmation by the director of the problematic and contradictory nature of (patriarchal) ideology.

This chapter has proposed that a feminist argument about gender politics is put forward in *The Cow's Orgasm* through the strategic use of comedy conventions. Johnston suggested that women's cinema should develop a strategy "which embraces both the notion of films as a political tool and film as entertainment".[25] Indeed, Malea's first film exemplifies such a strategy in the way feminist politics are served by a popular cinematic form, organising her material around schemes of broad popular comedy. Her stance, however, goes beyond the criticism of traditional, overtly patriarchal rural environments; it extends to a critique of the postfeminist fallacy. As the next chapter demonstrates, women's lives in a contemporary, 'liberated' urban environment are not quite as free from patriarchal constraints as imagined by Christina and Athanasia.

[25] Johnston, C. 1973. 'Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema' in Thornham, S. (ed) 1999. *Feminist Film Theory: a Reader.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. p. 39.

CHAPTER THREE

The Mating Game: Building sites and gendered identities

Gender and relationships are the thematic preoccupations of Olga Malea's second film, *The Mating Game*, which was anticipated with interest by Greek film critics and audiences after the unexpected box office success of *The Cow's Orgasm*. This chapter, divided in two sections, explores how Malea, narratively and formally, articulates a strong critique of postfeminism,[1] demonstrating that the idea of choice purportedly available to the contemporary, urban Greek woman is still very much bound by traditional structural constraints. In what I would like to describe as the second part of a trilogy about gender roles and gender politics, the director moves her narrative to the capital city, with older protagonists. Set in contemporary Athens, the story follows three sisters, Emilia (Lyda Matsangou), Laura (Natalia Germanou) and Helena (Natalia Stylianou), in their search for love, or more precisely a partner. Each of them has her own way of going about finding and claiming what she wants, each seems to represent an established stereotype (visually and in terms of character and choices), but all three are united in their common search. Emilia, the oldest, is a successful stockbroker. She is self-reliant and dynamic; wears power suits and flat shoes, little make-up or jewelry. Leadership comes naturally, which is, initially at least, presented as *the* problem in her relationships with men; Vasilis (Kleon Grigoriadis), a male colleague-come-lover calls her "man-repellent". Laura, the middle one, is a sports trainer and, despite her muscular body, is presented as very feminine and sexy; her clothing articles of choice are revealing, lacey dresses, tight-fitting leggings (to go with her job) and sexy, mostly red lingerie. She is in a long-term relationship with a married man, so her dream of marriage and family has to be postponed until he gets a divorce. The youngest sister,

[1] Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, in the introduction of their edited collection *Interrogating Postfeminism*, argue that postfeminism "suggests a more complex relationship between culture, politics, and feminism than the more familiar framing concept of 'backlash' allows", as well as the assumptions about the 'pastness' of feminism, mostly disseminated by the media (p. 1). For a thoroughly interesting interrogation of postfeminism, see Tasker, Y. and Negra, D. (eds) 2007. *Interrogating Postfeminism*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. See also Gamble, S. 2001. *Feminism and Postfeminism*. London and New York: Routledge.

Helena, is a design student and a self-proclaimed independent spirit, not tied down by desires for stable relationships, like her sisters. All she cares about is (sexual) pleasure and fun.

In an early sequence in the film, the three meet in their open plan kitchen/diner for breakfast. A tracking shot of a row of unblemished, perfectly round green apples resting on the dining table with equal distance between them opens the scene and leads to the end of the table where the three sisters take their places. A medium shot shows Emilia sitting at the head of the table, with Laura and Helena on either side of her. Each has in front of them half a grapefruit and a glass of orange juice for breakfast. The shot settles into a medium-close-up of the symmetrical arrangement of the characters within the space, which is also carefully arranged and colour coordinated. The symmetry is disrupted by the large chocolate cake that interrupts the healthy row of apples at the end of the table and is strategically placed within reach of all three sisters by Helena. The designer setting reflects access to new-found wealth for many – mainly urban – Greek citizens which lead to unparalleled levels of consumerism, and women more than ever before were considered true economic players. Greece's international outlook at the time allowed for modes of discourse that may not be considered 'national'; in this context Malea's film can be seen more as a reflection of European/global urban life at the turn of the century than one with particularly Greek preoccupations. Resembling many other postfeminist romantic comedies of the time, such as *You've Got Mail* (Ephron, 1998) or *Notting Hill* (Michell, 1999), *The Mating Game* positions the modern woman's search for a partner as a defining aspect of her life-narrative.

Laura reaches over her grapefruit and digs her spoon into the cake as she questions its tempting appearance on the table. Demosthenes (Phillipos Sofianos) showed up with his wife and daughter at the launch party the previous night, when Laura had anticipated that the two of them would enjoy their date alone. Despite Laura's request for sympathy and support, Emilia objects to Laura's dating choice. But she is in a bad mood, too. She reaches again over the grapefruit for a spoonful of cake. Vasilis, Emilia's colleague and on-off, may-be again boyfriend, showed up with another woman from the office, when Emilia had anticipated that the two of them would have at last enjoyed

another date together. Helena is unsympathetic to both of them. She declares that she just wants to have fun, so all this commitment and dating dilemmas are rather *passé* for her. Emilia and Laura are unconvinced by this choice however, and remind Helena that she ends up alone after every date and can never depend on the "so-called free-sex wannabes". Helena is adamant about her choices and a close-up shot as she declares this confirms the seriousness of the statement. She goes on to enjoy another mouthful of the cake.

In the 1980s, changes to legislation had made it much easier for women to work and achieve a degree of financial independence in Greece. By the 1990s, the postfeminist idea of sexual liberation was still confronted, however, by a feminist project not fully yet realised, particularly in rural areas. In this respect, the tone of this second film is very different to that of the first one. Feminism and postfeminism coexist in tension, just as modernity and tradition continue in unresolved conflict. The young women from *The Cow's Orgasm* would be disappointed: while city women in particular take certain things for granted, and sex and 'the hymen question' have ceased to be an issue, it would seem that women's lives and problems still revolve around men and relationships. Drawing on various comedic conventions and using a postfeminist discourse for the most part, the film explores female (and to a certain extent male) anxieties around dating, or rather coupling, within a contemporary urban Greek environment at the crux of yet another modernisation. Throughout the film Athens appears as a city under construction, acquiring a new, modern identity in preparation for the 21st century, but more importantly for the Olympic Games 'returning home' in 2004. The Greek capital's 'facelift' kick-started a series of big infrastructure projects at a time when the Greek economy was booming;[2] an air of unprecedented optimism was a characteristic of that period, but it was also a time when traditional values and ways of life were being re-evaluated.

Despite repeating the box office success of the director's previous film, some of the subsequent reviews[3] generally dismissed *The Mating Game* for its badly-done Almodóvar aesthetics, and as an unrealised comedy. I claim, however, that the

[2] Or so everyone conveniently assumed at the time.
[3] Some of these have been quoted in the first section of Chapter one of this thesis.

comparison with Almodóvar can more productively be considered in terms of the way another European popular cinema was recording the current realities of the young, urban citizens of Europe at a time of optimism and intense cross-cultural exchange, and social and economic mobility; these, in turn, mobilised a revision of established gender roles, especially in countries like Greece and Spain, where a strong nationalist patriarchal discourse still hovered as a remnant of dictatorial regimes in the recent histories of both countries. As Mark Allinson has observed, "many of Almodóvar's films problematize gender binaries [which] may involve simply portraying strong, positive female characters often in more professional roles than men, while their male counterparts are shown as insecure or worse".[4] The preoccupation with gender identities and relationships in *The Mating Game* therefore does not only reflect a Greek reality, but a trend afforded to young, educated urbanites by an increasingly globalised culture.

Although at first glance *The Mating Game* appears to be taking this rather clichéd route in the way the story around relationships develops, and the way the characters do not, I argue that the film also remains critical towards problematic and contradictory areas of a prominent postfeminist discourse, in a self-conscious way. In generic terms, the presence of some romantic comedy conventions (the romance narrative, the problems the potential couples face, the happy ending, among others), is tempered with an ironic tone throughout, which allows the audience to maintain critical distance from the narrative and the characters. In addition, the sex comedy's tropes of masquerade and miscommunication establish a playful mode of interaction among the characters, but also draw further attention to the binary opposition between surfaces and underlying, deeper structures that the film proposes. The position that is maintained in the film in relation to the performative and artificial nature of gender carries undertones of feminist discourses in the way that gender is questioned as the single most important factor for the creation of (female and male) subjectivity. In Judith Butler's terms, "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its

[4] Allinson, M. 2001. *A Spanish Labyrinth: the films of Pedro Almodóvar*. London and New York: I. B. Tauris. p. 82.

results".[5] Moreover, in keeping with the sex comedy genre, and resembling many of the Hollywood cycle's tropes as analysed by Kathrina Glitre, "the prevalence of the interior design [...] signals that image has become all-important, and the characters' construction of identity is repeatedly acknowledged".[6] While the film appears to be celebrating the empowering choices and personal freedoms available to the characters, at the same time it draws attention to the fact that these 'freedoms' belong to a rather affluent, professional, white and predominantly young social group. These 'concerns' of the main characters are set against the Filipino maids, who are constantly in the background throughout the film like a chorus, who undercut and destabilise even more any coherent discourse that the film might be trying to establish. Thus, the audience is continuously re-positioned in relation to the characters, and sympathies are constantly realigned.

Gender Games...

> [A]t a moment of widespread and intense hype about the spectrum of female options, choices, and pleasures available, so few women actually seem to find cause for celebration. [7]

The film very consciously, and playfully, sets out to explore established stereotypes of gender, for both men and women. In terms of generic discourse analysis of comedy, character groups often appear and function in trios; in this context, the three female characters satisfy conventional expectations in embodying different, but complementary types. In terms of a feminist discourse analysis, the use of three main characters instead of two challenges from the outset these types, by creating *varieties* of common stereotypes, rather than clear opposites, emphasising instead the postfeminist approach of 'choice'; none of the sisters fits exactly the binary of virgin/whore – a thematic preoccupation extensively explored in Malea's first feature –

[5] Butler, J. 1990. *Gender Trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity.* New York, London: Routledge. p. 25.
[6] Glitre, K. 2006. *Hollywood Romantic Comedy: States of the Union 1934-65.* Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press. p. 5.
[7] Negra, D. 2009. *What a Girl Wants?*. London and New York: Routledge. p. 5.

but all three represent or try out a blend of both those archetypes, drawing more attention to the constructedness of their gendered identities, which results in some of the humour in the film. The postfeminist insistence on choice, however, is also criticised in the film as fallacy, exposed as another symptom of ideology, much like the binary. At the same time, the film 'tests' these varieties by placing them within and drawing on various generic traditions: for example, the motif "of battling lovers and stereotyped oppositions"[8] between the male and female characters observed in sex comedy, and the creation of couples, which is the narrative culmination of a romantic comedy; the witty and very contemporary dialogue, which makes good use of comic timing, thus subverting or undermining the earnestness of the characters' utterances, and resulting in an ironic tone towards their concerns – a tone that is maintained throughout the film (faithfully to a stylistic attitude observed in Malea's other comedies). Moreover, the misunderstandings, the pretences, the games the characters play and the funny situations they find themselves in, are all reminiscent of various comedic strategies, employed here in order to comment on and satirise the social, cultural and ideological mechanisms of gender.

Gender roles, and the expectations that those create, especially in the way they inform and/or shape relationships, are the main topic of conversation for the characters, operating as a kind of meta-narrative reflecting on extra-textual popular discourses. The dialogue among all the main characters articulates questions about what men or women want, what is expected of a modern man or a woman in a relationship, what frustrates the characters (as outlined in the opening sequence above), or how family and career can or cannot be combined, which is a dilemma faced exclusively by the female characters in the film. In this sense, the topics of the conversation are obviously not something new; the urgency and confusion with which these conversations happen are, as they reflect on the changed nature of relationships between women and men within a contemporary, urban Greek social context. The setting plays a very important role in the film: contemporary Athens is presented as a hectic and demanding city to live in; a city under construction. The characters' actions

[8] Jeffers McDonald, T. 2007. *Romantic Comedy: boy meets girl meets genre*. London and New York: Wallflower. p. 39.

and quests are placed within this mise-en-scène of the unfinished, incomplete and shapeless city, which frames the shapeless, confused and 'unfinished' identities of these men and women just before the turn of the 21st century, when Greece had been witnessing an unprecedented increase in the number of people living in cities, a rise in divorce rates, and the press – especially those magazines aimed at women – trying to identify what is wrong with relationships, while providing purportedly useful 'how to' guides for the contemporary, emancipated woman still longing for *the* man in her life. In the film, the characters themselves draw attention to the contradictory nature of their predicament as they mock their own/each other's attitudes and attempts to incorporate or successfully perform the prescribed roles. For instance, Helena mocks Laura's conservative femininity in patiently waiting for the older man to give her the family and security she wishes for; at the same time she criticises Emilia as a workaholic and happily assists Laura to transform Emilia into a 'real', that is feminine, woman in order to lure a partner, as will be explored below. Helena herself remains undecided about which model to aspire to till the end of the film, when she reflects on her own confusion but with no solution in sight. This self-consciousness of the characters who reflect on their own performance – who indeed identify the roles they/women are required to play as a series of performances – creates a detachment between characters and audience; the viewers are thus more forcefully encouraged to notice and reflect on gendered identities as constructs.

According to Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, postfeminist discourses "having to do with women's economic, geographic, professional, and perhaps most particularly sexual freedom are effectively harnessed to individualism and consumerism".[9] These discourses appear to be shaping some of the formal qualities of the film (for instance the mise-en-scène and costume), with consumerism being displayed in the stylised spaces the characters inhabit, or the way they are dressed, reflecting on the variety of 'individual' feminine identities promoted by the appropriately targeted magazines (as mentioned above). But there is also a critical stance in the way the film foregrounds the artificiality of these seemingly self-determined and empowered 'individual' identities,

[9] Tasker, Y. and Negra, D. 'In Focus: Postfeminist and Contemporary Media Studies', *Cinema Journal*. Winter 2005, Vol. 44, No. 2, p. 107.

which are evidently mass-produced by mass media forms. Moreover, the rift between the sisters, who no longer want to interfere in each other's lives, is only momentary. They appear to represent different types of women who only live together and tolerate each other's character because they are siblings; but Malea underplays this (social and emotional) individualism by emphasising how they support and depend on one another. Their relationship is placed within and surrounded by other groups of women – for example their mother and her friends who seem to pass more time together than with their families, or the Filipino maids – who are united by common experiences.

The character who voices some of the above concerns the most is Emilia, who is repeatedly reminded by her sisters that her forceful demeanor and her insistence on stealing the role of the conqueror from men is the reason she is alone. Her only chance of ever finding a boyfriend/partner is to *learn* how to be a woman; interestingly, while the characters at first appear to reinforce certain stereotypical views of womanhood, at the same time, like a Brechtian actor, they point towards the artificiality of these perceptions, which become 'alienated' through their (the actors' and the characters') self-conscious performance as identified earlier. Thus, by alienating, "by foregrounding the expectation of resemblance[,] the ideology of gender is exposed".[10] Tasker and Negra have also suggested that "the 'girling' of femininity more generally – the competent professional adult woman who is made safe by being represented as fundamentally still a girl – is itself a characteristic of postfeminist representations".[11] Part of the action and dialogue in the film support such a statement; Emilia's aggressive dealing at work, in line with the attitudes of her male colleagues, warrants her the title of 'bitch'. She is criticised by Vasilis (her colleague) for being selfish and opinionated, the remedy for which is for her to find a boyfriend and learn to apologise. Later on, her flirtatious attitude with Dimitris (Vasilis is present) and her 'weakened' state, according to her (she cries in front of Vasilis at the paintball game), finally make her more 'approachable' and less threatening as a woman. However, in this case the learning process Emilia is undergoing is also informed by feminist analyses of "woman" as "a

[10] Diamond, E. 1996. 'Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory' in Martin, C. (ed) *A Sourcebook of Feminist Theatre and Performance*. London and New York: Routledge. p. 123.
[11] Tasker, Y. and Negra, D. 'In Focus: Postfeminist and Contemporary Media Studies', *Cinema Journal*. Winter 2005, Vol. 44, No. 2, p. 109.

fictional construct"[12] and even perhaps refers to Simone de Beauvoir's "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman"[13] in that the film acknowledges gendered identity as culturally determined, as will be discussed later. Emilia's feminist affiliations are indeed confirmed by the plot, when she reacts to Vasilis's attraction to her crying. Her speech about the conditional 'equality' imposed on women by patriarchy is dismissed by Vasilis as outmoded and irrelevant feminist discourse. His subsequent injuries (a theme which will be explored in more detail in the next section), I argue, act as a punishment for his disrespectful attitude by the director; at the same time Malea addresses the issue of polemic feminist discourse directly and self-consciously, answering in an amusing way to (mainly male) critics who categorise the director as a feminist, i.e. whose films are about women – in central roles which drive the narrative no less – and their preoccupations, and therefore not of wide appeal or significance.[14]

When Emilia does get a date, Laura and Helena are there to help her with the transformation; and Emilia, despite initial hesitation, goes along with it in order not to jeopardise yet another date. The dress and high heels are the costume that Emilia wears in order to construct herself as a woman; these are the same dress and heels that Laura was wearing in the opening sequence of the film, and Laura reminds her sisters and the audience of the happy memories she has wearing this dress, insinuating how it has helped her seduce Demosthenes. As she is getting ready, Emilia and her sisters adjust and readjust the dress, drawing our attention to the malleability of the fabric and indeed its seeming ability to construct a gendered, that is, more feminine, identity. Although in the first instance Emilia cannot go through with the masquerade, she later proceeds to 'perfect' the costume with noticeably more makeup, jewellery and the appropriate performance of the wide-eyed, vulnerable and sexy young woman (girl?), acting out in front of the mirror the instructions provided by her sisters earlier in the film. The whole scene self-consciously and humourously comments on the potential of

[12] De Lauretis, T. 1984. *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. London: Macmillan. p. 5.
[13] De Beauvoir, S. [1949] 1997. *The Second Sex*. London: Vintage. p. 49.
[14] The director has resisted any such categorisation in many of her interviews, and in a discussion we had in May 2008 she insisted that, although feminist readings of her films may be possible, her intention was certainly not to promote or put forward any polemic feminist argument.

clothing "to reconstruct the wearer's self",[15] therefore upsetting the assumption of the fixity of a gender identity that on surface seems to prevail in the film. What's more, Emilia's laughter – or rather a giggle – at her own performance identifies this given 'womanhood' as strange, alien; how ironic that this identification of the performed, constructed femininity is realised with a stereotypically girly giggle. Quite pointedly then, Emilia's girlishness by necessity comes to the fore, since it is these girlish qualities that are required for the pursuit of a man (boyfriend, partner, husband), as McRobbie notes in her analysis of contemporary postfeminist discourse.[16] The truth is, Emilia is not particularly masculine anyway, making it rather difficult to place gender (roles) precisely at any point in the film. Like her, so are all the other characters vested with both 'masculine' and 'feminine' characteristics in terms of their dress, behaviour or discourse; a cruel joke perhaps by the director on the characters, who involve themselves in a self-defeating game of trying to establish their identity/subjectivity through a concept as elusive, as fluid, as gender.[17]

In various degrees all three sisters become more or less 'visible' as women depending on their predetermined gendered performances, appearances and desires. Equally, each incorporates a stereotypically masculine trait (Emilia and her masculine pursuit of a career, Laura and her muscular-masculine body, and Helena and her lack of commitment to relationships) that they need to battle against for the most part in the film. McRobbie discusses an emerging "postfeminist masquerade as a distinctive modality of prescriptive feminine agency".[18] Not only are women expected to look 'naturally' feminine, but they are encouraged, within a postfeminist context, to take charge and "be actively engaged in the production of self",[19] facilitated as this is by various beauty products and services dedicated almost exclusively to women.[20] Moreover, traditional concepts of domesticity and motherhood are presented as

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[15] Khun, A. 1985. *The Power of the Image: essays on representation and sexuality*. London: Routledge and Keegan Paul. p. 53.
[16] McRobbie, A. 2009. *The Aftermath of Feminism*. London: Sage. p. 24.
[17] Khun, A. 1985. *The Power of the Image: essays on representation and sexuality*. London: Routledge and Keegan Paul. p. 57.
[18] McRobbie, A. 2009. *The Aftermath of Feminism*. London: Sage. p. 59.
[19] *Ibid.* p.60.
[20] Until recently, that is; men have been increasingly included and directly addressed as consumers of the beauty and cosmetics industries.

empowered choices, since they are now actively pursued by women. In the film, Laura is the most versed character in the art of femininity, in opposition to Emilia's lack of such 'knowledge' as discussed previously. Her sexy, red lingerie and revealing, tight dresses neutralise the potentially threatening connotations of her muscular body. In addition, her muscular-masculine physique is countered by her desire for and dedication to marriage, family and motherhood. Her clichéd, compulsive consumption of chocolate[21] provides her with an 'active' replacement of sexual satisfaction and comfort when her patience is tested in the context of her relationship to Demosthenes. Rather ironically, however, these active choices of hers are also shown to incapacitate her, placing her in a perpetual waiting game for Demosthenes – the sufficiently older and professionally established man – who promises to fulfill her dreams. More importantly, Demosthenes' status as the reliable, potent and therefore desired 'patriarch' is undermined in a series of comic scenes in the film, as his existing marriage is ailing and his virility is compromised by a weak heart and a funny fixation on collecting and smelling women's underwear.

Laura's gendered identity, her 'natural' femininity, however, is attacked on two fronts: her physique, her muscular body itself, as well as her more stereotypically feminine costuming of this body, both require a lot of work; the idea of 'building', of construction, as opposed to naturalness, is present here, too, and the idea that the heroine appears and is accepted as more natural when she *performs* femininity is exposed, quashed by the director, who draws attention to the characters' (conscious) investment of money and labour in acquiring their looks. In postfeminist, and new capitalist, terms, the acknowledgement of such 'work' and, at the same time, the denial of its existence have resulted in a double-voiced discourse where female/feminine beauty "is understood as at once "glamorous" and "natural" – in other words as both constructed and unconstructed". Virginia Wright Wexman continues:

> This contradiction grows out of the dual role assigned to women; as consumers they are urged to expend money in their pursuit of beauty (i.e. to construct their appearance), yet as objects of sexual desire, they are

[21] This is also a reminder of Maritsa (the widow, hence sexually deprived, friend) and her comical, compulsive consumption of chocolate biscuits in Malea`s earlier film *The Cow`s Orgasm*.

> encouraged to deny this expenditure (i.e. to present the results as unconstructed).[22]

The ideas of (body) construction and building, associated with an underlying base, a skeleton, are countered by Laura's body filmed as a reflective surface of gendered characteristics (masculine-feminine) conventionally in conflict. Whether dressed or nude, Laura's body is on display: when she is working, swimming, showering or having sex; in her lingerie, in tight-fitting training outfits or dresses, the camera isolates and puts in view parts of her body. Sensual shots within the context of the film, though, reveal sexual desire "as a cultural construct shaped by a social agenda that is built around material interests and relations of power",[23] still within a predominant patriarchal and capitalist system. Moreover, the film remains insistent on a postfeminist tone, which would dictate that the 'threat' of masculine traits on women (either in terms of behaviour or appearance or both) be 'neutralised' through the use of excessively feminine qualities (a practice pointed out by Tasker and Negra). The conscious demonstration of such performative acts and the severance of body parts from the whole by the director's framing further problematise gender and its importance in the creation of subjectivity; and instead of a 'natural' quality, gender as a category is thus presented as firmly rooted in socio-cultural contexts.

While Emilia's feminine appearance, but more masculine pursuits (career) are countered by Laura's masculinised body, but conventionally feminine desires (family), Helena, the youngest, is placed somewhere in the middle, or more correctly outside this binary schema. She wants neither a career nor a family; she indulges in a more open approach to sexuality, rather than 'containing' her desire in heterosexuality (and the commitment that comes with it). She incorporates and exaggerates both masculine and feminine markers, wearing noticeable amounts of make-up, but also short, bleached hair, boots, colourful trousers and t-shirts, much like her boy-friend, Johnny (Sotiris Skantzikas); several times in the film, the two look very much alike and a selection of close shots demonstrates this conscious blurring of gender features. Helena's image reflects her convictions: she claims to aspire to a liberal, socially aware

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[22] Wright Wexman, V. 1993. *Creating the Couple: Love, Marriage and Hollywood Performance*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. p.141-142.
[23] *Ibid.* p. 222.

ideology; however, her fight for worthy causes is carried out through wreaking havoc in order to have fun, rather than raising awareness or purposely disrupting the establishment. As with both her sisters and their convictions, the film remains skeptical and unconvinced about Helena's, and by extension the younger generation's, commitment to socio-political agendas and causes. Although the audience is encouraged to relish the rebellious attitudes and active rejection of all things 'old' by these young people, the context provided demonstrates how devoid of substance and meaning these actions actually are. Helena and a company of friends – pointedly only females – get arrested by an all-male police force when in a demonstration against GM foods; but the issue, the cause itself is unimportant and seems to only provide the opportunity for them to express their anger, resistance and rebellion against authority. This act may have its merits in itself, but the background emphasises this group's affluence of time and resources, as opposed to other people's attempts and angrily expressed need to get to work without disruptions. Hence, the 'politics' of, or in, the scene seem to disappear under an amusing police arrest sequence, to be replaced by another gender power-play, this time between Helena and Christos (Kostas Krommydas). As much as Christos is determined to "tame this wild babe", as he says, Helena is equally determined to resist. Christos's actions and vocabulary are informed by a stereotypical macho mentality that he feels he needs to display; Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* reference is not lost here, especially in terms of the didactic (and patronising) tone assumed by Christos, who apparently knows best what Elena – and every woman – really wants or why she behaves the way she does. In simple terms, she has to be convinced, to be made to understand, that her lifestyle is not an active choice, but rather a reaction, as Christos patiently explains, to her fear of accepting her role as a woman. I am paraphrasing some of the dialogue here, which is steeped in irony but spoken in earnest by the character, about the proposed appropriate concerns for a woman: nothing past the personal. His role is to 'empower' her, enabling an understanding and embracing of womanhood.

Helena does succumb for a while to the promised pleasures of femininity, despite the fact that she initially proclaims how pleased she is with her life and the independence her alternative lifestyle guarantees. Christos repeatedly advises her to

"not be afraid to be a woman" and compliments her on her choices of short dresses and high heels. Her potential career as a designer and artist are too readily abandoned for the security of marriage and an assisting role in Christos's dreams of his own business; and fulfillment is once again promised through motherhood. It is interesting to note that Helena feels she first needs to destroy her design projects and redecorate her room into a more somber space in order to be able to proceed with her marriage and family plans with Christos; an action that is particularly charged, connoting that she has to make a choice between the two rather than maintain both. This reality of her actions perhaps also portrays the supposed security a more traditional choice provides for women, as opposed to the rather insecure professional arena. Malea, however, compromises these utterances and actions through the revelation of Christos's ambivalent sexuality, despite the self-professed masculinity which is positively assisted by the macho police uniform (there is, typically for Malea, a double edge to this, given the status of police uniforms in gay iconography).

In one way or another, all three sisters show anxiety about their status and roles within relationships, and recognition that perhaps their empowered, emancipated position "impacts on their [women's] negotiation of heterosexuality and potentially detracts from their desirability".[24] Adopting femininity (in a feminist or postfeminist sense) as a conscious masquerade provides reassurance that they are not forfeiting male desire.

Although the explorations of the performativity of gender revolve mostly around women and femininity, the men in the story also find themselves trapped in the 'mating' game, as they have their own roles to perform and behaviours to uphold. For example, both Emilia and Dimitris (Sokratis Alafouzos), when they finally meet for dinner, feel compelled to put on a performance. Both characters are represented as insecure in their own skin, layering their identities (whatever those are) with predetermined gestures and patterns of behaviour stereotypically associated with femininity or masculinity. Emilia's mimicking of another woman and Dimitris's serving the phallically shaped hors d'oeuvres (a close-up emphasises the significance of what

[24] McRobbie, 2009. *The Aftermath of Feminism*. London: Sage. p. 66.

goes on the plate and how the action follows the rhythm of what Dimitris says) are overlaid with their conscious recitation of the rules, the 'musts' of 'real' manliness and womanliness. According to these rules, a man is strong, confident and effective, decisively taking charge of any situation, like Dimitris takes charge of making Emilia's plate, or looks at her intensely and disarmingly in the eyes. Conversely, a woman must be dumb, weak and sexy, leaving initiative and responsibility to men, like Emilia does when trusting Dimitris to choose her dinner, or in conversation avoids expressing her opinion while asking for his. Despite their best efforts, neither of the two can maintain their performances for too long, but "in accordance with the narrative trope of gender role reversal, the heroine often makes the first move, acting upon her own desire".[25] Emilia, in the course of the first date, feels secure enough to remove her bandage (more on which in the section that follows) and advance her sexual desire, while Dimitris feels threatened by the seeming lack of commitment and refuses to play to Emilia's (sexual) games and give in. In keeping with romantic comedy conventions, the potential couple meets several obstacles to their union, and themselves resist being a couple until the end; at the same time, a recognition of the inevitability of the union is encouraged here because the two characters complete each other so obviously and are resistant to the stereotypes of their gender in very much the same way. Apart from the obviously comic acts (the funny cough because of the makeup that has to be removed, significantly with the bandage, and Dimitris's jittery response to Emilia's hand in his shirt), this suggested inversion of roles is rather ironic in identifying that the characters can only re-define themselves by performing the stereotype in reverse. The film, then, appears to remain faithful to the generic requirements of the romantic comedy by providing a heterosexual couple; this reversal of roles, however, becomes more decidedly derisive of the (patriarchal) convention of the heterosexual couple, in the context of all the other 'revisions' and extensions of the norm executed by all the other couples (and co) in the film. For instance, Tasos (the younger man) marries Laura (the older woman), Demosthenes (the settled married man) seeks confirmation of his sexual prowess by his various mistresses, Christos acquires a new girlfriend (*and* a new secret

[25] Glitre, K. 2006. *Hollywood Romantic Comedy: States of the Union 1934-65*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press. p. 61.

boyfriend), and all these younger characters' mothers share an ambiguous relationship with their painting teacher (a very ambiguous person himself), and so on. Still, the film does end with a wedding (which will be explored in more detail further down) and the required heteronormative tone. Finally, the consciousness of the performance of gender, by actors and characters alike, becomes a rather interesting source for comedy in highlighting the ideological contradictions surrounding the concept of the couple.

Whether socially, culturally and ideologically prescribed or actively and independently sought-out, the film exposes the tensions around the constructedness of this costuming of gender. However, it does not appear to take either a feminist or a postfeminist stance: the performative processes outlined above can be read as simply 'odd', alien for comic effect, or it can be argued that they perform a political commentary in exposing the artificiality of gender. The comedy therefore cannot be separated from the politics because they both are delivered by the same performative attitudes.

In Style

As well as the performative characterisations, the highly stylised mise-en-scène of interior spaces – in contrast to the unstructured cityscape– also underpins the constructedness of gender. One of the main themes in the film is exactly the creation of images – as represented through the paintings of the Filipino maids by the older wives and mothers, Laura's photographs taken by husband-to-be Tasos (Aleksandros Bourdoumis), Helena's artwork, and even the interior décor with its clean lines and immaculate surfaces that appear to have 'jumped' out of design magazines. These operate in the same fashion as the aforementioned women's magazines, whose tips also 'jump' out of the page through the characters' actions, selling a contemporary lifestyle to a specific audience: young, professional, urban. By placing the action within highly structured and suggestive settings, the director manages to further denaturalise the notion of gender and reveal its artifice. Moreover, images not only serve as background, but interfere with the narrative by being inserted into the plot, as in the case of the 'doctored' picture which changes the course of the narrative. Helena and

Emilia decide that the only way Laura will let go of her relationship with Demosthenes is if she gets to think he is gay; a photo of hers with Demosthenes is used to achieve the desired result of breaking that relationship, which 'liberates' Laura and leads to the final scene of her wedding to Tasos.

The importance of image and image-making becomes obvious from the very beginning, when our view of the main characters shifts towards a set of paintings that prove to be more significant than a simple display of the harmless – and expensive – hobby for the older generation of women in the film. The content of these paintings/portraits is highly significant, as they present Filipino maids at work as this is observed by their employers, or more accurately, by their employers' wives. This is a doubly mediated imagery, juxtaposed with the more direct view of these minor characters through the director's camera. More than once, there is almost a seamless passage, effected with a camera pan or a zoom-out to a wider frame, between the Filipino maids serving drinks and canapés at the exhibition gallery to the paintings showing exactly this action; and on yet another representational level, characters, models and artwork all pose within the same photographic frame (a freeze-frame on our screens) in front of a camera. On another occasion, the maids are trying to cook while posing for their employers, who are trying to put on canvas this domestic scene; this is a comical sequence of the Filipino maids, who have to perform their duties while standing still. The director builds many such sequences into the story, disrupting thus the main narrative and criticising rather caustically the preoccupations of the main female characters with romance and their roles in it. In addition, by focusing equally on the process of the image-making as well as the content of the image itself, she comments on and exposes the constructedness of the main characters' 'reality'. This specific instance of dialogue between content and form acts as a reminder of the tension between feminist and postfeminist discourse in the film and the social and geographical inconsistencies of the postfeminist idea; (construction of) image and style is for those who can afford it, namely rich women in the West – or aspiring to the Western ideal in the case of Greece, a country liminally existing between ideological East and West, a 'battle' which is enacted between richer urban environments and

poorer, peripheral rural settings.[26] Interestingly, the communication between maids and their employers happens in English (or 'Greeklish'), another sign of the *nouveau-riche* aspirations of the urban, educated élite; English is not just the language postfeminist discourse mainly belongs to, but also the language of late 20th century globalised capitalism and economic migration.

Tasos's photographs of Laura – the character most on display – are another instance when the method of making, rather than presenting, the image is explored. As was the case with the Filipino maids and their reality observed through and mediated by an artistic form, so are Laura's desire and desirability mediated by the photographic lens. On several occasions we see Tasos taking photos of Laura; for instance at the gym, when Laura is trying to work. Her constant movement disrupts the creation of the portrait that Tasos attempts, and in symbolic terms her movement, her activity disrupts the stillness and passivity that the posing for the photo requires, again in a process analogous to the tensions in painting the maids as they try to carry on working. This active/passive dichotomy and the man with a camera pointed at a woman-model expose the workings of the male gaze as postulated by feminist film theory. The fact that we do not get to see the photos Tasos takes places the emphasis quite literally on the image-making process. Laura eventually succumbs to his persistent invitations and poses for him at his studio; and it is only when he manages to construct and capture the image that he wants of her, that their relationship is able to progress. The question whether he has fallen in love with the woman herself or her representation, which he composes, is raised by the film, itself fascinated by methods of representation and image reproduction. However, the director resists Laura's objectification by not showing the photos Tasos takes; instead, Malea shifts the authorial power back to her own camera, thus ultimately denying Tasos's agency in constructing the image.

These image-making processes are extended to the setting itself. Power-struggles (literal or metaphorical) amongst the characters take place in highly suggestive interior spaces, which are stylised, designed and contemporary, in clean, straight lines. The mise-en-scène reminds the spectator of the cycle of Hollywood sex comedy of the

[26] This is reflected in Malea's films set in rural or urban locations.

1950s and early 1960s (also a period of consumerist boom) which, as Glitre notes, "frequently makes such use of consumer industries and products as plot material",[27] in another nod by the director to the generic conventions she playfully undercuts. The house Emilia, Laura and Helena share is spacious, modern and all-female; it even provides the workshop where the older women often meet to paint. The characters are only ever seen together in the common rooms like the kitchen or the living room. These spaces are always tidy and clean, rather than giving the impression of lived-in areas. The décor further enhances the feel of a showroom, rather than a home; yet this still reflects the fact that home design (as proposed by various contemporary publications) is still primarily targeted at women as homemakers, thus charging even this seemingly neutral space with gendered qualities. In addition, this regimented mise-en-scène points towards the way the characters perceive contemporary domesticity and are indeed influenced by notions of domesticity steeped in consumer culture. The importance of this stylised décor is highlighted by the attention the camera pays to it. For instance, more than once the camera lingers on the decoration on top of the sisters' table: the row of perfectly green, perfectly round apples leading to the end of the table where the characters are sitting, discussing their relationship troubles (the scene outlined in more detail at the opening of this chapter); or the equally perfectly lined set of green bottles of a Greek natural mineral water brand with a single red rose in each, a motif which is carried over to Dimitris's office wall decorated with the roses Emilia sends to him each day, reinforcing associations of romance with consumerism. But romance is not to be bought 'off the shelf'. The backdrop for most romantic encounters in the film is, in fact, the city under construction. Despite the fact that there are myriad iconic and stereotypically national settings in Athens that would lend themselves to conventionally romantic scenes, none of them is selected by the characters, or the director. Instead, Emilia and Dimitris, for example, park their car under a half-finished bridge, or have dinner in a restaurant with a view of an open hole in the ground, surrounded by warning signs and protective cones. Helena exits her house and navigates through another set of building-and road-works to meet Christos,

[27] Glitre, K. 2006. *Hollywood Romantic Comedy: States of the Union 1934-65*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press. p. 34.

who escorts her to the hospital. The fixation of the camera on spaces under construction counteracts romantic notions of idyllic settings, kills off the romantic mood and underlines, or rather ironises the constructedness of such moments.

The most personalised space in the girls' house is Helena's room. She takes charge of the design, shaping the space and decoration to reflect her personality. Significantly in this context, when she decides to get married and have a child with Christos, her idea of growing up and getting serious means first of all destroying her designs and sobering up her room, as noted above; her action suggests that it is the space that needs to inform her identity, rather than the other way around. In a similar fashion, setting and décor reflect and inform all the characters' identities and behaviour. Emilia is very much associated with her office space, which is strict and perfectly ordered, with a controlled colour scheme of grays and blacks and added statement splashes of yellow; this is in line with the rest of the metallic, harsh but confident and ultra-modern design of the office building where she works. Her character is informed by the same control and confidence; when she moves to other settings, however, she is not always successful, and these traits seem out of place – her confidence is perceived as aggressiveness by Dimitris when the two make out in his car. So the shapeless, under-construction city not only contradicts established notions of romance, as previously demonstrated, but also alienates Emilia's environment-shaped character as incongruous to the surrounding space, whilst at the same time being unfit for her attempts at femininity. On the other hand, the disorderly and full-of-boxes little flat that Laura shares with Demosthenes visually reflects Laura's emotional state of incompleteness, within a relationship in limbo. Laura herself complains about "living out of boxes for years"; the shared space with Demosthenes stands in opposition to the ordered house Laura shares with her sisters or even the stylish shower room where she attempts to understand and deal with her disappointment and sexual frustration caused by Demosthenes. The stereotypically female/feminine urge to homemaking and the male/masculine resistance to it gender this environment, pointing at the same time at the constructedness of such concepts and their dependence on consumer products, rather than 'real' emotions.

Other interior, but less private, spaces, like the restaurants and bars the characters regularly visit also exemplify the narrative interest in image-making and design, and the general glossiness of the film relates to consumerism and places emphasis on the extra-textual designer-living promoted in Greece – mainly Greek cities – by the end of the 1990s. Newly acquired wealth by young professionals created the 'need' or rather demand for this type of consumer culture, for demonstrating affluence through designer homes, or by frequenting stylish restaurants and bars etc. At the same time, the director in an interview has noted her intention to juxtapose "people's excessive need to control a space, a situation within a chaotic era", characterised by constant re-construction, noise, confusion.[28] Furthermore, sites such as these become key, not only because they point to the artificiality and constructedness of gendered identities, as was previously argued, but also because they are the settings where often ideological statements and beliefs are explored, discussed, debated by the characters; on one occasion for example, Demosthenes imparts his knowledge to a younger Pericles (Haris Mavroudis) on how women are consumed by the single thought of entrapping men in marriage. His lecturing, however, is proven unsound and is mocked by being placed against the viewers' previous knowledge of his ineffectiveness both as a husband and as a lover. And on other occasions, romantic dinners or breakfasts are shared in these designed interior spaces by the couples in search of their suitable roles, identities and companions. However, in the generic context of sex comedy, "more often than not, romance is associated with the artifice of seduction, in opposition to the 'naturalness' of 'true' love. Seduction and romance are revealed to be based upon manipulation and commodification",[29] as was the case in Dimitris's and Emilia's romantic dinner explored above; or even more obviously between Helena and Christos in all their encounters and attempts at becoming a couple.

These immaculate interior spaces inhabited by the couples are not only disrupted from the outside, but from within, through the visual motif of bandages, which feature throughout the film, with all main characters (men and women) finding themselves

[28] Zoumboulakis, G. 'Olga Malea: the discreet charm of success', *Cinema*, Issue 97, January 1999. p. 74. My translation.
[29] Glitre, K. 2006. *Hollywood Romantic Comedy: States of the Union 1934-65*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press. p. 35.

injured at key points in the narrative, thus becoming a symbolic representation of lack; an issue which the genre requires to be addressed and remedied at the end of the film. Despite their best efforts to articulate concrete identities and coherent/consistent-to-their-gender desires, the characters find themselves 'vulnerable' within these excessively gendered (and artificial) environments. As was proposed above, Emilia's 'vulnerability' stems mainly from her insecurity about her own identity as a woman, and is visually represented by the bandage around her strained wrist, which is incongruous with her stylised image, underlining the dress she is wearing at her date with Dimitris more as a costume and alluding towards a fetishistic view of 'woman as vulnerable'. Emilia acquires her injury when she tries to control her confident flirting with Dimitris at the hospital, where she visits her injured sisters. The bandage is symbolically removed when she 'drops the act' of passive femininity and acts on her desires. Once her 'authentic' identity is on show (significantly the disguising make-up is also removed with the bandage as was noted earlier), the formation of the couple is finally rendered possible.

Laura and Helena's injuries are also a result of attempted romance. Laura strains her ankle when she refuses Tasos's help at the gym; and Tasos is the one who removes her bandages when she decides to break free from her unsatisfying relationship with Demosthenes, that is, from the unsatisfying and restrictive model of the 'proper' heterosexual couple. Helena sustains injuries during her arrest by the police at a demonstration. The same police officer she holds responsible for the injury, Christos, is the one that tends to her recovery; Helena gets better and almost simultaneously enters a relationship with Christos. Bandages are removed when couples are formed, remedying the proposed lack of partner, which in turn is what has been troubling the characters the most throughout the film.

The men are not immune to such injuries either. As was noted earlier, Vasilis breaks both his arms when he falls off a cliff after insulting Emilia about her old-fashioned, boring feminist convictions. Their argument is moved from the idyllic natural space of the woods where they had been playing paintball to a construction site at the edge of a cliff. After he disappears from the frame, the camera ironically lingers for a few seconds on the warning danger signs that mark the approach to the cliff.

Demosthenes breaks his leg by slipping on the brush with which Laura 'cheats on him'; his injury appears as a punishment to his false accusations of Laura being unfaithful, therefore transferring the responsibility for a failing, unsatisfying relationship from him to Laura. Johnny, Helena's non-committing boy-friend, sustains head injuries (like Helena in previous sequences) when he tries to sneak away from Helena's room after coming in to spy on her; when he realises she is with another man (his girlfriend's brother), he falls. The manner by which the men get injured and the injuries themselves are significant, highlighting 'mating' as a dangerous game, and these men as inappropriate partners to the three sisters. The three men collectively make up an almost complete male body injured and ailing because of its/their association with heavily critiqued (not least by the film itself) models of masculinity. While the women's bandages are removed when they directly confront their desire and leave previous relationships behind, the men are covered with theirs when they lose control of their relationships with these same women.

Finally, the bandage becomes a symbol of an ailing patriarchy, in the way Helena wraps/bandages mechanical equipment at the construction site where Laura's wedding takes place. Throughout the film, the city itself – littered with construction sites and machinery associated with men – is presented as injured. Gender identities and 'authentic' desires are sought within compromised spaces, or spaces that celebrate their own artificiality, disguising underlying and unstable structures with stylishly decorated surfaces – in the same fashion that the characters 'dress' their various roles.

This tension between surface/image and underlying structure further demonstrates what lies beneath the postfeminist masquerade. Perhaps here is where the ambivalence of the film is actually resolved. Malea/the film appears to be going back and forth, undecided of her/its feminist or postfeminist standpoint. But symbolic representations of the 'new order' of things (women's emancipation, their access to active choices in life, career and ultimately relationships, the dismissal of gender politics) are undermined and undercut by the exposure of underlying constructions, which act as representations of patriarchy. The association of the fathers (old, patriarchy) with the construction sites around the city (they are structural engineers) is not accidental; even if they are very much characters in the background, their presence acts as a reminder of

their association with and support of this seemingly new order. Maybe Malea's statement is, then, more forceful than initially perceived. The film ending with a wedding on a construction site could not be more skeptical within the context of this reading. Postfeminist enactment and celebration of individuality and sanctioned consumerism of gender identities/subjectivities are revealed to still stand on traditional patriarchal structures, or be set against a background of patriarchal constructs.

Indeed, true to its genre, the film ends with a wedding. However, the generic cliché does not quite accomplish the neat resolution usually expected in comedies.[30] Operating as a 'minor' tactic, it rather provides more of a cynical stop to the story that seemingly leads nowhere, and the convention is subverted from within; we have seen the characters questioning, expressing disappointment and frustration, exploring (identity/sexuality) and on occasion rebelling against the restrictive gender roles ascribed to them. However, they all still navigate through a limited, albeit revised to a certain extent, set of stereotypes. On the other hand, I cannot help but notice not only a rather intense cynicism, but also acute irony in the way the final event is staged; a staging which is self-conscious in the way the wedding ceremony draws attention to itself as a generic convention, and thus resists any confirmation or re-establishment of the institutional (patriarchal) status quo, often an argument put forward in relation to a comedy's resolution. The big event gathers everyone together at the end, despite their differences, or the changes that everyone has undergone. Everyone's story has to be put on hold in order to celebrate the constitution of the couple. All the characters – and several extras – gather in an otherwise barren landscape, but for a central scaffolding structure. The dialogue informs that we should perceive this as the culmination of Helena's talent in art and design and her offering towards her sister's wedding. The wrapped up machinery from the nearby construction site (apart from being charged with symbolic significance as discussed earlier) provides some concealed areas and hence ample opportunities for some of the characters to sneak away from the crowd; in these cases the camera leaves the main event and exposes

[30] Indeed, as James MacDowell observes, film endings are rarely as neat as generic conventions imply. See MacDowell, J. 2013. *Happy Endings in Hollywood Cinema: Cliché, Convention and the Final Couple*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

what is meant to be a secret. In a similar fashion to *The Cow's Orgasm*, the camera finds and isolates secret signaling between characters, which 'disrupts' the heteronormative quality of the event with the assertion of homosexuality: Christos and Pericles, it seems, have maintained (sexual) contact after their first indiscretion that ended Helena's and Christos's plans to get married.

Finally, the 'mating' between Laura and Tasos is not quite the conventional one, considering that the bride is proudly and revealingly pregnant in her tight dress and the groom is a younger man, an artist by profession (photographer) and not quite sure whether *he* is the father of the unborn baby; this further destabilises the conventional happy ending and any assumptions or generic expectations about a dénouement with, or even the existence of, the ideal couple, as established within patriarchal society. Moreover, the synchronised talk by the older generation of characters (mothers and fathers) adds to the comic value of the situation with extra emphasis on artificiality. It transpires that the ultimate event in the film is not actually the wedding itself, but within this context the announcement of a trip to India by the mothers/painters with their teacher. The older generation, although not an active part in the plot, has been ever-present in the film: the fathers exist in the background, symbolically present in the fragmentary construction sites around the city, as a reminder of the patriarchal rule; the mothers appear more often and are each time involved in painting images that observe the domestic reality of their class. They are often the ones who observe, know of, and comment on other characters' actions, without, however, themselves being part of the 'mating game', operating in some respects rather like a chorus, alongside their Filipino maids. It is this outsider position perhaps that allows them the freedom to depart at the end.

There is in the film a complex interrelation between feminist and postfeminist discourses and how these are articulated and performed by the characters. In her discussion on revived forms of 'chick flicks' and in particular the film *Down With Love* (Reed, 2003), Roberta Garrett notes:

> The gains achieved by second wave feminism – such as increased education and career opportunities for Western women – are integrated into the film's logic of female aspiration and independence, but their hard won historical

> and political struggle is erased from the film's light, playful treatment of gender/power struggles.[31]

In a similar way, I believe, *The Mating Game* treats the aspirations of the three main female characters as individual character or identity traits that do not seem to be shared by the majority of the other women represented in the film. The giggly, submissive, sexually liberated, mostly blonde characters that fill the background of the paintball scenes, or those sequences set in public spaces like restaurants and bars do not have these concerns; and the mothers and Filipino maids, because of age or economics respectively are outside 'the game'. Yet, unlike *Down With* Love, there are instances where Malea's film undercuts the postfeminist playfulness around the characters' rather conventional gender troubles with a foregrounding of arguments from feminist criticism and thought around gender equality on a professional and personal level (with an equally playful manner). This bears another criticism that might be directed towards the film, which tries to articulate various positions, without managing to achieve any depth or finality about any of them. As Glitre notes, in sex comedy this opposition "between artificial image and 'authentic' identity is not always resolved decidedly […] and on occasion the cycle demonstrates a postmodern awareness of the social construction of gender and sexual identities".[32]

Ultimately, though (or primarily, depending on how one looks at it), the clue to the film's agenda may lie in its title. In its English translation, *The Mating Game*, the word 'game' is particularly important; for games have rules and rules are constructs. The film and the performances are 'played' by one set of rules, only for these to be contested by another. This is consistent with the director's approach in her earlier film, where she deconstructs the rules she had initially established. In addition, the Greek title back-translates as *The Discreet Charm of Men* (or the *male sex*, as it is translated in the film's English subtitles when the title becomes one of Emilia's lines), alluding to Buñuel's film

[31] Garrett, R. 2007. *Postmodern Chick Flicks: the return of the woman's film.* London: Palgrave Macmillan. p. 10.
[32] Glitre, K. 2006. *Hollywood Romantic Comedy: States of the Union 1934-65.* Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press. p. 35.

The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie (*Le charme discret de la bourgeoisie*, 1972).[33] Although completely different in many respects – in terms of quality, thematic concerns, style – I believe the films are similar in their critical, unsympathetic and unforgiving attitude towards their characters. Using a variety of comedic devices as its strategy, Malea's film is determinedly ironic towards its characters and their shallowness (and in turn towards postfeminism and its links to bourgeois capitalism and consumerism), effectively revealing their inability to divest gender stereotypes, steeped in traditional patriarchal forms expressed with a different façade. The 'active' desires of the main female characters are the ones that seemingly initiate change when they are recognised and acted upon. Emilia, Laura and Helena appear empowered and secure in their liberated choices, especially in relation to the other characters. Moreover, these choices are suitably contemporary to the times. This celebratory state of change, however, is deemed deceptive and is undercut by the director's closer attention to the structure rather than the surface. The wedding, the happiness, the successful selection of the desired romantic partner (rather than the conventionally ideal), in other words the freedom of choice, appear as a re-worked embellishment to the stable framework of social patriarchal establishment, as represented by the city under construction.

Finally, the ironic tone, the unreliability of a narrator/camera that ostensibly engages in one set of narrative discourses whilst simultaneously undermining them, and the trivialisation of the characters' concerns, combined with the generic form of comedy, all undermine or are critical of the proposed postfeminist discourse. "Indeed – far from a 'motivated' resolution to the conflict – Hollywood romantic comedy often draws attention to the gap between reality and fiction by embracing artifice."[34] Similarly, this film remains irresolute in dealing with the ideological conflicts it tackles. The final freeze-frame of the Filipino maids laughing – now in the flesh rather than seen through a painting – seems at first glance to provide the final ideologically fixed position in the

[33] Although *The Mating Game* has been mostly associated with a style similar to Almodóvar's, Malea has noted in an interview with Yiannis Zoumboulakis (1999) that Buñuel (as well as Fellini and Bergman) have been more influential in her work.
[34] Glitre, K. 2006. *Hollywood Romantic Comedy: States of the Union 1934-65*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press. p. 16.

film, in direct opposition to the volatility of all other social, cultural and ideological concepts and propositions. The act of laughter itself however – indeed the last laugh in the film – functions as the final subversive statement of the film's generic self-consciousness and ideological self-criticism.

CHAPTER FOUR

Uncovered: *Risotto*, style and the postfeminist Greek mother

The preceding two chapters of this thesis dealt, respectively, with Olga Malea's use of comedic structures in articulating a feminist critique of rigid patriarchal structures in rural Greece; and with the director's appropriation of postfeminist discursive practices to question the very positions advanced by postfeminist discourse. The present chapter is divided in three sections, and claims that Malea's authorial voice, expressed in her stylistic signature and in her narrative choices, plays an important part in her continued interrogation of gender roles and identities in contemporary Greece. Analysing the director's third film, *Risotto* (2000), it assesses the way her conscious image-making extends her criticism towards unproblematised images (and imaginings) of women as successful working mothers. At the same time, the narrative of the film dismisses outright the postfeminist retreatist position which was briefly entertained by Helena's character in *The Mating Game*. The characters in this film are at a further stage in their lives than in the previous two features: they live in the city, they have found their partners, and they have good jobs – there is no question of giving them up. Crucially, though, they also have children.

Risotto opens with a question that reflects a contemporary debate about the changed roles of men and women in the family: "have roles changed in the family today?". The question is posed to people in the street in the opening sequence of the film in the form of a survey – it is not clear who is conducting this survey and for what purpose at this point, but some media involvement can be assumed, as there is a camera there (coinciding with Malea's camera) that a pollster addresses. The characters blend into the crowd – made up of actors, camera crew and Olga Malea herself with Manina Zoumboulaki, the co-scriptwriter – that the camera records in a shaky, 'realist' on-the-spot fashion. There is traffic, most people are in a hurry and caught in their everyday routines – shopping, going to work, waiting for the bus, taking the children to school... The handheld camera and the jagged, fast-paced editing, reflect the rhythms of the city of Athens at the turn of the 21st century. Space and time are established

clearly from the beginning: a character's call to a taxi and a close-up of a magazine's cover that praises talent in Greece in the year 2000 effectively position the viewer in the contemporary urban environment. The imagery decorating the city is predominantly that of nude or semi-nude female models: posters on billboards, magazine covers, advertising on buses and bus stops. These bodies, or carefully selected parts of them, advertise everything from weight loss clinics to cigarettes and denim jackets (a branded ad for Americanino Jeans, of a woman's bottom in giant proportions, features in key scenes several times in the film); they co-exist with those more 'serious' articles in magazines and newspapers hanging in plethora on and around the multiple kiosks caught by the camera, which lingers for a while on this feature article titled 'My First Time' about six new politicians running for the first time at the general election that year. Images and words are not only over-sexualised, but also excessively present: Malea's camera picks out and indeed highlights this sensual and sensorial overload. In the middle of all this, the male reporter's voice is heard incessantly asking the above question to men and women rushing by. The responses of the ordinary (sounding and looking) women – and a few men – are juxtaposed with the surrounding nude representations of young female bodies: "he doesn't cook or clean or wash, but I have a feeling he helps around the house", a woman says, loaded with her grocery shopping; a couple states that the division of labour *is equal*, in the 60%-40% region – or rather 70%-30% according to the male partner who states half-jokingly that he would not give in further. Although some of the main characters are 'caught' in the scene, their opinions are not yet heard. At the end of the sequence, Kyria Chrysa (Eleni Gerasimidou), the nanny for one of the families in the film, responds to the survey by returning the question to the young pollster and asking whether he is married. When he admits he is not married, she points out that if he was, he would perhaps not have to ask this question in the first place; the implication is that, in reality, not much has changed in family life and that only a man would ask such a question. While politely dismissing his attempts to get a definitive answer from her, however, she also points towards a problem, a lived reality that cannot be easily or clearly expressed. This difficulty in articulating whether gender roles have changed, and how, but also the difficulty in articulating the differences between these gender roles, is carried throughout the film.

Of mothers and friends

Gender roles, and more specifically the place and role of women within a modern environment, are topics already explored in Olga Malea's previous film *The Mating Game*. In *Risotto* these concerns resurface not just with regards to women's experience of modern life and relationships, but also in terms of women's experience of marriage and motherhood within a modern – urban – context, which poses expectations that often conflict with the more traditional values and enforced formations of the family that still persist. In this respect, once again the prevalent discourse of the film at first appears to be that of postfeminism, in which women's traditional roles are (re)introduced as active choices; Diane Negra discusses the phenomenon of retreatism in women's roles and life 'choices' at the end of the 20th and beginning of 21st century, and proposes that postfeminism re-introduces traditional roles as modern, active choices made by women who are liberated, quite importantly, from constrictive feminist demands.[1] The director and the film observe a real dilemma contemporary Greek women face – and I would say contemporary women generally, at least in the West – in assuming roles informed by both tradition and modernity. *Risotto* is the film in Malea's body of work in which this conflict and its broader ramifications for gender relations is the most forcefully examined. Unlike in *The Mating Game*, conflict is most prominently manifest in family life – while legislation and public roles may have changed, traditional structures within the family have remained. Just like in *The Mating Game*, the feminist project is not fully achieved, but there is an assumption that women are in an era of postfeminist abundance of choice. Career, marriage, motherhood, friendship and sexuality are all areas that are being explored and where these tensions also reside; all questions that Eugenia (Anna Mascha) and Vicky (Dimitra Matsouka) seek answers to; and all subjects that have been extensively considered by both feminist and postfeminist theory and criticism.

Yet, despite the obvious tensions (and dialogue) between feminism and postfeminism that the film attempts to negotiate, feminist discourse never plays an ostensive part; the few times that feminism is mentioned, it is bypassed quickly without

[1] Negra, D. 2009. *What a Girl Wants?*. London and New York: Routledge.

any response by the main female characters. For instance, when Vicky listens to a male colleague's advice who urges her to return home and ignore Manolis's infidelity; his question about whether she wants to "play feminist" is only a rhetorical one, delivered in a rather dismissive tone, using a rude distortion of the word (*fe<u>mouni</u>stria*, rather than *feministria*) to allude to the Greek word for 'cunt'.[2] This colleague however is stereotypically marked as gay through his exaggerated camp performance; his profession (he is a make-up artist/stylist in the fashion industry) is one which is often portrayed as non-masculine or effeminate in popular culture and the whole characterisation ensemble is often a staple of the comedy genre. This makes him an ambivalent voice in terms of gender politics, and the 'advice' (and his rudeness) is unconvincing – or at least needs to be taken with some scepticism. Vicky does not respond to his remark. She is only interested in the fact that her husband cheated and she does not want to live with him any longer. However, her silence can perhaps be read not only as a dismissal of the proposition – feminist politics is beside the point in the narrative; it can also be read as an act of resistance in extra-textual terms. The director/the film do not seem able to overtly reject the importance of feminist politics here in such a facile manner, in response to those traditionalist, and postfeminist retreatist, views on a woman's role in prioritising the harmony of her family, rather than her own contentment, pride and self-respect.

The second time a direct reference is made to feminism is when Manolis (Konstantinos Markoulakis) and Phillipos (Kleon Grigoriadis) discuss their predicament (Eugenia and Vicky have decided to move in together, an important turn in the narrative that will be explored in more detail later on in this chapter). As a father passes them with his two children – no wife at his side – Phillipos comments with frustration that because of feminism this is the model of a man that contemporary women are looking for. In the opening sequence of the poll, viewers had been informed that this is a father who takes care of the children while his wife is finishing her Master's degree in the USA. And while this secondary character declares this with pride, Manolis does not accept that this is a plausible model of masculinity, because clearly, he says, this is an unemployed, gay man that no woman would desire. This is a position often observed in

[2] Interestingly, the word is simply translated as 'feminist' in the film's English subtitles.

discussions of masculinity in crisis: as Tim Edwards points out, "concerns relating to the family and men's position within the domestic sphere relate strongly to underlying anxieties surrounding men's sexuality".[3] Thus, Manolis contests Phillipos's recognition of a new heterosexual man who has accepted a change in traditional gender roles as an oxymoron. Although the film remains playful in tone, it also hesitates in this instance in dismissing outright a feminist influence, and the importance of such a discourse to help understand certain societal changes in terms of the roles men and women are called to play. The film, in other words, as well as the scriptwriter and director, demonstrate an awareness of the way the film's subject matter is going to be received and discussed. Indeed, previous films by Malea featuring women as central characters and their lives and decisions as key themes were critiqued and discussed in terms of feminist influences, as I have outlined in the first chapter of this thesis. Although Malea herself stated that this was not her aim, she has also accepted that such interpretations may be valid.[4] With an ambiguously ironic tone, the two aforementioned scenes address the issue of feminist discourse and seemingly put it aside. At the same time, however, the irrelevance or 'out-modedness' of feminist politics are views introduced either by a character who is a caricature – the gay stylist – or during a comical sequence that emphasises the insensitivity and naivety of the central male characters, who base their argument on silly proclamations of 'real' masculinity and a certainty of knowledge about what women want; a pervasive ironic tone in this sequence signals clearly that such statements are not to be taken seriously. Consciously or not, the film recognises that aspects of feminist discourse are useful in articulating the confusion around relationships and gender roles, and in pinpointing the clash between traditional and modern requirements informing these roles. However, the film is more interested in highlighting the problems and the irreconcilable conditions of contemporary women's (more so than men's) lives, rather than proposing clear solutions and taking a clear position in gender politics, a tendency also observed in both previous films by Malea.

Despite dealing with some difficult concerns, the tone mostly remains non-polemical and pleasant, and the film stays committed to a comedic attitude towards a

[3] Edwards, T. (2006) *Cultures of Masculinity*. London and New York: Routledge. p. 13.
[4] Director's interview with me, Athens, July 2009.

complex issue, even if it has some cynical moments. Though no resolution is offered at the end, the problems are articulated with humour, hinting perhaps at the fact that changes and choices are not so readily available, particularly for women and especially within conventional family structures. The viewer is invited to sympathise with the characters and their dilemmas, and maintain a participatory dialogue with the film throughout – many questions are posed directly to the camera/audience from the very beginning, some answered by the characters, some not. Thus the viewer is immediately activated to a dialogic relationship with the film and its characters. Ultimately, perhaps this is a strategic mode of address by the filmmaker, trying not to alienate her audience by presenting the film as exclusively about women's issues and interests; this is a film operating within a popular genre, is decidedly commercial (various brands feature as product placements in the film, a novel practice for Greek cinema at the time, as was noted earlier, in Chapter one of this thesis) and is targeting a broad audience (the film had a wide release for then established Greek standards, with a successful box-office of 35,000 tickets in its first weekend, 3-5 November 2000).[5]

The process of canvassing sympathy for the two main female characters is initiated shortly after the opening credits, as the viewer is taken straight into the professional reality of the two women; the scene is set in the photographic studio, where Eugenia works. It is now clear that the character who was anxiously looking for a taxi in the opening sequence – and too busy and hurried to respond to the survey – was Vicky, who is again late for work, to Eugenia's annoyance. Vicky, a stylist, is also a young mother, who depends on her baby-sitter, Kyria Chrysa, to arrive on time in order to be able to be punctual at work herself. Eugenia, a fashion photographer and a mother, is very critical of Vicky's inability to handle both roles. The two women do not like each other very much, despite the fact that they seem to have so much in common. The director initially establishes the differences between these two characters, a strategy used also in her previous films. However, although the dialogue indicates the dislike between the characters, they are placed very close together in terms of their narratives

[5] http://www.gfc.gr/index.php?option=com_wrapper&Itemid=143 http://www.athensnews.gr/old_issue/12803/4022 [Date accessed: 03/09/2011]. Also see the section 'Olga Malea: a critical review' in Chapter one of this thesis.

and within the mise-en-scène – more specifically through camera work, increasing positioning of the characters within the same space, and proximity within the frame. In addition, they seem to be thinking very much along the same lines as professionals, as we see them separately react with disdain to the instructions by the male magazine editor for a lesbian-themed cover. The way the lesbian scene between the models plays out is later juxtaposed with the relationship Vicky and Eugenia develop (or rather, try out, as yet another possible choice). The male fantasy is placed next to the female experience; and although Phillipos insists, faced with Eugenia's disdain about the cover, that this is what every man wants, he later finds his wife's sexual relationship with her friend "disgusting". Still, and perhaps problematically, the sequence in which Vicky and Eugenia first have sex is shot in a way that re-enacts conventional representations of this particular male fantasy (slow motion, playful in-between freshly washed linen, drinking, dancing); and it also ultimately bears resemblance to the sequence of the lesbian cover they had to prepare and photograph. While the characters consciously and laughingly repeat phrases their husbands had used previously, the camera is also consciously quoting the visual discourse the film seeks to criticise. Ideological contradictions of this type are often highlighted both by narrative and style, but without the film articulating a clear position towards them.

Eugenia and Vicky are annoyed at the work they must do, but neither will admit it to each other at the beginning of the film. Both are frustrated with the fact that they have so little input into the photographs they create; both are frustrated and annoyed that they must re-create representations of women they evidently do not relate to or believe in. (Although the actresses selected to play the roles of the two working mothers in many ways conform to the stereotype of the thin, toned and fashionable models we get to see in the magazines portrayed in the film.) The pressure to conform to such image is not openly discussed, but is played out in the film through the juxtaposition of the characters' hectic lives and the roles they are called to play with the visual representations of femininity that surround them. These take the form of photos in magazines, art photography on walls, sculptures, paintings, calendars, billboard advertisements, some of which are produced within the film itself, highlighting the

effort and process of construction, rather than exclusively the result[6]. Vicky herself is 'caught' by a surprised Phillipos during the beautifying process, waxing moustache and legs, and having washed her hair, further emphasising that there is a process for looking the way she does. As in Malea's previous film, *The Mating Game*, the female characters are seen producing the images that entrap them, not only on the magazine covers, but on their own bodies. At the same time, they challenge such representations by highlighting their contradictions. Here, we see yet another example of the distance between the characters' claims and their lived experiences and practices. They seem unable to recognise their own interpellated position within the ideological structures they criticise. This of course is precisely how ideology in general and patriarchy in particular operate – and that which Malea exposes.

Though they often have to work together, Eugenia and Vicky are antagonistic and consider themselves as very different from one another. Eugenia is convinced that she is able to manage her professional and personal life a lot better than Vicky, who is always late and often brings her baby to work. Apart from the professional hierarchy, however, another distinction is also hinted at here by the way Eugenia looks down on Vicky, with the dialogue suggesting that this may be because Vicky is not originally an Athenian but moved to the capital from 'backward' rural Greece. In what can be considered a nod towards her first film, this is yet another enactment of the tensions between tradition and modernity which are present throughout Malea's work, and the roots of which will be discussed in Chapter six. Vicky detaches herself from Eugenia, who on her part is seen as snobbish and unsympathetic; she is quietly content when Eugenia has to postpone work in order to go and pick up Sofoula from school. Contrary to the dialogue and the characters' actions, and in a manner not unlike *The Cow's Orgasm*, a balanced structure maintained in the narrative and in the cross-cutting emphasises the similarities between the characters' lives, rather than their differences. Their background is deemed irrelevant and the film does not provide any contextual details; what is highlighted as most important is their current situation as

[6] The 'work' of femininity has been a central concern of feminist analysis and such issues have been dealt with more extensively in Malea's earlier film, *The Mating Game*, as discussed in the previous chapter.

married working mothers. The film in a sense acts as a "snapshot" of the characters' lives, like the snapshots of motherhood the characters themselves create in later scenes. As in her previous films, Malea establishes a pattern of equivalence in the way the characters are presented and are related to each other, but also in the way the story is told. A scene from Eugenia's life is juxtaposed with one from Vicky's and followed by one with both characters together, initially in their workplace, and later in the house they share, and they are brought closer together by experiences that emphasise how much they have in common. Both women are married and each has a child: Eugenia has a daughter (Sofoula) and Vicky, a son (referred to only as Bebis /Baby-boy). Both are working mothers, wives and professionals, struggling to manage all these roles and to be taken seriously by their husbands, who love them, but do not understand them. Consciously or not, deliberately or otherwise, Malea pronounces feminist preoccupations with women's shared experiences within patriarchy and proposes – directly in this film – a form of 'sisterhood'[7] between women who have to support each other in order to 'survive' the demands placed on them by patriarchal systems. This proposition however is treated here more like a practical solution, rather than as a polemic or radical feminist position.

The traditional roles of wife and mother are presented in tension with the modern role of the professional woman, and the film explores how these are negotiated by the two main female characters; emphatically, this tension is not evidenced in the way the male characters operate as fathers, husbands and professionals, pointing to a chasm between contemporary men's and women's experiences. Eugenia, a photographer, is married to Phillipos, who is a successful magazine editor. Vicky, a stylist, is married to Manolis, a lawyer. Both couples function the same way: men go to work, women take care of the house and the children, and then go to work – very much reflecting the 'predicament' of the contemporary Greek working mother. Writing about French popular cinema Tarr and Rollet have noted that

[7] A rather loaded term, which stressed the common oppression of women by patriarchy but was also criticised for obliterating social, racial, material and cultural differences among women; see Cartmell, D. *et al.* (eds.) 1998. *Sisterhoods: across the literature/media divide*. London: Pluto. p.1. I believe Malea alludes to such connotations and maintains an ambiguous, or rather, undecided stance towards such propositions of 'sisterhood'.

> [i]ndeed, a recurring theme of the 1990s in particular has been the absence or inadequacy of men as fathers, be it in films where women have to juggle their lives to include motherhood and a career, or films in which they simply try (temporarily) to piece the fragmented family back together again.[8]

This is evident in this film, in that both Vicky and Eugenia feel disappointed with their husbands for not helping them around the house or with the children; both are anxious to feel more creative and get ahead with their work; and both feel at a loss and cannot find a solution to their problems within the available *modus operandi*.

The story changes direction during a photo-shoot for a feature about career women, hosted by Phillipos's magazine; this 'assignment' appears as a favour to his wife, who always complains that she never gets to work on a serious topic. The scene is rather ironic as we are introduced to the women taking part; the focus is initially placed on a young lawyer, Katerina Karatzani (Olga Kardakari), keen to emphasise her femininity and sex appeal as much as her career achievements. She responds to the question posed at the beginning of the film about gender roles, marriage and family (surprisingly by the same pollster of the opening sequence – is this the same feature article?), while trying sexy poses for the camera. This is a caricature of the 'career woman' and reflects on the stereotype previously articulated in the film by the two husbands with irony: according to Manolis and Phillipos, the two notions, of 'career' and 'woman' are seen as contradictory, and only capable of being reconciled by an overt display of sexual availability. Indeed, the association of the sexualised image that Katerina here embodies defuses the 'threat' of the career woman, as the emphasis becomes the feminised, costumed body. This was an issue already problematised in *The Mating Game*, and in this film the director re-plays the (visual) stereotype, its over-signification exposing its patriarchal ideological underpinnings. Moreover, Katerina's naive statements about modern women's ability to combine family and career with ease (especially because men help) leave Eugenia and Vicky astounded, and the film comments rather critically on these false and therefore harmful perceptions condoned by women whose idealised view of their empowered position is far from the lived experience of many women. The young lawyer in question later plays the role of

[8] Tarr, C. with Rollet, B. 2001. *Cinema and the Second Sex: Women's Filmmaking in France in the 1980s and 1990s*. New York and London: Continuum. p. 192.

Manolis's lover, referring to the notion of women's career advancement through sex – the only possible way for a woman, as brains are inconceivable or irrelevant, according to a stereotypical male view expressed in the film when the all-male editorial team at Phillipos's magazine derisively comment on that feature article. Here, through her characters' stance, Malea inserts into her film a reflection of the generic practice identified by Yvonne Tasker when discussing Hollywood popular cinema. Tasker notes that, "the representation of working women almost inevitably involves an invocation of sexuality/sexual performance".[9] The 'empowerment' Katerina has claimed seems to translate (both for her and the men) as sexual freedom more than anything else, as the film demonstrates. But this sexual 'empowerment' itself proves unstable as Manolis later resists her sexual advancements at their hotel during a business trip, declaring to her that sex is not everything and that there are more important things in life. This statement is an appropriation of Vicky's response to his sexual demands during a domestic scene, when she is trying to get back and finish her shower that got interrupted by Bebis' needs and by urgent chores. Katerina Karatzani's character, then, is associated with a postfeminist discourse that takes women's empowerment for granted, without recognising previous social and political struggles by the feminist movement, which is deemed irrelevant or 'dead'. Instead, such a discourse places emphasis on individual, rather than collective, experiences and accomplishments; however, the director here treats this discourse with scepticism and targeted irony.

The film deals in, and with, primarily a postfeminist discourse, in tackling issues of personal and professional choice in these women's lives and addressing the pursuit of happiness and construction of self through consumerism. Yet, in response to such postfeminist claims that see feminism as obsolete at best or dead at worst, the 'ghost' of feminism is allowed to exist and inform the film in many respects, 'haunting' the characters' attempts to negotiate their predicament and their roles with inadequate postfeminist models of 'choice'. These choices indeed prove rather limited and they are mostly – or exclusively perhaps – based on traditional, and here intensely patriarchal, norms. Moreover, the film identifies a new capitalist economy that needs women to be

[9] Tasker, Y. 1998. *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema*. London and New York: Routledge. p. 6.

active participants in it, both as producers and consumers (and coinciding somewhat with postfeminist priorities), but does not reward them accordingly. The pressures that new capitalist economic conditions put on family life and personal and social health are presented here as more problematic than any of the feminisms. In this respect, a feminist discourse provides the tools to counter postfeminist (and new capitalist) postulations that feminism is dated or 'dead', and, I argue, an opportunity for the film to move away from ideologically normative formulations of the family.

Apart from Katerina, the lawyer, the film features a number of impatient career women – including a fictional government minister – waiting for their turn to be photographed and interviewed for the 'Career Woman' feature; but Eugenia eventually admits that she has to postpone the photo shoot because she needs to pick her daughter up from school. The dialogue and camerawork point to the lack of understanding and support between the different groups of women, who nevertheless face similar problems; but this is not an issue fully explored in the film. Rather strategically, and maintaining the dialogic relationship with its audience that the film established at the beginning, the impasse is unresolved, and the audience are left without easy resolutions, made to face their own contradictions by being exposed to a number of over-signified and ideologically charged sequences. Despite the various hints that the film recognises women as a group, a community, who share common concerns, the individuality of the characters and their problems is what remains at the surface for the most part in this sequence. For example, Eugenia's frustration at the fact that she needs to interrupt work for family needs is registered through a close-up that isolates her from the group of other women in the studio. Another close-up in quick succession captures Vicky's joy at being vindicated seeing another woman's career suffer (for a change, from her perspective), because of the demands of motherhood. The same type of shot is used to show the frustration of the Minister, who has to leave without completing the photo shoot. So far, visually and narratively, the women in the film have not been allowed any way out of the problems and visual representations that surround them, something which is increasingly frustrating for characters and viewers alike. The narrative, characterisation and style have emphasised the isolation of these women from each other – and from every other character in the film, including

their husbands and children. For instance, the continuous cross-cutting and the close framing of Vicky and Eugenia, extract the women from their environment and constantly refuse the utopianism of heterosexual coupling and family life favoured in conventional (Hollywood) comedies. At the same time these same elements – narrative, style, characterisation – eventually allow space for a recognition of the common worries that burden women, irrespective of their background.

When the photo shoot that Eugenia had to postpone resumes, the mood changes and a solution to the time-deprived and over-scheduled women is proposed by one of the participants. Frosso Ralli, a television producer (playing herself, as the Career Woman), takes her turn to pose while responding to the persistent questions about gender roles and family. These are still important questions even, or rather particularly, within a feature about professional women – the 'work/life balance' debate is discussed a bit more openly at this point, though not extensively. Through this secondary character, issues surrounding working women and working mothers in particular are articulated, and for the first time in the film, women are addressed as a group rather than as individuals. The fact that Ralli appears as herself further grounds the film in reality, addressing not only the other characters but the film's audience more directly, in an approach identified and discussed by De Lauretis and Smelik in order to promote a women's cinema agenda.[10] Thus the film briefly moves away from the exaggerated, stylised and ironic tone that characterises it. There is a reflection here of a social condition that the film recognises as the lived experience of many of its female audiences[11] and the dialogic structure established in the opening sequence is emphasised even more pressingly in this scene. Frosso Ralli's 'character' contends that

[10] See the section entitled 'Feminist criticism, women's cinema and narrative film' in the first chapter of this thesis.

[11] Malea has said that *Risotto* is the film that contains many autobiographical elements in terms of experiences of a working mother; she had young children to look after herself at the time she was writing the script with Manina Zoumboulaki, and both observed how tired they and other mothers around them were all the time. Malea has also commented on audience reactions from screenings, where female audience members recognise their reality in the problems surfaced in the film.
Malea, O. and Zoumboulaki, M. 2000. 'Introduction' in *Risotto: script*. Athens: Nea Synora, A.A. Livani Publications. See also Contis, A. 'Malea's flavour of motherhood on the silver screen', *Athens News*, 15 November 2000, p. AO9 http://www.athensnews.gr/old_issue/12803/4022 [Date accessed: 03/09/2011]

the current situation women find themselves in is unmanageable. Taking care of career and children, she believes, is quite a challenge; adding a husband to the equation makes things rather impossible to manage. The solution she proposes to the many problems contemporary families face is that two women could live together and share the chores of the house, helping one another. While this appears as a rather drastic solution, it also problematically and pessimistically implies that it might be impossible for men to take a more active role with domestic responsibilities, at least not while family structures and men's roles are rooted in traditional models, unchanged and unaffected by other social progress. To a certain extent, the statement made is akin to that made at the end of *The Cow's Orgasm*: if the status quo will not change, the female protagonists have no real alternative but to remove themselves from the oppressive patriarchal environment.

The practicality of this measure, however, is not lost on the characters, and this remains until the end the most radical proposition in the film for the social, professional and personal reality of modern mothers. This recommendation not only changes the course of the narrative, but also disrupts the seemingly unthreatening context of the feature article and photo session as put together and constructed by the all-male editorial team. Vicky's decision to leave home because of Manolis's infidelity is communicated to a colleague and is overheard by Eugenia. Eugenia herself has had her own fight with Phillipos in a preceding scene; he wants another child (and, more pressingly, wants sex), but finds a request to first take their daughter to the bus-stop in the morning to catch the school bus a turn-off. The camera shots are more open now, with a long shot clearly showing Eugenia in the background as a witness to Vicky's conversation. The isolated close-ups are replaced by medium and medium-long shots that show the women as a group within the same space. The dialogue in this scene and the inclusion of a catalyst character prepare the ground for the two women's cohabitation. Eugenia takes notice of Frosso Rali's suggestion and proposes the cohabitation to Vicky; with the use of a medium-long shot and deep focus, the viewers can also see the approving nod by Frosso Ralli in the background. With the structure of the couples changing in the second half of the film, this break of traditional systems and family configurations also appears to provide the solution (be it problematic) that

Eugenia and Vicky were looking for on how to make their lives easier and more fulfilling.

Irigaray explains that "This love [for sister-women] is essential if we are to quit our common situation and cease being the slaves of the phallic cult, commodities to be used and exchanged by men, competing objects in the market place."[12] She further proposes the concept of """secondary homosexuality"""[13] as a way of differentiating a bond between women dictated by their experiences (sisters) and love for the mother, and sexual relationships between women. Though the concept is articulated in psychoanalytic terms (especially in terms of the relationship to the Mother), it can be appropriated here to explain the scheme of support the women set up for one another in *Risotto*. While the potential of a sexual relationship developing between two women living together is recognised in the film, as noted above, such a relationship does not develop, mostly because it is articulated in the terms of the male fantasy and also because, overall, an emphasis is placed on the practical support a mother needs, rather than sexual desire (the latter issue is never a problem for the two women, who get along fine with their husbands). The film then proposes a "secondary homosexuality" as a pragmatic (rather than essential in Irigaray's terms) bond between women that allows them to fulfil their roles as mothers more effectively, without compromising at the same time their desire or other roles they have to perform (e.g. professional). This separation of motherhood from other roles allows the co-existence, in a sense, of the collective (in feminist terms) and the individual (as a postfeminist notion): in *Risotto* the individual can thrive only with the support of the collective, the group.

Of Husbands and Lovers

Relationships in *Risotto* are characterised by role-play and performance. Some of the comedy in the film results from the reversal of roles, as in Malea's previous film *The*

[12] Irigaray, L. 1980. 'Body against body: in relation to the Mother' in Oliver, K. (ed) 2000. *French Feminism Reader*. Lanham, Boulder, New York, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. p.250-251.
[13] Triple quotation marks are in the original.

Mating Game. After Vicky and Eugenia decide to live together, the schemes Manolis and Phillipos put in place to convince them to return to their families generally go wrong. The husbands are certain about their knowledge and understanding of women and women's psychology, but by constantly thwarting their plans, the film takes a clear position that this is a rather naive approach by the male characters. The arrogance with which Manolis and Phillipos behave, and their comical attempts at appropriating the protagonist roles – trying to reclaim a perceived power within the narrative through the use of code-named 'operations', like failed action heroes – are treated with irony, even if indulgently at times because of some of their immature and uncomplicated ideas. The mood and tone of the film tend to change from light-hearted and comedic, to ironic, sometimes cynical and rather serious. Despite these fluctuations, a general irony towards the characters and their choices prevails throughout, establishing a distance between the male characters (in this case) and the audience's sympathies and allegiances. For example, the united husbands' first scheme is called 'passe-partout', a confident analogy for a penis, the provider of good sex that all women want, Manolis informs. He elaborates his belief that all the women need is a bit more attention in bed, 'a good shag', and everything will return to 'normal'. Their wives' response, however, is less than enthusiastic; they realise that both husbands still just do not get it.

Since their plan fails, the men decide that perhaps this one time they should try a bit harder by looking beyond issues of personal desire. The next plan would have to involve engagement with family life; it is appropriately called 'the good father'. The opportunity to show that they want to engage with their children and take responsibility arises at Sofoula's birthday party that both Vicky and Eugenia have planned. Manolis and Phillipos do show up with carefully chosen presents, despite the stated fact that these events are usually very boring and noisy; however, they soon discover that this is not enough. Phillipos is particularly annoyed when he realises that he also has to help around the kitchen with the cake, remember to close the fridge, and most of all agree to take his daughter to the bus stop in the morning, on time for the school bus. For his part, Manolis believes that changing Bebis's nappy is a step too far, so they both decide to admit defeat and leave. The men, frustrated, agree on the final blow: they will threaten to take away the children immediately, because "women are

obsessed with their children". They decide to deliver their threat in English, in order not to traumatise the children who are present in the scene; this kind of linguistic precaution is rather comical since no consideration seems to have been given to the possible greater trauma of separating the children from their mothers without warning or explanation. Perhaps no thought is given to this, however, because the possibility of the mothers actually agreeing to part from the children is inconceivable in the men's eyes. Unfortunately their timing, and indeed their understanding of the situation, is not good: their wives have secured a contract for a photo shoot but have not managed to find a baby-sitter. Manolis and Phillipos unknowingly offer the solution and Sofoula and Bebis are happily handed over to the fathers. What was also not 'calculated' by the stunned men is the desire the children might have to actually spend more time with their fathers; Sofoula is ecstatic, since she has learnt to associate time spent with dad with play-time and fun. What the men conceive as a threat, then, is actually the help the two female characters were requesting all along: a sharing of responsibility with family duties.

The use of contrived plot turns and the misunderstandings on the part of the men, who base their assumptions on stereotypes, allow for the comedic treatment of a more serious ideological (and perhaps sociological) topic. However, no depth in this discussion is pursued by the characters, and the dialogue itself, through Manolis, dismisses the need for a social analysis of what women want from men in a postfeminist, emancipated era. The treatment given by the camera to the male characters is worth commenting on. For instance, when discussing 'plan passe-partout', Manolis and Phillipos's eyes are caught wandering towards a pretty young woman who walks by; the camera, however, is directed at them, with no cutaway point-of-view shot of the woman's bottom, even if we never see her face (only the body parts concerned), as the camera remains at waist-level – the eye-level of the sitting men. In other words: the male gaze is shown, but not shared by the camera. This is a familiar tactic in Malea's work, observed in the previously discussed scenes of the strip-club in *The Cow's Orgasm*, and in *The Mating Game*, where we see Tassos photographing Laura, but the director never shares his lens. Moreover, the men are also surrounded by sexualised images of women, placing them at the centre of this visual discourse. Unlike

the female characters also surrounded by these images, however, they are seen as active viewers (and creators) of these representations, and much of the ironic tone of the film stems from this. The idiom of women's popular cinema in Malea's work, then, articulates precisely this problem: even as, within the narrative, patriarchal discourse dismisses women's concerns as unworthy of debate, the generic conventions of comedy establish a meta-narrative which comments on the characters' positions. This moment of dismissal reflects a meta-textual tendency which is precisely what, on a larger scale, the proposed category of women's popular cinema addresses, through its popularisation of 'minor' concerns.

Still, there is ambivalence: the men's education to modern fatherhood follows genre conventions – perhaps best epitomised both in Coline Serreau's *Trois Hommes et un Couffin* (1985) and the American version *Three Men and a Baby* (Nimoy, 1987) – that see men alone dealing with children as comedic, since it is not part of their assigned role of masculinity; this is rather problematic as the film appears to be retreating here from its more far-reaching propositions of change. In a short period of time both male characters have to learn to change nappies, prepare meals, feed, pay attention to every need and whim of the young Sofoula and the baby. More importantly, the two fathers have to learn to put aside their own needs and pleasures and focus exclusively on the children. Of course, as Tarr and Rollet point out, "arguably this is only possible in a world from which women have been evacuated".[14] The fathers come to figure out the hard, and comic, way that work and their own fun have to happen after the children are in bed, leaving the adults exhausted and irritated the next day. Despite the difficulty, a certain routine is established, suggesting that these are skills that can be learnt irrespective of gender – the children need care by a parent (and not necessarily the mother, as both Manolis and Phillipos insist every time they hand the children back to their mothers). But the men are also exhausted and they categorically state that this cannot continue for much longer; so another plan is set in place to re-establish 'order'. Women must be swept off their feet with a romantic gesture, and witness the changed, more sensitive demeanour of their husbands towards the children, hence satisfying the

[14] Tarr, C. with Rollet, B. (2001). *Cinema and the Second Sex: Women's Filmmaking in France in the 1980s and 1990s*. New York and London: Continuum. p. 173.

mothers' need for shared (perhaps in an "equal" 70%-30% split?) responsibility in parenthood. This is one of the more cynical moments in the film, when there is a suggestion that men cannot or would not change, at least not at the same pace that contemporary living might require. Since the return of the women at home as full-time mums is established from early on as a non-option, and it is accepted that any change on the men's part is also an impossibility, the plot soon arrives at a dead-end. Indeed, it does not take long for things to revert to previous form and the narrative to acquire, briefly, a circular pattern. After the happy couples sail home from the beach where Eugenia and Vicky were working, on a boat hired by the husbands as a romantic gesture, reality hits harder than before, with phones ringing, and professional and family demands accumulating. The men's sense that their work is more important leads them quickly out of the house, and away from the children who are now safely 'deposited' with the mothers. But it does not also take long for the women to give up and move back in together, since they now know they can depend on each other. Far from ideal, the film insists on the only solution that appears practical in the given circumstances. However, this time the move is not a matter of choice – one of the choices that the women seemingly have – but instead it is presented as a practical necessity to guarantee the survival of the couples. The falsity of 'choice' is thus exposed, and ideas of female solidarity are reinforced, though not without problematic areas, as was discussed earlier. Malea, a keen observer of reality, is very astute in identifying problems in Greek society, even if she does not propose a satisfactory solution.

The comedy of the dads trying to cope with the children has been replaced by a rather sombre set of scenes of Vicky and Eugenia in their respective homes. Vicky is crestfallen and just sits, back-pack still on, listening to Bebis cry but unable to react. Eugenia looks astounded at the messy house and knows then that not much has changed or will change. She must go shopping but is too impatient and aggravated to wait for Sofoula to reappear from her hiding place.[15] Sofoula almost suffocates while hiding in a tightly closed chest and needs to be rushed to hospital. Phillipos arrives

[15] Sofoula keeps finding hideouts in her room, in wardrobes, under the bed etc, to avoid hearing her parents fight.

there and angrily accuses Eugenia of irresponsibility. Instead of supporting Eugenia in her sadness and guilt, he reminds her that it was not he who left Sofoula alone, especially knowing of Sofoula's tendency to hide. While men's failures in dealing alone with the children are comic, women's failures are portrayed as potentially tragic. Fathers are seen to mess up with 'little' things, such as nappy changes, milk temperature and the like, tasks that (it is assumed) mothers can manage; on the other hand, mothers' mistakes appear to always have more serious consequences, since they are more versed with the everyday needs and execute them 'naturally'. Generally, women in film are not seen to (need to) learn the process of raising a child. Even when such anxieties are addressed during pregnancy, usually these are followed by post-birth scenes when the new mother appears serene at the 'innate knowledge' she suddenly recognises she has. However, the inclusion of the cliché here emphasises more forcefully the need for women to support each other, including by living together. This proposed solution of the heterosexual couple functioning outside and independently of the family unit seems to work for the couples in the film, but not without difficulties or complaints from the husbands. Both Vicky and Eugenia repeatedly remind them that they are better mothers when they are away from their husbands.

Though both Vicky and Eugenia were surprised at how quickly they found themselves back to the unmanageable conditions they strived to escape, the audience had been preparing for such an event by being given access to the knowledge that the men's change had been only a scheme, a ploy to lead the women back home where traditional roles would be reinstated. Even if the male characters are seen to understand (temporarily at least) and accept that managing family and professional life is difficult and tiring without help, they certainly have not changed their minds about considering their wives' professional lives insignificant compared to their own. This selective alteration in behaviour and thought only highlights further the double standards contemporary working mothers are faced with. The proposition made by the film points to the fact that the traditional formation of the heterosexual couple does not seem to work under the given conditions; indeed, women's roles have changed, or more precisely increased. But this is not necessarily the case for men, who feel like "the

fallen rulers", as is pointed out by one of the male respondents to the survey in the opening scene, a sentiment confirmed by both Manolis and Phillipos in their desire to restore the status quo ante.

Uncovered

As described earlier in the chapter, the married women of the poll in the opening sequence have admitted to having the sense they are being helped by their partners at home, while at the same time identifying that they did not quite know how. The scene highlights a sense of confusion, not only about gender roles, but about the perceptions of these roles and responsibilities, and it critically exposes a reality that leaves women exhausted and unfulfilled. It has been made clear that the change experienced by the characters involves primarily the role of women (helping generate income), with no equivalent counter-motion following by men (helping more at home). At the same time, this change itself is put into question and exposed as a myth and an illusion, even a marketing ploy, rather than a lived reality for many women. Although the film is undecided, and seemingly shies away from engaging openly with its feminist credentials, it is only through a critical engagement with feminist discourse that the ideas it does present can be articulated. In an indirect way, through this unavoidable mobilisation of feminist modes of address, the film presents a "view from elsewhere",[16] or at least forces audiences to 'look from elsewhere'. The opening scene is used to expose the falsity and potential danger of perceptions about change and choice, of notions of empowerment that can only be manifest within ideologically regressive models. The male characters are not very likeable in the film and their lack of understanding and insistence on stereotypical views comment on a reality that is experienced differently by the two sexes. Perhaps problematically, while the men seem unable to view women beyond the stereotypes they inherit and perpetuate, the director also treats her male characters in stereotypical fashion. There is no let-up: even as they are actively looking at women, we see them through her critical, and comical lens, as described above. Even so, they are not treated as villains (as Christina's

[16] Teresa De Lauretis. 1987. 'The Technology of Gender' in *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. London: Macmillan Press. p. 25; see also Chapter one of this thesis.

father had more harshly been portrayed in *The Cow's Orgasm*). Their stance is comical because it is simply not viable anymore. Their failed, silly schemes are funny, because they will not let go of a position that they in fact never really held. Their self-proclaimed status as fallen rulers is itself questionable – their world has in many respects moved on, only they have not caught up. Still, the myth remains, and its power resides in the fact that it is hard for men to let go of a set of traditions that benefits them; their stasis is of their own choosing. Malea's attention is therefore turned most pointedly towards women. Thus, the choice to leave the male characters underdeveloped and lacking in depth further underlines a suspicion that the confusion around gender roles and their contemporary demands afflicts women mostly and more forcefully.

Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker have noted that "Postfeminism evidences a distinct preoccupation with the temporal – women's lives are regularly conceived of as time-starved, women themselves are overworked, rushed, harassed, subject to their 'biological clocks', etc. to such a degree that female adulthood is defined as a state of chronic temporal crisis."[17] In *Risotto* time management is an issue for the female characters, who are seen rushing from place to place and from employment to chores. Their attempts to manage or perform effectively all the roles assigned to them fail, leaving them in a constant state of frustration. This is in contrast to the way the male characters operate in the film; the men manage their time quite effectively, apart from when they have to take care of their children alone. But even then, they get accustomed to their routine very easily and they seem to believe things are running smoothly after a short period of time, though many house-chores have in fact been neglected. The different formation of the couples in the second half of the film – when the women live together without their husbands – is a model that works in terms of the female characters' time-keeping and time management. The move, as noted above, is initiated by the women, who take action towards helping themselves and each other (sisterhood), but also seemingly accepting that the/their men will not change despite their best intentions. Indeed, once the couples are back to traditional formations, the

[17] Tasker, Y. and Negra, D. 2007. 'Feminist Politics and Postfeminist Culture' in *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*. Durham: Duke University Press. p.10.

same problems reoccur. Vicky and Eugenia then try to find 'solutions' within a restricted set of options available. Despite the fact that women's temporal problems are often seen in wider popular culture to be resolved "through minimisation of their [women's] ambition and reversion to more essential femininity",[18] this film does not even consider such propositions as viable options that would see the main female characters leaving their jobs or tempering their ambitions. These are only put forward by the men, who long for a more traditional set-up of gender roles in their families, reflecting a parochial patriarchal view. Once proposed, the issue is angrily dismissed by both women and is never re-visited in the film even as a possibility. The ideological framework that constrains the characters, here, also seems to impose constraints onto the film. There is no offer of a satisfactory progressive or radical model outside the present discourses. In keeping with her commercial stance, Malea does not openly engage in polemics. Feminist discourse is conspicuous by its absence. Still, I argue, this very absence makes a statement: without it, the narrative is deadlocked, and characters are caught in contradiction.

Elisabeth Badinter examines the contradictions women have to navigate through in a postfeminist era, and considers the discourses available in relation to roles they (women) are called to play and the images of bodies they are called to maintain. She emphasises the constant presence of the image itself, as a highly sexualised construct that overwhelmingly dictates an emphasis on appearance:

> The image is omnipresent. No one is unaware, not even young children, that sex is everywhere, crudely exhibited in the cinemas, on television, in advertising, magazines, literature or private conversations. As Xavier Deleu rightly says, 'A sexual cacophony leads to the saturation of the public space by the accumulation of erotic signs'.[19]

Women are encroached upon and pursued by all these images, even in their domestic space. The design and decor of the mise-en-scène are coherent in their over-stylised, kitsch statements: the living spaces provide a link to the images in the public spaces,

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[18] Negra, D. 2009. *What a Girl Wants? Fantasizing the Reclamation of Self in Postfeminism*. London & New York: Routledge. p. 48.

[19] Badinter, E. 2006. *Dead End Feminism*. Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 57. Badinter quotes Xavier Deleu. 2002. *Le Consensus pornographique.* Paris: Mango Documents. p. 8.

where the commodification of the female body is everywhere, unavoidable, inescapable. Vicky's and Eugenia's stylish apartments are 'littered' with a series of sculpted female nude statuettes, photographs, paintings, prints and other artistic, and non, ornaments representing the female body, from artists as varied as Jeff Koons, Magritte, Lempicka and Dali – in a way analogous to the littering of the frame with images of pinups and cows in *The Cow's Orgasm*. This exaggeration in the image draws attention to the incongruity of women's lives as experienced, and their representations. Both Vicky and Eugenia fit in some respect the promoted model of womanhood; but at the same time, they suffer because of the simultaneous impossibility of maintaining such an image, and because they very much want to reject it.

When the two women move in together they observe the images on their walls with disdain and decide to re-decorate. The wall changes colour stereotypically from blue to red, and they hang up one of their own photos, from the Motherhood calendar,[20] a commission that was gained independently of Phillipos and his magazine. This professional independence comes only after Vicky and Eugenia have moved in together for the first time. Their professional success coincides with their decision to 'liberate' themselves of their husbands and their demands; both actions are set in the same place (a lingerie fashion show and party, complete with female models in their underwear – another cynical choice of setting that marks the inescapability of the sexualised – objectified? – image) and a handheld camera tracks the characters closely as they agree their contract for a calendar, followed by their rejection of their husbands' 'plan passe-partout'.

Despite the film's affirmative signification of the calendar the two friends get to create, and although they re-signify certain ideas around motherhood, the images produced are not very different from what was seen earlier in the magazines – semi-

[20] Malea said that the composition of a mother breastfeeding her baby with a bleeding pheasant on her skirt was based on a dream she had when she was writing the script for the film with Zoumboulaki. Malea, O. and Zoumboulaki, M. 2000. 'Introduction' in *Risotto: script*. Athens: Nea Synora, A.A. Livani Publications. p.16-17. She has also mentioned this during an interview with me in April 2011, commenting that this and all the other photographs we see in the film aim to represent the contradictions in motherhood, i.e. a mother's love for her child and her (violent) rejection of it at times, mostly due to tiredness.

naked models mothering in a sexualised way. They seek to signify this contradiction of "loving your child" but wanting to be away from it, according to the director, but essentially the characters are trapped within a signification system that fetishises them. The images are anything but motherly – they are still sexual, using the type of model registered on the images the film allegedly rejects. How much of their expression is really new or re-signified is certainly open to question, though the viewers are witness to the negotiations for the style and content of the photos, where the client's agent insists that there should be as many bare-breasted 'mothers' in the calendar as possible. Within this context, issues of free creativity and expression are questioned by the film itself, locating the problems female professionals may face, but not engaging with the topic in any depth.

The incongruity of the images (whether created by the women themselves or not) and roles assigned to contemporary women is satirically highlighted by the director. Malea notes that, "Precisely so that we are not accused of promoting what we satirise, we 'littered' the frame. We made a frame with grain and contrast in juxtaposition with the sleek illustration treatment of the nudes. This is why we used 16mm film, handheld camera, long takes and harsh lighting, in cinema verité style".[21] For example, the camera, as in Malea's previous two films, leaves the characters and events and lingers (even if for a moment) on the images in question, i.e. instead of Vicky, we look at a nude statuette in Vicky's living room as she complains to the nanny that she is late for work again. But what chances do (these) women have of being able to determine their role and identity and live up to obviously impossible and contradictory expectations? Despite the director's stated aims, I believe that this 'littering' of the image brings a problem to surface but fails to address it coherently, following a structure of representation and signification that is looping around itself. The danger here is that, in an attempt to highlight and denaturalise these images, the film ends up reproducing them. The saturation alluded to by Deleu in Badinter's quotation above means that even when the aims are different, the images remain the same, and one may not be able to really tell the difference. Still, the women in the film are more actively engaged

[21] Malea, O. and Zoumboulaki, M. 2000. 'Introduction' in *Risotto: script*. Athens: Nea Synora, A.A. Livani Publications. p. 21. My translation.

in experimenting with escape routes than the men, who are rather static and underdeveloped as characters, and whose change has been shown as deceptive and temporary.

Not only are the constructs of femininity challenged, the film also, and by extension, problematises marriage, by placing it first of all within this confusing context. Men and women appear to cope better when they are not in the same house. The problem then is not located in the couple itself but in the contradictions about expectations that surround the couple. This seems to corroborate Tarr and Rollet's proposition that "[t]here appear to be two main themes dominating women's comedy, an interrogation of the couple and an anxiety in relation to the contemporary fragmented family".[22] The married men and women in the film acquire their traditional roles within their newly formed family unit, but without other traditional support networks being in place – the extended family for instance.[23] In addition, equality between the sexes is taken for granted, but quickly comes into conflict with the more traditional settings and formations of the family. Ultimately, the alternative structure of the family unit is not offered as a solution by the film, but rather as a playful functionalism.

Despite the progressive notions introduced in the film by this point, the director is ironic until the very end; she makes use of yet another image – a freeze-frame/photograph (an established technique by now in Malea's films) of the couples side by side and the nanny, Kyria Chrysa, in the foreground with Bebis. The visual arrangement, the image produced is contrapuntal to the narrative. Moreover (and again this highlighting is characteristic of Malea's work), for most women, especially working class women represented here by the nanny, such 'solutions' are not an option. The main characters are distinctly a young, professional, urban demographic

[22] Tarr, C. with Rollet, B. (2001). *Cinema and the Second Sex: Women's Filmmaking in France in the 1980s and 1990s*. New York and London: Continuum. p. 192.

[23] A structure that would most certainly conform to gendered roles, where the usually older female relative (mother, mother in-law, aunt) would provide the necessary assistance with domestic affairs. This is a common practice in Greece, though less so in big cities. Having said that, both nannies in *Risotto* are often late to arrive or are rushing to leave because they have to look after their grandsons/daughters, nieces and nephews, so that the parents of these young children can go to work or have a social life.

that can afford such a set-up (still, the alternative couples do not appear to be able to operate without the services of the nanny). Thus the optimistic or progressive affirmations of the film are withheld at the end.

Malea does not offer idealism, utopia, or radical solutions in this film. Rather, she maintains a distance towards her characters and their efforts, leaving them and the audience rather frustrated at the end. Although many of the questions raised in and by the film allude to feminism, and indeed engage with concepts in feminist criticism, these are barely mentioned. There are families here with clearly allocated roles, at first at least, but at the same time there is not a sense of tradition and traditional roles beyond this formation. It is unclear why these women got married or had children; it is what people do, it seems. Routine, tradition or habit (and at best, necessity) come to the fore here as the motivations guiding the characters, more than active, conscious choices. What redeems them is precisely the fact that they are trapped within ideological constraints. Malea is not unforgiving towards them: her films highlight the restrictive ideological and other social structures within which these characters are called to operate. And although the main characters in this 'trilogy' are different people, they represent different stages in a contemporary Greek woman's life, as it is generally expected to develop. In each of these stages they are called to face the continuous problematic of traditional roles and expectations coexisting with desires dictated by a modern way of living and thinking. The move from the village to the city highlights the different pace with which modernity has come to different parts of the country – as mentioned in the previous chapters, problems that the girls face in the countryside are not even conceived of as issues in the city. Despite this, women still seem to be caught in a bind between a modernity that is not fully realised and a set of traditions that have not yet entirely disappeared. In fact, this surface-level modernity does not offer solutions, but more problems: the social and professional spheres are shared (to a certain extent), but the domestic has remained the domain of women.

Women's popular cinema engages with those debates; Malea therefore offers a continued critique of Greek society, and the character's problems cannot be examined in isolation. A solution is sought from absent, or rather consciously unreferenced, discourses. The continuity in the argument about women in the trilogy, however, allows

for some persistent elements of this critique to be brought together: the important discourses in operation here – tradition, modernity, feminism – that are not however directly dealt with in the 'reality' of the film narratives. Moreover, the men in the three films also undergo relative transformation – through their stasis in relation to a changing world. Masculinity is now ill-defined and not fit-for-purpose if ever it was. Tim Edwards, discussing feminist views on masculinity, suggests that "the emancipation of women was seen to depend increasingly on the unpacking of masculinity and perhaps even the liberation of men, the problematic implications of which did not go unnoticed within feminism".[24] As the next chapter will discuss, the insecurity of Thomas, or the lewdness of Vangelis, in *The Cow's Orgasm*, the ineptitude of the men in *The Mating Game*, and the sheer obstinacy of Manolis and Phillipos in *Risotto*, contribute to a picture of increasingly untenable masculinities, which lead the director to turn her eyes towards male characters.

[24] Edwards, T., 2006. *Cultures of Masculinity*. London and New York: Routledge. p. 104.

CHAPTER FIVE

Re-mythologising Masculinities in *Honey and the Pig*

The main characters in each of Malea's films until *Risotto* (2001) have been young women in various stages of their lives: starting with the young, coming-of-age characters in *The Cow's Orgasm,* they are single and searching for Mister Right in *The Mating Game*, and married with children in *Risotto*. Yet, they are troubled by the same pressures in their attempts to initially understand and then fulfil their multiple roles as women. Olga Malea's fourth film, *Honey and the Pig* (2005) changes direction with a young, single man as its main character. Bringing what has so far been in the background to the fore, the established hierarchies of patriarchy are still seen to be compromised here, but the focus turns towards a critique of their impact on men, as well as women. This is a turn that, consciously or not, reflects a trajectory taken by feminist cultural criticism, which also turned its attention to examining men and masculinities.[1]

The previous chapters have discussed how the structures of comedy can serve as a vehicle to examine the double-standards which patriarchy imposes on male and female sexuality (chapter two); how the director appropriates postfeminist discourse to advance a feminist argument about the performance of gender and the underlying patriarchal scaffold that supports this performance (chapter three); and how her authorial voice enables her to expose the precarious nature of the constructs that underlie the surface of such performances (chapter four). The current chapter discusses how, using black humour with 'surreal'[2] touches, Malea's fourth comedy portrays patriarchy as being associated with power structures complicit in reiterating certain

[1] See for example Kegan Gardiner, J. (ed) 2002. *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory: New Directions.* New York: Columbia University Press

[2] In an interview with me (Athens, July 2009), Malea has used the term 'surreal' to describe elements in this film; I believe these involve primarily aesthetic and narrative choices that relate to the prevalent black humour, though *Honey and the Pig* is certainly not a surrealist film. At the same time certain aesthetic choices, like lighting, the use of colour etc in the film rather impose a hyperreal tone.

oppressive models of masculinity (white, heterosexual, potent) that are damaging to both men and women, and which have a strong hold on the national imagination. At this point, a hinge in the director's work is detected: in order to scrutinise this hold, she returns to a rural space, more strongly associated with tradition than the modern urban environments of her previous two films – she continues this 'backward' trajectory in her next film, too, when she revisits the past, where much of this conflict between tradition and modernity originates, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Indeed, the notion of returning is an important structuring device in the narrative of *Honey and the Pig*, and, I argue, in the construction of Malea's critique.

The film starts by introducing Manos's (Christos Loulis) stressful reality in the big city.[3] Manos and his girlfriend live and work together. An early sequence establishes Manos's discomfort at work, a pastry workshop. He shudders at the touch of the dough for loukoumades (a honey-glazed doughnut), and his anxiety results in clumsiness that gets him fired. It soon becomes clear why he was working there in the first place, considering his aversion to its main produce: he needs money for rent. In the opening sequence of the film, he and his girlfriend are chased out of their apartment by the landlord, who demands the payment of arrears. This is the first time the film shows his disastrous attempts to have sex with his girlfriend; as they walk down the street after the landlord has caught up with them, Manos is curiously relieved about the interruption, despite the fact that he is now broke. His girlfriend, however, is later determined to entice him to have sex by placing loukoumades on her body, which has quite the opposite effect on him, but is consistent with his aversion to the sweet seen in the pastry workshop sequence. Although the question about Manos's problem with this particular sweet has been hinted at early on, it is quickly abandoned and not picked up until much later in the film. At this point in the narrative, he is simply portrayed as a modern man, perceived as "in essence, emasculated, passive, lacking in self-esteem and out of touch with nature and [his] instincts".[4] In this respect, he is not that different from Dimitris, the doctor in *The Mating Game*, who finds it difficult to

[3] We know the city is Athens from the character profile on the script notes, but the city is not named or marked in any way in the film. See Malea, O. and Alexopoulos, A. 2004. *Honey and the Pig: the movie/Loukoumades me Meli: I Tainia*. Athina: Ellinika Grammata.
[4] Edwards, T. 2006. *Cultures of Masculinity*. London and New York: Routledge. p. 27.

perform the version of masculinity expected of him. Manos resolves to leave the city in an attempt to avoid the problems that surround him in this hectic and hostile environment, where he is 'threatened' by a sexually voracious girlfriend, an aggressive landlord and unemployment – a city where he cannot adequately perform as a man (as a partner and a provider). In the first of the film's 'returns', he escapes to the countryside, to the village where he grew up, raised by his uncle and aunt. However, the openness of the natural setting is contrasted with the secrecy and taboo of the small rural community, another obstacle for Manos to battle against.

Homecoming

The move from the city to the village for the main character at the start of this film is the reverse from the one Athanasia and Christina make in *The Cow's Orgasm*, which concludes with them leaving the village behind for a move to the big city. While Athanasia and Christina were running away from a stifling environment towards a more 'liberated' mode of living (although Malea's subsequent city-based films question such assumptions), for Manos it is the impersonal and unsupportive city living that cannot provide the solutions he is looking for. However, I argue that his crisis does not stem from this modern world, but from old, pervasive patriarchy, both for the expectations it places on men and for the hierarchies it enables and supports, as will be discussed below. Still, the need to escape the city initiates the narrative and provides the motivation for the character to face his anxieties within what he believes to be the more supportive environment of his village. There, he meets Phenia (Fay Ksila), his old sweetheart, who works, and is the poster-girl, for the local funeral home. The two of them, with the help of Manos's beloved pet-piglet Marikaki, eventually unveil a truth that involves and affects the whole community: his uncle (Pavlos Haikalis), who is also mayor of the village of Eleon (the name translates as Olive Grove),[5] is revealed as a paedophile and gets caught in the act at the end of the film. As in *The Cow's Orgasm*, a respected member of the community is made the villain in the film; his power and authority resting on traditional, patriarchal systems are compromised and proven

[5] This is a fictional village.

unreliable. Here a comparison with "Aristophanes' unlimited criticism of any form of power" proves apposite: the "revelation of the perversion on the highest political level [...] can only be done by an outcast".[6] As was the case for the main female characters in *The Cow's Orgasm*, the natural setting becomes an ally to the protagonist; here, too, an animal is also employed as a catalyst for the film's resolution.

The new location is introduced with Manos getting off the bus at the edge of Eleon. The village could be anywhere – indeed there are many villages with that name (*Eleon*, or *Eleonas*) in Greece. In that sense, this is 'everyvillage' and as such stands for the whole Greek country(side). Manos's outsider status, the sense that he does not quite feel at home there either, is established in this sequence. He looks around and a subjective camera shot establishes a rural scenery of fertile fields, wild flowers in bloom and active wildlife; in this respect the name of the village is quite appropriate and matches the focus on nature and fertility of the land. The cinematography emphasises the potency of the landscape: nature in this film is more stylised than in *The Cow's Orgasm*, and while the attention to the colour and gloss of the image is more similar to that paid in Malea's previous two films (*The Mating Game* and *Risotto*), the light and colours are distinctly brighter than in those urban settings, and indeed than in the cityscape of this film, establishing a hyperreal mood, and further displacing the main character. The beauty of the environment is heightened, it is almost too perfect in the Spring light.[7] However, Manos looks preoccupied with something, and the camera follows his movement as he bends down and separates two turtles mating. He makes sure he moves them a fair distance apart and looks content once he has done that. The second *coitus interruptus* in the comedy, this visual joke, incongruous and crude, operates a number of functions: it breaks the solemnity of this encounter with nature, while it emphasises Manos's discomfort with all things sexual, a sign that perhaps the threat to his masculinity does not come from the city after all. At the same time, it

[6] Slapšak, S. 2013. 'Ancient Women's Cults and Rituals in Grand Narratives on Screen: from Walt Disney's *Snow White* to Olga Malea's *Doughnuts with Honey*' in Renger, A-B. and Solomon, J. (eds.) *Ancient Worlds in Film and Television*. Leiden, Boston: Brill. p. 269.

[7] Interestingly, the light in these hyperreal exterior scenes is natural. The director made a point that "a very important characteristic of *Honey and the Pig* is the exterior [natural] springtime environments". Malea, O. & Alexopoulos, A. 2004. *Honey and the Pig: the movie/Loukoumades me Meli: I Tainia*. Athina: Ellinika Grammata, p. 24. My translation.

offers Manos a degree of satisfaction and control over the situation, foreshadowing the film's resolution. In the meantime, Phenia's car is seen in the distance; as it approaches, it becomes evident that she is driving a hearse. She is quite appropriately dressed in black, though in a rather passé sexy rock-chick style complete with bleached blond hair that is incongruous with the sobriety of the vehicle she is driving. Contrary to Manos's sober demeanour, she runs out of the car full of excitement towards him, while openly flirting with the local farmers that are passing by (public relations, she calls it, confirming to Manos that she still works in the village's funeral home). In one sequence, Malea introduces the association between sex and death, two important motifs running through the comedy.

In this, Malea's first film located in a village in the Greek countryside since *The Cow's Orgasm*, the director maintains faith in the popular form and genre, in spite of its central theme being the difficult issue of paedophilia and sexual abuse; this, despite the fact that it was originally scripted as a drama by Apostolos Alexopoulos. The script was based on a story he read in a newspaper, but also contained autobiographical details. Alexopoulos took the script to Malea and the two re-worked it as a comedy, decidedly changing the tone in which it was originally written. Malea and Alexopoulos added a series of "surreal events", as she calls them, [8] happening around the main issue the film attempts to deal with. The funeral that is not happening, the sexy funeral parlour assistant administering sleeping mixture to distressed relatives or digging graves in her underwear, and the female pet-piglet, Marikaki, who runs after loukoumades she has smelt from miles away are some of these "surreal" elements that introduce a tone of black humour in the film. In a similar fashion to *The Cow's Orgasm*, Malea employs a humorous set of incongruities in this film, too, emphasising the comedic modes in use. John Parkin, in his discussion of Koestler and Bergson, points out that "the whole point about comic incongruity is that the parts do not fit together, cogs fail to mesh, things [...] fall apart, and humour results".[9] In theme, tone, performance and setting, incongruity becomes the main operating mode in *Honey and the Pig* where things do

[8] Malea, O. & Alexopoulos, A. 2004. *Loukoumades me Meli: I Tainia [Honey and the Pig: the movie]*. Athina: Ellinika Grammata, p. 11-12

[9] Parkin, J. 2006. 'The Power of Laughter: Koestler on Bergson and Freud' in Parkin, J. and Phillips, J. (eds.) *Laughter and Power*. Bern: Peter Lang. p. 121.

not fit together harmoniously. From early on the film's comic treatment of its theme was off-putting to producers.[10] The choice of genre is indeed interesting, and the director has defended it, noting that (black) "humour saves".[11] This belief in the transformative and transgressive power of comedy and laughter is not new. In his exploration of the relationship between laughter, comedy and power, Gaëtan Brulotte notes about black humour in particular:

> Quite unlike those discourses that opposed it, black humour was made into a revolutionary weapon by the surrealists, a weapon that shook the foundations of the established order and proposed a new vision of the world, and a reminder of those theories whereby humour does good both to the individual and to society.[12]

In the film, the humorous and the strange or surreal usually follow a painful revelation, serving as an alienating device and making the choice of genre a strategy that allows the characters, and the audience, to increasingly come to terms with harsh truths, confront the consequences of secrets and find the means of, to use Brulotte's words, "bearing the unbearable".[13]

Although the audience are not entirely sure or even aware at first of the sinister theme at play, increasingly the metaphor of 'sugar-coating' (or more appropriately 'honey-glazing') of the truth by the characters is revealed, resulting in an awkward discomfort in the final scenes of the film, especially as the comedic tone is reinstated after a brief moment of solemnity. A variety of comedy sub-genres are employed here: romantic comedy, where the emphasis lies on the ability of the protagonist to perform romantically and sexually; sex comedy, with the roles of the sexually charged man and the woman resisting reversed in the representations of Phenia (short for Iphigenia), the attractive and sexually liberated funeral home assistant, and Manos, the reserved protagonist; and farce, with the use of the band as 'live'/simultaneous commentary on the action. Black humour is in operation throughout, with the comedy acquiring sinister

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[10] Malea, O. & Alexopoulos, A. 2004. *Honey and the Pig: the movie/Loukoumades me Meli: I Tainia*. Athina: Ellinika Grammata, p. 11-12.
[11] *Ibid.*
[12] Brulotte, G. 2006. 'Laughing at Power' [trans. by J.Phillips] in *Laughter and Power*, Parkin. J & Phillips, J. (eds). Bern: Peter Lang. p. 15.
[13] *Ibid.* p. 16.

qualities when, for instance, the pig finally catches the perpetrator in the act and 'punishes' him by 'attacking' the loukoumades resting on his crotch. A number of popular generic discourses are thus deliberately mobilised in order to depict the most serious of themes. To borrow Cristina Degli-Esposti's phrase, the film is organised around a "playful eclecticism of styles",[14] demonstrating a postmodern streak which, for example, appropriates links to Greek history and tradition in the characters' names, playfully placing them within a contemporary context which is again torn between modernity and tradition, a society more like a collage of incongruous elements, rather than a coherent (and cohesive) social and cultural system. This appropriation is yet another instance of return to the past, as will be discussed below.

Despite the seemingly anarchic organisation of this film, there is a systematic use of motifs that structure meaning. Sex and death have already been clearly established and connected in the director's visual discourse. Associated with food and eating, they help organise the erratic events around the main narrative. Each of these motifs refers to important forces in life, universal themes: sex can result in new life/birth, but is also associated with the death drive; and food provides sustenance, but overeating can cause ill health (potentially death) and diminish a particular kind of sex appeal. Sex and food involve pleasure, which is accompanied by guilt and a tendency towards repression or hiding –pleasure operating as sin. The comedy in *Honey and the Pig* results from the relationships established between these themes, from mixing and matching them in unexpected ways, from having one as a result of the other. Slapšak notes that,

> Olga Malea structures her comedy around these thematic axes, which overlap persistently: food has a strong visual presence in the film […]. It is an important part of sexual habits of all kinds (as attraction, lure, as a necessary complement to the sex). There is women's obesity, which becomes sexually attractive. Food also appears as the main substance in funerary ritual. Making food is "sexed" along with food consumption. The final scene of the film, making love on the food,

[14] Degli-Esposti, C. 1998. *Postmodernism in the Cinema*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books. p. 10

> suggests the mixture of body and food, both interconsuming, and both eventually consumed by death. [15]

These grave – or, more accurately, fatal in this instance – consequences of indulging in temptation are played out in the scene of Ismene's (Sophia Philipidou) death. The director here, in Almodóvarian fashion, mingles comedy with melodrama, in a nod towards another staple genre of European popular cinema in general, and Greek popular cinema in particular. Ismene conveniently dies in the funeral home, where she goes to complain about Phenia's behaviour to Mr. Billy (Dimitris Piatas), the owner of the funeral parlour. He flirts with Ismene despite her protestations and openly admits his desire for her, put on hold for twenty-two years, as many as she has been a widow. Slapstick comedy takes over the scene and the characters coil clumsily around each other as Mr. Billy attempts to embrace Ismene. She clenches her chest and takes in short breaths (mimicked by Billy, who initially perceives this as part of their flirting ritual; he literally takes her breath away it seems). Ismene stumbles back and rests into a coffin leaning open against a wall; she dies in it and the coffin slides down and lays horizontally on the floor with Mr. Billy falling on his knees next to it. The camera assumes a high angle position taking in the shot from above. The image is striking for the intense blood red colour of the carpet, background to Ismene's white embroidery-lined coffin. Mr. Billy laments the twenty-two years he waited, though the film has powerfully demonstrated the effect of indulging to desire. The (melo)dramatic performance of the actors counters the intensely comical, farcical, tone in the scene; exaggeration and over-signification are modes typical of Malea's style, as seen in relation to *Risotto*, for instance. However, while in that film this over-signification is integrated into the narrative and its preoccupations, in *Honey and the Pig* it feels at first out of place. This creates the "surreal" effect Malea refers to, a necessary condition in the treatment of a topic so sensitive and difficult. How does one speak of paedophilia in any way? The film, I argue, goes over the top to articulate things that cannot easily

[15] Slapšak, S. 2013. 'Ancient Women's Cults and Rituals in Grand Narratives on Screen: from Walt Disney's *Snow White* to Olga Malea's *Doughnuts with Honey*' in Renger, A-B. and Solomon, J. (eds) *Ancient Worlds in Film and Television*. Leiden, Boston: Brill. p. 265.

be addressed otherwise – and this ultimately justifies the choice of comedy as a genre, in spite of what reviewers may have written about this precise choice.[16]

In keeping with the director's eclecticism of styles, though, the performances do not uniformly indulge in this tone. Highlighting the complexities of the subject matter, in a key early scene Pavlos Haikalis delivers a nuanced interpretation of the role of the Mayor, demonstrating the insidious and corrupting nature of power. Placing the camera in a medium close-up and a reverse angle from inside a shop-window displaying loukoumades, the director closes down the image, reducing the background activity and focusing attention on the two characters central to this scene. Both the Mayor (his name has not been revealed yet as everyone addresses him with his title, adding to the importance and authority of the character in his community) and young Achilleas (Spiros Kitsanelis) are framed by the loukoumades at the bottom of the frame and traditional embroidery decorating the window at the top. They are discussing the reasons why they cannot eat the much desired sweet. Achilleas is restricted by a vow his grandmother made to a Saint for his grandfather's health; the grandfather has since died, but Achilleas and his family are still bound by the religious vow. The Mayor suffers from hyperglycaemia. As they are discussing their troubles the Mayor confirms that he knows Achilleas' grandmother, "a good woman and loyal voter", and that he has the solution for Achilleas to enjoy loukoumades without breaking the vow. The young boy is intrigued as the worry about consequences is lifted: the vow cannot be broken if someone else buys him loukoumades. The whole sequence maintains an innocent tone while at the same time drawing attention to some interesting elements in the adult actor's performance; for instance he looks down at the young boy, smiling nervously, and hesitates before proposing the 'solution' to Achilleas. It is important to note here, that as much as the actor, the character is also performing – power in the guise of complicity. However, only in retrospect do these become meaningful signs of something sinister in the film. Part of the strategy of the film is to not reveal its theme, or what is at stake, right away. Instead the film presents a fairly benign world; it is not

[16] For the reviewers' response to this film see the first chapter of this thesis. Malea revisits the theme of paedophilia in her most recent film *Marjoram* (2013), which is a psychological thriller, and therefore does not form part of the corpus of this thesis.

immediately obvious what would be wrong with the relationship of the Mayor and the young boy. At a first glance, they both rather harmlessly yearn for the forbidden sweet. The uninterrupted medium close-up in this scene however (glaring at the shop window) affords a few noticeable details, even if their meaning is only fully realised in hindsight. More specifically, Malea's camera here, too, effects a systematic organisation of the audience's and characters' looks: the audience look at the Mayor, who is looking at the boy rather than the sweets. He pauses, swallows dryly, speaks increasingly faster and quieter after his initial hesitation and leans closer to the boy when he proposes a secret plan on how to enjoy the loukoumades without compromising the vow. After a big smile from the child at the prospect of eating the desired sweet without consequence, the camera finally pulls away; for the time being this is an innocent 'conspiracy' to subvert abstract religious rules, and sympathy is canvassed towards the Mayor, as someone who wants to subvert the arbitrary impositions of established tradition. Much like at the start of *The Cow's Orgasm*, the church seems to be imposing restrictions that the characters seek to undermine; only here the director is sending the audience off-track. Of course, the Mayor is in fact attempting to befriend the boy (with ulterior, sinister motives), and the loukoumades are the means to achieve this.

Sexual and gastronomic desires are thus conflated. The director embarks in a process by which a transgression (eating forbidden loukoumades) becomes a tool facilitating a further transgression (the crime of paedophilia), but also later a metonymic figure of speech used to refer to that crime. The pastry shop in front of which the above sequence takes place belongs to two twin sisters, Ismene and Antigone (also played by Sophia Philipidou), who are renowned for their delicious loukoumades, the sweet that both the Mayor and the young boy cannot eat. It is established through dialogue that no one else in a long radius will make loukoumades, because they cannot compete with the sisters' recipe. From the very beginning then, eating becomes a motif, and loukoumades the figurative way of exploring the problems of indulging or succumbing to the temptation (in some respects this is similar to the strategy in Malea's previous film *Risotto*, where successful cooking and pleasurable consumption of the title dish is a key moment in the plot development). As the film progresses, the desire to eat sweets (or not, as may be the case) drives the plot

forward. In terms of the film's signification system, a chain of equivalences (a strategy where one thing stands for another) is used in order to address paedophilia in an oblique manner and at the same time critique this very euphemism as a practice with tragic consequences – and perhaps this is why, at the climactic scene of the film, the tone of the comedy shifts to something altogether more crude (I will return to this later). Paedophilia, hardly a topic for comedy, becomes the central theme that drives the narrative, but is not openly revealed as such until the final sequence of the film.

The final link in the director's chain of equivalences is death. Together with the pastry shop, the funeral home, in which Ismene dies, is the most prominent business in the village square, and both are locations frequently visited by the characters. During the first funeral sequence, a distressed and overweight wife is stopped from leaning over her dead husband's coffin for fear of breaking it; Phenia provides a sleeping potion that sends the wailing widow to a quiet sleep – this is a regular tactic in the funeral home to induce or subtract drama as the situation may require, extending the commercialisation and performativity of and around death that had been introduced earlier with the performance of 'tight' measurements for a coffin. Clear associations between eating, sex and death are drawn during the set of sequences that follow. For instance, Phenia has sex by the aforementioned coffin with young Pericles (Haris Mavroudis), Ismene's son, and Manos' diabetic uncle revisits the Sisters' pastry shop with Achilleas for a fresh helping of loukoumades. For much of the film, Manos, Phenia and a number of other characters attempt to stop themselves and others from fulfilling their yearning for the sweet. From the start of the film, then, we see an association of "[f]ood, sex and death, the three main anthropological components of Aristophanes' comedies, [which] had to be deregulated so the comedy could start. Food has to be abundant, genders have to be destabilized, death has to be ridiculed".[17] These Aristophanic echoes in the film pointed out by Slapšak are, I claim, part of a wider re-appropriation of themes and forms of the national culture.

[17] Slapšak, S. 2013. 'Ancient Women's Cults and Rituals in Grand Narratives on Screen: from Walt Disney's *Snow White* to Olga Malea's *Doughnuts with Honey*' in Renger, A-B. and Solomon, J. (eds) *Ancient Worlds in Film and Television*. Leiden, Boston: Brill. p.264.

Unearthing the past: myth and gender

The director effects this re-appropriation by promoting the return of two fundamental (in the sense of foundational) elements of the Greek national imagination: ancient history – specifically the 'golden age' of Athenian democracy in the 5th century BCE; and myth, whose primary expressions are the tragedies of that period. The names of the characters in this context acquire a significance that was not emphasised before: all the main characters in the film bear names that make interesting and playful allusions to ancient Greek historical figures or characters in important Greek tragedies. For example, Pericles, whose name is a reference to the Athenian general and politician, who presided over the most successful period of democratic 5th century BCE Athens, is an ironically unbecoming name for Mavroudis's character, a naive young man who lives with his mother; Manos' uncle, the paedophile Mayor, bears the name of the legendary general Leonidas of Thermopylae. Thrassos, short for Thrassyvoulos,[18] is named after the general who led the resistance against oligarchy in Athens and restored democracy in the 4th century BCE; in some respects, Thrassos does initiate a change of heart in Manos's aunt Eleni (Fotini Baxevani) in terms of how she deals with her husband. This leads to plot resolution, but such 'heroism' rests on a rather selfish desire for Eleni. While promoting its return through metonymy, the director simultaneously and playfully undermines the potency (I use the word advisedly) of this historical tradition. Her challenge to the country's perceived democratic identity and credentials is overtly expressed in *First Time Godfather*, and will be further discussed in the next chapter. This engagement with, and unearthing of, cultural heritage points towards the roots of patriarchal rule. At the same time, the director seems to be stating that these power structures are inextricably linked with a traditional understanding of what it means to be Greek. As Benedict Anderson points out, "[i]f nationalness has about it an aura of fatality, it is nonetheless a fatality embedded in *history*".[19] The director's conscious re-appropriation of history highlights this.

[18] Also spelt Thrasybulus.

[19] Anderson, B. [1983], 2006. *Imagined Communities*. London and New York: Verso. p. 145. Italics are in the original.

The references to ancient Greek myth and theatre also abound. They start of course with Ismene's and Antigone's names referring to Sophocles' famous Theban plays. Here, echoing the well-known eponymous tragedy, Antigone has to try and bury yet another sibling; but there is also a funny reversal, since in the tragedy it was Ismene who had to suffer her sister being buried alive for love and disobedience to the set rules. Iphigenia, an innocent tragic heroine sacrificed for a great war, is hardly a match to Malea's less-than-innocent Phenia, who re-signifies the connotations of submission and sacrifice for a modern female audience. The role of the sacrificial victim is in fact appropriated by the pig – which also, in the end, is not killed. Malea forcefully denies the tragic resolutions of these texts, where the innocent (mostly women) lose their lives in the altar of patriarchy. Eleni, the Mayor's seemingly unattractive wife is of course the namesake of Helen of Troy, purported to be the most beautiful woman in the world. Eleni's relationship with traditional paradigms of beauty and femininity proves fundamental to the development of the plot, and is further explored below. Finally, Ismene's long dead husband, who she will finally meet once she is successfully buried, is called Orestis, the tortured son of Agamemnon and Klytemnistra, and brother to Iphigenia and Electra. Incest, sex and death are familiar themes of classical Greek tragedy and comedy. Malea mobilises the national cultural referents and appropriates their convention of dealing with such taboo issues, while establishing a connection between these cultural referents and the longevity of patriarchal hegemonic discourses. These discourses are part of what Frederic Jameson calls the "geopolitical unconscious [...] which now attempts to refashion national allegory into a conceptual instrument for grasping our new being-in-the-world",[20] and the director invokes this geopolitical unconscious only to alienate it through her narrative and stylistic choices, disrupting it and effecting her own refashioning of myth.

The film's content and structure evoke traditions rooted in Greek culture; there may indeed be Aristophanic components in the way Slapšak describes, but elements of tragedy are also recognisable; and observations of contemporary culture create a liminal space between tradition and modernity, with the villagers caught in this tense coexistence. Degli-Esposti observes that in postmodernism this "self-conscious

[20] Jameson, F. 1992. *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*. London: British Film Institute. p. 3.

theorisation of culture in a parodic reflexivity [...] becomes the way – possibly the only way – to inform contemporary creativity".[21] In this sense, Malea's "semiotic shuffle"[22] is a way of dramatising the confusing (post)modern landscapes of 'choice' and the schizophrenic qualities of modern Greek life, always torn between the strong pull of an historic, fixed sense of identity and a fluid, unfixed, modern and multiple subjectivity. The playful substitutions and equivalences are present elsewhere, too: the funeral home is ironically called the 'Scent of Spring', or perhaps quite pointedly so, operating as a euphemism for death. Instead of an ending, it implies the promise of a new beginning, a better world, an opening to another life and, like Spring, a re-birth. For Ismene, this 'new life' of death will allow instead a return to the old, a reunification with her husband after twenty-two years, just at the point when she may have been about to embark on a new affair. Antigone, then, has to see to the burial of her sister Ismene. Funny appropriations and a weird re-telling of the play, "parodic renderings of ancient women's cults and rituals",[23] are devices that help plot development, which is gearing towards revelation. In addition, the repetition of the funeral procession sequence acts both as the means for comedy and as a build-up towards the finale. Antigone is not doing a very good job of burying her dead sister – unlike her namesake who does too good a job at burying her brother – it takes multiple attempts and even more food before the funeral is successfully completed with a burial. Apart from its comic function, these multiple attempts also reflect the impossibility of laying the past to rest.

Malea offers to this problem another solution steeped in the Greek classical theatrical tradition: the *deus ex machina*, here embodied by Marikaki the piglet. Leonidas, the Mayor, is on a mission: to find loukoumades in order to entice Achilleas, who is not interested in any other sweet. Manos, for his part, is trying to prevent his uncle from hurting the young boy (he has seen them together in a key scene in the film, discussed below). The camera trails the characters in a decidedly sunny, bright

[21] Degli-Esposti, C. 1998. *Postmodernism in the Cinema*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books. p. 10

[22] I am indebted to Alison Butler for this brilliant phrase that captures the strategy in operation in this film, and in many respects in Malea's work in general.

[23] Slapšak, S. 2013. 'Ancient Women's Cults and Rituals in Grand Narratives on Screen: from Walt Disney's *Snow White* to Olga Malea's *Doughnuts with Honey*' in Renger, A-B. and Solomon, J. (eds.) *Ancient Worlds in Film and Television*. Leiden, Boston: Brill. p. 268.

setting, which makes it even more difficult for Manos to hide as he is following his uncle's every move. Spring and summer are stereotypically the seasons of comedy, and the film draws on these formulaic associations with sexuality, whilst also maintaining an ambivalent relation towards them. Manos spies on his uncle from the roof of The Twin Sisters' closed pastry shop. A low angle shot reveals that he is not the only one looking down at his uncle; Marikaki also trails the roof ledge sniffing for the sweets. Once she locates her target, she performs an accurate jolt from above on the box of sweets, leaving the uncle frustrated, and Manos marvelling at the break offered by the pig's tracking abilities. Marikaki's training starts immediately and Manos also enlists Phenia's help to coach the pig and catch his uncle. The training takes place in the lush fields around the village, which also provides an opportunity for Phenia's and Manos's relationship to develop. The protagonists, however, face the same problem as Leonidas: there are no loukoumades available and Marikaki must learn to only seek *them* out. With Ismene's death, loukoumades are in short supply. The solution to finding loukoumades is in the first instance provided by Pericles, who prepares them as a favour to Phenia. Both characters have sex in mind when preparing the loukoumades: Pericles wants Phenia, and Phenia wants Manos, who is only interested in her delivering the sweets. Phenia is represented as a completely liberated character; for her there is no guilt, fear or taboo attached to sex. She is the opposite to Manos, who is very reserved and full of anxieties and secrets. In a sense, she has been able to resolve some of the contradictions the protagonists in *The Cow's Orgasm* are faced with: like Christina and Athanasia, she has left the village; and after her studies she is now temporarily back, waiting for her appointment to the civil service to be effected. Like Manos, she retains an outsider status, which reinforces their alliance. As Slapšak points out, "[t]emporary evacuation/displacement is crucial to all Aristophanes' comic plots",[24] giving the protagonists the necessary distance for a critique of society. While training Marikaki, Phenia tries to seduce Manos, who resists, and eventually has to share his suspicions about his uncle with her; they have to catch him before he can hurt young Achilleas. Although this is not a full disclosure of the truth, it does bring the characters

[24] *Ibid.* p. 264.

closer, and Phenia becomes an essential partner in the subsequent funeral chase sequences.

In Malea's women's popular cinema, the conjoining of generic convention and commentary on power structures informed by gender and sexuality means that completion of the burial can only happen once the ghost of sexual abuse has been laid to rest. Once the first attempt at Ismene's funeral is under way, Leonidas seizes the opportunity to get hold of some of the loukoumades Pericles has made for Phenia in a desperate attempt to woo her during his mother's funeral. From this point on, the associations of loukoumades with sex, and sex with death are more prominent. Marikaki is chasing the loukoumades in Leonidas's possession. Manos on foot and Phenia driving the hearse with Ismene's corpse chase after Marikaki, in order to get to Leonidas, and the funeral procession chase after the hearse and Phenia. All the while, the musicians are accompanying the action with traditional melodies, sometimes appropriate for a funeral and often not, as the chase progresses, commenting effectively on the cartoon-esque quality of this sequence. The sequence ends with a failed attempt to catch Leonidas, who has escaped in time with Achilleas, and a car crash that has the hearse towed away and the funeral postponed. The setting of all this is a cherry orchard in bloom. The bright, full of life natural setting clashes with the black clothes of the community following the procession and becomes an interesting backdrop to the horizon of cars across the frame following the towed-away hearse. Antigone's voice is heard in the distance promising that she will bury her sister better the next day, thus concluding this surreal, and absurdly funny, sequence. Given the seriousness of the subject matter, the threat of tragedy is never far away, and Malea's use of black humour allows for this balancing act to be conducted effectively. As Wendy Everett posits, "film is not *either* serious *or* enjoyable: in this as in everything else, the identity of film is too complex to be approached in such simplistic terms".[25]

The seriousness of the situation almost assumes tragic contours in the second attempt to complete Ismene's funeral with a burial. Again, the ritual starts with making loukoumades: this time Leonidas convinces Antigone to prepare some, by appealing to

[25] Everett, W. (ed.) 2005. *European Identity in Cinema.* Bristol, UK and Portland, OR, USA: Intellect. p. 14. Italics are in the original.

her religious piety, superstition and by flirting with her (earlier on it was established that the unmarried Antigone has a secret crush on the Mayor). Leonidas does not hesitate to steal some of these sweets from the side of Ismene's coffin, an offering for the dead. It is interesting to note here how the established patriarchal power, personified in Leonidas, having previously dismissed religious piety in order to advance a sinister agenda (at the start of the grooming of Achileas) now makes use of religious piety and discourse for his own purposes. He does not know, however, that the sweets have been spiked by Phenia and Manos with the same sleeping potion used regularly at the funeral parlour for dealing with impassioned relatives. As is expected, the pig finds its way into the coffin with the loukoumades, too. Following another of Malea's motifs, the absurdity of the scene – and by implication the traditions in which it is inserted – is once again observed by the Pakistani guest-workers who notice the sleeping pig inside the casket as they are closing the lid, and comment on the weird funerary rituals of "these Christians". Indeed, the presence of foreign workers, functioning as commentators on the incongruities of Greek social reality has been a well-established technique in Malea's comic authorial repertoire. Marikaki only wakes up as they are about to lower the coffin in the grave after the last offerings are laid down: Ismene's and Orestis's (her late husband) wedding rings. In the confusion, Marikaki swallows the rings and is chased by all parishioners into a hunters' cabin in the woods. The crowd of mourners acquires the function of the chorus; classical Greek tragedy and comedy traditions merge in this sequence where another set of secrets are revealed. The main act of the sequence involves Eleni and her nephew, Manos, who discovers that Eleni has known everything all along and has been covering up for her husband. Eleni enters the cabin first and makes sure that both Achilleas and Leonidas escape before anyone sees them, confirming her involvement in concealing the appalling truth. The plot of tragedy, however, demands a sacrifice, and Marikaki is set to be the victim. The crowd/chorus, oblivious to the real events, demand that the rings the pig has swallowed be cut out from her stomach in order for the burial to be continued; agonising before imminent death, Marikaki coughs up the rings. Manos, however, cuts his own hand and presents his own blood to his aunt; and since Eleni believes that Manos has slaughtered the pig, this leaves no guarantee that her husband will be discovered in time before hurting Achilleas. Eleni is distraught and tries to

commit suicide after the funeral procession has departed by jumping down a well (even though she is in a hunter's cabin full of weapons). Hilarity returns as the overweight woman gets stuck and needs to be hoisted out. This time, it would seem, eating too much has saved her life. At the end of this lengthy sequence it is established that it is too late in the evening for a burial, and so once again it has to be postponed until the next day.

The analysis of the comedic style in *Honey and the Pig* exposes the idea of patriarchy as an organising force that is corrupt and unfit for purpose. The visual gag of Eleni getting stuck exemplifies Tasker's suggestion that "in the context of comic performance, the female body is already at issue, out of place".[26] Malea makes use of this displacement to make a point about the expectations imposed upon women (and men), and how these affect the performance of both femininities and masculinities alike. Early in the film, Eleni's pleasant demeanour is met with a cutting comment by the sour Mayor about her unattractive weight, establishing a strained relationship between the couple. Quite stereotypically, Eleni is convinced it is all her fault, and that her weight is the reason why her relationship with Leonidas is not working. Examining the work of Thomas Gershick on hegemonic masculinities and bodily normativity, Tim Edwards states that "bodies, male and female, are stratified according to a host of factors including age, weight, colour and size, into a kind of pecking order through which 'people are privileged by the degree to which they approximate cultural ideals' (Gershick, 2004 : 372)".[27] Eleni's guilt is compounded by the fact that she believes her husband's "perversion" is her fault: she has made him so, because she is fat and undesirable (this perhaps goes some way towards explaining her covering up for him). Again, a complicated relationship with food is established, and dietician Thrassos (Vladimiros Kyriakidis) tries to console Eleni, convincing her that her weight is not to blame – she looks beautiful as she is. In dietician Thrassos, then, we see contradiction re-enacted: he has introduced the incongruous proposition that one can lose weight by

[26] Tasker, Y. (1998) *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema*. London and New York: Routledge. p. 168.
[27] Edwards, T. 2006. *Cultures of Masculinity*. London and New York: Routledge. p. 154. Reference in quote: Gerschick, T.J. 2004. 'Masculinity and degrees of bodily normativity in Western culture' in Kimmel, M.S., Hearn, J. and Connell, R.W. (eds) *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities*. London: Sage. p. 367-378.

eating – a modern diet fad within a traditional village setting. Eleni engages (along with other women of the village) in the 'Thrassos-robics' technique, eating without restraint and exercising regularly in a bright yellow, high visibility thermal suit. Edwards continues: "In addition [...] people are going to ever-increasing extremes not only to discipline their own bodies but to discipline others through processes of stigmatisation and valorisation".[28] In the case of Eleni, this disciplining operates on three levels. A set of beauty standards that are a product of contemporary culture, at odds with the established lifestyles which associate women with food; her husband, who berates her for her lack of shape; and, most damaging of all, herself, internalising the other two disciplining acts and externalising them through her own ridiculous attempts to lose weight. Her aim is to recapture her husband's desire and avert his paedophilic impulses. Malea exposes the absurdity of this proposition, the futility of the women's attempts to lose weight – no amount of discipline will ever be enough for patriarchy – and the incompatibility between the expectations imposed on women by contemporary images (as seen in *Risotto*) and traditional ways of life. Their yellow body-suits are an eyesore (though admittedly humorous) among the traditional costumes displayed in the cultural centre where they join their Thrassos-robics class; and in the forest, where their exercise disrupts the natural beauty and serenity of the place. In each case, this mismatching leads to a disaster: one of the women's uniforms rips open in the cultural centre, and the group almost gets shot in the woods.

Of course, body dysphoria[29] and anxieties about sexual performance are not exclusive to women. In this film, Malea foregrounds the effects patriarchy, and its close association with hegemonic models of masculinity, has on other masculinities. Even within the director's generally heteronormative universe, expectations of potency and displays of virility, associated with an impossibility for men to express any feelings (lest they might be considered gay), impose a sense of crisis onto characters like Manos. This will again be discussed in relation to the sensitive Panos in Chapter six. The 'new man' is incompatible with old patriarchy. A number of questions have been raised

[28] *Ibid*.

[29] I am re-contextualising Ju Gosling's expression, who writes about British contemporary society, body image and disability. See Gosling, J. 2011. *Abnormal*. London: Bettany Press.

about Manos's inability to perform sexually and his phobia of loukoumades; of course, one of the links established in the film's chain of equivalences is that between sex and food. In addition, the problems this village as a whole has with food and eating have been outlined in various comedic ways. In terms of plot, one of the main characters has died, creating a scarcity of the sweet, and setting in motion the next sequence of events. The relationship between Manos and Phenia develops further and the two hide away in a barn removed from the village "to relax" and be alone. It is suggested that they used to visit this place more often when they were younger, raising familiar connotations of lovers' hide-out. However, this time they are not the only ones who have decided to take advantage of the isolated barn. Soon enough Manos's uncle appears with Achilleas and a box of loukoumades. While Manos indulges in some intimacy with Phenia, he catches a glimpse of his uncle with the young boy entering the barn. There is bright sunlight from the entrance of the barn which makes visibility rather hazy, and the combination of this with a point of view shot make the two figures entering the barn quite unreal, as if a dream, or rather a really bad memory for Manos. The image operates much like a Freudian 'Primal Scene', the picture that becomes "the point of departure for further manifestations of anxiety" [30] and which had been repressed by Manos. The performance of the protagonist at this stage is rather ambivalent; on one level, he feigns moans of pleasure, turning Phenia's back to the barn entrance so that she does not also see his uncle there with the boy. On a less literal level, what he sees, and what he tries to conceal, are memories of him being abused. His feigned pleasure is conflated with genuinely agonising moans at the sight of loukoumades, which conjure up the traumatic experience and a confirmation that what he sees is not an illusion. These are of course read quite differently by Phenia, who wonders whether she should be flattered or disappointed – they both still have their clothes on. The director effects a kind of gender reassignment to the cliché, with the man faking an orgasm. In effect, she castrates Manos. A comparison with *The Cow's Orgasm* seems appropriate: there, the 'Primal Scene' witnessed by Athanasia and Christina is a playful re-appropriation of the Freudian concept. Here, it is much more

[30] Freud, S. [1917-1919] 1955 in Strachey, J. (ed.) *The Complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud: "An infantile neurosis" and other works.* Vol.17. London: The Hogarth Press. p.39.

closely associated with trauma and anxiety. In both cases, however, it serves as a catalyst to transformation in the characters' attitudes towards sexuality. At this turning point in the narrative, when he is faced (literally) with his past, Manos decides to take action and expose his uncle. His return to the village has promoted a return of the repressed (the *Unheimlich*), which needs to be dealt with.[31] It is clear now that Manos's personal anxieties about sex and loukoumades, are the result of a crisis that is not his, but of masculinity itself, and the patriarchal power structures to which it is subjected. The uncle's reaction, when he hears that someone is there, is very comical but also very disturbing. He looks around frantically and urges Achilleas to run for the exit, while he gets rid of the loukoumades, as a criminal destroying the evidence of his crime. This very popular honey-glazed sweet that all characters are after, becomes an effective vehicle in the film for a tendency to keep secrets. In effect, if the loukoumades are discovered, so will this character's illicit actions. Indeed, this is exactly what Manos's plan entails: he will follow the trail of loukoumades – a substitute search for the uncle – by enlisting the help of Marikaki, the pet pig.

Style and black humour serve an argument against patriarchy which comes now to the foreground. It has become evident by now that this is a confrontational film, in ways that Malea's other features are not: the incongruities of the world in which it is set are most aggressively evident, both in narrative and visual terms. Visually, Malea maintains the same glossy and bright image she employed in *Risotto*. However, the bright setting and blooming, scent-full flowers are set against the 'dark' secret of the protagonist and the rest of the characters in the village. The black mourning clothes the characters wear for Ismene's funeral also clash with the brightness and colourfulness of the natural setting; it is as if the funeral cannot happen because it does not fit in to this celebratory environment. In that respect, the funeral acquires another level of meaning: the burial cannot happen, just like the secret can no longer be 'buried'. In other words, the visual incongruity of the characters within the setting reflects the uneasy content of the plot. In terms of style, then, the film acquires a new

[31] While psychoanalysis is not a framework used in this thesis, some of its key vocabulary is useful for the discussion of this sequence. Arguably, this and other instances of playful nods towards psychoanalysis may stem from Malea's educational background.

mode of expression, by openly referencing (be it in a flexibly postmodern way) ancient Greek tragedy in the way the aforementioned scene is played out inside the cabin and the synchronised, chorus-like commentary and reaction offered by the community outside. Like a chorus, they influence Manos's impulse to sacrifice Marikaki and they gather around in a semi-circle to witness the event. Once the pig divulges the wedding rings, however, they disperse, disappointed at the anticlimax of a non-burial and a non-sacrifice, and thus returning to the comedic mode. The plot twists and turns of the film make it, according to Slapšak, "'Aristophanic' in the sense that the world is turned upside down. It is not a comedy of characters but a satire on the political texture of today's world."[32] Precisely, the crisis pointed at is that of masculinity and power, not a personal one. While in the first three of the director's films, men have remained static in a changing world, here some men may have changed (Manos, Mr. Billy, and Thrassos), but the system remains. Patriarchy is exposed, becoming the central theme.

The third attempt to bury Ismene starts and ends with loukoumades. For this final act, Manos has to prepare the loukoumades himself and offer them to his uncle. Blinded by desire perhaps, the uncle does not perceive this as a ploy, but as Manos's attempt to make amends and 'understand' him – the same expression used by Leonidas to describe his relationship with his godfather, whose portrait has pride of place in his home, hinting at a cycle of abuse – another indication by the director that the problem is systemic, rather than individual. Thrassos is co-opted into the plan by Manos, who is aware of Thrassos's affections for his aunt, and enters the action more prominently, making sure Eleni leads the funeral procession to where her husband and Achilleas are set to be. Eleni, her desire liberated and confidence returned after Thrassos's declaration of love, this time does not hesitate. Eventually the entire community congregate in Antigone's and Ismene's shop cellar, following Eleni, who is driving the hearse this time, and Marikaki as she discovers the last remaining loukoumades in the village and catches Leonidas in the act. The distressed Achilleas and the spilled loukoumades on the Mayor's crotch force everyone to face up to the

[32] Slapšak, S. 2013. 'Ancient Women's Cults and Rituals in Grand Narratives on Screen: from Walt Disney's *Snow White* to Olga Malea's *Doughnuts with Honey*' in Renger, A-B. and Solomon, J. (eds.) *Ancient Worlds in Film and Television*. Leiden, Boston: Brill. p. 263.

truth and their own responsibility for what has happened. In other words, the community has to recognise that it has not been fulfilling its duty to protect its members; the Mayor has been abusing their trust and they were turning a blind eye for the sake of appearances, to avoid a scandal, or because they were acting selfishly, being simply too involved in their own problems (Eleni with her weight, Achilleas's grandmother with her arthritis and the hold of her religious vow, Thrassos with his own personal pain at losing his sister to anorexia, and so on). For as long as this is the case, Ismene's funeral fails completion three times (a conventional number in comedy); only when the community faces their own shortcomings can the burial be completed successfully. Tragedy (the sacrifice of the innocent) is averted. In addition, "by respecting the spirit of Aristophanes' standard comedy finale in the film, which is not socially defined by the elite […] Olga Malea in fact rethinks democracy. The main representative of the power, the mayor, is publicly unmasked, ridiculed and humiliated, just as in Aristophanes' comedies. The anti-hero is victorious."[33] The director's reassessment of democracy is indeed a crucial element of her next film, *First Time Godfather*, which will be discussed in the next chapter. The shift from sombreness (the revelation is confronted by the villagers' stunned silence) to crude comedy and humiliation becomes a structural necessity in this moment. Malea goes back to comedic mode exactly because what is happening is so poignant; in Aristophanic terms, for power to be dismissed the figure of authority needs to be humiliated. Leonidas is not caught by the police, but by a pig; with his trousers undone, he is dragged out of his hiding place by the villagers, i.e. the citizen's authority, not the established state structures of discipline and punishment. Although the moment that precedes this is quite serious and emotional, with a distressed child and a crowd lost for words, when the pig enters, the scene loses its subtlety and Haikalis's performance changes to grotesque. The attack by the pig on the uncle's crotch and his grimaces of pain are all filmed in close-ups. This overtness is crude in a way that the rest of the film is not; the scene of the uncle's arrest contrasts with the discreteness with which the issue had been treated so far. To re-appropriate Malea's phrase, humour saves, but

[33] *Ibid.* p. 266.

here it also accuses. The grotesquery of the performance points towards the grotesque nature of the act itself.

While this moment could operate as the major resolution in the film, another narrative thread has been initiated, with Phenia's departure. She feels betrayed by Manos and without understanding why he is so intently after his uncle, decides that it is time to travel as she always wanted. Phenia is not given an extensive background in the entire film; through dialogue, it is determined that she has studied and waits for a permanent placement, which might explain why she works at the funeral parlour. But she does not appear to have any family in the village; she is just there, and Manos is the only link to a shared childhood which locates her in that place. Returning to the romantic comedy mode, Manos runs after the bus Phenia is on, reveals his secret and admits his love for her. Even this revelation is treated with care – he finally confesses to Phenia that he has also "eaten loukoumades" with his uncle. The sensitivity of not naming the act, but knowingly admitting and facing the dreadful truth is now liberating, just like in *The Cow's Orgasm*, where Christina and Athanasia took ownership of the vocabulary used to oppress them. There, metaphors were used to describe body parts; here they are used as a cover to articulate what Edwards calls "men's ongoing difficulties in relation to emotional expression or communication and interpersonal intimacy".[34] What still cannot be shown or even called by its name is paedophilia, and while the villagers are busy with the mayor, Manos covers the boy's body and comforts him, telling him (and perhaps himself) that it is not his fault. Manos's embrace of the child is not charged, and Malea again carefully re-signifies (now in *her*, rather than her characters' vocabulary) the closeness of an adult-child relationship. Moreover, the grandmother promises to make Achilleas as many loukoumades as he wants; the oppression imposed by religious (patriarchal) piety has also been lifted.

In many respects, *Honey and the Pig* is emphatically a location film, placed in a bright, crisp environment. After disrupting the idealised generic connotations of spring, the director ultimately returns to the established associations of fecundity: the power of nature is reflected by the protagonist's return to his village, where he faces his trauma

[34] Edwards, T. 2006. *Cultures of Masculinity*. London and New York: Routledge. p. 13.

and is 're-born', liberated from his past, and finding new virility. Julián Daniel Gutiérrez-Albilla, writing about Almodóvar's *Volver* (2006), suggests that "our present and past existence is subjected to the fate of remembering our traumas and our incompatible memories, forgetting them, acting them out, enacting them, or working through them".[35] The translation of that film's title is, of course, 'to return'. There are many returns in *Honey and the Pig*: to the village, to the past – and importantly *of* the past, in the form of the repressed, of ancient Greek cultural referents, and of Phenia, the childhood sweetheart with a librated sexuality; and even Mr. Billy, the returned expat, who offers an alternative model of masculinity. They all point towards a liminal space between tradition and modernity that the characters inhabit. Eleon is more developed than the village in *The Cow's Orgasm* – we are almost a decade later – and contains more foreign or returning elements within it. It is important to note, however, that modernity is not just the intrusion of Western or urban values into a traditional location, but a crisis of patriarchal values, too. As Achilleas Hadjikyriacou points out in relation to the classic Greek film *Stella* (Cacoyiannis, 1955), the film "offered a unique representation of modernity as a product of domestic patriarchal crisis and not simply as an imported modus vivendi".[36] This (eternal) crisis – and its corollary a process of perpetual modernisation – is precisely what Malea highlights, and explores further in *First Time Godfather*. Modernity is a result of the precariousness of the established traditional models of masculinity.

The film concludes with the formation of a couple and with Manos successfully having sex with Phenia. In this final love-making sequence, loukoumades still function as a fetish object; they are still there even when the association with paedophilia has been resolved in the film and Manos has managed to have sex with a woman. Interestingly, for a film so firmly located within the village, and despite the re-signification of loukoumades, the final scene takes place as if in a fantasy space; although we are provided with a narrative link as to why Manos and Phenia end up

[35] Gutiérrez-Albilla, J. D. 'Returning to and from the Maternal Rural Space: Traumatic Memory, Late Modernity and Nostalgic Utopia in Almodóvar's *Volver*'. in *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* vol. 88, no.3, 2011. p. 323.
[36] Hadjikyriacou, A. 2013. *Masculinity and Gender in Greek Cinema: 1949-1967*. London: Bloomsbury. Kindle edition. Location 5198.

having sex in the pastry workshop, the lighting changes (becomes softer) and the framing isolates the couple, de-contextualising them. It is as if this 'liberation' can only exist in a fantasy space, as there cannot be a cure in social reality. In this respect this film, like all previous ones, offers an unsatisfactory conclusion, contrary once again to the generic convention. However, despite some unresolved issues, some resolution is offered in the end: the uncle gets caught, the couple is formed, Achilleas's grandmother decides to drop the vow and embrace the truth. The question does remain, however, whether the community as a whole rid itself of tendencies to secrecy and taboo. Still, it seems, Manos (in fantasy at least) can also finally cope with the pressures of being in the big city.

With their cartoon-esque quality, the spectacular jumps by the pig, the car collisions, the slapstick moments at the funeral, the aerobics exercise class with ducks following and hunters shooting in the distance, all are instances where the strange and the comical follow moments of seriousness, but also in a comic and peculiar way pave the way back to the confrontation of the main issue. Tasker suggests that "comedy provides a space in which taboos can be addressed, made visible and also contained, negotiated". [37] If Malea's films before this have been about dealing with taboo around sexuality, gender and relationships, this film is the logical climax with paedophilia, the main theme, as the ultimate taboo. In this respect, the comedy also has to be heightened, as was discussed above, to surreal or even crude levels. Strongly ideological material is presented in a way that is critical and humorous. The semiotic shuffle characterising the film has all the conventional thematic binaries employed, but scrambling and mismatching them into incongruous combinations. Women's popular cinema, then, not only operates through re-appropriating popular forms, but also by re-codifying other national, historical and cultural discourses. In her next film, *First Time Godfather*, Malea continues her examination of these discourses, and to that end she literally returns to the past in her first period film.

[37] Tasker, Y. (1998) *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema*. London and New York: Routledge. p. 163.

CHAPTER SIX

First Time Godfather: Performing gender and democracy

In Malea's last comedy to date, *First Time Godfather* (2007), the director seems to take yet a further turn away from her early preoccupations with gendered relations. The main character here is a young boy, Alex (Tex Pardue), who wants to go out for a ride with his father, a prominent politician (*archigos*, translated as Chief). Before the ride can take place, Alex needs to perform a mission: his father asks him to go to Crete to participate in a baptism on his behalf, as the godfather to a baby girl, the daughter of a political ally. After the Christening, Alex is to deliver his father's speech, in order to secure votes for the cause of democracy, as represented by his father's party. Indeed, the film begins and ends with the highlighting of the importance of "words, speeches", of discourse; and the use and choice of language is a key factor in determining the success of Alex's endeavour. This chapter argues that, although Malea has here seemingly moved away from earlier themes concerning primarily gender and sexuality, *First Time Godfather* still deals, ultimately, with patriarchal discourses and structures underpinning power relations in Greek politics and society, which are caught in a cycle of perpetual modernisation. Quite literally indeed, the film declares its aims from very early on: a young character needs to reproduce the speech (discourse) of his *pateras*/father, who is also the *archigos*/chief (*pateras* + *archigos* = patriarch), and the main question that drives the narrative is whether he will be able (or indeed willing) to do so. I suggest that this film is the logical next step in the path the director has taken so far, in two ways. First, Malea's preoccupation with gender roles and relations in Greece, as structured and informed by patriarchy, has led her from looking at women in various stages of their lives in her early 'trilogy', to investigating the effect patriarchy has on masculinities. In a sense, Alex and his friend Panos (Nikos Andreoulakis) are the ultimate (and literal) 'new men' who have to find their voice. Second, the tensions between tradition and modernity, which began to be explored with Christina and Athanasia wanting to leave their village; continued in the modern urban settings that were still seen to be bound by traditional patriarchal models and hierarchies; and led to

a return to the rural with references to an ancient past in *Honey and the Pig*; these tensions have led the director to examine a foundational moment in the history of the contemporary Greek state, when traditional modes of living and organising power were beginning to be challenged by new models of democracy in the formation of a national discourse. As Hadjikyriacou notes in relation to the transformations of Greek society in the 1950s and 1960s:

> What comes out of this complex procedure is a blend of cultural elements and views of gender, some of them similar and overlapping, others different and conflicting; some of them completely new, while others having their roots in a long tradition with minor or major alterations.[1]

Through her comedic strategies, this chapter claims, Malea exposes the complex relations between these forces, models and discourses.

Figures of speech: employing motifs and allegory

"Our weapons are words, speeches. That's our battlefield", Alex's father tells him as he dispatches his son to Crete. As soon as the boy arrives on the island, he is treated with a *mantinada* (a traditional type of rhyming couplet) by Nikitas (Manos Gavras), brother of Panagakis (Antonis Kafetzopoulos), the local political ally, and one of the men in the receiving committee. Two discourses are at play here: the Athenian, modernising democratic speech that Alex bears as his father's delegate encounters the traditional Cretan dialect and form. But a third linguistic code is also present: English. Alex's mother is American, and the boy has grown up in the United States. His Greek is not very good, and his understanding of the Cretan dialect even worse. Notably, young Panos (Panagakis's son), while still in the port, picks up on Alex's accent and says to him "welcome", in English; the director thus sets him up as a potential ally. The relation between the two boys proves to be key in the denouement of the plot, and in the way thematic preoccupations are articulated.

[1] Hadjikyriacou, A. 2013. *Masculinity and Gender in Greek Cinema: 1949-1967*. London: Bloomsbury. Kindle Edition. Location 1209.

Alex's outsider status had been foregrounded from the opening sequence of the film, when he is still in Athens trying to play basketball with a group of local Greek children, who would rather play football with the rules and moves they understand. There is a parallel with the overarching theme of the film here, with the director engaging, to use Jameson's term, in a process of "national allegorisation, providing individual narrative representations through which the national destiny can be fantasized".[2] The introduction of a new game with a foreign set of rules, and the degree to which these rules are absorbed, becomes an allegory for the attempts to bring a Western-style (mostly meaning from the USA) democracy to Greece. An active camera and a fast-paced editing of a succession of medium and close-up shots pick out details of this rather awkward game. Alex is dressed in a red, checked and buttoned-up shirt, shorts and branded All Star trainers, as opposed to the monochrome, light-coloured or white T-shirts and unbranded, fabric shoes of the other boys. He is characteristically blonder than the rest of the children and adults around him (the only other blonde character in the film is his mother, who only briefly appears as a reassuring familiar face when Alex is about to depart for Crete, and when he has returned), and he is made to bear little resemblance to his father. Alex's difference and vulnerability are further emphasised in the long pan-and-tracking shot that shows him making his way past the men in dark, formal suits gathering outside the Chief's house in anticipation for their leader. Alex is eager to reach his father's office pushing through the taller, overpowering crowd; it is three o'clock and his father has promised him a ride, just the two of them. Once outside his father's office door, he is briefly stopped by the guard. With the permission to enter granted, he leaves his basketball outside and closes the door behind him as he enters. The camera however, has titled down, focusing on the basketball left behind with a close-up shot, marking the importance of this prop, at once a metaphor for the new and imported modernity, and a symbol of a generation gap: Alex's father does not like or take seriously his son's love of the sport. The music, which had been playing since the title sequence, stops as Alex opens the door to his father's office; in silence, the first shot is a low-angle, medium-long shot from behind Alex's back, looking at the adults, who observe him with great interest. Straightaway he

[2] Jameson, F. 1992. *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*. London: British Film Institute. p. 37.

is assigned his task. As he departs on his mission, Alex is now wearing the grey suit of the political establishment – though he is also carrying, strapped across his chest, his inseparable basketball.

Like in Malea's earlier comedies, the role of the foreigner looking in to Greek reality and customs is a feature; but whereas before the outsiders inhabited the periphery of the narrative, observing from marginal – both in societal and narrative terms – positions (the Indian delivery men in *The Cow's Orgasm*, the Filipino maids in the *The Mating Game*, the English-speaking models in *Risotto*, and the Pakistani coffin carriers in *Honey and the Pig*), here the outsider is centre-stage. The critique of patriarchal discourse is thereby conflated with that of its all-pervasiveness in Greek national discourses of tradition, but also of modernisation. Patriarchy is a constant because it informs all aspects of Greek life – it pervades not only sexual and gender politics, but also social and governmental politics. In this way, the personal and political are associated. Thus, *First Time Godfather* remains close to the aims and thematic preoccupations of women's cinema; and, as will be discussed below, its strategy of consciously and methodically exposing the fixity (or at least the resistance to change) of patriarchal structures not only underpinning gendered relations, but also compromising political and historical modernisation efforts, is akin to feminist film practices.

As well as exploring the use(s) of language, the director employs two key motifs in her conceptualisation of tradition and modernity in opposition to one another. They are important not only for their manifestation of the intergenerational conflicts, but also in establishing the relationship between Alex and Panos: these are Alex's basketball, and Panos's hedgehogs. As soon as the party has left the port, the Cretan landscape is revealed in a long panning shot (it will be a while before the film revisits the open space again), followed by close-ups of the group in the car, and the running over of a hedgehog, much to the delight of Panagakis, who has steered the car towards it, and to the horror of his son Panos. In Malea's poetics of modernity[3] the humble

[3] I am borrowing the term from Richard Kearney; Malea constructs and examines models of modernity based on the crises engendered by patriarchal discourses. See Kearney, R. 1995. *Poetics of Modernity: toward a hermeneutic imagination.* Highlands, NJ. Humanities Press.

hedgehog becomes a metaphor for the rights of minorities in the democratic ideal as imagined by the two boys.

We first encounter the hedgehogs on the road. The road is a symbol of 'progress', the promise of which is part of the political arsenal for canvassing votes – but the hedgehogs are unwelcome there. Panagakis does not like them; the only explanation for this dislike is offered by Panos: whatever the boy likes, his father dislikes. In addition, Panos's masculinity is constantly questioned by his father. His taste in music, his unwillingness to speak in public in the traditional form of the *mantinada* and his love for the hedgehogs, represent a modern sensitivity, combined with an ecological conscience that characterise him as a 'new man', at odds with the brute model of masculinity his father seems to subscribe to (in fact, Panagakis's character is not so simple, as will be discussed later in the chapter). Panos wants to be "a poet – but a real poet, not just someone who recites couplets", and in conversation with Alex, he calls himself a minority, one of the most politicised terms introduced in the film. He identifies with the hedgehogs, which have no political or factional affiliation and (literally) stand in the way of the model of progress epitomised by the road that needs to be built, and therefore need to be crushed. Notions of individuality, belonging, and their relation to democratic ideals are discussed here; in response to Alex's observation that people keep asking for political favours (significantly, new roads), Panos suggests that in democracy, each person is out for themselves. Here, the hedgehog becomes the victim of the democracy of the fathers. Indeed, the democracy of the fathers is treated as ritualised and hollowed, in opposition to the ideals they claim to purport. The trampling over minorities embodied by the hedgehog is personified in the figure of the "crazy" peasant Moustakas (Giannis Kalatzopoulos), who inhabits the same territory as the hedgehogs, like an animal. He appears to represent the left-wing underclass that was persecuted in the post-Civil War period in which the film is set.[4] Of course, Panagakis does not see the association between hedgehogs and Moustakas; while he

[4] The dialogue hints at this association. The Greek Civil War took place between 1944-1949, but divisions and tensions in Greek society continued for many years after. See Mazower M. (ed.) 2000.
After the War Was Over: Reconstructing the Family, Nation and State in Greece, 1943-1960. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press; and Carabott P. and Sfikas T. D. (eds.) 2004. *The Greek Civil War: A Conflict of Exceptionalism and Silences*. London: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.

wants to kill the former, he claims to want to protect the latter. According to him, democracy must come "so that we are not hunted animals, like Moustakas". Paradoxically, while he is blind to the metaphor, at the same time he constructs a simile around the two. It is only through the eventual recognition by Panagakis of the hedgehogs' right to exist that a full embrace of the logic of his own words is observed. Indeed, the hedgehog is where the approval of the son by the father is enacted – Panagakis has accepted the changed, future world his son represents when he does not crush the hedgehog on the road. Malea's constant navigation between the personal and the political means that the hedgehogs are conceived of politically, as well as in terms of the father/son relationship. The symbolic charging of animals is a feature that reoccurs in all of Malea's rural films. As was discussed in previous chapters, the cow in *The Cow's Orgasm* becomes the means of self-acceptance for Athanasia and Christina; and Marikaki, the piglet, in *Honey and the Pig* is instrumental in Manos's coming to terms with his past in order to be able to imagine a future with Phenia. The animals, in other words, become catalysts for change in Malea's rural comedies, symbols of freedom and acceptance, nature in contrast to the constructed world of restrictive rules and rituals. Although the binary nature/civilisation is reductive here, the innocence of the animals and their existence outside ideology renders them capable of becoming symbols of change – the *Deus ex Machina* (*Deus ex Bestia*?) which appears and provides solutions.

While the motif of the hedgehog operates metaphorically, Alex's basketball operates metonymically in the film's construction of modernity. As was noted earlier, the ball is a marker of Alex's difference from the Greek boys. Moreover, it belongs in a game that has its own, foreign rules, new to the local players, who at first do not want to engage with them. By extension and metonymic association, it represents the American model of democracy, which is linked with modernisation (or at least some kind of progress), and which Alex's father wants to bring to the country. However, the Chief does not like the game; we have seen Alex leave the ball at his father's door, and the boy comments with Panos on his father's disapproval. Of course, like Panagakis, the Chief is not aware of the association, and is himself caught in the same contradictory ideological bind: he wants to bring modernity and new rules to Greece, but not the new game that

epitomises them. Both fathers' understanding of democracy is selective. The final sequence of the film, however, returns to the Athenian playground where Alex is this time playing basketball with the other children. While the audience are never shown a change of heart on the Chief's part, the implication is that the new set of rules has now been established. This being a Malea film, though, nothing is as straightforward as it seems. There is a final twist (and nod to the attentive viewer): Alex no longer has his basketball beside him – he has given it as a parting gift to Panos (who in turn has given him a hedgehog); so the children are playing the game of basketball, but with a football. Inevitably, although there is a positive meeting of cultures, this kind of hybridisation suggests that there is a compromise, because the Western model of modernisation is filtered through local sensitivities and practices. There is no value-judgement, only the acknowledgement of a complex and contradictory reality. Hadjikyriacou notes that "[w]hile this modernization process had a Western origin, this does not imply that Greece was a passive backward society simply receiving and adopting all foreign influences".[5] In her treatment of this scene, Malea seems to be acknowledging precisely that. It is important that a distinction is made here: while modernisation, as employed in this thesis (and in this chapter in particular), suggests an overall change of attitude, culture, way of thinking and operating – including here gender relations, political practices and other social interactions – progress rather relates to the visible changes in the country's infrastructure – such as the road/s that Panagakis promises to the village community. And while both concepts might be interrelated, and progress seen as part of a wider modernising effort, Panagakis needs to substitute the former (modernisation) for the latter (progress) in order to gain political support. The lack of fear that democracy will guarantee according to him (so that people are not hunted, i.e. persecuted) is a welcome promise, linked to his idealism and passion, but already tainted by the concessions he needs to make in order to achieve the change in the political regime; in other words, the political regime changes but not necessarily the political reality that benefits certain groups, the clients,

[5] Hadjikyriacou, A. 2013. *Masculinity and Gender in Greek Cinema: 1949-1967*. London: Bloomsbury. Kindle Edition. Location 1828.

more than others. In spite of this suggested permanence, the political reality of the film is in fact historically located.

The film is based on a collection of short stories by Nikos Papandreou (who is also the co-screenwriter with Olga Malea), *Ten Myths and A Story/Deka Mythoi kai Mia Istoria* (1995), released in English with the title *A Crowded Heart* (1998). Both the book and the film have autobiographical elements; however, Papandreou notes that the stories in the book, as well as the film plot, are *inspired* by autobiographical details rather than those details being recorded accurately or faithfully on page and on screen. The scriptwriters maintain that, in the film version, even further distance has been placed between the characters and the personalities they are meant to be portraying. According to Malea, the said Chief in the film is just *a* politician, who is also a father, and whose political career does not allow him to spend enough time with his son;[6] thus the private, family story is given priority in the narrative. However, elements in the representation of the character of the Chief undeniably make references to Andreas Papandreou, a dominant figure of Greek politics, Prime Minister between 1981-1989 and 1993-1996, and father to the recent Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou and the writer Nikos Papandreou. In addition, the narrative takes place in the 1960s (a single, brief mention of the elections of 1958 and 1961 in the dialogue helps roughly locate the film temporally), referencing a turbulent period of post-Civil War politics, with events that ultimately led to the military coup d'état in 1967. As noted before, this is Malea's only film set in the past. I argue that this temporal setting is significant in that it allows for national, cultural and historical discourses, at a key point of their formation, to be foregrounded.

In support of the writers' claim that, although anchored in some autobiographical details, this is a personal story removed from historical figures and events, the script has been re-worked by Malea 'in genre', made to follow a series of comedic conventions in terms of structure and characters; for example, like in her other comedies, there is here, too, a series of recognisable stereotypes, which are employed only to highlight the constructedness of their own nature and carry much of the

[6] Interview with me, Athens, April 2011.

comedy in the film. Indeed, I argue that while the temporal setting is important, and despite some (intentional) references to historical personalities, the issue of specific historical accuracy is not important in *First Time Godfather*; rather, its relationship to the nation's recent history becomes significant in the way the film's content reflects on the contemporaneous reality at the time of its release. In 2007, Greece was increasingly experiencing a post-Olympics low, accentuated by a series of political scandals that started dominating the country's current affairs. I claim that the film constitutes Malea's critical response to a political reality which is registered as ever-present and continuously problematic in Greece. The tension between tradition and modernity, which has been an important structural device for Malea's previous films, here becomes more overtly political, mapping (rather cynically at times) the country's attempts at development, whether referring to the 1960s or the 2000s; the film observes and satirises a condition that is continuing and familiar, and that still impacts on gender roles and relations. Hadjikyriacou points out that "[a]s far as gender is concerned, despite the obvious trend towards a more westernized reality, signs of continuity of older Greek traditions, within a revised, urban-oriented model of patriarchy, remained evident for several decades".[7] Thus, despite the director's claims that the emphasis of the narrative lies with the familial father/son relationship, this is the most overtly political of Olga Malea's films. The nameless political Chief is indeed an example of how the film consciously seeks to distance itself from real personalities and events; and the de-contextualisation of the personalities from historical events goes even further in this direction. However, the public domain of politics is ever-present in the film and is intertwined with the personal (carrying echoes of a key feminist notion, and expanding its application to the electoral in the context of this film), creating a tension that fuels much of the narrative. Indeed, electoral gain is achieved through the establishment of personal bonds of kinship, even if occasionally their "efficacy in the organisation of economic or political tasks is put to the test";[8] and even if the institution of these bonds operates as an obstacle to the interests of the film's young protagonist. Moreover,

[7] Hadjikyriacou, A. 2013. *Masculinity and Gender in Greek Cinema: 1949-1967*. London: Bloomsbury. Kindle Edition. Location 675.
[8] Loizos, P. and Papataxiarchis, E. (eds.) 1991. 'Introduction', in *Contested Identities: Gender and Kinship in Modern Greece*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. p. 7.

much of the comedy comes from satirising the clientelist relationship that is established between politicians and voters through the use of religious ceremonies; Alex himself, in the young age of eleven years and eleven months has already participated in numerous weddings, "as para-koumbaros and para-para-koumbaros" (or second-Best and third-Best Man), with the ever-growing distance from the actual role of the Best Man treating the practice with increasing irony. There are also strong religious connotations here, with the son sent to represent the father, enhancing earlier connotations of the image of the charismatic leader (for instance with the headshot posters of the Chief on cars, doors, walls), who holds the promise of a better, more democratic future. It is clearly pointed out in the dialogue that it will be indeed an honour conceded to the Cretan political allies for the Chief to send his very own son to the baptism. But this is also a politically risky proposition, considering Alex's "geotopic otherness".[9]

Eat, praise, vote: domestic and national politics

The only obstacle against sending Alex to represent his father in Crete is the fact that he is not *obviously* Greek and does not command the Greek language very well yet. As one of the Party Chief's aids points out with concern, the Cretans are a difficult crowd who could only be won over by an experienced politician. The implication is not only that young Alex is inexperienced, but that his foreignness and difference may indeed prove a hindrance to the political cause. Notions of national identity and how this is rendered recognisable are raised here, introducing one of the key conflicts running through the film: autochthonous tradition in its interaction with modernity and cosmopolitanism. Although temporally, the film generally remains vague (with that single mention of the elections of 1958 and 1961 as the recent past in the film), it is rather firmly placed in terms of its location: Crete. This is the largest island of Greece, with a proud cultural heritage and identifiable local cultural and linguistic traits, such as a distinct dialect, strong musical and poetic traditions, but also eclectic local cuisine. Many of these are referenced in the film, often rather playfully, and contribute to the

[9] Jameson, F. 1992. *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*. London: British Film Institute. p. 37.

humour of the film in further alienating Alex from the already challenging reality. In other words, the little Greek that Alex knows proves insufficient when confronted with the Cretan dialect, and the urban modernity represented by Athens quickly disappears in the face of the local and deeply traditional praxes. Malea's film deals with one of the founding principles of Greek history and myths (in Barthesian terms)[10] in the national psyche: democracy. As Wendy Everett suggests in relation to European cinema in general, "[f]ilm is important because it interrogates and articulates identities, as it constructs and deconstructs defining myths and images".[11] Malea's work deals precisely with this type of interrogation, in a Greek context.

The need for democratic change is powerfully articulated in the scene where Panagakis, his family and Alex encounter a group of men from the Manedakis faction upon arriving at the central village square. The difference between the two local factions is represented by the colour of their shirts: the Manedakis group wear white shirts; having arrived from Fountedakis' house, Panagakis and his brother are still wearing their black shirts – but there is no other difference in the traditional Cretan costume both sides wear. Costuming is rendered important in this film in the same way that it was in *The Mating Game*, as an overt projection of constructed identities; here it signifies kinship and by extension politics, though the similarities between them are as markedly important in Malea's visual discourse as are their differences. Crucially, the official state, represented by the policeman in this scene, quite pointedly turns its/his back to the impending violence. Panagakis and his family have to either change route or face a dangerous situation. Part of this battle for democracy, for Panagakis's brother at least, is facing up to fear of the other side and reclaiming the public space; individual gain is never completely removed from the equation, though. His bravado is strengthened when he sees the girl he is in love with also approaching the square. The *plateia* (square) is a space "closely associated with masculinity",[12] which has to be performed. The need for performance is exacerbated by the presence of his romantic

[10] See Barthes, R. 1993. *Mythologies*. London: Random House.
[11] Everett, W. (ed.) 2005. 'Introduction', in *European Identity in Cinema.* Bristol, UK and Portland, OR, USA: Intellect.
[12] Hadjikyriacou, A. 2013. *Masculinity and Gender in Greek Cinema: 1949-1967*. London: Bloomsbury. Kindle Edition. Location 323.

interest, particularly as "[n]ormally women and especially young girls were not allowed to go to the *plateia* except when festivities were held."[13] The rare encounter (we see a few other instances of furtive exchanges between them) is charged: this is a forbidden romance – she is one of "The Others", as the factions reciprocally are called, and the hope is that democracy will also help the young couple beat the current obstacles. In this sequence, then, gender and politics are performed in the self-same act. Panagakis, however, is there to ground Nikitas with his voice of reason, cynically pointing out that a political change will not change anything for the couple. The Others will always be 'Other'. With this, he undermines the very promise of freedom he campaigns for. The contradictions in the character are forcefully exposed by the director. After facing off the unexpected encounter with The Others and going past the square, a change of costume takes place for the next phase of political campaigning. Panagakis's role is significant because, in his effort to get elected, he needs to bring the two factions together (in ways that the couple can never achieve), and the change in costume is one of the tools in his diplomacy (or fakery according to his son, Panos). Indeed, artifice is established as the operative mode across all social and political acts: eating, praising, delivering speeches and promises, and dressing are established as performative acts, means to achieve desired ends. Edwards points out that "performativity theory [...] argues that *all* acts, including those that are rendered entirely normative, are a form of performance or are 'performative'".[14] This 'fakery' also compromises the potency and promise of democracy. Thus the scene at the square is an instance of social comedy: the seriousness of the situation (and what it represents) is counterpointed by the two opposing groups meeting under conditions of exaggerated choreographed formality, which is matched by the camera crosscutting during the scene from one group of people to the next, and by juxtapositions of close-ups of each person's look. The director therefore, in constructing the comedy in the scene through editing and cinematography, highlights the performative aspect of politics and gender.

[13] *Ibid*.
[14] Edwards, T. 2006. *Cultures of Masculinity*. London: Routledge. p. 100. The italics are in the original.

Apart from acting out political and kinship loyalties, all characters also heighten their performance of gender; masculinities and femininities are performed particularly in social contexts and by the older generation (though the children are not entirely immune to this either). As was pointed out in the introductory chapter of the thesis, a number of reviewers noted that there are very few positive representations of Cretan people in the film, especially of the older generation; this has been one of the main criticisms of the film, since its comedy is to a large extent provided by the acting out of stereotypes. However, I argue that the ironic treatment of the film is targeted not towards the characters, and the people they represent, but at the conventions, traditions and customs that will have to change if these people's worlds (and worldviews) are to be modernised; they are meaningless in the world they are trying to build. The stereotyping heightens the audience's awareness of the artificiality of the situations. The characters want progress, but insist on parochial practices. Malea films all that with close-ups, emphasising every little performative act: she does not just show the action, she emphasises it, highlighting the detail and ridiculing it. However, her emphasis is different from the emphases attributed by the characters' performances. She uses the filmic tool to achieve the opposite result, which renders the characters comical, but the convention, too. As Richard Dyer points out, writing about representations of gay people, the "simplicity of formal means [...] and evident ideological purpose" employed by stereotyping are not to be mistaken for "a simplicity of connotation and actual ideological effect". [15] Like in *The Cow's Orgasm*, the 'rules' become the joke, with their inconsistencies and the double standards in their application. Similarly here, the rituals are treated as ridiculous, rather than the people caught in these prescribed forms of behaviour. For instance, in both households/factions the group visits, the ritual is the same: the women serve food, the men ask for political favours. In the first house they visit, a high angle shot shows women and men separated: women stand around the food, men in the sitting area, further away – each in their domain. The scene typically reflects what Jane K. Cowan

[15] Dyer. R. 1993. *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation*. London: Routledge. p. 73-74.

describes as "the pervasive reality of a sexually segregated spatial world"[16] when she is discussing the exchange of *kerasma*, the customary offering of hospitality involving food in social occasions in Greece. This kind of spatial segregation has already of course been observed in the church scene in *The Cow's Orgasm*, and one can draw a parallel here between the religious rites and the rites of democracy – both strongly linked with patriarchy. The separation between genders extends to their costume. The women's costumes are colourful, the men are in traditional dress, their hallmark black shirts and brown trousers. The only two male characters not wearing these are Alex, who is wearing his suit of authority, and Panos, who has a light-coloured shirt marking him as the non-conformist in the community. Significantly, though, once the political negotiations have started (the men's domain), the women enter this space in a ritualised, choreographed manner, presenting Alex (and the other men) with food, their offerings at the altar of democracy. For democracy to take place, the offering needs to be accepted. Alex needs to eat (and praise the chef). The first *kerasma* offered to Alex is a syrupy sweet made of orange peel. "The gluey but perfectly preserved fruit is widely considered an emblem of the housewife's artistry and skill", Cowan explains in her analysis of gendered social relations in Greece.[17] The hostess has made it herself with oranges from their own trees. In a voice-over, Alex wonders why he has to eat the rind; he is clearly not versed in the importance of the ritual, and his hesitancy causes tension in the room. Only after he (apparently) eats and compliments the sweet (washing it down with plenty of water) is everyone at ease again. The importance of the procedure is emphasised when later Alex spits the sweet he had been keeping in his mouth out in the street, and Panagakis anxiously looks around, thankful that no one has seen them. This would have been a great insult, which would most certainly result in the loss of votes. The procession of foods continues as the negotiations advance, until the next stage in this liturgy of democracy is arrived at: Nikitas offers a *mantinada*, and Panos is called upon to speak a couplet of his own. When he falters, Alex rescues him with "Long live Democracy", bringing the ritual to an abrupt, but celebratory end.

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[16] Cowan, J. K. 1991. 'Going out for Coffee? Contesting the Grounds of Gendered Pleasures in Everyday Sociability', in Loizos, P. and Papataxiarchis, E. (eds.) *Contested Identities: Gender and Kinship in Modern Greece*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. p. 183.
[17] *Ibid*.

In the second house Alex and the Panagakis family visit, it is more of the same: through the use of repetition, the ritual of eating and the "treats" coming around is further hollowed out. After success in the first household (including his act of dissembling), Alex is confident; but no matter how much he eats and praises, the food will keep coming, until the whole sequence loses meaning from saturation. The food is the pride and joy of the women, it is how they contribute to the exchange system that the ritual commodification of democracy entails; each dish represents not only Cretan tradition as a whole, but individual household recipes and the women's skills – and if one offends them, the household is offended, and by extension the whole kinship group or political faction. Collier and Yanagisako point out that, "[g]ender and kinship are mutually constructed. […] They are realized together in particular cultural, economic and political systems."[18] The scene culminates with a final offering: a delicacy of snails in a sauce stewed for three days and nights. This proves an insurmountable challenge for Alex, and the performance falls apart. He spits the snail he has been practically force-fed by Mrs Panagaki, and it lands on the Cretan knee-high polished boot of Manedakis. There is something intensely political here. The adults do not see Alex for what he is, a child who does not like snails; spitting the snail onto the boot is an insult with wider consequences. The choice of shots – extreme close-up of the boot, close-up reaction shot of Manedakis, wider shot of the collective gasp – operates cumulatively to create the humour in the scene, and satirises the constricting character of the custom. As Tasker suggests, "[i]f comedy has a particular relationship with authority (which it typically subverts) it also emphasises performance: facial expression, intonation, delivery and body language".[19] Malea's strategy is clear: just like in the square scene, the over-signification in the camera parodies the over-signification of the event in the eyes of the community, and the hypocritical nature of the convention is ridiculed.

In both houses the ritual is presented as grotesque; the low-angle shots – the most common in the film – show the sequence of hovering plates from the boy's point of

[18] Collier J. F. and Yanagisako, S. J. 1987. *Gender and Kinship: Essays toward a Unified Analysis*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. p. 7.
[19] Tasker, Y. 1998. *Working Girls: Gender and Sexuality in Popular Cinema*. London and New York: Routledge. p. 171.

view. Above them, the monstrously presented women bear the offerings. The more Alex eats, the more grotesque the situation appears to be, and this repetition is matched by the repetition of the camera, in a process of visual accumulation that creates a litany of excess. The ritual of food appears as 'monstrous' because it is so excessive, and indeed because it is ritualistic – the ritualistic element is 'monstrous'. There are rules to be followed so that his delegated authority is accepted; and foreign-looking and -sounding Alex needs to pass the test in all its stages of increasing strangeness, as if he is delving further and further into the local tradition that the food represents. Alex has learned the form, but not the meaning and implications of these rules and rituals. Cretan identity is portrayed in this film through food, which operates as a figural device that locates tradition in the same way the basketball and the hedgehogs embody modernity. Throughout the sequence, Panos's presence is very important, even when he does not speak; the camera cuts continually to him as he witnesses Alex's efforts. The ritual is satirised then by the camera and editing, as has been demonstrated, but also by the character, the outsider from within the community. And in seeing Alex's distress, Panos regurgitates to him the words "Long live Democracy", which Alex tries to use in order to evade his predicament and attempting to replicate the success in the previous house. The meaning of the repeated expression is now not only hollowed out, but completely dismantled: the phrase has become nothing more than the tactical plea of a distressed child trying to avoid eating, and its performative functionality as a speech-act has collapsed.

It's all Greek to Alex: learning the local ways

Before Alex engages in these rites, he needs to be initiated (or indoctrinated) in the local ways, a process of overt interpellation. Alex, who had been outside the local ideology and praxes, needs to be 'summoned into' the traditional Cretan ways in a process of further de-naturalisation by the director. The task of his education is undertaken most visibly by Panagakis, who is eager to teach him how to behave and what to say. There are three important lessons Alex needs to learn: he must eat everything; say yes to everything; and say something of his own. The scene, which itself is a 'rehearsal' of the behaviours expected from Alex, is constructed in an overtly

performative manner; the whole family are gathered around a centre table in the main front room and each member of the family has something to contribute. Mrs Panagakis adjusts Alex's tie and takes care of his appearance; Panagakis teaches Alex the manners he will need to use when out canvassing, and the food on the table is used to represent the two factions in Panagakis's explanation. The trays are foregrounded in the centre of the frame, with both Alex and Panagakis on either side framing the food, which is in between them. Panos and his uncle, who are sitting at the table with Myrto (Panagakis's young daughter, played by Anna Louizidi), move out of the way in a synchronised, choreographed manner when Alex and Panagakis approach and take centre stage. In fact, Mrs Panagakis tries to take Myrto away, in accordance with the "gendered dichotomy in space" ascribed by tradition and as has already been established "symbolically legitimated by the Christian Orthodox religion",[20] but she sticks around, contributing to the conversation. It is she who teaches Alex to compliment the chef, showing a keen awareness of how the 'game' should be played – to such an extent that Panagakis suggests that she should have been the son, not Panos. This is in itself problematic, in that he recognises her contribution, knowledge and political acumen, but refuses to acknowledge that these traits can be found (or at least have any usefulness) in a girl. Gender equality is not part of his political aspirations and horizons, further compromising the democracy he purports to enact. Maintaining an objective camera during this exchange of dialogue, the film, however, distances itself from this view.

Once again, the importance of speech-acts is highlighted; more than just eat, Alex must verbalise his appreciation. Moreover, in trying to say something of his own (Long live Democracy), Alex mispronounces the word "demoCRAtia" as "demoCREtia", unwittingly turning the word into a battlefield. Panos's creative way of interpreting "democretia" as the democracy of Crete is dismissed by the father, who insists: "Cra"; which Panos then undermines by comparing it to the sound of hedgehogs being crushed. Democracy, as it is offered by the father(s), crushes minorities in its path. Here, Malea extends the 'semiotic shuffle' she had established in her previous films towards

[20] Hadjikyriacou, A. 2013. *Masculinity and Gender in Greek Cinema: 1949-1967*. Kindle Edition. London: Bloomsbury. Location 3096.

what might be termed a 'linguistic shuffle',[21] which highlights the emptiness of these words: they are being simply recited, repeated and there is a parallel between their performative nature, and that of tradition. The mispronunciation, however, removes the word from this cycle of repetition, offering a variation which Panos enjoys, and actually assigns meaning to. Indeed the only attention given to real meaning in the entire scene comes from this observation. While the other characters' comments and interventions are on the level of ritual, Panos's is on the level of discourse. And although gender is not overtly at the centre of the film, it keeps coming back: Panos and Myrto are the locus for gender "training". Because they are young, their roles are reversed – they have not yet fully learned (or accepted the lessons on) how to behave, even as they are repeatedly reminded of their proper place (Panos has to deliver couplets, but not romantic poems; he should not play the piano; Myrto has to leave the room). As Judith Butler puts it, "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*".[22] Malea, as was the case in all her previous films, repeatedly shows how gendered behaviour is (also) constructed, learnt and performed.

Throughout the film, gender relations are present, even if in the background. For instance, the Cretan wives, in all their supposed dependence and submission to their husbands, are also presented as the key to winning votes; their role, it seems, is to proudly represent their household through their cooking, and if they are happy, then their husbands will be more easily convinced to offer the votes to Panagakis. In other words, the Cretan wives are not passive and voiceless entities who lack influence; instead, this influence is located in the domestic sphere. This subscribes to what Cowan calls the "rhetoric of benign complementarity, which entailed 'separate spheres' for husband and wife (and men and women) in the framework of the 'common' goals and interests of a 'unified' family".[23] Despite recognising a certain authority in these women,

[21] I'm grateful to Simone Knox for her suggestion of the term, following Alison Butler's earlier suggestion.
[22] Butler, J. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York and London: Routledge. p. 140. The italics are in the original.
[23] Cowan, J. 1996. 'Being a Feminist in Contemporary Greece: Similarity and difference reconsidered', in Charles, N. and Hughes-Freeland, F. *Practicing Feminism: identity, difference, power*. London: Routledge. p. 72.

the director is also critical towards them for accepting their prescribed domestic roles and performing them with pride. They are presented as an active part of the fake ritualistic traditional world of patronage and clientelism. The young couple who try to date are also bound by traditions, even if they are already uncomfortable with them. As discussed above, in the square scene, a peculiar 'dance' around tradition and (gender) politics is enacted, with a number of other social groups enmeshed in bigger political issues. The different family feuds and their vendettas, which, on a personal level have an impact on two young people's lives, on a wider level represent the civil and political animosity existing in the country during and after the Civil War. The young woman in love is represented as a victim of this system, whose future is shown in those monstrous wives, who demand their own rituals and seem to ask no questions; they are equally responsible and may even give advice, but in key moments they are reduced to "the wife", with no place in the public debate.

Malea juxtaposes the adult women with young Myrto, who refuses to leave the room when she is told, and is always present in the scenes where politics are discussed. Through her, the feminist politics of the film are realised, as she carries the promise of a different possible future, rather than the deterministic trajectory which seems to exist for the other women. Indeed, the role played by Myrto in Alex's acclimatisation to Crete is worthy of some attention. The relationship is first established early on in the film. On the evening of his arrival, Alex is playing with the basketball in his room; the ball rolls out onto the balcony and a close-up shot follows his feet (now in grown-up's shoes) walking out. When he looks down, he notices that Panagakis and his wife are talking about him, though he does not quite understand what is being said. This is now a high-angle shot, from his point of view. As part of Malea's alienating strategy, the camera never seems to be at a level with the adults when Alex is around the frame. Myrto is sent to fetch Alex downstairs, and he co-opts her to help and explain to him what is being said; they whisper in a conspiratorial fashion, as Alex does not want it to be found out that he does not quite understand the local dialect. As Myrto translates for him and keeps his secret (this is a tacit agreement), their relationship is established: she becomes an adviser and a translator. She intervenes and teaches him not only the linguistic, but also the cultural codes. When later she helps Alex by discreetly swapping

his large portion of sweet for her smaller one, she is presented as a true ally joining in the game and appropriating the role of the 'woman behind the man' – she really knows the rules and assists him. In the labyrinthine politics of Crete, it is as if Myrto is Alex's Ariadne, helping him navigate the maze of local tradition. At the same time, she is also a commentator, as she looks at events from the margins, and she becomes a very important character in relation to Alex and his performance in Crete; she represents the possible future of emancipation for women, and through her agency she calls patriarchy out. Whether this future is fully realised has been of course already been challenged by Malea herself through her previous films.[24] Indeed, even the independent Myrto does not, in the end, share the public platform in which Alex is to deliver his speech; this is left to Panos, as will be discussed later – and perhaps the director's priority here is to show that a different model of masculinity is possible.

Back on the balcony, the action of the film is set in motion; Alex is about to be sent back to Athens, as Panagakis and his wife (she is never given a name, only the role) deem him incapable of performing his duties. When he learns of this (through Myrto's translation), he picks up his "weapon", the speech given to him by his father, and puts on a performance – or rather, the performance of a rehearsal, i.e. he appears to be practising his speech, and thus convinces Panagakis that he will be able to fulfil his duties, not as godfather, but as a political ally. It is not enough that his father sent him, he needs to prove a worthy surrogate, and Alex reveals himself as a great political actor. The notion of surrogacy is further emphasised by the presence in Alex's room of his father's picture on a political poster (a recurring image in the film); the picture provides the inspiration for Alex to deliver his performance. The ever-present image of the charismatic leader is treated almost as a religious icon, and it is significant that the father is seen in pictures more than live. Here, as in *Risotto* the importance of representation in establishing and securing patriarchal structures is highlighted. Only this time, the object of representation is the patriarch himself even in Alex's 'impersonation'. There is a clear association between the issue of tradition and belonging, on the one hand, and patriarchy, on the other. Alex's ability to represent his

[24] *Ibid*. An interesting evaluation of the relative achievements of feminism (and their perception) in Greek society, is provided in Cowan's chapter referred to above.

father hinges on his capacity to perform a certain kind of 'Greekness', to be approved by the local adults who, like so many of Malea's characters, seem to be caught in a double-bind, between a modernising impulse and the security of traditional anchoring structures. Mouzelis explains this condition in broad societal terms:

> As in other late-developing societies, lagging behind the West, in Greece there is a persistent, all-pervasive split between two types of mutually antagonistic political orientations. One is a more traditionally oriented, indigenously based, inward-looking political orientation, hostile to Enlightenment ideas as well as to the institutional arrangements of Western Modernity. The other is a modernising, outward-looking orientation that tries to "catch-up" with the West by adopting Western institutions and values as rapidly as possible.[25]

The Cretan world appears as parochial, not remotely international and very unlike Athens. Ideas of Americanisation are associated with modernisation and progress, though the Cretans appear unconvinced and questions are raised about whether American values can be productively assimilated. The American influence on ideas of change and democracy, mostly through the basketball clearly branded as originating from the USA, is represented as positive in the film, though it is debatable how much this reflects reality in a country deeply suspicious of the American interference since the Civil War years. Nevertheless, to a certain extent it is indifferent where Alex is from; what is at stake is more the idea of surpassing inward-looking tendencies and locked-in traditionalism. The film seems to aspire to a more outward-facing cosmopolitan reality.

In no other character is this dichotomy between inward-looking traditionalism and outward-facing modernity more in evidence than in Lefteris Panagakis. As noted earlier, he insists that Panos performs the traditional *mantinada*, but at the same time provides for him to learn English and to play the piano. Panagakis is trying to introduce "democracy", and his son's education is aspirational, as if he is preparing his son for this modern, democratic period, which nevertheless has not yet arrived. Panagakis, too,

[25] Mouzelis, N. 1995. 'Greece in the Twenty-first Century: Institutions and Political Culture', in Constas, D. and Stavrou, T. G. (eds.) *Greece Prepares for the Twenty-first Century*. Washington, D.C.: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, and Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press. p. 20.

is caught in-between these two worlds. Symptomatically, he does not belong to either faction in the village. He tries to bring both factions together by whatever means possible, and his intention to usher in democracy is genuine, even as it is already compromised by this Machiavellian stance. His commitment to the democratic end is constructed as moving, in the scene when he explains to Alex the importance of the task at hand. But the film remains ambivalent towards him, as the means by which he tries to achieve this suggest that, even as democracy arrives, it is already tainted. As Mouzelis points out,

> […] the gap [between theory and practice] is particularly wide in political systems like the Greek one, in which vocabularies imported from the West are used to conceal and/or legitimize institutional arrangements that are a far cry from the political modernity seen in Western European parliamentary regimes.[26]

Panagakis has to balance pragmatism with idealism, a position that the children refuse to accept. While he acknowledges the need for compromise – he defines politics as "the art of adapting", his son Panos is less forgiving; for him, politics is "the art of faking".

In their own terms: modernising discourses

The tension between Panos and Panagakis is emblematic of the greater narrative topos of the film. As is the case with Alex in relation to the Chief, public and filial obligations appear as obstacles to the fulfilment of personal wishes. The boys have an open conversation about this when Alex, having been sick from too much eating, decides he cannot fulfil his duties after all, and runs away from Panagakis's house into the Cretan countryside. There, he encounters Panos, who has been building a sanctuary for the hedgehogs, a way of preventing them from crossing the road. The political engagement the children have is made explicit when they are discussing their likes and dislikes in relation to their fathers, basketball and hedgehogs, as alluded to above. Importantly, they are finally discussing what they want, but this is only possible in nature, outside the familial, and ideological, spaces. The countryside is where they can

[26] *Ibid*. p. 23.

be themselves, and it is at this point that Panos overtly declares himself a minority. Again, as in *The Cow's Orgasm*, nature provides a sanctuary for the free enactment of identity. Here, in order to discuss the national, Malea goes back to the rural, as the urban anxieties evident in her city films have been uprooted further from these traditions and histories. The countryside has a closer relationship with the (father-)land. Crete in particular is associated with resistance in the national imagination. And while Cretan culture has distinctive local traits (including its cuisine and crucially its dialect, which Alex does not fully comprehend), regional identities need to be co-opted as part of a wider national effort. Malea does not just use Crete as the location and setting; she highlights it at this key moment in the narrative. Because of the space Crete occupies in the national self-narrative, this gives her the opportunity to make her critique more pointedly. The décor, however, is markedly different from previous films – very tempered and naturalistic, not too garish, and with nothing interrupting the beautiful scenery. The characters are more integrated into the scenes, and not so pointedly out of place (as was the case, for instance, in *Honey and the Pig*). It is as if the Cretan landscape is significant enough.[27] When the search party approaches, Alex sacrifices himself to protect the hedgehogs by giving himself up so that Panagakis does not come across the enclosure Panos has prepared. The religious connotations here are quite apparent; Alex finally understands his responsibility and accepts he needs to fulfil his father's mission. The director, however, returns to an irreverent tone. Alex's disappearance is spun by Panagakis: "The boy has told me everything", he says. "He was not abducted by humans, but stolen by the beauty of Crete". The listeners know it is a spin, but no one dares to contest. The landscape anchors local pride and identity, and unifies the political factions.

The director is a destabiliser *par excellence*. Nothing is ever certain in her films. She plays a game of building and undermining, proposing and simultaneously exposing the univocality of patriarchal, but here also national, histories and myth-making. Her comedy derives from this playfulness, but also from her complex politics. The unreliable

[27] The same applies to interior spaces: there are no close-ups to any specific ornaments, and the oversignification present in *Risotto*, or *The Mating Game* is markedly absent here. The exception, of course, is the recurring picture of the Father.

power structures and meaningless notions, such as responsibility, power, democracy, political support, are all at the centre of Panagakis's discourse and are treated ironically by the boys, too. Panos, especially, ridicules the beaurocracy and fakery that appear to surround the politics of democracy and is largely unconvinced by his father's efforts to secure the necessary votes for his election. Eventually, both boys make fun and are critical of the way the adults utilise the term, disrupting these mythologies in Malea's typical style, as Alex understands and joins in playing with the sound of the word as something destructive (the cra-cra of the hedgehogs being crushed). Different models of democracy are examined; individualist democracy where, according to Panos, everyone is out for themselves, with favours and promises given out to all parties, so that voting becomes a matter of self-interest. But a simple democracy of the majority is also not enough. It is as if the children do not yet feel the burden of History (hence Alex's need to be taught, as detailed above), and the contradictions are not easy to resolve. Whilst being the "birthplace of democracy" in the way the West sees itself, the country has also been at the periphery of neo-imperialist/neo-capitalist endeavours. In other Malea films, the overt examination of the national condition is not so visible, but some of the anxieties this creates on everyday lives is. In them, echoes of these larger political shifts are seen in the smaller picture – not the grand narrative. For example, women are educated – one aspect of their lives changes, but not all, and this creates conflict. Even cosmopolitanism becomes problematic – everything is done like in the capitalist West, but daily lives are ideologically constrained by notions that do not belong in that cosmopolitan society. Perhaps the repatriated ex-pat, who himself inhabits an ambiguous space, brings the necessary measure of foreigness and becomes the wedge that cracks the old world (to a certain extent, this is what Manos has done in *Honey and the Pig*). Alex was not born in Greece, but has the Greek heritage, and this confounds people. In a similar way, modern democracy is simultaneously associated with the United States and Greece.

The juxtaposition of the universal and the local is played out even in language terms. It is when they finally take ownership of their language and speech – when they say something of their own – that Alex and Panos are capable of articulating the pluralist and inclusive vision the children represent. Having baptised the aptly named

Elpida (Hope), Alex proceeds to the main village square, where a podium has been erected for him to deliver his father's speech. The Chief's picture, which as noted has been ever present, is framed by laurels and Greek flags. Alex is off-centre. He looks at the crowd, and decides to enter the battleground on his terms: he puts away the speech and will use his own words/weapons. This is the culmination of that first instruction: eat and pay compliments, say yes to everything, and say something of your own. Thus far, Alex had repeated his father's words (Long live Democracy), but now his speech is freed from the burden of calculation and patriarchy. It is not the speech of the fathers. This at first falls flat with the crowd, but Alex has re-signified the term democracy for Panos, who then can also participate; democracy has to allow for diversity. Panos takes the stage and likewise accepts, but also transforms, the tradition, offering a couplet of his own but not as a cultural habit, form without meaning. Thus, he re-inscribes meaning to the *mantinada*, re-appropriating cultural and historical heritage, which does not have to be compromised: the diverse personalities he cites are all from Crete. Unlike in *Honey and the Pig*, where a re-appropriation of history and tradition is undertaken by the film-maker, as discussed in the previous chapter, here this is undertaken by the character himself. He appropriates the traditional terms and needs to use traditional language to put forward his non-traditional view. This is a 'minor' tactic – using generic discourse to undermine the genre's own stewardship of patriarchal structures – and as such operates also as meta-narrative in the context of this film. The issue of autonomy is important when considering Panos. He is a good speaker and he shows that Cretans can represent themselves without the need of an outsider. He embodies the idea of autonomy for Cretan people who can have their own leaders, and while he is a more spontaneous individual, he also fulfils his father's expectations. Individuality and role-play (somewhat associated respectively with modernity and tradition) are brought together, in the way the children take on the roles expected of them, but perform them in an individual way. Alex gives a speech and secures the support and the votes for the local candidate, but he gives it in his own way, not his father's wooden, old-fashioned speech; Panos delivers the *mantinada* and makes the public speech like his father had been hoping for, but he does it in his very own way, like Alex. This appropriation is particularly significant. Anderson argues that "there is a special kind of contemporaneous community which language alone

suggests – above all in the form of poetry and songs".[28] Panos makes sure that he indeed is perceived as part of his community; there needs to be a degree of rupture and healing for a transition from one notion of democracy to another to take place, that is, from a tokenistic, dynastic mode, to a more inclusive one. Within this scheme the children are portrayed as being both simultaneously the minority and the future.

This is the most positive of all Malea's films in its ending; the fact that change is arriving (slowly) is represented by Panagakis stopping his car for a hedgehog, when taking Alex back to the port; and, as seen above, the basketball also stays in Crete – a symbol of something new. As Tarr and Rollet suggest, "[i]f comic narratives are marked by disruptions against authority, their resolutions are conventionally linked not just with the restoration of order but also with the desire for renewal and social transformation".[29] At the same time, Malea's endings always rework the conventions of the genre and the notion of the happy ending; there is a sense of closure and renewal, but with a nod to her observation of the complexity of people and their realities. The film ends with a fade, not a freeze-frame. The film chooses to be hopeful, especially because a political speech is now taken over by the children, but this does not take away from the cynicism of the adults. When Alex finally meets his father again, the Chief is about to tell him something very important, when outside events interrupt him. The father does not finish his words – the father's words have been rendered meaningless. In a voiceover, Alex tries to state what his father might have said – but these are Alex's words now. As always, a degree of optimism is reached having had all the contradictions, compromises and cynicism of the operating system exposed. Though this young generation are those who are running the country when the film is released, the extra-textual conditions make the optimism of the film bitter-sweet. In extra-textual terms, even if it reminds people of the optimism of the 1960s, the timing of the release just before the economic crisis gives it further significance. Malea is a keen observer of reality and public sentiment. The film was released at a time when the optimism and euphoria of the Olympic Games in 2004 had started waning, and Greeks

[28] Anderson, B. [1983] 2006. *Imagined Communities*. London and New York: Verso. p. 145.
[29] Tarr, C. and Rollet, B. 2001. *Cinema and the Second Sex: Women's Filmmaking in France in the 1980s and 1990s*. London and New York: Continuum. p. 168.

were increasingly faced with socio-economic problems fuelled further by political scandals and revelations of corruption at every level. The film's critical approach to concepts of democracy – by far one of Greece's most treasured ideals – and its ironic depictions of opportunism, populism and clientelism in the name of democratic rule were particularly apposite. Thus, at a time when national optimism is coming down from a celebratory high, the film appears almost as a warning and a reminder of the false foundations upon which such political stability stands. One of the reasons for paying attention to the popular is that sometimes it is better at commenting and capturing the *zeitgeist*, general mood and anxieties. As Hadjikyriacou points out, "popular films offer a unique view point from which to observe traditional ideas regarding gender hierarchies".[30] Women's popular cinema in general, and Malea in particular, look at the same issues as films that are considered more "art", but in a way that allows mass audiences to identify and process those anxieties, and criticise these hierarchies in a lighter tone. She steers away from making an openly political statement, offering her own, authorial, point of view. In bringing back the father-son element at the end of the film, she re-anchors it in the personal, rather than the public sphere. *First Time Godfather* and all Malea's other comedies are observations, critiques, and sometimes satires of the contemporary Greek schizophrenic reality during the decade between 1997 and 2007; images capturing aspects of contemporary Greece and Greeks, and their relation to gender, image-making, politics, generational conflict, and that between modernity and tradition.

[30] Hadjikyriacou, A. (2013) *Masculinity and Gender in Greek Cinema: 1949-1967*. London: Bloomsbury. Kindle Edition. Location 5728.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the film comedies directed by Olga Malea and released between 1997 and 2007 in Greece, in order to make a claim for the study of women's popular cinema in Greece and beyond. Women's popular cinema refers to films which are thematically associated with women's cinema while formally operating in popular forms, such as genre. I have argued that Olga Malea and her work provide a particularly interesting case study in that they encapsulate the relationship between these two broad categories of women's cinema and popular cinema. In addition, this thesis has claimed that the two categories inflect one another in interesting ways, and their intersections can act as a productive framework for the analysis of women's cinema *as* popular cinema, effecting a popularisation of usually marginalised themes.

In this conclusion, I will outline how each chapter has contributed to the overall argument of this thesis; highlight thematic strands in the director's work, which are useful in the framing of the argument; and draw attention to recurring motifs which support this analysis. Moreover, this conclusion considers how the discussion in this thesis has contributed to the understanding of Malea's authorial agency, and how this voice articulates ideological concerns through the use of generic forms. Finally, I will briefly consider here the director's historical position in the light of the economic crisis that erupted in 2008. All this contributes to an understanding of Malea's work as exemplary of the proposed subcategory of women's popular cinema, pointing towards a new analytical framework for the work of other women filmmakers.

The introductory first chapter of this work primarily outlined the theoretical frameworks for the argument that followed, namely: women's cinema and feminist theory; discussions around popular cinema; and considerations about authorship. The concept of national film culture and its possible meaning in relation to Greece was also alluded to as a contextual factor. While setting out the claim that the study of the processes by which women's popular cinema takes form and develops in the work of Olga Malea can be fruitful in elucidating approaches for women's cinema to be

conceived of *as* popular, Chapter one also presented the director and her work, placing her in the context of Greek cinema. This was achieved through a brief outline of Greek film history and the critical reception of her work, with the aim of explaining why her work should hold an important place in the study of Greek cinema. Athena Kartalou, in her analysis of Greek popular cinema of the 1960s, points out that, "those filmic texts which belong to the popular film production and are assumed to be uniformly mass-produced are not usually the topic of serious study in Greek theoretical discourse", but that in fact it is "a legitimate theoretical endeavour to consider films destined for 'mass consumption' and to examine them as vehicles of cultural meanings."[1] The work of Olga Malea relates directly to this discussion. As such, the subsequent chapters were constructed around close textual analyses of the director's films, following the order of their release, in an attempt to trace a trajectory in her work that follows the logic of the argument presented.

Chapter two, 'Schemes of Comedy in *The Cow's Orgasm*' has demonstrated how, through her use of comedic structures of opposition, parallelism, exaggeration and incongruity, Malea highlights the contradictions within patriarchal modes of structuring gender relations in rural Greece, advancing a feminist argument. The film centres around two young women, who in the end decide to run away to the big city. Chapter three, '*The Mating Game*: Building sites and gendered identities', has extended the analysis of Malea's strategies to include her use of generic conventions and tropes of romantic comedy in her second film. Through the use and subversion of these tropes and conventions, I have claimed that the director makes a strong statement about the construction of gendered identities in contemporary Greek urban environments. Chapter four, entitled 'Uncovered: *Risotto* and the postfeminist Greek mother', has focused on Malea's stylistic and narrative choices, examining how style and image-making are part of a postfeminist discourse, which the director re-appropriates for her own critique of the postfeminist myth. The characters in this film are working mothers, living in Athens. While not overtly operating as a trilogy, I have argued that Malea's first three films can be read as such, marking a progression both in narrative terms –

[1] Kartalou, A. 'Gender, Professional, and Class Identities in *Miss Director* and *Modern Cinderella*' in *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Volume 18, Number 1, May 2000. p. 105.

from teenagers escaping the constraints of rural Greece, to adults looking for love in the capital, to working mothers experiencing difficulties in reconciling the demands of contemporary urban life – and in terms of her critique: from highlighting the contradictory structures of patriarchy, to exposing gender as constructed, to unmasking the fallacy of postfeminism. In other words: from structure, to construction, to surface, contributing to an understanding of "how power relations shaped female 'experience'"[2] in Greece.

Chapters five and six have examined Malea's apparent turn away from the concerns of women's cinema, and have demonstrated how, in fact, her final two comedies expose the inextricable connections existing between patriarchy and these power hierarchies in Greece. Here, the director extends her reach to show how these connections contribute to a picture of masculinity in crisis. Indeed, it is clear from the director's films that, as Edwards puts it, "masculinity is not *in* crisis, it *is* crisis",[3] in that it is intrinsically associated with untenable gendered models and behaviours. Therefore, Chapter five, named 'Re-mythologising Masculinities in *Honey and the Pig*', showed how, through the use of black humour and incorporating elements of ancient Greek comedy and tragedy, the director exposes the all-pervasive effects of patriarchy and the power structures it tacitly and explicitly endorses, with damaging effect on the lives of men as well as women. Malea in this film returns to the countryside, to a village more developed than that of the first film, a village caught in the same bind between tradition and modernity that the country as a whole experiences.

Chapter six, '*First Time Godfather*: Performing Gender and Democracy' has dealt with Malea's most overtly political film. It has examined the ways in which the director's use of stereotyping and exaggeration in order to de-naturalise behaviours, located patriarchy at the centre of national discourses at a key moment of twentieth-century Greek politics. In these last two films examined, the director has turned her attention to masculinities, executing a return, as it were, to the source of the problems her feminist

[2] Cowan, J. K. 1996. 'Being a Feminist in Contemporary Greece: Similarity and difference reconsidered', in Charles, N. and Hughes-Freeland, F. *Practicing Feminism: identity, difference, power*. London: Routledge. p. 67.
[3] Edwards, T. 2006. *Cultures of Masculinity*. London and New York: Routledge. p. 17.

critique has identified, bringing what had heretofore been in the background, to the foreground.

Throughout these analyses, this thesis has identified two major strands running through Olga Malea's comedies, encapsulating key conflicts or dichotomies. The first strand revolves around the relation between feminisms and patriarchy. In *The Cow's Orgasm*, this is forcefully expressed in the radical action of Athanasia breaking her own hymen, effectively rupturing the structures of patriarchal control over female bodies; in *The Mating Game* this conflict is in evidence, for instance, in the costuming of the three female protagonists, who have to construct their identities according to certain gender expectations; and in *Risotto*, it is clearly articulated in the exposition of the fundamental incompatibility existing between postfeminist expectations of motherhood and patriarchal models of fatherhood. In *Honey and the Pig*, the patriarchal regime is expressed through the disciplining of the female body (shown in its absurdity in the gymnastics sequences), and its reach is seen to perpetuate oppressive structures of power that affect men as well as women; finally, in *First Time Godfather* patriarchy's relation to democracy in Greece is shown in the segregated gendered spaces in which politics take place.

The conflict between feminisms and patriarchy outlined above is seen to be closely related to a second one, also identified as a strand running through all of Malea's comedies: that between modernity and tradition, which is critical in the formation of Greek national identity. Cowan has highlighted "the importance of this 'traditional/modern' dichotomy as an ideological phenomenon – that is, the degree to which this dichotomy has become entrenched in 'indigenous' (both local and national) discourses about individual and collective selves",[4] and she goes on to state that "[a] consideration of examples of such denaturalising [of dominant discourses] nonetheless reveals how inextricably Greek feminism was intertwined with existing discourses of 'modernity' and 'modernisation'".[5] In *The Cow's Orgasm*, modernity is represented by

[4] Cowan, J. K. 1996. 'Being a Feminist in Contemporary Greece: Similarity and difference reconsidered', in Charles, N. and Hughes-Freeland, F. *Practicing Feminism: identity, difference, power*. London: Routledge. p. 63.
[5] *Ibid.* p. 80.

the absent big city, to which the young protagonists aspire, and seen in stark contrast with the traditional forces that dominate life in a small rural community; in Malea's second film, the characters are in the capital, but its promised modernity is shown to be an unfinished project, still under construction, while in *Risotto*, traditional family structures are challenged by modern ways of living. In Malea's fourth comedy, tradition and modernity are made to clash within the setting of idyllic Eleon, with its modern aspirations and ancient character names. Finally, in *First Time Godfather*, the director locates the action temporally at a point in Greek history where a particular model of modernity is being introduced to the country, and locates it spatially in Crete, one of the regions of Greece most steeped in traditional practices; and of course, the conflict of generations between the boys and their fathers encapsulates those tensions to great effect.

Indeed, the two thematic strands constantly intersect, as in Greek society "various continuities from a long patriarchal tradition continue to shape the behaviours of people of every gender, age, class or origin."[6] These strands are identified within the films through a series of recurring binaries that appear as motifs throughout the director's work – even as she destabilises these very binaries. For example, notions of performance and image construction (associated with gender and politics), epitomised by the binary surface/structure are evident most explicitly in *The Mating Game* and *First Time Godfather*, but are also present in the littering of the frame with sexualised images of women in *Risotto*; and in the façade maintained by Leonidas (the mayor), or Eleni's preoccupation with body image in *Honey and the Pig*. Judith Butler writes of bodies as being "a set of boundaries, individual and social, politically signified and maintained".[7] This in fact highlights another of the binaries present in Malea's work: individual/society. All central characters in her comedies attempt to navigate their individual desires within a set of preordained societal expectations. In that respect, the notion of agency is continuously questioned by the director. Finally, the binary

[6] Hadjikyriacou, A. 2013. *Masculinity and Gender in Greek Cinema: 1949-1967*. London: Bloomsbury. Kindle edition. Location 2845.
[7] Butler, J. 1990. *Gender Trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity.* New York, London: Routledge. p. 33.

urban/rural is constantly present. In the rural settings of *The Cow's Orgasm* and *Honey and the Pig*, the city is an alluring (if somewhat distant) concept for the two female protagonists, in the case of the former, and a threatening environment to Manos, on the latter; in Malea's second and third, urban films, characters are still struggling to free themselves from traditional rural gendered models. As Hadjikyriacou points out,

> [W]hile as one would expect, the values of urban life undermined the traditional values of the countryside, to an extent this process applied vice versa with certain urban values and social institutions having rural or provincial origins. We can also talk about significant similarities in the ways people in the rural and urban areas experienced their gender roles.[8]

The author here is referring to the 1960s, but in Greece's perpetual cycle of modernisation, the same appears to apply all the way until the year 2000 and beyond, as pointed out in Chapter six.[9] Finally, in *First Time Godfather*, Alex brings to the Cretan setting a model of modernity and democracy that is markedly urban, Athenian, even foreign. Cowan has pointed out that in certain Greek villages "location was conceptualised in terms of the symbolic dichotomies of modernisation: the village versus the city, or 'Greece' versus 'the west' (often particularised as 'America', 'Germany' or 'Australia')".[10]

Two other recurring motifs are also identified: first, food, with its associations to the performance of gender and sexuality is present in every film. In addition to the two films whose titles include a reference to food (in *Risotto* the dish also carried the connotation of a cosmopolitan, i.e. non-Greek recipe, which needs to be mastered), food is seen as present in the rituals of courtship; for instance, Athanasia is asked to take food to Vangelis as an excuse for meeting him in *The Cow's Orgasm*, and eating is pointedly made part of the 'mating game' between Emilia and Dimitris. Moreover, the

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[8] Hadjikyriacou, A. 2013. *Masculinity and Gender in Greek Cinema: 1949-1967*. London: Bloomsbury. Kindle edition. Location 688.

[9] I have noted in Chapter six that Hadjikyriacou points to the "continuity of older Greek traditions, within a revised, urban-oriented model of patriarchy, [which] remained evident for several decades". *Ibid.* Location 675.

[10] Cowan, J. 1996. 'Being a Feminist in Contemporary Greece: Similarity and difference reconsidered', in Charles, N. and Hughes-Freeland, F. *Practicing Feminism: identity, difference, power*. London: Routledge. p. 81

performative role of food, and its function within the gendered rituals of democracy was discussed at length in relation to *First Time Godfather* in Chapter six. The second recurring motif in Malea's rural films is the key presence of animals – cows, piglet and hedgehogs (again, twice included in the titles of films) – marked as creatures living outside ideology, and therefore serving as vehicles for the reassessment of the constraints imposed by it.

Other recurring themes have emerged from the analysis of the films, but fall outside the remit of this thesis. Issues of class and immigration have been identified, for example, in the characters of the Filipino maids in *The Mating Game*, or the Eastern European models in *Risotto*. While not addressing these issues fully, this thesis has acknowledged that the presence of such 'outsider' characters further complicates the examination of gender roles effected by the director, and at the same time affords her opportunities to provide points of view outside those of the main narrative, a literal 'view from elsewhere'. The exception to this is *First Time Godfather*, where the foreign Alex takes centre-stage. Still, the maids, the Pakistani workers of the funeral parlour (*Honey and the Pig*) and the Indian piano-carriers (*The Cow's Orgasm*) operate to a certain extent as chorus, effecting what might be termed a reverse-othering, commenting on the action and pointing towards the strangeness of the Greek characters' behaviours and customs.

The director's authorial voice emerges, therefore, in some respects as that of an outsider. Her choice to work within a popular generic form places her outside 'serious' discourses; and her status as a woman places her outside the spheres of patriarchal power. From this vantage point she records people's experiences and observes the contradictory nature that these manifest. Her characters attempt to navigate very difficult systems that pull them one way or another. As Tim Edwards observes,

> there is within more contemporary culture a contradiction, or at least an irreconcilable tension, in our understanding of gender: namely that men and women are the same socially and therefore equal and that they remain naturally and fundamentally different and therefore unequal. The former idea is the outcome of modernity and the philosophy of contract while the latter notion is the legacy of the

> ongoing history of patriarchy, in itself seen as originally premised on the idea of natural difference and superiority of men.[11]

Women are expected to be independent, but must also be housewives and mothers, and this creates an impasse, which the director observes in her films.

Stylistically, this is captured by her camera which alienates the action in two ways. First, through a number of strategies of over-signification: littering the frame with images of cows, building sites or nude women; employing exaggerated performances and stereotypes; creating hyperreal environments. Second, through what I have called her systematic organisation of the looks – both of characters and audience. The director actively and effectively exercises a control of the various gazes, using her camera and editing to observe looks between characters and build power relations between them, such as in the church scene in *The Cow's Orgasm*, the shop-window sequence in *Honey and the Pig* or the square scene in *First Time Godfather*. Her use of close shots restricts the audience's gaze to specific elements of the mise-en-scène. For example, the snail on the boot in *First Time Godfather* generates comedy, but also makes sure the ridiculousness of the situation is noted – apparently democracy depends on it; or conversely, allowing her camera to linger and reveal elements not directly central to the narrative, but important for her critique, such as in the final wedding sequence in *The Mating Game*. Malea's refusal to engage in a point-of-view shot of the male characters looking at a young woman going by in *Risotto* is another example of this authorial control – the audience are not allowed to see what the characters see, but rather share the director's critical' view from elsewhere'. According to Claire Johnston, "women's cinema [...] attempted by formal means to bring about a dislocation between sexist ideology and the text of the film."[12] Malea's authorial signature in the text therefore markedly aligns itself with the aesthetics of women's cinema, while also maintaining strong traits of the popular. It is worth noting that, in discussing the popular Greek comedies of the 1960s, Achilleas Hadjikyriacou states that "what appears on screen should not be taken at face value; films do not reflect 'reality'

[11] Edwards, T. 2006. *Cultures of Masculinity*. London and New York: Routledge. p. 21.
[12] Johnston, C. 1973. 'Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema' in *Notes on Women's Cinema*. Screen Pamphlet 2. London: Society for Education in Film and Television. p. 29.

or history, but represent it in their own terms",[13] suggesting that indeed there is more to popular forms than their entertainment value.

Malea's choice of genre cannot be seen outside an ideological frame. Aside from the fact that the director is a great believer in the value of entertainment,[14] comedy allows, through its playful tone, for a combination of reach (in terms of audiences) and level of criticism that is not available to other genres. Its subversive element is in fact part of its appeal. The director's work points to the inherent contradictions which exist within the narratives she creates, and in which the characters are caught – often to comic effect – but also, and crucially, between the overtly expressed views within narratives and the structures of the films themselves. The style undermines the narrative while seemingly corroborating it, but to such an extent that over-signification draws attention to itself.

Generic forms establish themselves through offering familiar structures, formulae and a collection of established signs. Malea makes use of these, exposing and undermining structure, re-appropriating formulae, and re-signifying semiotic codes. A great semiotician, the director constantly plays a game of setting up systems with apparent fixity of meaning, only to dismantle them through a combination of narrative and visual style. Moreover, she is flexible in her approach to the comedy genre, engaging in practices from a variety of subgenres: from romantic comedy, to political satire, to slapstick (and more) – often within a few frames of each other. Writing about the work of Nelly Kaplan, Claire Johnston says that

> [t]he use of such strategies serves to disengage the imagery from the workings of myth and brings about breaks within the text of the film which render the thematic reversals [...] extremely powerful in their impact, as they have been intensified with a multiplicity of additional (cinematic and ideological) references.[15]

Similarly, Malea productively utilises a wide range of narrative and stylistic references offered by the genre (stereotypes, absurd situations, contrived close shots, incongruous

[13] Hadjikyriacou, A. 2013. *Masculinity and Gender in Greek Cinema: 1949-1967*. London: Bloomsbury. Kindle edition. Location 5636.
[14] Interview with me, Athens July 2009
[15] Johnston, C. 1973. *Notes on Women's Cinema*. Screen Pamphlet 2. London: Society for Education in Film and Television. p. 14.

framing), in a way that is useful to her politics. For example, her use of comedic stereotypes is not an easy solution to avoid character, but is strategic in pointing out the construction of the stereotype itself and its ideological implications. Having said that, at face value, her films are not complex; there are no convoluted plot turns (the most complex in this respect is *Honey and the Pig*) or great polemics (perhaps with the exception of the hymen-breaking scene in *The Cow's Orgasm*), but on close inspection of the kind this thesis sought to pursue, there is great work happening at the level of semantics, meaning-making and working with the form. The destabiliser *par excellence*, Malea re-forms the formulae of narrative cinema, and in doing so she destabilises the hierarchical, patriarchal foundations upon which some of her narratives at first appear to be resting.

This is particularly appropriate for the kinds of observations about modernity that she makes. It seems as if some of the issues raised by the advent of modernity have not been resolved before Greece passed on to post-modernity – in a manner analogous to postfeminist ideas being introduced in a society not yet fully having come to terms with feminism. The set of ideas relating to modernity that Malea represents in her films – in terms of gender equality and relations, politics, consumerism, development – are always qualified and shown to still be rooted in traditions informed by hierarchical systems that are patriarchal. Moreover, Cowan observes that "the subordination of [Greek women] has to be seen not only as a consequence of indigenous patriarchal forms, but also in terms of capitalism and western/American political and cultural hegemony".[16] Furthermore, Hadlikyriacou notes that in Greece "tradition and modernity are interpreted as social entities which are linked by their problematic nature towards masculinity. In these terms, their antithesis and negotiation can be viewed as the main causes for the maintenance of men in a state of constant 'masculinity crisis'".[17] Both men and women are caught in this bind. Tradition and patriarchy within this context are not the same, but one cultivates the other.

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[16] Cowan, J. 1996. 'Being a Feminist in Contemporary Greece: Similarity and difference reconsidered', in Charles, N. and Hughes-Freeland, F. *Practicing Feminism: identity, difference, power*. London: Routledge. p. 70.

[17] Hadjikyriacou, A. 2013. *Masculinity and Gender in Greek Cinema: 1949-1967*. London: Bloomsbury. Kindle edition. Location 3694.

My claim is that what allows me to categorise Malea's popular comedies as women's cinema, therefore establishing the subcategory of women's popular cinema, is her observation of the tentacular nature of patriarchy that informs Greek national culture, which can be located more easily in traditional formations, but also in the ways that the people and the country try to modernise. In fact, her work can be characterised as a typical example of women's cinema: even when her central characters are men, there is an observation of the contradictions that are inherent to patriarchy. This recognition, however, does not lead to definitive statements at the end of her films. It is as if the director is distrustful of anything that might claim final or absolute status: the contradictions and ideological problems that surface are made fun of, but they are left as they are – at least the solutions offered are not ideal. None of her films provide a viable way forward – and since overtly feminist discourses are dismissed by her characters, they have no way, model or language to articulate their concerns. They end up caught in a semiotic void, which they have to fill with new linguistic strategies (most explicitly in *The Cow's Orgasm*, and *First Time Godfather*), because the existing discourses most capable of this articulation (feminism) have been dismissed. To appropriate Judith Butler, Malea's construction of alternative models of femininity (and masculinity) is purposefully "an ongoing discursive practice, […] open to intervention and resignification",[18] which is expressed through what I have described as the director's semiotic shuffle.

In a sense, Malea's comedies are films that could only have been made in that particular time – they are very topical and capture an image of Greek society. Even her last, period film, captured a particular *zeitgeist*, as discussed in Chapter six. It is safe to affirm that the films would not have been made the same way after the financial crisis and the profound changes in Greek society that ensued. The re-politicised nature of everyday discourses would have rendered Malea's more sceptical and (at least apparently) non-committal tone untenable. In particular, the radicalisation of political life, with the rise of the nationalist right would certainly colour the director's discussion of national identity in a very different manner. Likewise, the director's playful

[18] Butler, J. 1990. *Gender Trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity.* New York, London: Routledge. p. 33.

representation of a political demonstration and subsequent arrests in *The Mating Game*, or her (thinly veiled) allusions to the Papandreou family in *First Time Godfather* would certainly have to be re-signified, and speak differently within a changed socio-political landscape. Although this thesis does not offer a historical analysis of the decade in which the films that form its corpus were released, I would like to argue that Malea's comedies frame and represent their time and place in interesting ways.[19] As such, they have an important place in Greek film history.

In this respect, this thesis has started to address a gap within Greek Film Studies with a discussion of a historically significant director. It has expanded the discussion of Greek popular cinema, particularly of a type that has been dismissed as light and inconsequential; and, more widely, it has proposed the subcategory of women's popular cinema, suggesting there is a particular approach that can be applied to the analysis of the way women filmmakers appropriate popular forms. There are of course limitations: its scope encompasses one case study of one filmmaker within a very specific period and a specific filmography of five films in ten years. In that respect, it offers a glimpse into that approach, and I recognise that this is not a blueprint, but a way in. These limitations notwithstanding, women's popular cinema, initially seen as a subcategory of women's cinema, is productive in popularising women's cinema itself: in the work of Olga Malea its themes are conceived of, represented and perceived as prominent in the country at that particular point in time – and one can finally address women's cinema as popular.

[19] More recently, and after a relatively long absence working on television (*Litsa.com,* ANT1, 2008-2009, and *Dreamcatcher/Oneiropagida* ANT1, 2010-2011), Malea returned to filmmaking with a psychological drama *Marjoram/Matzourana,* 2013. An analysis of this body of work, alas, is for another project.

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Filmography

Olga Malea's comedies (in order of release):

The Cow's Orgasm/O Orgasmos tis Ageladas.

Date: 1997

Length: 91 mins

Distributed by: Proopriki

Production: Nikos Papahadzis, Attika SA; Hyperion Productions

Screenplay: Olga Malea, Apostolos Alexopoulos

Director of Photography: Alexis Grivas

Editing: Nikos Kanakis

Costumes: Rania Damianidou

Set design: Dafni Kalogianni

Music: Yiannis Spyropoulos, Giorgos Vorvis

Cast/Characters: Irini Balta – Athanasia

Natalia Stylianou – Christina

Eleni Gerasimidou – Koula

Katerina Didaskalou – Jovanna

Kostas Koklas – Vangelis

Vladimiros Kyriakidis – Murphy/Thomas

Mihalis Mitrousis – Babis

Alexandros Koliopoulos – Mr Alexandrou

Iro Mane – Maritsa

Plot synopsis:

The film tells the story of two teenagers discovering their sexual identity and growing up in rural Greece. Athanasia wants a career, Christina wants a family, but a series of events lead them to challenge these prescribed choices and eventually escape to the big city.

The Mating Game/I Diakritiki Goiteia ton Arsenikon.

Date: 1999

Length: 90 mins

Distributed by: Prooptiki

Production: Pantelis Mitropoulos, Attika SA; Greek Film Centre

Screenplay: Olga Malea, Apostolos Alexopoulos

Director of Photography: Platon Andronidis

Editing: Giorgos Mavropsaridis

Costumes: Vaso Tranidou

Set design: Afroditi Skinner

Music: Stefanos Korkolis

Cast/Characters: Natalia Dragoumi – Laura

Lyda Matsaggou – Emilia

Natalia Stylianou – Helena

Philippos Sofianos – Dimosthenis

Socrates Alafouzos – Dimitris

Alexandros Bourdoumis – Tasos

Kleon Georgiadis – Vasilis

Kostas Krommidas – Christos

Sotiris Skantzikas – Johnny

Plot synopsis:

Set in Athens, the film revolves around three sisters who are looking for love, each in her own terms. Emilia, Laura and Helena have very different personalities, and want different things from life, but all three face a number of obstacles in their relationships with men. Only when they decide not to compromise and reject tradition, do they manage to find what they want.

Risotto.

Date: 2000

Length: 97 mins

Distributed by: Spentzos SA

Production: Tasos Papandreou, Papandreou SA; Antenna; Plenman Enterprises Ltd.; Antonis Maniatis

Screenplay: Olga Malea, Manina Zoumboulaki

Director of Photography: Giorgos Argyroheliopopulos

Editing: Giorgos Mavropsaridis

Costumes: Vaso Tranidou

Set Design: Olga Leontiadou

Music: DNA

Cast/Characters: Anna Mascha – Eugenia

Dimitra Matsouka – Vicky

Kleon Grigoriadis – Philippos

Konstantinos Markoulakis – Manolis

Sotiris Skantzikas – Mihalis

Eleni Gerasimidou – Kyria Chrysa

Alexandra Rama – Sofoula

Haris Mavroudis – Reporter

Kostas Krommidas – Good Dad

Plot synopsis:

Vicky and Eugenia are working, young mothers, living in Athens. When they do not find the support they want from their husbands at home, the two women decide to live together, sharing chores and childcare, in order to save their marriages.

Honey and the Pig/Loukoumades me Meli.

Date: 2005

Length: 95 mins

Distributed by: Prooptiki

Production: Tasos Papandreou, Papandreou SA; MEGA; Attika SA; Greek Film Centre

Screenplay: Olga Malea, Apostolos Alexopoulos

Director of Photography: Ilias Adamis

Editing: Giorgos Mavropsaridis

Costumes: Eva Nathena

Set design: Sofia Zoumberi

Music: Yorgos Andreou

Cast/Characters: Christos Loulis – Manos

Fay Ksila – Phenia

Pavlos Haikalis – Mayor Leonidas

Fotini Baxevani – Eleni

Vladimiros Kyriakidis – Thrassos

Haris Mavroudis – Periklis

Sofia Filipidou – Ismini/Antigone

Dimitris Piatas – Billy

Spyros Kitsanellis – Achilleas

Plot synopsis:

The film tells the story of a young man, Manos, who returns to his village and manages to overcome the psychological problems caused by the sexual abuse he had suffered by his uncle; he achieves this by uncovering the truth and saving another young boy from his uncle's advances, all amidst a burial ceremony attended by the whole village.

First Time Godfather/Proti Fora Nonos.

Date: 2007

Length: 90 mins

Distributed by: ODEON

Production: Kostas Labropoulos, CL Productions; ODEON; Greek Film Centre; NOVA; Finos Film; FilmInMind; East Media

Screenplay: Olga Malea, Nikos Papandreou

Director of Photography: Kostis Gikas

Editing: Giorgos Mavropsaridis

Costumes/Set design: Eva Nathena

Music: Kostas Livadas

Cast/Characters: Antonis Kafetzopoulos – Lefteris Panagakis

Eleni Kastani – Mrs Panagaki

Tex Pardue – Alex

Nikos Andreoulakis – Panos

Manos Gavras – Nikitas

Anna Louizidi – Myrto

Tasos Kostis – Manedakis

Haris Emmanuel – Fountedakis

Giannis Kalatzopoulos – Moustakas

Evelina Papoulia – Alex's mother

Giorgos Kimoulis – The Chief

Plot synopsis:

The film tells the story of young Alex, the son of a political leader who has recently arrived in Greece from the USA with his family. Alex is keen to spend more time with his father, who is busy with his election campaign. Alex is soon enlisted to the political effort: he has to go to Crete and be a godfather to the party's local candidate's daughter, but more importantly, he has to read his father's speech in a language he does not speak well.

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Brides/Nifes. Dir. Pantelis Voulgaris, 2004.

Bridget Jones' Diary. Dir. Sharon Maguire, 2001.

Childhood Memories: the books of Penelope Delta/Paidikes Anamniseis: ta vivlia tis Pinelopis Delta. Dir. Olga Malea, 1990. (ET 1, Greece).

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Dogtooth. Dir. Yorgos Lanthimos, 2009.

Down With Love. Dir. Peyton Reed, 2003.

El Greco. Dir. Yannis Smaragdis, 2007.

From the Edge of the City/Apo tin Akri tis Polis. Konstantinos Giannaris, 1998.

From the Snow/Ap'to Hioni. Dir. Sotiris Goritsas, 1993.

I Don't Know How She Does It. Dir. Douglas McGrath, 2011.

Marjoram/Matzourana. Dir. Olga Malea, 2013.

Miss Violence. Dir. Alexandros Avranas, 2013.

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Stella. Mihalis Cacoyiannis, 1955.

Telos Epohis. Dir. Antonis Kokkinos, 1994.

The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie/Le charme discret de la bourgeoisie. Dir. Luis Buñuel, 1972.

Three Men and a Baby. Dir. Leonard Nimoy, 1987.

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