

Introduction

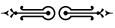
Prolegomena to Theo Angelopoulos' Life and Filmmaking



Exploring the Oeuvre

This monograph aims to present the Greek filmmaker Theo Angelopoulos as a global auteur by contextualising his life and work, delineating central elements of his cinematic language and analysing crucial motifs of the political, aesthetic and mythopoetic visual imagery embodied in his movies. It attempts a synoptic but thorough interpretation of his films and their poetics, pointing out continuities and discontinuities between them while interrogating the wider questions embedded in their narrative and visual structure. Overall, the book is about Angelopoulos the *metteur en scène*, the screenwriter and the image-maker, rather than the political thinker, left-wing ideologue or ambassador for a national culture.

Despite the usual framing of his work as representing the epitome of political modernism in the European periphery, and of Angelopoulos as the symbol of a 'national or local cinema', I argue for the global and transnational significance of his oeuvre by unframing it from its 'marginal' or 'peripheral' character. My intention is to explore the cinematographic poetics of Angelopoulos' visual idiom, his *cinécriture*, in the sense that Robert Bresson understood the term, as 'writing with images in movement and with sounds' (Bresson 1986 [1975]: 7). I will also discuss the various problematics Angelopoulos incorporated in his images, or indeed brought out with his images, with the intention of providing an alternative to the hegemonic regimes of occlusion that popular culture, and its cultural



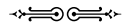
privileging by postmodernism, imposed on cinematic production after the mid-eighties.

The book engages with Angelopoulos' works in three main chapters, each one with a different perspective and methodology. Each chapter presupposes and leads to the other, aiming to investigate the full scope of Angelopoulos' creative output and critically address his overall achievement. Each chapter aspires to foreground what is determined by immediate historical context and what transcends it while discussing Angelopoulos' conscious attempt to articulate a global language for cinematic representation by synthesising various genres, filmic discourses and heterogeneous styles. Ultimately, of course, we are trying to better understand the work and the life of Theo Angelopoulos, since, as Jean Cocteau would have stated, 'a film, whatever it might be, is always its director's portrait' (Cocteau 1972: 77). Indeed, within the political and aesthetic form of his movies, a complex, contradictory and somehow tormented portrait of an ambitious artist emerges, one that asks for cautious and systematic analysis.

Chapter 1 gives a summary of Angelopoulos' life, situating him within the historical and social realities that formed his world from his early years until his sudden death in 2012. However, I am not presenting his films and life as commentaries on the upheavals of his native country. On the contrary, I examine them as the symbolic extensions in time of their social contexts and their implied subtexts. Nevertheless, I will draw on various contributing factors, including the biographical, that led to the formation of Angelopoulos' cinematic language starting with his decision to become a filmmaker. To that end, I have consulted a variety of sources about his life, including interviews in Greek journals and newspapers and, especially after 1990, on television.

I have also sifted through various and, occasionally, contradictory statements, which were often coloured by personal feuds, bitter frustrations and professional bias. Yet I have avoided any Freudian interpretation, since psychoanalytic biographism does not fully account for the many invisible texts we find emerging from Angelopoulos' films and that cannot be explained by reductionist references to personal or contextual particulars.

Within this loose biographical sketch, I have attempted to incorporate details about the production and reception of Angelopoulos' films in a coherent narrative that could function as the hermeneutical background for certain aspects of his work in general. (A comprehensive account can be found in my previous book, *A History of Greek Cinema* (2012), and a more detailed analysis of his visual problematics in *Realism in Post-War Greek Cinema* (2016) with specific reference to his 'ocular poetics'.) Perhaps, in another study, a more biographical and probably Freudian or even Laca-



nian analysis of Angelopoulos' films is needed in order to explore the psychological 'mirrorings' encoded in the structure of his cinematic language; the recurring themes of returning fathers, incestuous psychodynamics and maternal absence. Some of these aspects will be raised briefly while discussing Angelopoulos' filmic texts during critical moments in his professional life and the external circumstances governing the reorientation of the film industry in Greece, such as, for example, the Restoration of the Republic, after July 1974.

Chapter 2, which is the longest, provides a systematic and chronological presentation of Angelopoulos' works on their own terms and independently from the wider over-texts of their time. There are many detailed presentations of his films and their storylines: in Andrew Horton's brilliant monograph (which unfortunately ends at 1998) or Acquarello's¹ lengthy article, for example, both of which I recommend. Furthermore, Artificial Eye has released a three-volume collector's edition of Angelopoulos' films without, however, any commentary or an accompanying booklet but that nevertheless gives the opportunity to study his films in their entirety. Since this monograph is written for an international audience, I have avoided including unnecessary references, reviews or articles in Greek. I make an exception for the essays by Vassilis Rafailidis (1934–2000), who followed the development of Angelopoulos' work from the beginning as a friend, co-worker and intellectual comrade in arms until his death.

Chapter 3 focuses on how Angelopoulos constructed his cinematic language by combining, inventing, or reinventing different components from various genres in classical and experimental filmmaking. The central theme of this chapter is the constant transmutation of Angelopoulos' visual vocabulary; a radical transmutation that reflected wider cultural revisions in the social dimensions of film production as well as in his personal ideological perspective and philosophical hermeneutics of cinematic representation. It also briefly addresses the various elements his filmic visuality is comprised of, like acting, sexuality, religion and ideology. Finally, it argues that in his perplexing evolution as a filmmaker, he aspired to explore and elaborate a new dimension in the field of cinematic visuality, which I would term as the cinematic sublime.

Consciously or unconsciously, Angelopoulos was working towards the construction of the sublime as an aesthetic dimension within the moving images of cinema, and this is what his best films are about. My belief is that he *did* succeed in creating the sublime in his best films, although we find fragments and isolated elements of its presence in most of them. His cinematic sublime was the outcome of his constant struggle to expand the expressive potential of cinema so that as a filmmaker he could give the 'audience the credit of being intelligent, to help them understand their



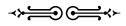
own existence, to give them hope in a better future, to teach them how to dream again' (Fainaru 2001: 149).

Following Angelopoulos' Journeys

Angelopoulos made thirteen films and a small number of shorts and documentaries. He started with a materialistic, Marxist understanding about the function of cinema in contemporary societies, which was dominant in the sixties through the work of the French structuralist Marxists Louis Althusser and Nicos Poulantzas. Coming out of the militant Marxist period of the Cahiers du Cinema between 1966 and 1969, he firmly believed in the revolutionary or liberational potential of cinema – through the principles of historical and dialectical materialism – as the only true *public* art in modern capitalist societies, characterised by the exploitation of the working class, the alienation of their social existence and the reification of their individual consciousnesses. This approach runs deep throughout Angelopoulos' whole career. Even when he grew disappointed with the Left, as late as 2010 he still believed: 'I remain left-wing emotionally, although I don't know what to be Left-wing means anymore.'²

Furthermore, Angelopoulos' early work was in a constant, implicitly agonistic, dialogue with Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre, particularly in its anti-Aristotelian de-dramatisation, its relative independence from all conventions of realism, its unemotional picturing of the world, and in being able to shift the position of the spectator from empathy to detachment outside action, amongst other things (Brecht 1964: 35). However, his Brechtian period ended rather abruptly with his fourth film, never to be revisited except as self-quotation and self-parody. In the end, Aristotle returned triumphant, and his understanding of tragedy as 'catharsis' (Aristotle 1995: 46) through pity and fear (*di' eleou kai fovou*) can be found at the heart of Angelopoulos' most distinct contributions to filmmaking, avoiding all forms of referential or indeed mimetic fallacy that has framed the hermeneutics of Aristotle's *Poetics* for centuries. Aristotle's influence dialectically surpasses, in the Hegelian sense of *aufheben*, all Brechtian elements in Angelopoulos' work after 1977 and often even seems to resynthesise Brechtian performative stylisation through classical mythopoetic narratives.

The changes in Angelopoulos' cinematic language manifested a growing pessimism about the Left, pessimism, or melancholia, he gradually transferred, politically and psychologically, to the anti-realism of grand utopian quests while at the same time struggling to 'visualise' their specific formal poetics. Despite such disenchantment, Angelopoulos main-



tained his fascination with the enduring political impact of cinema in the age of neoliberal, post-ideological and post-metaphysical consumer capitalism, when images became disposable commodities and the working class, which in the past he thought of as the central social force for revolutionary action, appeared to have all but lost its 'revolutionary' potential for political liberation and social emancipation. His disillusion with the organised parties of the Left, and his repudiation of them as bureaucratic managerialism, led Angelopoulos to explore but never quite endorse a certain aesthetic autonomy of art bespeaking the diachronic, if not perennial, 'essence' of cultural imaginary.

The last chapter functions as a counterpoint to those that have preceded it. It aspires to unframe Angelopoulos from the heavy politicisation of his films and the constant attempts by critics to see them as visual notes, or indeed footnotes, on the political tragedies of contemporary Greece. For this purpose, it explores his films as a sustained autobiographical visual narrative, or a cinematic roman-fleuve in the form of mythobiography,³ by foregrounding the personal and sometimes personalist themes present in the works that are based on Angelopoulos' own experiences, relationships and encounters (pragmatic details of which are given in the first chapter).

On the other hand, Angelopoulos himself stated: 'All my films are autobiographical. There is an internal and an external autobiography. Even in the *Reconstruction* one could find autobiographical elements.'⁴ Despite the dominant tropes in the interpretation of Angelopoulos' work as a political director who was afflicted by mal-du-siècle melancholia after the collapse of socialism in 1989–91, this study also explores certain existentialist themes embedded in his images, which address questions of freedom, personal identity, ethical choice, memory and subjectivity, together with a peculiar nostalgia for a lost absolute, sometimes full of religiosity but totally devoid of religion. Ultimately, a pattern of evolution emerges that brings Angelopoulos' intellectual and spiritual quest close to a reverse form, as it were, of Soren Kierkegaard's stages of development; especially in the last two decades of his life, when the temptation of an aestheticised history became dominant in his thinking, confronting the nihilistic implosion of meaning pervading Europe after 1989.

A prevailing misconception about Angelopoulos' work is that viewers need to know about Greek political history in order to understand it. Talking about *The Travelling Players*, David Thomson noted that 'we know after half an hour, that, as non-native watchers, we are always to be cut off from the roots of this extraordinary ritual [which became] a film' (Thomson 2008: 910). This is not the case; no sensitive or responsive viewer can feel cut off from Angelopoulos' films because of their historical subject matter. Each film not only reconstructs history but also constructs its own



history and both forms the expectations of its audience and is informed by them. Therefore, there is no need to read books on Greek politics before watching Angelopoulos. The film is itself the historical event, a spatio-temporal osmosis of collective and individual experiences through its images, a synergy between the formal intentions of the its director and the projections of its spectators, transforming it into a social encounter.

With the belief that cinematic images provide both the text and context for their experience, this monograph minimises superfluous information about local politics regarding production, conflicts with other directors over funding, or personal squabbles with journalists and reviewers. The otherwise respected Greek film critic Dimitris Danikas, for example, loved poking malicious fun at all Angelopoulos' films and has stirred considerable controversy about their reception. Such debates went on for long and were acrimonious, without ever elucidating or accounting for the visual dynamics of Angelopoulos' overall achievement.

The central point of my analysis is that there is no single 'Angelopoulos' cinematic language but rather four stages constituting the visual articulation of his work. The first is the period of political films, structured around Brechtian theatricality and a persistent tendency to demystify political power. The second is the period of delving into existentialist dilemmas through the discovery of introspective conscience in the individual psyche (a new parameter in his poetic vocabulary). In the third, Angelopoulos either assumes the mask of the cultural icon exploring collective myths across borderless regions or identifies with the archetypal poet of nationhood in times of crisis.

Finally, in the fourth Angelopoulos oscillates between scepticism and nihilism; from the ideological enthusiasm that promised a new social and political life to the pulverisation of existence in modern cities inhabited by virtual realities, spectral presences and groundless ontologies. However, the ultimate question about visual temporality remains unanswered, as his last film, *The Other Sea*, in which he would have formulated a coherent presentation of the predicament of displaced refugees, as embodying the ontology of homelessness and deterritorialization, was left unrealised because of his violent death.

Overall, Angelopoulos' cinema is characterised by complex fluidity, an urgent quest for innovation, and the persistent search for what we might call visual historicity. The filmmaker was for him both historian and history, sometimes with the initial letter capitalised (which indeed might be problematic for his early historical materialism). His cinematic images were both *res gestae* and *historia rerum gestarum*, being themselves historical events that challenged and provoked viewers and invited them to think critically about the past and act radically in their present.



They were also images encapsulating a philosophy, a way of thinking, a specific form of life; this philosophy of image-breaking and image-making is at the heart of Angelopoulos' visual project throughout his work. Images as collective histories are central to his iconographic legacy, constructing representations that do not simply epitomise the historical experience of the Greeks but also elucidate many frustrated or aborted projects of European modernity.

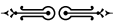
My ultimate suggestion is that all these elements frame and point to a cinematic visualisation of the sublime, to the degree that cinema has been able to encapsulate and construct a specific, non-literary perception of sublimity as primarily a mental event, as a noumenon in the Kantian sense of the word. As Immanuel Kant would have stated: 'a noumenon is not for our understanding a special [kind of] object, namely, an intelligible object; . . . For we cannot in the least represent to ourselves the possibility of an understanding which should know its object, not discursively through categories, but intuitively in a non-sensible intuition' (Kant 1999: 273). Such intuited objects, which Kant aptly called 'intellectual intuition' ('*nicht sinnliche Anschauung*') (Kant 1999: 267), are expressed through concrete visual forms without being completely determined by them, presenting metonymically the emerging non-correspondence between the specific form and its meaning: the viewer intuits the surplus meaning that comes out of each image without being able to define its specific location.

Aimilia Karali relates a story about Angelopoulos looking for locations for his film *Alexander the Great/O Megalexandros* (1980):

he wanted to find a mountainous village with its buildings arranged in semi-circular order and a central square in the middle. They were looking for quite some time for such a village, but they couldn't find it. But Angelopoulos insisted: 'since I thought of it, it exists,' he said to his associates. At a certain moment, one of them saw a documentary on television about the village Deskati, in Grevena. That was the village that Angelopoulos had thought.

The sublime in Angelopoulos is a mental event, a visionary transfiguration of the real, which he, simultaneously as the *metteur en scène* and the *auteur*, felt compelled to extract from his visual unconscious and bring out into the light of material existence. Angelopoulos' sublime can be drawn out of what Hegel called 'the flight beyond *the determinateness of appearance* that constitutes the general character of the sublime' (Hegel 1975: 303), which accounts for the asymmetries between images and significations that proliferate in his most mature and accomplished films.

The visual form of the sublime and its mental intuitive content are, despite their connection, at the same time in an entropic relationship: they materialise each other, but what is left out collides with its own realisation.



As Andre Bazin, a theorist whom Angelopoulos did not really appreciate much, suggested: 'What is imaginary on the screen must have the spatial density of something real' (Bazin 2005: 48). Such existence of the real, but not of the realistic, in his *poetic* imaginary, as expressed through his emblematic long take, provoked ambiguous emotions in his viewers and critics.

Indeed, in *Landscape in the Mist* (1988), the broken finger of the colossal hand seen pointing at the viewer and yet lost on the closed horizon of modern architectural brutalism is probably one of the most sublime images conceived to illustrate the lost unity of a reality that may never have existed in post-war Europe, unless, perhaps, as a dream or an alibi. But it is precisely the thinkability of being in the realm of the beyond while experiencing reality through the confines of material necessity that makes Angelopoulos' cinematic sublime so significant and so elusive.

Furthermore, it is the imminent presence of the numinous within the material object that renders this specific image sublime in the Kantian sense. Such asymmetry between the real and the ideal expresses precisely the tragic character of sublimity that led Angelopoulos, unexpectedly and from the back door, to the empathic mimesis and catharsis of his renewed Aristotelianism.

In stark contrast to the gigantic statue of Jesus Christ in Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (1960) or Lenin's statue in Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003), Angelopoulos' broken hand is both numinous and ominous, framing the sublime through its absence but also foregrounding it by the enormity of the emptiness around its vestiges. Overall, Angelopoulos' cinematic language was a systematic and persistent attempt to achieve the cinematic sublime: the sublime as immersion and emergence, the catalysts for ecstatic and oneiric experiences through filmic images.

Preliminary Notes on the Auteur and His World

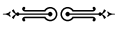
I must point out that Angelopoulos is a *difficult* director to watch; I could claim that he is consciously and deliberately a director's director, an auteur's auteur, and not a filmmaker courting large audiences. As with many post-war directors, like Robert Bresson, Satyajit Ray, Yussef Chahine, Miklós Jancsó and Glauber Rocha, and more recently Abbas Kiarostami, Milcho Manchevski, Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Nuri Bilge Ceylan, he never made films intended for amusement, escapism or entertainment. With a consciously contrarian attitude, he made films to cinematically explore the formless or more appropriately the 'unfilmed' – sometimes even the unfilmable – existential dynamics that he observed or intuited in the historical experience and the individual mind of his viewers.



As I argue here, Angelopoulos was both filmmaker and mythmaker, producing collective and personal 'biomythographies', emulating to a surprising degree, given the small market of Greek filmmaking, some of the greatest names in world cinema. Through his scripts, he was a veritable auteur, synthesising *mise en scène*, screenwriting and visual settings in a uniquely personal (and impersonal) style. Furthermore, he placed his individual stamp on all the elements of his movies: music, colour patterns, acting style, location choice, camera movement and editing. So, the purpose of this study is to facilitate a sensitive yet critical and judicious understanding of the scope of Angelopoulos' achievement with his films' distinct styles, diverse perspectives and multiple imaginings.

Being 'difficult' to watch, Angelopoulos' films have been scorned and rejected by many prominent film critics for their 'pretentious', 'funereal' or 'self-indulgent' style. Such facile reactions say more about the spectators (and the critics) than about the films. The reception of movies depends on many external factors that are not always about the unmediated or implicit relationship between audience, movie-production and filmmaker. It also changes according to new contextual realities, cultural reorientations and aesthetic revisions (or advertising promotions) from decade to decade, even from year to year. Indeed, forgotten, neglected or lost films are rediscovered, reinterpreted and gradually restored to the canon, where they sometimes achieve commercial prominence; like the neglected films of the late Orson Welles, for example, or the underrated melodramas of Douglas Sirk. The truth, however, is that Angelopoulos as a name or a brand never became part of the 'film industry', and his films could never have become sellable products for exports (as is the recent case with Yorgos Lanthimos). They existed within the 'film culture' as expressions of experimental marginality and creative inventiveness but were only peripheral in the realm of film as industry and production, although their contribution to establishing international co-production strategies should not be underestimated.

The commercial success of a film might be purely circumstantial and not connected to any intrinsic qualities, especially in the current era of dizzying eclecticism and 'imaginal politics', in which, as observed by Chiara Bottici: 'images are no longer what mediate our doing politics but that which risks doing politics in our stead' (Bottici 2014: 178). Today, cinema is mostly dominated by digital effects and computer-generated imagery, which totally erase narrative, plot, characterisation and, most importantly, any sense of a creative mythopoeic imaginary. In a sense, cinema has been transformed into post-cinema or non-cinema, which indicates a profound and radical problematisation of its nature and function as new media of virtual representation become more widespread.



How can an average viewer whose visual experience is saturated by digital effects, celebrity icons and escapist extravaganzas watch an Angelopoulos film today? Perhaps the post-cinematic condition is a victory of technology over representation, in which, as Marshall McLuhan aptly summarised, 'the medium is the message'. And if the current state of affairs has proven anything, it is that there is nothing else beyond the medium. We pay more attention to the ingenuity of the special effects than the imagination of the director as the *creator* of films, the acting styles of their performers, or even the story of the collaborative synergies between the two.

In a way, here we return to Francois Truffaut's statement: 'There are no good or bad films; only good or bad directors.' In this study, I strongly defend the idea of the auteur director, the person whose singular vision of reality indicates a critical interpretation of the act and the art of filming, and in a telling gesture towards a particular way of reinterpreting the auteur approach, I draw on Andrew Sarris' suggestion that we must put '... a greater emphasis on the tantalising mystery of style than on the romantic agony of the artists' (Sarris 1996 [1968]: 272). The dynamic equivalence between the vision of filmmakers and the power of their style is essential for the understanding of the complexity or even the very structure of their films. This has nothing to do with directors as celebrities but instead with directors as culture-makers who construct mythopoetic narratives through which collectivities can *recognise* themselves or find traces of their own realities in the field of visibility – something that may contribute to their commercial success but of course does not depend on it.

Their mythopoeia is essential for understanding the structural form of their films and the patterns of cinematic 'visual thinking', since, as Rudolf Arnheim argued, eventually in an era dominated by images '... visual perception [becomes] a cognitive activity' (Arnheim 1969: v). Ultimately, in the hypermodern temporality of today, commodified images define what is visible and what remains unvisualised. Yet instead of seeing images only as funereal monuments, or as monumentalising 'gods that failed', Angelopoulos also saw them as spaces of emancipation and topoi of existential rupture, leading to 'an upsurge of individual autonomy and a lessening of people's subjection to collective frameworks' (Lipovetsky 2005: 76).

However, even perceptive film critics are often mistaken when it comes to Angelopoulos, such as when Geoff Dyer accused *Ulysses' Gaze* (1995) of being 'another nail in the coffin of European art cinema' (Dyer 2010: 12). Indeed, the link between directors and their audience (or film critics) has been totally severed by today's blockbusters, screened in shopping malls and cinema multiplexes. Implicitly, the association between commercial



success and the quality of films remains strong even when the opposite is most obviously the case. The experience of going to the cinema and watching films of the recent past has been profoundly and perhaps permanently changed by the internet, new technologies and the privatised world of hypermodernity. In this study, we will address some of the radical ways of *looking* that Angelopoulos elaborated in his films in order to counteract the abnormal stimulation of the senses that commercial cinema employs to manipulate spectators and commodify the psychological impact of the cinematic experience. While, as Angelopoulos stated, 'cinema is a disease' (Fainaru 2001: 35), it can also be its own cure, and he addressed both diagnoses in his films, elaborating a unique philosophy of visuality that has been thus far underestimated.

Angelopoulos was one of the first directors to oppose the new visual regimes of hyper-stimulation that characterise movies made since the late seventies. Undoubtedly, he is a transitional figure in a period marked by experimentation (the sixties and seventies) and then by the retreat from radicalism through the gradual re-emergence of the studio system and the commercial competition between cinema and television. The retreat from radical experimentalism coincided with the avoidance of what was called 'slow or dead time' or 'long take' and the replacement of its condensed temporality with fast jump-cuts, continuous action and digitised montage. Film culture, which co-evolved with the film industry, suddenly found itself trapped in the new managerialism of the studios, with films made by committees and targeting specific focus groups, and effectively dispensing with the critical function of cinema and the personal vision of its auteurs.

Many commercially successful movies, like *Jaws*, *Star Wars*, the Indiana Jones sagas or the Alien series, were being made at the same time Angelopoulos was producing his films. What made these films successful was the fact that they resembled extended fast-moving videos or television programmes through their condensation of visual time into ninety minutes of relentless action, sharp dialogue and constant camera movement. Angelopoulos, like many filmmakers from Europe, South America and Asia, responded with the discovery of energetic slowness as visual experience, which is one of his most important contributions to contemporary filmmaking. Not, of course, that we did not have 'slow' filmmakers before him: Michelangelo Antonioni, Glauber Rocha, Andrei Tarkovsky and even Stanley Kubrick are the direct antecedents of Angelopoulos' style.

Following on from the early Antonioni, for Angelopoulos slowness was a restorative method for visually embodying the complexities of the human psyche in an era of existential and political implosion. These complexities were unspoken and indeed unfilmed, but their visual vestiges in



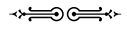
his images allowed viewers to enter the dark territory of their own unconscious and unvisualised personal shadows. He called that 'dark territory' melancholia, which, in the late eighties, became the dominant mood of Angelopoulos' films, expressing his ambivalence towards the cunning of history and its broken promises of emancipation, especially after the collapse of the so-called socialist countries. Yet still upholding Hegel's suggestion that 'ultimately History fulfils its ulterior rational designs in an indirect and sly manner' (Tucker 1956: 269), Angelopoulos nurtured the hope that the cinematic screen could still liberate a modern audience from its oppression, reaffirming rationality and ecstasy as existential realities at the same time. Such fusion of Enlightenment's emancipation project and romanticism's integrative perspective was for him the final frontier in order to combat 'the powerful dynamic of individualization and pluralization within our societies' (Lipovetsky 2005: 29).

Cinematically, the slow movement indicated that the camera did not simply record or reflect; it mainly revealed and foregrounded unvisualised realities. Thus, Angelopoulos' visual rhythm was in fact a method of uncovering 'formal invariants' under conflicting and antinomic layers of human interactions. In a personal note sent to Yvette Biro, Angelopoulos stated:

A film's rhythm is an inner rhythm, therefore a personal sense of time. In my films the rhythm resembles time dilation but in actual fact it is not. The ratio of filmic time to real time is 1:1, the fact that it appears like a time dilation of the sort that in music terms, we would call *ritenuto* or *lento* allows the viewers, if they let themselves, to savour or breathe time. (Biro 2008: 166)

Angelopoulos used the term time dilation to describe his attempt to translate the inner temporality of his viewers into a structural element of cinematic visuality. As on many other occasions, he used the metaphor of different movements in music: *lento* is mostly the tempo of his images, which might either expand into monumental cosmic symphonies or be transformed into intimate chamber music, or indeed into solo sonatas for piano or wind instruments.

He persistently focused his efforts on making slowness, which was for him 'the real sense of time', an organic element of cinematic experience. This meant that slowness was not simply an artificial delaying of action but the actual visualisation of a world's inner temporality, one which is felt by viewers when they reflect on their own act of seeing and the sense of being. In a distinctly personal way, Angelopoulos equated unvisualised time with the oneiric structure of the unconscious. Susanne K. Langer observed that 'cinema is "like dream"' in the mode of its presentation: it creates a virtual present, 'an order of direct apparition. This is the mode of



dream' (Langer 1953: 412). Angelopoulos wanted his spectators to enter a dream-like or even daydreaming mode by depicting the equivalence between the sense of slowness in their mind and its active presence in their social world.

The energetic slowness of Angelopoulos' films aspired to transform all cinematic experience into an oneiric state of being, as in the works of Fellini, Tarkovsky, Chahine and Terrence Davies. Robert Eberwein suggests that the narrowing of the gap between viewer and director in cinema happens because films 'replicate activities associated with oneiric experience' (Eberwein 1984: 82). In that respect, Angelopoulos builds on and carries further the oneiric slowness of Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972) and *Stalker* (1979), Federico Fellini's *Amarcord* (1973), Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (1957) and Antonioni's *L' Eclisse* (1962) and *The Passenger* (1975). He also builds on the chaotic temporal simultaneity of the unconscious mind in films by experimental directors like Stan Brakhage, Maya Deren and, especially, the early Alain Resnais. Oneiric yet energetic slowness is indeed the most significant formal invariant of Angelopoulos' films, encapsulating his own philosophical and anthropological understanding of cinema.

On the other hand, from his first film Angelopoulos understood that *his* cinema had to be different from everyone else's in his country. In an early discussion with the film critic Vasilis Rafailidis, to whom we will return frequently in this book, Angelopoulos stressed that he followed the 'Brazilians of the cinema novo, [who made films] as if they had forgotten European cinema, looking for an expression almost national'. So, in other words, he was also looking 'thematically, to make films that constituted testimonies about space' (Rafailidis 2003 [1969]: 153). In order to achieve this, Angelopoulos wanted to totally discard any form of 'picturesque' image: that is, clichéd images and any other derivative representations. In his conversation with Rafailidis about his first film, Angelopoulos stated: 'I have bypassed the danger of picturesqueness. The whole story is seen with so much *abstraction*, which makes it impossible to fall into picturesqueness' (Rafailidis 2003 [1969]: 143).

To the fast-moving, narratively exciting and thematically melodramatic films of the dominant cinematic genres, Angelopoulos developed an antithetical, almost oppositional style that was to completely re-envision and reorganise the cinematic language of his native tradition, and at the same time offer a differential alternative to the hegemonic visual idioms of world cinema. Michel Ciment, who explicitly includes Angelopoulos in his list, contextualised such an approach in his well-known address about 'slow cinema', claiming that: 'Facing this lack of patience and themselves made impatient by the bombardment of sound and image to which they



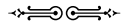
are submitted as TV or cinema spectators, a number of directors have reacted by a cinema of slowness, of contemplation, as if they wanted to live again the sensuous experience of a moment revealed in its authenticity.¹⁵

The discovery of duration as the visual rhythm of cinema is probably one of Angelopoulos' most interesting contributions to the temporal foregrounding of filmic images in the human mind. Visual duration was for Angelopoulos the translation into cinematic images 'of pure temporality, of the *lived consciousness*, which is continuous and indivisible and can be only known through intuition' (Bergson 2001: 75). His cinematic language aspired to visually 'think in duration' and create a cathetic sympathy between the viewer and the screen, thus intensifying their emotional responsiveness.

In that respect, it is through cinema that Greece became his 'imaginary homeland', a place of the imagination and in the imagination. His material was primarily 'Greek', but its framing, visualisation and conceptualisation was transnational and universal, therefore purely cinematic. At the same time, we can infer from his work that Angelopoulos never felt he belonged to any periphery, or that he needed in any way to address himself to a hegemonic centre, whether in Europe or Hollywood. His cinematic ontology was founded on a universalising vision of polycentric visualities. In a strange way, Angelopoulos never reflected on his position agonistically or, even more, antagonistically to the presumed centres of cinematic culture.

Even in his use of international film celebrities, like Marcelo Mastroianni, Jeanne Moreau, Harvey Keitel, Bruno Ganz, Willem Dafoe, Michel Piccoli, Irène Jacob and others, he seems to deliberately demythologise their cinematic personas by debunking their glamour and mystique yet elaborating forms of their cinematic anti-types. Angelopoulos tried in his movies to synthesise modes of representation and forms of presentation in which various problematics and experiences converged and diverged. He never had any dilemmas about belonging, or about the Greek position between East and West, the Balkans and the Mediterranean, or generally at the centre or the periphery of Europe.

His main concern was with being as visually expressed, in an attempt to make cinematic images 'the house of Being' – a role that originally Martin Heidegger had attributed to language (Heidegger 1998: 239). His camera was part of the continuum of life and history, not an external or detached observer and recorder. Being in Time and Being with Others as events born out of and through cinema were at the heart of Angelopoulos' project. Furthermore, his cinematic eye was the catalyst for more interpersonal ways of seeing and being in society. In a way, his camera is at its best when it resides in the eye of the beholder, when it absorbs spectators in ways that do not annul their freedom but instead intensify their respon-



siveness to the exigencies of history, the impasses of their existence and the dilemmas of their creative imaginary – *these* were the focal points of his comprehensive visual project.

Summing Up

The present monograph reconceptualises the study of Angelopoulos' films through the perspective of transnational cine-aesthetics, investigating the complex ways his films are linked with major post-war and post-communist European cinematic exchanges, ethical anxieties and political projects. It argues that his early films deal not simply with Greek history but more significantly with political power as existential reality, with its mechanisms of oppression and domination and the various ways it was exercised by post-Enlightenment, pseudo-modernist elites in the European periphery. The films of his second period deal mainly with loss, absence and trauma through the representation of displaced individuals and their existential homelessness and broken interiority, indicating the crisis of authority and legitimacy that Angelopoulos observed taking place in European cultures.

During his third period, which followed the collapse of 'existing socialism' and the end of the last utopian project of revolutionary enlightenment, Angelopoulos transgressed state borders and explored the proximity of otherness; although, strangely enough, in order to do so he had to invest himself with the mantle of the prophet, or the representative 'poet', of the nation and its language. In his final period, which coincides with the new millennium, his camera explored the rise of European nihilism together with the hegemony of a capitalist globalisation that homogenised cultural expressions and imposed strategies of surveillance and control, stripping the individual naked from their mystery and enigma, and, indeed, stripping them of their very freedom. His last film is a long, rather pessimistic elegy on the death of a whole world image, as the quest for 'lost movies' in which the gaze was innocent and young is replaced by death, suicide and the 'dust of time'.

If studied carefully and sensitively, Angelopoulos' films have the potential to change cinematic thinking. Indeed, some of them were catalysts for wider and permanent reconsiderations of dominant practices. The fact that his films radically challenged visual thinking indicates that they also constitute historical events, ruptures in the horizon of conformist politics in a period of mediocracy, can still potentially challenge the dominant contemporary regimes of cinematic visibility. How Angelopoulos employed cinema and imagined the cinematic is essentially the ultimate



question that emerges from his films. Despite the fact that he never elaborated a detailed or systematic theory about cinema, we can extract from his work itself a firm belief of the purposeful intentionality of visual images; through this, we can also examine his ideas not only on how to make cinematic images but about their telos within the historical world of their viewers. In a way, this study explores what Robert Sinnerbrink called Angelopoulos' 'cinematic ethics', since, as he states when concluding his study: 'Angelopoulos' films, both early and late, serve as ethically and politically significant memorials to the (often tragic) intersection of cinema and history over the previous century' (Sinnerbrink 2015: 96).

Ultimately, this study situates Angelopoulos within the macro-narratives that have dominated European cinematic production since the seventies. It argues that, whilst belonging to Greek society and expressing the specific elements of the Greek historical experience, Angelopoulos gradually transcended the barriers of his native culture and produced an oeuvre that was truly transnational, multidimensional and cosmopolitan. Dina Iordanova placed Angelopoulos' films in their appropriate context and directorial perspective when she wrote:

Angelopoulos' Balkan films are also historical collages, raising issues of displacement and lost homelands, and trying to go beyond the geopolitical intricacies that dominate the approaches of other film-makers. His trademark atmosphere of lonely wandering through the mist prevails in all his films which deal with issues of universally distorted harmony, irrecoverable identities and fin-de-siecle sadness. He is the only one daring enough to claim that problems of universal identity lurk from within the peculiar Balkan universe. (Iordanova 2001: 107)

Angelopoulos' cinema is Greek, Balkan, Mediterranean, European and global; it belongs to what Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli called 'Mythopoetic Cinema' (Ravetto-Biagioli 2017: 64–123), although not solely focused on the ruins of European identity (in itself a Eurocentric perception) but on something wider and much more foundational: the uneasiness that permeates culture, as Sigmund Freud would have called it. His films are precisely about how such uneasiness impacts individuals and societies and seriously impairs their need to dream and the desire to be otherwise. Because of its profound anthropological concerns, Angelopoulos' mythopoetic cinema belongs to, or indeed comes out of, the wider project of establishing a global culture of cinephilia, tentatively articulated by Thomas Elsaesser as that which 'reverberates with nostalgia and dedication, with longings and discrimination and evokes, . . . more than a passion for going to the movies, and only a little less, than an entire attitude towards life' (Elsaesser 2005: 27). Cinephilia is a movement in which every local visual tradition contributes forms, patterns and iconologies, constituting the grand mosaic



of world cinema that we see being formed today: diverse, contradictory and palimpsestic.

Angelopoulos' contribution to the emerging global cinephilia constitutes an important chapter in its historical process, and the present study wants to elucidate certain aspects of his achievement. Furthermore, drawing again from Thomas Elsaesser, we can understand the complex intersection between local power structures and international institutional alliances that made Angelopoulos a global auteur, as he achieved '... a paradoxical kind of autonomy and agency that that has the potential to reinvent the cinema, not as an art form, nor as a life form, but as a form of philosophy . . .' (Elsaesser 2017: 39).

Indeed, Angelopoulos is a global auteur because he created and imagined an intricate, complex and challenging philosophy of visuality, one that needs more attention and further exploration.

Notes

1. For more on Acquarello, see <http://sensesofcinema.com/2003/great-directors/angelopoulos/> (Retrieved 1 December 2020).
2. See a selection of Angelopoulos' commentary on his films: <http://www.cinephilia.gr/index.php/prosopa/hellas/606-agelopoulos-6> (Retrieved 1 December 2020).
3. I borrow the term from Audre Lorde's book, *Zami: A New Spelling of my Name* (1982), which is a blend of memoir, history and myth.
4. On *Eternity and a Day* (1998): <http://www.cinephilia.gr/index.php/prosopa/hellas/606-agelopoulos-6> (Retrieved 1 December 2020).
5. Michel Ciment, 'The State of Cinema', delivered at the 46th San Francisco International Film Festival (2003). See *Unspoken Cinema: Contemporary Contemplative Cinema*, 10 March 2006, <https://unspokencinema.blogspot.com/2006/10/state-of-cinema-m-ciment.html> (Retrieved 1 December 2020).