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(Re)Sounding Greek Newsreels: Music In Short Films From The Hellenic National Audiovisual Archive

Yunan Haber Filmlerini (Yeniden) Seslendirmek: Yunan Ulusal Görsel-İşitsel Arşivi'ndeki Kısa Filmlerde Müzik

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ABSTRACT

This audiovisual essay investigates the sonic landscape within Greek military dictatorship newsreels (1967–1974). Drawing from numerous short films held at the Hellenic National AudioVisual Archive (HNAVA), the research treats music and sound as fundamental pillars of the regime's audiovisual continuum. By applying narrative theory to analyze diegetic, non-diegetic, and pseudo-diegetic elements, the study uncovers how filmic soundscapes were strategically engineered for propaganda, ideological messaging, and the construction of national identity. Ultimately, the work illustrates how these aural strategies functioned to mold collective memory and social narratives under strict authoritarian rule, repositioning these newsreels as multidimensional historical artifacts.

ÖZET

Bu görsel-işitsel deneme, Yunan askeri diktatörlüğü haber bültenlerinin (1967–1974) işitsel manzarasını incelemektedir. Yunanistan Ulusal Görsel-İşitsel Arşivi'nde (HNAVA) yer alan çok sayıda kısa filmden yola çıkan araştırma; müzik ve sesi, rejimin görsel-işitsel sürekliliğinin temel sütunları olarak ele almaktadır. Anlatı teorisini kullanarak diegetik, diegetik olmayan ve sözde-diegetik unsurları analiz eden çalışma, film ses dünyalarının propaganda, ideolojik mesaj iletimi ve ulusal kimlik inşası için nasıl stratejik olarak kurgulandığını ortaya koymaktadır. Sonuç olarak bu çalışma, söz konusu işitsel stratejilerin katı otoriter yönetim altındaki toplumsal anlatıları ve kolektif belleği nasıl şekillendirdiğini göstererek, bu haber bültenlerini çok boyutlu tarihsel belgeler olarak yeniden konumlandırmaktadır.

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INTRODUCTION

The creation of this audiovisual essay began with a fascination for the "hauntology" of archival remains—specifically the newsreels produced during the Greek military dictatorship (1967–1974). My goal was not merely to write a history of the regime, but to perform a "sonic excavation" of the audiovisual media it produced. While much has been written about the historical and political aspects of the Greek junta, the visual/auditory dimension of the regime remained largely an invisible/silent background in academic discourse. The central motivation for choosing an audiovisual essay format, rather than a traditional paper, was the medium's ability to "listen" and "speak back to" the archive (Bergstrom, 2019).

By placing my analysis directly alongside the digitized fragments of the Hellenic National Audiovisual Archive, I could allow the viewer to hear the disconnect between upbeat "light music" and the oppressive reality of the era. This written report outlines how I navigated the repository, applied musicological and cinematic frameworks, and ultimately synthesized these findings into a cohesive narrative. Examining musical and sonic data both as accompaniments to moving images and as part of the broader aural framework of domestic newsreel production sheds light on the social, political, and cultural dimensions of national audiovisual narratives, with particular emphasis on the aesthetic, ideological, and technical strategies of mass media.

Research Questions and Methodology

Two key research questions guide this investigation: (a) How were music and sound used in the newsreels of the Greek military dictatorship to shape narrative structure, propaganda, and audience engagement? (b) In what ways did these sonic elements contribute to constructing national identity and collective memory within the audiovisual sphere of the regime?

My methodology combined approaches from film studies, musicology, and media history. Online research involved systematic examination of digitized newsreels found in the archival collections, focusing on those produced between 1967 and 1974. The analysis classified three diverse sound types (diegetic, non-diegetic, and pseudo-diegetic), drawing on established theoretical frameworks to examine music, narration, speech, and ambient sounds. Contextual interpretation explored how musical choices, voice-overs, and soundscapes interacted with ideological messaging and cultural narratives embedded in these short films.

The first phase of production involved an immersive engagement with the Hellenic National AudioVisual Archive—an indispensable source, particularly the "Greek Newsreels Collection." However, the sheer volume of footage necessitated a rigorous selection process. I focused on the junta era. My criteria for selection were not just political significance, but "sonic density." I looked for instances where music, sounds, and voice-over were used to transform mundane events into ideological spectacles. This process required systematic viewing alongside what is commonly referred to as "active listening" (Rost and Wilson, 2013) which involved focused auditory attention, interpretive engagement, as well as the logging of musical cues, narrator's descriptions, and sound effects.

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This archival labor revealed that the newsreels were not just reportage; they were "illustrated marches," meticulously edited to project a propaganda image of Greek society (Lambrinos, 2013).

Soundtrack Analysis and (Con)Textual Functions

To analyze this data, I drew upon Claudia Gorbman's (1987) influential work on film music. Applying her typology allowed me to move beyond a superficial description of the music and toward a structural understanding of how sound functions as a tool of power. Diegetic sounds, originating from the scene's milieu, were limited but vital for establishing "authenticity" and "authority." Pseudo-diegetic sound (including music) was a fascinating discovery; I discovered numerous instances where specific effects or songs were clearly added in post-production to make a scene feel more "festive" and "immediate" than it likely was. Non-diegetic sound and music were the regime's primary weapons. From orchestrated dances in the opening titles to the "Voice of God" narration, these soundscapes served to bind the images together.

In the essay, I focused on various genres of music used by the regime. My research identified the presence of diverse musical styles. Symphonic works and marches implied European sophistication, while their rhythmic regularity mirrored the military's obsession with order. Unexpectedly, the newsreels were often underscored by contemporary pop songs, a strategic move to appeal to the youth with a sense of "modernity" as a distraction from international isolation. To ground the regime in "national values," folk music was used extensively, although this was a sanitized, canonized, and aestheticized version of folklore to construct an image of the nation's pure—though unmistakably monolithic—cultural identity (Papaeti, 2018).

A significant portion of the audiovisual essay is dedicated to narration. In the Greek context, the "Voice of God" is a convention where an invisible, authoritative male voice directs viewers' interpretation of the images. These narrators used a specific rhetorical style—in some cases hyperbolic and emotional, and in others restrained and measured—to lend credibility to the regime's claims. By isolating the voice-over tracks, I was able to demonstrate how the narration acted as a "semantic anchor," preventing the audience from forming their own perceptions of the visuals. This was a direct form of audience engagement and psychological manipulation.

Crafting The Audiovisual Essay

Translating these findings into an audiovisual essay presented unique technical but also ethical challenges. I had to decide how to present the footage: should I let the propaganda speak for itself, or should I intervene with my own voice? I adopted a "dialectical" approach, juxtaposing audiovisual data and interpretation to contrast the regime's intended message with historical reality and highlight the artificiality of these productions. The essay's analytical, explanatory, deconstructive, and interpretative editing was essential for turning the propaganda against itself, allowing the viewer to see and hear the "seams" in the regime's audiovisual tapestry.

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The audiovisual essay is organized chronologically and thematically. It opens with a definition of newsreels and the development of the Hellenic National AudioVisual Archive, establishing historical context. Subsequent sections focus on the Greek dictatorship's newsreels, examining editorial practices, propaganda strategies, and the deployment of diegetic, non-diegetic, and pseudo-diegetic sound and music. Each segment contrasts archival footage with interpretive commentary to emphasize the interplay between audiovisual and ideological meanings. The essay concludes with reflections on the legacy of these newsreels, considering their role in shaping collective memory, audience perception, and sociopolitical identities.

By highlighting incompatibilities, repetitions, and stylistic exaggerations, the essay encourages viewers to critically engage with the material rather than passively consume it. This approach also foregrounds the tension between (re)presentation and reality, inviting reflection on how media can shape social imaginaries. Ultimately, the essay not only analyzes the newsreels but also proposes an ethically conscious mode of seeing and listening to the archive.

Conclusions and Reflections

The outcome of this research revealed that music in these newsreels was never truly "neutral." Even when it seemed to function as mere background, it performed utilitarian and ideological functions. One of the most striking findings was "culturally mismatched" music—instances in which, for example, a German march underscored a Greek rural harvest. This highlighted the regime's disregard for cultural realism: as long as the music conveyed a sense of "pomp and circumstance," it fulfilled its purpose. The newsreels did more than documenting history; they actively constructed "mediated memories" (Van Dijck, 2004) of the oppressive era of the Greek junta.

Creating this essay has fundamentally altered my perspective on archival materials. I no longer see newsreels as "inert" historical remnants. They are active, layered narratives that continue to influence how we perceive the 1960s and 1970s in Greece. This project also reinforced the importance of interdisciplinary research. By combining film studies, musicology, and political history, I was able to uncover nuances that a single-discipline approach would have missed. The audiovisual essay format proved to be a powerful tool for public history, making complex academic analysis accessible and engaging through the same media it criticizes (Herzogenrath, 2019).

The Greek military dictatorship ended in 1974 but its "sonic architecture" remains preserved in the Hellenic National AudioVisual Archive. Through this audiovisual essay, I have attempted to deconstruct that architecture, showing how music, sound, and moving images were used to create authoritarian propaganda. As we move further into a digital age where manipulated media is once again at the forefront of political discourse, the lessons from Greek newsreels are more relevant than ever. Understanding how dictatorial regimes of the past manipulated aural elements to manufacture consent provides us with the critical tools to recognize similar strategies in the present.

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Conclusively, this essay is a testament to the power of the archive not just as a place for simply storing documents, but as a site for actively and critically engaging with historical narratives, ensuring that the echoes and the reflections of the past continue to inform contemporary understanding.

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