

**The Affective Crisis Image in the Formal Elements of Yorgos Lanthimos' Films *Dogtooth*
(2009) and *The Lobster* (2015).**

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Introduction

The *affective turn* in the (Western) social sciences and humanities indicated a shift towards an interest in matters of embodiment and materiality in a context where approaches concerned with representation and meaning had become relatively dominant by the end of the 20th century. The turn to affect thus emphasised the importance of experience, sensation, and the body as key factors in processing and understanding information that is presented to us.¹ In the context of art theory, attention on affect underlined the rigidity of the existing theoretical frameworks that prioritised analysis based on semiotics, and often disregarded the materiality of the artwork itself.² The affective turn is usually referred to in singular form, but it could rather be seen as a wave of multiple simultaneous moves towards the corporeal and embodied, across different fields. This was also the case for film theory, where the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze was among the first to examine the autonomy of affect in relation to film. However, while Deleuze could be considered one of the pioneers in establishing a more significant connection between the film image and embodiment, others within the field (e.g. feminist film theorists and phenomenologists) also started reconsidering the role of physicality and the body in relation to film around this time.³ We could say that the discourse surrounding the affective qualities of film has since its emergence originated from multiple diverse viewpoints, and thus it is important to establish the theoretical stance and argument for this specific thesis.

In my research, I will examine the work of the Greek director Yorgos Lanthimos in order to identify and analyse affective structures within the formal elements of his films. The two case studies I have chosen are *Dogtooth* (2009) and *The Lobster* (2015), which are both associated with the fairly recently emerged movement of *Greek Weird Wave*. I argue that both films renegotiate the viewing process of the spectator through the use of the *crisis image*, a perceptible manifestation of disruption, liminality, and transition. This concept is elaborated on by Anna Backman Rogers, who utilises the work of Gilles Deleuze to illustrate how a series of American independent films employ specific aesthetic elements to render the film image unstable, and cause a breakdown of meaning in the spectator's mode of viewing. In other words, the crisis image elicits alternative ways of

¹ Lisa Blackman, and John Cromby. "Affect and feeling." *International Journal of Critical Psychology* 21, no. 1 (2007): 6; Eugenie Brinkema. *The Forms of Affects* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), xi-xii.

² Simon O'Sullivan. "The Aesthetics of Affect: Thinking art beyond representation." *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 6, no. 3 (2001): 125-126.

³ Brinkema, *Forms of Affect*, 26; Felicity Colman, "Deleuzian Spectatorship." *In The Routledge Companion to Cinema and Gender*, ed. Kristin Lené Hole, Dijlana Jelača, E. Ann Kaplan, and Patrice Petro (New York: Routledge, 2016), 322-323.

perceiving the filmic world, and can in extension help question the hegemonic conventions that govern our understanding of the cinematic medium. I aim to extend the concept of the crisis image from American independent film, into the work of Lanthimos. The aim of this thesis is to outline and examine how the crisis image manifests on a formal level within these films. I suggest that these formal elements are inherently *affective*, as they create a shift in the habitual viewing process of the spectator. In other words, because the crisis image captures the curiosity of the spectator, it is possible for them to be affected by the film's material qualities. The basis for the methodology of this thesis is drawn from Steven Shaviro's understanding of the cinematic body and Eugenie Brinkema's notion of affective structures within films, and reading their form for affect.

The cornerstones for the theoretical framework of the thesis are Backman Rogers' book *American Independent Cinema: Rites of Passage and the Crisis Image*, and Marios Psaras' work *The Queer Greek Weird Wave: Ethics, Politics and the Crisis of Meaning*, which reconceptualises the movement itself. While Backman Rogers' work is significant as a reference for the central argument of the thesis, Psaras' book is utilised in contextualising the argument in relation to the phenomenon of Greek Weird Wave, and more specifically, the work of Lanthimos. Utilising David Bordwell's and Kristin Thompson's book *Film Art: An Introduction*, I will compare and contrast the formal composition of Lanthimos' work with traditional film art. Through an in-depth scene analysis, and with the support of the previously existing theory, this thesis aims to answer the research question "How do crisis images manifest in the formal elements of Yorgos Lanthimos' films *Dogtooth* (2009) and *The Lobster* (2015)?", and its sub-question "In which ways do these images influence the viewing process of the spectator?".

The films are analysed in two separate chapters, with three parts (in chronological order) in each. Because the narrative of *Dogtooth* is rather fragmented, the division of the chapter is intended to make it more coherent, in order for the argument to progress logically. Each part exemplifies how the film utilises the crisis image in different ways, and showcases the gradual changes in the film's form and the spectator's relation with the film image. The narrative of *The Lobster* is more transparent, and thus the chapter has been divided into three slightly differently. The first two parts focus on the first half of the film, while the third focuses on the second. This is done mainly because at the film's midpoint, its setting changes drastically. The analysis concludes that the most important function of the crisis image in the films is to destabilise the spectator's mode of viewing, and to solicit attentive modes of viewing, instead of the spectator relying on habitual viewing patterns. Both films engage in a deliberate refusal of meaning, and exercise a continuous

renegotiation of the expectations of the spectator, whether through going against conventional film art, or by disturbing the previous patterns that are created during the film viewing process. To extend on this analysis, further studies could place their emphasis on other directors within the movement of Greek Weird Wave, examine how they utilise the crisis image, and draw conclusions that could be extended to a movement-wide level, rather than simply focusing on one director.

Affect: from film-phenomenology to radical formalist analysis

There are a multitude of perspectives on the precise definition of *affect*. For example, Lisa Blackman and John Cromby distinguish affects from emotions by noting that affects usually refer to that what is *sensed* rather than *known*, and emotions in contrast appear as more structured, socially and culturally recognised responses to stimuli. Thus, affect could rather be seen as an unconscious force of intensity on the subject's body.⁴ Steven Shaviro agrees with this notion, but also builds upon it by noting that emotion is affect that has been captured by the subject, and has been reduced to a point where it becomes comprehensible. Many scholars characterise affect as pre-subjective, and thus it is suggested that there could be a degree of universality in how it is experienced.⁵ Felt affect remains challenging to define precisely because of its primary, visceral and unconscious connotations that language struggles in capturing. Thus, when filmic affect is examined solely through the personal viewing experience, sensation, and description of the researcher, the study can remain on a fairly subjective level. I would characterise my initial viewing experiences of *Dogtooth* and *The Lobster* as affectively intense, however, the analysis of this thesis will not be based around my personal experience. While the initial viewings can act as references to *what* types of sensation the films evoked, the focus is on *how* the films were capable of creating this affective experience. Affect in this case could be seen intertwined within the perceptible qualities of the film, constituting structures that can be read for their form.

Steven Shaviro's understanding of the *body* of the film as the perceptible, material entirety of the work is important in establishing a clearer connection between the spectator and the affective film image. At the time of its publication, Shaviro's *The Cinematic Body* (1993) presented profoundly different ideas to the analysis of film in a field dominated by semiotic approaches. Shaviro emphasises that the relationship between the spectator's body and the body of the film is innately affective, and the materiality of the film has the capacity to influence the spectator before

⁴ Blackman, Cromby, *Affect and Feeling*, 5-6.

⁵ Steven Shaviro. *The Cinematic Body* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 25.

they can consciously assess what they are experiencing.⁶ This view was significant as it expanded on the idea of the spectator's body reacting and responding to the sensation felt by the physical bodies on screen. While the filmic human body remained important in the spectatorial experience, the attention was also shifted towards the formal details (e.g. cinematography) and their role in the transmission of affect. Thus, the essence of Shaviro's argument is to recentralise the spectator body as a key site of the affective experience with film, and emphasise the material agency of the film's body.⁷

This type of spectatorship has been assessed to a great extent in phenomenological film research, which places the focus on detailed descriptions and assessments of the experience that emerges from watching a film, and how the spectators are situated in relation to the body of the film.⁸ While film-phenomenology can no doubt enrich the discourse surrounding spectatorship and affect, the reliance on first-hand accounts of the viewing experiences bring us back to the concern of subjectivity. The risk is in the research remaining at a point where descriptions of the affective experience are created, but ultimately the argument centers on what it feels like to be *affected*, rather than what *affect* is and how it manifests in the film. This limit to the generalisability of the research is one of the major arguments in Eugenie Brinkema's *The Forms of Affect* (2014), which argues for an approach that is based on reading affects as having textual forms, instead of focusing on the immediate, felt sensation of the body. Brinkema's work could be considered to be a shift on the affective turn itself, and thus the premise of the approach is radical compared to more prominent ideas in film-phenomenology.⁹ Brinkema suggests that specific affects (e.g. disgust) are part of structures within the film itself, and can be studied through a close reading of their formal composition (e.g. colour, light). The role of the spectator body in the viewing process is de-emphasised by the indication that affect can be consciously read for, *without* the need for a spectator that is affected. To put it another way, the phenomenological focus on *experience* is no longer essential for understanding affect. Brinkema's approach distances itself from spectatorship and the viewing body in order to examine a more generalisable manifestation of affect in film.¹⁰

⁶ Ibid, 24-25.

⁷ Ibid, 254-255.

⁸ Jenny Chamarette. "Embodying spectatorship: from phenomenology to sensation." In *The Routledge Companion to Cinema and Gender*, ed. Kristin Lené Hole, Dijlana Jelača, E. Ann Kaplan, and Patrice Petro (New York: Routledge, 2016): 311-312.

⁹ Brinkema, *The Forms of Affect*, 25, 32.

¹⁰ Ibid, 36-37.

The different views on the role of the spectator in relation to film's affective qualities represent the most significant contrast between the arguments of Shaviro and Brinkema. While Shaviro continuously underlines the significance of the viewer body and critiques formalist approaches for treating the cinematic image as a construction with decodable ideological meaning, Brinkema in turn integrates a 'radical formalist' approach into the study of filmic affect, and questions the dominance of studies centered around spectatorship.¹¹ The approach of this thesis adapts Brinkema's perspective on reading the film for formal manifestations of affect, but also considers the significance of the spectator encountering these structures during the viewing process. Brinkema's concepts act as a clear theoretical intervention that is set against the relatively dominant phenomenological approaches, but excludes the significance of the spectator entirely. In the case of this thesis, the role of the spectator is essential in assessing how the crisis image both captures their attention and allows for the affect to be conveyed in alternative modes of viewing. Similarly, while Shaviro's case for the spectator's body's central role in the study of affect creates a large part of the theoretical basis for this thesis, the phenomenological view seems too reliant on subjective experience. Furthermore, Shaviro's strong critique of psychoanalytic and cognitivist approaches to film analysis denies any overlap between the fields, and thus leaves the argument of the book restricted within the domain of film-phenomenology. To conclude, the arguments of both books are dependent on an either/or divide of theoretical viewpoints, and the approach adapted in this thesis aims to combine the two in an analysis that prioritises the importance of affect in formal structures, and film spectatorship in equal measure.

The crisis image, Greek Weird Wave, and cinematic conventions

The argument for this thesis is developed through Anna Backman Rogers' book *American Independent Cinema: Rites of Passage and the Crisis Image* (2015). Backman Rogers shares Shaviro's idea of the body of the film consisting of its interacting parts, while also adding that because there is continuous alteration in the film's individual elements (e.g. lighting, colour), the body of the film remains in a constant state of flux. Thus, the medium of film presents itself as an ideal way to explore themes of crisis, transformation and transition.¹² This type of *becoming-other* is integral to Backman Rogers' argument, as the different ways she defines *crisis* all revolve around this notion. Drawing from the anthropological work of Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner, crisis

¹¹ Shaviro, *Cinematic Body*, 36; Brinkema, *The Forms of Affect*, 36-37.

¹² Anna Backman Rogers. *American Independent Cinema: Rites of Passage and the Crisis Image*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 2-3.

is denoted as a specific time frame that is ritually significant and represents the subject's progression from one state of being to the next. This could also be understood as a *rite of passage*. The rite of passage typically involves a state of *liminality*, or being 'in-between' that is associated with progression through the crisis. The subject exists on the *threshold* of the old and new mode of being, and thus, in a liminal phase. Backman Rogers notes that American cinema has traditionally utilised this notion of crisis by centering the narratives of films around the protagonist crossing this threshold, and navigating their way through specific crises. The rite of passage is then completed when resolution is provided by the end of the film. Furthermore, Backman Rogers emphasises that the repeated use of these type of narrative and cinematic conventions has created habitual film viewing processes, where the film image reaffirms the spectator's understanding of the film. In other words, the spectator knows what to expect and how to process what happens on-screen with the aid of formal elements that complement the narrative.¹³

Through a Deleuzian approach to film analysis, Backman Rogers argues that specific American independent films deliberately counteract this by using film images that throw the viewer's mode of viewing into crisis, create an extended state of liminality, and disrupt the natural progression through the narrative. This means that the spectator's existing modes of comprehension are compromised in favour of a more unfamiliar, curious viewing process. The material elements of the film that initiate this type of shift in spectatorship are conceptualised as *crisis images*.¹⁴ While Backman Rogers emphasises the existence of situations of crisis within the narrative of the American independent films and how the viewer relates to them, the core of her argument is that the narrative alone cannot alter the viewing perspective of the spectator. Crisis images, these images of instability and transition, challenge the viewer's dominant patterns of thought purely through the perceptible body of the film. The central idea of the crisis image revolves around the inherit state of flux the moving image is in. The film's body and composition (as well as physical bodies on screen) are constantly shifting and changing form, or *becoming*. Backman Rogers describes the crisis image as a disruption of the formal and stylistic structures set in place to control the unpredictable moving image. In other words, while specific formal details maintain the comprehensible filmic world and narrative, the crisis image disturbs these structures and causes a breakdown of meaning for the spectator. The types of films that utilise the crisis image are conceptualised under the notion of *cinema of crisis*.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid, 2, 7.

¹⁴ Ibid, 7-8.

¹⁵ Ibid, 149-150.

I argue that the crisis image is integral in understanding the affective structures that can be found in the filmic bodies of *Dogtooth* and *The Lobster*. While the narratives of both films center around rites of passage that ultimately remain unresolved, the unconventional formal composition of the films is what effectively throws the spectator into crisis. Here the crisis image represents a formal detail that renders the film image unstable, and shifts the spectator's mode of viewing into that of attentiveness/curiosity, thus allowing an affective experience. That is to say, if crisis images constitute as affective structures, affect can be considered *immanent* to the crisis image. If we return to Brinkema's idea of reading the film's formal composition for affect, the manifestations of the crisis image seem to be an excellent point to progress from. Thus, the crisis image can be integrated into the ideas of both Brinkema's formalist analysis, and Shaviro's focus on the importance of the spectatorial encounter.

While Backman Rogers applies the notion of the crisis image onto American independent cinema, the crisis within the Greek cinematic industry and its films has also been discussed previously. Marios Psaras focuses on the origins and definition of the movement of *Greek Weird Wave*, and its implications as a form of contemporary social critique. Psaras remarks that the year 2009 marked a precise turning point for Greek cinema, when *Dogtooth* gained previously unseen domestic and international attention. Lanthimos' work was the first among the many Greek films of the 21st century to receive significant critical success at various film festivals, and viewers became curious about the unusual narrative and formal details of the films.¹⁶ Many critics have connected the 'weird' attributes of the films to the economical turmoil in Greece, and asked whether the emergence of the movement could be considered a product of this crisis. Psaras mainly attributes these narrative and stylistic choices to the extensive history of local film productions that precede the movement. Thus, while Psaras explores the implications the financial crisis had for the films of Greek Weird Wave, he also underlines how the reconfiguration of the more long-standing national narratives played an important role in their content and form.¹⁷ We can connect this back to Backman Rogers' idea of the cinema of crisis. The crisis images constitute a common thread in these type of films, as they attempt to question and reassemble the ways we understand cinema, and our surrounding world. Cinema of crisis is critical, and always *becoming*.¹⁸ This is precisely the case with the films of Greek Weird Wave, which seek to radically reframe the discourse surrounding

¹⁶ Marios Psaras. *The Queer Greek Weird Wave: Ethics, Politics, and the Crisis of Meaning*. Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2016, 23-24.

¹⁷ Ibid, 3-5.

¹⁸ Backman Rogers, *American Independent Cinema*, 150.

Greek societal norms and institutions through their narrative and formal construction. Psaras argues that the highly unconventional constructions of cinematic space and time, themes of alienation, and the emotionless acting style create an unique feeling of ‘strangeness’ in the spectator.¹⁹ Psaras’ work will be used to connect the crisis image with previous discussion of the formal elements within the movement of Greek Weird Wave. In other words, the ‘weird’ elements of the films can be delineated specifically through examining manifestations of the crisis image.

Because the aesthetics of the films are often characterised as strange or unconventional, I want to emphasise the filmic traditions that demarcate the conventional from unconventional. *Film Art: An Introduction* by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson presents a comprehensive overview of the key concepts, techniques, and history of film. *Conventions* are defined as formal and narrative elements in film that are repeated, appear common, and are easily understood by the spectator. In other words, conventions are highly tied with the *expectations* of the spectator, as the habitual film viewing relies on these easily assimilated elements.²⁰ Because the reconfiguration of the spectator’s expectations is an integral part of the crisis image, discussion of conventional formal elements will help in illustrating how the films diverge from tradition of film art. I will use the book throughout the analysis of the two films, and frequently compare and contrast specific formal elements with their conventional connotations.

1. Perpetual disruption of meaning in *Dogtooth* (2009)

This chapter aims to emphasise and explore the formal manifestations of the crisis image in Lanthimos’ breakthrough film, *Dogtooth*. While the central narrative of the film centers around a turbulent rite of passage, its formal composition delineates a similar state of *crisis*. Here, the film has been divided into three distinct parts (each around 30 minutes), which all illustrate the capacity of the crisis image to challenge the spectator’s habitual viewing patterns governed by cinematic conventions. The division is intended to make the structure of the fragmented narrative more transparent, emphasise how all the parts utilise the crisis image in different ways, and showcase the gradual changes in the film’s body and the spectator’s relation with the film image.

The narrative of *Dogtooth* centers around a Greek family living at a secluded country residence. The family’s three adult children have never set foot outside of the high fences that surround the villa, and their reality has been entirely constructed around the house and its vicinity.

¹⁹ Psaras, (*Queer*) *Greek Weird Wave*, 24-25.

²⁰ David Bordwell, and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction*. (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2017): 55-57.

While the father maintains the family's living conditions through strictly authoritarian parenting, and represents the only figure of the household that is allowed to leave the residence, the mother spends her days keeping an eye on the children while her husband works, and teaching them new vocabulary through audio tapes. However, many of the taught words gain an entirely new meaning for the children because of the definitions given by their mother. The salt shaker becomes a *telephone* and *zombies* refer to small yellow flowers in the yard. In other words, the parents control the language that defines the reality of the children, and nullify the meaning of words that could potentially reveal an outside world, by connecting their definitions to objects around the residence.

The most anticipated event for the children is the time when they get to leave the house. The atmosphere of the household is heavily characterised by myth-making, and the ultimate lie the children have been told is that they can leave the premises once their dogtooth falls out. The central crisis for the narrative develops when the eldest daughter (the family members do not have assigned names) discovers that the reality she inhabits is not the only one that exists. Through a series of events that secure her newfound agency, the eldest daughter eventually escapes the family home.

The existing body of work on *Dogtooth* is mostly focused on how the family is represented in the film, and how it criticises traditional notions of the (Greek) family. Being mostly semiotic in their approaches, these studies place emphasis on the 'strange' qualities of both the narrative and the individual stylistic elements. The film is for example read as a commentary on the spheres of public versus private, an allegory for the long-standing patriarchal family narratives in Greece, and a representation of the absurdist qualities of Greek Weird Wave.²¹ While the existing research often touches on the materiality of the film, the formal means are assessed for their meaning, rather than through an affective lens. The focus on Greek society and family is of course understandable considering the origin of the film, but the affective qualities of the film image have wider reaching implications. This analysis sets aside how *Dogtooth* represents the contemporary Greek crisis with traditional national values, and underlines how the film offers a more generalisable *presentation* of the affective crisis image, which manifests in the formal elements of the film.

²¹ Tatjana Aleksic. "Sex, violence, dogs and the impossibility of escape: Why contemporary Greek film is so focused on family." *Journal of Greek Media & Culture* 2, no. 2 (2016): 155-171; Stamos Metzidakis. "No Bones to Pick with Lanthimos's Film *Dogtooth*." *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 32, no. 2 (2014): 367-392.

1.1. Defamiliarisation and stasis

After the setting of the film has been identified as a secluded country residence, and we have seen glimpses of the family members separately, a dinner scene brings the whole family together. A medium close-up shows the back of the eldest daughter's head, and a barely visible mirror where we see a part of her face, as she gets ready for dinner. The younger sister approaches, and sits down to wait for her. The older sister turns around to ask for an opinion on her outfit, while we transition to a medium shot that shows the younger sister sitting on the bed, while only the lower half of the older sister is in frame. They discuss how many stickers each of them have, the younger sister stands up, and is framed in a way where her head is excluded from the shot. They walk out of the room, and the next shot shows the whole family sitting around a table. The two sisters are on the left, the mother is on one end, the brother on the right, and the father sits in middle of the shot, with his back facing the camera. The conversation and the dinner seem fairly normal, until the younger daughter asks the mother to pass the 'telephone' to her. The mother gives her the salt shaker. Each child then proceeds to tell how many stickers they have, and the son has the most.



1.1. The eldest daughter (screen capture) *Dogtooth*, 2009, Yorgos Lanthimos, Boo Productions.



1.2. Preparation for dinner



1.3. Sisters framed unconventionally



1.4. Father sits at the end

While the extensive focus on the stickers and their significance for the adult children is unusual to begin with, the intimate event of a family dinner is made strange through two unconventional ways of framing the characters, that appear throughout the film. The first one is a shot where the character is shown almost entirely, but a part of their body is cut out due to the framing, while the second is a shot from behind a character, that only shows the back of their head. The camera distance in these type of shots is always between a medium long shot and a medium close-up. Bordwell and Thompson note that when framing a human subject, medium shots typically exclude a part of the lower body of the character, and are intended to give a clearer view of the expression and emotion of the actor.²² In the case of the first type of framing, because the character's head is cut out, the shot signals presence, but lacks the component of a coherent human subject. The very form of the body becomes fragmented, and the bodies appear as mere extensions of the space they inhabit. During the preparation for the dinner, the framing performs the function of erasing any sign of individuality from the characters (in this case, the daughters), and they appear to be simple participants in the daily life dictated by the parents. The shots that focus on the back of the character's head have a very similar alienating effect, because they deny any facial cues from being translated to the spectator. The shot of the eldest daughter in front of the mirror works to maintain a distance between the spectator and her character, and the shot of the father at the end of the table establishes his omnipresence within the household, while simultaneously obscuring his emotion. Both framing techniques ultimately *defamiliarise* the spectator with the consistent form of the human body, and work against the conventions of traditional cinematographic framing. I suggest that the framing techniques represent the first example of how the film utilises the crisis image to challenge the spectator's expectations, which are based on cinematic conventions. Loss of subjectivity is in this case the most important element that prevents the spectator from connecting with the on-screen bodies. Another catalyst for the defamiliarisation of the character bodies is the emotionless performances of the actors. Although visible during the family dinner, they are best illustrated by another scene.

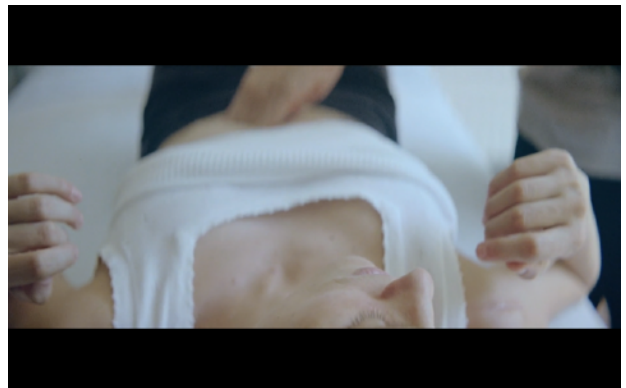
A medium close-up opens the scene, as we see the younger sister sit on the floor next to a bed, reading an anatomy book. We hear the older sister off-screen, complaining about stomach pain she has had since the day before. While the shot transitions to show a clearer view of the room, the bed, and a large window framing the background, the older sister lays on the bed, and the younger begins examining her stomach. A close-up shot shows the younger sister pressing different points

²² Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, 178, 189-190.

on the older sister's abdomen, and asking her to describe the pain. They both get up and decide to play a game. The next medium shot shows them both sitting on the bed with their heads cut out of the frame, and the younger sister holding a glass bottle in her hands. She notes that the bottle contains an anaesthetic, and asks if her sister wants to try it out. They decide to have a competition, where they inhale the anaesthetic, and the first one to wake up is the winner. The younger sister pours the liquid on two pieces of cloth, the shot changes to a medium close-up showing the faces of the sisters, and they count to three before pressing the cloths over their faces, and inhaling deeply. They both slowly fall down, and out of the shot.



1.5. Anatomy book



1.6. Examination



1.7. Ready to play



1.8. Endurance game

If the unconventional framing devices are used to obscure emotion and defamiliarise the human body, the lack of perceptible emotion in the actor performances complements these cinematographic tools used achieve the strange effect. While the acting in the film has been frequently characterised as deadpan,²³ I want to use Lauren Berlant's conceptualisation of *flat affect* to expand on the significance of the emotionless performances. Flat affect is used to refer to an underperformance of emotion, which in the medium of film, manifests in narratives where the

²³ Psaras, (*Queer*) *Greek Weird Wave*, 18.

subject has muted responses towards events or experiences that would typically incite an emotional reaction. Flat affect can be distinguished from deadpan as emotionless rhetorical delivery, because deadpan is usually clearly contextualised (most notably through comedy), while flat affect resists being tied down to a specific meaning within a set of conventions. In other words, the spectator is not given clarity as to *why* the actor/character is underperforming their emotion.²⁴ I argue that the scene with the sisters is an excellent example of how flat affect as a formal element can contribute to the alienation from the characters, and making the on-screen bodies strange. Similarly to many of the film's scenes, the one at hand illustrates the flat affect of the actors through monotone delivery of their lines, stiff body language, and lack of facial expression. However, the scene's extensive focus on corporeality in terms of content and visual elements is what makes it so effective in placing the focus on the actor performances. From the beginning to the end of the scene, the body, its sensation and physical limits take center stage. We can see this in the opening shot of an anatomy book that shows detailed illustrations of internal organs, shots that show the younger sister pressing the abdomen of the older sister, body-centered framing techniques akin to the ones shown in the dinner scene, and the endurance game, which momentarily severs the conscious mind from the body. Both sisters seem to be strikingly unfazed by the game that borders on self-harm, and being either conscious or unconscious does not seem to make any real difference in terms of the animation of their bodies.

The underperformance of emotion by the actors is what ultimately directs the attention of the spectator to the *material* level of the film image. Psaras refers to *aesthetics of the performative*, when discussing the actor performances in *Greek Weird Wave*. These type of performances draw away from the semiotics of the text, and focus on immediate, physical *presentation* that lacks references to any existing structures (e.g. portrayal of culturally recognisable emotion). That is to say, because the performances are not a *representation* of something, they are not inherently tied to a specific *meaning*.²⁵ Because no recognisable affective cues are translated to the spectator from the performances, all that remains is the non-subjective, fleshy existence of the character bodies. This presentation cannot be easily assimilated through habitual viewing patterns that rely on grasping the meaning of the performance, and thus the effect becomes disruptive. Furthermore, while the residence embodies the image of a perfect family home with its beautiful interior design, and a lush

²⁴ Robbie Duschinsky and Emma Wilson "Flat Affect, Joyful Politics and Enthralled Attachments: Engaging with the Work of Lauren Berlant". *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 28, no. 1 (2015): 184-187

²⁵ Psaras, (*Queer*) *Greek Weird Wave*, 24-26.

garden with a pool, the detachment created by the defamiliarised bodies echoes the equally hollow construction of the family home. That is to say, the lack of liveliness or animation in the characters and their presentation extends to the setting itself. At this point in the film, the spectator does not understand *why* the family is bound to this persistent state of stasis. The spectator seeks to find a point of identification that would give the character's actions *meaning*, but the presentational flat affect of the performances does not allow this.

To return to Backman Rogers and the crisis image, she emphasises that on-screen bodies have the capacity to 'incarnate ambiguity and mutability', as they can be made stable or unstable depending on the way they are filmed and contextualised. In other words, nonconforming approaches to presenting character bodies can in themselves throw the spectator's understanding of the stable film image into crisis.²⁶ The medium of film allows Lanthimos to make the form of the human body foreign through framing that resists the presentation of a coherent subject according to conventions of traditional film art. While the framing techniques obscure the emotion of the characters by themselves, the presentational, flat affect of the actor performances further disrupts the spectator's relationship with the bodies on-screen. Above all, the use of these formal elements in the first third of *Dogtooth* leaves the spectator to seek *meaning* from the performances, and as this attempt becomes futile, they are forced to adjust their mode of viewing. The perpetual state of stasis that characterises the deanimated bodies and setting extends to the viewing process of the spectator, as progression through the narrative within the filmic world seems difficult without clear affective cues from the actors. The next part of this chapter will focus on how the delicate equilibrium of the family home starts unraveling in the second part of the film. The fairly late initiation of the central narrative (the eldest daughter's rite of passage) highlights the film's refusal to conform to structures typical to narrative cinema. I argue that shortly after the emergence of the central narrative, its significance is obscured through formal language that above all, works against narrativity. Furthermore, the formal construction of the second part illustrates Backman Rogers' idea of sustained moments of liminality, as a way of subverting conventions associated with progression through cinematic crises.

1.2. Suspended narrative and extended state of liminality

For the first third of the film, the focus is not on any specific character, but rather on the family as a whole. Conventional narrative cinema (also referred to as Classical Hollywood Cinema)

²⁶ Backman Rogers, *American Independent Cinema*, 3, 7.

generally governs the expectations of the audiences, in terms of how the narrative is expected to unfold. Typically, the crossing of a threshold begins the protagonist's navigation through a crisis, a time of liminality and change follows, and the film and the central crisis are wrapped up in a neat conclusion. This would require for the crisis to manifest in the first part of the film.²⁷ *Dogtooth* does not adhere to this structure, as the first part of the film refuses to give meaning to the actor performances, and is also characterised by a lack of a clear narrative. The sort of empty space that remains and governs the viewing experience in the first part allows for the central narrative to begin fairly implicitly. That is to say, because the spectator is conditioned to search for meaning (especially in the character actions) without results, the prolonged state of stasis helps conceal the beginning of the central narrative in the second part.

This narrative revolves around the eldest daughter discovering the existence of the outside world, and her eventual escape from the family home. The moment that pushes the eldest daughter into crisis, and consequently properly begins the narrative, relates to Christina, a security guard who works at the same factory as the father of the family. Early on, we learn that the father has paid Christina to satisfy the sexual needs of his son. When the son of the family refuses to give oral sex to Christina, she goes to the eldest daughter with a suggestion. She proposes that the eldest daughter should give her oral sex in exchange for her sparkly headband. The brief scene fundamentally changes the way the eldest daughter understand her surroundings, as she learns the skill of negotiation through the purely transactional act. Because everything in the household has to be earned through the approval of the parents, the encounter with Christina shows the eldest daughter that she also possesses her own agency independent of the parents. The argument for this part of the chapter starts with how the scene after the encounter implicitly signals the emergence of the eldest daughter's narrative, and the consequential move towards liminality. Furthermore, the subsequent sequences effectively disrupt the stable progression through this newly emerged central narrative. This is done through a combination of formal elements that emphasise the omnipotent power of the parents, and create a sense of disorientation in the spectator, that ultimately results in a further collapse of meaning.

Shortly after the scene with Christina, we see the family's son laying in the grass with the youngest sister, playing with a toy airplane. The shot shows only the hand that is holding the plane, and the sister laying in the background out of focus. The eldest daughter walks into frame, and points out that the plane does not belong to the brother, and he tells his sister to leave him alone.

²⁷ Backman Rogers, *American Independent Cinema*, 7; Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, 97-99.

This prompts the elder daughter to attack her brother, and they wrestle in the grass. The shot transitions to a blurred close-up view of the grass, and we see the hands of the characters trying to hold on to the toy plane. Next, we see a shaky handheld tracking shot follow the elder daughter as she runs to the fence and throws the plane out of the opening in the gate. There is a brief shot of the toy plane laying outside of the gate on a gravel road. We see the son walk into the house from a door on the right, as the older sister sprints to view from the left, and suddenly slices her brother's arm with a knife. As the brother yells in pain, we see blood spray on the wall in a close-up shot, and afterwards we see him holding the wound with his hand. The final shot of the scene shows an out-of-focus view of the mother throwing the eldest daughter on the bed and slapping her head. Afterwards, the eldest daughter lays on the bed with her face covered by hair, and a shuddering breath.



1.9. Son plays with the plane



1.10. Tracking shot



1.11. Brief moment of stasis



1.12. The eldest daughter attacks her brother

The scene starts out with a similar slow pace that we have seen up to this point, but the eldest daughter's aggression disrupts the calm setting. The conflict seems to emerge out of nowhere, and there is a stark contrast to what we have seen in previous scenes. Bordwell and Thompson acknowledge the importance of *variation* in the body of the film. The spectator is actively

participating in the process of creating and readjusting their expectations based on the patterns that are created by the formal elements of the film.²⁸ Especially relevant in this case, the variation in the scene's unexpected excess of motion reflects the change that has happened with the eldest daughter. While this is made apparent through the general aggression towards the brother and the rules of the house, she also throws the toy plane over the fence, as if to test the boundaries of the house. The sudden movement away from stasis is exacerbated first by the blurred shot that shows the rapidly moving, struggling limbs of the siblings fighting over the plane, and the handheld tracking shot that follows the eldest daughter to the fence. The tracking shot is first of its kind during the film, and the shaking motion creates a large contrast to the shots that have to this point always been static. Not only is the demeanour of the eldest daughter showing more animation, but the cinematography is adapting to the increasing pace of action. Lanthimos is taking advantage of the sense of lethargy that the spectator has been directed towards up to this point, and negating this previous familiarity through visceral, violent action. The rebellious act is over fairly quickly, and after the conflict, the shuddering breath of the eldest daughter echoes the sudden change of pace just experienced by the spectator. Here, I argue that the scene compels the spectator to adjust their expectations based on the sudden peak in action. The scene represents the first disruption to the stasis of the household, and signals to the spectator that something is *changing*, even if not explicitly specified. Furthermore, I suggest that although the variation is powerful, the sequences that follow, intentionally obscure its significance.

After the eldest daughter's sudden burst of violence, the event is not mentioned again, besides a scene where the father retrieves the toy plane. Later, the son of the family comes across a cat in the house's yard, and decides to kill it with garden shears. This begins a series of scenes that center around the creation of familial narratives within the household. A long shot shows the father answering the phone in the factory he works at. While the person on the other end is not shown, it is implied to be the mother, calling about the dead cat. The factory machines whirl loudly in the background, as the father inquires about what has happened. During the dialogue, the diegetic sound (originating from the film world) from the factory continues in the background, but the shots transition multiple times. First we see a medium shot of the son's face looking at something, a cut to a close-up showing the mutilated corpse of the cat, and finally, a medium shot showing the lower half of the father, standing outside next to the car, and cutting holes into his trousers with a knife. With the cut to the next shot, the audiovisual synchronisation is back again. This time we see the

²⁸ Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, 54, 67.

upper half of the father, as he rubs fake blood all over his white shirt, and tears it up. The next shot is a close-up of his bloody hands, as he stands in the house's garden, and tells the children that their 'brother' has died (the children believe their long lost brother ventured out of the garden, and was left behind the fences). The father explains that the cat tore him apart because he had left the vicinity of the house, and the next medium shot shows his upper body and face is covered with the fake blood as well. The next shot shows the father walk back and forth in the garden, as he is giving a lecture about cats. In line with the other bizarre myths within the household, the cat is described as 'the most dangerous animal there is', and the children are warned to stay inside to avoid it. All of a sudden, the father barks loudly. We quickly cut to a medium shot that shows that the whole family is on the ground, on all fours, in front of the father. All the family members start barking loudly, and the father incites even louder barks from each of them. The scene lingers for a while and the effect becomes highly disturbing.



1.13. Father gets the call



1.14. Cutting trousers with a knife



1.15. 'Your brother is dead'



1.16. Defence against the cats

Bordwell and Thompson emphasise that a coherent narrative is constructed from a chain of events held together by cause and effect relationships, occurring over space and time.²⁹ In her

²⁹ Ibid, 73.

reading of American independent cinema, Backman Rogers focuses on films that are narrative at their core, but their formal construction denies the spectator's automatic assimilation of the events that occur. To put it another way, through formal disruptions to causality, space, and time, the film can hinder progression through their central crises.³⁰ I argue that the sequence above interrupts the stable progression of the freshly emerged central narrative through formal means, and conceals it within the presentation of the countless myths created by the parents. Instead of giving a reason for the gruesome killing of the cat, the scene forces the viewer to infer the significance of this event purely through the one-sided conversation the father has on the phone. The scene uses nonsimultaneous audio, typically associated with diegetic sound, which comes from a place in time, that is either before or after the image that is shown.³¹ However, the scene creates confusion through its treatment of time. Namely, the first shot of the *present* is established as the source of the diegetic sound, then, the image changes to one from the *past* (son and dead cat), and finally, there is a transition to an image from the *future* (father cutting holes in the pants). Even if the spectator is able to assimilate the three layers of time, the scene is full of distractions: the loud noise from the factory machines, the father's fairly cryptic dialogue, and changing locale. The scene occurs right after the eldest daughter's brief act of rebellion, which is now obscured with the events that follow it. That is to say, the recently emerged central narrative is not continued with a clear causal relationship to another scene, but is rather followed by a seemingly unrelated sequence that is in itself characterised by disruptive sonic and visual elements. I argue that these two factors result in a momentary *suspension* of the central narrative, which continues throughout the second part of the film, as more similar disruptive scenes are introduced.

Another sudden change of the shot cuts to complete silence, as we see the whole family standing in front of a fence, in formal clothing. One by one, all the children throw yellow flowers over the fence, as a long shot shows the whole family from another angle. The son begins giving an eulogy for his dead brother, and the shot changes to a medium shot of the pool, as the children play in it. This time, the audio begins as diegetic sound, but changes to a voice-over, when the shot transitions to the pool. The eldest daughter begins giving her eulogy in a voice-over, as we see the children carry her to the side of the pool. As the eulogy ends, the siblings start resuscitating her, but the dialogue between them suggests this is only practice. They try different techniques, and for the

³⁰ Backman Rogers, *American Independent Cinema*, 15.

³¹ Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, 297.

rest of the scene, the audio is completely silent, We see multiple medium shots of the children practicing resuscitation with the younger sister, and jumping in the pool.



1.17. Funeral of the brother



1.18. Throwing flowers over the fence



1.19. Siblings playing in the pool



1.20. Resuscitation practice

The funeral represents a continuation to the ‘death’ of the ‘brother’, which was previously overshadowed by the father’s aggressive demonstration of how to defend the family from cats. Backman Rogers notes that although cinema of crisis is narrative-based, it often shifts to a presentational mode, that is purely optical or sonic, essentially refusing meaning.³² The sequence above represents a small reprieve after the intense barking scene with the family, but the following shots transition quickly back to a state of audiovisual confusion. The shots at the pool do not seem to have any correlation to the eulogies on the voice-over, and the spectator is presented with a visual of the next event, before having the chance to digest the ongoing one. Psaras notes that the films of Greek Weird Wave are often able to ‘disrupt the referentiality of language and images’ through formal means.³³ This is precisely the case, as the scenes above present incoherent constructions of cinematic space and time, and disrupt clear causal relationships between the scenes. This formal

³² Backman Rogers, *American Independent Cinema*, 8.

³³ Psaras, *(Queer) Greek Weird Wave*, 89.

refusal of meaning manifests with even more clarity, as we get a brief take of the dialogue at the pool, and cut to complete silence right after. It seems as if Lanthimos is intentionally presenting an abundance of information at once, and as the spectator is on the brink of grasping onto meaning, he disrupts the film image to make this an impossibility.

The second part of *Dogtooth* is characterised by excess of images, lack of clear relations between cause and effect, and deliberate manipulation of space and time. After the scene at the pool, a long series of comparable, disjointed images follows, and the accumulation of new irregular optic and sonic elements overpowers the spectator's capacity to *understand*. Because these scenes focus on the myths created by the parents, they illustrate the incredibly complex structures maintaining the equilibrium of the household. The content of these sequences in itself makes the possibility of escaping these structures seem unlikely, and the formal disarray of images following the eldest daughter's brief act of rebellion effectively conceals the central narrative. Backman Rogers suggests that the crisis image has the capacity to create extended or sustained moments of *liminality*, which manifest as the difficulty of advancement through crises.³⁴ I argue that since the second part of the film does not allude towards the eldest daughter's narrative after the initial act of rebellion, the sequences above delineate an extended state of liminality. That is to say, although the process of change has started for the eldest daughter, rather than aiding in advancement through it, the formal elements of the scenes are intended to illustrate the difficulty of narrative progression. The spectator's mode of viewing is thrown into further crisis, as the comprehensibly constructions of narratives are disrupted. The third, final part of the film, turns the focus back towards the central narrative, however, true to the previous form of the film, this is not entirely straightforward. Namely, the final part goes against the presentational, flat affect created by the actors, as the eldest daughter begins to develop her own way of performing affect. Furthermore, the audiovisual disarray created in the second part of the film is counteracted by a previously unseen clarity in the film's imagery. After the spectator has adjusted their mode of viewing again, the ending of the film highlights the refusal of meaning that has been insinuated throughout the film.

1.3. Performing affect and presentation of agency

After the sequences described in the previous part, Christina and the eldest daughter have another encounter. However, this time, the eldest daughter is the one making the demands, and manages to blackmail Christina for two VHS tapes from her purse. She watches the films in secret

³⁴ Backman Rogers, *American Independent Cinema*, 3, 7.

at night, while her parents are sleeping. The scene that follows opens with a shot of her standing in front of big window, but we only see her legs. She turns around, sits down to fit into frame completely, and we hear her start speaking in monotone voice, in a way that is completely distinct to the language used before in the film:

THE ELDEST Dad, I want to learn to fight. What was that? I can't hear you. When will I learn how to fight? Can you turn your robot off? I fight so you don't have to. I want you to use your head for something else, other than a punching bag, like me. Your head doesn't look like a punching bag. No. This is good, thanks. It looks like a baseball glove. You're a smart-ass, aren't you? Mr. Balboa, Mr. Creed on the phone.

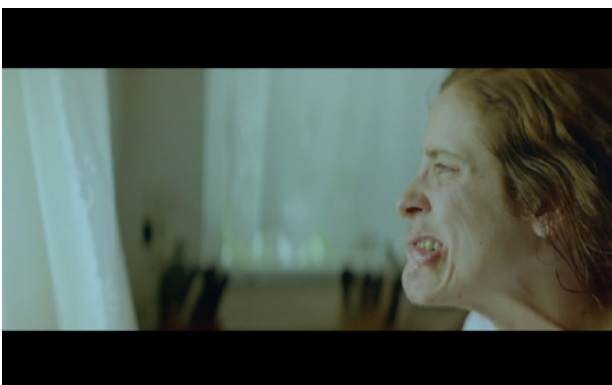
While never explicitly mentioned, the monologue is the eldest daughter reciting *Rocky IV*, which she has seen on one of the VHS tapes. The second the monologue ends, the scene cuts to a close-up shot of the eldest daughter punching air, and showing grimace in her expression. She continues throwing punches, and takes a sip from a glass of red juice sitting next to her. She then pretends to hit herself a few times, and as the last punch connects, she spits out the red liquid from her mouth. The scene continues with a very similar reenactment of *Jaws*, another VHS tape.



1.21. First shot



1.22. Reciting monologue



1.23. Intense expressions



1.24. Fake boxing

The tapes have shown the eldest daughter an entirely new dimension that exists beyond the fences of the house, and the scene presents her at the point of no return. In other words, she is now properly progressing through the liminal phase of her rite of passage, and exists on the *threshold* between her old and new reality. What truly facilitates this process are the Hollywood tapes she has watched. However, because of the distinct context of the isolated family home, the significance of the films is something else for the eldest daughter. As mentioned in the first part, the *aesthetics of the performative* refer to the presentational performances of the actors in the films of Greek Weird Wave.³⁵ The reenactment sequences divert from this existing pattern that has been created by the presentational, flat affect previously in the film, as the eldest daughter engages in performances that are in essence, representations *based on* representation. Her perception of the outside world comes from Hollywood film, and thus it is dramatised, and characterised by an excess of affect. To put it another way, the performances are what the eldest daughter *perceives* affect to be. In the reenactments, there is an odd disparity between presentational and *representational*. The eldest daughter recites the lines from *Rocky IV* with the same flat affect that has been seen throughout the film, however, her rendition of the boxing sequence (and the *Jaws* performance) becomes incredibly animated and recognisable. It is this contrast that throws the spectator's mode of viewing into crisis yet again. The spectator notices the referentiality of the image, but cannot place it within the context of *Dogtooth's* filmic world. Furthermore, as the content of the VHS tapes is only implicitly referenced, and the reenactments are the main way of progressing the narrative, the film is again disrupting clear relations between cause and effect. As the film moves closer to its climax, the performances of the eldest daughter become gradually more intense.

Because the father finds out about the films, he beats the eldest daughter with one of the VHS tapes. This forces her to mask her revelation from her parents, until a scene that occurs close to the end of the film. The scene is set during an anniversary celebration of the parents, when the house is decorated with colourful lights and balloons. The initial view shows the daughters preparing to dance for the parents in the middle of the shot, as the son sits on the left with a guitar. The shot is very unusual, because we see every character entirely, and their faces are in clear view. The sisters start performing a clearly choreographed, minimal dance, while the son starts playing the guitar. The sisters do sidesteps, spin and do slight movement with the arms. The younger sister starts to feel tired and is given the permission to sit down by the father. The eldest daughter begins to move in a way that is clearly not part of the previous choreography. She jumps up and down,

³⁵ Psaras, (*Queer*) *Greek Weird Wave*, 24.

throws her body all over the floor, starts running in one spot, shaking violently, and falls down. She gets up and starts pointing at all the family members at the table. She runs back to dance next to the brother and poses in different positions (many of the moves resemble the audition sequence in *Flashdance*, likely another tape the eldest daughter has seen). Finally, the next shot shows the table in view again, as the eldest daughter begins to shake her body in an incredibly intense way, and almost seems to lose control, as she falls to the floor. The family's mother interrupts the scene by shouting at her, and dragging her to the table. The eldest daughter hastily grabs a piece of cake and starts devouring it, as if to pretend that nothing has happened.



1.25. Initial setup



1.26. Choreography



1.27. Eldest daughter's own dance



1.28. Pointing at family members

The scene adds another layer to the reenactment of film scenes, as the eldest daughter is now giving an actual performance to her parents. In the carefully monitored, restricted family home, the uncontrolled, violent dance is the ultimate display of defiance against the parents. The intensity of the performance is exacerbated by the cinematography, which utilises a static camera that shows the eldest daughter fully in frame, and every little movement of her body. The fragmented bodies and flat affect from the first part, and the disorientating formal language of the second part are pushed aside in favour of a spectacle that gives the spectator a sense of clarity that has not been featured in the film thus far. That is to say, the eldest daughter is now whole (symbolically, and on a formal

level), and the full potential of her agency is now on display. Furthermore, as the eldest daughter performs for her family, the question of whether this is representational or presentational is no longer important. In other words, the dance stands on its own as a presentation of the full potential of her agency, and defiance against the parents. She has become the outlier that no longer fits in the hollow universe created by the hegemonic control of the parents, and her erratic movement underlines the unravelling construction of the stable family home. All that stands between her and the departure from the house is the most important myth created by the parents, the significance of the dogtooth.

In an extremely visceral, violent sequence, the eldest daughter removes her own Dogtooth by hitting it with a dumbbell multiple times. She makes her way through the garden, and climbs into the trunk of the family's car. The next morning, a long shot shows trees swaying in the wind, a close-up shows the father turning on the car, and the mother watching from afar looking worried. The car leaves the driveway, and the next extreme long shot shows the car arrive at the factory the father works at. He gets out of the car and walks in the factory. Finally, a medium shot frames the trunk of the car in the middle of the image, and the shot lingers. This lasts for around 25 seconds, before the film cuts to a black screen, and the credits.



1.29. Eldest daughter after dogtooth removal



1.30. Next morning



1.31. Father arrives at the factory



1.32. Final shot

While the eldest daughter has managed to disprove many of the myths created by the parents, the removal of the dogtooth acts as an ironic reminder of the depth of the family's many narratives. The self-mutilation finalises the eldest daughter's conditions for entering the outside world (although she still thinks that the only way to depart is by car, and she cannot drive). The ending encapsulates what Psaras points out as the Greek Weird Wave's defiance against narrativity. Narrativity in this case refers to the general expectation for all narratives to work towards closure, and a fulfillment of meaning.³⁶ As we never see the eldest daughter emerge into the outside world, the cut into the black screen solidifies the formal refusal of meaning that has been delineated throughout this analysis. Unlike the narratives of the Classical Hollywood Cinema the eldest daughter engages with, the ending of *Dogtooth* showcases its rejection of a neat conclusion.

The crisis image manifests in each of *Dogtooth*'s three distinct parts delineated in this analysis. Above all, the effect of the crisis image in the film is *destabilising*, as the spectator's habitual viewing patterns, and expectations based on cinematic conventions are continuously renegotiated. In addition, the film subverts the spectator's viewing process through repeated variations in the formal composition of the film. Namely, the first part of the film challenges conventions of actor performances and their framing through cinematography defamiliarising the form of the body and presentational, flat affect of the characters. As the spectator struggles to find meaning within the actor performances, the characters and filmic remain in a state of stasis, rendering progression difficult. The film goes against the conventions of traditional narrative cinema by properly introducing the central narrative only in the second part of the film, and shortly after its emergence, an excess of disorienting audiovisual images obscures this narrative. The formal language delineates an extended state of liminality in the narrative, and spectator's meaning-making processes are disrupted. As the film reaches its third part, the central narrative comes into focus again. However, its progression is concealed within the eldest daughter's performances of affect, which thread the line between presentation and representation. Disrupting the referentiality of the images, the performances still conceal the implicit central narrative as the film moves towards its climax. The last performance of the eldest daughter underlines the deviation from the fragmented bodies and flat affect illustrated in the first part, and the disorienting overload of images in the second, to present the spectator with the unclouded amalgamation of the eldest daughter's agency. After the spectator witnesses the most visceral moments in the film, the narrative (and consequential rite of passage) is stripped of its conclusion, with an ending that showcases the

³⁶ Ibid, 26-27, 89.

refusal of meaning that has been highlighted in each part of this chapter. Overall, the film illustrates the capacity of the crisis image to disrupt the stylistic/formal systems that contain the stable film image, and to alter the spectator's habitual viewing processes. By engaging with the formal elements of the film and the spectator's relation to the film image, this analysis highlights the affective capacity of the crisis image. At its core, *Dogtooth* foregrounds the importance of Lanthimos' work as a prime example of *cinema of crisis*.

2. Gradual descent from humour to despair in *The Lobster* (2015)

This chapter focuses on Yorgos Lanthimos' first international production, *The Lobster*. Similarly to the analysis of *Dogtooth*, in this chapter, I have delineated three distinct parts of the film, however, because the narrative structure of *The Lobster* is much more coherent, and in line with traditional narrative cinema, they have been divided slightly differently. The first two parts assess the first hour of the film, and the third part is focused on the second hour, based on a change in the central setting of the film. In other words, the first and second part assess the contrasts that manifest in the first half of the film, and the third part illustrates the second half, which is more simple in terms of narrative. The aim is to emphasise how the film engages with the expectations the spectator develops throughout the film and how it renegotiates their mode of viewing with the crisis image.

In *The Lobster*, a dystopian society requires for all single people to sign into the 'Hotel', and find themselves a partner. The people staying in the Hotel are given 45 days to form a couple with another suitable guest, and if they are unable to do so, they will be turned into an animal of their choice. The film follows David, who arrives at the Hotel, and begins navigating his way through its complex customs. For example in order for a couple to be formed, the two individuals need to share a common (often fairly superficial) characteristic. The guests can also extend the deadline of their transformation by hunting and tranquillising 'loners' who live in the nearby forest. We learn that the individuals in the forest have previously escaped from the Hotel, and live a life that is not restricted by the norms shared by the rest of the society. David manages to get into a relationship with someone referred to as the 'Heartless Woman', by modifying his own behaviour to convince her that they share a trait. The Heartless Woman learns of his deception, and an intense sequence of events leads to David's escape from the Hotel, to the nearby forest.

While at first sight the Forest's loner group seems to offer David solace, we learn that all romantic relationships between the members are strictly forbidden, and punishable by mutilation.

Despite this threat, David sets his eyes on the ‘Short-Sighted Woman’, who has also escaped from the Hotel. Their common characteristic (short-sightedness) draws them together, they begin a relationship in secret from the rest of the group, and develop their own gestural language to communicate. Because the loners are often taken on covert missions to the nearby city, David and the Short-Sighted Woman have to pretend they are a couple. While they start to visibly enjoy this, the loner group leader notices their affection, and decides to intervene. She takes the Short-Sighted Woman to an eye operation, where she is purposefully blinded, and thus the trait that connects her to David is gone. Struggling with their seeming lack of similarity, David and the Short-Sighted Woman decide to abandon the rules set in place by the loners, and escape to the city together.

The existing papers on Greek Weird Wave have often excluded *The Lobster* from their analyses, as the film was not produced or shot in Greece. It is also Lanthimos’ first English-speaking film. However, there are studies which argue that the film employs similar formal elements that characterise movement. The film is read for example for its depiction of normative and anti-normative relationships, and its focus on the significance of similarity in partnership.³⁷ Much like *Dogtooth*, the existing body of work engages with the formal composition of the film, but this is done fairly briefly. The aim of this chapter is to take into account these formal elements, and establish their significance through the affective crisis image.

2.1. Masking a dystopia through comedy

Different medium shots show David looking around his room in the hotel, and we see close-ups of a rifle, tranquilliser darts on a table, and a closet that contains many identical outfits. Simultaneously, a narrator is describing the items in the room. David looks out the window, as we see a slowly zooming long shot that shows multiple people laying on the ground in front of the hotel (later we learn that they are loners from the forest), and more people standing in front of them, with rifles in their hands. The next medium shot shows David resting on his bed after arriving at the Hotel. We hear a knock on the door, and see some staff walk into the room, as a woman sits down on a chair in front of David. We learn that the woman is the Hotel manager, and she has come to inform David about his stay. She asks if David has read ‘the leaflet’, and quickly notes that although he will turn into an animal if he fails to fall in love during his stay, this is not something that should upset him. ‘Just think as an animal you’ll have a second chance to find a companion’, she remarks.

³⁷ Sarah Cooper. “Narcissus and *The Lobster* (Yorgos Lanthimos, 2015)”. *Studies in European Cinema* 13, no. 2 (2016): 163-176; Timothy Laurie and Hannah Stark. “The end of intimate politics in Yorgos Lanthimos’ *The Lobster*”. *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 19, no. 2 (2021): 200-216.

As a medium shot slowly zooms in on David, he tells the Hotel manager that he wishes to be turned into a lobster, if he does not make it. The manager congratulates him for an excellent choice, and points out that most people go for the first animal they can think of, and this is why the world is full of dogs. David's brother Bob, who has been turned into a dog, watches from the background. The staff asks David to stand up, and a medium shot shows them handcuffing his other hand behind his back. The Hotel manager suggests that this is to 'show how easy life is when there are two of something, rather than just one'. The staff leave, and another medium shot shows David standing in the middle of the room with his right hand behind his back. The shots transition as we see David struggling to complete simple tasks, such as brushing his teeth, or undressing to go to sleep.



2.1. Tranquilliser rifle (screen capture) *The Lobster*, 2015, Yorgos Lanthimos, Film4 Productions.



2.2 Loners laying outside



2.3. David and Bob in the background



2.4. Hotel manager

Similarly, to *Dogtooth*, the demeanour of the actors is characterised by a visible lack of emotion/affect. However, in this case, the notion of deadpan seems more appropriate for understanding these performances. As mentioned, deadpan is often associated with a type of dry humour, which is also the case here. The muted reactions and bizarre dialogue signal an odd disparity between the subject matter that seems completely unfamiliar to the spectator, but which

for the characters, seems fairly routine.³⁸ The deadpan delivery of the actors is accentuated by details that add to the strangeness of the scene. For example the inclusion of Bob (the dog) within the shots delineates the narrative being constructed by the conversation, and the difficulties David faces when only having one hand available underline the cinematic world's obsession with couples. I suggest that while the scene sticks to conventional depiction of deadpan humour to a significant extent, the effect that is created already signals towards disparities in the *tone* of the film. Namely, the construction of the dystopian setting through humour acts as a way of familiarising the spectator with the strange filmic world, but simultaneously concealing the darker undertones that govern these structures. Furthermore, because the shot of the unconscious loners laying outside of the hotel is placed right before the comic dialogue, the spectator places more focus on this contrast. Thus, we could say that the deadpan humour of the scene acts as a significant formal tool in directing the spectator's attention towards the conflicting elements of the film image. While this scene acts as our introduction to the Hotel, the sort of contradictions in tone are utilised even more explicitly, when the spectator gets an in-depth look into the lives of the loners.

The scene begins with a long shot of a forest, and birds can be heard singing in the background. A piano melody starts, as we see people moving in slow-motion (lasts throughout the rest of the scene) from the lower part of the shot, towards the forest. The angle changes, and the people are seen running in the forest, carrying guns in their hands. The next shot shows people running out of a van, and making their way towards the forest. A medium shot shows the hotel staff waiting outside of the van and lighting cigarettes. David's friend, the 'Lisping Man', is seen in a close-up, running through the forest and struggling to find balance in the uneven terrain. He helps another fallen Hotel guest to her feet, and they continue on. We hear the first vocals of the Greek song, 'Apo Mesa Pethamenos' in the background. We see the another friend of David's, the Limping Man chase another human in the woods, and he fires his gun at the person he is following. We see two women in raincoats sprint through the forest, and the Heartless Woman can be seen on their trail. The shot cuts closer, she hits the woman in the raincoat with her rifle, and can be seen laughing as the woman falls to the ground. Close-up shots show the Heartless Woman beating the woman in the raincoat with her fists. Unconscious people can be seen laying on the forest floor, David chases another one of the loners, and misses his shot. As the song reaches its climax and fades out, we see David sitting on the ground, panting.

³⁸ Duschinsky and Wilson, *Flat Affect*, 185.



2.5. First shot of the forest



2.6. Staff smoking cigarettes



2.7. Lispering Man falling



2.8. Heartless Woman chases the loners

The sequence acts as a proper introduction to the Forest, the loners and the ritual of the hunt. The event in itself is unfamiliar to the spectator at this point in the film, however, I argue that Lanthimos magnifies its strangeness by subverting the cliché of the slow-motion sequence. Bordwell and Thompson remark that slow-motion is usually used to turn the scene into a spectacle, and to allow the spectator to ‘dwell in the moment’. Slow-motion emphasises the on-screen event, and as an effect, it is greatly descriptive.³⁹ Backman Rogers notes that in film, the *cliché* can act as formal shorthand that helps the spectator in automatic assimilation of the film image. Thus, conventional use of specific techniques in film are often associated with the cliché. Furthermore, she uses the subversion of the cliché as a prime example of how the crisis image can manifest. By undoing the associations the spectator has with a specific cliché, the film image can initiate alternative modes of viewing.⁴⁰

While I do not suggest that the technique of slow-motion is a cliché in itself, I argue that Lanthimos plays with the spectator’s expectations of what a slow-motion sequence *should* be. The action sequence is cluttered with the clumsiness of human bodies tripping and falling over in the

³⁹ Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, 167.

⁴⁰ Backman Rogers, *American Independent Cinema*, 8-10.

forest, and the theatricality of the scene is contrasted by the seeming mundanity of the event, which manifests in the staff casually smoking cigarettes, while waiting for the hunters to return. The entire affair becomes a tongue-in-cheek parody of the high drama of slow motion in classical cinema. That is to say, the conventional use of slow-motion accompanied by a dramatic score is disrupted through images that do not correspond with this cinematic cliché. Thus, instead of acting as a formal shorthand for the assimilation of the film image, the subverted cliché of the slow-motion sequence becomes a way to challenge the expectations of the spectator. Because the spectator does not know the context of the event to begin with, the effect forces them to adjust their mode of viewing based on both the absurdity of the event, and the comic effect that comes from the images themselves. This is in line with Psaras idea of the films of Greek Weird Wave going against the conventional referentiality of the film image.⁴¹ I suggest that this reimagination of the slow-motion sequence goes hand-in-hand with the deadpan comedic delivery of the actors before this scene. That is to say, while the dystopian filmic world is delineated by its many rules and structures, the comic connotations that result from the formal elements contribute to a unique blend of the unsettling and humorous. The deadpan acting brings this disparity to the surface, and the subversion of the cliché solidifies it. The comic effect challenges the spectator's expectations through its contrast with the dystopian tone of the setting. While the first half of David's stay in the Hotel is characterised by comedy, during the second half of his stay, the darker undertones of the cinematic world start to become more apparent, as the film starts deviating from the humorous connotations that accompany them.

2.2. Emphasising the unsettling

The scene begins with the one of the Hotel guests, the 'Nosebleed Woman', swimming backstroke in the Hotel pool. The medium shot tracks her for a while, and we see a long shot of David sitting by the pool. Next, a medium shot shows the Limping Man standing next to the pool, as strings begin playing in the background. Another medium tracking shot shows the Nosebleed Woman swimming in the foreground, and the Limping Man slowly walking along the edge of the pool, slightly out of focus. He keeps an eye on the Nosebleed Woman, gets in the pool, and swims towards her. The shot transitions to a close-up as they begin conversing, and their demeanour is again very stiff. Another medium shot shows the Nosebleed Woman swim away, as the Limping Man stays at the edge of the pool. A long shot shows the entire pool, and begin zooming slowly as

⁴¹ Psaras, (*Queer*) *Greek Weird Wave*, 24.

the Nosebleed Woman swims across. She swims back and there is a close-up shot of her face, as she discusses swimming techniques with the Limping Man. She notes that the Limping Man's nose is bleeding, and the shot transitions to a close-up of his face, and we see blood drip down his face (we later learn that he did this on purpose by hitting his head on the edge of the pool). He holds his nose, and says this happens to him all the time. Finally, we hear the Nosebleed Woman note excitedly that she has the same problem.



2.9. Limping Man watches from afar



2.10. Limping Man follows the Nosebleed Woman



2.11. Beginning of slow zoom



2.12. Ending of slow zoom

In line with the contrasts in tone in the first part of this chapter, the first meeting of the future couple is made unsettling through cinematography and audio that create *suspense*. Firstly, the fairly high-pitched strings in the background are the most noticeable element of distress in the scene. Bordwell and Thompson emphasise the capacity of sound in shaping the spectator's understanding of the image. In essence, an image can be perceived in numerous different ways based on its contextualisation through sound.⁴² The cinematographic tools for creating an atmosphere of suspense in this case are the tracking shot that shows the Limping Man creeping in

⁴² Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, 265, 272.

the background, and the slow zoom in the long shots of the pool. Tracking shots maintain the focus on the subject, while zoom is often associated with an emphasis on a specific detail or a point of interest.⁴³ The tracking shot of both characters moving in unison in combination with the foreboding score makes the Limping Man's approach oddly stressful. The 'hunt' for a partner in the Hotel becomes visualised quite literally, as the setup starts to represent a predator stalking its prey. As the conversation begins, the stiff body language and rambling dialogue of the Limping Man maintain the strange tone of the scene. However, the foreboding score makes the effect of the deadpan performances seem less comedic than before in the film. The following zooming shot does not seem to reference anything specific, but it creates the feeling that something of significance is *supposed* to happen. All of these formal elements come together to create an effect that demands anticipation from the spectator, but the scene never graduates to a point where this tension would be relieved. The deviation from the previous comedic tone underlines the fairly bleak reality where all romantic interactions become governed by superficiality, and the search for a partner represents the only correct way of existing within society. At this point, the film begins gradually highlighting the darker undertones of the dystopian setting, and this is further illustrated by another scene.

David has decided to pursue a relationship with the 'Heartless Woman', but he still needs to prove to her that they share a characteristic. We transition to a long shot that shows the 'Biscuit Woman' (another Hotel guest) lay on the ground screaming, blood pooling under her head, and the Heartless Woman at the edge of the shot, drinking coffee. A close-up shot shows her face, as she looks at the injured woman, without any emotion showing from her face. The previous angle of a long shot returns, and the shot lingers, as the woman lays on the ground and continues screaming in pain. After a while a group of people runs up to her, and in another medium shot, David walks up to the scene and looks shocked. However, he notices the Heartless Woman nearby and walks up to her in, and asks what happened. She explains that the woman jumped from the hotel's window. David purposefully makes harsh comments about the woman (e.g. 'I hope she dies quickly') to impress the Heartless Woman. Throughout their whole conversation, the Biscuit Woman yells in the background. They decide to have a talk sometime more quiet. An extreme long shot shows the Hotel from afar, and in the next long shot, we see David and the Heartless Woman sit in two hot tubs outside of the Hotel. David asks if he can join the her and gets in the same hot tub. The shot transitions to a medium close-up, and we see the Heartless Woman eat an olive out of a martini glass. All of a sudden, she seems to be choking, and a slowly zooming medium shot shows David as

⁴³ Ibid, 170-175.

this is happening. Again, we hear strings in the background. David does not do anything, and the next medium close-up shows the Heartless Woman fall unconscious. We see another shot of David just staring at her. Finally, a similar medium shot shows the Heartless Woman get up, take the olive out of her mouth, as we understand she has merely pretended to choke. ‘I think we are a match’, she notes. We hear the Hotel manager say ‘The keys to the double room please’, in a voice-over that seems to be coming from a later time.



2.13. Biscuit Woman after jumping



2.14. David and the Heartless Woman



2.15. Extreme long shot of the Hotel



2.16. Hot tubs

This time, the scene utilises diegetic audio to create the fairly disturbing sequence, as the Biscuit Woman yells in agony over the casual conversation of David and the Heartless Woman. The scene represents a further shift towards emphasising the bleakness of the filmic world, and the cinematography supports this. The long shot of the Biscuit Woman on the ground lingers for a long time, and the longer the sequence extends, the more unsettling the effect becomes. The (extreme) long shots typically showcase a wider view, that is integral for worldbuilding,⁴⁴ and in this case, the Hotel is seen in a new way compared to the fairly character-centered shots of before. The human

⁴⁴ Ibid, 189.

figures become very small in comparison to the exterior shots of the Hotel, and the effect is above all *isolating*. In addition, the grey colour-scheme of the shots contributes towards this, and the filmic world seems to embrace its gloomy connotations. The sequence in the hot tubs showcases the extent David is willing to modify his behaviour to conform to the norms set in place by society, and the tone of the scene is again unsettling. While I do not suggest that *The Lobster* abandons its deadpan humour as it progresses, I argue that the second half of David's stay in the Hotel highlights a more bleak filmic world, and underlines the change in tone from the first half. That is to say, the spectator's expectations based on the first part are characterised by *absurdity* that results mainly from the use of humour. The second part however deviates from this notion by shifting the emphasis more towards the unsettling elements of the film image. In line with Backman Rogers' crisis image, the effect is *destabilising*, as the viewing process of the spectator is reconfigured throughout these two parts.⁴⁵ Finally, I want to include a sequence that leads to David's escape from the Hotel, to illustrate the culmination of the darker tone, and the resulting transition into David's new life as a loner in the forest.

As David and the Heartless Woman go through their trial period, the Heartless Woman begins suspecting David's integrity. A medium shot opens the scene, and we see the Heartless Woman stand next to the bed, and wake David up. She tells David that she has killed his brother, and explains in detail how she did this. A close-up shows her bloody leg. Despite the gruesome explanation, David seems to remain calm, as he makes his way into the bathroom. Another close-up shows Bob (the dog) lay in a pool of blood on the bathroom floor. The shot lingers for a while and another shot shows David walk up to the mirror looking shocked. He begins telling a story to the Heartless Woman, but midway through, he bursts into tears. The Heartless Woman walks in the bathroom, slaps David after uncovering his deception of pretending to be heartless, and decides to bring him to the Hotel manager so he will be turned into 'the animal no one wants to be'. Medium and long shots show David and the Heartless Woman walk through the Hotel's hallways, but all of a sudden, David punches the Heartless Woman in the stomach. He runs away, as another series of medium shots shows them chasing each other through the hallways. A hotel maid tells the Heartless Woman that David ran past her looking frantic, but as the Heartless Woman leaves to chase him, the maid knocks on a door, David walks out and shoots a tranquilliser dart with his rifle. The Heartless Woman falls to the ground, and David and the maid carry her to the 'transformation room'. The narrator describes the ways David wanted to hurt the Heartless Woman, but notes that in the end he

⁴⁵ Backman Rogers, *American Independent Cinema*, 7.

decided to turn her into an animal. A long shot shows the door to the transformation room, and David dragging the Heartless Woman inside, as the door closes. We never learn what animal she was turned into. A dissolve shows the long shot of the transformation room transition into a long shot of the forest, as David runs through it.



2.17. Heartless Woman after killing Bob



2.18. Walking the hallways



2.19. Transformation room



2.20. Dissolve into the Forest

The scene acts as David's transition into the life of a loner in the forest, and the formal language of the sequence highlights this passage. The sequence is integral in setting up the part of the film that takes place in the forest, and setting the expectations for the rest of the film. The most striking detail of the scene is the violence, or rather its aftermath. The death of Bob is delineated as a turning point for David's narrative within the Hotel, and it ultimately severs his stable progression through the rite of passage that is required by the filmic world. Both the explicit violence (Bob's death), and the implicit violence (transformation of the Heartless Woman) act as a further deviation from the comic tone established especially in the scenes discussed in the first chapter. The sort of cruel, isolated filmic world is now on full display. While the film has previously shown David go along the requirements put on him by society, the scene highlights his refusal to conform. The different shots of the Hotel hallways visualise a liminal space (a transitional space), which show

David progressing further, and further away from his expected role in society. The visualisation of the transition culminates in the dissolve that shows the door of the transformation room and the forest overlap. I argue that the first part of the film conceals the filmic world's darker undertones through humour (deadpan delivery and subversion of cliché), and as the second part brings these to the surface, the transition into the forest provides the spectator with a sense of relief. The end of the sequence visualises David's separation from the structures that govern the Hotel and its guests, as the dystopian horror is left behind in favour of a life as a renegade. However, as we learn in the third part of this analysis, the life in the forest draws heavy parallels to the restrictions of the 'civilised' world. That is to say, while the presentation of the Hotel has conditioned the spectator to feel significant relief as David finds his way out of its oppressive regime, the equally rigid structures that govern the life in the forest ultimately make this transition seem fairly *meaningless*.

2.3. Pessimism through formal means

After David has escaped from the hotel, and settled in the woods, he embarks on his first trip to the City. David, the Short-Sighted Woman, the Loner Leader, and another member of the loners emerge from the woods in an extreme long-shot and make their way into the nearby city, posing as couples. They are all wearing formal wear, and the landscape gradually becomes more civilised. Another slow-motion sequence begins with a medium shot of the characters in an escalator, and we hear strings start playing triumphantly in the background. Another angle shows a long shot of the escalator, and reveals they are in some type of shopping mall. There is a close-up shot of them in a home decor store, looking at different items. A medium shot presents the characters walking through another store, a close-up shot shows David looking at a holographic picture of horses, the characters pick different items from the shelves in a series of shots from varying angles. The fairly ordinary setting is accompanied with the intense melody that plays in the background. A tracking close-up shot shows David and the Short-Sighted Woman walk hand-in-hand through the store. There is a close-up shot of a cake, and another close-up shot of the character faces as they eat it. The Loner Leader eyes both David and the Short-Sighted Woman for a while, as the slow-motion sequence ends, and the melody in the background fades out.



2.21. The grey City



2.22. Shopping mall



2.23. Loner Leader looking at items



2.24. David and the Short-Sighted Woman

The spectator has by this point learned about the rules of the forest (mainly, no romantic relationships), and the sequence above presents them with another aspect of the life of a loner, covert missions to the City. The sequence draws a *parallel* to our first introduction to the Forest with its use of slow-motion. Bordwell and Thompson note that parallels are used to place the focus of the spectator on the similarity of two separate images within the film. This can be done using any of the formal elements within the film.⁴⁶ This is significant, because the spectator's *introductions* to the Forest and the City are both characterised by the slow-motion technique. Both of the settings represented different outcomes that can result from staying in the hotel. You can go to the City as a couple, or stay in the Forest as a loner/animal. However, the unifying technique of slow-motion places the focus on the similarity of these perpetual states of being. In essence, both outcomes are presented as undesirable. The either/or situation presents the options of being hunted and living a strictly committed life as a loner (no partnership), or succumbing to the expectations of society, and spending your days in the empty construction of partnership based on superficiality. While the former is seen quite literally in the dramatic event of the hunt, the latter is highlighted through a

⁴⁶ Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, 63-66.

moment of spectacle combined with the most mundane event of going shopping. The former is made seem unstable, as the latter is made hollow. In other words, David's stay in the woods is revealing to the spectator that his choices are fairly unimportant, as the outcome will always be dictated by the strict norms that govern the filmic world. There is no true *freedom* within this context. This characterises the third part of the film with a sense of hopelessness, and in line with the crisis image, the spectator's expectations for an orderly, satisfying conclusion are thrown into crisis. A scene that occurs slightly later also underlines this through its visual elements.

The scene begins with a long shot that shows the Short-Sighted Woman in the centre of the shot, and a flamingo walking behind her in the forest. She begins narrating and explains that her and David have fallen in love and want to escape from the Forest into the City. Another long shot shows David using the gestural language the two have developed. The scene begins with a long shot that shows the Short-Sighted Woman in the centre of the shot, and a flamingo walking behind her in the forest. She begins narrating and explains that she and David have fallen in love and want to escape from the Forest into the City. Another long shot shows David by putting his hand over his eye, using the gestural language the two have developed. The Short-Sighted Woman stands up three times to answer to David. A medium shot shows two loners sit next to each other in the forest, and their mouths are covered with bloody bandages. Earlier, we have learned that loners who flirt together are given the 'Red Kiss', which means their lips are cut open with razors and they are forced to kiss. A medium shot shows the Loner Leader looking around suspiciously. After a few more shots of David and the Short-Sighted Woman communicating gesturally, the voice-over transitions to a scene where another loner is reading the narration from a diary. We now understand that the Short-Sighted Woman has lost the diary in the forest, and it has been delivered to the Loner Leader. A medium shot shows a camel walk in the background of the forest, as the leader grab the diary, and say she will 'deal with it'.



2.25. Gestural communication



2.26. Flamingo in the background



2.27. Couple given the 'Red Kiss'



2.28. Camel walks behind the loners

By this point, the relationship between David and the Short-Sighted Woman has become the central focus of the latter half of the film, but they are still forced to keep it a secret. The scene utilises two significant *motifs* to delineate a state of bad outcomes for David, the Short-Sighted Woman, and their life in the forest. Motifs refer to reoccurring formal elements, that are very much in line with the parallels discussed in the previous scene. They often refer to an element that has significance for the narrative, and is thus repeated.⁴⁷ In this case, the motifs could rather be seen as an additional way to emphasise the lack of good outcomes delineated in the last scene. The first motif are the animals that make appearances in the background of the scene (flamingo and camel), and the second is a shot of the two loners who have had their lips cut. Both motifs are present in the latter half of the film, multiple times. The animals act as a reminder that the life of a loner in the forest is tied to a state of *uncertainty*, as the a transformation awaits the loners if they are caught during the hunt. Furthermore, the couple who has been given the 'Red Kiss' display the other side of the twofold possibilities for the loners, as the punishment for any types of romantic relationships. These two motifs become significant because of their contextualisation in a scenario, where the narration underlines the couple's plan of escape. There is great irony in how a failed attempt at partnership in the Hotel has lead David to the loners, and the strict limits against romance within the Forest prevent him from realising his feelings towards the Short-Sighted Woman. At this point, the escape to the City seems to be the only way to circumvent the dilemma that comes from their life in the Forest. However, as the Loner Leader catches onto their plan, the spectator is reminded of the difficulty of progression within the filmic context. The final scene of the film illustrates the culmination of the crisis image, with its ultimate dissolution of the central narrative, that has been suggested throughout the third part of the film.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 63-66.

Because the Loner Leader learns of the relationship of David and the Short-Sighted Woman, she decides to blind the Short-Sighted Woman in the City. However, this does not completely stop the two from enacting their plan of escaping the Forest. David and the (formerly) Short-Sighted Woman walk through the forest in a tracking shot, and shortly after they arrive at the road that leads to the city. In a long shot, they hide from a car that is driving on the road. A medium shot shows them arriving in the City. We see a long shot of a restaurant along a highway, and the couple going in the door. A series of medium shots show the Short-Sighted Woman show David her profile, her hands and her elbows. David asks the waiter for a steak knife, and as another medium shot shows him cleaning it, the Short-Sighted Woman mentions that when you go blind ‘one of your other senses is heightened’. A long shot shows David making his way to the bathroom, and the next medium shot shows him holding the steak knife to his eye. He puts a ball of paper into his mouth and prepares to pierce his eye with the knife. However, the shot transitions back to the restaurant, and we see the Short-Sighted Woman sit by the window in a medium shot. The shot lasts for almost two minutes, we see cars drive in the background, the waiter brings the Short-Sighted Woman water, and she sits in anticipation. Before David returns to the table, there is a cut to a black screen, followed by the credits.



2.29. Escaping the Forest



2.30. One last look before going blind



2.31. David prepares to pierce his eye



2.32. Final shot

The ending of the film is very similar to the ending of *Dogtooth*, and follows through with the sense of pessimism that has been constructed especially throughout the second and third part of the film. The only way for David and the Short-Sighted Woman to be together is to share a new characteristic, being blind. Questioning the extent one is willing to go to adapt to the norms of society, the scene represents another difficult outcome that could potentially open up to the couple. The last minutes of the scene are full of suspense, and the spectator is eager to see whether David is willing to go through with the act. However, the lingering shot that keeps this suspense going is interrupted by the sudden cut to a black screen, effectively denying the spectator any sign of resolution for the narrative. The scene encapsulates Backman Rogers' notion of the crisis image challenging narrative-based cinema, which sees a neat trajectory in the story, with a clear conclusion,⁴⁸ and Psaras' reference to denying of narrativity in *Greek Weird Wave*, as the ending refuses the fulfilment of meaning.⁴⁹ The turbulence in the spectator's changing expectations throughout the film is met with an ending that is as bleak, and devoid as the filmic world itself.

The Lobster presents the spectator with the bizarre filmic world governed by normative structures that privilege partnership over individuality. The spectator's introduction to the Hotel and its customs is characterised by the contrast between humour and the dystopian setting. In the first half of David's stay in the Hotel, this manifests in the deadpan performances of the actors, and the subversion of the cliché that we see in the slow-motion sequence. These factors simultaneously place the emphasis on the disparities in tone, but also, conceal the darker connotations the cinematic world carries. During the second half of David's stay in the Hotel, these structures governed by humour start to crumble, as the bleakness of the dystopian setting becomes visible with more clarity. The violent end to David's journey in the Hotel represents a culmination of these dark tones of the filmic image, and the consequent transition into the Forest gives the spectator a moment of reprieve from the rigid structures that govern the society of the film. However, the third part of the film is quick to shatter this sense of relief through creating parallels between the Forest and the rest of the dystopian society. Through visual parallels and motifs, the part of the film places emphasis on the seeming lack of positive outcomes for David and the Short-Sighted Woman. A sense of pessimism defines this final part of the film, and the ending of the film encapsulates the hopelessness that has been delineated by the formal elements in the third act. That is to say, the crisis image in the film manifests in a gradual descent from humorous, although highly bizarre

⁴⁸ Backman Rogers, *American Independent Cinema*, 12.

⁴⁹ Psaras, *(Queer) Greek Weird Wave*, 24.

filmic world, into a state of hopelessness, that reflects onto the spectator's viewing process. The constant reconfiguration of expectations keeps the spectator engaged, and highlights the affective potential of *The Lobster*'s formal elements.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I set out to identify and illustrate affective structures inherent to the formal elements of Yorgos Lanthimos' films *Dogtooth* and *The Lobster*. Based on approaches from film-phenomenology, especially Steven Shaviro's notion of the cinematic body, I have established the necessary background for an analysis of filmic affect. While these approaches are often associated with subjective accounts of felt affect, I have aimed to combine the spectatorial experience with Eugenie Brinkema's method of reading the formal construction of a film for affect, in order to establish more generalisable, perceptible manifestations of affect. Mainly, these distinct approaches have been brought together with the inclusion of Anna Backman Rogers' conceptualisation of the crisis image. With an in-depth scene analysis of both *Dogtooth* and *The Lobster*, I have placed the crisis image within the context of the movement of Greek Weird Wave, and utilised the work of David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson to compare and contrast the formal construction of the films against conventional film art. Furthermore, I have used Marios Psaras' discussion of Greek Weird Wave to contextualise the disruptions caused to the film image, and particularly, to the formal elements that determine the construction of the narrative.

The affective crisis image can be seen throughout both films, and above all, its main significance is to *destabilise* the spectator's mode of viewing. That is to say, the expectations the spectator derives from their habitual viewing processes are disrupted through formal elements that make the film image reveal its inherent instability. A shift in the spectator's *comprehension* of the film image thus creates the need for an *affective* reconfiguration, in order to make sense of the perceptible body of the film. The significance of this change is that the crisis image asks for the spectator to engage in *attentive* patterns of thought, rather than relying on existing, habitual frameworks. The crisis image can manifest in defamiliarised character bodies, extended states of liminality, or performances of affect that thread the line between presentation and representation. It can be delineated through the use of contrasting elements within the film image, subversion of patterns established by previous formal construction of the film, and ultimate deviations towards pessimism. Both films engage in active refusal of meaning (especially in very similar endings), which is made manifest on a formal level. Furthermore, the films continuously renegotiate the

expectations of the spectator, whether through diverting conventions of traditional film art through their form, or by disrupting the patterns that are created previously during the film viewing process. This thesis has presented the crisis image in the context of Greek Weird Wave, but more specifically, it has established its significance in the work of Lanthimos. The detailed formal analysis of the scenes in *Dogtooth* and *The Lobster* underlines the affective potential of both films, and presents them as excellent examples of *cinema of crisis*.

Further research could utilise the notion of the crisis image to examine other directors and their work within the movement of Greek Weird Wave. In the case of this thesis, the conclusions cannot be extended to the entire movement, because this would require for a more comprehensive analysis on similarities and differences between the work of the directors. However, an in-depth look at multiple directors could potentially create greater differentiation of formal styles and their relation to the crisis image. That is to say, the analysis could potentially reveal clearer patterns in the use of the crisis image as a tool of destabilisation, within the movement itself.

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