
Managing the Archives of the Hellenic Film and Television School

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Abstract

For the purposes of my dissertation concerning the evolution of Greek institutions that have provided education for future filmmakers and other professionals of the audiovisual sector, I had the opportunity to access the archives of the Hellenic Film and TV School «L. Stavrakos». Being the oldest and most recognized institution of its kind in Greece, it has served for many years as the main source of professionals for its national film industry.

Its archives consist of numerous documents on a variety of issues, such as detailed catalogues of students and faculty, notes on lessons, grades and diplomas. All this material, from the institute's foundation until today, has been preserved in a proper state thanks to its director's care and interest, followed to an equal extent by its heirs.

Given the fact that academic research relating to Film Studies in Greece faces a notable difficulty to find archives of that kind on such a large scale and in such good condition, their importance can be easily understood. The combination of the information they provide, along with other testimonies and the few existing related bibliographical references, constitutes the main corpus of my study. Furthermore, the methodology used in processing the findings could be useful as an example for similar research attempts.

The interest of Greek scholars and researchers for their national cinema and more specifically for its history and development, has witnessed an overwhelming growth in recent years, especially since the turn of the millennium. This comes in significant contrast to its neglect during the precedent period by the academic environment. Besides the disregard of Film Studies as a distinctive discipline, an equally indifferent attitude could be discerned towards the practical education of the new filmmakers. The Greek state finally established the first and only public film department in 2004, at the Fine Arts School of Thessaloniki's Aristotle University¹.

During the previous years, young Greeks who wished to enter the film and audiovisual industry of their country had three alternatives:

1. Try to sneak their way in by finding first a menial job in a crew. Then they would gradually learn their craft through work itself, next to their elder and more experienced colleagues. Later on, given that they had the skills and got their superiors attention, they could rise to higher posts of the film production's hierarchy.



Openings of the «Hellenic Film & TV School» in 1950



Έγκαίνια της Σχολής - 1950

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Shooting of a film in 1955. The second man from the right, is the director of the School L. Stavrakos

2. Study abroad at one of the established and renowned film schools of Europe, such as Centro Sperimentale in Rome or at the Filmová a televizní fakulta (FAMU) in Prague. Yet that option was the privilege of the more wealthy and fortunate ones who actually succeeded in getting selected by these schools.

3. The third option, that seemed to be the most appealing for the majority of the aspiring filmmakers, was to study inside the country, at one of the private institutions that offered relevant courses.



Characteristic sample of the material found in the institute's archives. It is the official license of the film - school, approved by the Ministry of Education

The biggest and most significant among these private film schools was the one founded by entrepreneur Lycurgus Stavrakos in Athens, at the beginning of 1950. The Hellenic Film and TV School “L. Stavrakos”, or more simply “Stavrakos Film School”, as it has commonly been referred to since, is the only institute of its type, still operating after 65 continuous years. Throughout this time it has played an important role as a pool that provided young and on many occasions, talented personnel for the audiovisual sector of the country. It was founded and developed in the context of the overall post World War II massive growth of film culture within Greek society². Overcoming its initial financial problems and lack of means, as well as the governmental lack of concern for film education, it managed to establish itself by gathering cinematographers, film theorists and other artists who had an impact on the cultural life of modern Greece, in order to constitute its primary teaching staff. In this way it became the conservatory of many directors who would emerge during the late ‘60’s and early ‘70’s, as representatives of the *New Greek Cinema*³.

Moreover, Stavrakos’s institute was accepted as a full member by CILECT in 1956. Since then it has remained the unique representative from Greece within the framework of this international organization⁴. The school continued to shape the education of young Greek artists and technicians to a large extent during the following years, up until today⁵. Its unremitting, intense activity and its connection to the country’s audiovisual production, along with the absence of an equivalent state institution, resulted in creating a bizarre status quo. Unofficially yet quite vividly, the Stavrakos Film School acquired the role of a substitute national film school in the minds of Greek cinematographers. A characteristic phrase coming from the famous Greek painter and designer Yiannis Tsarouhis, who had also been one of the institution’s first teachers, summarizes this notion: “This school is like the army. Everybody has spent some time there, either as a student or as a teacher⁶.” Taking all the above into account, it becomes obvious that it would be impossible to investigate film education in Greece without examining the history of this specific establishment.

A basic parameter that characterizes current academic research in Film Studies is the quest for substantial evidence. Since the epistemology of modern historic and social sciences became more influential in the discipline⁷, the need for sufficient and justifiable confirmation of each argument has been regarded as the essential canon. But how could this be realized in the case of my PhD thesis on film education in Greece? The issue’s intertemporal disregard by scholars, seemed to lower any expectations of producing adequate elements. As for the related academic bibliographical references, it came as no surprise that they proved to be extremely limited⁸. For these reasons, the need to look for information in previously unexplored areas became apparent during my research from early on.

The most scientifically reliable survey on the school came from Vassilis Rafailidis. A well known writer and film critic, Rafailidis originally studied and then became a teacher in Stavrakos Film School for more than 20 years. In his effort to recount the institute’s evolution, instead of relying solely on his personal recollection, he came up with the idea of using data from its archives. Having free access to them as a member of the faculty, he was able to present figures and charts showing the course of student - attendance for every year and each department. He proceeded by conducting a statistical analysis, concerning various parameters⁹. His work, although not produced within a strict academic context, served as a major guideline for my study’s methodology, due to its innovative approach to the topic. Rafailidis’s research focused on the period from the beginnings of the school’s operation, until 1975. There arose thus the possibility to pursue a similar approach for the subsequent period, whilst attempting at the same time to widen and elaborate it furthermore, through the gathering of more analytical data from primary sources. For that reason though, I needed first and foremost to gain access to the archival material itself.

The archives have been well-preserved by the founder’s family as a private collection, and are kept partially at the school’s head office and at Stavrakos’s own house. It should be noted here that since Rafailidis’s study, this material had not been examined again. Fortunately, the school’s current administration was eager to collaborate in order to unravel still unknown facts about the history of the institution,

stemming from its large amount of documents. I was allowed to gather and analyze all the related archives that I requested. Stavrakos proved to be a scholastic accumulator of reports and official correspondence, organizing them into different files, according to item and chronology. The main body of the Hellenic Film and TV School archives comprises analytical student catalogues for each year and department, their ratings on every taught lesson and information regarding their graduation film - projects. There are also notes from the program of study and extended CV of numerous members from the institution's teaching personnel.

In addition to that, I found out that each private film school had been obliged to send detailed information about its students, the faculty and a variety of other issues to a special agency at the Ministry of Culture, which was responsible for the inspection of their own operation. This agency, still in action today, has also managed to collect archival material concerning every institution, among which the one about the Hellenic Cinema and TV School is the most extensive. It consists of several volumes of files and reports, dating from the late 1960's until the mid - 2000's. Arranging my access to the Ministry's archives proved to be a rather simple procedure, since the Greek legislation on the management of archival material has been recently changed, providing the opportunity for researchers – as well as any other citizen who has an interest - to overview documents and data from the public sector¹⁰. Even though the Ministry's archives were not as complete as their counterparts in Stavrakos School, they nevertheless enabled me to crosscheck the validity of information or supplement the initial data, since the research showed that in many cases the same document was printed out twice and a copy was kept in each archive.

In my attempt to come up with valuable conclusions based on tangible evidence, I conducted a process of organizing and analyzing the data that originates on Rafailidis's paradigm, yet develops itself in a more sophisticated manner, through the usage of multiple parameters. I've managed to gather, verify and record the total amount of students throughout the period from 1975 to 1990, for all the departments of the school (directing, cinematography, acting, scenography and movie projection operators), separately for each class of the 3 academic years, which was the duration of the complete studies. The principal findings of this procedure showed a steady increase in the overall number of students. In that way the research benefited from important quantitative data that bear witness to the school's further development through the years, and the resonance that it earned amongst the young filmmakers, as well as the professionals of the audiovisual sector during that period.

On some occasions, the extended and itemized processing of archives has also facilitated the determination of qualitative factors which were responsible for a number of changes that the institution witnessed within this particular era. For example, the gradual reduction in student attendance that was observed in the department of movie projection operators in the '80's - which finally led to its suspension a few years later – proved to be closely related to technological alterations that were taking place in that The fact that steadily throughout the period, the percentage of students who dropped out during the course of their studies diminished, pointed at new directions of inquiry, such as the institutional developments that occurred and had an impact on the status of the school.

Apart from the afore-mentioned findings, I discovered a superabundance of documents from the institution's communication with the Ministry of Culture that dealt mostly with administrative, financial and bureaucratic matters. From these, I was able to acquire more significant information coming from formal sources over previously unobserved aspects of film education in Greece. For instance, I indicated documents that confirm the Ministry's decision during the mid - 80's, to financially support the school's graduation movie - projects, by paying for a part of their film stock. Additionally, material from the same period confirms the existence of an intense dispute as to whether the institute should be granted to the State, becoming in that way the country's official film academy. Furthermore, there are plenty of files from the correspondence between the school and the Ministry of Defense, mainly concentrating on cases of students that needed to be re - examined as to whether they were entitled or not to study at the institution¹¹.

Being able to access and analyze the archives, offered me a unique opportunity to combine a variety of data. The comparison of references from biographies and memoirs with the related archival material, has led to a fruitful conjunction and complementarity between sources of a subjective nature and those of an official form. The presence of the latter has proved especially vital in the effort to equip my study with a solid basis of confirmed information and elements that had not been previously examined.

Biography

Born in 1979. BSc in Psychology (University of Athens, 2003). Diploma in Film Directing (Hellenic Cinema and TV School «L. Stavrakos», 2007), followed by a Master's degree in History and Theory of Cinema (University of Crete, 2010). He is currently writing his dissertation on Film Education in Greece (University of Crete, 2010-2015). His PhD research was awarded a scholarship from the Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation.

He has worked as assistant director, editor, cinematographer and producer's assistant in various film and TV productions. In 2007 he directed the documentary: *Dead End-Stop: H.M. Esfigmenou* and in 2009 the short film *The room*, which was selected at the Short Film Festival of Drama. From 2009 - 2011, he participated as a filmmaker/trainer

in the educational program «Video Museums», conducted in public high schools of Athens.

Papers for Conferences

- "The Institutional Framework of the Audiovisual Education in Greece," in the Proceedings of the 1st International Conference of the Hellenic Film Academy: The Importance of Audiovisual Education, 19-20/11/2011, Athens, Greece.

- «The Relationship between School and the Education of Film Professionals», at the Meeting for Public Education and Film Training, organized by the 2nd experimental Lyceum of Athens, 5-6/ 4/ 2014, Athens, Greece, (forthcoming).

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2. CILECT, *La X^e Rencontre Internationale des Écoles de Cinéma et de Télévision*, (Bulletin d'informations no.5), Vienna, CILECT, May 1963.
3. Grigoriou Grigoris, *Μνήμες σε Ασπρο και σε Μαύρο (Memories in Black and White)*, Athens, Aigokeros, vol. 1, 1988 and vol. 2, 1996.
4. Mikelides Ninos Fenek, "Brève histoire du Cinéma Grec (1906-1966)", M. Démopoulos (dir.), *Le Cinéma Grec*, Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou, coll. "cinéma pluriel", 1995, p. 43-64.
5. Rafaildis Vassilis, *Ένα τέταρτο του αιώνα κινηματογραφικής παιδείας στην Ελλάδα, (A quarter of a century's film education in Greece)*, Athens, Stavrakos Film School, 1975.
6. Rose Steve, "Attenberg, Dogtooth and the Weird Wave of Greek Cinema", *The Guardian*, 26 August 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/aug/27/attenberg-dogtooth-greece-cinema> (accessed 10 September 2014).
7. Schuster Melvin, *The contemporary Greek Cinema*, London, Scarecrow, 1979.
8. Stavakros M, *Ακολουθώντας το δρόμο του φεγγαριού (Following the moon path)*, Athens, Aigokeros, 1999.
9. "School of Film Studies - Fine Arts, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki" <http://www.film.auth.gr/en> (accessed 10 September 2014).
10. "Για την περαιτέρω χρήση πληροφοριών του δημοσίου τομέα και τη ρύθμιση θεμάτων αρμοδιότητας Υπουργείου Εσωτερικών, Δημόσιας Διοίκησης και Αποκέντρωσης". Αθήνα. (ΦΕΚ 57/ 15.3.2006). (Law 3448/2006)

Notes

¹ See further information on the official web site of the department: “School of Film Studies - Fine Arts, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki”, <http://www.film.auth.gr/en> (accessed 10 September 2014).

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² For more information on the post - World War II prosperity of Greek cinema, see: Mikelides N.F., “Brève histoire du Cinéma Grec (1906-1966)”, M. Démopoulos (dir.), *Le Cinéma Grec*, Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou, coll. “cinéma/pluriel”, 1995, p. 43-64.

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³ Melvin Schuster, *The contemporary Greek Cinema*, London, Scarecrow, 1979, 360 p.

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⁴ Cilect, “Etablissements adherant au Centre”, *La X^e Rencontre Internationale des Écoles de Cinéma et de Télévision*, (Bulletin d’informations no.5), Vienne, Cilect, Mai 1963, p. 6 - 12.

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⁵ Among its recent graduates, we can distinguish Yiorgos Lanthimos, considered as one of the most prominent directors of contemporary Greek cinema: Rose S., “*Attenberg*, *Dogtooth* and the Weird Wave of Greek Cinema”, *The Guardian*, 26 August 2011 <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/aug/27/attenberg-dogtooth-greece-cinema> (accessed 10 September 2014).

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⁶ M. Stavrakos M., *Ακολουθώντας το δρόμο του φεγγαριού (Following the moon path)*, Athens, Aigokeros, 1999, p. 62.

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⁷ One of the most representative works in that direction was: Allen R. & Gomery D., *Film History: Theory and Practice*, Boston, McGraw-Hill, 1985, 248 p.

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⁸ Stavrakos himself had written his memoirs of the school’s first decade of life. These memoirs were to be published soon after his death, by his wife and co-director of the school: (el) Stavrakos M., *Ακολουθώντας το δρόμο του φεγγαριού (Following the moon path)*, op.cit., 222 p. In addition, Grigoris Grigoriou, one of the leading Greek directors of the 50’s and 60’s had also left appreciable information about the school’s early period in his own autobiography. Grigoriou was the main partner of Stavrakos in his effort to organize and establish his institute. He was responsible for redacting the school’s initial curriculum. All related references can be found in his double - volume work: (el) Grigoriou G., *Μνήμες σε Ασπρο και σε Μαύρο (Memories in Black and White)*, Athens, Aigokeros, V. 1 , 1988, 173 p. and V. 2, 1996, 141 p.

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⁹ Vassilis Rafailidis, Ένα τέταρτο του αιώνα κινηματογραφικής παιδείας στην Ελλάδα, (A quarter of a century’s film education in Greece), Athens, Stavrakos Film School, 1975, p. 91.

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¹⁰ The relating law enacted in 2006: (Law 3448/2006) - Νόμος 3448/2006 “Για την περαιτέρω χρήση πληροφοριών του δημοσίου τομέα και τη ρύθμιση θεμάτων αρμοδιότητας Υπουργείου Εσωτερικών, Δημόσιας Διοίκησης και Αποκέντρωσης”. Αθήνα, (ΦΕΚ 57/ 15.3.2006). In order to be allowed to see the material, it is first necessary though to fill up an official form. Furthermore I was asked to bring a confirmation letter from the educational institution for which I conducted my research (University of Crete), stating the purposes of my study and the need for examining the specific data.

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¹¹ Military service continues to be compulsory in Greece. Stavrakos Film School was one of the few private institutions that were allowed to provide a deferment to their male students, for the three years that the studies lasted.

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