

His glasses
 are like two tiny round windows
 opening in the sea. A white sail boat
 passes by, unseen in the fog. Look,
 on the mole
 a small clown with a tiny rubber ball
 on his nose
 and two tear drops painted on his cheeks.
 Do you see him?
 Why are you crying? I told you this to make you laugh.

Athens, January 26, 1988

Between Modernism and the Avant-garde: Alternative Greek Literature in the 1960s

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the debates on modernism in Greek literary criticism of the 1960s. It concentrates mainly upon the impact of these debates on the editorial policy of the journal *Πάλι*, a small press journal of the Greek avant-garde, published in Athens in 1964. The discussion of the implications of these debates in the Greek 1960s takes into consideration the particular features of that era in Greece, in terms of its significance to the development (either continuation, culmination or decline) of Greek and Western modernism. In the light of the international developments of modernism, I examine certain texts of Greek criticism, most indicative of the concerns of this era, in relation to modernism. My intention is to highlight first the implications in the promotion and dispute of modernist writing, and second, the particular relations between the debates for and against modernism. I intend to prove that the challenges of the Greek modernism of the 1960s bear the seeds of a new, post-1960s, cultural epoch, mainly epitomized in the discourses of the new avant-garde and/or postmodernism.

I. MODERNISMS AND BEYOND: MYTHOLOGIES OF DEATH

Up to the 1960s the turning point in the development of the Greek avant-garde and modernist aesthetics coincide with the transformations within east and west modernisms and avant-gardes. This coincidence would highlight some significant instances of the debates about the "end of the avant-garde" along with the "revival of avant-gardism" in the 1960s. From its first appearance in the cultural scene of the early twentieth century, the Western avant-garde immediately differentiated itself from modernism. This oppositional avant-gardist stance to modernism resulted in the rejection of the immediate past as authoritarian and oppressive. Instead, the avant-gardist trends brought to light a new body of texts which was marginalized by the literary and artistic establishment. However, avant-gardism was mainly oriented towards the future. Its idealistic futurism indicates a dynamic attitude towards both, the past and the present, and reveals its links with extreme political movements.

Although avant-gardist political dissent had aesthetic origins and concerns, avant-gardism is directed against bourgeois ideology. Indeed, the environment that nourished avant-garde movements was the cosmopolitan metropolis whose social construction was mainly bourgeois. The bourgeoisie represented for avant-gardist artists and writers a hostile, uninterested and uncivilized audience, which only considered art as of high value commercially. Avant-garde aspired to transfer the aesthetic concerns from the individual to the collective sphere, while reintegrating art into praxis.

The various definitions of the avant-garde depend on the geographical and chronological circumstances of their different applications. Notably, Raymond Williams (1989:38) states that after 1945 the internationalist features of avant-gardism were expanded and transformed, since the metropolitan centers, where the avant-gardist trends originated, underwent a process of change. In the post-war years the notion of the metropolis was widened to encompass the technically advanced and dominant cultural economies which transmitted their messages to their suburbs. These messages were modified under the metropolitan influence according to the time of their reception.

The "old" or "historical avant-garde", which was based on the above principles and became active in the first decade of the twen-

tieth century, had already formed its identity and reached its peak by the end of the 1920s. In the next few decades, the policies of the historical avant-garde went through a number of transformations related to the main concerns of avant-garde writers and artists in a changing cultural and political context. In the 1930s, although the avant-garde was reflecting nostalgically on its youthful past, it still inspired new groups politically and socially revolutionary writers and artists.¹

At the same time, surrealism, which was still considerably influential, started to spread beyond the countries where it first appeared. Groups and reviews with surrealist affiliations appeared in Greece, Sweden and Czechoslovakia. In parallel, some more traditional trends combined with the emerging nationalist claims entered the cultural scene. The rise of fascism in Germany, although at first connected with expressionism, favored an art totally committed to nationalistic principles. A similar thing happened with Italian Futurism. In the Soviet Union, while being at first definitely attached to the revolution, avant-garde was finally suppressed for the sake of socialist realism. This turn to realism affected the already disillusioned historical avant-garde. The encounter of surrealism with realism was evident in movements like "the Oxford poets" in England, "new realism" in France, and the work of Federico Garcia Lorca, Bertolt Brecht, and Pablo Picasso.

During the Second World War, Surrealism enriched the poetry of resistance, which was in need of oblique expression. In addition, it was transplanted to the United States and Latin America by its major representatives who fled there from Europe. After 1945, avant-garde was confronted with Italian neo-realism and French existentialism. At the same time, the avant-garde started to become historicized. In 1945 Maurice Nadeau wrote his *History of Surrealism*, while in 1947 an International Surrealist Exhibition took place in Paris. In the 1940s and 1950s, surrealism regained its power by the return to France of the surrealists who had emigrated to the United States. Up to the 1960s new journals were established, such as *Medium* and *Le surrealisme, Même*. Surrealist practices also affected other trends and writers, such as the group of Vienna, "KZ" literature, the ideology of negritude, the poetry of Paul Celan, and the works of Aime Cezare, Octavio Paz, Gabriel Garcia Marques or Juan Rulfo².

The manifestation of avant-gardist trends in the post-war era was not identical, however, in every cultural milieu. The social and cultural environment of the countries that nourished avant-gardist movements exerted an influence on the aims and means of those movements. One can thus notice an apparently belated appearance of avant-gardist in countries other than Western Europe, the United States or the former Soviet Union. Avant-gardist trends of single and peculiar character are evident in countries such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, Spain and Latin America – where the appearance of the avant-garde coincided with the first attempts at modernization.³

The historical revolutionary trends of the early twentieth century, such as Dada and Surrealism, underwent significant changes in the post-war era as a result of the social and political innovations affecting culture. These changes brought about certain reservations in the attitudes of scholars towards the success of avant-gardist projects in the post-war era. The development of post-war avant-garde was examined in relation to ideology, institutionality of art, modernity, and philosophy.

First of all, it was claimed that the term “avant-garde” and its contemporary applications were ideological issues *par excellence* for experimental art submitted to the international bourgeoisie, which commercialized it and transmitted it via the mass media.⁴ As a consequence of the transformations in the aims and function of revolutionary art, the post-war avant-garde institutionalized art, turned it into a commodity and thus erased any hope that the attack against art as an institution would be accomplished. On the other hand, the loss of the agonistic character of avant-garde art in the post-war era was considered to be a result of the attenuation of those radical ideologies and trends, such as Marxism and psychoanalysis, which supported the historical avant-garde. This disenchantment with the major radical ideologies, along with the exhaustion of pre-war social conflicts deprived the post-war avant-garde of its most efficient weapons (Jameson 1984:187).

The 1960s was an era during which Europe adopted an ambivalent attitude towards the avant-garde: experimental art was condemned for its absorption by the “cultural” industry, while at the same time, the death of art was declared and a cultural revolu-

tion was called for. In the United States, contemporary modernity was debated in the context of the newly emerged term “postmodernism”. On the other hand, the decline of colonialism highlighted the importance of the Second and Third World, which were more politically active. The appearance of these new forces created the necessity for a new collective identity and a political discourse concerning the claiming of power. In his examination of the political and cultural aspects of the 1960, Frederic Jameson is unsurprisingly cautious when discussing the avant-garde. In particular, he asserts that high modernism, which was still prevalent despite the avant-gardist attacks against it, had not yet managed to totally autonomize art. Art, for Jameson, still existed in a state of semi-autonomy, committed to the metaphysical tendency of desiring the ghost of its own signified.

As a result of the disputed success of radical artistic plans, avant-garde must be viewed in a new perspective. Robert Dunn, for example, claims that the 1960s brought the end of the “aesthetic” and the beginning of the “cultural” avant-garde.⁵ The former is artistic and homogeneous, while the latter is heterogeneous and has social and cultural origins. Cultural avant-garde challenges the autonomy of art, because it seizes everyday life and aestheticizes society. More than that, it emphasizes the need to democratize the distribution of meaning, by motivating the discourse of new ethnic and racial cultural forces with new anti-hegemonic conceptions of culture, politics and knowledge.

Miklos Szabolcsi (1971:65-70) distinguishes four types of “neo-avant-garde” which emerged in the 1960s: first, the “technocratic” avant-garde, cultivated by Jean Crayol, Samuel Beckett, or the French *nouveau roman* and the group of *Tel Quel*; second, the anarchic revolt of expressionist and dadaist origins, mainly represented by the Beat poets; third, the avant-garde inspired by (neo) Marxism and mainly practiced by the Italian “neo-avant-gardists” between 1960 and 1963. Presenting the fourth kind of post-war avant-gardism, Szabolcsi points to the radical trends of the 1960s in Eastern Europe, which incorporate “without discrimination the real and the sham of the old and the new avant-garde” (70).

Modernism, on the other hand, is included in the above debates, although it seemingly rests on its laurels. Having reached the ex-

treme point of its renowned subjectivity, autonomy, independence, irony and preoccupation with form, it had already been established as a canon. Furthermore, it was incorporated into the conservative ideology of the 1950s and often subsided the cultural and political propaganda of cold-war anti-communism. In these circumstances, many of the anti-conservative scholars of modernism, would analyze the signs of its decline, which, until then, could only be pronounced by modernism itself against more traditional artistic forms. Peter Bürger, who introduced the concept of modernism as an institution inherent of the irrational character of religion being transformed to a new, autonomous aesthetic realm, connects closely the avant-garde with modernism, and condemns the former to failure and the later to a process of decline, unless it is dialectically continued in a "re-semanticization" of art and the abolition of its infatuation with one material (modernism) or the free availability of materials (postmodernism) (Bürger 1992:47).

Opposing avant-garde to the canonized modernism – which was even incorporated into the conservative ideology of the 1950s and often supported the cultural and political propaganda of cold war years (Huyssen 1986:60) – Andrew Benjamin (1991:131-41) emphasizes the pluralism and cosmopolitanism of the avant-garde, which found unity in diversity and acquired a political stance by distinguishing itself from liberalism and promoting the reconciliation of diverse cultural forces. This quality of difference links the avant-garde with postmodernism. The trend of American postmodernism during the 1960s was, according to Jürgen Donnerstag (1991:45), parallel to the European neo-avant-garde, since it negated the traditional autonomy of modernism, "democratized" art, and joined the social and political turmoil of the era through its leftist and utopian concerns. Investigating the nature of American post-modernism, Andreas Huyssen (1986:164-67) considered its first appearance, which spanned between the mid-1950s and the 1960s, as a revolt against modernist autonomy and eclecticism. By the end of this clearly avant-garde stage, the post-modernist culture that followed became less and less subversive and finally turned to scepticism rather than revolution. According to Nicholas Zurbrugg (1986:69), post-modernity incorporated the "hybrid" phase of the avant-garde, during which

experiments matured and recognized their debts to the previous phases.

The above debates are indicative of the turning point in modernist aesthetics during the decade of 1960s. Being already established in the post-war scene, modernism was gradually revealing its most conservative aspects. The violent although short reaction against these aspects was accumulated in the various revolutionary movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Prophesied to be the last appearance of the twentieth century avant-garde (TLS 1964), the 1960s turmoil intensified the political nature of anti-conservative culture by emphasizing its democratic, pluralistic, popular and hybridic character. Once more a new debate on decadence was added to the previous modernist ones by also opening a late capitalist sphere to the contradictions of postmodernism.

II. THE GREEK SCENE: THE PREDICAMENT OF THE AVANT-GARDE

The reception of twentieth century avant-gardist trends in Greece was determined by the need to adjust these trends to the principles of the indigenous literary tradition. Greek intellectuals introduced Dada, Futurism and Surrealism to their audience at approximately the same time as these trends emerged abroad. As early as 1909, when Marinetti's manifesto on Futurism was first published in Italy, Futurism was also presented in Greek newspapers in Istanbul, Smyrna and Alexandria⁶.

Surrealism also appeared considerably early in Greece⁷. In 1925 it had already been presented by Kostis Palamas (1925:313), the most influential critic of that time. In 1929 Kleon Paraschos, a critic of the generation of the '20s – the generation that introduced "pure poetry" in Greece – also presented the newly emerged surrealism in *Nέα Εστία* (1933:118). In the same year Yiorgos Theotokas in *Ελεύθερο Πνεύμα*, the manifesto of the generation of the 1930s, described the "prerequisites of a real avant-garde" (1929:57-74), a term which reflected the liberal cosmopolitanism of Greek modernism rather than the avant-garde. *Ta Nέα Γράμματα*, the journal that introduced modern poetry in the 1930s, promoted the work of Greek surrealism, without however, directly supporting the movement. Although surrealists such as Andreas Embirikos and Odysseas Elytis belonged to this generation, the

main representatives of the 1930s never accepted surrealist practices.⁸

Being in contact with European modernism, the generation of the 1930s promoted the autonomy of literature although still motivated by the quest for "Greekness".⁹ The avant-garde was only marginally involved in the conflict between modernity and tradition, a conflict which was in fact concerned not only with aesthetics, but also with more general issues such as national identity and language.¹⁰ Notably, both the restricted and indecisive attitude of Greek modernism and traditionalism, which tended towards the nationalization of the arts, hindered the challenge of the autonomy of literature, and, as a result, did not provide the necessary circumstances for the development of an avant-garde.

In the post-war years surrealism was used, mainly by critics of the generation of the 1930s, to confront more conservative aesthetics.¹¹ What had actually happened, however, was that established criticism had incorporated surrealism into modern Greek literature by relating it to the Greek tradition. This more traditional attitude¹² was opposed to cosmopolitanism, the main feature of the avant-garde. The existence of avant-garde trends was only marginally apparent in Greece until the 1930s, a decade when the avant-garde began to attract the attention of authors and editors. Along with *Ta Nέα Γράμματα*, other journals promoting avant-garde trends – without being totally committed to them – were *To Τρίτο Μάτι*, and *Μακεδονικές Ημέρες*, first published in the 1930s, *Κοχλίας*, published in 1945, as well as *Τετράδιο* and *Πρώτηγλη* in 1945 and 1959 respectively.

It seems that surrealism – the most pre-eminent trend of the Greek avant-garde – was clearly defined in the mind of Greek intellectuals as an adversary movement, which could never be included in the literary canon¹³. As such, the Greek version of surrealism was too limited and marginal to constitute a real danger to canonical literature¹⁴. It included a corpus of texts which would be both easily criticized as anti-Greek and opposed by other texts, more explicit and intelligible. Moreover, Greek criticism and literature in the post-war years were related to politics in an explicit way (poetry of defeat, right and left-wing criticism, prose of the war experience). This direct link of politics with aesthetics was an obstacle to a more

complex politicalization of literature advocated in the projects of the avant-garde.¹⁵

The concept of literary autonomy, which determined the western modernist canon, was hardly in use by Greek criticism until the 1960s, as I will prove later. The conflict between modernism and the avant-garde was postponed for the decade of the 1960s, when the Nobel Prize was given to George Seferis, the most prominent representative of the 1930s, and Greek modernism became widely recognised. At the same time, the publication of *Πάλη* brought to light some suppressed avant-garde forces, together with the promotion of other trends which bore the seed of a new cultural epoch, mainly epitomized in the discourses of the new avant-garde.

III THE NARRATIVE OF DECLINE: MODERNISM, ANTI-MODERNISM, AND THE CRITICISM OF SEFERIS

The beginning of the 1960s can be considered as the culmination point of Greek literary modernity. Apart from Seferis' international recognition, the era was marked by the publication of Elytis' epic anti-war poem *Το Άξιον Εστί* (1959), as well as the appearance of two major novels, such as N. Petzikis' *Τα μυθιστόρημα της Κυρίας Έρσης* (1966) and Stratis Tsirkas' *Ακυβέρνητες Πολιτείες* (1960-65). The generation of the 1930s, of which Seferis was the main representative, still held in the 1960s the scepter of literary criticism, although some alternative voices disturbed the monopoly of its aesthetics. A collective volume which summarized the main critical trends of that era was *Για το Σεφέρη* (1961), with the significant subtitle "*Τμητικό αφιέρωμα στα τριάντα χρόνια της Στροφής*". The determination of the thirty years period between 1931 and 1961, during which Greek modernism was developed, indicates the ultimate confirmation of the modern canon including Seferis' original work and its critical interpretations. Representatives of all the major critical trends include members of the older and younger generation of left-wing critics, such as Markos Avgeris, Nikiforos Vretakos and Stratis Tsirkas, writers of the 1930s, such as D.I. Antoniou, T. Papatzonis, N. Petzikis, critics of the same generation, namely Zissimos Loretzatos, Y. Katsimpalis, and K. Dimaras, as well as their younger

disciples Linos Politis, Alexandros Argiriou, G. Savidis, Takis Sinopoulos, Y. Themelis, and Yiannis Dallas.¹⁶

The volume *Για το Σεφέρη* brought to light a variety of modern or anti-modern critical approaches to Seferis' poetry, also resolving certain hermeneutical problems. An analysis of these critical texts will highlight the main trends in Greek critical approaches to modern literature in the early 1960s to which the commentaries of *Πάλι* were addressed. Yiorgos Themelis' impressionistic criticism¹⁷ in "Αγγελικό και μαύρο φως" (Zenakos 1961:66-85) ventured to highlight the Greekness of Seferis' work, which, for him, "internalized" ("εσωτερικεύσε") the Greek world. Themelis based his argument on an idiosyncratic definition of modernism – intensified by adjectives such as "national individuality" and "sefericity" ("σεφερικότητα"). The main element of Seferis' poetic mythology is, according to Themelis, the dialectical conjunction of darkness and light, metaphysical and physical, death and life.¹⁸ These oppositions constitute the very substance of the "Greek tragic".

As the origin of the "neohellenic tragic", Greek tragedy contains, for Themelis, both the Dionysian and Apollonian elements which coexist, despite the belief of many contemporary Greeks that the Dionysian can only be found in the foreign cultures of the "Super-northerners". Such an attitude can be attributed to the negligence of its supporters towards classic tradition. In Themelis' words:

Κάποιοι μάλιστα βλέπουν αυτό το φως από τη λαμπρή του επιφάνεια μόνο. Έχουμε, λέγε, άφθονο φως και μας χρειάζεται λίγο σκότος: να το δανειστούμε από τους βόρειους. Δεν υποπτεύονται τι μαυρίλα κρύται πίσω του. Δεν διάβασαν ποτέ τους, δεν ένοιωσαν, την Ελληνική Τραγωδία, που είναι σαν ένας διαθλαστικός καθρέφτης σκοτεινής ανταύγειας. Θέλουν ν' αλλάξουν δέρμα και να γίνουν Υπερβόρειοι. Δεν μπορούν, ως φαίνεται, να σηκώσουν τη δυσβάσταχτη και στέρη τραγικότητα της ελληνικής υπόστασης την επώδυνη αξιοπρέπειά της. Είμαστε, λένε, πολύ

λογικά Απολλώνιοι, σχεδόν κενοί καλλιτέχνες της ωραίας μορφής, μας λείπει το βάθος της ψυχής. Προτιμούν τον Σέξπηρ από τους τραγικούς (72).

It seems that, for Themelis, nothing distinguishes the modern Greek writers from their ancient predecessors. A particular feature of Ancient Greek tragedy (the combination of Apollonian and Dionysian) is therefore applied to contemporary Greek culture, people and geography in an indiscriminate and metaphysical way.

The dialectical oppositions continue in the combination of the angelic and the black. In Seferis' poetry, orthodox morality and aesthetics is combined with the contemporary loss of unity and ideals. According to Themelis, Seferis, like Orpheus, thirstily desires the dead Euridice, or the lost classical world. In his poetry the Greek landscape is replete with relics of a life *par excellence*. The once animate bodies, which resemble the marble princes of the fairy tales who wait for the water of immortality or the golden apple, have been incarnated to living statues, as if time had stopped. Seferis' nostalgia of the living dead, which represents the essence of the Greek tragic, is conveyed in his "consciousness of historicity", a gift capable of leading to the future Greek "miracle" of the dead heroes' reinstatement.¹⁹ By striving to reconcile the natural and the transcendental, the visible and the invisible, content and form, silence and sound, Seferis negates the synchronicity of space and retains the diachrony of time. He therefore demolishes dualities and aspires to a Greek utopic unity.

In his criticism Themelis traced the Hellenic origins of contemporary aesthetics. Since the major debates between tradition and modernity are conveyed in the Apollonian-Dionysian polarity, the coexistence of these elements in the "Greek tragic" enhanced Seferis' poetry by ascribing a universal quality to its meaning, incorporating North and South, foreign and indigenous, contemporary and archaic. Any attempt to escape the borders of the Hellenic is doomed in Themelis' criticism, since differentiation is imprisoned in an over-determining identification; the tradition, geography and transcendental essence of Hellenism is autonomous and self-contained since it combines the polarities of contemporary thought.

The next text, "Το χαμένο κέντρο" (Zenakos 1961:86-146),

written by Zisimos Loretzatos, also represents a Hellenocentric and introspective attitude.²⁰ Loretzatos begins by surveying the contemporary crisis of literature, which is gradually leading to its end. It is impossible to replenish the void left after literature's death. The alternative could only be found in traditional societies. Before the creation of the Greek state, the nation's indigenous art and literature was the one created by the people. Yet, from 1821 onwards Greek art shared the fate of the European one, where the gap between the artists and the people grew bigger, having already been opened during the Renaissance era. In order to trace the development of this gap Loretzatos ventures a diachronic exploration of the development of Greek poetry from 1821 until the emergence of George Seferis. Until 1927 poetry was considered to be an eternal and inaccessible quality whose existence was prolonged by demoticism. On the other hand, Greeks were victimized by Romantic classicism, which held that orthodoxy ruined ancient Greek glory. Cavafy was the first to exclude his poetry from such a debate. The second major reaction to the a-temporal and immortal quality of poetry came from Karyotakis, whose decadent poetics challenged the "healthy" physiology of Greek poetry and brought a rupture to its uneventful development. In 1935 the first response since Karyotakis was given by Seferis' *Μυθιστόρημα*, which marked the "turning point" during which Greek poetry started to search for an outlet. His poetry approached its peak, which was not destined to be transgressed, during its contact with Valéry's poetics. Having stated the landmarks of the crisis in Greek poetry, Loretzatos seeks a way for this crisis to be overcome. The only solution would be repentance ("μετά-νοια"), a total change of mind in order for poetry to regain its metaphysical function and recapture its "service" ("λειτουργία") by returning to the spiritual tradition of the East. Peculiarly, Greek Oriental orthodoxy can be the channel through which Greek culture will retrace its indigenous tradition which will distinguish it from the West.

Loretzatos formulates the narrative of the "lost centre" based on a variety of archetypal concepts and images. These images shape the Greek cultural universe in the aftermath of the great spiritual loss: that of indigenous tradition. Seferis' poetry holds a significant position in this universe, since it indicates the hard work

necessary to create his exemplary poetic texture. His poetry represents the irredeemable loss of the centre.

The contemporary crisis of poetry is represented by Loretzatos by the metaphor of chaos, whose meaning is, however, considerably transformed. Along with the element of disaster and erosion, usually applied to the concept of "chaos", the term also bears its ancient Greek meaning, which signifies the abyss gaping at the beginning of the world. Dissociated from its constitutive elements, European poetics traces back the matrix of all arts. The idea of the matrix accommodates the most significant concepts of Loretzatos' argument: it is the lost centre, the lost vision, the heavenly root, and the archetypal image or mother. It is the point towards which contemporary man should turn after being released from the bonds of rationalism. The era of crisis has crucially challenged the prison of rationalism, as evident in French surrealism, modernist poetics, and the conclusions emerging from the study of primitive traditions. It is then possible to create a certain aesthetics, based on the supernatural, the ancestral, the interest in eastern and archaic languages, pre-Socratic philosophy and Byzantine tradition.

The metaphor of the lost centre is exemplified in Loretzatos' account of his meeting with Seferis at the chapel of St. George at Kokkinaras, an area on the outskirts of Athens. Although they both want to enter the church, they cannot find the key to open the main door. They sit outside and Seferis remembers two tombs which used to be there. The description of the chapel's surroundings is crucial for the elaboration of Loretzatos' argument:

Μια μεγαλεπήβολη μικρή πολιτεία - τα Βουλευτικά - είχε οργανωθεί κατά το βοριά, και οι δρόμοι της τρέχανε, από δεξιά ή αριστερά, να ενωθούν με τους άλλους δρόμους, και οι άλλοι με τους άλλους, ως την άκρη του ορίζοντα, και από τα σύνορά μας ως την καμπυλότητα ολόκληρου του πλανήτη, σε ένα μεταδοτικό και αδυσώπητο σφιχταγκάλισμα που ολοένα συμπληρώνεται, τώρα, με την γρηγοράδα της πανδημίας ή όπως οι φωτιές στα μεγάλα δάση. [...] Τσιμέντο και ασφαλτός είχανε δώσει τα χέρια και καταργούσανε τα διάχωρα,

ξαπλώνοντας οριζόντια ή σκαρφαλώνοντας κατακόρυφα, επί παν το πρόσωπον της γης. Αυτή είναι η μοίρα της επιφάνειας, να αλλάζει πάντα, είτε στη στεριά είτε στη θάλασσα, και κανένας δεν παραπονήθηκε, ή δε θέλει να σταματήσει (δεν το μπορεί) τη φυσική φόρα της ζωής. (139-140)

The topography of St. George's surroundings is used as a metaphor of the lost centre. Athens has been extended so much that there is scarcely any difference between the actual city and its districts. Newly opened roads violated the natural growth of the forest. The expansion of artificial procedures over nature demolished the borders between neighborhoods, cities, districts and countries. On the other hand, the tombs, which only Seferis remembered, had disappeared, and nobody was there to open the chapel's door. A dramatic change – in quantity rather than in quality – had been inflicted upon the area of Athens. Yet, during the development of modern urban planning, the earth's spiritual and metaphysical axis was abandoned.²¹ As a result, the surface has reigned over the depth, the contemporary violated the eternal, the external exceeded the rules of the internal.

Loretzatos' argument regarding the painful loss of spiritual qualities coincided with the debate on decadence. The idea of decadence, which was as old as Plato's philosophy, was interlinked with the concept of temporality, newness and contemporaneity. "Degeneration" was experienced as early as Greek time was differentiated from Christian time (Calinescu 1987:153). The a-temporal and archetypal features of antiquity were therefore different from those of Christian eschatology. The latter was still prevalent in the modern era – which began with the Enlightenment – and was criticized by such nineteenth century movements as Romanticism and *Décadisme*.

The above account of the historical evolution of the concept of decadence is useful for the analysis of Loretzatos' critique of western modernity. His debate on decadence was based on a particular conjunction of Romantic Christianity and the Nietzschean notion of Greek culture.²² Schelling linked Christianity with Ancient Greek culture by establishing his Dionysian trinity of Zagreus, Bacchus

and Iacchus as the manifestations of unconsciousness, consciousness and the absolute spirit (Braeumer 1976:166). Romantic Christianization of Greek culture was further elaborated by Nietzsche who emphasized the happiness of the archetypal and joyful Greek.²³ Loretzatos' oppositions ostensibly occupy the horizontal and vertical axes of Christian and Greek time, respectively. For him the horizontal axis represents the metropolitan West. It is the presence and the change in diachrony. It is subjected to the metonymical process of modernity, the particular and the fragmentary. It is the nihilist "ακοσμία" (impropriety, lack of cosmos and decorum) of the surface, the meaningless articulation of formalist aesthetics. On the other hand, the ideal cultural revelation is developed in the axis of Greek time, which incorporates the centre, the matrix, and chaos as the origin of culture. The vertical axis of the archetypal and the atemporal incorporates the qualities of the East – or the western colonies. It is the absent synchronicity of unity and the tragic element of permanent tradition. It also incorporates the metaphysics of re-generation and depth, the metaphor of inner substance, the content and "cosmos". Yet, for Loretzatos, modern Greek culture belongs neither to classical Greek nor to modern time. Rather, it occupies the very point on which the two axes intersect. Although Greeks belong to contemporary time, and are subjected by the West to only a superficial modernization, their indigenous, Eastern tradition attracts them towards a permanent and archetypal synchronicity. The purely "central" place given by Loretzatos to the "turning point" of Greek culture initiated by Seferis is sufficient for the articulation of his aesthetics of decadence. The articulation of Seferis' Hellenic modernity constitutes Loretzatos' answer to the end of literature. Here again the Apollonian (as Hellenic and timeless) is imposed over the Dionysian (as western and modern): the former incorporates the latter at the point of their intersection by attracting it towards the centre of its utopia.

The texts in *Για το Σεφέρη* which represented to some extent the established literary criticism of the 1960s were written by K. Dimaras, T. Sinopoulos, A. Argiriou and G. Savidis, whose work proved essential – also in the decades that followed – for the promotion and influence of the modernity of the 1930s. Being favorably disposed towards Seferis' modernity, these texts distinguished his

poetry from Palamas' demoticist tradition, and created a new aesthetics based on his work.

K. Dimaras, first of all, evaluated Seferis' essays (Δοκίμεις, 1944) in relation to both his poetry and Palamas' critical work. According to Dimaras, Seferis as a critic was governed by his literary vision and technique. Compared to Palamas, Seferis was much more a poet than a thinker and a scholar. As was Solomos, he too was exclusively concerned with the language of poetry. Deriving from the emotive character of poetic language, Seferis' empiricist criticism is opposed to idealist criticism which considers poetry as an art of abstraction. His empiricist poetics give a combination of prosaic (popular and naive) rhythm and poetic technique (poetic images, ellipses, evocativeness) to his critical work, which promotes the "transformation of the word", and the "mystical society which links the poet with the critical discourse" (Zenakos 1961:65). Prosaic and poetic elements are linked in Seferis' methodology in such a way that criticism itself becomes a literary entity capable of identifying the naive with the purely artistic.

Takis Sinopoulos' text is an account of Greek poetics in the thirty years period after the publication of *Στροφή*. Sinopoulos investigates Seferis' poetry within the context of – and in contrast to – Palamas' demoticism on the one hand, and the contemporary avant-garde experiments on the other. He emphasizes that Seferis' relationship with surrealism was ambiguous: although the poet believed that surrealism could not be aesthetically judged unless it abandoned automatic writing, his own poetry since 1935 had often been considered as surrealist (Zenakos 1961:163). Seferis' poetry, however, is yet emphatically differentiated by Sinopoulos from both the formalist and symbolist canon:

...έχοντας φοιτήσει στα μεγάλα εργαστήρια και τις λεωφόρους του καιρού του προσπαθούσε να πειραματιστεί στον ελληνικό χώρο. Αγωνίζεται να σπάσει τα φράγματα μιας τελετουργικής φραστικής, που έγινε διαβρωτική σύμβαση ή μίας τελετουργικής φραστικής, που έγινε διαβρωτική σύμβαση ή μίας ψευδομουσικής ισχύος τύπου Χατζόπουλου και να φέρει στο φως τη στερεότητα της κλειστής ποιητικής ουσίας. (164)

Sinopoulos' account of the obsolete traditional poetics and pure subjectivism could be related to the Apollonian and Dionysian elements respectively, as analyzed in Themelis' text. In the context of the above movements Seferis suggests a new order of poetic discipline based, for Sinopoulos, on "long and harsh battles with language" (164). He does not invent a new vocabulary; rather, he organizes the already existent material, and capitalizes on the long literary tradition. This process results in the identification of thought and rhythm. Seferis' poetics do not rely on the "gift" of poetry as do other poets who employ "freedom" of expression in order to cover their unaccountability:

Χωρίς να αποτείνεται στο χάος μίας εσωτερικής πραγματικότητας, ανταποκρίνεται προς τις άλλες λέξεις του Σεφέρη δε βγαίνουν από μια βίαιη και απροσδόκητη σύγκρουση με τα πράγματα, όπως θα συνέβαινε π.χ. μ' έναν ρομαντικό ή έναν υπερρεαλιστή, περιέχουν όμως τη μοναδικότητα μιας εσωτερικής εμπειρίας [...]. Στο Σεφέρη η αξία της λέξης δεν επιχειρεί να καταστρέψει το λειτουργικό χαρακτήρα της γλώσσας ούτε να δημιουργήσει την τερατώδη γοητεία μιας έκρηξης. Πηγαίνει βαθύτερα... (165)

Seferis' concern to elaborate the links of his poetics with the Greek literary tradition is combined with – and motivated by – his desire to transform poetry into an act of morality and duty, and convert language into a means of educating and representing his own social class. Such a culturally and socially dutiful function of Seferis' poetry is promoted by Sinopoulos against the irresponsibly superficial Dionysian explosions of Romanticism and surrealism. Seferis' "purity" is opposed to the "alchemist research of the potential of language" and the disposition to search for "magical recipes" to which avant-gardists, surrealists, and, finally, Elytis devote themselves (170). For Sinopoulos, *Στροφή* cannot be challenged, even after 30 years, during which time the demand for "Greekness" was questioned, and the classicism of tradition was opposed; Seferis' book was still influential in the 1960s because no other poetics had been proposed or imposed.

As a representative of the post-war generation of modern Greek scholars and critics, Alexandros Argiriou introduced a new approach to Seferis' poetry which combined the Greek version of New Criticism with the historical interpretation of the texts themselves. Argiriou admitted that contemporary poetry had entered a new era: it had become "difficult", and complicated, making direct or indirect references to other texts. Criticism should follow this development by introducing a new method of interpreting the modern texts. This method would be based first, on actual elements of the modern text, and second on the critic's culture and sensibility. According to this method, Argiriou traced the motifs and formulas of *Κίχλη*. The most significant point of his text is his recognition that Seferis represented the canon of Greek poetry in the early 1960s (Zenakos 1961:259). The passage from Symbolism to Seferis' modernity, from the 1920s to the 1930s is summarized in the following reference to the stylistic differences between the two generations:

Γεννημένος στο έτος μηδέν του εικοστού αιώνα, ο Πώργος Σεφέρης βρέθηκε προετοιμασμένος στα ρεύματα της εποχής του. Και γράφοντας συνθετικά ποιήματα υπάκουσε στις αντιλήψεις των νέων καιρών. Έτσι ο μύθος της παλιάς σχολής γίνεται όραμα, η πλοκή ένας συνειρμός της μνήμης, η περιπέτεια μια κατάσταση ψυχική και η διάθεση μουσικός τόνος. Από τέτοιες στενές πύλες μπορούμε να περάσουμε στον εσωτερικό χώρο κάποιων πραγμάτων. (256).

By juxtaposing the points of difference between the old and the new, Sinopoulos transforms the external features of traditional poetics to textual ones. Investigating, on the other hand, the social aspects of Seferis' poetry, Argiriou emphasizes his "Greek perception of the world" as the aesthetics which prevented him from relying on mysticism. Argiriou's interpretation of such a perception is based on the notion of contemporaneity. Seferis' world was constituted mainly by the present and recent history, and further, by elements of Greek antiquity. The abstract qualities of "Byzantinism" were not compliant with the transparent and hu-

manistic character of his poetry.²⁴ Finally, Argiriou proposes that the "fragile and black light" analyzed by Themelis in length, constitutes the two different aspects of human existence.

G. Savidis, finally produced a *par excellence* example of New Criticism's practice of close reading. His text, with the title "Μία περιδιάβαση" and the subtitle "Σχόλια στο *Κύπρον ου μ' εθέσπισεν*", extensively analyzes a note given by Seferis as an explanation of the actual circumstances that inspired him to write the poem. Savidis' "Περιδιάβαση" is densely footnoted and frequently interrupted by quotes. Commenting on his method in a significant footnote, Savidis writes:

Πα τον τρόπο με τον οποίο ο Σεφέρης γράφει, διαβάζει και ακούει την ποίηση, πρβλ. ειδικότερα στο Γ 505 'την ποίηση από την τεχνική άποψη, θα την έλεγα "ο αρμονικός λόγος", τονίζοντας όσο μπορώ τη λέξη αρμονικός με την έννοια του σύνδεσμου, του ειρμού, της αντιστοιχίας, της αντίθεσης της μιας ιδέας με την άλλη, του ενός και του άλλου ήχου, της μιας και της άλλης εικόνας, της μιας και της άλλης συγκίνησης. Κάποτε μίλησα για ποιητικό αυτί. Εννοού το αυτί που μπορεί να ξεχωρίζει αυτά τα πράγματα'. Προσθέτω ότι ο πρώτος έλληνας κριτικός που εφάρμοσε μεθοδικά τούτο τον τρόπο είναι, απ' όσο γνωρίζω, ο κ. Κ. Θ. Δημαράς [...]. Φυσικά η όποια ανεπαρκής ή κακή χρήση της μεθόδου αυτής δε βαραίνει παρά εμένα (Ζενάκος 1961:314-15).

Dimaras' peculiar critical formalism and Seferis' empiricist attitude are presented by Savidis as the methodological paradigms of his own reading. Parallel to his relation with the Modern Greek scholars of the generation of the 1930s, Savidis presents Seferis' modernity as a tragic fluctuation between modern time and classical time. According to him, Seferis realizes that the present world is broken into pieces, sick and numbed, without any firm ground, indulging in the chaos of impressions (307). Yet, because Greece has not totally surrendered to "hyper-civilization" (note 2, "υπερπολιτισμός"), the original ancient world is still present in

contemporary poetry. The organic "mechanism" of the Homeric narrative and technique is followed by Seferis in *Κύπρον ου μ' εθέσπισεν*, where the poet identifies himself with Homer and reproduces the geography of the latter's long narratives. Seferis, according to Savidis, searches for the "closed" cities ("κλειστές πολιτείες") of Hellenism outside Greece whose purity and unity are contrasted to the "opened" cities ("πολιτείες που άνοιξαν") of modernity, being fragmented, globalized, and anti-traditional (308).

The texts of Themelis and Loretzatos were based on the analysis of the Dionysian and Apollonian polarity and most importantly, on the coexistence of these elements in chronological, geographical, metaphysical and political terms. A discussion of these elements in an aesthetic context was practiced by modernist inclined post-war criticism. Being favourable to the innovations brought to modern Greek literature, Dimaras, Sinopoulos, Argyriou and Savidis proposed Greek tradition as an alternative to modern dissolution. Greek modernity was, for them, composed collectively since each generation inherited the other, thus ensuring the continuity of Greek culture. Furthermore, the criticism in favor of modernity promoted the marginalization of the avant-garde, empirical criticism or close reading as the predominant critical method of analysing modern poetry and, last but not least, the acknowledgement of Seferis as the main figure in the formation of literary modernity, whose poetry expressed the nostalgia, anxiety and the potential of Greek culture. Notably, tradition and modernity, the Apollonian and Dionysian element, is recognized by these critics as coexisting within Seferis' modernist texts. In contrast to the anti-modern approaches we examined before, the two poles are now combined dialectically and conceived in aesthetic, rather than in historical or metaphysical, terms. The Apollonian and the Dionysian are now linked *inside* the modernist text, where prose and poetry coexist, while tradition and contemporaneity are coupled through literary language and style.

IV THE NARRATIVE OF BATTLE AND DEFEAT:

MODERNISM AND THE LEFT

The most apparent distinction between modern and political (and therefore formally conservative, since based on the theory of so-

cialist realism) poetry made by critics of the Left was inspired by the debate on decadence.²⁵ The critics of the Left had a relatively hostile attitude towards modern poetry, further authorized by Marxist criticism, whose debate on decadence was still high on the agenda in the early 1960s. The theory of artistic decadence as the inevitable conclusion of western bourgeois culture was articulated in Marxist aesthetics by G. Plekhanov. The "highbrow" decadent art, identified with modernism and the avant-garde, was for vulgarized Marxist criticism the reactionary choice of the artistic bourgeoisie. This theory, reinforced by Zhdanov, led to the doctrine of "socialist realism".²⁶ The negativity of modernism as a basic concept of conservative Marxist criticism has obviously influenced the Greek critics of the left.²⁷

Contrary to the anti-modern attitude of the old Left, there were other debates during the 1950s and 1960s within the ranks of left-wing criticism that indicated revised views towards modern literature, mainly expressed by the younger generation of Greek Marxist critics. Indicative of these debates is the criticism written about Stratis Tsirkas' trilogy *Ακυβέρνητες Πολιτείες*²⁸ and the discussion on the "poetry of defeat".

As Chrysa Prokopaki (1980) pointed out in the introduction to her collection of critical texts about Tsirkas' trilogy, the issues raised by *Ακυβέρνητες Πολιτείες* were dominant in the ideological concerns of the Greek Left during the 1960s. Although the Cold War had eased, the process of de-Stalinization was still too vulnerable to tolerate an open critique of the old order. Socialist realism, being the aesthetic expression of the Stalinist era, was still restraining the liberalization of left-wing cultural discourse. On the other hand, a new generation of Greek intellectuals emerged, associated with the Left and represented by the periodical *Επιθεώρηση Τέχνης*, such as Kostas Kouloufakos, Dimitris Raftopoulos, Giorgos Papaleonardos, and Nikos Siapkidis. Their main concern was to modernize the attitude of the Left towards literature and the arts, escape the clutches of socialist realism and introduce an impartial criticism of modern texts. Tsirkas' book provided the convenient subject-matter for their project for two reasons. It presented the psychological and historical adventures of a left-wing writer involved with the World War II resistance in the Middle East. Throughout his adventurous life the main character of Tsirkas' tril-

ogy realizes the relativism and imminent dissolution of his consciousness and ideology, judges his principles and criticizes the mechanisms of the Party. Further, the style of the book accorded with the standards of western modernism: the writing is experimental, the narrative is complex and the persons involved in it are given their own discourse. Referring, on the other hand, to the ideological adventures of an intellectual of the Left, *Ακυβέρνητες Πολιτείες* provided the basis for literary criticism to be transformed into a purely ideological conflict.

Dimitris Raftopoulos reviewed Tsirkas' first book, *Η Λέσχη* in *Επιθεώρηση Τέχνης*. Although his review was positive and promoted the innovatory elements of the novel, he nevertheless thought that these elements overshadowed the novel's style and plot. He argued:

Ο μύθος είναι ασύνδετος και κατακερματισμένος ... αριστοτεχνικά. Τα πρόσωπα μας γίνονται γνωστά εκνευριστικά αργά και αντίστροφα πρώτα από μέσα κι ύστερα απέξω, σε τομές. Ως εδώ έχουμε ένα είδος λογοτεχνικού κυβισμού, που δεν μας πείθει ότι έχει μεγάλες ελπίδες στην πεζογραφία.

[...] Τέτοιοι ενδιαφέροντες τύποι, τόσες πρωτότυπες ιδέες, τόση γνώση και καθαρότητα πνεύματος! Γιατί ενορχηστρώνονται έτσι, γιατί συμπυκνώνονται, γιατί συνωθούνται ως το αδιαχώρητο; (1961:361)

The weak points of Tsirkas' work mentioned above are also attributed by Raftopoulos to the writer's familiarity with the "fatigue of European culture" (28). Yet, his exhausted modernity challenges traditional literature, which suffers from "literaritis", verbalism, bliss, 'paleontology', gossiping and micro-politics" (29). In addition, Raftopoulos introduces the main characters of Tsirkas' trilogy, whose analysis will form the axis of the subsequent critical texts. The main hero, Manos Kaloyiannis, a disaffected humanist scholar, comes in conflict with the leadership of his Party, symbolized by the persona of "Ανθρωπάκι" (Little man), and resolves

his relations with the other members of his group. In 1963 Raftopoulos reviewed the second part of Tsirkas' trilogy, *Αριάγνη* in *Επιθεώρηση Τέχνης*. In this text he insists on Tsirkas' attempt to articulate the social consciousness of his main hero. To this venture he attributes the much more mature and innovatory narrative experiments of the novelist. He returns to the persons of the novel, whom he investigates more extensively. The portrait of the main hero, Manos Simonidis, represents for him the paradigm of the contemporary western intellectual:

Δεν φεύγει τις ευθύνες του σαν ανθρώπου, διανοούμενου και αγωνιστή, μόλο που οι συγκρούσεις γίνονται όλο και πιο βάνανυες και συγκεκριμένες. [...] χτυπιέται με πείσμα, αντιδραστικό, κομφορμιστικό που βρίσκει στους άλλους και στον εαυτό του. Η λέξη 'παλιό' ίσως εδώ να μην είναι στην θέση της. Για την ακρίβεια, ο αφηγητής της Αριάγνης έχει πολύ παλιό μέσα του. Έχει σα διανοούμενος βαθιά παιδεία, διαποτισμένη από το γνήσιο πνεύμα της δυτικής Αναγέννησης. Αν αυτή συγκροτεί τα θεμέλια της πνευματικότητάς του και ιδιαίτερα την κλασσική διαύγεια και τον ορθολογισμό του, η ευαισθησία του είναι θρεμμένη με μεγάλη αφομοιωτική ικανότητα κι από τον αγγλικό και γερμανικό ρομαντισμό και από τα νεώτερα πνευματικά-αισθητικά ρεύματα της ευρωπαϊκής αγωνίας ανάμεσα στην παρακμή και την επανάσταση (1963:217).

The young intellectual of the Left, with a long cultural tradition and an actively awakened consciousness is opposed to the "Minotaurs", the party leaders, considered to be self-centred dogmatic formalists, bureaucrats and conformists. As Tsirkas created this type of anti-conformist left-wing intellectual, he was considered to have produced a work of catharsis.

The answer to Raftopoulos' criticism was given by Markos Avgeris, an established critic of the Left, in the journal *Ελληνική Αριστερά* (1964). Avgeris admits from the beginning that his study

has primarily ideological motives, and Tsirkas' book is only used as an example. He blames Tsirkas for describing a world that cannot conceive the sublimity of history, and, being involved in subtle passions, is nihilist, deprived of bravery and indicative of bourgeois decadence. Tsirkas' aristocratic style and poetic verbalism underlines his links with modernity. Yet, his contents are a mixture of romantic and decadent themes and his technique is contrasted to the morality and health of socialist realism.

Based on this debate between Raftopoulos and Avgeris, Y. Kalioris' article, published in *Εποχές* (1964), undertakes a double demystification: the debunking of the old Stalinist ideology, and the disclosure of the ideological basis of the debate on Tsirkas. He states that Tsirkas' characters function as symbols of the old and the new Left. According to Kalioris, Avgeris' old "bureaucratic criticism" was proven to be inadequate for the evaluation of a novel which expresses a new era of leftist demystification. In addition, Tsirkas' aesthetics is closely interwoven with his ideology, since the omnipotent narrator is extinct. As for Manos, the main character of the novel:

...αν ο χαρακτήρας αυτός, καθόλου επίπεδος, πορεύεται με αντιφάσεις και σκαμπανεβάσματα, τότε δέσμιος μίας εσωστρέφειας, τότε απελευθερωμένος απ' αυτή, με οδυνηρά διακυμαινόμενη κατάσταση ψυχής, με ασύντακτη κάποτε συμπεριφορά, αλλά πάντα σε ένα συνεχή αγώνα να κερδίσει τον εαυτό του - όλα αυτά τον φέρνουν πολύ κοντά μας σ' οικεία ανθρώπινη και περίπτωση και αποσπούν την προσοχή μας (105).

Reinforcing Kalioris' argument Raftopoulos in his rejoinder (in issue 14 of *Επιθεώρηση Τέχνης*, 1964) extends the frame of the debate by identifying the novel's characters with real persons. He observes that the hero of *Αριάγνη* has been finally identified with Tsirkas himself, and now the author is the one who faces the danger of slander. Avgeris, on the other hand, represents for him the leftist establishment.

Evidently, the narrative and characters of Tsirkas' novel were used as the fictional background to the critical and ideological battle

within the ranks of the Left. The young and the old generation of left-wing critics anticipate that the new sections of the trilogy would inspire the outcome of their critical conflict. A similar identification also occurs in the debate on "the poetry of defeat", which also took place in *Επιθεώρηση Τέχνης*. Viron Leontaris' article "Η ποίηση της ήττας" (1963:106-107) summarizes the features of the "generation of defeat" – where he himself belongs – whose dreams of a socialist revolution expired after the Civil War. For Leontaris this poetry marks the end of the ideology of resistance. Ideology and poetry of defeat, interlinked in their disbelief in heroism and futurism, question the established aesthetics and political norms. The poetry of defeat is difficult, complex, prismatic and dense.²⁹ Tasos Vournas (1964), on the other hand, supporting the canonical poets of the Left, opposes the generation of defeat to the militant "humanistic poetry". Yerasimos Likiardopoulos (1964) and Tasos Livaditis (1966) join the discussion. The former claims that "poetry of defeat" continues the resistance by returning to symbolism, as well as introducing criticism and conflict. The latter proposes that the defeat is more psychological than ideological or military. The new generation of poets shares some of the principles of the New Left, whose emergence changed the ideological and aesthetic horizon of post-war Greece.

The critical approaches of literary modernity discussed above constructed their own aesthetics of modern literature based on Seferis' and Tsirkas' texts. In the realm of leftist criticism a similar, although less aesthetically oriented, approach foregrounds the dependence of modern aesthetics on modern Marxist ideology conveyed within the literary text.

V. THE EMERGENCE OF THE AVANT-GARDE

The publication of *Πάλι* had to confront both the challenge to the Western avant-garde during the 1960s and the mistrust of any existing avant-garde trend in Greece. Involved in the concerns of the 1960s with experimental art and literature, and acknowledging the principles of the historical avant-garde, the group of *Πάλι* undertook the task of reviewing the Greek surrealist and experimental trends.³⁰ In order to investigate its contribution to the Greek avant-garde I will indicate the characteristics of its political and artistic

radicalism, explore its connection with the avant-garde and examine the views of its contributors on Greek literary tradition.

a) Radicalism as an Avant-Garde Practice

At several points in the editorial of the journal the political and literary agenda of the group is related to the avant-garde. The author of the editorial, Yiorgos Makris, is known for his radical position, his activist life and his avant-garde literary and philosophical concerns.³¹ The mode and content of his preface follow a number of avant-garde ideological principles:

[...] ό, τι αρνιόμαστε να μην υπάρχει καν λόγος να κατονομαστούμε αρχής, εντοπίζοντας έτσι εκείνο που διάχυτα είναι 'εγκατεστημένο'... Το τετράδιο είναι ξένο προς κάθε πνεύμα συντήρησης

[...] Θέλουμε να λειτουργήσει 'Πάλι' οργανικά η ανακοίνωση, η διαμάχη και οι αντινομικές εκφράσεις

[...] Βλέπουμε δηλαδή το 'Πάλι' σαν ένα ξανάνοιγμα της αέναης δυνατότητας που συνιστά την ουσία κάθε αυθεντικής στιγμής στην σκέψη, στην τέχνη, όπως και στην ιστορία

[...] απόλυτη περιφρόνηση κάθε σχηματικού "esprit de serieux" και κάθε δογματισμού

[...] σειсмоγραφικά ευαίσθητο προς κάθε απελευθερωτικό μήνυμα, προερχόμενο από το ιστορικό όσο και από το πνευματικό πεδίο. (1, 1-2)

The preface reflects the negation of the oppressive tradition, either literary or not, and the combative character of this negation. It also emphasizes an optimistic faith in the future, the wish to escape from dogmatism and an interest in political and cultural radical movements. The preface, with its uncompromising character, acquires the form of an avant-garde manifesto, which emphasises the need to oppose the restrictive establishment. It also

highlights the interest of writers and artists in both politics and history, as well as their involvement in revolutionary action against conservatism. Nevertheless, it does not take a direct political position.³²

The political attitude of the contributors to *Πάλι* is explicitly stated in Nanos Valaoritis' comment "Τύρω από την έκδοση του *Πάλι*" (4, 77-78) where cultural events are considered as functioning in parallel with political ones. Another aspect of the radical concerns of *Πάλι* is the fact that its publication and circulation was intended as a reaction against the sublimation of the Greek past. The subversion is evident in Valaoritis' comment "Το μαρμαρωμένο βασίλειο ή το άλλο άκρο" in which Greece is presented as an "enchanted" or "marble kingdom" (5, 92-93) which has sunk into a painful silence and has to be eventually awakened.

Some other texts, also indicative of the periodical's radical political and artistic positions, are, for example, the essays "Ζεϊμπέκικο" by Kostas Tachtsis (2-3, 85-90) and "40 χρόνια ελληνικού κινηματογράφου" by Giorgos Maris (2-3, 91-98), the preface to Tristan Tzara's "Διάλεξη για το Dada" by Nikos Steryiou (2-3, 99-104), Leon Trotsky's "Φουτουρισμός" (4, 69-74) and the criticism of Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* by Jorge Semproun (4, 75-77).³³

Aspects of avant-gardism can be traced first in K. Tachtsis' "Ζεϊμπέκικο". This essay presents the history of the music of "zeimpekiko" in a perspective which does not focus on the quest of its "Greekness" as a measure of value. On the contrary, as emphasized in the first and last paragraph of the essay, Tachtsis' study of "zeimpekiko" is based on aesthetic principles:

Αν έχω κάποια αρμοδιότητα είναι στο γενικότερο πεδίο της αισθητικής [...] Αλλά είναι λίγο αρμόδιος να κρίνω το αισθητικό αποτέλεσμα (2-3, 90).

These principles are applied to a musical form whose development is associated with the class conflict. Namely, "zeimpekiko" was produced and consumed by the proletariat rather than the bourgeoisie. Thus, the official study of "zeimpekiko" represents the adulteration of a genuine marginal musical form by the bourgeoisie:

Οι αστοί αντιστάθηκαν. Μα γρήγορα κατάλαβαν το μάταιο της προσπάθειας. Με τη γνωστή λοιπόν μέθοδο της εκλογικεύσεως ή την επίσης γνωστή τακτική της εξουδετερώσεως διά της περιέξεως, τ' αγκάλιασαν, τὰ 'καναν δικά τους. Είναι πάντα ο καλύτερος τρόπος εννουχισμού μιας 'επαναστάσεως' - φτηνός, ασφαλής και αναίμακτος (89).

In discussing the music of "rebetiko" in terms of the conflict between high and low art, Tachtsis relates the form of "ζεῦμπέκικο" to the avant-garde by presenting it as an aspect of low art, which has been aestheticized by the bourgeoisie.³⁴ The conflict between the bourgeois art and avant-garde cultural radicalism is implied here. The bourgeoisie aestheticizes revolutionary art in order to undermine it when it threatens the cultural establishment by rejecting sterilised and politically neutral aesthetic categories.³⁵

Yiorgos Maris' essay "40 χρόνια ελληνικού κινηματογράφου" has different aims. The historical development of the Greek cinema is closely connected with political changes in Greece. The Greek cinema, which during the 1960s was still directed towards commercialization and promotion abroad, is here studied from a different perspective. Related to the political situation, which deeply affected Greek culture, cinema in Maris' text becomes as important as political developments.

Another aspect of radicalism presented in Πάλι criticizes the political aspects of avant-garde trends. This criticism stems from the introduction of Tristan Tzara's lecture on Dada. In this text, Nikos Steryiou attempts to define, along with the development of Dada, the political agenda of both dada and surrealism. He considers the political principles of those trends from a novel point of view. More precisely, the essay examines the relation of Marxism to the avant-garde, while hinting at the Marxist notion of alienation in art and the idea that surrealism is a "ghost-trend" which confronts its "death". The final contemplations on the avant-garde indicate the writer's intention to criticize the violent Cold War milieu and propose instead a re-examination of the historical avant-garde:

Σήμερα, που οι διάφοροι 'Δρ Strangelove' επισείουν τις στατιστικές και "επιστημονικές" προετοιμασίες του Γ' Παγκοσμίου Πολέμου πάνω από το κεφάλι μας, [...] δε νομίζουμε πως η δημοσίεψη της διάλεξης για το Dada είναι ιδιαίτερα ανεπίκαιρη. Δε δίνει πια απάντηση, αλλ' αποτελεί μέρος μίας αινιγματικής κληρονομιάς (101).

Commenting on Tzara's lecture, Steryiou presents a cultural argument against the militarism of the Cold War superpowers. Yet, he acknowledges that the revolutionary features of the historical avant-garde, which at first covered both politics and aesthetics, were finally assimilated by either politics (Tzara's commitment to communism) or the nationalist tradition (Breton's surrealism "rehabilitated the 'patriotic' strategy of alienation"). Those transformations of the avant-garde deprived artistic radicalism of the potential to influence post-war political developments in an effective way. The "enigmatic heritage" of Dada represents a quest for the survival of the repressed avant-garde tradition.

Leon Trotsky's essay on futurism was published in two successive issues of Πάλι, translated by Kostas Tachtsis. Trotsky's text also refers to the relation of early futurism to Marxism, and, more precisely, to the establishment of futurism as the official artistic trend of the proletariat immediately after the Russian revolution. In this text Trotsky argues that the only thing which can give life to decadent bourgeois art, even in its most extreme radical manifestations, such as futurism, is the art of the proletariat. He also attempts to analyse the contradictions between the artistic avant-garde and applied Marxism. futurism, surrealism and the movements subsequent to them questioned political radicalism first on the aesthetic and then on the ideological level. The avant-gardists used radical politics in order to demonstrate their revolutionary belief in the crucial role of art in society. The radical artistic trends were unwilling to submit their nihilistic and anarchic attitude towards bourgeois society to the well-organized and disciplined system of a single political party. This long-standing conflict between the artistic and political avant-garde was the consequence of applying different criteria to the confrontation of art.

Jorge Semprun's text criticizing Trotsky's views is indicative of the fact that the contributors to *Πάλι* intended to re-examine the relation between Marxism and the avant-garde. It is interesting to observe how the intellectuals of the 1960s approached Marxist thought. The following extract from Semprun's criticism demonstrates a revisionist position:

Η ανάγνωση του 'Λογοτεχνία και Επανάσταση' μας ξαναφέρει στο παρελθόν, θέτει παρόμοια επίσης και ένα πρόβλημα μέλλοντος. Το πρόβλημα της ανανέωσης 'σων παγωμένων ή δογματικών δομών της μαρξιστικής σκέψης. Και φαίνεται καθαρά πως αυτή η ανανέωση προϋποθέτει μέσα στην ίδια και την αυτή κίνηση, την ιστορική ενσωμάτωση της τροτσικιστικής κριτικής, και το ίδιο της το ξεπέραςμα (4, 77).

The publication of both Trotsky's *Λογοτεχνία και Επανάσταση* and Semprun's criticism indicate that the group of *Πάλι* were, above all, interested in the conflicts inside the avant-garde, because they determined its further development. In addition to this, the group maintained a critical stance towards short-sighted Marxism and preferred certain more radical, or even marginal leftist, political forms³⁶. Moreover, the choice of Trotsky's text, and the fact that its publication in Greek coincided with its translation and publication in English, is indicative of the move towards alternative forms of Marxism during the 1960s. Trotsky's positive attitude towards modernist art offered the opportunity to debate the notion that literature should be strictly committed to socialist principles. This is the reason why Trotsky's criticism was used by leftist critics who favoured modernism in support of their views (Segall 1988:424).

In summarizing the views of the above publications and comments, which indicate the political attitudes of *Πάλι*, we can conclude that the group's political preferences were expressed only indirectly through more or less inadequately discussed translations, essays on artistic genres and avant-garde trends. In spite of this, they are still characteristic of the debates in the 1960s about the avant-garde.

B) A RESPONSE TO THE WESTERN AVANT-GARDE

We may now examine the way in which *Πάλι* promoted its links with cultural developments in Western Europe and the United States. It has been repeatedly noted that the contributors to the journal deliberately pursued a close relation with the western avant-garde. This is already obvious in the preface to the journal:

Θέλουμε 'Πάλι' ν' ανοίξει ο ορίζοντας της ανίχνευσης και της έκφρασης, καθώς και της επικοινωνίας με τον ντόπιο και τον παγκόσμιο χώρο (1, 2).

This contact of *Πάλι* with developments "outside Greece" was initially formed by its contributors' experiences of living abroad. As noted above, most of the members of the group had either spent a long time abroad, or had resided permanently outside Greece. Nanos Valaoritis, for example, had just returned from Paris when he decided to publish *Πάλι* with the contribution of Kostas Tachtsis, who was called from New York on this occasion. As stated in the second chapter, other contributors, such as Manto Aravantinou, Panos Koutroumpousis, Nikos Stangos and Alexandros Pop, had already established links with other countries, where they lived more or less permanently during the decades that followed. The tendency of Greek intellectuals to find refuge in Western Europe and the United States indicates their wish to escape political and cultural oppression. Such a desire, accompanied by a feeling of bitterness can be traced in the note "Τύρω από την έκδοση του *Πάλι*":

Η νεώτερη γενιά – φοιτητές, νεαροί επιστήμονες, διανοούμενοι και καλλιτέχνες – διαλέγουν κι αυτοί να δράσουν σε ξένη χώρα, ακόμη και σε ξένη γλώσσα (4, 78).

The familiarization with the western tradition demonstrates the international orientation of the journal. This evidently exerts an influence on the choice of the texts to be published. Most of them belong to French and American literature, although they do not pertain to a certain movement or trend. Instead, they represent a variety of avant-garde movements, such as surrealism, Beat literature or the Nouveau Roman.

This lack of homogeneity in the contents of *Πάλι* explains the function of the journal as a "notebook of free search" ("τερτάδιο αναζητήσεων") (1, 3), distinguishing it from other European and American periodicals of the avant-garde, which represent only a single trend to the exclusion of all others. According to Valaoritis, the hybrid nature of *Πάλι* stems from the fact that the Greek avant-garde "did not have the luxury of being as orthodox as the French one" (Valaoritis 1991). Besides this, the contributors to *Πάλι* promoted the exchanges between Greek and western avant-garde trends and communicated with their French and American colleagues because they believed that Greek poetry of the avant-garde was still unknown outside Greece (5, 93).

c) *Πάλι* and Greek Modernism

The realization that the appeal of Greek poetry abroad was either limited or non-existent involved a rupture with regard to the distance between the *Πάλι* group and the literary generation of the 1930s, which created its own ways of promoting modern Greek poetry abroad. However, the contributors to *Πάλι* seem to regard the poets and critics who inherited the artistic notions of the generation of the 1930s as representatives of a "narrow ethnocentric Greek attitude" ("μία στενά ελλαδική στάση", 5, 94). According to Valaoritis, although this attitude was considered to be innovative during the inter-war years, in the 1960s it was simply "naive", or even concordant with the western notion of an "exotic" Greece.

The resistance to the generation of the 1930s is indicated by both, the marginality of *Πάλι* as a "little magazine" and the issues raised by the choice of such a position. *Πάλι* was an avant-garde journal because it explicitly differentiated itself from the modernist canon. Its avant-garde character is defined by the plurality and diversity of the texts published in it, in contrast with other long-lasting periodicals which academicize modernism. An example of such a journal is *Εποχές*.

The conflict between *Πάλι* and *Εποχές* is straightforward. The frequent publication of *Εποχές*, and the consistency of the views expressed in its articles represent for *Πάλι* the tendency of academicized modernism to adopt an undiversified and homogeneous attitude. What is more, the way the group chose to emphasize

the importance of surrealism reveals the difference between *Πάλι* and *Εποχές*. As Valaoritis mentions in his introduction to the second edition of *Πάλι*:

Ο Σεφέρης μάλιστα μία βραδιά στο Αμερικάνικο Ινστιτούτο μούπε. 'Καλό το Πάλι, πολύ καλό, μα γιατί να κάνεις τόση υπερρεαλιστική Ακαδημία... γιατί είναι Ακαδημία' τόνισε 'ο υπερρεαλισμός σήμερα' του απάντησα πως υπήρχαν φυσικά λογής Ακαδημίες, κι ανάμεσα σ' αυτές εννοούσα φυσικά του μοντερνισμού γενικά, και ειδικότερα του Πάουντ και του Έλιοτ.

In the above passage a difference in perspective is discerned that is a result of the two interlocutors' different attitudes towards tradition. While for Seferis *Πάλι* represented the repetition of a movement that had already been consolidated, for Valaoritis, the Greek version of surrealism, despite its intention to surpass localism, had yet to be considered as avant-garde.

A review of the trends with which the texts published in *Πάλι* are chiefly associated will show that they belonged to either the "technocratic", the anarchist or the "leftist" avant-garde. The texts of Aravantinou or Schinas, for example, are influenced by French and German experimentalism, while the publications of the journal's younger contributors are related to the revolutionary anarchism of the Beats. In addition, *Πάλι* was concerned with juxtaposing the traditions of surrealism and modernism and investigating the relations between political and artistic radicalism.

In conclusion, the avant-garde character of *Πάλι* was defined by the attitudes its contributors adopted with regard to politics, the cultural milieu of Western Europe and America and Greek modernism. The group of *Πάλι* was acquainted with the principles of the avant-garde in general as well as the contemporary avant-gardes. The publication of experimental texts in *Πάλι* was motivated by the journal's attempt to familiarize its readers with radical artistic trends inside and outside Greece. Some strategies involved in this initiation were the adoption of aesthetic criteria in artistic and literary criticism and the interest of the Greek avant-garde in forms of expression other than poetry, such as music, cinema, paint-

ing. Moreover, there was an interest in the contact of the Left with the avant-garde, with an emphasis to those "non-orthodox" groupings of the Left whose concerns coincided with radical avant-garde trends. In the context of political radicalism the board of *Πάλι* foregrounded —mainly in the editorial comments of Nanos Valaoritis that I will present in the next section— the marginalized aspects of Greek history, rarely recorded in the past, such as the concealed consequences of the Civil War, and the growing power of the para-military forces. Finally, the relation of *Πάλι* to modernism is determined by the fact that those associated with the journal kept close contact with the western avant-garde of the 1960s. Such contact contributed to the promotion of the less obvious aspects of political and cultural history, which in the case of Greece were also connected with the country's distinct identity.

In reply to the approaches to literary modernism promoted in the volume *Για το Σεφέρη* Nanos Valaoritis published in *Πάλι* two editorial notes which put the debate on modernity in a new perspective. In the first text, "Τύρω από την έκδοση του Πάλι", (4, 77-78) Valaoritis gives an account of his personal experience of the political and cultural situation in Greece between the inter-war years and 1965. The mutilating effects of the Second World War, and especially the Civil War on the consciousness of Greek writers and artists were reflected in such phenomena as the negation of cultural development and the introverted and provincial attitude of cultural leadership. These attitudes penetrated the cultural situation of post Civil War Greece:

Ο πίθος των Δαναΐδων έχει ανοίξει κάτω από μία
αλόκληρη χώρα. Μαζί με το αίμα και τα δάκρυα
κατρακυλάνε και τα έργα των ανθρώπων (78).

Due to the Civil War people were kept imprisoned in different concentration camps. Culture was consumed by division, became futile and was discarded. Valaoritis uses the myth of Danaides in different way to Themelis'. The channels in Valaoritis' text are not opened by the inescapable nature of the "Greek tragic". Rather, their rupture is one necessitated by clearly political reasons. It is a narrative of destruction, stagnation, lapses and gaps in the creative process of Greek culture mainly due to the ferocious political fac-

tions. In addition, three other catalytic effects of the war were immigration, exile and the alienating depatriation of many Greek intellectuals. In his description, Valaoritis uses an allegorical language:

Μεσ' τη σύγχυση και τις αντιφάσεις, η απάθεια κι'
η πόρωση κάνουν την εμφάνισή τους και θα
μείνουν μόνιμα χαρακτηριστικά ως τις μέρες μας -
της επικρατούσης νοοτροπίας, που υποδέχεται τον
έκπληκτο επαναπατριζόμενο σα να μην είχε φύγει
ποτέ του, ή κι' ακόμη συμβουλευόντάς τον να
ξαναφύγει αμέσως. Φεύγει άραγε ποτέ κανείς από
αυτό που τον περιμένει στην επιστροφή - απ' την
Κλυταιμνήστρα του πνεύματος με το μαχαίρι
σηκωμένο; Η αντίδραση εκείνων που είχαν γίνει
ψυχικά αφιλόξενοι όπως οι Λαιστρυγόνες και να
δουν την Ελλάδα απλώς σαν έναν τόπο αναψυχής
όπως οι άλλοι ξένοι, αυτοί που ήταν ξένοι στον ίδιο
τους τον τόπο... (78).

The motif of the Homeric homecoming is here transferred to the adverse post-war atmosphere. Both myths, Klytemnestra and Lestrygonians, are facets of the warrior's return to his own country; the repatriated intellectual will either find death or, at worst, he will be rejected by his compatriots who have irrevocably lost their identity. In Valaoritis' text, a destructively centrifugal force contrasts the centripetal ideal of anti-modern criticism. Political developments and their ideological aspects are as important as, and dialectically related to, cultural and artistic ones.

The equal importance of politics and culture is evident in the language of Valaoritis' text. According to him, the "concentration camps" are both "real and imaginary" (78), while the whole of Greece is compared to a "psychological concentration camp" (77). Violent expressions and exaggerations are used in order to represent the feelings of bitterness inevitably caused by such narration. Statements such as "immunity in cultural matters" (77), "provincial atmosphere", "people totally ignorant and unsuitable for cultural leaders", "indifference and rigidity make their appearance" give a contentious tone to the text. Both the metaphorical language of the

war, which echoes the memory of the Civil War, and the rhetoric of those intellectuals who recognised the influence of this memory on their work, demonstrate the importance of resistance to political stagnation.

Another aspect of the radical concerns of *Πάλι* is the fact that its publication and circulation was intended to react against the sublimation of the Greek past. The subversion is evident in Valaoritis' comment "Το μαρμαρωμένο βασίλειο ή το άλλο άκρο" (5, 92-93):

Αν η ποίηση χάσει το πόλο του απελευθερωτή της συνείδησης μέσω του 'συναισθήματος' παύει να υπάρχει ως λειτουργούσα, και γίνεται μανιέρα, σχολή, αρνούμενη κάθε υπόσταση ανθρώπινη (sic) κάθε αυθόρμητη πηγή της. Θα είναι μοιραίο μιν, αλλά άψυχο, αιώνια περιμένοντας ένα μυθικό βασιλόπουλο για να ξυπνήσει (94).

Themelis' figure of the living dead princes is here expanded to the role of poetry. The eschatology of Themelis' image appears to be mythical and idealistic. Valaoritis' reference to the monumentality and purity of Greek poetry also connotes the spectacle of Greece (as both a site for tourists and an irredentist fantasy), immobility, ignorance of history, lack of contact with political and cultural reality, sterility and superstition. The fable of the "marble kingdom", along with its symbols, which originate from the classical tradition, (Danaides, Klytemnestra, Lestrygonians), has been transformed into the "folklore of bouzouki and popular festivals, which have degenerated into mere attractions for the tourists". This commercialised folklore, which is offered to the tourists as "other", also represents the cultural submission of Greece to the West through the deformation of Greek folklore and causes the alienation of intellectuals, who feel "foreigners in their own country". The publication of *Πάλι* sought through internationalism, to react against this kind of monumental petrification of Greece, which was a result of both the commercialisation of Greek folklore and the terror of war.

Commenting on the Dionysian-Apollonian debates in *Για το Σεφέρη*, Valaoritis wrote:

Το φαινόμενο της ποίησης είναι και θα είναι πάντοτε περίπλοκο. Πηγάζει τόσο από το Διονυσιακό όσο και από το Απολλώνιο στοιχείο. Αλλά όταν οι οπαδοί του Απόλλωνα τα βάζουν με τους οπαδούς του Διόνυσου και αντιθέτως - κόβουν ασυναίσθητα ένα μέλος τους - καταδικάζουν τον εαυτό τους είτε στον 'αισθητισμό' είτε στο 'διακοσμητισμό' οι μιν, και οι άλλοι σε ένα άμορφο και αδιαφοροποίητο υποκειμενισμό. [...] Τα οράματα του μέλλοντος δε θα είναι καμωμένα από 'συνταγές', αλλά από 'εκδηλώσεις', 'γεγονότα', γύρω από ένα ηφαίστειο εν πλήρη δράση (93).

The application of the Nietzschean polarity of cultural history defines the process of cultural development as the continual recurrence of a schematic dual opposition. As Calinescu remarks (1987:89), the two parts of this opposition were often substituted by terms of historical periodization, such as classicism for the Apollonian and baroque, manierism, romanticism and modernism for the Dionysian element. Furthermore, in reference to twentieth century cultural developments, the Apollonian is identified with modernism and "pure poetry" while the Dionysian relates more to experimentalism and the avant-garde. The above reductions may highlight Valaoritis' argument in contrast to Seferis' critics presented above. Themelis, Loretzatos and Sinopoulos insisted on the coexistence of these elements in Seferis' poetry. Based on the Hellenic, and, therefore, unified, origins of his aesthetics, they thus submitted the most experimental elements of his poetics to the timeless character of his modernism. Valaoritis considers their insistence on this harmonizing character of Seferis' poetry obsolete, conservative, and indicative of a closed system of continual return to Hellenocentric tradition. On the other hand, he reverses Sinopoulos' argument of the surrealist "magical recipes" by hinting that their formalism is only compatible to the poetics of "pure poetry". Finally, reacting to Sinopoulos' claim that avant-garde was a long past whim, Valaoritis opposes the dissemination of its explosive power.

Valaoritis' views on Seferis' modernity are further expressed in two of his later articles. The first one, published in *Σχολιαστές* (24-25-26, 1985) presents the Greek version of modernism and its "branches". Exploring the notion of contemporaneity, first introduced in Greek literature by Seferis, Valaoritis links the term with the positive detachment of modern Greek culture from demoticism and *ethographia*. Referring to Seferis' contemporaneity, Valaoritis wrote:

Μιας και τοποθετήθηκε σε μια βάση, ας πούμε, σωστή η σχέση του παλιού με το νέο, μπορεί να δημιουργηθεί το έργο που θα φέρει τους δυο κόσμους σε αντιπαράθεση δραματική και σε συγχώνεψη μέχρι την ταύτιση. Κι εδώ θα παίξουν πολύ σπουδαίο ρόλο το τοπίο και η ελληνική φύση, επίσης ιδωμένα χωρίς ιδεαλισμό, [...]. Το ίδιο και ο αρχαίος κόσμος θα πλεχτεί σχεδόν με το σύγχρονο τοπίο, το φως, τα σπίτια (1990:126-127)

Further down he wrote, in reference to *Μυθιστόρημα*:

Αδιάλειπτα το καινούριο, το σύγχρονο, μπλέκεται με το παλιό, το ορατό με το αόρατο, και οι συχνές αναφορές σε έναν άλλο κόσμο υποδηλώνουν την συμπλοκή τους στο σώμα του ποιήματος, που, όπως κάθε μοντερνιστικό δημιούργημα, έχει τη σκληράδα και την απτότητα ενός αντικειμένου (1990:127).

The coexistence of the two worlds, the ancient and the modern, two languages, the purist and the demotic, ascribed to Greek literature the concept of contemporaneity, which was produced by the fertilisation and not the denial of tradition.³⁷ Yet Greek modernism as an aesthetic combination of differences articulated almost exclusively by Seferis, was soon superseded by a precocious ironic "post-modernism", which owes its early appearance to political and social circumstances such as the Civil War and the extended depatriation of Greek intellectuals (*ibid.*, p.129-130). The attenuation of modernism in the post-war years is further promoted, for Valaoritis, by the critics of Seferis' poetry, who exalted only the

Hellenic, "classicist" part of his work, while ignoring his connections with surrealism (1990:212-219). This tendency to "Hellenise" Seferis' poetry is attributed to Sinopoulos (1961), who emphasized Seferis' formalist concerns; Argiriou (1961), who considered Seferis' experimentations as "non-orthodox rhymes"; and Savidis (1961), who used Seferis' avant-garde images indifferently as index entrances. Western and Hellenic constitute, for Valaoritis, the unified modernist realm which conveys the traditional and the modern as its two sides, as its inseparable signifier and signified. The only reasons for giving prominence to the repressed, avant-garde side of Seferis' poetry are, for Valaoritis, the need both to emphasise the stylistic implications in the use of language by literature, thus suppressing the nationalist discourse of the language question, and to disclose the evaluative quality of the Apollonian-Dionysian antinomy on which the criticism of modernity was based.

The coexistence of the two archetypal trends, the Dionysian and the Apollonian in the history of modern Greek criticism is fundamentally related to the coexistence of the two languages, the katharevousa and the demotic in modern Greek literature. Such a coincidence is both conciliatory and despotic. For most of its critics, Greek modernity is condensed with maturity and novelty by programmatically including the most radical Dionysianism of the avant-garde together with the Apollonian formalism of modernism. The latter is attributed to Greek literature because of its nationality, while the former is related with the indisputable cultural modernity.

Avant-garde, on the other hand, supersedes the language dilemma and focuses on the stylistic priorities of literature over its language. Such an attitude renders the Dionysian-Apollonian distinction or coexistence also unnecessary. Although necessary in the early stages of Greek modernity, the above polarities in language and style indicate in the post-war years a conservative compromise with the past and a manipulation of the radical present.³⁸

In conclusion, it is essential to summarize the main trends in the Greek criticism of the early 1960s. The anti-modern criticism was empirical and identified Seferis' poetry with the Greek tradition. The modern criticism of Seferis' poetry promoted a narrative of autonomising the text, also ensuring the Apollonian ideals and

continuity of Greek literary tradition. In the case of leftist criticism, the debate on aesthetics was used as the theoretical tool of the discussion of purely ideological issues. Finally, the comments of *Παλί* de-mystified the narratives of Greek criticism by highlighting their cultural and ideological circumstances.

In the essays of *Για το Σεφέρη*, criticism was employed to reconstruct the aesthetics and poetics of Greek modernity. Leftist criticism, on the other hand, was so much absorbed by the plot of Tsirkas' novel, that the saga of the main hero, Manos, became the allegorical narrative of the critics' own ideological adventures during the Occupation, Civil War and post-Civil War years. The avant-garde posture of *Παλί* was practised in the magazine's contents, which criticized the generation concept, the centrality of modernist territory, the emphasis on the language question, and the myth of traditional orality. Furthermore, *Παλί* promoted a counter-modernist debate by focusing on foreign, non-conventional, written, "low", futuristic, morbid, exotic, and erotic elements.

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¹ Endre Bojtár (1990:56) notes that the avant-garde (and especially surrealism) inspired during the 1930s the Third World and Eastern European literatures.

² A historical account of the development of avant-garde trends in the twentieth century is given by Weisgerber (1984).

³ The example of Brazilian and Cuban literature during the 1960s is indicative of the political and national character of the avant-garde in these countries. In Brazilian literature of the 1950s and 1960s the trends of Concreticism, Praxism and Semiotic Poetry had national and social aims, combined avant-garde with post-modernism, and were curtailed in 1964 by a military regime. The Cuban revolution in 1959 also affected the country's literature in an interventionist way. For more details see Stern (1988:257-63).

⁴ Jochen Schulte-Sasse, the writer of B?rger's introduction, holds that such a view belongs to the criticism of social and political pessimism.

⁵ Robert Dunn (1991:122) described the development of the avant-garde in the postmodern era, after noticing the unsuccessful attempts to revive the avant-gardes: "despite extreme attempts to revive the shock-value of earlier movements, particularly dada and surrealism, the 1960s experiments over all failed to rejuvenate any strategy for disassembling the institution of art (the undermining of high art notwithstanding) of the hegemonic meaning systems underpinning the larger society."

⁶ In *Νέον Πνεύμα* of Istanbul, A. Kalevras presents futurism. In *Σεράτιον* of Alexandria, D. Chrisanthis criticises futurism negatively, while in *Κόσμος* of Smyrna, St. Pittakis supports the movement.

⁷ Surrealism was the main twentieth century avant-garde trend in Greece. Although I will sometimes use the notion of the avant-garde in order to refer to surrealism, these two terms cannot, by definition, be identical.

⁸ This is evident in the theoretical texts of the 1930s, represented mainly

by Seferis' *Δοκιμές* and the poet's debate with K. Tsatsos on, among other issues, the "irrational" element of poetry ("άλογο στοιχείο"). The reception of surrealism by the Greek critics was never particularly favourable. Bourgeois criticism held the movement in contempt for inconsistency (*Νέα Εστία*), questioned the possibility of automatic writing, compared surrealism with romanticism, anticipated its decline into sheer mysticism (E. Chourmouziou in *Καθημερινή*) and presented it as the most evident example of cultural crisis, either too foreign or too new to be positive (Theotokas) or too perverse to fit the Greek temperament (Orologas in 1940s). During and after the Second World War Marxist and liberal critics alike deprecated surrealism for being indifferent to the struggle for liberation (Ambatzopoulou 1976).

⁹ An example of this ambiguous attitude is Zisimos Loretzatos' essay "The Lost Centre", written in 1961 (1980:85-146), which conveys a par excellence anti-modernist position.

¹⁰ Dimitris Tziouvas (1989:136) observed that Dimaras, Theotokas and Tsatsos, who represented different aesthetic positions, "meet in their opposition to surrealism" (my translation).

¹¹ For Antreas Karantonis, surrealism contributed, together with Seferis' poetry, to the departure of modern Greek literature from the traditional poetics. In reference to modernism of the 1930s, he writes: "Αυτή η παρόρμηση υποκινείται από ένα καίριο αίτημα της πνευματικής μας ζωής: ν' απαλλαγούμε βέβαια κι από τη νεκρή παράδοση του λογοτατισμού μα κι από τον αποπνικτικό φόρτο της επικίνδυνης φιλολογίας, της τυποποιημένης φρασεολογίας, που έζησε με τα χρόνια το λογοτεχνικό δημοτικισμό" (1958:154).

¹² Surrealist texts were either incorporated into the hesitant modernism which incessantly followed the tradition of either symbolism or the more conservative aspects of modernist European writing, or, when not coinciding with the limited expectations of the Greek readers, these texts were ridiculed and disclosed. The writings of N. Engonopoulos and A. Embirikos, for example, were derided, the prose of the latter was censored, and their books were not readily available during the '50s and '60s.

¹³ As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Greek literary canon, as well as the critical and historical works on it, focused on the national essence of Greek texts. This resulted in the identification of modern Greek literary history with the history of ideas and the correspondence of the history of Greek criticism with the history of the language issue. Until the 1960s the histories of literature and the uncertainty about the official use of the demotic were included in the developments of canon-formation of Greek literature.

¹⁴ Paul Mann (1991:15) referring to the main attitudes of the established criticism towards the avant-garde, claimed that the recuperation of the avant-garde is a critical strategy developed in a late capitalist environment and, therefore, was not applied to other cultures which suppressed, eradicated or walled avant-garde out.

¹⁵ Panayiotis Bosnakis (1994:1-6) argues that the Greek avant-garde belongs to the category of "national" or "peripheral" avant-gardes, such as the Polish and the Lithuanian avant-gardes, which form their identity from the way they respond to their national literatures.

¹⁶ The critical texts included in *Για το Σεφέρη* belong to all three of the trends attributed to modern Greek criticism by Lambropoulos (1988:216-222), i.e. lyrical impressionism, political realism and symbolist formalism. These trends correspond to romantic idealism, Marxism and New Criticism respectively and indicate the main stages through which modern Greek criticism was developed. Despite their different origins these trends share six main assumptions, such as the transparency of language, the full presence of the text, the genius of the author, the authority of the critic, the irrelevance of gender and the supremacy of the canon. All these features constitute the humanist-romantic Greek modernity which prevailed over classicism and Antiquity (ibid., 222-224).

¹⁷ Themelis argued that criticism was an activity parallel to the poetic one. In this respect, its potential as limited and the only thing critics could do was to "besiege" poetry by resorting to their own fictional narrative ("μυθολογία") (67).

¹⁸ These dialectical oppositions are also expanded by Themelis, to the creation of a new racial myth. Seferis' poetry is an Odyssey whose Ithaka is lost. Homer's Greek becomes metaphysical in Seferis, since the present life of the Greek race is lost in the past memory, alike with contemporaneity which is submerged in the immortal antiquity. The attempt to reconcile the past is similar to an endless Odyssey, equally as futile as the myths of Danaides' jar and Sisyfian rock.

¹⁹ The transcendental abilities ascribed to Seferis by Themelis testify to the latter's intention to refer to the poet as a modern Greek hero. Having incorporated the ancient and the past qualities of Hellenism, the poet would circumvent the danger of decline and save the essence of Greekness. Notably, Nietzsche (1976:122-123) ascribed the same potencies to Goethe, who combined reason and sensuality, sentiment and will. According to André Reszler (1981:173) the charisma of the prophet, the politician and the philosopher were combined in modern times in the figure of the poet.

²⁰ According to Gourgouris (Layoun 1990:73-74) Loretzatos' language "present[s] itself as a transcendental discourse which demonstrates the capacity to reverse Time". In addition, it is "the language of anti-modern-

nity *par excellence*: it doesn't just express a denial (of the modern): it forwards a quest -the quest for the anti-modern". According to Jusdanis (1991:116-117) Loretzatos' narrative of the *centre* as a "realm outside modernity" "is a very modern strategy" which presupposes aesthetic concerns.

²¹Notably, the landscape described by Loretzatos corresponds with a certain geographical trend which resisted the developments of modern space. Nicholas J. Entrikin (1991:69) called this tradition "utopian communitarianism". Talking about "provincialism" and "regionalism" as two aspects of this tradition, he wrote: "In both, a social order was posited that linked social group to place, and in this sense both views ran counter to the forces of modernism. Through the attachment to place, both offered a sense of "centeredness" in a rapidly changing world. It is important to note however that this emphasis on the local, camouflaged an inherent universalism. They differed on the basis of this universalism, a basis that can be arranged along a continuum from Judeo-Christian religious beliefs to scientific rationality" (69).

²²Discussing Loretzatos' rhetoric Artemis Leontis (1987:184-186) substantiated his intellectual origins in nineteenth century romanticism and especially in Friedrich Schiller's essay "On the Naive and Sentimental in Literature" (1795). Leontis notes that "the twentieth-century Greek critic is participating in a discussion that belongs to the world that he nominally rejects, namely Western European (particularly English and German) romanticism" (184). By doing so, Loretzatos uses the Greek-modern distinction as parallel to the one between the "authentic" and the "radical Other".

²³It is remarkable that George Seferis (*Αγγλοελληνική Επιθεώρηση* E,7, 1951:259-260), commenting on Sikelianos' role in harmonising the oppositions of Greek tradition, emphasises his line "Τλυκό μου βρέφος, Διόνυσέ μου και Χριστέ μου" which indicated the identification of Dionysus with the crucified Christ. Such an identification substantiates, for Seferis, the continuity of Greek tradition.

²⁴To support his argument, Argiriou quotes in a footnote (280) Seferis' opinion on Byzantine art. In this passage, the poet underlines the Hellenistic element of Byzantine iconography and notices the danger for it to have been reduced to either scholasticism or naiveté unless the renaissance of Paleologi would not strive to preserve the fragile equilibrium.

²⁵The debate on decadence, as evolved in the leftist journal *Επιθεώρηση Τέχνης* 1 (1955) began with Avgeris' article "Θεωρητικά στοιχεία της κριτικής" which criticised the art of "escapism" and "formalist quests". The debate ended with Yiannis Imvriotis' study "Επιστήμη, τέχνη και μαγεία" (4, April 1955) which condemned the "morbid techniques" and "formalist artefacts" of modern poetry.

²⁶Matei Calinescu (1987:195-211) in his account of the concept of decadence in Marxist aesthetics noted the relations between the Soviet condemnation of decadence and the Fascist rejection of the "sick art" of modernism (205).

²⁷Alexandros Argiriou, in his introduction to Vasos Varikas (1979: 9-18) remarked that only eight out of the twenty-six mid-war Marxist critics had a purely Marxist methodology. Some of them, such as Chourmouziou, Calas and Varikas, were released from Marxist orthodoxy rather early. Yet, most of the Greek Marxist critics had at some stage fallen victims of easy polarisations, such as bloom-decadence, optimism-pessimism, bourgeois-proletarian artist (12). X. Kokolis (1993) presented some typical passages of the leftist critique to Seferis' modernism between 1931-1950. The early reviews characterised Seferis' work as decadent, individualistic, and reactionary. As time passed the reviews became less militant and more lenient and paved the way for a Marxist interpretation of Seferis poetry.

²⁸The role of Stratis Tsirkas in the revision of the hostility towards modern literature in the ranks of left-wing critics is made clear by his significant contribution to the special issue of *Επιθεώρηση Τέχνης* on Cavafy (December 1963). Following the perspective of his book *Ο Καβάφης και η εποχή του*, (1958) Tsirkas published in that issue three articles on the social and political circumstances in which Cavafy's poetics was developed, also promoting the recognition of a representative of "decadence" by leftist criticism. Notably, Kostas Varnalis, Nikiforos Vrettakos, and Manolis Anagnostakis also paid their tribute to Cavafy's work.

²⁹The seeds of Likiardopoulos' concept about "poetry of defeat" may be traced in his former article "Ιδεολογικοί προσανατολισμοί της μεταπολεμικής ελληνικής ποίησης" (1960), where he uses the term "defeated" (οι διαψευσμένοι) for the poets of the Left who experience the turning point between the culmination and the crisis of radical ideologies.

³⁰About the peculiar avant-gardism of *Πάλι*, Gregory Jusdanis wrote: "In its support of these movements, its valorisation of the new and its contempt of tradition, *Πάλι* is a classic example of the avant-garde, which even by the late 1960s was still struggling for legitimacy in Greece. This avant-garde sought not to subvert, but to consolidate the position of the aesthetic in society" (1987:90-91). The contributors of *Πάλι* themselves also accept that the journal belongs to the avant-garde press: "Μετά τα Νέα Γράμματα, μετά τη Τρίτο Μάτι και ίσως το Τετράδιο θα έλεγα ότι το Πάλι ήταν το περιοδικό εκείνης της δεκαετίας που είχε αξιώσεις ενός μοντερνισμού, μιας avant-garde, μέσα και έξω από την Ελλάδα" (Kokkinos 1987:60).

³¹ The first Manifesto of the "League of saboteurs of aesthetic antiquities" (Σύνδεσμος Αισθητικών Σαμποτέρ Αρχαιοτήτων) written by Makris in 1944 was published twice: in Makris (1986:251-253) and Christakis (1992:43-45). In this text "SASA" undertakes the "destruction of Parthenon" as a purely aesthetic act. As we learn in *Γραπτά*, the avant-gardism of Y. Makris derives from futurism, and relates to the poetry of K. Karyotakis, while developing with the study of Sartre, Canetti and Eliade.

³² This stance, according to Ambatzopoulou (1976:43) is a preliminary declaration "beyond parties" which reacts to the restrictive attitude of the Greek Communist Party towards artistic radicalism. Although this is largely true, a further point which explains the political impartiality of the preface is Makris' reference to Ernst Bloch.

³³ The intention to react against the political, cultural and social repression can also be found in texts such as Alexandros Schinas' parodies of canonical modern Greek poems (*Πάλι* 2-3, 115-118), Leonidas Christakis' poem "Μήπως μυρίζει τίποτε άσχημα;" (5, 87-88), and Allen Ginsberg's "Αμερικνή" (2-3, 45-48).

³⁴ It is interesting that Yiannis Tsarouchis approached *zeimpekiko* from a viewpoint similar to Tachtsis. In his essay "Πα το Ζεϋμπέκικο" (1986:268-272) Tsarouchis claimed that the popularity of *zeimpekiko* among the middle class vulgarised its "aristocratic features". A comparison between the two approaches would indicate that although Tachtsis emphasised the usurpation of *rembetiko* by the bourgeoisie, he also sustained, following Tsarouchis' somewhat elitist view, the degradation of their authenticity by an all-encompassing populist ideology.

³⁵ For more about the debates on "rebetiko" during the 1950s and 1960s see pages 30-32. The re-discovery of *rebetiko* by composers such as Manos Chatzidakis and Mikis Theodorakis is seemingly a form of rehabilitation of the underground music by high art, something that Tachtsis appears to reject. Nevertheless, this rehabilitation acquires a new meaning with the "artistic popular song" (έντεχνο λαϊκό τραγούδι). Such a popularisation of modern poetry, which transcends the modernist distinction between high and low, seems interesting and relevant to postmodernist practices (Kondilis 1991:42).

³⁶ Nanos Valaoritis, referring to his conflict with Vassilis Vassilikos, commented: "Κι εγώ του λεω [του Βασιλικού], γιατί δε συμφωνείς, αριστερά δεν είμαστε κι εμείς; 'Ναι,' μου λει, αλλά είστε κουρασμένοι.' Εννοούσε ότι εμείς κάναμε πόλεμο στην ορθόδοξη αριστερά, ως προτοκιστές, ως αναρχοπροτοκιστές, πάντως ως απόκλιση από την ορθόδοξη αριστερά" (Kokkinos 1987:60). Referring to Calas' Trotskyism, which reacted to orthodox Marxism, the canon

and continuity of the demoticist tradition, Venetia Apostolidou writes: "Η ουσία είναι ότι η εκδοχή του λογοτεχνικού κανόνα που πρότεινε ο Κάλας δε βρήκε καμία συνέχεια ανάμεσα στους μαρξιστές" (1990:189).

³⁷ Indicative of the cultural conflict based on the above oppositions is Valaoritis' concept of the conflicting personas of the national poet Dionysios Solomos. Solomos' identity is, for Valaoritis, both Hellenic and Italian, scholarly and popular. Such a conflict within Solomos' poetry is due, for him, to a colonised Hellenism. Namely: "Ο Σολωμός, λοιπόν, προτείνω, ζει εσωτερικά το δράμα του αποικιοκρατούμενου ελληνισμού, μες την ίδια του την ψυχή. Τον χωρισμό, στον κατώτερο αυτό, τον καταπατημένο, και στον ανώτερο, το 'Δυτικίζοντα, Ιταλοφέρνοντα, Ευρωπαϊό' των Ιόνιων νήσων" (1990:145). Correspondingly, Jusdanis links modernism with the wish to explicate these oppositions: "The initial encounter with modernity launched Greek society on a cataract of ideological oppositions (East-West, traditional-modern, purist-demotic, classical-contemporary, ethnicity-state) which led to instability and sometimes violence. To resolve these tensions, if only in an imaginary way, another modern construct was imported, the autonomous aesthetic" (1991:xiv).

³⁸ Jusdanis recognises as the project of demotic modernism the creation of a "unified literary culture" and the communication "in a standardised language" (1991:139). Beaton describes the different —and widely conflicting— stages of the "politicisation of the language question" (1994:321). The demotic was linked with the bourgeois revolution while *katharevousa* with conservatism. Since 1927 the Greek Communist Party adopted the demotic as its official language. On the other hand, Metaxas' dictatorship supported the demotic. Tziovas's argument, based on Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, is more eloquent. Tziovas argues that the generation of the 1930s practised a strategy of restraining any centrifugal trend, relevant to language or culture in general (189). Prose writers of the 1930s avoid any heteroglossic element which would insinuate conflicts in the social and political sphere (200). An alternative approach to the language question would be the consideration of the "consent for the enforcement of monoglossia" rather than the conflict between *katharevousa* and demotic (218). Such a "suspension of heteroglossia deprived the Greek novel of humour, parody, wit and puns" (221). Valaoritis' insistence on the humorous quality of Seferis' poetry against the melancholic severity inflicted on it by its critics, as analysed in his text "Μια άλλη ανάγνωση του Πλώργου Σεφέρη" (1990:236-251) is also characteristic of his stance against the soothing of conflicts in modernist literature and criticism.