

Greece as a postmodern example: *Boundary 2* and its special issue on Greece

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However we may think of Greece, it is certainly not as “the origin of postmodernity”. Readers of Perry Anderson’s well-known introduction *The origins of postmodernity* (1998) may, however, have been intrigued to see Athens taking its place as one of the supposed origins in the first pages of the book. Playfully narrating the genesis of the idea of the postmodern as an itinerary with stops in various places of the world, Anderson starts his chapter titled “Crystallization” with a first stop in Athens (before moving on to Ihab Hassan’s Cairo, Robert Venturi’s Las Vegas, and Lyotard’s Montreal). For someone going through these pages the effect is immediate: Anderson seems to be suggesting that the postmodern in its crystallized form was first born in Athens!

I hasten to add that the reason Athens earns its place in this genealogy of the postmodern is almost entirely accidental, and has to do with a Greek-American critic and academic, William Spanos, who decided, while in Athens in the early 1970s, to found the first journal of postmodern literature and theory. The journal, *Boundary 2*, subtitled “a journal of postmodern literature”, was founded in 1972 at the State University of New York at Binghamton by Spanos and the author Robert Kroetsch, and became, as Anderson notes, “the real turning point” in the crystallization of the postmodern, the first scholarly publication to include the term

postmodern in its title as a qualifier for the word literature.¹ Anderson explains:

[The creator of *Boundary 2*,] William Spanos, decided to found the journal as a result of his shock at US collusion with the Greek Junta, while a visiting teacher at the University of Athens. He later explained that “at the time, ‘Modern’ meant, literally, the Modernist literature that had precipitated the New Criticism and the New Criticism which had defined Modernism in its own autotelic terms.” In Athens he sensed “a kind of complicity”, between an established orthodoxy, in which he had been trained, and the callous officialdom he was witnessing. On returning to America, he conceived *Boundary 2* as a break with both. At the height of the Vietnam War, his aim was to “get literature back into the domain of the world”, at a time of “the most dramatic moment of American hegemony and its collapse”, and to demonstrate that “postmodernism is a kind of rejection, an attack, an undermining of the aesthetic formalism and conservative politics of the New Criticism.”²

Influenced by Heidegger and by the larger appetite of the time for engaged progressive intellectual discourse, the first contributors of *Boundary 2* proposed that “the postmodern impulse was characterized by a desire for authentic existentialist historicity and could lead to a postmodern poetry that, in Robert Kern’s words, would embody the presence of living speech, Heidegger’s ‘Saying’” (Bertens 1997: 10). For this particular early version of postmodernity, and at least for Spanos, as I will explain, Athens, Greece and Greek literature of the time provided some crucial characteristics that allowed it to be seen as paradigmatic.

Indeed, as early as its second appearance in 1973 (volume 1 no. 2, winter 1973), *Boundary 2*, the first “Journal of Postmodern Literature” dedicated a whole issue to Greece (guest-edited by

¹ Some of the contributors to the first volume included: Edward Said (“Michel Foucault as an Intellectual Imagination”), David Antin on “Postmodernism in American poetry”, Ihab Hassan, and James Curtis on “Marshall McLuhan and French Structuralism”.

² Anderson 1998: 16; quotations from Spanos 1990: 1-3 and 16-17.

Nicos Germanacos). As this was the first special issue of the journal and the first to be devoted to a national literature, the effect was that Greece was treated as a paradigm for the idea of postmodernity the journal wanted to propose.

In what follows, I will try first to give a historical account of how this special issue of *Boundary 2* came about, before presenting in detail the “postmodern” reading of Greece offered by the editors of the journal. In hindsight, this is not a very easy task, since our understanding of the postmodern today has certainly moved on from the embryonic definition that was emerging in 1973. I will thus initially attempt to see *Boundary 2*'s claims about Greece on their own terms. I will then implicitly contrast them with later and current understandings of the postmodern, which, for working purposes, I understand as a cultural expression that: is largely antimodernist; engages with the socio-economic situation of late capitalism; uses new media and reflects on their impact; promotes undecidability at the expense of absolute values; defies cultural boundaries and subverts rigid cultural taxonomies; focuses on identities rather than identity; opens a playful dialogue with the past and avoids aesthetic canons while not escaping aestheticization; promotes pastiche and hybridization over modernist parody and irony; distrusts grand narratives and privileges space over time.

All this is not what *Boundary 2* originally understood as postmodern, and, indeed, in William Spanos's or Ihab Hassan's thinking of the period the postmodern is very often much closer to what criticism classifies today as high modernism or avant-garde – today's critics might condescend, pointing out that their understanding confuses the post-modern with the postmodern (see Bertens 1995: 37-52). On the other hand, we cannot downplay the important input of these figures and the journal itself in the multiple conceptualizations of postmodernity that followed it.

Even in the early 1970s there were huge differences between the understanding of postmodernity offered by, for example, Ihab Hassan (whose book *The dismemberment of Orpheus: toward a postmodern literature* and polemical article “POSTmodernISM”

were both published in 1971, setting the agenda), Leslie Fiedler (who argued persistently in the 60s for a re-appreciation of youth popular culture) and William Spanos's Heideggerian liberalism, let alone Edward Said, who was much more influenced by French poststructuralism. *Boundary 2* appeared at that crucial moment, and became a forum to synthesize diverse opinions proposed by American intellectuals about what was collectively understood as a new cultural phase, and a need for a new theoretical basis to analyse and comprehend it. Browsing its issues of the 1970s and early 1980s, one realizes that arguments that later came to dominate the discussion on the postmodern appeared in its pages early on. In closer review, it seems that *Boundary 2* is not as "archaeological" to our version of the postmodern as we think. Concepts and ideas have their own genealogies, a living background, an echo that remains constantly with them. In that genealogy of postmodernity constantly reshaping our current understanding, *Boundary 2* undoubtedly has a decisive place.

Having said that, in the last part of this paper I will attempt to contrast *Boundary 2*'s views with a more up-to-date assessment of postmodern elements in Modern Greek culture that, it goes without saying, can in no way be exhaustive or definitive. My main focus will be on literature, but I will also mention other cultural domains as well as the larger understanding of the postmodern as a sociocultural historical phase.

Before I go into the details of the *Boundary 2* special issue on Greece, I should add that the issue does not seem to have had any impact in that country whatsoever, either as a theoretical/poetic statement, or as a piece of intellectual history. It is indicative that the first book on the postmodern published in Greece (*Μοντέρνο-Μεταμοντέρνο*, 1988), begins with an essay by Olivier Revault d'Alonnes, in which he gives 1975 as the date for the genesis of the term. Neither his nor any other essay in that collection mentions *Boundary 2* and its 1973 special issue. Moreover, the postmodern, as a theoretical concept and cultural modality, has been persistently seen as coming from outside Greece and, unlike what happened with modernism, there has not been a sustained

effort to localize, to hellenize postmodernism as an intellectual stance, or to argue that its condition could be re-viewed as somehow indigenous. As Vassilis Lambropoulos remarked in 1988, “Postmodernism is the impossible paradox of contemporary Greek literature – a deviation, an aberration, a scandal. [...] It will not enter the mainstream because its tradition is quite foreign” (1988: 156).

Why, then, does this special issue on Greece by the now almost forgotten first journal of “postmodern literature” matter?

It does, one could say, simply because it is there, a statement about Greece in a journal that played a pioneering role in the central debate of recent intellectual history. Furthermore, looking back at this issue, and addressing its historical specificity from the point of view of Modern Greek Studies, gives us an interesting angle both to review and critique these first steps in the theorization of the postmodern. A second reason is that, as a rare and early statement about Greek postmodernism, this issue stands as a challenge for us to start a discussion about the possibility of reading postmodernism into Greek culture, which is long overdue.

Reading Greece as a postmodern topography

A claim that Greek literature is postmodern, coming from as early as 1973, sounds extremely dissonant to all of us who know that the concept of postmodernism as a condition and a cluster of critical discourses remained under-used in Greece until at least the 1990s. Moreover, most critics have yet to acknowledge the possibility of a classification such as “postmodern Greek literature”, and the term which still takes precedence is that of belated (or uneven) modernism, of avant-garde and modernity (πρωτοπορία and νεωτερικότητα), terms largely associated with the modern and with modernist discourses.³

³ Even attempts such as the journal *Πάλι*, which could be seen as bringing about a rupture with modernism, are viewed as a combination of modernism and avant-garde; see Valaoritis 1997. On the other hand, major research projects on postmodernism have only registered the absence of a discussion about postmodernism in Greece. In Fokkema and Bertens 1997, for instance, Greece is almost the only European country

Boundary 2's editors seem to pre-empt this in a way, since they start their introduction by claiming that “*On the surface*, a great deal of the literature of contemporary Greece recalls earlier modes of modernism” (1973: 261, emphasis added). Nevertheless, one only needs to go a layer deeper, for the modernist surface to be dismantled and a *critical condition* to erupt:

Greeks [after the Fall of Constantinople] – especially those committed to the life of the spirit – were driven into a world devoid of those religious, social, political, and creative points of reference that give the individual and the society in which he lives a sense of identity, which is to say, a sense of direction. They were driven, that is, across the frontiers of a dead past into a *boundary situation*. (ibid., emphasis added)

After independence things did not improve, since Greeks were “torn between the ‘neo-classic’ humanism of the Philhellenic West and its ‘oriental’ roots in Byzantium and the Greece of the *Turkokratia*”, and consequently “the Greek imagination has been unable to reconcile the discontinuities” (1973: 262). Thus, the editors conclude,

the Greek writer continues to confront the same unnamed boundary world with all its uncertainties, its anxieties – and its possibilities [...]. He [sic] encounters this boundary world, in other words, not as in the contemporary West, as a recent development, but as something like a heritage. [By contrast, the Western critic or writer] all too easily loses the feel of that *Ur-realm*, the encounter with which has almost always generated the most moving, if not the most “beautiful” literature, the dreadful sense of being on the boundary, in the zero zone, which demands the courage to be, the courage to risk oneself in one way or another for the sake of the human community. [...] Besides expressing their agony, therefore, perhaps the “unsophisticated” – the uncertain, the tentative, the heroic – voices

that is not given a chapter (and actually, not even one mention) in the part of the book on “postmodernism in Europe”.

in the following pages have something very important to teach the West about the boundary. (262)

What is being argued here is that in Greece, a permanent feeling of living “this late” in history and “this marginally” in cultural geography establishes, always already, a postmodern condition. Greek culture, the editors imply, remains discontinuous in its re-inventions of identities drawn from the past, and therefore becomes ideally postmodern because it forces writers to be always critically self-reflexive, to take a stance, to fight. All this, they argue, happens in spite of the modernist effort to bridge the gaps and “impose a cultural identity on this very old, new nation by alternately recovering the forms of Ancient Greece or of Byzantium” (ibid.). Put simply: it is Greece’s uneven modernity, in both the cultural and the sociohistorical domain, that safeguards and sanctifies it as an islet of postmodernity.

The introduction, titled “Greek Writing and the Boundary: A foreword”, is signed by William Spanos and Robert Kroetsch (and not by the guest editor of the issue, Nicos Germanacos). It is, however, identifiably written mainly by Spanos (who had the necessary knowledge, and also repeated similar claims in later single-authored texts). One could thus comment on the parallel between that view of Greek culture, and his own feelings about his Greek identity being under pressure and erasure while growing up as a child of Greek immigrants in USA. Being discriminated against and abused when he first went to school, he responded, he says in an interview, by blaming “my parents, [...] the fact that I was of Greek descent, [...] the language, the first language I spoke at home, which was Greek, and which our parents insisted on our speaking, and thinking that somehow *I* was wrong, somehow *we* were wrong, *my family* was wrong, somehow *the culture* my family was part of was wrong [...] [I understand now] how absolutely coerced I was by the hegemonic discourse that is dominant in America” (Spanos 1990: 6). It is interesting to note here the importance assigned to Greekness on a personal level. Returning to his own suppressed Greek identity, the critic also becomes able to revolt and liberate himself from American hegemony.

Spanos's own latent feeling of the contradictions inherent in his being a Greek-American seems here to have been the crucial catalyst for his later views on Greece as a "boundary situation" and a "critical condition". The very personal experience of diasporic Greekness as a boundary situation seems to have shaped the intellectual decision to see Greece as the paradigm for being and thinking in-the-boundary.

In the interview from which I have already quoted (conducted in 1990 by his successor to the editorship of *Boundary 2*, Paul Bové), Spanos also gives some clues about how he came to experience the particular sociopolitical situation in Greece of the 1970s as a critical space for the intellectual. He describes how crucial it was for him, as a young scholar on a visiting post in early-1970s Greece, to realize that he had to react against an oppressive regime. When his secretary was arrested and tortured by the secret police, he realized, he says, that something in the "remoteness" and "autonomy" of the literary text he was advocating as a young New Critic had to change.

I don't think I began to understand the political imperative of an existential stance – of being-in-the-world – until I confronted the crassness, the self-serving vulgarity, of the American Embassy's response to the brutal imprisonment by the security police of my Greek colleague in the Fulbright office. That was the real occasion – the real beginning – of my self-conscious development as a literary intellectual and of my realization that the intellectual life is necessarily the life of practice.⁴

As we have seen, Spanos went on to advocate as a result the active engagement of literature and literary scholarship through a solid system of "postmodernity" conceived on the basis of Sartrean existentialism and the Heideggerian notions of being-in-the-world and actuality. This remained the intellectual obsession in *Boundary 2* for a long time and was perhaps more successfully used in Spanos's own critique of New Criticism, which he saw as

⁴ Spanos 1990: 13.

a spatializing enquiry draining the text and the reading process of their actual temporal presence, that is, as a negation of temporality in the name of spatiality.⁵

Putting aside questions one might raise, such as why a liberal American scholar went to Greece during the Junta with Fulbright assistance in the first place, or why he had to wait until his secretary was arrested to understand the oppression exerted by the regime, we need to consider both the reasons and the rhetorics of nominating Greece as a postmodern example in this particular instance. As I have already implied, Spanos's personal feelings about his cultural heritage (and possibly his feelings of nostalgia about a lost cultural background), as well as his own experience in Greece, have most certainly played a role in this theorization. An even more important factor was, I think, that by 1972 a very large circle of Greek intellectuals had become fully engaged in the struggle against the dictatorship, and had produced a series of subversive publications. The intellectual environment Spanos found when he went to Greece was as close as one can be to his ideal for a literature that constitutes a political act.⁶

Reviewing the famous anti-dictatorship Greek collection *Δεκαοχτώ κείμενα* (*Eighteen texts*) in a 1973 issue of the journal *Contemporary Literature*, Spanos would celebrate that publication as not “simply an aesthetic experience. It is, rather, a book of poetry, fiction and criticism that *collectively* constitutes a *political act* [...] this book does indeed release a kind of beauty precisely at the point where the word engages the world that denies it [...] [we have] to perceive the work as an act in its own complex context” (Spanos 1973: 364).

⁵ This is the main argument of his article “The Detective and the Boundary”, published in the first issue of *Boundary 2*, autumn 1972.

⁶ It is no coincidence that a fragment from a defiant woodcut print by Vasso Katraki (showing a person in front of a tree raising his hand) was chosen as the colophon of the journal (it would stay as such for at least twenty years) and that a group of poems by Yannis Ritsos was translated for the first issue of *Boundary 2*, and printed following Spanos's own polemical article, “The Detective and the Boundary”.

Let me make this clear: it seems to me that the most important reason Greece takes its place within this particular view of the postmodern is a historical contingency, the dictatorship, and the way it has forced literature and culture to stage a *reaction* to it. Indeed, *Δεκαοχτώ κείμενα* would not only become the sole book presented (by Peter Bien this time) in the review section of the *Boundary 2* special issue on Greece; it would also serve, it seems, as its prototype.⁷ The way this special issue is laid out, with a series of suggestive epigraphs on the first pages, Seferis's poem "Επί ασπαλάθων..." as its first text, followed by texts by writers from all generations and from across the political spectrum, more than reminds one of the layout of *Δεκαοχτώ κείμενα*.

Last but not least, this issue belongs, without a doubt, to a certain genre gathering momentum at the time: literary journals devoting special issues to Greece or other countries under a military regime. By issuing a volume on Greece, the first postmodern journal was proving how literary scholarship could also be politically engaged. Talking about Greece had pressing intellectual credentials; talking about its culture showed an insider's knowledge that perhaps other similar writing on Greece may have been seen as lacking.

Boundary 2's Greek postmodernism reminds one, in that sense, of certain much more recent postcolonial takes on Indian or African writing. Like them, it capitalized on the relative obscurity and remoteness of Greek writing, its exoticism, as it were, for American intellectuals, which it turned into pure difference, or, in Spanos's terms, into "being in the zero zone, in a boundary situation".

Defining postmodernity

We should not forget that, in the introduction to the special issue on Greece, the editors make their first attempt to offer an overarching definition of what they mean by postmodernity. The

⁷ The similarity between parts of the introduction to the special issue and Spanos's own review of *Δεκαοχτώ κείμενα* published in *Contemporary Literature* is more than persuasive.

inaugural issue of *Boundary 2* may have offered articles that individually attempted to theorize on new literary trends, but it did not include any attempt at a definition, and did not have any introductory or other overarching statement. The issue on Greece is the first instance when “postmodern literature” is given a concrete and programmatic definition – with the help of Greek writing as a necessary example. Crucially, in its attempt to pin down postmodern literature, this issue presents something both illuminating and risky: it territorializes the postmodern.

This introduces a series of further complications. The most impressive is seeing postmodernity as an inherent condition in the case of Greece. Postmodernity is, according to the introduction at least, for Greek writers “something like a heritage”. Greece, that is, is postmodern *avant la lettre*, it is always already postmodern. Moreover, taking into account that the situation described has much to do with the establishment of the modern state in the nineteenth century, postmodernity in Greece was precipitated, it is suggested, at the very moment when (and by the very process by which) Europe was inventing its own modernity. This more or less means, if we want to push the thought further, that European modernity operated by also creating islets of postmodernity on its margins that would eventually be drawn out of the wilderness as liberatory modes in a later phase.

One should recall here that ideas about space and time have been very central in our understanding of modernity and postmodernity. Fredric Jameson has influentially argued that while time is at the centre of an understanding of modernity, space becomes the main way of experiencing and expressing postmodernity (Jameson 1991; 1994). On the other hand, Spanos seems to have had a tendency to celebrate postmodernity as a new modernity which would defy what he saw as the spatializing (over time) tendency of New Criticism; his “in-the-world” literature is seen as a victorious return of time to upstage space (Spanos 1972). What is crucial in the case of the *Boundary 2* issue is that Greece becomes the place par excellence where *time and space collapse into each other*. Time is spatialized (constant boundary) and its

topography gives rise to the constant synchrony of (re)act(ion), crisis and agony. That is to say that in the case of Greece, the boundary cuts through space and time to introduce a new metaphysics – a metaphysics of actuality.

But let us take another look at the issue's material. It presents different generations of poets, from Cavafy to Valtinos, Mastoraki and Poullos; there is, however, a preference for the Seferis and Elytis of the late 1960s, enough Cavafy but no Palamas, more poetry than prose. There is a limited attempt to include a discussion of art forms other than literature, in the texts by musician Theodore Antoniou (on contemporary theatre music) and artist A. Tassos (on Antonis Kiriakoulis). Many texts have a political subtext: the issue starts with Seferis's "Επί ασπαλάθων...", includes Cavafy's "Πλην Λακεδαιμονίων", Valtinos's "Η κάθοδος των εννιά", Anagnostakis's political poems. There is also an emphasis on literature that deals with the "quest for identity", both national and personal – tellingly, the last piece in the collection is Taktis's short story "Τα ρέστα".

A centrepiece of the special issue is the long interview/discussion between the guest editor, Nicos Germanacos, and three well-known Greek writers of the time. Its insistence on the pragmatics of the literary profession in Greece and long description of the way Greeks see themselves and their past and use symbolic language in their literature can be viewed as an extension of the issue's introductory note. There are also questions about censorship, the authors' decision not to publish in the first years of the dictatorship, and a handful of anti-Junta insinuations. The word postmodernism, though, never appears, and each time Germanacos attempts to introduce questions that could pave the way for it, the Greek authors retaliate by persistently underlining the extent to which their country still has to catch up on its own process of modernity.

"Personally, I don't think I have any problems of identity. At least, no more than any other human being," answers Valtinos, to a question about how much Modern Greek identity is weighed down by the classical past. He continues: "I don't understand why

this thing you call ‘the awful burden of the past’ should weigh on my shoulders, or on my shoulders only and not, say, on an Englishman’s” (279). And a little later the same author comments on the political situation and the way it affects expression: “on the one hand you have a nation constantly struggling and bleeding to stand upright, to see a sunny day, and on the other a bunch of carpetbaggers, an untalented jaundiced bunch of usurpers constantly shortcircuiting the people’s aspirations.”

All in all, exploring modern identity and political commitment in literature seem to have been the key criteria behind the editing of this special issue. In any case, the framework set out by the introduction would allow almost any Greek writing touching on identity and politics to be called postmodern. This could even apply to the modernist modalities of Seferis’s poetry, or the rational and emancipatory statements of the three writers in the interview with Nicos Germanacos. On the other hand, readers of the issue today can acknowledge postmodern characteristics in Valtinos and Ioannou, or the poems by Poulivos and Jenny Mastoraki. It would be more difficult to make such a claim for the poetry by Ritsos collected under the title *Corridors and stairs*, and almost impossible for other texts, such as those by Tsirkas, Elytis, Karouzos and Anagnostakis. From a contemporary viewpoint, therefore, it is clear that the issue brought together both modernist and postmodernist texts and tendencies, and its overall importance was performative rather than descriptive: it pointed towards the possibility of a departure from modernism in Greek literature, without mapping it exhaustively.

Whither the Greek postmodern?

I am by no means the first to point out the problems that theorizations of postmodernity have when they attempt to construct a coherent narrative, and present the postmodern as a distinct period, a mode of production (cultural, social and economic), or, in the words of Fredric Jameson, a concrete narrative. Jameson himself has painstakingly argued about the unavoidable necessity, but also the violence that a periodization along these lines would

imply (Jameson 1998). To put it simply, to nominate the postmodern and define postmodernity seems much more difficult than to theorize about it. In a sense the postmodern ceases to be so postmodern the very moment it gets inscribed in the critical discourse purporting to define it. This is as much of a problem now as it was when the term first started being used extensively. Thus to speak about “postmodernism in Greece” runs the risk today, it seems to me, of as many problems as it did back in the 1970s.

As I have already mentioned, literary criticism in Greece has been reluctant to adopt the category of the postmodern as viable; some critics have seen this as evidence of Greek culture’s structural inability to nurture a postmodern expression (Lambropoulos 1988) and others have argued that, in the absence of a high modernism that would establish an autonomous realm for art, an indigenous postmodernism is almost impossible (Jusdanis 1987).

On the other hand, there has been some effort to map specific characteristics of recent Greek writing that can be seen as inaugurating a Greek postmodern. A persuasive argument is that if there is a larger trend in world literature that we understand as postmodernism, then it does not make sense to argue that Greek writers remained impervious to, intertextually blocked from, a dialogue with it (Beaton 1999: 21-3). Critics have also started locating postmodern elements in many Greek texts, in characteristics ranging from formal aspects such as the techniques of allusion and parody or the use of magical realism, to characterization and the use of language, the presentation of self and otherness or Greekness and the idea of history and the historical narrative in them. In doing so, they also attempt to trace its emergence in the cultural fabric of Greek society of the twentieth century (Tziovas 1993; 2003).

On the basis of these and many other similar analyses, it is clear that we can no longer argue that postmodernism is impossible in Greece. This becomes even more evident if we include a review not only of literature, but also of art, architecture, historiography, music and popular culture trends – and certainly if we accept that, just as it is fruitless to think of postmodernism outside

postmodernity and late capitalism, it is also flawed to think that a postmodernism-free culture can exist in the global socio-economic context of late capitalism.

The heart of the matter is not whether elements that are linked to postmodern expression can be found in modern Greek writing or art. Anybody can point out postmodern elements in, say, *Tristram Shandy*⁸ and someone who would aim to do the same for Roidis's *Pope Joan* would not have a difficult time either. The point is not whether this or that text has postmodern characteristics; it is, rather, whether the text's postmodern features make sense as a whole and help create a meaningful relationship with its context, the cultural institutions, the sociopolitical, economic and cultural reality that envelops the work of art and its (re)production. Whether, that is, these features evolve into a modality that is meaningful within the sociohistorical space in which they are uttered.⁹

The problem with *Boundary 2* was not that it imposed postmodernism on a Greece that could not have had it; it was, instead, that it tried to produce the Greek postmodern by articulating it not so much with the Greek reality of the time, but with American intellectual needs. Greece makes sense as a postmodern example, as presented by *Boundary 2*, only in the context of *Boundary 2*, that is, within the circles of the American postmodernists of the early 1970s. We still have to search out those other contexts in

⁸ Spanos himself, in a later text, claimed as postmodern the following works, among others: Euripides's *Orestes*, Petronius's *Satyricon*, Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Dickens's *Bleak House*, also claiming that "postmodernism is not fundamentally a chronological event, but rather a permanent mode of human understanding" (Spanos 1979: 107).

⁹ Here the critics who argue the impossibility or structural marginality of Greek postmodernism may have a point, in that they imply that, even though certain postmodern aspects appeared in Greek texts, they never made sense within the Greek cultural economy. But in doing so, in presenting a certainty about the "impossibility" of postmodernism in Greece, they fail to notice alternative developments that have changed the picture.

which what we understand as postmodern occurred and became meaningful in Greece.

I would nevertheless like to close this discussion by taking up the challenge the *Boundary 2* 1973 issue presents us with, and hazarding an attempt to discuss some postmodern trends in Greek culture related to ideas and texts presented by the journal.

1) *The relationship with the classical past* as an unresolved riddle of identity, especially as it is paired with Greece's uneven modernization. This is, to be sure, a relationship that has been scrutinized by a number of Greek theorists, who have read it through notions such as "aporia", "oxymoron", "gap", "belatedness", "dream" and recently Vangelis Calotychos's "ab-sense". Such theorizations show how fertile this ground can be for a postmodern expression, if indeed there is the willingness to articulate the identity gap through postmodern modalities. In short, I would suggest that a defiance or an overturning of modernism, especially in the cultural domain, can come and has come in recent Greek culture from a review of the "identity pressure" the classics exert over the country's culture. This is certainly not tantamount to claiming a residual postmodernity that has always been there in Greece, as *Boundary 2* did. On the contrary, Seferis's use of the classical past, for instance, does not have anything to do with the use of the classical (inter)text in Matesis's *Ο παλαιός των ημερών*, Bost's *Μήδεια*, Gourogianis's *Το ασημόχορτο ανθίζει*, the *Μήδεια* of Omada Edafous, Kouroupos/Heimonas's *Πυλάδης*, Eva Stefani's *Ακρόπολις*, Houvardas and Marmarinos's takes on ancient drama, and so on and so forth.¹⁰

¹⁰ Research work that is being done at the moment shows, for instance, how much recent theatre producers in Greece have engaged in postmodern interpretations of classical texts that, while in contact with similar readings of their colleagues abroad, use these new avenues of expression in order to construct a further dialogue with their own, Greek tradition of reading the classics. In other words, many of the new uses of classical texts in theatre are not only self-consciously postmodern, they do so in a manner that makes their interventions meaningful in the larger context of Greek culture, thus producing a Greek postmodern.

2) *The role of the dictatorship in precipitating postmodern modes of expression in Greece.* As Spanos realized, the Junta did indeed create a sense of urgency that made artists adopt new models of expression to cope with the situation. The dictators established an oppressive regime and used the discourse of economic modernization and the language of myth and the past, as its main propaganda tools. A discussion among intellectuals about the meaning of Greek identity and the pressures of Hellenism resurfaced at that very moment as a resistance to the absurdity of the dictatorship's discourse. And one could argue that modes of expression able to reach beyond modernist readability were at the time used for these particular reasons – postmodern expression being the only way both to make sense of the situation and create subversive work.

Postmodernism, *pace* Spanos, was certainly not the only way, and actually much reaction to the Junta's inconsistent, inconsequential and often near-psychotic discourse came through very modernist tactics. In *Δεκαοχτώ κείμενα*, for instance, the modernist strategy of Seferis's "Οι γάτες τ' Άη Νικόλα", or of the rational critique of *katharevousa* by Argyriou in his essay, is contrasted to the more postmodern modalities of the texts by Heimonas, Valtinos, and Nora Anagnostaki, not to mention the collection's parody by Bost in his series *18 Αντι-κείμενα*, published in the magazine *Αντί* in 1973-74. In the larger context, the modernism of Theodorakis and the work he produced after moving to France could be contrasted with the postmodern hybrids of Savvopoulos, especially in performance in the clubs of Plaka; the high modernist framework of Angelopoulos's monumental film *Ο Θίασος* could be contrasted with the extremely popular TV series *Εκείνος κι εκείνος*, written by Kostas Mourselas. I venture the suggestion that after 1974, modernist modalities gained the foreground again with postmodern elements moving to the background until well into the 1980s. The reasons for this are to be found not only in the cultural domain, but also in the socio-economic structures and political discourses of that period, areas which I do not have space to discuss here.

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To conclude: I have presented and contextualized here a very early attempt to define postmodernity, and have analysed its use of Greece and Greek writing as a paradigm. I have explained how this view was produced but have also shown the limits of this attempt. However, my aim was to characterize *Boundary 2* as both limited by its own specificity and as extremely helpful in stimulating us to think about the Greek postmodern. I have thus moved in two directions: on the one hand to analyse and critique the journal's special issue, and on the other, to take its cue and see it as a challenge. My larger claim is that even though the postmodern in Greece may not reside exactly where *Boundary 2* said it did, we need to look to the period of its publication and the literary and cultural texts it presents, in order to establish the genealogy of the Greek postmodern. In other words: *Boundary 2* reminds us that the "scandal of postmodernism" has happened in Greece. What remains is to find the scene of the crime.

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