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## **Introspective cosmopolitanism: The family in the Greek Weird Wave**

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### **Abstract**

This article reframes the critical discourse around the ‘Greek Weird Wave’ using an approach informed by theoretical work on cosmopolitanism. Focusing on Yorgos Lanthimos’s *Dogtooth* (2009) and Athena-Rachel Tsangari’s *Attenberg* (2010) the critical interpretation of the role of the family is radically rethought. I argue that the privileging of allegorical readings of the family in the Weird Wave films constitutes a form of critical denial of the deeply problematic and specifically Greek ways in which the family (dys)functions. I challenge the absolute and exclusive power that the Greek ‘crisis’ holds over interpretations and evaluations of Weird Wave films, which discursively displaces the problems of the family to broader socio-political frameworks. In reclaiming the importance of literal readings of the films, I reposition them as manifestations of a specific cosmopolitan disposition, that of introspection, a process of self-examination that overcomes denial. In turn, the critical reframing of the films outlines the contours of a complex agonistics of introspective cosmopolitanism, an inward investigative disposition that is dialectically linked to cosmopolitan positioning. Jean François Lyotard’s 1989 theorization of the *oikos* (home/house) provides a conceptual model for understanding the family (*oikogeneia*), which, in its Greek specificities, is central to the films under discussion.

### **Keywords**

Greek Weird Wave, cosmopolitanism, Lyotard, family, Lanthimos, Tsangari

**Short Bio**

Dimitris Eleftheriotis is Professor of Film Studies at the University of Glasgow. He is an Editor of *Screen* and on the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Greek Media and Culture*. His publications include *Popular Cinemas of Europe: Studies of Texts, Contexts and Frameworks*, *Cinematic Journeys: Film and Movement* and *Asian Cinemas: A Reader and Guide*. His recent work focuses on cosmopolitanism as a theoretical framework for the study of film.

In this article I will rethink and reframe the critical discourse around the so-called ‘Greek Weird Wave’ using an approach informed by theoretical work on cosmopolitanism. Specific attention will be paid to two films that played a catalytic role in the very creation of this dubiously termed but all-pervasive and influential category<sup>1</sup>, Yorgos Lanthimos’s *Dogtooth* (2009) and Athena-Rachel Tsangari’s *Attenberg* (2010). These two films have been discussed extensively and signalled an ‘originary moment’ of what is widely perceived to constitute a distinct cinematic movement. The timing of their appearance, at the beginning of the Greek economic crisis, has been a significant contributing factor to their central positioning and can also account, at least partially, for the attention that they attracted. They are chosen as the focus of the present study because they have been essential to the critical discourse and they have informed the terms and tone that the analysis of the films bundled together under the category ‘Weird Wave’ has adopted.

‘Weird Wave’ is a contested term used to describe a certain cluster of post-2009 produced Greek films that have attracted international critical attention and had a considerable success in the festival circuit. Critics have questioned the connotative semantics, the periodization suggested, and the coherence and inclusiveness of the term. Lydia Papadimitriou, for example, locates the ‘Wave’ in a broader historical and discursive context while considering alternative and perhaps more appropriate terms such as ‘New Greek Current’ or ‘Young Greek Cinema’:

These are more inclusive labels and instead of focusing on thematic and stylistic dimensions, they place emphasis on the films’ break with previous practices and their focus on topics of particular relevance to contemporary Greek society – whether those were represented obliquely, such as by Lanthimos or Tsangari, or more directly, such as in Tsitos, Koutras, Tzoumerkas or Papadimitropoulos and Vogel’s films.

Irrespective of labels, however, and notwithstanding the degree of coherence or not of

this 'New Greek Current', consensus has it that since 2009 Greek cinema emerged as an energetic presence internationally. (2014: 3)

While acknowledging the limitations and weaknesses of any periodization and categorization I will go along with what seems to be a term that has significant critical currency and recognition. I will address directly the semantics and agonistics of the 'weird' aspect of this term in pursuit of a critical reframing of the thematic preoccupation with the family. The centrality of the familial unit surfaces in many of the films and I will interrogate the way that this social structure is cinematically articulated, utilizing the existing and extensive literature on the subject. I will argue that the privileging of allegorical readings of the family in the Weird Wave films constitutes a form of critical denial of the deeply problematic and specifically Greek ways in which the family (dys)functions. I will challenge the absolute and exclusive power that the Greek 'crisis' holds over interpretations and evaluations of Weird Wave films, which discursively displaces the problems of the family to broader socio-political frameworks. In reclaiming the importance of literal readings of the films, I will reposition them as manifestations of a specific cosmopolitan disposition, that of introspection, a process of self-examination that overcomes denial. In turn, the critical reframing of the films will outline the contours of a complex agonistics of introspective cosmopolitanism, an inward investigative disposition that is dialectically linked to cosmopolitan positioning.

In a project like the present there is always the danger of homogenizing both the films and the critical responses that they provoked. Film-makers grouped under the Wave umbrella vehemently reject the suggestion that they form a coherent movement. On the other hand, the critical discourse around them is also varied, both in terms of approach and in terms of quality. Nevertheless, the films of the Weird Wave share a number of common aspects and characteristics: they are seen as linked to the Greek 'crisis' that erupted in 2009, they adopt an inward look by exploring specific aspects of Greek society, more commonly the family,

but they also have outward ambitions and have gained international recognition that more often than not exceeds their success in the domestic market (Papadimitriou 2014: 5). I will consider the cosmopolitan position of the films in terms of overlapping and interacting national/international contexts and conceptualize their thematic introspection as a cosmopolitan disposition. Introspection is defined here in clear opposition to what cultural theorists have described as ‘closed’ cosmopolitanism<sup>2</sup> (Ong 2009) in that in their inward investigative look the films demonstrate an engagement with rather than avoidance of the world in its broader sense. I will demonstrate how the international orientation of both Lanthimos and Tsangari stimulates an introspective look that opens up the seclusion of the Greek family and brings it to a fresh and harsh critical light. I will use the etymologically and conceptually related terms of *dispositif* (Foucault) and *disposition* (Bourdieu) to outline a dynamic definition of introspection as a cosmopolitan disposition that is both structurally determined and open to individual agency.

Jean François Lyotard’s 1989 theorization of the *oikos* (home/house) will provide a conceptual model for understanding the family (*oikogeneia*), which, in its Greek specificities, is central to the films under discussion. In his approach, the partial, familial and familiar (*oikeion*) becomes the necessary focus of any political engagement with the broader context and as a form of intellectual investigation replicates the inward/outward dynamics of introspective cosmopolitanism. Significantly, the *oikeion* according to Lyotard is what belongs to the *oikos* and it is the analysis of the culturally specific aspects of the Greek family that guides the critical repositioning of the family in Weird Wave films; *Dogtooth* (in which the *oikos* provides the setting) and *Attenberg* (which places the family within the *oikismos* - settlement/built environment) will be analysed in that light as pivotal texts within the Wave.

### **Cosmopolitan positions and dispositions**

A recurring theme emerging in multidisciplinary discourses on cosmopolitanism<sup>3</sup> is a sense of difficulty. Difficulty in the lived experience of citizens struggling to reconcile local and national experiences with broader cosmopolitan principles and demands (see, e.g. Benhabib 2008; Douzinas 2007) but also difficulty in the ways that cosmopolitanism can be realized as an ethical or political objective. In broad terms, difficulty arises from positions that involve overlapping and often conflicting sets of norms, values or ideas, as well as from the ways in which such positions interact with the more subjective ways that we, as citizens of the world, structure and conceptualize our relationship with the world in its broadest sense, with the ways in which we are disposed towards others and their histories, cultures and experiences. The emphasis on difficulty is necessary for several reasons. It is crucial to recognize that a definition and a critical practice of cosmopolitanism are not epistemological givens but tentative articulations that must be tried out; they represent critical practices that are coming-into-being and await realization (Pollock et al. 2000) and thus contributions in this discursive field are also marked with difficulty. Furthermore, difficulty can be productive in defining a dynamic field of tensions and struggles constituting a form of *agonistics*. Importantly for the present argument, the complex cosmopolitan positioning of Greece and the dispositions engendered and manifested since the turn of the twenty-first century, are particularly difficult to deal with if one wants to avoid reductionism and to recognise fully their multifaceted complexity. Finally, the Weird Wave directors find themselves in difficult positions as they experience multiple pressures and conflicting demands from national and international audiences, from critics and funding bodies, while at the same time pursuing their personal ambitions and creative aspirations.

I would argue that duty, challenge and difficulty are not only ‘ingredients’ of cosmopolitan practice and discourse but they are also fundamental to an understanding of

cosmopolitanism as a form of struggle. *Agonistics* as a critical concept encompasses these characteristics. The term originates from the Greek *agon* that refers to a struggle and/or a competitive game. *Agon*, however, is also suggestive of *agony*, denoting both anxiety and suffering. Etymologically, therefore, we have clustered around ‘agonistics’ a constellation of meanings that are crucial to cosmopolitanism either as lived experience or as a critical practice that addresses a multiplicity of conceptual and methodological difficulties. Crucially, agonistics<sup>4</sup> also provides a conceptual link to Lyotard’s work as a term introduced in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984a) in an attempt to articulate a new way (contra totalization) of thinking about politics.

Greece’s international position since the turn of this century is marked by extremes of optimism and pessimism, by real difficulties and hardship on the economic and social fronts, and by uncertainty not just for the future but also about how to account for and explain the past. Key here is a profound anxiety around understanding the relationship that Greece has with itself and with its international partners, an anxiety that permeates the public sphere and critical discourse. The characteristics of the period that immediately precedes 2009 (the pivotal year for periodization in relation to both the ‘crisis’ and the Weird Wave) and its immediate aftermath have been extensively summarized and analysed by many scholars and in many disciplines not least within discussions of Greek cinema (e.g. Chalkou 2012; Lykidis 2015; Calotychos et al. 2016b, Papanikolaou 2018). Papadimitriou offers perhaps the most cogent and nuanced account of the period and one that has the additional advantage of placing film culture within that broader context (2014). Her summary is particularly interesting in linking the pre- and post-2009 periods but also in terms of the references to the emotive registers of the public, with anger clearly identified in the quotation that follows and with references to low morale or depression in other parts of her article:

The 2000s were, for the most part, a period of intense economic growth, fuelled by extensive (and what then seemed to be cheap) external borrowing, that was facilitated

by the country's entry to the Eurozone... [later], however, it emerged that the country's public finances were in disarray, its fiscal debt was unsustainable and the possibility of bankruptcy was imminent... Anger surfaced, both against politicians – current and past – for their corruption and lying, and against the iron-fisted Europeans who were not prepared to compromise. (2014: 4)

This is important for the present argument because it alludes to a connection between historical and political processes and emotive responses of citizens. In Papadimitriou's exposition of the period, a cosmopolitan positioning, arising from the impact on the national level of global processes and from the experience of failures of national and international governance, is seen as generative of emotive responses, of ways in which the public is affectively disposed in relation to these events. But while there is a tone of objectivity and detachment in the way critics and historians usually describe the macro-processes that define cosmopolitan positions, citizens' dispositions appear to be subjective, personal reactions that belong to a micro-level.

'Disposition' in this article indicates the ways in which people relate to the world in its broadest sense, to other people, other cultures, other histories, and the environment. It is usually associated, as noted above, with purely personal, individualistic patterns of behaviour. As mentioned in the introduction, the term 'cosmopolitan disposition'<sup>5</sup> aims to exploit the productive potential opened up by the tension between the level of subjectivity that the common sense understanding of the term implies and the far more structured and heavily deterministic ways in which *disposition* and *dispositif* are conceptualised by Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault respectively. The balance that my use of 'disposition' is striving to achieve is between a degree of autonomy and agency that underpins the ways in which we relate to the world and the larger scale processes and structures which always permeate, inform and influence this relationship.

Despite in-passing uses of the term in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault's *dispositif* is a term that he developed primarily as a methodological accompaniment to the detailed studies of discourses and practices of sexuality that he undertook in the later stages of his life. In many ways that later work encapsulates the tensions underpinning my own use of disposition. Foucault's discussion of sexuality relates deeply personal aspects of human life and of the body itself to larger socio-political structures and discursive formations. While Foucault rarely wrote explicitly about *dispositif*, he has offered broad definitions in various interviews, perhaps more comprehensively so in a 1977 interview (Foucault, 1980). Translated as 'apparatus' (a term already suggestive of the deterministic nature of the approach) *dispositif* was defined there as

[a] thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions (1980: 194).

Foucault clarifies that the relationship between elements of this 'ensemble' is complex and that its various arrangements might respond to particular and urgent social or political needs (1980: 194-5). Expressed simplistically, *dispositif* is the way in which discursive and non-discursive formations make possible the things that people, think, say or feel at specific historical moments.

Bourdieu's use of *disposition* is closely linked to the key foundational concept of *habitus* that underpins much of his theorisation of culture and society. *Habitus* represents the complex structure of social relations and positions that ultimately determine the broad range of individual actions and choices. As Bourdieu explained in a lecture delivered in 1996 at the University of Oslo:

[a]t every moment of each society, one has to deal with a set of social positions which is bound by a relation of homology to a set of activities (the practice of playing golf or

the piano) or of goods (a second home or a master painting) that are also characterized relationally. This formula, which might seem abstract and obscure, states the first condition for an adequate reading of the analysis of the relation between *social positions* (a relational concept), *dispositions* (or habitus), and stances (*'positions taking'*), that is the 'choices' made by the social agents on most diverse domains of practice, food or sport, music or politics, and so on (1996: 10, original emphasis)

In Bourdieu's formulation, the way that we are affectively disposed towards various aspects of social life is determined by social positions and structures.<sup>6</sup> We can see how this particular definition of disposition operates in a dynamic field similar to that of Foucault's *dispositif*, delineating the relationship between individual attitudes on the one hand and social structures and discursive formations on the other. Although I want to avoid the hard determinism of Foucault's and Bourdieu's formulations, it is at the same time important to keep in sight that, despite their assumed individuality, cosmopolitan dispositions emerge within complex social structures that underpin cosmopolitan positions.

### **The Greek Weird Wave and introspective cosmopolitanism**

It is necessary, therefore, to outline briefly the significant aspects defining Greece's cosmopolitan position in the 2000s and 2010s. Certain canonical events and processes are routinely identified in relation to that: the entry to the Eurozone (2001), the organization of the Olympic Games (2004), the spectacular growth of the economy in the early 2000s forcefully coming to a halt by the international financial crisis (2008) that was fully experienced in Greece with a year's delay, and the subsequent financial, political, social and cultural crisis that ensued. Cosmopolitan positioning is evident in both the pre- and the post-2009 periods. During the early period, Greece opens itself up to the world with confidence

and a pronounced ambition to be a significant player in the international arena but despite initial successes, it suffers the consequences of its grave exposure to the enormous economic and political forces that hold sway in the global arena.

This precarious positioning becomes fertile ground for introspection. This is not the only cosmopolitan disposition that arises in the period, just one of the possible ways in which a reflection on Greece's relationship with the world is felt and articulated. An anxious soul-searching about what went wrong, how and why things got so bad, is pervasive, giving expression to various responses, some blaming global processes, others internal malice, most suggesting that the culprit might be a combination of both. The political discourse of the period also encourages introspection often expressed as a game of historical blame - 'it is all your party's/government's fault' - that permeates public discourse, especially the rhetoric of political parties. Processes such as investigations of financial and other scandals, treated by the media with great hyperbole, also point towards the prominence of introspective mechanisms on a socio-political level.

In his exploration of Foucault's *dispositif*, Gilles Deleuze suggests that, in moments of crisis, settled discursive and institutional 'ensembles' are stressed to fracture point enabling creative challenges to established equilibriums (1992). I propose that an introspective disposition emerges in the seismic cracks of the Greek crisis. Its manifestations are multiple but most tangible in the cultural sphere. Dimitris Papanikolaou suggests that the cultural production of the period of the crisis makes visible a more generalized 'archive trouble'. This is very much in line with Deleuze's conceptualisation of Foucault's work on discursive formations as archival settlements (1988), a model that suggests that 'fractures' can be felt and conceptualised as disturbances of the archive. Papanikolaou's comprehensive exploration of cultural manifestations of 'archive trouble' is motivated by a perceptive diagnosis:

It seems to me that there is an interesting trend of cultural expression produced in Greece at the moment, which, even though not always related to the crisis directly, can assume, in the current climate, a radical political position. This is a trend characterized by its effort to critique, undermine and performatively disturb the very logics through which the story of Greece – the narrative of its national, political, sociocultural cohesion in synchrony and diachrony – has until now been told (2011).

Importantly for the present argument, Papanikolaou understands archival unsettling as a creative process of questioning, an interrogation of past hegemonic socio-cultural equilibriums. Of course, all archives are always in flux, but Papanikolaou is correct in stressing both the importance of the hegemonic struggles around consolidated views of the past and the fact that the Greek cultural production in the period under discussion is marked by a qualitatively and quantitatively unprecedented questioning of received wisdom and certainty. This argument is perhaps most lucidly expressed in his discussion of *The City State*, a performance by the group Kanigunda:

This was not just a story about ancient democracy, the ancient polis, gone awry in its modern resurfacing. It was instead a radical questioning that started from the current state of precariousness, in order to critique the reading of the past and ask: Who has been doing this reading on our behalf, in what ways and to what effect? ... Therefore, instead of ‘who will take the blame for having pushed us to this point’, the question became how one can tell the story of the now in relation to the past, what it means to act while also positioning oneself within a genealogy that has reached a critical point.... Making sense of it all would perhaps open up a new space for critique. An incitement to act, therefore, just like in epic theatre. Yet, unlike epic theatre, an incitement to act *from within*, not from a vantage point (with)out (2011, original emphasis).

I would like to suggest that in this seeking to know of what is ‘within’ from ‘within’, Papanikolaou describes a process of introspection that takes the form of cultural critique. Defined simply as the act of studying yourself, introspection is seen in certain paradigms of epistemology as a reliable cognitive source.<sup>7</sup> This is not offered here as a firm and undisputed definition – any approach informed by psychoanalysis, for example, would dismiss out-of-hand introspection as a valid form of self-knowledge. I am using the term loosely and for its evocative potential rather than to propose it as a trustworthy and universally accepted method of ‘knowing thyself’. More importantly, the focus of my argument is on the possibilities that this act of ‘knowing from within’ opens in the particular case of Greek culture and cinema. Without having any intention to assimilate ‘archive trouble’ and the type of cultural questioning that Papanikolaou proposes into my category of introspective cosmopolitanism, the conceptual overlaps are significant and analytically productive.

This dynamic relationship between cosmopolitan positioning and introspection can also be traced in the work of Lanthimos and Tsangari. In an interview with Tsangari conducted by the editors of a special issue of the *Greek Journal of Greek Media and Culture* on contemporary Greek film cultures, Yannis Tzioumakis asked the director:

Is there such a thing as an ‘outward-looking’ Greek cinema, i.e. a Greek cinema that foreign audiences find appealing or with which they can engage without having knowledge or understanding of Greek politics and society? (Calotychos et al. 2016a: 242)

The question seems to encapsulate the key paradox around *Dogtooth* and *Attenberg* in the suggestion that the films might be perceived as outward-looking, which is clearly the case in terms of their international career, despite the fact that their themes, stories and narration remain extremely inward-looking, even esoteric, locked in an investigation of the complexities and disfunctions of Greek families. In her answer, Tsangari dodges the issue of

a

possible ‘outward-look’ of her film but confirms that international distribution was very important to her, before reluctantly speculating that ‘for *Attenberg*, perhaps they [distributors] were drawn to it as a coming-of-age story in a version of Greece that people may not have seen often’ (2016a: 243).

Tsangari, who appears to be more direct if not more articulate than Lanthimos in positioning her film, is also clear that Greece’s particular cosmopolitan position at the time was a contributing factor in attracting international attention, describing the crisis as ‘Greece’s primary cultural export’ (Calotychos et al. 2016:243). This indicates one of the many ways in which the agonistics of cosmopolitanism operates: while the crisis offers a means of reaching international audiences, it is also something many of the Weird Wave directors resist as an ultimate interpretative and evaluative frame of reference for their films, asserting instead the individual artistic merits and cinematic specificities of their creations.

Furthermore, Lanthimos and Tsangari are profoundly cosmopolitan in terms of positioning and openness. Both directors’ careers have a pronounced international outlook. Tsangari’s training and early career as a director was in the USA, where she lived from 1989 until 2004 when she returned to Greece to become the video director of the opening ceremony of the Athens Olympic Games. She studied at New York University but also had strong links in Texas with the University of Austin where she taught, collaborated with Richard Linklater, and run the Cinematexas International Short Film Festival. In the 2010s, she worked at Harvard’s Visual and Environmental Studies Department. Lanthimos and Tsangari met at the 2004 Olympic Games where they both worked in the production of the opening ceremony.

Her production company HAOS Film helped to finance and produce Lanthimos’s first feature film, *Kinetta* (2005). Lanthimos always aspired to an international career, an ambition he has by now fulfilled with great aplomb. Aided by the international recognition of *Dogtooth*, which received an Academy Award nomination for Best Foreign Film in 2010,

Lanthimos established himself as an international director with the recent success of *The Favourite* (2018) consolidating this reputation.

The cinematic culture of the period is characterised by an openness fuelled by digital technologies and platforms that enabled unprecedented access to international works. Maria Chalkou details how in the 2000s a broad range of international films of a variety of genres and crossing the boundaries of art/popular became available to Greek cinephiles and filmmakers who she describes as ‘the most cine-literate in the history of Greek cinema’ (2012: 255). The influence of this wealth of global cultural texts is acknowledged by Lanthimos and Tsangari in interviews (for example, Zalenko 2010; Calotychos et al. 2016a).

This cultural openness is matched by a willingness to try their hand with a variety of audio-visual forms and practices. Lanthimos ‘has worked successfully in every possible field of the industry (television, commercials, music and dance videos, theatre and the Olympic Games ceremonies)’ (Chalkou 2012: 248). On the other hand, in the interview with the *Journal of Greek Media and Culture*, Tsangari offers several examples of working with various formats (including 16mm and 35mm cameras as well as an Hi8) and of experimentation with different types of filmmaking (Calotychos et al. 2016).

The doubly *cosmopolitan position* of Tsangari and Lanthimos, as individuals and as Greeks in precarious times, encourages an *introspective disposition*, expressed as an interrogation of a failing and malfunctioning Greek family. Lanthimos’s, possibly autobiographically informed,<sup>8</sup> personal questioning of the family as a normalised and normative yet deeply dysfunctional unit is openly acknowledged in an interview in *Electric Sheep* as a prime source of inspiration for *Dogtooth* (Selavy 2010). Tsangari is more explicit about the investigative, introspective process that she wants to undertake in her films, importantly defined in relation to her position as a relative outsider and to the crisis:

This is the situation and somehow we have to fix it now, and cinema is a great way to do that. I am not saying I am going to make a film about the riots – I don't want to be that literal – but Greece is an unknown country, even to its citizens, and I want to discover it for myself (Rose 2011).

The introspection of the two directors comes from a cosmopolitan position and it is critical and interrogative rather than a reaffirmation of the status quo. In that respect, it is a drastically different disposition from what critics have described as 'closed cosmopolitanism', defined by Jonathan Corpus Ong as follows:

Closed cosmopolitanism is the identity performance when individuals *reject* the ideal of openness and fall back on the comforts of the similar and the predictable, separating 'self' from 'other'. While the basic idea of cosmopolitanism is premised on permissibility, closed cosmopolitanism is premised on impenetrability. Its geographies are borders, barriers and boundaries, walls and firewalls, fences and fortresses (Ong 2009: 454; original emphasis).

Ong's definition demonstrates why it is imperative to distinguish between closed and introspective cosmopolitanism in relation to the films under consideration. It is striking how closely the *mise-en-scene* and the thematic preoccupations of *Dogtooth*, but also the sense of isolation of the community that the characters of *Attenberg* inhabit, seem to correspond to the key characteristics of a closed cosmopolitanism: 'impenetrability, 'walls' and 'fortresses'. However, in their introspection, the films offer a powerful view of what an 'identity' that rejects openness would look and feel like and it is precisely this commitment to a de-normalization of isolationism and self-sufficiency, this foregrounding of the oppressive seclusion within the family or a community that defines their dialectical opposition to closed cosmopolitanism.

### *Oikogeneia*

A key tension in the introspective cosmopolitanism of *Dogtooth* and *Attenberg* is between the forensic examination of the minutiae of Greek families - the ‘inward look’ - and the international aspirations of the films. A credible possibility could be that the esoteric nature of the films’ settings and narratives can potentially render them impenetrable to international audiences and make them incapable of crossing cultural borders. A survey of the critical literature suggests that this apparent contradiction is adequately compensated by the ability to read the films either as allegories for the country’s multifaceted crisis or as demonstrations of broader if not universal aspects of human life.

Indeed, the dominant critical trend is to construe the focus on the family of the two films (and others of the Weird Wave including *inter alia* *Strella* [Panos Koutras, 2009], *Hora Proelefsis/Homeland* [Syllas Tzoumerkas, 2010], *Miss Violence* [Alexandros Arvanas, 2013]) as allegorical. Alex Lykidis reads *Dogtooth* and *Attenberg* as articulations of a crisis of sovereignty, in Greece but also in the broader European context: ‘the interpersonal violence we see in Lanthimos’s films can be read as an allegory of the “systemic, anonymous” violence of global capitalism currently wreaking havoc on contemporary Greek society’ (2015: 11). Papadimitriou argues that in *Dogtooth* ‘Lanthimos depicted an enigmatic and allegorical crisis’ (2014: 2); Ipek A. Celik sees the film’s family as ‘a central allegory’ to ‘internal and external borders in and of Greece’ (2013: 219); in her analysis of *Attenberg* Anna Poupou sees ‘the subject of the family’ as ‘an allegory for the nation, the society or the political system’ (2014: 47). Other critics link the representations of the two films to broader themes: Tonia Kazakopoulou reads *Dogtooth* as a ‘parable of patriarchal ideology’ (2016: 190); similarly Vrasidas Karalis describes the film as a ‘bleak parable about the family as the locus of disseminating power and meaning’ (2012: 273); Ina Karkani relates *Attenberg* to an

‘aesthetics of recession’ (2016); Stamos Metzidakis links *Dogtooth* to the socioeconomic crisis (2014); Rosa Barotsi resists the ‘temptation’ of reading *Dogtooth* as allegory by shifting her focus to the middle class identity of the cinematic family (2016); finally, Tatjana Aleksić also resists the crisis allegory and instead aligns *Dogtooth* with a critique of the universally oppressive nature of the family as a social unit (2016).

The tendency to read the films as allegories or as depicting broader, often universal themes, is perfectly understandable, and it is not posited here as a rejection of the incisive and multifaceted analyses that the critical works by and large offer. As a basic structural unit, the family is only meaningful in the broader socio-cultural, economic, political and historical context in which it operates. It is inevitable that any critique of the family becomes by extension a critique of such broader contexts. What is slightly surprising in most of the existing literature, however, is that the horrific specificities of familial violence and abuse in the *Weird Wave* films, are not addressed as specific issues of Greek families but become meaningful only when allegorically, metaphorically or metonymically linked to broader issues.

Again, this is understandable. For international critics, the temptation to use allegory in order to approach specific manifestations of national cultures is often irresistible, even for accomplished cultural critics such as Fredric Jameson who, now infamously, argued in the context of what he called ‘Third-World texts’<sup>9</sup>:

[A]lthough we may retain for convenience and for analysis such categories as the subjective and the public or political, the relations between them are wholly different in third-world culture. Third -world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic – necessarily project a political dimension in the form of national allegory: *the story of the private individual destiny is always*

*an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*  
(1986: 69, original emphasis).

In contrast, in journalistic discourse where the term ‘Weird Wave’ originated, allegory is a convenient frame of reference that can be mobilised to ‘explain’ to audiences such ‘messed-up’ films (Rose 2011). But still there remains a deafening silence about the possibility that such unfathomed violence and abuse can be specifically Greek, not in the sense that it is only within Greek families that such oppression emerges but as an acknowledgement of its specifically Greek features.

The risk in closely associating the ‘dysfunctional family’ to the socio-economic crisis is that it creates a causal link that obscures different genealogies of familial oppression and turns the problem into a recent one, as if oppression, abuse and violence in Greek families did not exist before the crisis. It is equally surprising that sociological research data into sexual or other abuse within families is almost impossible to find, as if such issues do not exist or do not merit scrutiny. I would like to argue, polemically and provocatively, that the abusive potential of the Greek family becomes a critical blind spot and a powerful form of critical denial. By positing the representations of the family in Weird Wave films as allegories or by categorising them as ‘weird’ rather than as relating to what might be a ‘norm’, the specific forms and causes of the violence that permeates Greek families are conveniently bypassed.

While data is hard to find it is worth citing two sources that give a clear indication of the seriousness and the extensive nature of domestic violence and abuse. The *Greek Reporter* stated last year:

Greek police have released chilling statistics which reveal that more than 13,700 cases of domestic violence – overwhelmingly against women – were recorded between 2013 and 2017. The Athens-Macedonia News Agency reported a police source saying 2017 alone saw 3,134 cases of domestic violence involving 4,234 victims. Women

made up 70 percent of these victims, the source added, with the number of females killed in such assaults double that for men. (2018)

The statistics were widely reported in the Greek press and news sites. Furthermore, in analysing the enactment of Law 3500/2006 which still covers issues around domestic violence, Ph. Obessi alarmingly suggests that:

[the] Greek judge only adopts an absolutely negative attitude towards wife's battery (sic) only if she is pregnant and battery could lead or has led to miscarriage or premature labour. Quite often battering is considered justified due to the wife's extra-marital affairs, or even due to the suspicion of an affair that the husband might invoke in court (2008: 9).

The films of the Weird Wave enable a number of readings, with allegory a clear and legitimate possibility but, as the above quotations suggest, can and must also be read literally, as bearing witness to a very real issue. It is telling that a report on domestic violence commissioned and published by the social support network ActionAid refers explicitly to films of the Weird Wave (*Dogtooth* and *Miss Violence*) as having made an important contribution to opening up public debate to issues of domestic and other sexual violence (2018). The present argument that the family in itself rather than as allegory is the subject of the Weird Wave's introspective investigations is supported by the central place that the family occupies in Greek cultural production since the 2000s. By far the most comprehensive, evocative and intellectually sharp survey of the preoccupation with the family in recent and contemporary Greek culture is offered by Papanikolaou in his monograph *Kati Trehei me tin Oikogeneia: Ethnos, Pothos kai Syggenia tin Epohi tis Krisis* ('*There Is Something about the Family: Nation, Desire and Kinship at a Time of Crisis*'). It is clear that the family is a major aspect of the 'archive trouble' that Papanikolaou has identified and examined in earlier works and this is well documented in the monograph, which details and explores the all-pervasive

and often shockingly explicit violent representations of the *oikogeneia* in recent Greek film, literature, theatre and performance art. Significantly, like the vast majority of critics, Papanikolaou situates his critical investigation in the context of the crisis. The double possibility of allegory/reality, however, is clearly acknowledged by Papanikolaou who is keen to maintain that issues around the family and sexuality in these texts constitute a form of what he calls ‘biopolitical realism’, which arises from and relates to the reality of Greek biopolitical power structures. Perhaps more important though, is Papanikolaou’s honest acknowledgment of the resistance that an acceptance of such reality encounters:

Watching the film [*Miss Violence*], I keep shivering; I also keep repeating to myself *this is not my family experience, this has never been an experience I have ever been close to, this violence cannot touch me*. And then I keep wondering – why on earth did I feel the need to say that? What is it that makes that particular subject matter affect me like that? What is it that makes me want to shelter myself from the porosity of its violence? (Papanikolaou forthcoming 2020, original emphasis)

This emotive reaction indicates that although the crisis might provide an important and meaningful discursive framework, the issues around the family that the films work through also have a distinct and independent existence and reality. What Papanikolaou might be alluding to is that although specific representations of familial violence might be difficult to relate to individual personal circumstances, they still connect to experiences that are culturally familiar, to types of violence that, in the densely built and occupied urban environment, we have all seen, heard or felt close to, if not in our homes, then perhaps in the neighbourhood or in public places, and it is precisely this, embodied rather than rational, knowledge that makes us so uncomfortable.

What adds credibility to the argument for a literal reading of the films is the alternative genealogy that Chalkou documents (2012) and which situates the Weird Wave in

practices that considerably predate the crisis. This is, of course, more evident in the case of *Dogtooth*, which was conceived and produced before the crisis, but it is also clear that Tsangari was working on *Attenberg* in the pre-2009 period. Perhaps more important is that *Spirotokouto/Matchbox* (Oikonomidis, 2002), the film that is widely acknowledged as having initiated the focus on violence in the family, appeared at a time when all was ‘rosy’ in the Greek financial and political landscape. In what follows I want to place the Greek family, the *oikogeneia*, in its ‘natural’ home, the *oikos*, because an important common thread in many of the Weird Wave films is that familial violence is set within the confines of the four walls of a house or an apartment.

### ***Oikos***

I will use Jean-François Lyotard’s essay on the *oikos* (delivered as a seminar in 1988 and published in a collection of his *Political Writings* [1993]) to propose a reframing of the way the *oikogeneia* has been analysed in relation to the Weird Wave and more generally to speculate on how a politics of the family can be conceptualized. I feel the need to explain why this particular and, in some ways, dated and rather obscure essay is introduced as a conceptual and analytical tool. Lyotard’s seminar was addressing ecology (*oikologia*) and used the etymological root of the word to facilitate his thinking. In the seminar he contrasts ecology to economy (*oikonomia*), juxtaposing a discourse about the home to a law (*nomos*) pertaining to the home, asserting them as two different ways of thinking about the *oikos*. This is of crucial importance as it places the *oikos* and by extension the *oikogeneia* into a distinctive and drastically different discursive framework to that of the economy (and concomitant socio-politics) echoing my suggestion that while all families are meaningful in broad contexts, they also demand specific attention, especially so in the Greek context.

Furthermore, Jameson's suggestion of reading 'third-world' texts as national allegories, which is not dissimilar to common and dominant reading practices around the family in Greek Weird Wave films, was heavily contested in the 1980s in the so-called 'Jameson/Ahmad debate' (Jameson 1986; Ahmad 1987). It is not within the scope of the present argument to fully revisit the debate, it is, however, important to recall that the key tension that underpinned that infamous critical disagreement was the relationship between the specific and particular on the one hand and the universal and totalizing on the other, mirroring the argument around the family as allegory or not. It is also crucial to note that the national allegory debate was a discursive subset of a broader debate around postmodernism that saw Lyotard's search for agonistic micro-politics pitted against Jameson's defence of totalizing politics (see for example: Lyotard 1984a, Lyotard 1984b; Jameson 1984a; Jameson 1984b). While the critical reading of the family as an allegory in the Weird Wave films is not necessarily a sign of a totalizing tendency, it is important to recognize that a different kind of politics might be best suited when dealing with issues that arise in relation to the family.

Finally, Lyotard builds and develops his argument by prioritising the partial over the whole. Literally, by initiating his investigation with a fragment of the word 'eco-logy' but also in the way in which he uses a tiny part of our environment, the home, in order to understand the way that we need to think of our relationship with the world, which is fundamental in any ecological discourse. At the same time, the interrogation of our relationship with the world is also a key aspect of discourses on cosmopolitanism and, perhaps more pertinently, this investigation of and focus on the partial and what is close to the self, which in this case is the *oikos*, is resonant with the modality of introspection. Lyotard's discussion of the *oikos* facilitates both an understanding of introspective cosmopolitanism and offers a new way to approach the *oikogeneia* in the Weird Wave.

Lyotard suggests that we should examine what resides in the *oikos* as a starting point in questions of ecology. He looks into the *oikos* as the place where the *oikeion* resides, and it is the *oikeion* that offers him the basis of an ecological theory; a theory not fully developed in the short essay but with some of its basic tenets discernible as an outline in Lyotard's overall discussion in the seminar. A starting and startling point is that, in sharp contrast with commonsensical understandings, both the *oikos* and the *oikeion* are not defined as places or entities of safety. In terms that resonate with the questioning of the family in the Weir Wave, Lyotard asserts:

And yet the *oikos* in the Greek tradition (*domus* in the Latin tradition), is not, and I insist on this, the place of safety. The *oikos* is above all the place of tragedy. I recall that one of the conditions of the tragic enumerated by Aristotle is precisely the domestic condition: relationships are tragic because they occur in the family; it is within the family that incest, patricide, and matricide occur. Tragedy is not possible outside this ecologic or ecotragic framework (1993: 97).

In other words, it is in the *oikos* that the tragic aspects that concern ecology, which after all is a discourse about the home, initiate. Although Lyotard consistently resists the need to propose concrete political forms of action, his argument is very suggestive, as it creates a pathway in which the focus on the *oikos* and the *oikogeneia* can be aligned to a non-totalizing political critique and project.

The cultural context in which the argument proposed above is placed is even more significant for our concerns. Given the links of the melodramatic with Greek tragedy, one can see how the representations of the *oikos* and the *oikogeneia* are ways in which *Dogtooth*, for example, deconstructs the dominant generic theme and *mise-en-scene* of a happy harmonious home and family as the ultimate ideological and emotive horizon that reigns over the conventions of the melodramatic. In that respect what have been seen by critics as the

primary iconoclastic and disturbing aspects of Weird Wave films are in fact a narrational activation of the ecotragic.

Lyotard's interrogation of the *oikos*, as well as the treatment of the home in the films under discussion, force us to look closer to the *oikeion*, the familiar which is also the familial. The *oikeion* is a 'dysfunctional entity par excellence' (1993: 100) – which is of course also what critics have termed the family of the Weird Wave films.

My *oikeion* is an otherness that is not an *Umwelt* at all, but this otherness in the heart of the apparatus. We have to imagine an apparatus inhabited by a sort of guest, not a ghost, but an ignored guest who produces some trouble, and people look to the outside in order to find out the external cause of the trouble. But probably the cause is not outside, that is my idea (1993: 100).

Lyotard suggests that the dysfunction lies not in the context (the *Umwelt*) but in the *oikos* within which the *oikeion* must now be understood as what is ignored in what appears to be familiar, as otherness, unfamiliarity and strangeness in the home<sup>10</sup>. We can, again provocatively and polemically, propose that it is precisely this 'making strange' of the familiar and familial that makes the Weird Wave 'weird' and because of that connotative possibility we should reclaim the term 'weird' as positive.

Lyotard also contrasts the *oikeion* with the '*politicon*', which is not to suggest that what pertains to the home is not political but that the discourse of the *oikeion* is what he calls 'a discourse of the secluded', excluded and concealed from the public sphere. He concludes his essay in a way that is doubly evocative – as a hint on how to develop a politics of the secluded (in sharp contrast again to Jameson's 'national allegory' thesis) and as an alternative way of constructing a political reading of the cinematic families of the Weird Wave:

The political is the public sphere, while the *oikeion* is the space we call 'private', an awful word that I'm trying to avoid in saying 'secluded'. It is the shadowy space of all

that escapes the light of public speech, and it is precisely in this darkness that tragedy occurs (1993: 102).

In what follows I will explore how the *oikeion*, that needs to emerge out of the shadows of the home, can be situated in the secluded settings of *Dogtooth* and *Attenberg*. An understanding of the ways in which seclusion is constructed within the *oikos* can provide the blueprint for a non-totalizing politics that addresses the violence that pertains to the Greek family.

### **The films: *oikogeneia*, *oikos*, *oikismos***

Both films have been analysed extensively and I will base my discussion to a great extent on existing intuitive and intelligent critical arguments but reframe them around Lyotard's key terms and the concept of introspective cosmopolitanism. In the 'meta-analysis' that follows I assume the reader's familiarity with the films and the main critical lines around them (see Rose 2011; Metzidakis 2014; Papadimitriou 2014; Poupou 2014; Aleksić 2016; Barotsi 2016; Karkani 2016; Kazakopoulou 2016; Papanikolaou 2018, forthcoming 2020). The films construct their respective *oikeion* in different but, as I will argue, complementary ways. This is because *Dogtooth* and *Attenberg* centralize the family but each places the *oikogeneia* in different settings. The seclusion of the Lanthimos film is accomplished within an *oikos* that bears all the marks of borders, enclosure and restriction, while Tsangari situates her diegesis in a broader community but one that is also rendered secluded, that of the *oikismos*. In *Dogtooth* the *oikogeneia* is a 'typical' nuclear family and the film tells the story of their imprisonment by the father (Christos Stergioglou)<sup>11</sup>, in *Attenberg* it is under drastic dissolution and consists of 23-year old Marina (Ariane Labeled) and the dying (and dead by the end of the film) father Spiros (Vangelis Mourikis). Domestic violence is direct and explicit in *Dogtooth* whereas in

*Attenberg* familial dysfunction is represented as failure to plan for the future, a failure that extends to the lack of care for the built and natural environment.

### ***Dogtooth***

I have argued earlier that an alternative genealogy of the cinematic deconstruction of the family to the one that ties it to the crisis is possible, one that links *Dogtooth* with the pre-crisis *Matchbox*. However, the two films could not be more different stylistically: the visual intensity and the hectic pace of the latter is in sharp contrast with the polished, cool and detached style of the former.<sup>12</sup> The aesthetic dissonance of the two films can be usefully situated within the agonistics of introspective cosmopolitanism. The sleek cinematography and absurd humour of *Dogtooth* make possible a spectatorial position that in detachment offers some comfort in the way that the film's culturally specific, explosive and provocative subject matter can be experienced. That was perhaps key to the film's success in international markets (a stated objective of its director) in sharp contrast to the evident 'inexportability' of *Matchbox*. At the same time, while arguably catering to an international audience, the observational, dispassionate and forensic scrutiny of the family adds potency to an investigative introspective look – the familiar made strange that summons questioning – a feature of the film that Lanthimos (as well as Tsangari in relation to *Attenberg*) explicitly recognized in interviews (see Zalenko 2010 and Calotychos et al. 2016a, respectively).

The smooth and polished 'surface' of the film that enables a safe detached spectatorial position stands in clear contrast with the deeply violent and abusive reality that resides underneath it, in a way that is reminiscent of how the *oikeion* exists within the *oikos* according to Lyotard. From this perspective *Dogtooth's* forensic defamiliarization of the familial creates a formal context within which the terms of seclusion and the nature of the *oikeion* become visible.

The physical isolation of the home is emphasized through an iconography of fences and barriers and the tight framing noted by critics (for example Celik 2013; Kazakopoulou 2016). However, it is the isolation of the family from the public sphere that is arguably the most potent form of seclusion and the role of language is crucial in that respect. While the majority of analyses of the film correctly identify language as an instrument of power (e.g. Lykidis 2015) they tend to overlook its concomitant aspect as a facilitator of a social bond and its nature as a social convention. In the rejection of a shared symbolic system, which the film constructs as an act of patriarchal violence, the *oikogeneia* exists outside the public sphere and beyond social conventions, a positioning further intensified by its placement outside the law. This brings to light a key paradox of the reading of the film as a national allegory: while from a theoretical and critical perspective, the family is a primary social unit in the construction of the community and the nation, the film poses its family as not only standing beyond society but as actively resisting social conventions and any commitment to a broader community.

The *oikeion* of the secluded *oikos* of *Dogtooth*'s family is what places the *oikogeneia* beyond and above the law and the *politicon*. What this seclusion enables is crucial. The absurd nature of the acts that take place within the home dramatized by a highly stylised film, makes it difficult to see them for what they are and that reinforces the attraction of allegorical readings. However, if we peel away the stylistic layers, we can just name what resides in *Dogtooth*'s secluded *oikos*: domestic violence, incest and physical, psychological and sexual abuse. To acknowledge that is not to lament the failure of the omnipresence and omnipotence of the state and to demand an extension of its powers in order to accomplish more effectively its biopolitical strategies of power but simply to suggest that the seclusion of the *oikos* is the breeding ground for domestic violence which leaves its secluded victims with limited recourse to any form of social, legal or political protection. Socially important political

interventions can be developed around and in opposition to the nature, terms and effects of such seclusion as a cornerstone of the violence and oppression that exists within Greek families.

The title of the film invites some speculation with regards to cosmopolitanism and the *oikeion*. Lanthimos claims that the English ‘dogtooth’ while not translating in the most accurate way the Greek ‘kinodontas’, a more appropriate translation would be ‘canine tooth’, appealed to him precisely because of its ambiguity (Zalenko 2010). On one level this can be read as an indication of a deliberate attempt to proliferate the possible ‘meanings’ of his film which could arguably broaden its international appeal. This is speculative but lends additional credibility to the view that Lanthimos was thinking strategically about the international ‘life’ of his film, its promotion and marketing constituting a game in the manner of cosmopolitan agonistics, the introspective look of the director not inhibiting his cosmopolitan aspirations.

Lyotard opens his 1988 seminar with a tribute to Sascha, the dog of the event’s host, calling her ‘the mistress of us all in matters of ecology’ (1993: 96), who he suggests is an *oikeion* par excellence. What the philosopher alludes to is the need to pay attention to the non-human in the way we approach ecology but also to look closely to what is familiar in the *oikos*, in this case Sascha, as a domesticated animal made strange as a rhetorical opening gambit in the essay’s exploration of the *oikeion*. In *Dogtooth* the narrative role of the ‘canine teeth’ enables and invites a similar rethinking.<sup>13</sup> The father offers a way out of the seclusion of the home to the children of the family: When their canine teeth fall, he tells them, they will be free to leave the *oikos*. In a gory scene, the older daughter (Angeliki Papoulia) knocks a tooth out of her mouth as a desperate means of escaping the seclusion of the home. In this most private and personal enclosure, the mouth, a *dogtooth* (not a *human* tooth) resides, an *oikeion* made strange in terms of its name and which, in its destruction, releases the member of the *oikogeneia* from the *oikos* and allows her access of the *politicon*. On another level, this

is undoubtedly an act of self-harm resulting directly and tragically from the abusive environment of the family.

This necessarily limited discussion identifies some of the key ways in which *Dogtooth* deploys a complex system of formal strategies that deconstruct the Greek *oikogeneia* and the *oikos* as protective and secure environments and relentlessly reveals the multiple layers of violence and abuse that lie hidden beneath the surface of a normative and sacrosanct social unit.

### ***Attenberg***

In this coming-of-age story, as Tsangari describes it, the family is dysfunctional by default, through the physical decay of the parents (the mother is dead and the father dies by the end of the film) and through Marina's flagging struggle to achieve autonomy and social integration. In a masterful orchestration of its formal elements, the film's narration renders the physical dissolution of the *oikogeneia* as also the dissolution of the *oikos*. Editing is the main means of achieving this as it withholds an establishing shot of the family's home until the 50<sup>th</sup> minute and also creates a profound spatial ambiguity by systematically connecting diverse locations: the bedroom of the home where Spyros and Marina watch David Attenborough documentaries, hospital corridors, waiting rooms, operation theatres and patients' rooms, hotel rooms and canteen, the backyards of the town of Aspra Spitia. Through a diachronic succession of non-contiguous shots, editing creates a spatial geography that places familial interaction in a *mise-en-scene* unconstrained by the *oikos*, establishing instead the family's habitat as the broader community they occupy, the *oikismos*.

This formally accomplished extension of the *oikos* into the broader environment reflects the double meaning of the word '*oikismos*' as, on the one hand, a descriptor of a built settlement and, on the other hand, as the process of creating it, of building homes in a

hitherto unbuilt natural environment. The placing of the *oikogeneia* in an *oikismos* rather than the *oikos* is significant and it invites a relocation of the *oikeion*. The film extends the decay and failure of the family into the built environment of its diegesis, a substantially abandoned, specially developed industrial settlement which exists in a state of terminal decline.

Despite the potential of the *oikismos* to provide the characters with a broader diegetic arena than the *oikos*, it is represented in the film as profoundly secluded as it is cut off from any surrounding villages, towns or cities.<sup>14</sup> There are several instances of mobility in *Attenberg* (Marina is after all employed as a chauffeur, she drives her scooter around, Spyros enjoys rides on a speed boat) but they are formally constructed as contained and constrained. The spatial trajectories of the mobile characters either originate or terminate in the *oikismos* with no sense of what exists beyond its limits or of a possible ultimate escape from its enclosure. The shots of Spiros, Marina and her one and only friend Bella (Evangelia Randou) on the speed boat demonstrate perfectly if ironically the containment of speed, freedom and mobility within the enclosure of a landscape that offers no open horizon, and which is visually dominated by the industrial complex that the *oikismos* was created to serve.

Tsangari spent her early childhood in Aspra Spitia (Karkani 2016: 206), the main setting of *Attenberg*'s story, so the choice of location has an autobiographical reference, but it is also employed to foreground the failure of an alternative 'European'<sup>15</sup> future for Greece which like the film's *oikismos* has decayed and died. Yet Aspra Spitia seems to be a paradoxical choice in the sense that it is an exceptional place in terms of its conception and creation. This purpose-built town was designed by the foremost Greek architect and urban planner of the twentieth century, Constantinos A. Doxiadis, whose extensive international career includes the design of Islamabad. Aspra Spitia was a carefully designed *oikismos* that stands out as a rare model of planned development in Greece, a country where urban design is either completely absent or plays minimal role in the evolution of cityscapes.

In a short but comprehensive essay Doxiadis details the key aspects of the master plan for Aspra Spitia (2019). What is startling about his document is that the obsessive attention paid to design aspects is matched by a complete indifference for future development and lack of provision for a sustainable evolutionary plan for the *oikismos*, exemplified by a total absence of references to the past and history or to ways in which the town will physically connect with the outside world. Poupou offers a striking example of this inattentiveness to the future in the absence of a cemetery in Aspra Spitia (2014: 63), which further underlines the disjuncture between abstract planning principles and the concrete natural course of human life. What is particularly poignant about this is that in the film the dying father makes a conscious decision to be cremated in Germany, as cremation was not legal in Greece at the time, but a burial in his home town would be impossible in any case.

There are, therefore, clear parallels between *Attenberg*'s seclusion of the *oikismos* with Doxiadis's indifferent to context masterplan for Aspra Spitia in their common negligence of the future. In the film, this is brilliantly played out in a scene set at the top of a high-rise building from where Spiros, an architect by profession, and Marina survey the enclosure of the town and its visible decay. Spiros delivers his assessment of the built environment that unfolds below his gaze: 'it is as if we were designing ruins, as if calculating their eventual collapse with mathematical precision', the failed architect and ineffective parent spelling out how the planning philosophy that underpinned the *oikismos* rendered the town dead at the very moment of its creation. Here we have a formal manifestation of what constitutes the *oikeion* in *Attenberg*, by visually and narratively defining what resides in the seclusion of the failed, futureless and decaying *oikismos* as the failed, futureless and decaying *oikogeneia*.

In a paper delivered in 1987, a year before his seminar on the *oikos*, Lyotard discusses the destruction or the swallowing up of the *domus* by the *megalopolis* (1991); while the *oikos* cannot be reduced to the deliberately idealized *domus* (a heaven of

domesticity and belongingness), its expansion to an *oikismos* bears close similarity to the creation of the *megalopolis*, a monstrous entity that grows by following the demands and the values of the ruthless and deadening economics of capitalism, clearly manifested in the creation of Aspra Spitia and by extension in that of the monstrous Greek mega-cities with Athens as the prime example. Where the father in *Dogtooth* attempts to create a grotesque version of *domus*, Spyros admits responsibility for the creation of an alienating, slave to performativity and productivity *oikismos*, a mirror of *megalopolis*.

The role of the family in the creation of an irrational, destructive, alienating, unsustainable and oppressive built environment in post war Greece is central, in particular in the country's large urban concentrations. In a widely applied practice called '*antiparohi*', family ownership of land has been used in a system of exchange whereby constructors would get the rights to a building plot on which they would develop multi-story buildings, offering as payment the promise of ownership of a number of apartments after completion. No money changes hands and families end up owning several properties in the same building. The intensive urban development of the 1960s and 70s was fuelled by this system of exchange and as a result the cityscape of several major cities was profoundly altered. Combined with strong urbanization this led to an exponential increase in the density of occupancy in cities, a diminished quality of life and extremely high levels of pollution. In this context, a different form of destructive violence emerges marked by positing the financial interests of the *oikogeneia* beyond and above principles of communality and environmental sensitivities. Furthermore, while not directly responsible for domestic violence or abuse, the exchange system created relationships of dependency and oppression as properties were handed down to younger generations restricting their mobility and independence by creating complex, informal and all-pervasive power structures of obligation and expectation.

The lack of a long-term national planning strategy (in sharp contrast with Doxiadis's 'over-planning' of Aspra Spitia, ironically) coupled with the unwillingness or inability to apply planning regulations meant that the needs of individual families more often than not outstripped social concerns or communal well-being principles. While Aspra Spitia is in planning terms very different from a major urban centre such as Athens for example, similar factors inform the decay of both with the family placed at the heart of the failed projects, a key contributor to the creation of the monstrous *megalopoleis*. Unlike in *Dogtooth*, there are no prominent acts of explosive familial violence in *Attenberg*, just a slow process of a failed upbringing and the handing down of an inheritance of a decaying social, built and natural environment deprived of hope for the future and that arguably constitutes an even more devastating form of violence.

**'Ethics today means not being at home in one's house'**

Theodore Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, #18

This article has shown how introspection as a particular cosmopolitan disposition is determined by the positioning of Greece at a specific historical moment while simultaneously being shaped by the creative agency and professional aspirations of Lanthimos and Tsangari. Emerging at the time of a profound fracturing of the settled discursive and institutional formation, the films demonstrate the dynamism of introspective cosmopolitanism by giving expression to a cluster of anxieties around the family which exceeds the temporal and discursive boundaries of the crisis. They challenge an understanding of the family as a protective shield to hostile global forces, a particularly popular narrative at the time (see e.g.

Varoufakis 2018), their introspection becoming an intervention that opens up the secluded nature of such unit and exposes the closed cosmopolitanism that underpins it.

A peculiar agonistics has been outlined involving a complex interaction between ambitions and constraints, opportunities and barriers. The combination of national focus and international outlook creates tensions exemplified in the way that Greece's 'crisis' can represent both an opportunity, in creating a fertile ground for the dissemination of the films internationally, and an obstacle, in becoming the ultimate interpretative and evaluative framework for their reception. The hermeneutic agonistics around the allegorical nature of the films, which the directors resisted, demonstrates the structured nature of introspective disposition as the films find themselves within a political and discursive environment which privileges certain readings over others and ultimately attempts to deny the most challenging findings of introspection. To follow Adorno's epigraph provocation, the major achievement of the introspective look of these films and many others of the Greek Weird Wave is that they turn the home into a house, they discover what is 'unhomely' in the home, they reposition the *oikeion* as an 'ignored guest' that unsettles the *oikos*, they divest the *oikogeneia* from its assumed safety, security and beneficial social function, they situate it at the heart of a failed *oikismos*. In *Dogtooth*, the seclusion of the home places the family as standing above and beyond social, political and legal conventions, and becomes a facilitator to domestic violence and abuse rather than the guarantor of safety and provider of protection. In *Attenberg*, the centrality of a failing family in the *oikismos* is linked to urban decay and destructive violence to the environment.

The introspective look of Greek Weird wave films brings to light a deeply disturbing reality which, not surprisingly, provokes critical responses that struggle to reposition the texts in less challenging frameworks, and in that sense to make us feel at home again, through allegorical readings that dismiss the dysfunctional abusive family as an actual social referent. Papanikolaou, perhaps the only critic that successfully resists this urge, uses the term *oikeion*

in a different but highly pertinent way describing how ‘the extreme, often grotesque domestic violence is by now a very familiar [*oikeio*] and recognisable subject matter’ in Greek cultural production (2018: 13; my translation). This points to yet another form of critical denial in which familial violence becomes a familiar thematic and stylistic aspect displacing in that way the unsettling nature of the films from the signified to the signifier. The intention of this article was to force a close look at this *oikeion* cultural phenomenon and to reclaim it as unfamiliar, as weird, as pointing towards a deeply unsettling social reality, a referent that cannot be assimilated by allegorical readings or stylistic conventions.

Adorno’s maxim proposes an ethical rejection of a secluded ‘private’ home and simultaneously a questioning of what appears to be normal in our ‘at home’ feelings and assumptions. This encapsulates the critical significance of introspective cosmopolitanism which by questioning taken for granted socio-political assumptions opens the home, and by extension the homeland, to a critique that reveals and deconstructs their insular secluded nature. As is the case with the introspection of Weird Wave films this demands that the *oikeion* is open to the *politicon* and vice versa. So far in this essay, nevertheless, the *oikos* has functioned as a negative category in order to sharpen the focus on a critique of the unassailable sanctity of the Greek family, but in concluding it is essential to consider Lyotard’s unstated but clearly implied double potential of the term. What would after all be the purpose of such close consideration of the *oikos* in a seminar that aims to develop ecological thinking if it was limited purely to the identification of abusive, destructive aspects? Without a doubt such form of ‘negative dialectics’, a questioning of limits, identifies the home and the family as key stakes in the agonistics of micro-politics, proposing at the same time the need to reject the way the *oikos* and the *oikogeneia* are experienced and regulated, and to disrupt their inexorable extension to the monstrous *oikismos* of the *megalopolis*. In answering questions that followed on from his 1988 seminar, Lyotard rather abruptly turns his attention to

childhood and the child, articulating in the process the tentative positivity of his deconstruction of the *oikos*. It is a ‘childlike fear of the given’, of the settled nature of the *oikos* that mobilises its possible transcendence. It is in the child, this familiar but also unfamiliar entity, this ‘internal stranger’, that creativity and invention can be found, in the home, in the family, in society. Childhood is defined not as a developmental stage but as a state of openness to the possibilities of being that seems able to sustain an urgent utopianism – ‘I am interested in remaining a child’ Lyotard concludes (1993:105-07).

Strikingly, the narratives of both *Dogtooth* and *Attenberg* are about the unfolding profound anxiety around the management and containment of the strangeness of/in children who, even in the most oppressive internal and external conditions, resist normative oppression through inventiveness and creativity. It is the familial curtailment of the playful activities (a form of ludic agonistics) of the children in the films that foregrounds in the most obvious way the violence of the *oikogeneia*, the *oikos* and the *oikismos*. The weirdness of the Weird Wave resides in this introspective examination of the ‘given’ and in their defamiliarizing creativity the films offer powerful glimpses of political possibilities. The overwhelming, all-encompassing nature of the Greek crisis defined a field of political discourse that privileged a focus on ‘big’ issues and grand narratives, such as neoliberalism and globalization, amplified by an unprecedented sense of urgency and hyperbole that often posited the very survival of the country as being at stake. Lyotard’s creative ‘micro-politics’ seems irrelevant even impertinent in such context, which might be another reason for the hegemony of the allegorical over the literal in critical approaches. However, the *oikeion* revealed in *Dogtooth* and *Attenberg* demands political action to counter the multifaceted violence that resides in the *oikos*.

Acknowledging the firm grip of *dispositif* over political possibilities, Foucault also opted for ‘micro-politics’ (1987). In his model, an inventive introspection, that he calls a

‘limit-attitude’,<sup>16</sup> involves a key question: ‘in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints?’ (1987: 45). Like Lyotard, instead of totalizing politics Foucault prefers

‘the very specific transformations that have proved to be possible in the last twenty years in a certain number of areas that concern our ways of being and thinking, relations to authority, relations between the sexes, the way in which we perceive insanity or illness’ (1987: 46-47).

From such perspective we can see how the Weird Wave’s critique of the Greek family, essentially partial in nature and hence non-allegorical, constitutes a questioning of the limits of Greek society and a challenge to the abusive violence that the films bring to light. Not just the violence of the oppressive heteronormative function of the Greek *oikogeneia* and the licence it grants to hegemonic oppression against the legitimacy of alternative arrangements, but also the violence *in* the home, the violence against the environment, and the violence against all those residing outside the exclusive and secluded home of the always central, abusively powerful, sacrosanct Greek family.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the history of the term, its uses and various suggested alternatives, see Sifaki and Stamou (2020).

<sup>2</sup> The term seems paradoxical, but it is used to indicate that despite its decidedly not open characteristics, closed cosmopolitanism still represents a way (albeit insular and non-interactive) of being a ‘citizen of the world’.

<sup>3</sup> I have discussed the usefulness of the term for film studies, as well as its differentiation from ‘competing’ approaches such as ‘transnationalism’, in earlier articles, most explicitly in Eleftheriotis (2012).

<sup>4</sup> I use the term in a restricted and limited sense informed by Lyotard’s emphasis on the ludic aspect of micro-politics and in juxtaposition to an explicitly political discourse such as that advanced by Chantal Mouffe (2013) for example.

<sup>5</sup> The present discussion of ‘introspection’ is part of a broader project on cosmopolitan dispositions that has previously focused on ‘empathy’ (Eleftheriotis 2016) and ‘love’ (Eleftheriotis 2020). Future work will examine ‘fascination’ and ‘openness’. This is clearly an eclectic rather than exhaustive collection of ‘dispositions’ aimed at sketching out the contours of the agonistics of cosmopolitanism.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between emotions and social structures (*habitus*) in Bourdieu see Scheer (2012).

<sup>7</sup> See for example Alvin I. Goldman’s defence of introspection: ‘Introspection is accepted as an evidential source by most epistemologists. In making this acceptance, epistemologists go along with people’s general disposition to form beliefs about their current mental states (sensations, propositional attitudes, emotions) based on their “awareness” of these

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occurrences. Self-awareness or introspection is the source that confers PF [*prima facie*]-warrant on these beliefs' (Goldman 2003: 4)

<sup>8</sup> His family background does not conform with the normative model of a Greek 'nuclear family' (see article on Lanthimos in the celebrity site *People* dated 17 February 2017 (<https://www.peoplegreece.com/celebrity/giorgos-lanthimos-ola-osa-den-xeroume-gia-ton-ipopsifio-gia-oskar-ellina-dimiourgo/>) accessed 31 July 2019.

<sup>9</sup> His use of the term 'Third-World' is not necessarily aligned with other geopolitical definitions and seems to be informed by a 'West and the Rest' power relations approach which would place Greece at a moment of crisis and dependency, as well as the Greek Weird Wave as a minor cinema, in that category; see Ahmad 1987 for a more detailed critique of the term and its application by Jameson.

<sup>10</sup> This clearly resonates with Freud's 'uncanny' (Unheimliche). I have deliberately sidestepped Freud in order to avoid the universalism of psychoanalysis and to focus instead on the materiality of the *oikos* that allows the historical and social specificities of the Greek family to emerge.

<sup>11</sup> With the mother (Michelle Valley) shown as substantially collaborating in this project; for a detailed analysis of her role see Kazakopoulou (2016).

<sup>12</sup> The aesthetics of *Dogtooth* are discussed briefly but with precision by Barotsi (2016: 176).

<sup>13</sup> The family of the film also intends to takeover ownership of a specially trained dog. The training of the dog by professionals is foregrounded by the film and in that way this rather violent process of domesticating the animal, of turning it into an *oikeion*, offers another way of exposing the violence that underpins the familial, the familiar and the domestic. For an extensive discussion of this aspect of the film see Metzidakis (2014).

<sup>14</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the organization of space in *Attneberg* and in Tsangari's cinema see Poupou (2014).

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<sup>15</sup> Tsangari describes it in these terms; see Karkani (2016: 206).

<sup>16</sup>This is within a similar intellectual trajectory to Adorno's quest for negative dialectics (1973) as a way of thinking philosophically in ways that avoid the affirmatory impulse of Hegelian dialectics. Adorno's search is for an incomplete and evolving way of thinking ('it lies in the definition of negative dialectics that it will not come to rest in itself, as if it were total' [1973: 406]) that operates at the limits of philosophical thoughts and traditions.

Importantly for the present argument, a key critique that he levels against dialectics is that it constructs a powerful way in which 'the difference between the particular and the universal [is] dictated by the universal' (1973: 6).