

Crossing Boundaries: Shock Effect, Optical Unconscious and Messianic Time in Theo Angelopoulos's Cinematic Language

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Abstract

The films of Theo Angelopoulos narrate a poetic “new humanism,” and this genius director of the 20th century has left an enduring artistic ‘aura’ in Walter Benjamin’s era of mechanical reproduction through his unique use of long-take narration and internal montage. This paper explores the dialectical relationship between long takes and internal montage in Angelopoulos’ films, as well as how the conflicting arrangement of mise en scène affects the audience’s psyche. Drawing on Walter Benjamin’s theories of Shock Effect, Optical Unconscious, and Messianic Time, the analysis focuses on *Landscape in the Mist*, one of Angelopoulos’ Trilogy of Silence, to examine his “boundary-crossing” cinematic language. Benjamin’s shock effect is evident as Angelopoulos breaks the logical constraints using iconic and impactful images, delivering a disruptive shock to an audience accustomed to the anesthesia of art reproductions, prompting critical contemplation. Angelopoulos’ lens possesses a unique magic, consistently influencing the audience’s optical unconscious and prompting reflections on the past and self. *Landscape in the Mist* tells a story of searching for the father, with the protagonist transcending allegorical boundaries. Angelopoulos’ transcendent cinematography, beyond time and space, inherits the imagery of Greek culture, revealing the anticipation of the past and future in messianic time. The paper concludes with the reflection that on the desire for redemption through a messianic promise, asserting that the present time is the optimal moment for crossing boundaries, no matter how much we yearn to await redemption.

Keywords: Theodoros Angelopoulos, cinematic language, Walter Benjamin

1. Introduction

In the era of mechanical reproduction, as expressed by Benjamin, the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence (Benjamin, 2007, p. 221). Photographic techniques, especially in cinema, bring the audience closer to the works of art but simultaneously strip away the originality and inaccessibility of the art, leading to the withering of the aura surrounding artistic creations. Under the influence of Russian montage film theory and the French New Wave movement, a group of pioneering directors in the realm of art cinema challenged traditional film narrative structures. They embraced more liberated and experimental techniques, using the unconscious eye of the camera to capture internal montages of life, time, and history.

The great Greek director Theo Angelopoulos excelled in utilizing long takes instead of editing montage to capture nonlinear narratives, creating peculiar mise en scène to construct inner montages that would trigger an impressive shock effect. As Horton reveals, Angelopoulos is a poet and a thinker with the camera, using film to explore complicated questions of identity and of memory (Şerban Adriana, 2019, p. 2). His films always speak of crossing borders, they dare to cross a number of borders: between nations; between history and myth, the past and the present, voyaging and stasis... (Horton, 1997, p. xi). Angelopoulos’ dream of a border between Greece and Germany, woven in *Landscape in the Mist*, and the child’s embrace of the border’s tree, both approach the same ideal — transcending boundaries. As Angelopoulos said:

In dealing with borders, boundaries, the mixing of languages, and cultures today, the refugees who are homeless and not wanted, I am trying to seek a new humanism, a new way. (Angelopoulos, quoted in Fainaru; 2001:86, from an interview conducted in 1992 original).

The Greek director, in the odyssey journey of *Landscape in the Mist*, employs poetic language to depict the world's obscurity, capturing and presenting an ideal utopia that transcends the reality through the unique optical eye of the camera. The filmic world as Perez notes is never restricted to what lies in frame. It is always in relation to what lies offscreen that the meaning of the frame is asserted (Perez Gilberto, 1998, p. 137). Angelopoulos' cinematic language breaks free from conventional frames, narrating the splits emphasized by Benjamin, which is between near and distant, then and now, present and absent, saving element of history, for as he writes, phenomena 'are saved through the exhibition of the fissure within them' (Benjamin, 2002, p. 473). In the search for home, father, and distant lands within the realm of loss, Angelopoulos takes the themes of his films to the extreme by portraying the fragmentation of time and space. The rupture of spacetime and the disruption of linear temporal narratives conflict with objective time. The present time is disrupted, filled with fragments of messianic time that shatter the entire linear model. For Benjamin, we no longer examine history in chronological order; instead, we rearrange the fragments of thought in a way that thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts but also their arrest. When thinking abruptly halts in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, crystallizing it into a monad (Benjamin, 2020, p. 262). In Benjamin's concept of messianic time, the term "monad" symbolizes both the partial and the whole. Like a hologram, what seems to be a unique individual pattern is, in fact, a reflection of the total pattern of collected monads (Ware Owen, 2004, p. 102). Angelopoulos' camera transcends the fragments of history, bridging the past and the future. Under the impact of internal montage, new monads are born.

The analysis in this paper embarks on a journey into the intricacies of Angelopoulos' filmmaking, drawing inspiration from the theoretical foundations laid by Walter Benjamin. The purpose is to interpret the inner montage of Angelopoulos' long take cinematography and mise en scène, exploring the dialectical connections between them. I will base on Walter Benjamin's theory and take Angelopoulos' Trilogy of Silence: *Landscape in the Mist* as a case study to examine how industrial technology influences human perception, memory, and experience. Benjamin's shock effect explores how it infiltrates the audience's consciousness through film frames and its resulting effects. What is the process of optical unconscious in the appreciation of cinematic art? How does the passivity and unconsciousness of the subject play a role in perceiving the aura of art? What implications does Benjamin's concept of messianic time have in revealing the central themes of the film? I will unfold the answers to these questions in the subsequent sections of this paper. Moreover, I consider the stages of Perception, Shock Effect, and Optical Unconscious as a section of thought with crests, akin to a wave function line. The process, from perception and consciousness to shock as a peak, descending to the optical unconscious, mirrors the journey in films like *Landscape in the Mist*, where consciousness immerses in tranquility, the shock of the visuals awakens consciousness numbed by industrial replication, ultimately leading to the unity of optical unconsciousness and self-reflection.

2. Long Take and Montage

For visual storytelling, the long take and montage are two frequently employed cinematic language techniques. They may seem opposed in terms of expressive effects, but in reality, they are in a dialectical unity, interconnected and mutually integrated. In Angelopoulos' films, the interplay between long takes and montage produces unexpected and nuanced results.

The camera serves as a surrogate for the audience, and the interaction between the camera and the scene can significantly influence the audience's perception and experience of the setting. Moving from long to close shots is a trade-off between showing informative visuals or intimate emotions (Heiderich Timothy, 2012, p. 6). The long take refers to continuously presenting a complete action or event in a unified time and space. André Bazin believes that the long take is a more natural and authentic way of depicting reality. It is often seen as a means of opposing excessive editing and artificial manipulation, contributing to maintaining a connection between film and reality. Montage, originated from the idea of a Russian filmmaker, Sergei Eisenstein, who was characterized by conflicts and beliefs that collided with two factors contradicting each other (Eisenstein Sergei, 1977, p. 39), on the other hand, involves combining shots through editing and collage. From the definitions of these two, the emphasis on natural presentation in the long take and the artificial editing in montage seems to be two relatively opposing concepts. However, in the actual process of filmmaking, the long take rarely appears in its pure state (as a sequence filmed in one shot), but almost always in combination with some form of editing. The cut is the limit or boundary of the shot and this boundary enters into and determines the nature of the shot itself (Henderson Brian, 1971, p. 9). Hegel says: A thing is what it is, only in and by reason of its limit. We cannot therefore regard the limit as only external to being which is then and there. It rather goes through and through the whole of such existence (William Wallace, 1965, p. 173). Therefore, the long take and montage technique form a

dialectical unity, interconnected yet contradictory, mutually negating and determining their significance.

According to Henderson, the long take is not in itself a principle of construction (in them), but is part of a shooting style, or characteristic way of shooting and building sequence (Henderson Brian, 1971, p. 7). The prominent stylistic feature in Angelopoulos' films is the extensive use of long takes, creating a slow sense of time for the audience. For instance, in the film *Eternity and a Day*, with a duration of 125 minutes and 42 seconds, there are only 64 shots, of which 61 are moving shots. The longest single shot lasts for 7 minutes and 34 seconds. In comparison, the Hollywood classic *Casablanca*, with a duration of 102 minutes, contains 450 shots. While long takes lack the editing combinations between shots, they inherently involve a relationship between frames, essentially making long takes a form of inner montage. The camera does not follow the characters' movement. It maintains an autonomous function relative to the action as it unfolds, observing from a distance as the characters walk in and out of frame. Angelopoulos incorporates a type of 'inner montage', where the edit is transferred within the frame and the action is seen in its full process (Makrygiannakis Evangelos, 2009, p. 302).

Since the montage editing technique is rarely employed in Angelopoulos' films, why can it still give the audience a sense of temporal and spatial montage? This is due to the clever arrangement of mise en scène in his long takes, utilizing highly metaphorical scene and prop arrangements. This arrangement causes different images within the same shot to collide with each other, impacting the sensory nerves of the audience. It generates an intellectual montage experience based on the mental activities of the audience (Azizah Afifatul, et al., 2019, p. 233). Eisenstein believed that in the field of art, the dialectical principle contained in the conflict was a fundamental principle for the existence of every work of art and every form of art (Eisenstein Sergei, 1977, p. 37). The impressive images in Angelopoulos' films are always interwoven with contradictions and conflicts. He imparts metaphorical meaning to material film elements, intentionally placing objects that seem out of place but have an intrinsic connection to the environment. Angelopoulos extends this sensory understanding of "corporeal material nature" explicitly to what has traditionally been defined as mise en scène scene: mise en scène means literally 'what is put onto the stage,' has now been brought from stage to screen: 'costume, décor, lighting, camera movement, setting and the behaviour of figures' (Rutherford).

Mise en scène, when utilized on the screen by Angelopoulos, maintains the temporal sense of long takes without allowing the narrative to become too fragmented due to editing. Instead, it infuses the imagery with infinite significance through elements of conflicting drama, achieving a unique poetic film aesthetic. In *Landscape in the Mist*, there is a scene with a long take where Voula and her five-year-old brother Alexander, on their journey to find their father, encounter an identity crisis at a police station. At that moment, the police suddenly pause in their tracks, captivated by the beautiful snowscape. Seizing the opportunity, the children escape from the police station. The positioning of the characters in this scene is intriguing. The five policemen are arranged from left to right in the frame, gazing blankly at the sky, as if appreciating the snowfall. The contrasting black police uniforms against the white snow create a visual juxtaposition, completely disregarding the pursuit of the children. This mise en scène might symbolize the intertwining of power and emotion, forming a strong conflicting tension. The slow-paced cinematography, coupled with the poetic rhythm, allows this conflict to slowly unfold and be released.



Figure 1. Snowfall scene in *Landscape in the Mist*

3. Perception and Shock Effect

Since the era of Benjamin, human senses have been given wings, with the continuous development of industrial technology and digital technology giving rise to new sensory systems. With the advancement of computers, television, and smart screen devices, visual culture is intertwined with audio, tactile, gustatory, and olfactory cultures, creating multisensory interactions that go beyond embodied experiences. The upgrading of sensory technology also influences the ways in which human practices and thinking occur as Kerruish notes that thought no longer emerges from reflection on experience, but instead arises more immediately from perception (Kerruish Erika, 2012, p. 4). Cinema and photography, as the most prominent sensory arts, have evolved from mere industrial technologies since their inception in the 18th century to becoming undisputed forms of art today. How has this process influenced our perception and thoughts about art? As Benjamin cites Georges Duhamel's comment that in the cinema he "can no longer think what I want to think" because "my thoughts have been replaced by moving images" (Benjamin, 2006, p. 267). Therefore, in the multisensory modern society, the directly presented or replicated images in films have, in fact, dulled our sensitivity to thought, although they themselves challenge traditional artistic perspectives and have even become indelible artistic crystallizations of the 20th century.

The iterative process of cinematic art itself carries a sense of mechanical reproduction, which dispels the "auratic traces" left upon art from its successive functions as part of religious worship and the Renaissance cult of beauty (Ezcurra Mara Polgovsky, 2012, p. 6). Furthermore, advancements in film technology bring about more tangible audiovisual experiences which 'abolishes the space where contemplation moved and all but hits us between the eyes', for criticism requires 'correct distancing' (Benjamin, 2004, p. 476). Therefore, the mechanical reproducibility of film withers the sacred artistic aura, as Benjamin notes, that placed a distance between the work of art and the spectator, regardless of how close they were. At the same time, the highly concrete nature of film weakens critical thinking, immersing individuals in the enchantment of industrial art. In Benjamin's writing such anaesthetisation is also caused by dulling sensation through trained responses, like the repetitive movements of factory and office workers who perform actions without experiencing them (Benjamin, 2006, p. 327-29). However, with the birth of art cinema, from the French New Wave pioneer Jean-Luc Godard to the Russian film master Andrei Tarkovsky, and to the distinguished Greek film director Theo Angelopoulos, we can discover traits of rebellion, interruptiveness, and shock in their films.

For Benjamin, if a perception is consciously experienced (*erlebnis*) and remembered then it is not experienced unconsciously (*erfahrung*) and is prevented from sinking into the recesses of memory to form rich associations and meanings for the self (Benjamin, 2006, p. 338). However, the shock effects brought about by montage unconsciously can stimulate imagination and reflection. Benjamin, in "The Arcades Project", carefully assembles quotations in a literary montage, indicating his admiration for montage. It is not a mere reenactment of the past; the montage in literature and film carries an unconscious shock that disrupts memory, leaving a profound impression on the reader or viewer. Furthermore, Benjamin's reflections on shock explore the intimate relationship between sensation, memory and thought. Following Sigmund Freud, he thinks of consciousness as combatting shocking experiences by registering them and preventing the experience from implanting itself in the unconscious as a memory (Benjamin, 2006, p. 316-18). Therefore, there is a dialectical philosophy between consciousness and shock. Consciousness inherently opposes shock, but it also internalizes shock, giving rise to impressions within the mind. According to Benjamin, the shock of the dialectical image is that of a static image of the past flaring up in the present, it is "an image that emerges suddenly, in a flash. What has been is to be held fast — as an image flashing up in the now" (Benjamin, 2002, p. 473).

Theo Angelopoulos' film concepts resonate with Benjamin's insight that film in 1930s Europe "demanded an understanding of the aesthetic that relates artistic technique to urban industrial technology and its impact on the conditions of perception, experience, and agency" (Hansen Miriam, 1987, p. 78-79). The perspective shifts in Angelopoulos' long take shots and the internal montage of *mise en scène* in his films create a shock effect for the audience. In the iconic scene from *Landscape in the Mist*, a massive sculpture's hand rises from the sea, towed by a helicopter from the seabed to the surface. At this moment, the children run out, and there are two people in yellow clothing riding bicycles, observing the sea. The camera follows the movements of the children and shifts to Orestis. They watch in awe as the giant hand ascends from the sea. Accompanied by the characters' gaze, it brings a sense of shock and contemplation to the audience as the fragmented giant hand is carried further away by the helicopter, and the camera shifts from the sea to the back of the three characters. The theme of "searching for the father" permeates *Landscape in the Mist*, and while the direction of this hand may reveal some symbolic significance, the rising colossal object in the frame has already transcended consciousness and common sense.



Figure 2. The hand in *Landscape in the Mist*

4. Optical Unconscious

For Benjamin, photography, and especially film, are means of accessing a past lost from view, erased from normative history and the conscious mind, a past captured in an image that brings the present into focus. Angelopoulos' films employ montage-like fragments to bring the past back into the present. The imagery acts like a mirror, observing both the external world and the self. As Jacques Lacan stated, "In the scopic field, everything is articulated between two terms that act in an antinomic way — on the side of things, there is the gaze, that is to say, things look at me, and yet I see them" (Lacan, Jacques, 1998, p. 109). The camera's gaze is an unconscious state, mechanically replicating actions of zooming in, zooming out, and changing angles, telling the language of the frame. Angelopoulos' long takes align with this passivity, relinquishing the narrative control of the story to the audience within the hollow of time. Through the inner montage breaking the linear narrative, Angelopoulos is attempting, in Benjamin's words, 'to carry over the principle of montage into history' (Benjamin, 2002, p. 461). The camera can play the role of optical unconscious to retrieve forgotten history, and the actions triggered by images are often unconscious. This passive reception of the other and the external world is often the trigger for evoking emotions in art. The gaze upon the image, whether conceptualized in terms of loss or an uncanny *déjà vu*, confronts the subject with a fundamental strangeness that recalls a deeper recollection of the self (Conty, 2013, p. 477).

In *Landscape in the Mist*, there is a scene involving a wedding and a dead horse. Shortly after leaving home, Voula and her brother Alexander encounter a bizarre wedding. The bride abruptly rushes out of the ceremony, crying in despair. The crowd chases after her, pulling her back inside. Shortly after, a group of people, along with the bride, joyously emerges. In the snowy landscape, a white horse lies gasping for breath and then dies. Voula stands in bewilderment, while Alexander crouches down and weeps intensely, mourning the horse's passing. The death of the horse triggers a profound sense of sadness in Alexander's subconscious, and the little boy might be contemplating the meaning of death at this moment, a crucial lesson in his journey of growth. The contrasting emotions of the wedding joy and the horse's death create a powerful juxtaposition. These strange and surreal visual images subtly impact the audience, and Angelopoulos, through his long takes, unconsciously reveals deep emotions, leaving the audience with time for reflection and self-reflection.

Benjamin emphasizes the importance of weakening the subject's consciousness in the "Arcades Project", where the aura is described as requiring passivity on the part of the subject. He writes: the fleeting moment of auratic perception actualizes a past not ordinarily accessible to the waking self; it entails a passivity in which something 'takes possession of us' rather than vice versa (Benjamin, 2002, p. 447). Therefore, the aura of art creates a distance between itself and the audience. Appreciating art requires the audience to detach from autonomous consciousness, achieving a passive state of receptivity. Immersing oneself in the experience of photographic images to evoke inspiration demands a moment where human consciousness yields to the optical unconscious.

Benjamin associates "optical unconscious" with the "instinctual unconscious" in psychoanalysis, revealing the internal characteristics of the body's unconsciousness triggered by optical images. As Benjamin states, it is another nature that speaks to the camera than to the eye: 'other' in the sense that a space interwoven with human consciousness gives way to a space interwoven with the unconscious (Benjamin, 1996, p. 510-12). Photography,

especially film, with its sequence of continuous flowing images, as Benjamin argues, opens up “the physiognomic aspects of the world of images, which reside in the smallest details, clear and yet hidden enough to have found shelter in daydreams” (Kreilkamp Ivan, 2006, p. 425). Therefore, when the photographic image transcends what the eyes see, the unconscious state can help understand the symbolic meaning of the image, much like the highly symbolic tree in *Landscape in the Mist*. In the final scenes, Voula and Alexander reach the “border” of Germany. The screen goes completely black, and after several seconds, a small boat appears. The children board the boat, which paddles into the darkness. Then, a thick fog engulfs everything, and in the murkiness, a faint light emerges. On the horizon stands a towering tree. The children rush towards it, embracing the tree trunk tightly. Orestis has once found a discarded film negative and told Alexander, “Look carefully through the film, in the fog, in the distance... there will be a tree.” Indeed, the children find that tree. The large tree represents the embodiment of their father’s presence and strength, a perpetual home for their souls. The dense fog cannot hinder the children’s pursuit, and life’s hardships cannot extinguish their determination to search. At this moment, the journey to find their father reaches the endpoint of time, yet it is also the starting point of life. Interpreting this tree in an unconscious state, the audience remains devoid of subjectivity, unaffected by the film’s mist covering their eyes. Thus, the tree becomes more than just a tree: it becomes an eternal spiritual refuge. Although this unconscious interpretative process weakens subjectivity, it sparks the aura of the self, as Jiddu Krishnamurti says: “You have to be a light to yourself in a world that is utterly becoming dark.”



Figure 3. The tree in *Landscape in the Mist*

5. Messianic Time

Benjamin’s Theses on the Philosophy of History, written in 1940, contains criticism of fascism. In order to transcend fascism, he proposes an alternative temporal model known as messianic time, focusing on oppressed classes both past and present (Ware Owen, 2004, p. 101). In Benjamin’s thought, unlike objective time, messianic time is not a linear progression towards a utopian future but a rupture within the continuum of historical time. The ruptures, terminations, and collapses in history often signify promises for the future, involving a revolutionary presence that looks back at the past, denies it, and affirms the ‘time of the now’. As Benjamin states, history is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now (Jetztzeit) (Benjamin, 2020, p. 261). Past memories are not distant constellations but exist within the material world, suspended in parallel and juxtaposed spacetime. If a historian can establish the constellation formed by his era with a definite earlier one, then he links the ‘time of the now’ across spacetime, filled with chips of Messianic time.

In Angelopoulos’ visual galaxy, whether in the work itself, individual frames, or each character, explosive fragments scatter in the audience’s memory. This relates to Angelopoulos’ recurring themes: the breakdown of relationships, nations, beliefs, and causes. It’s evident that Angelopoulos consistently repeats certain figures, names, and themes in his artworks. Does this repetition serve as a foreshadowing and connecting function in artistic works? For instance, the repeated names Voula and Alexander in *Voyage to Cythera* and *Landscape in the Mist*, as well as the recurrence of the name Alexander in Angelopoulos’ post-1984 works such as *The Suspended*

Step of the Stork (1991) and Eternity and a Day (1998) (Donald, Stephanie Hemelryk, 2015, p. 206). According to Horton, this artistic repetition always goes beyond history itself, suggesting connections, echoes, and relationships (Horton Andrew, 2016, p. 15).

When the historical materialist interprets history and extracts the particular from the universal, whether it is “blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework”, in Benjamin’s view, this interpretive process yields a nourishing fruit that contains time, akin to a precious but tasteless seed (Benjamin, 2020, p. 263). The fruit itself carries the value of history, while chips of messianic time render the seed tasteless. This critique perhaps questions whether interpreting the present through a retrospective examination of the past serves as an enlightening revelation for our true destiny. In light of this, we must address the following questions: Can the particularity of history surpass its temporal considerations independently? Can the past and the past of the past provide redemption for the present? How should we approach time to adapt to future living? Benjamin’s concept of messianic time, however, does not anticipate that disrupting the linear model of time will bring about future redemption; it is “a power to which the past has a claim” — lacking future orientation (254).

In Angelopoulos’ long takes, he maintains the linear narrative of the time dimension while presenting a complete space and plot through 360° pan shots. In *Landscape in the Mist*, there is a scene where, on a clear morning, Voula and her brother wake up to see members of a theater group rehearsing by the seaside. The director uses a 360° pan shot to vividly capture the scene of the theater group’s rehearsal, starting with Orestis, followed by an elderly person preparing breakfast, an actor shaving while memorizing lines, an actress walking in front of the camera holding a cup and reciting lines, an accordion accompanist, multiple actors performing scenes, and finally, the camera follows the children to their chairs. A reverse pan shot is then executed, during which the actress holding a cup and reciting lines moves in and out of the frame several times until the camera finally stabilizes. Throughout the entire process, there is no disruption to the linear development of time, providing the audience with a natural and smooth macro-narrative, thereby declaring the messianic future-to-come. This, as Ware notes, declares the messianic future-to-come, offering ceaseless movement to the subject (continual deferral) and preventing it from ever halting the movement of its delimitation. This distinction is crucial, as it differs from determining the future using eschatological content, explicitly acknowledging the universal closure of history.



Figure 4. Theater group rehearsing in *Landscape in the Mist*

Angelopoulos’ long-take narratives are always open-ended, weaving an epic of Greek civilization through the continuity of the camera lens. Furthermore, his film visuals consistently transcend history itself, connecting the past and the present, foreshadowing a messianic future. This encourages critical engagement from the audience with the present, urging individual awareness and response to the potential for change and liberation. Scenarios in the film where the theatrical troupe struggles to find a venue and faces dissolution reflect the director’s contemplation on Western modern industrial civilization. Ancient Greek civilization, one of the earliest in Europe and a source of Western civilization, held theater as a crucial art form, as explored in Aristotle’s dedicated work, *Poetics*. However, in the withering era of industrial replication, Greek theater groups face

exclusion and even struggle to find performance places. The waning prominence of theater serves as a symbolic representation not only of the diminishing Greek civilization but also mirrors the broader decline within Western civilization.

In Greek civilization, theatrical performances were a means of communion with the divine, with Dionysus presiding over wine, festivity, and theater. The death of theater in modern industrial society signifies the death of the divine, the death of God. The film reflects on the past of ancient Greek civilization through the theme of Voula and her brother searching for their father, aligning with the mythological story of Telemachus seeking his father. In *Landscape in the Mist*, Voula and her brother uphold a messianic promise — their father at the border of Greece and Germany, even if this border is allegorical. Ware suggests that the very structure of a promise is inherently future-oriented; thus, by affirming the promise, we indirectly affirm the future, approaching it as something other than the present without appropriating it (Ware Owen, 2004, p. 114). Therefore, the tree embraced by Voula and Alexander symbolizes a positive future, transcending the significance of borders and negating the universal closure of history associated with eschatological content.

6. Conclusion: Crossing Boundaries

In *Landscape in the Mist* the little boy asks his sister at one point: ‘What is the meaning of borders?’ At this moment, the border loses its significance, as these allegorical boundaries fade away, accompanied by the theme deepening within the alienated imagery. Just like the severed hand that rises and flies away from the sea surface, abstract images detach the audience from the performance, creating an alienation effect in the audience’s hearts. As Brecht pointed out in his essay “Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting”, viewers require an emotional distance to reflect on content presented in a critical and objective manner (Brecht, 1961, p. 133). We experience its power and what can only be described as both a dislocating effect and a sense of transport as the image carries us beyond our every day reality.

As Nikos Kolovos has noted in his book-length study of these films, Angelopoulos believes in treating each image with “lucidite”: like a poet, selecting his images carefully, but letting the image speak for itself (Horton Andrew, 2016, p. 7). In this paper, I discuss Angelopoulos’ cinematic language features, which are rich in poetic temporality and carry symbolic significance for thematic exploration. In an era of increasingly rapid editing, Angelopoulos’ films use narrative temporality to offer audiences a fresh perspective on moving images. Critic Wolfram Schutte puts it this way: “His poetic medium is time... he remains critically aware of the technical means employed: the long shots, sequence shots, slow pans and long takes. They are scenes from a voyage through the world. Their complex structure sends the viewer on his own inner journey” (Horton Andrew, 2016, p. 8).

In addition to the use of long takes, Angelopoulos is adept at mise en scène with abstract significance, involving conflicts and connections among characters, props, costumes, and settings. As Mitchell observes, this embodies a “tension between the appeals of spiritual likeness and material image” (Horton Andrew, 2016, p. 7). The interruptive nature of the images awakens the audience’s consciousness numbed by industrial replicas, achieving a shock effect that triggers emotional responses and contemplation. Beyond the peaks of the shock, subtle visual elements in the film stimulate our subconscious. Through the camera lens, realities not immediately visible to the naked eye can be revealed — a process aligned with Walter Benjamin’s concept of the “optical unconscious.” In an interview, Angelopoulos commented on the abstraction of crucial scenes in his films, referring to this technique as ‘off space’, stating that:

It is part of the ancient tradition of Greek tragedy. In such traditions, actual death or violence is never shown on stage; it is always “off.” The same principle applies to Chinese and Japanese theater (Angelopoulos, quoted in Horton 2016: p. 206, from an interview conducted in 1993).

This technique terminates the frame, breaking the linear time structure. Consequently, a transformative, redemptive moment occurs in thought — a moment where the redeemed beliefs disintegrate. This is connected to Benjamin’s concept of messianic time, which seizes fragments of time, establishing a notion of the present moment. Angelopoulos’ films transcend multiple historical boundaries, continually reinforcing the film’s themes through the use of long takes and inner montage, involving multiple cross-references and allusions. These symbolize a messianic promise that is both futuristic and embedded in the awakening and seizing of the present redemption moment. They create an echoing effect, becoming an integral part of the enjoyment of watching the film.

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