

# The Disjunctive Aesthetics of Myth and Empathy in Theo Angelopoulos' *Ulysses Gaze*

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*The true is inimitable, the false untransformable.*

Robert Bresson

### *i) As a Prelude*

In his insightful study on Theo Angelopoulos' cinema, Andrew Horton posits an extremely crucial question about the director's visual strategies in order to establish creative empathy between his audience and his epic cinema of 'contemplation': "while Angelopoulos often refers to Brecht and the need for an audience to think as well as feel in theater and cinema, we do not experience anything close to what could be called an 'alienation effect' in Brechtian terms. To the contrary, the mixture of theatricality and reality in his films often leads us into a deeper, fuller emotional bond with the film – one that, we could say, embraces our thinking mind as well".<sup>1</sup> In our opinion, this premise needs qualifications and some further discussion in order to better appreciate the formal and visual techniques employed by Angelopoulos to transport his viewer through imaginative empathy into the levels of meaning that themselves establish and denote.

For this purpose we will attempt a close look at one of his most 'epic' films, *Ulysses' Gaze* (1995), in order to examine the creative dilemmas of the artist in an era of intense commercialisation of cinema and of the absence of political projects for artistic renewal.

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<sup>1</sup> Horton, Andrew, (1997: 14-15) *The Films of Theo Angelopoulos, A Cinema of Contemplation*, Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey.

Within the context of major technological advancements that are destined to change film production, Angelopoulos' movies represent somehow humanist monuments resurrecting an era of creative optimism and mythopoetic experiments. Digital technology has created completely different conditions for the production and reception of movies; Angelopoulos however, like Abbas Kiarostami or even Martin Scorsese, continues a tradition of exploring foundational myths and grand narratives with the conscious concern to discover their contemporary relevance. Mark Cousins also observes that "Greece's borderline position between Europe, Asia and the Balkans seems to have made the idea of contested space a central political and historical one in Angelopoulos' great films".<sup>2</sup> Indeed most of Angelopoulos' movies investigate the idea and the reality of 'contested space' but they can also be seen as contested spaces themselves; places that is where signifiers collide and refract accepted codes of representation towards new *morphoplastic connections*.

Angelopoulos' films are made on constructivist principles linking forms through geometric connections, and joining them with actual historical experiences. His constructivist projects foreground situations and objective configurations which, despite their emotionally charged iconography, are in themselves anti-subjective. What interests him is to depict the dynamic forces resulting from such connections and the vital forms born out of their co-existence. The political background of his movies, and the politics of their production, are not sufficient to explain his artistic innovations and his visual experiments with four-dimensional space. Angelopoulos' cinema establishes an "artistic language, ... whose active prophecy of new and future forms will not be its least and most negligible achievement", as Fredric Jameson observed.<sup>3</sup> In this brief discussion we try to examine how the traditional empathic function of artistic representation is reconciled with the critical gaze of the director who doesn't want his viewers to be trapped by verisimilitude or

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<sup>2</sup> Cousins, Mark, (2004: 376) *The Story of Film*, London, Pavilion Books.

<sup>3</sup> Jameson, Fredric, (1997: 94) "Theo Angelopoulos: the past as history, the future as form" in *The Last modernist, The Films of Theo Angelopoulos*, ed. by Andrew Horton, Praeger, p. 78-95.

melodrama. His cinema is a paradoxical amalgam of European experiments with cinematic form and a personal poetic perception about the visual function of cinema today. In the era of digital revolution, of television and of the internet, his movies seem to re-invent cinematic language by infusing traditional plots (road movies for example) with questions that go beyond their semiotic systems. The paradox and the collision make his movies 'contested spaces' which go beyond generic boundaries or accepted conceptual references.

### **ii) *The Work***

*Ulysses' Gaze* (1995) is probably not only the most ambitious cinematic work that came out of Greece since the introduction of cinema to the creative imaginary of the country but obviously one of the most mythopoetic works produced in Europe during the period after World War II. However, the movie itself with its monumentality and 'archetypal' imagery gives an incredibly ambiguous sensation about its visual iconography, mythic structure and historical relevance. Many critics have accused Theo Angelopoulos' characters and stories as lacking in individuality and specificity and see them as mere allegories, symbols and abstractions.

Visually, Angelopoulos' cinematic idiom tends towards colossal and the sublime; it elevates its forms into totalising unities which do not simply depict a situation but inherently locate the structural forces that produced them. Furthermore, Angelopoulos' movies in general tend to depict a story without the dramatising effects of Hollywood movies recording a temporal structure that is episodic and illusory. Real time is never as condensed or miniaturised as we see in action movies for example; real time is always slow and tends to prolong experience in an attempt to transfer the mind on the sphere where the real drama takes place. Angelopoulos' sense of time avoids the anecdotal or the impressionistic; it bends the

expectations of linearity into forms of confusing circularity or multi-directional spirality. The actors find themselves trapped in a non-directional space; they lose themselves and the fixity of their character or the centre of their emotions within a non-Aristotelian universe of puzzling poetic beauty. Circular temporality that dominates Angelopoulos' landscapes brings to the fore the platonic *eidos* in each one of them, that is the epiphanic image as the sum of all aspects seen. This may give the impression that they transform themselves into anti-historical presences: as if their very existence negates the kind of history in which they participate.

However, Angelopoulos' cinema does not aspire to create characters in dramatic actions. His characters are humans confronting their historical conscience, therefore they abide by the limits of their existence, on the boundary between what they are and what they have been. So, they always tend to be elsewhere or otherwise; their faces express their very estrangement from the fact that they are where they find themselves. They experience a profound historical disturbance not in terms of pathological *anomie* but as amphibious creatures in search of their nests within the incomprehensible flux of Heraclitian rivers.

For Angelopoulos, historicity and temporality are necessarily interlinked. So if history is such an undesired nightmare, then the temporal sense embodied by his characters has to be discontinuous and disruptive. He depicts thus a sense of time which is not internal or esoteric but which seems to forcibly negate the historical presence of its participants. In almost all his movies, characters seem to have something *neutral* in them as if all that happens around them happens without their consent *through* them. One could even claim that some of his central characters are indeed Quixotic, half tragic and half comic, unable to come to terms with the history around them. This gives sometimes the impression of a *fin de siecles* melancholia or post-communist pessimism, or even from the point of view of his country a kind of elegiac farewell to a lost innocence. However in reality, his characters are mainly victims of history and his stories represent unexpected consequences of larger configurations, in themselves totally beyond representation. Instead

of reverting to easy solution of depicting a story in its Aristotelian conformity to the addictions of an audience which looks for escapism and voluntary infantilisation, Angelopoulos creates monumental *aporias* about historicity and meaning.

History is the first *aporia* of his work. One could easily refer to the famous letter by Friedrich Engels, that history as it happened is something that no one ever wanted. (This idea has not been explored thoroughly by historians, or even by post-modernist thinkers, despite its extremely subversive and anti-deterministic nature.) This precisely is the crux in Angelopoulos' epic cinema; his characters exist in a profound discrepancy with their historicity, emerging almost within a radical conflict between their social context and their persona. The movie depicts masks looking for faces, as if the real and the authentic are beyond representation and understanding. Angelopoulos' movies illustrate the cognitive *aporia* in front of the incomprehensibility of their position in history. Few words, which are usually references to canonical authors, function as signposts towards a positioning which is untenable; the character is in a painful understanding of its unreality. Most of his characters live in something which is beyond their mental horizon not simply because of its immensity but mainly because they participate in a story which is not theirs. They are intruders into their own life and what the cinematographer is doing is to express their own numbness in front of the image of themselves trying to be themselves.

In Greek the word that can be used to express the appearance of Angelopoulos' characters is *amechania*; the theatricality and the stylisation of behaviour underlines this existential *amechania* of his characters. We would translate this word as 'neutralisation': Angelopoulos' movies depict the historical neutralisation of the creative imaginary as it confronts projects of social organisation. We would even suggest that the poignant depiction of personal memories belongs more to what Marcel Proust and Henry Bergson called *involuntary memory* and less to any kind of Freudian association. His stories and their characters depict a reality which they themselves do not comprehend. No sense of traumatised

subjectivity since his movies depict "trauma-scapes", "places marked by traumatic legacies of violence, suffering and loss", as defined by Maria Tumarkin.<sup>4</sup> All his stories take place in sites of historical crimes and to a certain degree represent historical crimes.

The centreless gaze gliding over endless surfaces on single shots indicates the disunity between the creative artist and his *mise-en-scene*. The disunity is inhabited by all the residues of involuntary memory; neglected stories, self-referential comments, distinctive details. The Brechtian alienation does not exist in the character or between the character and what they do; or even between the viewer and the movie. But between the camera and its subject matter. Angelopoulos sets the camera against its seen object. The presumed calmness or serenity of his gaze is not of the same order as Tarkovsky's or Antonioni's. The cinematic gaze either withdraws from its subject or runs along parallel trajectories with it: the meeting is in the eye of the viewer with a great sense of loss-recorder. The empathic union or Aristotelian identification happens only incidentally, in random manner, expressing the rare moments of ecstatic self-transcendence that humans achieve probably against their own will in an historical environment that threatens their presence.

Angelopoulos' style is equally interesting in his attempt to frame that profound divergence between humans and history. He avoids empathic close-ups that would give the impression of an identification with the character. He does not give the impression of an inner life, of a hidden reality of emotions. The camera is always set at deep focus, with almost parallel focalisations, replacing thus multiple shots with multiple perspectives. Whereas the camera starts off from an 'establishing shot', it moves parallel to its subject creating in many occasions an interaction between frame and window: the formal arrangement in the long scene of the dismantled statue of Lenin, for example, moves between the framing of the dead god through intense close-ups and macroscopic shots of the

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<sup>4</sup> Tumarkin, Maria, (2005: 12) *Traumascapes, The Power and fate of Places transformed by tragedy*, Melbourne University Press.

river, the people along its banks and the horizon. The old slogan about socialism in the horizon is now replaced with the horizon swallowing up the dead symbol of socialism. The cataclysmic event of a dead god leaves behind the frightening emptiness of the horizon and the polyphonic speechlessness of the faithful. (Along the banks of Danube people cross themselves in religious awe attending the funeral of a dead deity in exactly the same way as in antiquity people did when they heard the cry "The great Pan is dead!") Against such emptiness, people talk and understand each other but act against the very fact of communication. The great code that used to give perspective to their divergent multiplicities is now gone and the characters can only recount their dead. In the scenes in Belgrade the brothers recount their dead and recall their memory as if they descend into Hades with the very fact of uttering their names. But talking about the dead is not enough; Angelopoulos' visual fields record the desperate attempts of the living to communicate with the dead. In fact the whole movie starts with the psychopomp cab driver making prophecies about Greece and offering libations to nature. The whole movie can be seen as a modern descent into the Inferno of human inability for communication either in the manner of Homer or of Dante; all grand landscapes frame devastating events, the one catastrophe after the other. History is a palimpsest of unwritten catastrophes: the filmmaker unravels the layers of dark secrets that have defined history, through the ominous act of seeing closely what connects humans and places. The spectacular and somehow 'beautiful' settings hide in them the invisibility of collective crimes. In such invisibility we can detect another important characteristic of Angelopoulos' morphoplastic creativity.

In a paradoxical way, Angelopoulos avoids the iconography of frontal representation tending towards the uniconic. Despite its strong visuality and polychromatic euphoria, his images depict empty spaces in their creative potentiality neutralised by history. In the empty spaces of Tarkovsky's *The Mirror* the characters can see angels and visions of elemental transfiguration. In the mountainous landscapes of Abbas Kiarostami majestic characters appear out of

nowhere populating the visual field with associations and a sense of magic realism. Even in Bela Tarr's seven hour epic *Satantango* (1993) the camera is set in a taxonomic way; imposing a hierarchy of perspectives onto its subject matter. But Angelopoulos' camera gives an effect analogous to Michelangelo's ceilings, without their overcrowded rhetoric. The gaze must roll along the picture in order to follow its movement and through its movement to understand its meaning in a spiral way of representing present and past. The meaning is in the constant internal movement of temporal sensation as subtle transitions from one state of mind to the other. Indeed there is no visual contemplation of centreless modernity in *Ulysses' Gaze*. Centres are fictive idealisations of ultimate authority and psychologically express the implied heteronomy of contemporary social structure. The only centre that cannot be lost or be fragmented is the human body which is depicted in its pristine innocence.

In Angelopoulos' previous movies, what is missing is vulgar sexualisation of the gaze; the viewer looks at de-erotised nudity. The body even in the scenes with the naked soldier in *The Travelling Players*, or the sailor in *Voyage to Cythera* or Harvey Keitel's nudity in *Ulysses' Gaze*, is the only way to understand existence in its complete vulnerability and innocence, even shame and guilt. It is almost impossible to read his movies psychoanalytically. The interplay of masculinity and femininity loses its sexual tension and becomes a defence against loneliness and history. Angelopoulos is one of the few directors who doesn't employ a facile Freudian hyper-textuality in order to present human beings as sexually active. Like in Tarkovsky, sexuality influences people indirectly; it does not represent part of their identity or their core identity. His movies avoid sexual symbolism and leave the body to exude its invitation for union in its free association with visual vibrations. Since sexuality is not the produce of love, then the mechanical dispersion of sexual activity is simply pointless and wherever it exists, it seems to indicate problematics of communication, absence of self-consciousness, and violence.

His forms are characterised by *miraculous innocence* against their own history. This is expressed through the ocular gathering of time

around strong sources of light which radiate from within. Despite its Renaissance monumentality, linear perspective with a specific source of light is missing in *Ulysses*. The light of day or night, or as it comes through the holes created by bombs in Sarajevo, is gently diffused and refracted. It shows the visuality of objects and forms without distorting their distinct figuration. Angelopoulos' forms are immersed into self-produced light. Shadows and penumbras which could justify the grades of chiaroscuro do not exist even in his first black and white movie *Reconstruction*. His forms float over each other retaining their solid materiality; strong colours complement each other and yet create an uncanny feeling of surreal fantasy. By sculpting out the 'formal objecthood' of what is seen, Angelopoulos situates his stories within dark contexts whose obscurity can only be inferred.

In his earlier movie *Megalexandros*, set in the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Alexander 'found refuge in the cities' escaping the consequences of a primeval crime. It is interesting to remember the crimes that we see throughout his cinematography (*Reconstruction*, *The Hunters*, *Megalexandros*, *Voyage to Cythera*, *Landscape in the Mist*). His movies depict subjectivity in the context of Rimbaud's "era of the assassins". Such crimes are not sacrifices or ritual blood bonding; they are not sacrifices of consecration nor expiatory offerings to a hungry or silent deity. In a popular movie about Jack the Ripper, *From Hell* (Albert & Allan Hughes, 2001), the action opens with a statement attributed to the criminal himself: "One day men will look back and say I gave birth to the twentieth century." The collective crimes and the collectivity of criminal behaviour loom large in Angelopoulos' stories. The whole of *Ulysses' Gaze* culminates in another crime symbolising the senseless crimes committed during the war in Yugoslavia. This movie is one of the most crucial 'political' commentaries of the actual events in Srebrenica and Sarajevo. In his very last poem W.H. Auden's exploration of human psyche reached it's pinnacle in most painful and tragic verses, that can be seen at the backdrop of this movie: "From Archeology / one moral, at least, may be drawn, / to wit, that all / our school text-books lie. / What they call History / is

nothing to vaunt of, / being made, as it is, / by the criminal in us: / goodness is timeless."<sup>5</sup>

How can an artist who makes 'political movies in political ways' represent the crime of war? War means the suspension of politics and the de-politicisation of history. There can be no politics in the Greek sense of the word during such historical moments when the 'criminal in us' rules over the need to communicate solitude and transcend limitations. As in the *Iliad*, the war objectifies humans, as a matter of fact, de-objectifies objects (guns, canons, uniforms) and makes them objects of desire. What was the war around Sarajevo about? Angelopoulos depicts death as a fact of life, as a catalyst of knowing who you are in moments of shared illumination. Harvey Keitel talks about "the journey" "between one kiss and another, between one embrace and another". The private language of intimacy demolishes the cruelty and savagery of collective madness. The facelessness of crime dominates the last part of the movie; no one is able to see the enemy who talks in different languages. The mist around Sarajevo indicates the absence of bridges of communication. (Vasillis Rafailidis observed that "the mist is the most political of Angelopoulos' symbols"). The bombarded buildings with their shattered windows hide instead of revealing. The squares and streets of public recognition and re-enactments are crowded with people from the asylum of terrified bodies who never respond. "Is this Sarajevo?" Harvey Keitel asks: but no one stops to tell him anything. In the monastic tradition of Christianity, Hell is thought of as place where people cannot look at each other's eye. The gaze that frames the presencing of every form in space and time is unable to see what is in front of it. Angelopoulos' work could be aptly described as the *cinema of presences* framed through the ocular gathering of time in symbols of striking objectivity. If the modernist project implied the subjective decentring, Angelopoulos has no place for such subjectivity in his movies.

On the contrary, this movie is based on a structural disjunction between diegetic distanciation and cinematic empathy characteristic

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<sup>5</sup> Auden, W.H., (1979: 304) *Selected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, Faber and Faber, London.

of his whole mature work and which make his oeuvre oscillate between Brecht and Aristotle. The narrative level of *Ulysses* is focused around temporal juxtapositions (past-present) or diegetic sequences (mythemes moving forward the story). The voice of the narrator is heard (as if reading or writing letters, in *Landscape in the Mist* and *Ulysses' Gaze*) to bring the storyline together with the whole mise-en-scene. In this level of constructing his narrative, Angelopoulos uses ancient myths grafted onto particular historical episodes of modern history (*Oresteia* in *The Travelling Players*, *Odyssey* in *Ulysses' Gaze* etc). But he employs ancient myths not in an a-historical archetypal manner or by reducing the immediacy of the events described to their perennial meaning in a Jungian way. The Freudian interpretation is also missing in *The Travelling Players*, for example, and in his early *Reconstruction*. In his diegetic distanciation Angelopoulos raises an immense space between the viewer and the story: the mythemes (elements of the original myths) refer to the past but as they are enacted in the moment of the cinematographic setting they create a disjunctive effect: characters are simultaneously specific and anonymous, in their form the elements individuality and collectivity develop a symbiotic relationship. A. in the movie is both Angelopoulos and Alexander, is the anonymous character of mythic prototype and an autobiographical comment on the director himself.

In the cinematic language, however, the space between the mythic sub-text and the contemporary storyline is brought together through the phenomenological empathy of the visual field. Colours, shapes and configurations generate emotions of pity and identification. The cold yellow and green colours in *the Hunters*, the earthy warm maternal colours in *Megalexandros*, the luminous and sharp colours in *Ulysses' Gaze*, all indicate Angelopoulos' concern for the participation of his viewers to the actual mise-en-scene by employing colours in a dialectical synergy with the noetic associations of his viewers. Following Wassily Kandinsky's understanding of colour as crystallised vibrations emanating from a specific formal arrangement, Angelopoulos makes his colours express his approach to his subject matter and give a thread through

the labyrinthine construction of his stories. The colours of the night that we see in the early scenes set in Greece are gradually opening up to the gloomy atmosphere in Albania, claustrophobic scenes in Skopje, the soft and gentle colours of his childhood in Romania until they are filled with cosmic exuberance in the majestic scene of the statue of Lenin in the Danube. Cold and warm colours are used interchangeably in the scenes in Sarajevo, until the reality of death destroys all colours in the mist or on the white screen where the original gaze was recorded. The viewer sees the inner psychic unfolding of the collective adventure in a set of non-verbal signs. The cathartic element (his debt to Aristotle) comes through the colours of the film not through the story. The use of colour in the cinema of Angelopoulos is in itself a representation of a second order through which we can 'read' the mental translation of his topographies into psychological indicators.

Cinema liberated artistic creation from the shackles of language and storyline by making colours the most important means of producing a running commentary on action. Eisenstein attempted something similar with his constant references to painters (El Greco and Alessandro Magnasco) but he had the opportunity to use colour in the final scenes of *Ivan the Terrible* in which the red of murder and the blue of innocence are dancing frantically in an interplay of emotional reactions. The visual impact of such 'tragic colours' is finally sternly contrasted to the black and white murder in the cathedral scene: all colours have been extinguished as the crime happens. The same is seen in the final scenes in Sarajevo: empty houses without colours, urban streets without lights. All forms are floating on the unreality created by war and the obscuring mist. The gaze is empty because there is nothing to be seen.

If *Ulysses* is Angelopoulos' reference to the ancient past, gaze is his reference to Jacques Lacan. Lacan's 'mirror stage' is probably the main presupposition of all cinematic experience. By looking at ourselves on screen we see our objectified body as it is seen by others or even as it should be seen by us. At the moment we see our body moving, our eyes looking back at us, we re-live our infancy when for the first time we established meaningful relations with the

objects around us, after we saw our self in between them. Every cinematic experience is a symbolic rebirth of the viewer or of a whole community. Certainly Western cinema has exhibited an obsessive preoccupation with the self at the expense of the collective, of what Angelopoulos calls at the end of the movie "the adventure". Close-ups and flash-backs try to bring the camera into the inner mind for their viewer in an attempt to present the mental world of the character in its irreducible specificity. (Lawrence Olivier's *Hamlet* is probably the classic example of such diving into the brain of his character). They also try to foreground the psychological depth of their character by employing dramatic transitions from one episode to another with a climactic summation of everything in moments of tension and catharsis. Angelopoulos' cinema, as in Miclos Janco, Antonioni, Tarkovsky and more recently Sokurov, the self is an element which is seen against its context. Angelopoulos does not isolate the mind of his characters from the minds around them. Climactic scenes are spectacularly absent from his films. "Things happen in silence", as Akira Kurosawa observed, so there is no hierarchy of order: all that happens is equivalently crucial. Everything on the screen points to the mortality of the viewer: it depicts an ethical fable about death.

Angelopoulos' representation of temporality in *Ulysses' Gaze* and *Eternity and One Day* is in its core about death and dying, about the crucial transition from the state of being able to see, to the state in which you will only be seen by someone else. The cinematic gaze in *Ulysses* is about absence; but absence indicates death and *aphanisis*, again in the Lacanian sense. Death the signifier devours the body; this is not a body anymore but a *dead* body. It has changed its mode of being into a phantasmal existence similar to the women we see in the Macedonian village in the movie of the Maniakis Brothers. These images essentially define the mise-en-scene of the film: they are absent and yet they represent the desire to be seen in their pristine completeness. When they became for the first time prisoners in a film and remained as the residues of light after the light of their eyes was lost, by disappearing as individuals they re-appeared as gazes looking back to the living and questioning their life through their

mortality. Yet, in their absence, their gaze remains alive, through one of the paradoxes of cinematic language. Humphrey Bogart is equally alive in his movies when we watch today, as he was when he married Lauren Bacall. Angelopoulos creates a *cinema of presences*: real or illusory, numinous or ominous. His iconography transforms the absent body into a numinous presence: it foregrounds its very ambiguity by fusing it with its various forms throughout time. In the collective level, history can only be contemporaneous because history is not about memory but about recalling into life. The past as memory is completely different from the past as historical facts.

In his earlier movies Angelopoulos presented communities without children (*Megalexandros*), children without parents (*Landscape in the Mist*) or children looking for parents (*Eternity and One Day*). The crisis of modernity is essentially a search for a father; after the father is gone, dismembered or devoured, then the real journey begins: to see your own beginning. The whole journey over the Danube can be easily seen as an exit from the maternal womb; the arrival in the place where war happens is the confrontation with the history of those parents and their works. The broken ideological symbols help the individual to come of age: the exit from the womb of personal memories leads to the desire to enter the world of otherness. Cinematic art makes human gaze see the world and the other as uncanny (*unheimlich*), as beyond narrative translation, in an endless conflict with meaning and signification. The gaze opens the seen into a multiplicity of significations by transferring it onto a new level of self-awareness. The image organises a new perception of forms seen in a constant polarity with the form framed in films. So, in our perceptual abilities today, the real is complemented by its mirror-image in a dialectical union. The viewer enters an uncanny state of uncertainty and dislocation: why is A. in *Ulysses' Gaze* trying to find a movie when he is in a movie? Do we have to accept a minimum of suspension of disbelief in order to understand the final words in the movie or indeed to understand what the whole movie is about?

Angelopoulos' movie does not create a simulacrum of existing realities; it does not copy or reproduce an actual organisation of

forms in an attempt to depict the ultimate truth about them. As we argued earlier, his cinema is about presences: it is about the patterns of relations that forms enter when the camera imposes its own organisation on them. In that respect his camera organises movements in space in ways that reveal their collision with their experience in life. The movie from amusement becomes bemusement: it shows that in the ordinariness of objects and encounters there is something exceptionally problematic. In his early movies the problematic of history was dominant: how can we distinguish between image and imagination? In *The Hunters* for example the dead body of the rebel becomes the catalyst for revealing the hallucinations that inhabit the mind of people in position of power: fantasies, oppressed desires, suicidal tendencies, fear, self-hatred, contempt. In his later movies this level has been replaced by the contemporaneity of memories. Time becomes the great illusion because psychic time cannot be measured; it is against the time of clocks and of logical quantification. In *Megalexandros* the anarchists destroy the clocks in the village in an attempt to liberate people from their self-imposed enslavement. Angelopoulos' films explore such foundational myths of the Western world, especially the acosmic vacuum that has been created in Europe after the death of politics. His *Ulysses* is in fact in search of a political *theoria*, in the Greek sense of the word, a *theoria* which will liberate time from its own circularity. His images therefore are not copies or reproductions of existing situations of objects but analogies of being.

The *analogia entis* in his images is probably one of the most interesting formalistic elements of his work, in the purely constructivist sense of the word. His images draw cognitive maps over reality. His visual thinking in a purely gestalt morphology "organises the sensory raw material creatively according to principles of simplicity, regularity and balance, which govern the receptor mechanism".<sup>6</sup> Indeed, film is residual reality through which we can recollect and reconstruct forms and objects in their pure objecthood and alterity. The purpose of cinematic language is

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<sup>6</sup> Arnheim, Rudolf, (1957: 3) *Film as Art*, University of California Press, Berkeley.

not to invest reality with personal emotions or project subjective responses. In cinema such practices lead to melodramas and escapist entertainment which in themselves can be extremely anti-realistic, in the mere ideological sense of the term. For Angelopoulos, the visual language of film brings out what makes the river Danube *be* the river Danube or the statue of Lenin *be* the statue of Lenin. The profound love for the formal specificity of figures and objects makes Angelopoulos' movies depict a reality in constant reorganisation, with the centre of balance changing but yet imposing a creative symmetry over the immense expanses of space and the labyrinthine pathways of history. His images are analogical sentences about the perceptual networks we establish in order to depict and imagine the other. The other in Angelopoulos does not exist as something similar or akin or related; it exists in its pure alterity from the gaze but it can be seen in its pure alterity through the gaze.

Cinema offers such gaze by employing imagination and technology, by converging both cultural institutions and cultural industry and finally, by mobilising audiences. Cinematic gaze has primarily a social and socialising function; it politicises private vision by placing it into the public domain for debate and dialogue. Angelopoulos' images are analogies of a complete unity that is restored in its complete form. In *Ulysses' Gaze* he reached the limits of filmic actualisation that makes use of minimal language and verbal communication. Everything that is said is not really meant. The gaze alone establishes balance, order and symmetry, without hierarchy. Angelopoulos' prismatic images are in a dual function of analysing and of being analysed. They stand out as visual commentaries on historical experiences and as iconic representations of the psychic level of historical awareness.

### iii) *The Tragedy of Language*

In *The Suspended Step of the Stork* (1991) a politician (Marcello Mastroianni) announces from the Parliament before resigning and disappearing that we must stop talking and listen to the natural phenomena and silence. There is no other film-maker who has

expressed the purely incidental role of dialogue and indeed of language itself in his movies than Angelopoulos. Even in Ingmar Bergman's *The Silence* (1963), or Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev* (1966), dramatic and dramatising dialogue is constantly implied and defines the actual communication of the characters even through its absence. Angelopoulos employs language as *rupture* in corporeal communication, as in the Freudian belief that 'language hides whereas the body always reveals.' His characters say few words which are either ambiguous or vague. Dialogic sequences sound abstracted from their actual context and are invested with an aura of transpersonal oracularity. Central characters seem to have forgotten language as expression of their being because language itself has lost its *aletheia*, its ability to save their experience from oblivion. In the last scene of *The Suspended Step of the Stork* a number of yellow-jacketed workers are climbing telephone poles linked by wires and move up and down, like notes on a technological music score. Communication is music and heals the existential homelessness of people suffocating within artificial borders. There are the inaudible voices of reality bespeaking something which cannot be named. In Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* god speaks to the faithless through gigantic screens and trivial commercials; but no one has the time to look at them. All signs have become meaningless and incommunicable since they have lost the expressionist aura of their truth. Angelopoulos' movies – and more specifically *Ulysses' Gaze* – construct symphonies of unmediated encounters. As the quote from Plato in the beginning of the movie, they look into the psyche of things through their own psyche. They are not about death or dying but about the possibility or the impossibility of communication. The theme of communication is the thread that permeates his films, linking them into a narrative synthesis about the human condition. Angelopoulos' paradoxical art works effectively: while language is minimally used, a story is eloquently told. In the creative synergy between the empathy given by a story and the critical distance established by the director's stance the paradoxical aesthetics of his cinema of presences emerge.