

Chapter 8 -

Surplus Cinema: Feminisms and Filmmaking in the Context of Greece and its Intertwining Diasporas

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The victims of neoliberal crisis management are not the 'Greek citizens', but the subordinate classes in Greece, not all of whom are citizens. These subordinate classes are differently affected by the racialized management of borders and populations. (...) Those who do not find safety in this hetero/cis-normative and patriarchal notion of shelter were soon to not find safety in the Greek streets either, as nationalist oppositional discourses were used violently to reaffirm the male 'head of family' as the sole signified of the 'citizen'.

— Dimitra Kotouza, *Surplus Citizens: Struggle and Nationalism in Crisis Greece* (2019)

Introduction

Surplus Cinema is a group of itinerant, diasporic makers, artists, activists, writers and friends. We ask questions about feminist filmmaking and decolonial practices within the context of Greece and intertwining diasporas.¹ The project was initiated in September 2021 by the curatorial team consisting of Maria Christoforidou, Sofia Dati, Rabab El Mouadden, Christina Phoebe and Elli Vassalou. The idea for a gathering like Surplus Cinema had been brewing for several years between friends in Greece, on the road, in diasporic kinships, wanting to make a space for femme, women and non-binary artists to gather and support each other in creative processes and struggles. Several women's circles began taking place, but the time, place and team had not yet come together to form a more long-term systematic process of collective research and slow curating that could eventually lead to a public event or program with multiple film screenings, discussions and workshops. During that time, Christina Phoebe began compiling an ongoing personal list of films (with links) to map out women's and non-binary film production in Greece and intertwining diasporas, and a reading list, both growing alongside conversations, friendships and kinships. This list would later be collectively watched, informed, discussed and expanded as an ongoing Surplus Cinema library. In September 2021, the Post (Film) Collective worked together during a residency at Kunstencentrum 404 (Ghent). Their main question: which tools and methods can develop a polyphonic film on belonging and placemaking, which would also be collectively authored? Forming cine-kinships, Christina was

¹ Diaspora comes from the Greek word diaspora/διασπορά; dia-/δια-(prefix-meaning across) and -speiro/-σπείρω (verb-meaning to sow or to scatter). Σπόρος/sporos, which shares the same root as -speiro, means seed.

invited to talk about her experience working on the polyphonic film with collaboratively formed script of *Amygdaliá* (2019). At the same time, Rabab El Mouadden had recently completed her master's thesis² on diasporic and exilic filmmaking, while Maria Christoforidou's new film *ΜΑΙΘΑ: The thrice burnt archives of unreliable prophecies* (2021), premiered at Beursschouwburg in Brussels in the "Black Archive: A Decolonial Approach to Experimental Cinema"³ programme. We all went to the premiere of *ΜΑΙΘΑ*, attended the "Black Archive" programme and the closing cine-assembly screening of The Post (Film) Collective at 404. It was here that all the Surplusines met for the first time. A dream for old and new friends to live together for a few days, sharing questions and futuring together. A few discussions later and Surplus Cinema was born.

With a desire to explore filmmaking as a feminist placemaking and space-taking practice, Surplus Cinema is an ongoing invitation of forming community and non-hierarchical solidarities between those seen as 'surplus' within white patriarchal structures. We form an impermanent, fluid collective sharing questions around collaborative filmmaking, camera work as care work and cinema as community action. We are part of an always-moving process, a continuous rehearsal feeding on accumulation rather than building up to an apex. Through humour and code-mixing, diasporic sisterhoods, afro confessions, queer joy and mourning, rerooting rituals, cinematic nests⁴ and sensory pleasures, Surplus Cinema seeks to bridge communities and celebrate 'metasporic' ones.⁵

Drawing on Dimitra Kotouza's writing of 'Surplus Citizens'⁶, we propose to shift the attention away from the pedestal to the backstage, situating our ruminations in surplus, excedent, unruly filmic narratives. In reshaping a lexicon derived from economy, Kotouza translates the surplus value of subordinate classes to signify a type of superfluity productive of non-capitalist (social, relational, common) transactions. She looks at how struggle and solidarity are formulated and acted upon during perceived "crises", and how bubbles of race, class, gender and nation condition solidarity formations, leading us to question who expresses solidarity to whom and why. Which forms of 'surplus' solidarity remain on the margins, or are yet to be formed? This lens was central to our reflections on cinema and feminisms in, and in relation to, the context of Greece. Thinking through Surplus became a way for us to gather, share and bond in narrative spaces allowing for unproductivity and refusal. Kotouza

² Rabab El Mouadden, *In search for a home: Utopian visions dismantling systems of oppression in the diasporic and exilic films Home?, Amygdalia and Women's Country*, University of Groningen, 2021

³ A program formed on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Collectif Jeune Cinéma, in which Maxime Jean-Baptiste and Stéphane Gérard presented a program of films, panels and workshops at Beursschouwburg and Cinematek. <https://www.beursschouwburg.be/en/events/black-archive/>

⁴ In conversation with the question "Can a film be like a nest?" in *Amygdaliá* (2019) by Christina Phoebe.

⁵ The Post Collective initially started using the term "metaspora" to describe the difference from "diaspora", as a term describing scattering of communities, to "metaspora", an intended creation of cross cultural ones. Later on they discovered the work of Joël Des Rosiers, not translated yet in English or Greek, who gives deeper insights in the term.

⁶ Artist, curator, researcher Eliana Otta, member of Mouries Collective, introduced this book to Christina Phoebe in the context of the exhibition "Lost and Shared: Approaches to collective mourning towards transformative politics" and her PhD thesis. A screening of the film "Amygdalia" and discussion of it through the book "Surplus Citizens" took place on 1 November 2021 at One Minute Space in Athens, GR.

reminds us that “we should not limit our conception to struggles for ‘inclusion’ into an already given regime of rights, especially a regime founded on and delimited by national belonging and the nation-state.”⁷ With Surplus Cinema, we intend to take up this invitation to imagine kinships and belonging beyond the “already given”, which problematise the nation as a homogenous, pure, tidy space.

One form of belonging that exceeds the nation-state formation can be crystallised in the term ‘metaspora’, which the Post (Film) Collective adopts to shift from the unidirectional pathway implied by the mainstream media framing of diasporic movement, as a way to reclaim uprooting mobility into rerooting movements finding joy and solace in polyphonic dispersion. In the what follows in this chapter of collective writing, we alternate between the terms ‘diaspora’ and ‘metaspora’ to refer to the (forced) displacement of people and imaginaries on the one hand; and to the nurturing of new, multitudinous, choral communities on the other hand.

In Surplus Cinema we have been watching and talking about films made by women, femme and non-binary filmmakers, films that stand outside of canonical representation and industry conventions, with interdependency at the core of their doings. The films featured in the Surplus Cinema programme in Beursschouwburg⁸ (Brussels, 2022) outline a practice of failure⁹ that rejects exhaustiveness and nests in dispersion, taking a step aside from dreams of mastery and success stories that pave the way of most mainstream narrative tropes. Surplus Cinema weaves the kind of radical kinship that nurtures ties beyond the homogenising apparatus of state control.

Despite the renewed blossoming of feminist movements, certain geographies remain more frequently centred and discussed in feminist film discourses than others, and as such reproduce dominant structures and hierarchies based on colonial ideas of binary north-south and west-east. Therefore, positionality via our physical (dis)placements therefore became a crucial point for us to reflect on, together with Kotouza’s writing, on the intersecting imaginaries of gendered, racialized ‘crisis’ and citizenship in relation to our embodied mappings of transitional, rerooted worldmaking. What internal locations and geographies do we carry that remain invisibilized by colonial thinking? What kinds of tools and strategies emerge from dia/metasporeic feminist filmmaking practices? How might we envision futures from and within a Surplus position? And how can the cinematic space embrace a wholeness which comes from the unruly, messy, complex, interwoven?

Through Greece’s geopolitical location - both borderland¹⁰ and centre - studying and screening films made in relation to this region and intertwining diasporas is a case study in exercising personal/collective understandings of location and positionality. Thinking with activist scholar Suryaia Nayak in ‘Location as Method,’¹¹ locating ourselves through shared and differing locations challenges

⁷ Kotouza, Dimitra. *Surplus Citizens: Struggle and Nationalism in Crisis Greece*, Pluto Press, 2019, p.4.

⁸ The program can be found here: <https://beursschouwburg.be/en/events/surplus-cinema>

⁹ Halberstam, Jack, *The Queer Art of Failure*, Duke University Press, 2011

¹⁰ Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands = La Frontera : The New Mestiza*. San Francisco, Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987.

¹¹ Nayak, Suryaia. 2017. Location as Method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 17(3):202-216.

neat narrative categorizations made in quiet acceptance of the border industrial complex of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. Paraphrasing Nayak when she asks “who is allowed to inhabit and survive the locations of research, writing and the academy?”, we make a collective call: who is allowed to inhabit and survive the locations of cinema? What cinematic forms are allowed to survive in collective memory as feminist filmmaking? And what forms of ciné-writing contribute to their survival? In the pages that follow, we invite you to our unruly assemblage of singular-collective ruminations mapping out some terms, reflections and conversations that have emerged - and keep emerging - within Surplus Cinema.

Friendship in Surplus

– *Christina Phoebe*

Each of us lives in a different place (Athens, Brussels, Cornwall, Rotterdam), while carrying many other places within us, in our diasporic webs. When our first programme took place we had all been together in person only 2-3 times. Dia/metaspotic friendships remind us that our worlds are local and global at the same time; they remind us to question distances and borders of varying shapes and sizes. What types of gazes make us feel near, while being far? How do films, like love letters, bridge spaces in light of separation? How can films console and motivate us, to voice ‘feeling diasporic’¹² or find words to speak of unspeakable injustices? Our friends are often our first audience, reminding us of what we have in common, without erasing our differences.

Antagonism between women upholds a particular pillar of white capitalist patriarchy. Spinning questions around friendship as a central thread of Surplus Cinema, friendship appears as an approach to collaborative research, collective organising, and feminist activism. How do our friendships teach us about the world; move us? bell hooks writes “The life lesson: We all sort of know it, but it's important to remember that our friends are as important as our lovers.”¹³ When it comes to coming-of-age fantasies and making kin, where does friendship fit in? In the tradition of women's circles and feminist consciousness-raising groups, how might friendship act as a place to blossom collectively, unweaving internalised oppressions?

Friendship is the protagonist of the film *Girlhood* (2021) by Vania Turner and Maria Sidiropoulou. Three teenagers confide in each other in lockdown Athens: “I feel like I’m more like myself when I’m with the girls”, Nefeli reveals. Sharing passions, insecurities, celebrations, they enjoy acceptance, and feel free in the encouraging space they create together. Making their inner worlds visible, they envision non-normative families. As Vera says, “We make a family, the three of us all together. We’ll adopt children and raise them all together.” Facing uncertain futures, they dream,

¹² ‘Feeling diasporic’ is a text by Lauren Wagner (2012) Rabab El Mouadden brought to the Surplus Cinema library which we read together during the Surplus Cinema residency at workspacebrussels in September 2022.

¹³ bell hooks. *All about Love : New Visions*, William Morrow, New York, 2000.

question, and appease fears with one another. Their friendship is a space to just be, hang out, be themselves.



Image 8.1: Childhood archives and memories meet in *MAIΘA (Maltha): The Thrice Burnt Archives of Unreliable Prophecies* (2021) by Maria Christoforidou

In *MAIΘA*¹⁴: *The Thrice Burnt Archives of Unreliable Prophecies* (2021) by Maria Christoforidou, childhood friends weave whispers from their personal archives. In family albums, past and present pulsate. A friendly archive, a kind reminder: *you are not alone, I see you*. Their friendship creates a safe(r) space to utter the public ‘secrets’¹⁵ of racism, the bleaching of identities in the 1970s and 1980s in post-dictatorship Greece.

Don't forget another story. Our friends are often our first confidants, ‘enlightened witnesses’¹⁶ in our grief of displacement; accomplices in the face of systemic trauma and decolonizing archives. Nationalist narratives insist on erasure. But we know this crossroad, currently baptised ‘Greece’, has always been a meeting point of languages, cultures, religions, peoples.

Filmmaker Sophia Farantatou pinpoints friendship as a means of survival: “in Greece¹⁷, where we can’t rely on institutional support, we often work with minimal resources. And when social justice fails to exist, our friends help us survive and overcome structural barriers.” In 2018, Sophia lost a friend: Zak Kostopoulos, Zackie Oh!, a Greek-American activist, writer, drag queen and openly

¹⁴ Translation: Maltha is a black viscid substance intermediate between petroleum and asphalt also called *earth pitch, mineral tar*, that was used in ancient times on wooden boards for everyday writing that can be melted and reused. It comes in contrast to the white permanent writing on marble.

¹⁵ As Maria Christoforidou said on day 1 of the Surplus Cinema program (23 November 2022): ‘I love secrets.’ The phrase ‘public secrets’ is borrowed from the work of artist, filmmaker and writer Crystal Z. Campbell.

¹⁶ Referencing psychologist, psychoanalyst and philosopher Alice Miller in her book *The body never lies* (2004)

¹⁷ “Or anywhere really where white capitalist patriarchy normalises violence daily”, later added in the group call where this discussion takes place.

HIV+ advocate of human rights, who was murdered in broad daylight in Athens. Like films, Zak's murder had an audience. Bystanders made videos, televised endlessly on the news and social media for over six months, torturously replaying homo/transphobic brutality of shop owners and police.



Image 8.2: The opening scene of *Bitter September* (2021) with Zak Kostopoulos and Sophia Farantatou

Three films in Surplus Cinema mourn Zak/Zackie. *Bitter September* (2022) by Sophia Farantatou treads images before and during grief. Sophia and Zak began filming for a portrait of a young drag community in Athens building in the 'crisis' years. Years after Zak's murder, Sophia interrogates the camera, a tool used for violence or justice. The court case continues to condone perpetrators without consequences. Justice remains out of reach like bitter fruit.¹⁸ *This is Right: Zak, Life and After* (2020) by Gevi Dimitrakopoulou, braids together voices, collectivising loss in the #Justice4ZakZackie¹⁹ movement that erupted in demonstrations, home sanctuaries and drag obituaries. Claiming public space for the dead and the living, Madonna's song 'Like a Prayer' vibrates like an anthem of another

¹⁸The title "Bitter September" comes from the bitter orange trees imported and planted everywhere in Athens by the assigned to Greece, Queen Amali, a because of their colour, and as the filmmaker's father told her, "because its fruits were uneatable for the citizens of this town".

¹⁹ During the movement, a monitoring initiative began of the court case the murder trial of Zak Kostopoulos - Zackie Oh: Greek page: <https://zackieohjustice.watch/> English page: <https://zackieohjustice.watch/en/> Today the court case has gone to European trial. The appeal of Eleni Kostopoulou, Zak's mother, on the killing of Zacharias (Zak) Kostopoulos and police impunity in Greece, speaking in European Parliament can be heard here in the Committee on Petitions (26 January 2023), timecode 16.05.40 min - 16.11.41. https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/webstreaming/peti-committee-meeting_20230126-1500-COMMITTEE-PETI?fbclid=IwAR08U91585Nt7TB65DtEhXV2FkMKuH8AWlhXJAiEORCcYsWjmK1rFMEyCbA

faith. A faith in solidarity, in collective memory as a vehicle for social justice. *No Nos Soltemos Mas*²⁰ (2022) by Alkisti Efthymiou features the metaspotic mobility of a stencil of Zak's face as it migrates from Greece to Chile, in transnational protest. The walls speak via graffiti in grief. Before leaving home to take to the streets, a godmother and goddaughter paint the contours of Zak's face.

Alkisti: Imagine if someone was painting your face like this...with so much affection.

Would you like it?

Mara: Yes, of course.

Alkisti: I think he would like it too.

The collective Friends of Zak/Zackie in Belgium²¹ bears friendship in its name: an entrance to solidarity and action. Knowing each other from near or far: "We believe you".²²

Despite distances, friendship makes diasporic mourning possible, especially when justice feels warped, ungraspable. In the triangle πατρίς-θρησκεία-οικογένεια,²³ friendship becomes a force capable of disrupting structures of domination, allowing polyphonic grief and joy to intertwine.

(M)othering

– *Rabab El Mouadden*

Alongside friendship, mothering is a space of practice, rehearsal, reflection that we have consistently been circling back to. *The Brides of Maltepe* (2015 - ongoing) by Eva Giannakopoulou and Persefoni Myrtsou, in its four episodes, has been a close companion in thinking about the mother as other, the other as mother, the earth as mother... In the third episode, one of the filmmakers chooses to depict a very vulnerable experience of hers; that of giving birth. The separation of bodies: mother and child, during birth. It is a crucial point of the whole series: the kid doesn't belong to the parents but to themselves.

After recently experiencing a loss myself - that of my 17-year old cousin who attempted to reach the Spanish border by entering the Atlantic ocean from Morocco - I got in contact with his mother. She had encouraged him to leave. Despite this brave attempt of separation coming from the mother, and the hope it entailed, the result was fatal.

²⁰ Title translation: "Let's Not Let Go"

²¹ The collective took part in the Surplus Cinema Ciné Assembly, screening / discussion, 25 November 20220.

²² Confronting sexist disbelief of survivors of rape and gender-based violence, the phrase 'Sister, we believe you' ('Hermana, yo si te creo' and "αδερφή μου, σε πιστεύω" / 'aderfi mou, se pistevo') started circulating in feminist activist spaces in Latin America, Greece and elsewhere, to empower survivors who are often intimidated into retracting their reports, if they manage to make them.

²³ Translation: 'fatherland-religion-family'.

I mention this personal story because in re-watching *The Brides of Maltepe*, and especially this scene in episode III where Persefoni gives birth, I felt a resonance between these two events: leaving - willingly or unwillingly - the mother's body or the motherland to explore what is beyond it. In *Brides*, by showing a moment as intimate as giving birth, the filmmakers/mothers attest to how a very personal experience acquires political meaning. The personal-political conundrum also shines through when the two filmmakers/protagonists talk about their kinships as Greek citizens with their Turkish partners.

What we can see in *Brides*, but also in many other films of Surplus Cinema, such as Christina Phoebe's *Amygdaliá* (2019), is that filmmakers as Others include in their images other Others. In episode IV, *Brides* highlights the challenges of establishing a mosque for devoted Muslims in Greece; another such example is the relationship between religion and transness when referring to the singer Bülent Ersoy. The other Others²⁴ are also the protagonists of *Amygdaliá*, where we listen to the voices of several women with migration experiences. This multivocality is also an attribute of the film *Rerooting* (2022). Many voices but also many filmmakers. The cinema of The Post (Film) Collective²⁵ is a cinema of subversion such as Fifth cinema as defined by Kaur and Grassilli.²⁶ It is a cinema of art and activism. The filmmakers and creators are in a process of movement; one that can be defined in many ways.

In *Amygdaliá*, we also see images taking us to notions of borders. Specifically, in a very interesting scene where we see Christina entering and exiting a baggage scanner. She crosses the border seemingly effortlessly, implying the insignificance of geographical boundaries, while highlighting the control exerted on the body. Another scene depicts her hand squeezing and applying pressure to barbed wire, emphasising the physical pain of geographical borders.

²⁴ The filmmakers, having already been excluded from the normative ways of being, choose to embrace in their films other individuals that do not fit the norms of their society.

²⁵ *The Post Collective* members are Sawsan Maher, Mirra Markhaëva, Alimu Mohhamed, Hooman Jalidi, Marcus Bergner and Elli Vassalou. The Post (Film) Collective is co-created with the artist in kinship, Robin Vanbesien and the project *Metaspora* together with artist Anna Housiada.

²⁶ Kaur Raminder and Mariagiullia Grassilli. 2018. Towards a Fifth Cinema. *Third Text*, 33(1): 1-25.



Image 8.3: Christina Phoebe's body entering a baggage scanner in *Amygdaliá* by Christina Phoebe

This complex passage of in and out, inside the womb and outside the womb, from motherland to foreign land and what is in between, entails a tremendous amount of pain. Nature and the flow of life become a source of suffering. In *Rerooting*, Sawsan Maher emphasises the dangerous side of nature for refugees crossing borders 'illegally' in contrast with people carrying out activities such as hiking in order to reconnect with the forest and nature:

I start to understand the privilege of enjoying visiting nature and enjoying hiking and going around.

It is really different from being vulnerable to nature.

In some situations nature can be really cruel and can take over your existence.

That pain and suffering does not only affect humans but non-humans as well.

This reconnection with nature can happen, for instance, by placing focus on the forest. In *Ritual for a Burnt Forest* (2022), Mouries Collective²⁷ makes a ritual for a forest that was taken by fire on the Greek island of Evia in 2021. The forest, or more generally Earth, is associated with mother as a life-giving entity that is exploited. Instead, in the film, the forest - the earth, the land - is not only there to be observed; she becomes a subject. Since non-humans have always been in the margins of

²⁷ Currently in the Mouries Collective are: Maria Juliana Byck, Thalia Dimitropoulou Isabel Gutierrez, Eliana Otta, Sanchez, Sanem Su Avci, and Vasiliki Sifostatoudaki.

cinema and cultural representation,²⁸ I begin to wonder what a non-human cinema could be, and how we can imagine it.

Make Kin and Babies (Surplus Babies)

— *Elli Vassalou*

Between human and non human, there is the foetus and then the baby, a state of being human closer to nature than we will ever be as long as we are alive, before we become humus, earth again ourselves. Babies are not just offspring and heirs of their parents' reality, they are worldmaking entities themselves, with the power to create unexpected, unorthodox, unfamiliar futures. “Make kin and babies” is about understanding childbearing and childrearing, not as peripheral moments in (an artist's) life, 'but in themselves, an integral part of artistic and cultural production,²⁹ a production that happens in collaboration with them, as they are themselves important agents of transgenerational solidarity.

The provocative quote of Donna Haraway 'Make kin, not babies'³⁰ was later rewritten as 'make kin, not population.'³¹ In this edition are reflected complex issues of intimacy and kinship, from reproductive justice to environmental justice, from human to nonhuman genocides to new practices for making families and kin. Population is usually conceiving of unwanted or surplus life—and thus of disposable life. Michelle Murphy states “Population control could hardly be said to 'harm' the unborn: Rather, it made the poor across the developing world surplus by definition.”³² We dare to wonder: Who has the right to make babies? Who makes the right babies? Are there Surplus babies?³³

I am part of the Post (Film) Collective, a group of transcultural artists, activists and thinkers who have different access to civil and artistic rights due to their legal status in Belgium. Working with

²⁸ However, the genres of animation, documentary, horror, sci-fi are more known for putting on the spotlight non-human species. Although there are many films of the last decades that focus on climate change and eco-disasters (e.g. eco-dystopian) and many types of eco-cinema, in general, most of them have the human gaze as the most prevalent. What do the trees or birds have to say about it? How does a flower feel about it? Anna Tsing's 'The Mushroom at the End of the World' (2015) comes to mind here, which by focusing on the mushroom, highlights the worlds of other non-human living beings.

²⁹ As Mary Jirmanus Saba writes in her text “Artistic genius is a myth of the Colonial Patriarchy” In the book: *Why call it labour? On mothering and art work*, (2020) Mophradat and Archive books .

³⁰ Donna J. Haraway . *Staying with the trouble*. (Duke University Press, 2016).

³¹Kristen Angrieski. *Making Kin Not Population*, Edited by Adele E Clarke and Donna Haraway. (Prickly Paradigm Press, 2018).

³² Looking at mainstream media, addressing different mothers, we see very conflicting narratives arise. In the commercial 'The Girl Effect' # (2004, NIKE foundation) we see the education of girls in '3rd world countries', as a way to stop women from making babies, -make money instead- to help their country and save the world from 'overpopulation'. In the Greek promotion video for the first Panhellenic Fertility Conference (2021), a white woman with a career is presented as an ignorant egoist, an enemy of the state, who forgot to provide her country (pure) Greek citizens (and soldiers). The conference got heavily criticised by the feminist movement and got cancelled, however the spot is still online

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rtnk1ziliEc&ab_channel=BCIMedia

³³ Murphy, Michelle. *The Economization of Life* (Duke University Press, 2017).

the notion of diaspora could not fit our collective. Diaspora often stays in a binary between a here and a there, keeping minorities separated, still able to feed them toxic patriarchal narratives of ethnic nationalism. We wanted to create a place where we could flourish collectively, by committing playfully to each other. As other 'children of compost'³⁴, after escaping wars, poverty and borders, we came together to cultivate our speculative collective garden. A garden containing our worries, hopes, bodies, experiences, children, the non-human species who live near or with us, our ancestors, the local soil, people and the stories that sprout between us all. We call this process METACIORA (metaspora): creating synergies and new ecologies with care as an open community; to redefine belonging and dream of a common future; and as Joël Des Rosiers would say, to write our “own mythology, and forge post-national spaces, within the general movement of peoples”³⁵. The film *Rerooting* is an experiment in how to create these spaces through the medium of cinema.

In the film, dialogues and cine-letters between Sawsan Maher, Mirra Markhaëva and Alimu Mohhamed, members of the collective, their interactions with Sawsan’s young children, and non-human agents in the forest of the Belgian Ardennes, create a world. The form of the film is also shaped by the fact that Sawsan, a refugee mother with no access to networks of care (by social state or family), is participating in an artist residency while being stuck at home with her children, as circumstances made it impossible for her to travel with the collective.

In the films *The Brides of Maltepe*, the two Greek filmmakers are having babies with Turkish partners, committing the “ultimate ethnic betrayal”, having babies with “the nation’s enemy.” The artistic duo responds to the complexity of their shared situation by making a series of episodes, where they digest their experiences in dialogue with each other and the world around them.

In both *Rerooting* and *The Brides of Maltepe*, the filmmakers, who are mothers or in kinship with babies (some of them children of immigrants themselves) are wondering how the children will develop the ability to grow roots, what stories they should tell them and how to prepare them for a world where dominant narratives will keep them out and tag them as surplus. Sons and daughters of illegalised migrants in one case (stateless babies), babies out of nation-state control (treason babies) in the other. *The Brides of Maltepe* call this new form of family they created 'My miserable, infectious family'³⁶ and fantasise about an island full of people who invent future traditions, people with no devotion to any country, infectious and blessed, “we the ones who swallowed the sperm of national toxicity and by metabolising its toxins into living cells, we gave birth to new organisms... paradox children, so that we piously invent our degenerate traditional futures”³⁷.

³⁴ Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the trouble*. (Duke University Press, 2016).

³⁵ Des Rosiers, Joël. *Métaspora: Essai sur les patries intimes*. (Montréal: Triptyque, 2013).

³⁶ *Brides of Maltepe*, episode IV

³⁷ as above



Image 8.4: Contemplation on giving birth to a child that does not fit in national narratives in *Brides of Maltepe*, episode IV (2021) by Eva Giannakopoulou and Persefoni Myrtsou

Motherhood (and kinship with babies) in the two films, stands as a worldmaking power that has an affinity with making art. In coexistence, mothering and art produce subversive body politics, methodological tools and research-based practices. Mother - Artist - Stateless are three identities that were not designed by the imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchal world to exist together. When women are called out as bad mothers, bad artists and bad citizens, “unloyal to civilization itself,”³⁸ they create art forms and family forms that are queer, precarious, and infectious.

But in these forms we can sustain and celebrate our ways of being, creating collective conditions and *traditional futures*, “newly complex and open-ended.”³⁹ They are constantly translated and transitional archives, artefacts, films and lullabies. Being able to build in dreams, every single night, again and again our new home, a place where we belong, as Fluffy the spider does outside Sawsan’s window.

³⁸ As Ursula K. Le Guin will point out in her essay *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (2019).

³⁹ Clifford, James. (2004). *Traditional futures*.



Image 8.5: Fluffy the spider weaving his web in *Rerooting* (2022) by The Post (Film) Collective

Landmarks and Placeholders

– *Sofia Dati*



Image 8.6: A hand caressing a burnt tree trunk of the forest of Evia in *Ritual for a Burnt Forest* (2022) by Mouries Collective.

Let us circle back to Mouries collective, and linger a little longer in the company of the burnt forest. Let us be with those bodies devoted to the ashy landscape of Evia. Listen to their silent song as they caress the land and gather in remembrance of an interrupted life cycle. In their collective gesture, Mouries Collective re-members, re-collects, and re-roots the forest. In their attempt to connect with their wounded surroundings, they navigate the landscape as a frontier space, a place of death and regeneration. *Ritual for a Burnt Forest* is a testimony to how the body archive stores and transforms dispersed traces travelling through open pores and spores. It is in such dispersion that Surplus Cinema started making its nest, thinking about diasporic kinships and metaspore. How to imagine the diasporic not as a stigma imposed on us, but as a condition of circulation, of multiple rootings and rerootings across the suffocating confines of nation, gender, and identity constructs?

As symbolic representations of a place or a nation-state, landmarks constitute a collection of traces or imprints that history deemed worthy of preservation. As such, they are inseparable from notions of borders and boundaries. The forest is one such landmark. Romanticism has depicted forests as one of its preferred motifs. A whole tradition reveres those sublime wanderings in the wilderness, in that place of uncontaminated authenticity - remember Sawsan's and Rabab's thoughts about the hiker and the fugitive? Mouries' ritual, however, amplifies through performance a process of co-becoming that exceeds those romantic ties to the *preservation* of nature as a nationalist drive. With her filmic essay *ΜΑΙΘΑ*, Maria Christoforidou opens up another doorway allowing to unbind the foreclosures of national identity formations. She summons pop culture, mythical heroines and family portraits to inhabit some of the most iconic sites of Greekness. By inscribing Black bodies within the texture of Greek and European mythology and archeology, the film invokes an invisibilized 'we' in the process of reclaiming space and (surplus) value. *AfroGreek, like Aphrodite* – a key character in the myth of Greekness - embraces her *darkness*, her blackness. The black femme body eludes her own codified cinematic representation and comes to signify a disruption in the representational canon of Greekness. Something else infiltrates the reassuring, numbing, and violent image of the norm.⁴⁰

Welcome to the nipple at the top of Athena's highest hill. In Eva Stefani's *Acropolis* (2001/2004), the monument speaks and acts in the guise of a woman's *feminine* body - a body that stands in as a generic spaceholder for a representation of femininity constructed and upheld by the male gaze. Like the glitch effect in *ΜΑΙΘΑ*'s soundscape, the frenzied edit of Acropolis accentuates a break from 'the tourist gaze.'⁴¹ A gaze that consumes and reproduces clichés. In *Acropolis*, the role of the tourist gaze as part of a *reproductive machine* is exacerbated through erotic, consumerist and

⁴⁰ Cf. Keeling, Kara. *The Witch's Flight: the Cinematic, the Black Femme, and the Image of Common Sense* (Duke University Press, 2007).

⁴¹ Note by Christina Phoebe: As described by John Urry and many others. Also influential to our conversations was the text by Dean MacCannell "Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of Social Space in Tourist Settings," *American Journal of Sociology* vol. 79, no. 3 (Nov., 1973):589-603 (15 pages) published by: The University of Chicago Press. Thank you to filmmaker Dimitra Kondylatou for offering these texts to our surplus library.

patriotic associations. The film produces a body (or multiple bodies signifying the female, feminine, body) as a space to be consumed for a fee, enjoyed for a brief moment as visitors come in and out and snap a picture to immortalise the memorable sight. The body becomes encoded within the scripture of monuments and myths. It glitches.

Now, imagine a beach at the feet of the mountain. The sand is warm, the air carries with it a joyous song. It feels like Summertime on a Greek island. In their films *Express Skopelitis* (2020) and *Luxenia* (2021), Emilia Milou and Dimitra Kondylatou respectively look at this consumable landscape in narratives that challenge labour conditions within the Greek tourism industry. But *Lesvia, The Herstory of Eressos*⁴² chooses to place its focus on the political significance of the mythical island for Lesbians and lesbians. Tzeli Hatzidimitriou offers the portrait of a sanctuary that gives another twist to the tourist gaze. While other films set out to dismantle the exploitative mechanisms of tourism, *Lesvia* tells the story of a pilgrimage that, since the 1970s, has brought women from all over the world to Sappho's birthplace. They sought refuge, community and rest. Rest from a constant search for belonging and recognition; a break from the everyday struggle to just be. 'I felt free, I fell in love' - says one of the interviewed women. The kiss at the end of *Enomena* (2022) feels like such a moment of bliss. Away from the bullies waiting outside with a taser, Anna and Jo find in each other an escape route from the suffocating microcosm that school can be - alongside a range of educational institutions. Phaedra Vokali's teenage love story is one of transformation, solidarity, and self-love as self-defence. The desire for intimacy and closeness in the face of adversity emanating from *Enomena* and *Lesvia*, translates a common search for new landmarks and revisited mythologies. Stories where we - lovers, friends, communities - collect, convey, transform, reform common tropes. Picturing the possibility of such narratives means thinking of a landmark for more than one voice.

⁴² At the time of the Surplus Cinema program, *Lesvia: The Herstory of Eressos* was in post-production. The program did not show the final film but featured a work-in-progress excerpt of the film while filmmaker Tzeli Hatzidimitriou was in the final stages of completing the film.



Image 8.7: Close-up of a woman's face inclined upwards, in laughter and/or pleasure, in *Acropolis* (2001) by Eva Stefani

In *Acropolis*, *ΜΑΛΘΑ*, *Enomena*, *Lesvia*, and so many films and conversations within Surplus Cinema, the landmark seems to be lured closer to the body, in resonance with Julietta Singh's ruminations on the unruly alliance between body and archive. Appealing to the body archive as 'an attunement, a hopeful gathering, an act of love against the foreclosures of reason' means challenging dominant history-making tropes. In contrast with the Derridean archive, this archive performs a gesture of attunement rather than one of commandment; it gathers an assembly rather than engaging in a quest for origin and authenticity. The Mouries Collective engages in such a gathering, while invoking the *chthonic*, the earthly, the grounded.⁴³ Filming with each other and with the forest, their performance of grief problematises the myth of 'human exceptionalism and bounded individualism' emanating forms of disembodied, unsituated knowledge.⁴⁴ Here, knowledge is situated, and it is channelled through sensation.

Perhaps the landmark holds space and place for something else to emerge? If we think of the landmark as one of the tenets of a Master narrative, it is then possible to unlock one layer of the

⁴³ Donna J. Haraway takes cue from the ancient Greek terms *khthonios* (from the earth) and *khthōn* (earth), describing 'Chthonic ones' as 'beings of the earth, both ancient and up-to-the-minute'. From Haraway, Donna J. *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chtulucene* (Duke University Press: Durham and London, 2016), p.2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 30.

Surplus space-making gesture. These (and other) films shake the grounds where the rock lays, where the building is erected, where the story is told. Together, we occupy symbolically charged places with our dia/metasporic kinships.

an archive of errors

— *maria christoforidou*

Yesterday I was hoping something would go wrong with the machine so I wouldn't have to work. Any machine: the car, the computer, the white supremacist capitalist heteronormative machine- whatever, I need a rest. Today my thoughts wander through film scenes from the Surplus Cinema programme that stand out for their lateral or direct examination of official narratives surrounding work and rest. The scenes speak beyond the historical and cultural context of Greece, whilst being very much situated there. Considering these scenes, I subscribe to Legacy Russell's description of the technological error as 'glitch'. Russell celebrates the glitch as 'a vehicle of refusal', a 'strategy of non-performance.'⁴⁵ The uniform, literal or abstracted, often features as a remnant of the late-industrial, militarised, racist, and male-dominant workplace.

Luxenia (2021) by Dimitra Kondylatou evolves one Summer's day at a Greek resort. Parallel to the main glitch *de resistance*⁴⁶ (where the radio voice of the capitalist colonial tourist machine is extinguished by the push of a button) there is another glitch. One of radical rest, borne out of failure and accident. We recognise the figure as a worker by her pink chambermaid's uniform. She puts her towel on the busy beach. She sits down, then we see ...she sleeps. Her phone alarm goes off, she sleeps. By the time she hears it, it's dark and hopefully too late to work. Morpheus⁴⁷ helps the worker override learnt functions of obedience and becomes the 'vehicle of refusal'. This quiet glitch in the fabric of work time allows the body to belong to life, not to global economic apparatuses. The beach transforms from a site of capitalist neocolonialism to a site of rest.

⁴⁵ Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*, (Verso Books, 2020).

⁴⁶ A play on words, from *piece de resistance*, a glitch de resistance: the most important or remarkable glitch in the film but also in an open translation it connotes the aspect of resistance in the glitch.

⁴⁷ Ancient Greek god of sleep



Image 8.8: Anous Bogosian lying on the beach in *Luxenia* (2021) by Dimitra Kondylatou

A socially shaped uniform arises in Prokne and Filtig's video performance *Trud* (2019). A body dressed in the male worker uniform, a blue boiler suit and hard hat, is welding. The worker takes off the uniform to reveal a tender female body; soft, warm and alive amongst unspecified rusting machinery. The moment the breasts emerge, like a light in the abyss, illuminates the mind to see the body as an intersection of possibilities, glitching layers of uniformity and compliance. Seamlessly the worker's body is enveloped in another uniform - the garb of a Greek housewife of a bygone era, housecoat, hair kerchief and *tsokara*⁴⁸ - and then irons the boiler suit. Apart from little details this costume has not changed in the last 100 years. Time stands still in the heteronormative patriarchy. This modern-day Sisyphus, caught in a loop between distinct uniforms of male and female labour, never rests. Judith Butler's 'performativity of gender'⁴⁹ runs by this scene, cackling.

⁴⁸ Greek word for wooden clogs, referencing also Prokne's film *Carmela's Garden* (2018)

⁴⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. (Routledge, 1990)



Image 8.9: Prokne ironing an industrial jumpsuit in *Trud* (2019) by Prokne & Fitlig

The glitch perches on the female body in a different way in *I am Afrogreek: Black Portraiture in Greece* (2021) by Adeola Naomi Aderemi. Grace Chimela Ezen Nwoke, an Afrogreek teacher in an international school in Athens, recounts a pertinent, and for us Afrogreeks, recognisable scene of error. Whilst handing out school uniforms to parents at the beginning of term, she listens to two parents who enter her classroom looking for the teacher. They ignore her, assuming she is the cleaner. She says: ‘Hello, I will be your child’s teacher this year.’ I imagine the couples’ faces but the punctum here is Grace’s face,⁵⁰ her bitter pursed lipped smile as she remembers. Her composure echoes countless women of colour who develop strategies to deflect an inadvertent ‘non-performance’ of their expected roles in the theatre of employment. The body, due to the hue of its skin, is a glitch so powerful it becomes invisible in the machine that produces students, whiteness, and prejudice.

⁵⁰ Punctum is a term used by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (1980) to refer to an incidental but personally poignant detail in a photograph which ‘pierces’ or ‘pricks’ a particular viewer, constituting a private meaning unrelated to any cultural code.



Image 8.10: Kirezi Chakizimana in *I am Afrogreek: Black Portraiture in Greece* (2021) by Adeola Naomi Aderemi

To underline these scenes comes *Ritual for a Burnt Forest*, perhaps itself a malfunction in the archive. In one scene, as the collective is performing rituals to support the lost forest in their regeneration process, bodies come into the frame to gently bestow on a burnt tree body, kisses, strokes, silent wishes, and quietly leave. The ritual as unwavering, methodical, psychological labour with unquantifiable results is a glitch challenging official technological knowledge and labour. Donna Haraway's call for new stories to call forth new worlds⁵¹ manifests in Mouries' psychodynamic refusal of the expected work. Rather than digging or cutting, it glides, bringing hope to the post-apocalyptic atmosphere. Before, after and during the apocalypse there is repair and care. The ritual counteracts the deluge of news images of the fire, suggesting another story.

Express Scopelitis (2020) by Emilia Milou holds a glitch like a pearl in an oyster. After we see men working hard at maritime pursuits, we land in a scene of an ancient looking woman on a sewing machine making bags out of maritime detritus. The female body and voice is a glitch in the male work heroic imagery of the film that ignites a mythological perspective of the error. An Odyssey with several Ulysses and one ancient Penelope. The boat, the men, the work are all sailing towards her, she is folded in the story like a grain of sand (a glitch, an error, a mistake, a pause, a secret!) that grows into a pearl. Wrapped in age, wisdom and stillness, 'She' quietly carries on her invisible unofficial work.

⁵¹ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. (Duke University Press, 2016).

Where can *we* get the power to lie down, to walk away, to make our bodies visible, free in the light, to repair? The error for me always carries the pleasure of its near homophone, the erotic. I draw strength from Audre Lorde: 'Within the celebration of the erotic in all our endeavours, my work becomes a conscious decision - a longed-for bed which I enter gratefully and from which I rise up empowered.'⁵² The film space can constitute a pause to the endless labour cycles of exhaustion, a bed we climb into to dream irresistible strategies of refusal and healing.

Sailing Further Together

In the place of a conclusion we offer a love letter to the Surplus Cinema gatherings. Lingering traces, film quotes and questions as a poem of experience and desire for what is to come. Fragmented memories we take with us as we move in between our dia/metaspotic islands.

Summertime, and the livin ain't easy.

"I'd heard stories from the 80s, 90s, a kind of lost paradise"

"We're not very good at telling our history of how we got here"

"Where do I find that history, my history?"⁵³

Who will write our history? Our friends? What is a friend? What materials are friendships made of?

A soothing friend's gaze and embrace? A caring phone call, feeling like infinity?

How many hours of whispers and secrets clocked in, in bedrooms, boats and beaches?

Where on the map can we find borders crossed, between strangers and friends?

From distance to proximity, closeness?

What keeps a friend? What helps mend a friend's ruptured heart?

What aquarium antagonism allows for a kiss to replace a taser?⁵⁴

For which errors can we make amends, to feel connected again -να νιώθουμε πιο ενωμένα;⁵⁵

What landmarks of friendship are heard on the horizon? In Errresos or aboard Express Skopelitis?

A siren song of a working-class mermaid without weekends echoes

"Location is an intervention and method rather than a place to go or position."⁵⁶

⁵² Audre Lorde, *Essay, Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power*, 1978.

⁵³ Excerpts from the protagonists in the film *Lesvia: The herstory of Eresos* (2023) by Tzeli Hatzidimitriou, a personal glance on the lesbian beach of Eressos in Lesvos.

⁵⁴ In reference to the film *Enomena* (2022) by Phaedra Vokali, a teen love story set in an aquarium on the island of Crete.

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Suryia Nayak. 2017. *Location as method*. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 17(3):202-216.

Sowing seeds for friendships enduring,
surplus cinemas grow like trees that “sprout where they are not sown”⁵⁷

- Φυτρώνει εκεί που δεν το σπέρνουν

A (m)other of babies she did(n't) give birth to, who nobody owns
one that creates kin and whose body
-from endless labour and exploitation- soothes

Φύλες, φίλο, φύλο...⁵⁸

Ten years ago I asked, *είναι φίλος μας το φύλο;*⁵⁹

We sat on the floor in a circle in an occupied theatre, equal distance from the centre -
needing reminders of the peripheries and masters we carry within

In grieving Mediterranean waters, a reminder floats

“Groupers can change sex you know.”

Not on one side, nor the other

a metasporic fish

swims from reef to reef, in the borderlands⁶⁰

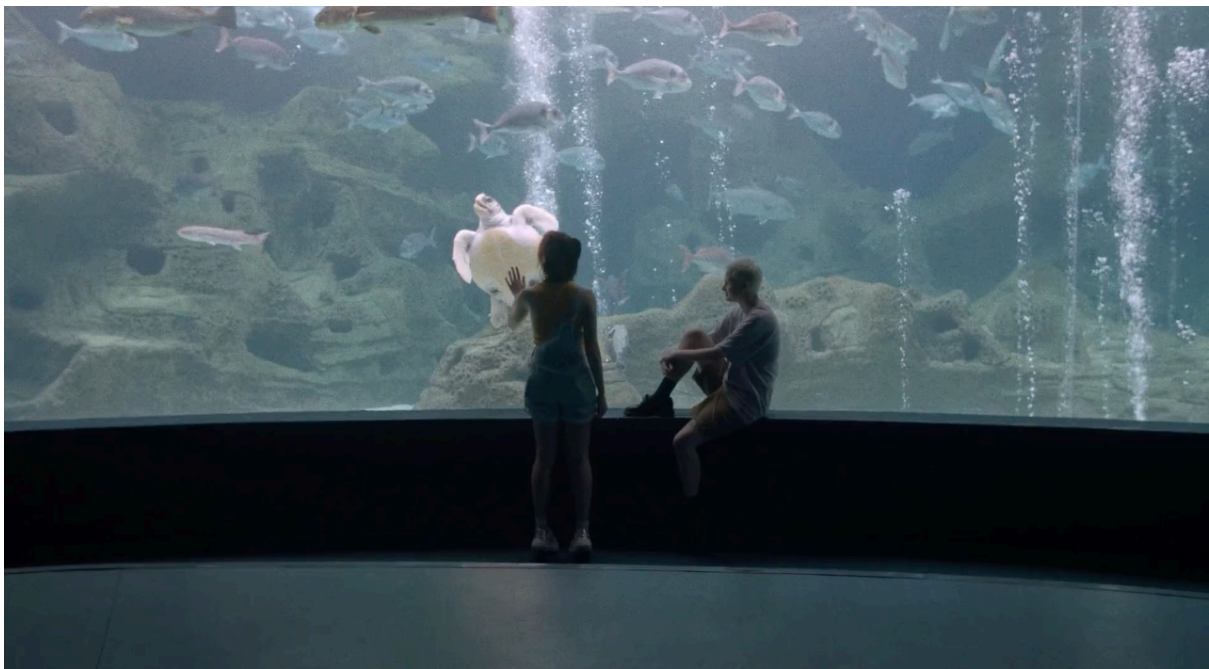


Image 8.11: “Groupers can change sex you know” from *Enomena* (2022) by Phaedra Vokali

⁵⁷ Greek expression which can be metaphorically translated as ‘poking one’s nose where it doesn’t belong’

⁵⁸ Translation: Φίλη - Friend (in the female), Φίλο - friend (in neutral), Φύλο - gender

⁵⁹ Translation: *Is gender our friend?* Posed in a workshop held at Embros Theater, on 14 February 2013.

⁶⁰ Referring to Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza*, 1987

Metadata

Keywords: activist films; borderlands; care work; collective authorship; crisis; decolonizing archives; diasporic feminist filmmaking; friendship; glitch; Greece; glitch; grief; intergenerational herstory sharing; labour; landmarks; metaspóra; (m)othering; non-human protagonist; rest; surplus cinema; tourist gaze

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BIO

Surplus Cinema is an itinerant gathering of diasporic artists, filmmakers, writers, thinkers, activists and cultural workers asking questions about feminist filmmaking and decolonial practices within the context of Greece and intertwining diasporas. The project was initiated in September 2021 by the curatorial team consisting of Maria Christoforidou, Sofia Dati, Rabab El Mouadden, Christina Phoebe and Elli Vassalou. With a desire to explore filmmaking as a feminist placemaking and spacetaking practice, Surplus Cinema is an ongoing invitation of forming community and non-hierarchical solidarities between those seen as 'surplus' within white patriarchal structures. Its public programmes began in late 2022 in Beursschouwburg, Brussels, and will continue morphing into new forms and places. Talks, mistressclasses, workshops and screenings have also taken place at workspacebrussels, erg school of arts and DocNomads (Brussels), Ergo with Hermitage Gathering / Onassis Air (Athens), NECS conference (University of Oslo).

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