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## Ulysses' Gaze: In Pursuit of the Eternal Now Amidst the Ruins of the Balkans

### Ulis'in Bakışı: Balkan Yıkıntılarında Ebedi Şimdinin İzinde

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#### Abstract

From the inception of cinema, the concept of time has been one of the most important issues in filmmaking. Unlike other art forms, cinema has the unique ability to manipulate time, allowing for techniques such as flashbacks and flashforwards. Many filmmakers have utilized these techniques in their works. However, some directors have approached the notion of time in a different way, capturing time as a transcendental instrument in their films. This understanding, referred to as the cinema of eternal now, is a product of filmmakers' endeavor to touch upon the eternal within the realm of the mortal. In this study, the manifestations of this endeavor are examined through the film "Ulysses' Gaze." The film, which explores the century-long history of the Balkans through the lens of the Manakis Brothers' early films, seeks to depict a non-linear quest for the eternal now. Angelopoulos, the director, rejects the chronological narrative of time and compresses it, aiming to reach a sort of atomic present. This can be seen as both the director's personal longing, pain, and sorrow in his own history, as well as his effort to resist the destruction and misery in the history of the Balkans.

#### Keywords

Ulysses' Gaze, Theo Angelopoulos, Transcendence, Eternal Now, Eternal Now Cinema

#### Öz

İlk sinema filminden itibaren sinemada zaman meselesi sinemanın en önemli gündemlerinden biri olmuştur. Nitekim sinema diğer sanatlardan farklı olarak zamanı işleme noktasında geri dönüş ve ileriye gidiş (flashback ve flashforward) gibi farklı imkanlara sahiptir. Zira pek çok yönetmen de bu tür tekniklere başvurmuştur. Ancak bazı yönetmenler zaman meselesini farklı bir şekilde ele almış, zamanı bir aşkınlık aracı olarak filmlemişlerdir. Ebedi şimdinin sineması olarak tanımlanan bu anlayış yönetmenlerin bir beşer olarak fani olanın içinde ebedi olana temas etme çabasının bir ürünüdür. Bu çalışmada Ulysses' Gaze filmi üzerinden bu çabanın görünüşleri ele alınmıştır. Buna göre Balkanların yüz yıllık tarihini Manaki kardeşlerin ilk filmleri üzerinden lineer olmayan bir şekilde ele alan film bir tür ebedi şimdi arayışı içindedir. Angelopoulos zamanın kronolojik anlatımını reddederek zamanı sıkıştırmış ve bir türden atomik şimdiye ulaşmaya çalışmıştır. Bu hem yönetmenin kendi bireysel tarihindeki özlem, acı ve kedere, hem de Balkanların tarihindeki yıkım ve sefaletle karşı koyma çabası olarak görülebilir.

#### Anahtar Kelimeler

Ulis'in Bakışı, Angelopoulos, Aşkınlık, Ebedi Şimdi, Ebedi Şimdinin Sineması

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## 1. Introduction

"Ulysses' Gaze" is a 1994 film directed by Theo Angelopoulos. The film depicts a geographical and temporal journey across the Balkan region. The main character, *director A.*, embarks on this journey to find three lost reels of film that he considers the earliest films in Balkan history. Throughout the journey, A. experiences time not chronologically but in a kind of "atomic" way.

This journey in the film initially represents a search for "a gaze" and holds multiple meanings. In this study, this search will be analyzed. In addition to the central theory of "Cinema of Eternal Now," which will be the focus of this film analysis, Heidegger's subject-object thought, decay theory, and Deleuze's concept of time-image will be employed to achieve a more comprehensive and conclusive analysis. Using these concepts, the film will be examined through a discourse analysis method called text-centered analysis.

The fundamental questions addressed in this study are as follows: What does the search for the three film reels represent throughout the film? Why are these gazes, referred to as "lost gazes" by the director, so important in his quest? Can the film's juxtaposition of events from different time periods, compressing time, be seen as a pursuit of the eternal now? Throughout his journey across the Balkan region, director A. witnesses nothing but blood, tears, death, separation, and sorrow. Has the director developed a stance to resist this misery and suffering? Can this stance be associated with the compression of time? Can this quest be considered an effort to reach the Eternal Now? Can the experience of Eternal Now be achieved through cinema?

## 2. Conceptual framework

As mentioned in the introduction, the central theory used in this study will be the Cinema of Eternal Now. According to this theory (Celik, 2023), the Cinema of Eternal Now offers a new perspective on mainstream commercial cinema and art cinema. It suggests that there is a quest for eternity, particularly in art cinema but also in other cinematic approaches, and this quest can be observed in certain elements, cinematographic techniques, and scenes. This quest aims to attain a transcendental experience referred to as the "eternal present" or "eternal now" in traditional thought. This experience, known as the eternal now, signifies a dominant mode of perception and enlightenment encompassing all time and space in tradition. The cinematic counterpart of this understanding, proposed as the Cinema of Eternal Now, can be considered as an attempt to create a perception that freezes time or encompasses all moments within the present moment, aiming to achieve the experiential state sought through the struggle of the self in tradition.

The Cinema of Eternal Now is primarily manifested through elements such as wind, sunset and sunrise, water, darkness, and single-shot sequences. Its fundamental objective is to provide the audience with an experience that transcends the boundaries of time. Directors of the Cinema of Eternal Now aim to transport the viewers to a timeless dimension and evoke the sensation of the eternal present. This cinematic approach represents a different approach from traditional commercial cinema. The Cinema of Eternal Now guides the audience on an internal journey by slowing down time, employing silence, and utilizing long takes. During this journey, there is an interaction that connects the viewer with the eternal present. The viewer finds themselves detached from the flow of time and immersed in a point where the past, future, and present moment converge.

The cinema of eternal now aims to transcend the boundaries of time and respond to human inner quests. Consequently, it seeks to provide individuals with a timeless and transcendent experience by either freezing time or creating a realm that encompasses it. This approach to cinema offers an experience that goes beyond traditional filmmaking, presenting the audience with an opportunity to transcend time. The ultimate goal is to reach a perpetual moment that encompasses past and future, an endless and mysterious presence where everything's essence resides.

The director of the film *Ulysses' Gaze*, Theo Angelopoulos, can be considered as one of the filmmakers who align with this understanding. As will be discussed in more detail below, Angelopoulos often places time at the center of his films, attempting to capture the eternal within the flow of time.

Furthermore, the theoretical framework of the cinema of eternal now can be reinforced by a Heideggerian perspective. Heidegger, in opposition to Descartes' understanding that reduces human beings to mere subjects, rejects such hierarchy of existence (Tarhan, 1997:44). Instead, he introduces the concept of "being-in-the-world," considering human beings as integral entities in their existence (Steiner, 1994:59).

The pursuit of the eternal present, inherited both by cinema and human beings, is an aspiration to become one with both space and time as a whole. In this context, it rejects duality and integrates humans into an organic unity with their surroundings. Indeed, Heidegger supports the concept of the eternal present by asserting that "being is in time," denying the past and the future, and recognizing only the existence of the "present moment" (Karakaya, 2000:63). Heidegger expresses this as follows: "*What is past, present, and to come appears in the oneness of its own present being.*" (Heidegger 1968:140)

Similarly, Deleuze's conceptualization of time-image corresponds to this notion. Deleuze argues that the past, future, and present are not separate from each other. "*The past and the present do not denote two successive moments, but two elements which coexist: One is the present, which does not cease to pass, and the other is the past, which does not cease to be but through which all presents pass... each present goes back to itself as past.*" (Deleuze, 1991:59).

The cinematic phenomenon described by Deleuze as the time-image is also corresponds to the notion of the everlasting now. This will be further explored in detail in the context of the film. However, before delving into that, it is necessary to take a brief look at Angelopoulos' life and the general understanding of cinema.

### **3. The Life and General Cinema Philosophy of Angelopoulos**

Theodoros Angelopoulos was born in Athens in 1935 and directly experienced both World War II and the subsequent Greek Civil War when his father was arrested and sent into exile. These early experiences shaped his life and art, laying the foundation for his political stance. While studying law in Athens, he changed the course of his life in his final year and traveled to Paris in 1961 to pursue studies in literature, cinematography, and anthropology. He worked with Claude Lévi-Strauss at Sorbonne, whose influence would be seen in his style of image creation. Angelopoulos then entered the French Cinema Institute, IDHEC. Developing a unique poetic visual style and cinematic language, Angelopoulos explored the specific problems of the geographic region he belonged to and the turbulent history of the 20th century on both societal

and individual levels. Throughout his career, he gifted the history of cinema with thirteen exceptional feature films. During the filming of his last film, "The Other Sea," he tragically lost his life in 2012 when he was hit by a motorcycle in Piraeus. (Kökek, 2022: 66)

As Bordwell explains, at the core of Angelopoulos' cinematic approach lies the use of long takes and the incorporation of epic cinema and dedramatization techniques. Alongside the long take, key elements of his visual style include wide shots or general plans, moments of dead time, off-frame spaces, empty frames, 3/4 back shots (dorsality), and the juxtaposition of deep-perspective and planimetric framing. These elements create a dialectic of rhythm and movement, forming the fundamental characteristics of Angelopoulos' visual style (2000:102). Bordwell's analysis delves into the visual composition in great detail, underscoring the tranquil quality of Angelopoulos's extended long shots. These shots are described as "dead space," inviting viewers to reflect on prior developments or simply immerse themselves in a mood of expressive emptiness (Ning, 2017).

As detailed by Kökek, one of the key elements of Angelopoulos' mise-en-scène is the barren landscapes of the North, where the sun is rarely seen, and the dark skies are hidden behind clouds and mist, dominated by rain and cold weather. Angelopoulos has shown a fondness for rain, rocky terrains, and stone houses. It is known that he would pause filming when the weather cleared and postpone the production to the following winter if it wouldn't conclude by spring. While examining the political and ideological issues such as the Balkans' dramatic history of the past two centuries, the great exchange, migration, and refugee problems, as well as geographical and political boundaries, Angelopoulos also created a unique aesthetic code by incorporating the inherent forms of poetry, tragedy, mythology, and epics found in Greek culture. His films revolve around questioning boundaries and implying a continuous search, depicting both physical and spiritual journeys. Angelopoulos associated this imagery with the cold, cloudy, and misty landscapes of the wounded Balkan region, creating a highly distinctive panorama of a journey. He referred to this panorama as the "geography of human beings" (2022: 70). Makriyannikis (2023) argues that in Theo Angelopoulos's films, the image of utopia is not a distant future concept, but rather a feasible possibility within the present time of the films. This possibility, according to us, points to the path that leads to the eternal present. The characterization of Angelopoulos's cinema as a "cinema of contemplation" (Horton, 1997) also points to this reality.

In addition to this conceptual possibility, Angelopoulos's mise-en-scène techniques also point to the eternal now. The predominant use of these long takes is at the core of Angelopoulos' cinematic approach, which is also central to the cinema of eternal present. Furthermore, elements such as water, mist, rain, and wind, which are constant features of Angelopoulos' cinematic language, directly represent the cinema of eternal present. The film under study, *Ulysses' Gaze*, extensively employs both the technique of long takes and these elements.

#### **4. Ulysses' Gaze Plot**

As detailed by Gül, *Ulysses' Gaze* begins with the film "Weavers," which is the first film shot in the Balkans. This film, depicting women at a loom, was filmed in the village of Ardella, Greece, in 1905 by the Manakis Brothers. Its significance lies in being the first film shot in the Balkans. The movie follows a director named "A." (Although not mentioned by name in the film, the character is portrayed by Harvey Keitel, and the script refers to him as "A."). A, who resides in

America, returns to his homeland, Greece, for a special screening of his own film and embarks on a journey across the Balkan countries in search of the recordings of the first film shot in the Balkans. This journey represents an inward adventure parallel to the state of the region, as he rediscovers his passion for cinema, which has shaped him into the person he is today. A, a Greek filmmaker living in exile in the United States, returns to his hometown of Ptolemais to attend a special screening of one of his highly controversial films. However, A.'s true interest lies elsewhere: the legendary reels of the first film ever shot in the Balkans, documenting the region's history and traditions, disregarding national and ethnic conflicts, captured by the Mannakis Brothers at the dawn of the cinema era. A. sets out to find these reels, traveling first to Bulgaria, then to Macedonia, Albania, and finally to Bosnia. Throughout his journey, he grapples with different layers of his own past and identity while experiencing the lives of the Mannakis Brothers. The film concludes with A. finding the reels and "gazing" at them for the first time (2018: 146)

Director A. journey is both a personal odyssey and an attempt to trace the traces of suffering in the Balkans. As Director A. embarks on a quest to find a lost film, he also confronts his own past and identity. As evident, the entire film revolves around the director A.'s search for the lost three reels of film, which he refers to as "lost gazes." This quest takes him through various Balkan countries. However, it is clear that this search carries deeper meanings beyond a physical journey and the pursuit of a tangible object.

## 5. Method

This study will employ a text-focused analysis method, which is a form of discourse analysis, using the concepts discussed above. Umberto Eco and Julia Kristeva are among the prominent theorists in the field of text-focused discourse approach. The perspectives of these two theorists center around the text. According to Umberto Eco, a text is an "*open-ended universe in which the interpreter will discover infinite connections*" (2012: 57). In Eco's discourse approach, the text carries truth implicitly rather than explicitly; every utterance exists to conceal the unsaid and can only be revealed through profound interpretation and analysis (2012: 58). Julia Kristeva contributes to the text-focused approach with the concept of intertextuality. Intertextuality is defined as "*a textual interaction that allows us to perceive various forms (or structures) of a certain textual organization as transformations of numerous segments (or structures) taken from other texts within a single text*" (Aktulum, 2000: 42). Kristeva describes the text as an intersection of various interactions, and from the perspective of intertextuality, the text is referred to as a "*mosaic of quotations*" (Aktulum, 2000: 41). With its layered narrative, *Ulysses's Gaze* film precisely invites such a methodology.

## 6. Discussion: How Does *Ulysses's Gaze* Resist the Flow of Time?

As briefly mentioned above, the main theme of the film *Ulysses' Gaze* revolves around time. The protagonist, Director A., travels through the Balkan region in search of a lost three-reel film. However, during this quest, he also embarks on journeys through time in each place he visits. Understanding what drives the director to undertake such a search requires a comprehensive answer. But first, it is necessary to examine how and where the director employs the technique known as "time compression" in the film. Time compression refers to the technique of narrating events that occur at different times by compressing time through the use of spatial associations. The director's intention behind using this technique will be thoroughly discussed.

The time compression technique in "Ulysses' Gaze" is evident right from the opening credits. As summarized by Çelebi, the protagonist, Yannaki Manaki, aims to capture the departure of a blue ship in Thessaloniki's harbor. As Yannaki begins filming, his assistant, who previously worked with him in 1954, becomes the narrator within the film's story and recounts the events. The shot transitions from black and white, depicting Yannaki in 1950s attire, to color as the ship starts to move. However, a sudden twist occurs when Yannaki suffers a heart attack and dies while filming the ship's movement. After placing Yannaki's lifeless body on a chair, the assistant continues narrating the story and walks closer to another character named A., who is positioned off-camera. As the assistant speaks, the year gradually changes. When he approaches Yannaki's body, it is 1954, and as he reaches A., the year shifts to 1994, the present time within the movie's narrative. While the assistant reminisces about his memories from the 1950s, A. begins walking towards the spot where Yannaki died. However, the chair, Yannaki's body, and the camera have disappeared (2019). This scene, captured in a single long take, serves as a prime example of the time compression technique by condensing a long period of time.

Indeed, Angelopoulos employs a unique treatment of time, intertwining the present time of 1994 with events from the past, particularly the 1900s. He incorporates interconnecting incidents to create a unified sense of time, aiming to establish an atomic "now." Certainly, in accordance with this, Angelopoulos highlighted, "In my films, time is the central theme" (Gronstad, 2015) As Celebi also points out, Angelopoulos's depiction of temporal shifts differs from conventional flashbacks. The reconstruction of the moment is not clearly attributed to either the narrator assistant or A., adding to the ambiguity. Furthermore, the order of time is not linear, as typically seen in flashback scenes where the sequence follows present time - past time - present time. Instead, the sequence follows a structure of past time - elapsing time - present time. The past time is not presented in a fragmented manner but rather represented through the elapsing of time, symbolized by the assistant's walking. As the assistant walks towards A., the sound of the ship is heard, creating a sense of overlapping time. Additionally, when A. starts walking towards the spot where Yannaki died, the ship reenters the frame as if it has been waiting for years and years. This scene portrays the overlapping of different times rather than simply showcasing the passage of time. It blurs the boundaries between virtual time and actual time, adding to the complex temporal structure of the film (2019:51).

Angelopoulos's layering of different time frames, his compression of time, can be seen as a response he creates against human mortality. In line with Deleuze's definition of crystallized time (1997:81), he attempts to create a passage from the temporal to the eternal. It can be said here that Angelopoulos, faced with the blood, tears, and misery of the Balkan geography, as well as his own personal sorrows, turns to a more mature gaze towards events. By adding time to space and compressing time, he seeks to gain mastery over all events and sorrows, aiming to grasp them with a holistic understanding, under a godly perspective. This endeavor can also be observed in other attempts at time compression in the film.

As film continues, director A., while walking through the streets of Manastir, comes to a halt in front of a door, and a transition takes place, transporting him to the year 1904. Through the narration of Miltos Manakis, the historical period from 1904 until the end of World War I is explored. Miltos mentions that after returning from exile in Filibe (Plovdiv) following the

conclusion of World War I, they opened their first cinemas in Manastır, and the first film they showcased was "Rin Tin Tin." As seen, the effort to compress time continues.

As Çelebi mentions, the recurring theme of the game of time continues throughout the film, with another instance occurring on the Macedonia-Bulgaria border. A. (the protagonist) is placed under surveillance by the police, and although he remains the same person, the year seems to shift to the time of the First World War. A. transforms into Yannaki, and a police officer dressed in 1916 attire reads a sentence accusing Yannaki Manaki (or Manakias) of possessing firearms and explosives intended for use against the Bulgarian and German armies. However, his sentence is commuted to exile in Plovdiv for the duration of the war, by the order of King Ferdinand of Bulgaria. Once again, the perception of time elapses, and the combination of virtual and actual time merges with A.'s reality. Angelopoulos chooses to overlap time instead of utilizing a traditional flashback technique. In this instance, he draws a parallel between A. and Yannaki: Both characters are displaced and uprooted, longing to have their last photograph taken. A. remains out of the frame until his mother calls him to join the photo. When he enters the frame, he transforms into a child in 1950 for the first time (2019:54).

The compression of time through the layering of space, characters, and especially different temporalities is similar to previous instances. Angelopoulos, without using flashbacks, attempts to bring a holistic perspective to time, which is perceived as fragmented by humans. He strives to create a moment that encompasses all moments. We refer to these moments as the evidence of the existence of the eternal present in cinema, the moments of the eternal present. The pursuit of accessing such moments continues throughout the film, employing the same technique of compression.

While undergoing passport control on the train, *Director A.* is brought down and suddenly experiences the moment when Yannakis is being interrogated by the police. He is informed that firearms and explosives were found in his house, and he is first sentenced to death and then exile. Thus, temporal layers are once again intertwined.

The same technique is maintained as follows. As Director A. looks out of the train window, the layers of time intersect again, and he sees his childhood within the present moment. Soldiers walking in the street, holding red flags... Another dimension emerges from the same present. He returns home with his mother in Bucharest. The whole family is there. The father, whose house was taken by the soldiers, has returned. The year becomes 1945. The father's story is Angelopoulos's own father's story. Time unfolds again, and it transitions to the Christmas celebration of 1948. One of the family members is taken away by two individuals. As it moves to the New Year's Eve of 1950, the people's committee comes to seize the house. The family takes one last photograph. Thus, Angelopoulos, just like what photographs aim to achieve, tries to freeze time all at once and encompass all memories within that moment. This compressed time should also be a moment that encompasses all answers, but it will not be that easy. Indeed, such an experience requires effort and dedication over a long period of time.

The efforts to compress time continue through Director A., and in the subsequent scene, a connection is established with the Manakis' film, depicting the events of 1915. The lament of a woman whose husband has been killed suddenly reaches the present. Angelopoulos, like a god, desires to observe the entire timeline as if everything is happening in front of him at all times.

As relayed by Gronstad (2015), Angelopoulos expressed during an interview, "Everything that has existed will always exist. Nothing fades away, nothing dies." This statement encompasses the enduring existence of all that has come into being, including experiences, actions, emotions, suffering, love, ideas, thoughts, and people. This formulation, presented in this study, serves as an alternative expression of the claim regarding the concept of the eternal present. Here lies the passion to reach towards a moment where everything finds its place.

This desire becomes even more apparent in the following scene, where a funeral and a wedding are shown simultaneously. When looked at holistically, Angelopoulos's time compression technique can easily be said to aim for the comprehension of the eternal present. This claim is supported by other narrative elements of the film.

In fact, Angelopoulos himself, through the voice of Director A, states, "My end is actually my beginning." This perspective rejects the chronological perception of time. According to the understanding of the eternal present, there is no beginning or end in time; everything has already happened or is continuing to happen simultaneously.

As mentioned by Çelebi, Angelopoulos tackles the past, the present, and the future as intertwined and integrated. In this way, he becomes engaged in a similar endeavor (2019:3). By adopting this time compression technique and exploring the concept of the eternal present, Angelopoulos engages in a similar endeavor of capturing and intertwining different temporalities. His aim is to create a cinematic experience that goes beyond traditional chronological storytelling and presents a layered and interconnected view of time. This effort allows him to delve into the complexities of human existence and the continuous interplay of past, present, and future. Through his unique approach, Angelopoulos invites the audience to contemplate the fluidity and non-linear nature of time, blurring the boundaries between different moments and creating a sense of timelessness within the film. Angelopoulos explain himself: "...the past is an integral part of the present. The past is not forgotten, it affects everything we do in the present. Every moment of our lives consists of the past and the present, the real and the imaginary, all of them blending together into one." (Fainaru, 2001:98).

Therefore, as Çelebi also mentioned, Angelopoulos "by querying the time that is imposed by the modern world, like Proust, Angelopoulos tries to catch the time and reunite the past, present and future again. For that reason, none of his movies involves chronological integrity" (2019:42). As also indicated by Makrygiannakis (2018), Angelopoulos developed an aesthetic founded on prolonged shots that evoke a distinct perception of time within his films. This aesthetic, built upon the intrinsic rhythm of each shot, imbues a temporality in which the past, present, and future coalesce within a single, concurrent image. Liberated from the demands of a progressing narrative, this autonomous image stands on its own, enabling a tangible experience of the passage of time. Considering all of this, it can be said that Angelopoulos, by compressing time, as Çelebi also argues (2019:66), attempts to capture the meaning of life. In line with Carus' theory of landscape (Kökek, 2022:42), Angelopoulos presents the intrinsic, inner, and mysterious aspects of natural phenomena, including the mystical understanding of nature. Particularly in the chaotic Balkan geography in a state of distress, he tries to integrate the fragmented particles of time, independent of chronology, into a single gaze, seeking salvation and solace through this perspective.

Indeed, the Manakis brothers, whom he pursued in his films, are also engaged in a similar endeavor, as described by *Director A* in the train sequence:

"The Manakis Brothers traveled to many places, taking photographs and shooting films. They were trying to document a new era. A new century. For over 60 years, they captured nature, people, and the turmoil in the Balkans. They were not interested in politics, racism, friendship, or enmity. They were only interested in people. They were always on the move. During the decline of the Ottoman Empire, they researched it. They recorded everything. Landscapes, weddings, local customs, political movements, villages, events, revolutions, wars, official ceremonies, sultans, kings, grand viziers, bishops, rebels. All the contradictions, similarities, differences, and conflicts of the world in that region were reflected in their work."

Manakis brothers' passion for recording can be clearly seen as a result of their search for a perspective that sees all times. In this sense, the answer to the question asked in Sarajevo is also given: "*Did you come all this way for three reels of film, to find something that everyone believes is lost.*" For *Director A*, lost films are not just about the film itself. They are a lost gaze, forgotten in the darkness and awaiting liberation. In a sense, they are eternal present moments. That's why the thing worth sacrificing for in the film is the "*unwearying sea, which is both the beginning and the infinite.*"

This is precisely Angelopoulos' search for transcendence, an effort to reach the eternal within the flow of time, a quest to attain the eternal present. As Kolovos also pointed out, Angelopoulos is "ritualistic" (1990:20). This ritualistic endeavor aligns closely with Eliade's theory on the repetition of rituals. According to Eliade, rituals transport individuals back to the mythical origins and recreate the primal moment, erasing all non-sacred time in between. With each repetition of the ritual, the archetype of the ritual is renewed (Eliade, 1994:93). It serves as a means of purification that carries individuals back to their primordial moment. However, there are also instances where the situation is reversed. If the religious content is emptied from the archetype-myth-ritual repetition, the repetition becomes pessimistic and meaningless, turning into a horrifying and hopeless activity (Eliade, 1992:95). This situation can be associated with Angelopoulos' helplessness. Despite bending time in a ritualistic manner, Angelopoulos cannot reach the primordial moment and remains in despair. At this point, referring to the *theory of decay* will help us better understand Angelopoulos' situation. According to this theory, memories are remembered by following a neurochemical "memory trace." This trace leads to the memory. However, over time, this trace gradually deteriorates. Particularly, memories that are not revisited for a long time lose their way, and they become inaccessible in the memory (Thornidike, 1914:4). Halbwachs expresses similar ideas. "*To revive any category of memories, we need to turn our attention to space - our own space where we reside, frequently pass through, always have access to, and where our imagination or thoughts can constantly recreate. Our thoughts should be anchored in it*" (2018:174).

In this case, memories can permeate the present as images. It can be argued that Angelopoulos' images are of this nature. Indeed, when direct access to the source events, whether memories or ritualistic, is lost, all memories are pulled into the present simultaneously, swirling within the present like a whirlpool. This situation, as Eliade (1992) mentioned, will generate mourning, grief, and anxiety instead of salvation. In the film, the sentiment expressed through the taxi driver's words is as follows:

"Shall I tell you something? Greece is dying. We, the Greek people, are dying. Our revolution is over. After 3,000 years of living among stones and statues, we are dying. We have reached the end of the road. If Greece is going to die, let it die quickly! Because the longer the agony, the more painful the death. And he addresses nature: 'Oh, nature, you are so lonely, aren't you? I am as lonely as you are!'" Similarly, Angelopoulos expresses this situation in his film "Eternity and a Day," saying, "Why must we decay helplessly, divided into pain and desires?"

The reason why Angelopoulos' cinema is so dark and a kind of ocean of anxieties is precisely this. Although it is an effort towards the eternal present, because it does not go through a certain discipline, the relationship established with the sacred produces not tranquility but sorrow. This aspect can also be observed in other narrative elements of the film.

### **7. Other Symbols of Transcendence in the Film "Ulysses' Gaze"**

Elements such as wind, sea, sunrise, and sunset have been traditionally used as symbols of transcendence in narrative traditions. Similarly, the film "*Ulysses' Gaze*" employs similar elements. The film opens with the flight of birds, followed by a vast sea and a ship presented as if traveling through time. Both birds and the recurring presence of rivers and seas throughout the film evoke a sense of transcendence. In fact, the film is presented as floating fragments in the waters. The connection of water to the sacred is observed in ancient traditions, with water being considered the origin of existence. In the Old Testament, it is mentioned that the spirit of God was hovering over the waters. Although we cannot make further references due to limitations, water serves as a bridge between the transcendent imagery and the divine and human realms. Angelopoulos also utilizes the imagery of water in a similar way. Water, as a symbol of transcendence, remains constant and serene, unlike humans who constantly seek to transcend. In the film, a toast is made to the sea, reflecting humanity's longing for this state of water. Makrygiannakis (2008) explains that in Angelopoulos's work, the presence of water shifts between representing time as change and time as endurance. Water also symbolizes human yearning for redemption. Angelopoulos's treatment of water transitions from the physical to the metaphysical, adding depth to contemplation and the aspiration to move beyond the present moment. However, this aspiration is always viewed through mortal consciousness. This consciousness doesn't depict nature's apotheosis as a realm where individuals break free from cultural constraints to reunite through ecstatic experiences. Likewise, the sea embodies a feeling of duration that surpasses the histories of individuals and nations (294).

Similarly, the recurring presence of snowflakes in the film signifies transcendence and coming from a distant place. Snowflakes come from the unknown and disappear into the unknown. Likewise, the use of fog in the scene set in Sarajevo serves a similar function. Angelopoulos, praises the fog, saying, "*In this city, a person's best friend is fog. Fog has the ability to cover and conceal everything, possessing a divine quality of encompassing everything within it.*"

Music is also used in the film as a symbol of transcendence. In ceasefire situations, Serbs, Croats, and Muslims come together to make music, surpassing all hostilities. Home also in Angelopoulos' cinema, as Makrygiannakis (2018) mentioned, ceases to be an object or a geographical plane, giving its place to a ceaseless journey driven by desire: and the permanence of eternity gives way to an image of time as flux, time as an image moving beyond closure.

When looking at the film as a whole, elements such as the sea, river, water, and fog are utilized as means to establish a connection with transcendence. The search for that gaze, pursued through the three missing reels of film from the beginning of the film, can therefore be referred to as the "divine gaze." It is the only gaze that can transcend the fragmented nature of time and space, encompassing all times and places simultaneously, known as the "moment of eternity" or the eternal now in tradition. The protagonist embarks on a quest for those gazes that are unknown and fleeting for humans but eternally preserved in the gaze of eternity. This is why the character who preserves the film archive describes himself as a "collector of lost gazes." In this context, we observe that Angelopoulos embodies the characteristic Ning (2017) attributes to slow cinema. This is the contemporary slowness that allows us to engage with the coexistence of multiple pasts and futures within an expanding present, thereby deviating from the prevailing ideology of rapid acceleration and linear advancement.

In a way, the protagonist of film endeavors to preserve all gazes and seeks to reach the moment of eternal now. In this sense, the dialogue that gives the title to another film by Angelopoulos, *"One day, I asked you: 'How long will it last?' You answered: 'As long as eternity and a day,"* confirms this idea. The eternal now, also known as the moment of eternity, is both as long as the entirety of time and as short as an instant.

Thus, as highlighted by Makrygiannakis (2018), movement in Angelopoulos's cinema encapsulates duration, bringing together diverse chronological events within a singular meta-historical space. This is essentially an expression, on a different conceptual plane, of the assertion that there is a quest for the eternal now within Angelopoulos's cinema. This meta-historical space encompasses both the possibilities of the eternal and the timeless, and the referred "duration" signifies the moment of eternal now, encapsulating both the eternal past and the eternal future. As articulated by Makrygiannakis (2018), much like the angel of history who observes events from a dual perspective of inside and outside, Angelopoulos's films establish a realm where the past and present converge without losing their distinct identities. Comparable to the angel's unwavering gaze upon an event before progressing onward, the camera in Angelopoulos's films momentarily fixates on actions, only to subsequently depart at a deliberate, meditative pace. As Lakka points out (2006: 119), Angelopoulos's shot is more than just an image – it embodies a rhythm, an evolution within time. Temporality isn't a supplement to the image; rather, it constitutes the image itself, defining its uniqueness and expressiveness. Without time, all images would be uniform. According to this perspective, even vacant temporal intervals hold significance, on par with periods filled with action; these are akin to "musical pauses" or essential components of the fabric of life's time.

At this point, it is necessary to refer to briefly Orr's concept of the "Cinema of Wonder." John Orr's concept of the "Cinema of Wonder" (2000) is associated with Eastern European filmmakers like Paradjanov, Tarkovsky, and Angelopoulos. This cinema style, characterized by extended takes, transcends historical specifics to offer a perspective beyond ordinary experiences. Orr suggests that this cinematic approach preserves a quest for totality inherited from socialist culture but shifts it away from ideological contexts. Grounded in tangible imagery, it seeks deeper meaning beyond official materialism. The narratives of this cinema create alternative worlds to official politics without relying on supernatural or purely symbolic elements. However, while Orr downplays the metaphysical aspect of this type of cinema, our

concept of "Cinema of the Eternal Now" claims that it reflects filmmakers' pursuit of reaching the eternal moment, a timeless aspiration inherent in humanity.

As a student of Orr, Makrygiannakis, in his doctoral thesis (2008), which is cited in various sections of this study, refrains from attributing Angelopoulos's pursuit of transcendence in his cinema to the ancient tradition of transcendence. Therefore, Angelopoulos's endeavor for transcendence is identified as an autonomous and derived effort, or at the very least, Makrygiannakis identifies shared attributes among cinema directors, as Orr did in 2000. However, the pursuit of the eternal present, as referenced in this study, emerges as a quest that has arisen in all of humanity's cultures and has found its unique manifestation solely in cinema. Angelopoulos stands as a significant carrier of this pursuit within the realm of cinema. Furthermore, it's worth noting that, akin to its presence in primitive cultures, this pursuit is sometimes unconsciously carried out within cinema. Just as in Gilgamesh's quest for immortality, some artists seek the eternal present instinctively, attempting to touch upon this experience without fully comprehending what they are seeking, endeavoring to convey this sentiment to their audience.

### **8. Can The Pursuit of The Eternal Now in Cinema Be A Remedy For Transience And Decay?**

Although discussing this question briefly here may push the limitations of this study, not addressing it at all would leave the topic incomplete. In our discussion, we have considered Angelopoulos's efforts to freeze time, to perceive all times at once as an eternal now, as a quest for the eternal now in cinema in response to the decay and passing of time experienced by humans. However, if we seek an answer to the question posed in the title, even a quick response would lead us to acknowledge another filmmaker, Tarkovsky, who can be considered a director of cinema's eternal now, as Tezcan also points out. Tarkovsky defines art as the reawakening of the experience of infinity and wholeness in its full sense. This recalls a sense of unity by repairing the negativities that existence brings forth in terms of materiality (2016: 316). Indeed, according to Tarkovsky, cinema plays a vital role in conveying truth with its "infinite and dimensionless" structure (Tezcan, 2016: 323). However, this quick answer does not entirely dismiss the question. The question requires a more detailed examination, for which it is necessary to refer to Bergson's views on cinema at the very least.

Bergson argues that cinema's mechanical movement aligns with the linear concept of time created by the modern world. Time is divided into fragments and connected to specific spaces, but Bergson believes time cannot be dissected in this way. He sees time as the change between movements. However, cinema does not capture universal and natural movement, but rather a temporality based on human perception. Bergson offers a critical view of cinema, considering it as a "cinematographic illusion" (Çelebi, 2019) It's worth noting that these criticisms were influenced by the early period of cinema and may not fully apply to its later developments, as pointed out by Rodowick (Rodowick 1997:21).

Although Rodowick attempts to limit Bergson's film criticisms to an earlier period, stating that it does not invalidate the notion of "cinematographic illusion," Deleuze elaborates on the response given to Bergson. According to Deleuze, cinema is not composed of images added to movement but rather movement is composed of images (Deleuze 1997a: 2). In the early years of cinema, these images of movement are manifested through movement-images. The movement-image combines time with movement and serves as the foundation of cinema. Time

is considered as a whole in relation to the movement-image, although it is indirectly explained. Deleuze's perspective emphasizes the integral role of images in shaping movement and the temporal dimension of cinema. (Çelebi, 2019: 35)

As detailed by Çelebi, Deleuze introduced the concept of the time-image, which emphasized the integrated state of time in cinema. In this concept, movement took a secondary role while time became the central focus, operating in conjunction with thought. With the time-image, movement ceased to be subordinate to time; it transformed into time itself. Narrative in the time-image concept no longer followed a linear and organic structure. Instead, it embraced ambiguity, uncertainty, open-endedness, and independent frames as characteristic features. The time-image opened up new possibilities for storytelling and challenged traditional narrative conventions (2019: 35).

Deleuze's concept of the crystal-image centers around the fundamental operation of time, where the past is not constituted after the present but simultaneously with it. Time is depicted as splitting itself into two at each moment, creating distinct directions of the present and the past, which differ in nature. The crystal-image captures this temporal duality, where the present extends towards the future while simultaneously falling into the past. It highlights the complex and intricate relationship between time, memory, and perception in cinema (Deleuze, 1997b: 81)

Deleuze's claim that the crystallized image allows for the penetration of all dimensions of time through cinema can be considered valid. However, at this point, another illusion arises. In traditional experiences of the eternal now, one prepares oneself for this experience through years of struggle, worship, and ritual practices, resulting in a healthier relationship with this experience. It is like climbing a staircase step by step to reach that experience. In cinema, however, this experience, which is easily obtained, can be lived and ended as a momentary thrill, a fleeting flash of enlightenment. Although, as Socrates said, *"learning is actually nothing but recollection; according to that too, if it's true, what we are now reminded of we must have learned at some former time"* (Plato 2002: 19) in Phaedo, recalling past memories alone does not provide a salvation.

Angelopoulos seeks a frozen time in a kind of eternal now. It is a divine gaze that can encompass all times. The director pursues it, but such a transcendent experience cannot be attained through such a journey. In fact, the only thing the director encounters is the devastation in the Balkan geography. However, the experience of transcendence, even though filmmakers have the ability to capture it in a momentary experience through the camera, requires a long struggle and patience. Here, as mentioned by Scharader (2017), the spectator is brought to the level of equilibrium, but if they are not mentally prepared for it, they will not be able to hold on there and will descend back to their mortal realm. In the film, the quote from Plato, *"If the soul is to know itself, it must look into itself,"* is mentioned, which requires much more effort and striving than a mere cinematic experience. Otherwise, as Bazin claims, cinema remains an attempt to resist death through the mummification of time (Bazin 2005: 9). It is evident that this effort is a futile struggle. Thus, Angelopoulos' attempt to represent the eternal present through cinema does not guarantee its actual experience. The film can provide the audience with a temporary moment of enlightenment, but it cannot sustain that moment indefinitely. Hence, the pursuit of the eternal present in Angelopoulos remains, as described by Agamben's term for slow cinema, "a present where we have never been."

## 9. Conclusion

Angelopoulos's character, Director A, is in search of immortality represented by the three-reel film throughout the movie. It is an effort to cast a divine gaze upon existence and a purification from suffering. It is an attempt to compress time and attain the essence of all existence in a single moment. Its counterpart in tradition is the eternal now, the ever-now. Angelopoulos, as Ibn al-Waqt, seeks to transcend the tragedy and helplessness of humanity. Ibn al-Waqt means the possessor of the eternal now. As explained in detail by Ilbey, the moment in which a spiritual "state" is experienced is referred to as the child of time. The past and the future are not important; what matters is the present moment in which time exists. The child of the moment surrenders to divine manifestation without adding its will and freedom, and experiences the emergence brought by it. Those who contemplate divine manifestations are in a state of ecstasy due to spending their moments in sublime tranquility. Let us hear from Niyazî-i Mîsrî, who states in his Divan that he is the "son of time": *"I have no past, no future; I am the mother of every moment."* Then, with the same ecstasy, he says: *"I am the son of time, I cannot be the father of time / I am a servant who knows no control."* It means: I am the child of time, not the father of time. I am a pure servant who does not possess control. The one who is the son of time does not look at the past or the future; they look at the manifestation of their present state (2014).

However, although Angelopoulos engages in such an endeavor to become the son of time, attaining such a level through cinema will not be easy. In fact, of course, as Burke pointed out, art is concerned with the sublime. Burke introduced the concepts of the Sublime and the Beautiful. He argued that while beauty is traditionally associated with harmony and proportion, the Sublime evokes feelings of awe through its vastness and power (Kökek, 2022:40).

However, the artistic understanding that corresponds to what we refer to as the cinema of eternal now in fact touches upon the right place. Yet, when compared to tradition, it produces a much more limited effort and consequently a much more limited experience.

In conclusion, Angelopoulos' endeavor remains as an invitation to the eternal now, a defiance against mortality within the flowing tragedy of human existence. It is a kind of timeless flow of Angelopoulos' consciousness against the crushing and helpless flow of time. On one hand, this endeavor, which is the noblest pursuit of humanity, seeks to unite the individual with the sublime by carrying them to the eternal now. The archivist character in the film being a "collector of lost gazes" signifies this. The director, in a sense, is the hoarder of the eternal now, its greatest suitor. However, despite being an apparatus that can reveal the unseen, the cinema apparatus in his hands cannot bestow this as a permanent experience to either the director or the audience. Therefore, "collecting lost gazes" turns into the story of the character in Greneir's novel *Sine Roman*, who is cursed with the inability to forget all the films he has watched and everything related to them (Gögercin, 2023). Accumulating and piling up moments becomes a curse rather than an enlightenment. The director becomes a slave to the past and future, and to all times, haunted by the past as a fearful ghost that plagues the director's present. In this way, the film turns the present into a desolate Balkan landscape, just like the subject of the film. Although it vividly portrays the century-long pain in the Balkan region spatially and temporally, its resistance against this pain remains confined to an implied refuge in the eternal now. Hence, this film emerges as a wish, akin to Pomeroy's (2011) portrayal, that the Balkan world could be recreated once more, expressing a sentiment of longing and hope.

As a final word, the film "Ulysses' Gaze" represents Angelopoulos' quest for the eternal now and his defiance of the flow of time. However, considering the limitations and temporary nature of the pursuit of the eternal now in the film, it becomes evident that this quest is not fully realized and offers a limited experience. The film can impress the audience with a temporary moment of enlightenment, but it remains limited in creating a long-lasting impact and providing a true experience of the eternal now.

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