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Non-places in the Mist: Mapping the Spatial Turn in Theo Angelopoulos's Peripatetic Modernism

The dialectic today is back on the agenda. But it is no longer Marx's dialectic, just as Marx's was no longer Hegel's. [...] The dialectic today no longer clings to historicity and historical time [...]. What matters is to grasp movement and non-movement in the present, to grasp what it is that shifts and collides with that which does not shift: [...] To recognise space, to recognise what 'takes place' there and what it is used for, is to resume the dialectic; analysis will reveal the contradictions of space. (Lefebvre 1976: 14, 17, emphasis in original)

In a modern world where everything has been turned upside down everything appears muddled or murky in the mist. (Angelopoulos in Petrides et al. 1998)

In Theo Angelopoulos's film Taxidi sta Kithira (Voyage to Cythera), made in 1983, an elderly Greek communist returns 'home' after thirty-two years of exile in the Soviet Union. Just as his absence had been, the arrival and presence of this (pall-)bearer of history is greeted with silence and denial. An old neighbour tells him he is dead, his daughter declares that she 'doesn't want to spend her life chasing phantoms', and the authorities, at a loss as to where to 'place' him, try, unsuccessfully, to expedite his return to Moscow. Unable to expel or accommodate this ghost from the past, they put him on a raft and tow him out into international waters, a neutral and ambivalent zone of stasis. For this dialectical refugee, the clamour of history has given way to the inertia of silence. Banished to the margins, to the interstices of identity and community, his is a vision of frail and precarious isolation. Home, for this latter-day Ulysses, has now become a non-place in the mist: Ithaca, a displaced and internalised landscape prompting existential journeys of the individual.

The first of his self-dubbed 'trilogy of silence', Voyage to Cythera is as much the director's valedictory reflection on his hitherto
more political, historiographical corpus of films – perhaps best represented by *O Thiaisos (The Travelling Players, 1975)* – as it is a meditation on the death of ideology or the ‘end of history’. In the film’s final scene, Spyros, now joined by his estranged wife, unfastens the rope mooring the raft in place. As they drift away towards a mythical non-place – Cythera’s fabled island of dreams – the film’s end signals the journey’s beginning: a cinematic odyssey originating, in the first instance, from inside the head of Alexander, the director of the film-within-a-film that is *Voyage to Cythera* (in which he plays the role of Spyros’s son – a Telemachus, to the home-coming Ulysses). A secondary embarkation is that which marks the ongoing odyssey of Angelopoulos’s exilic and existentially homeless Ulysses. Traveling from film to film, this melancholic drifter charts a cinematic topography of displacement, alienation, and nostalgia for a lost vision of modernity. Subsequent incarnations, whether in the form of Marcello Mastroianni’s Spyros (*O Melissokomos/The Beekeeper, 1986*), Harvey Keitel’s ‘A’ (*To Vlema tou Odysseas/Ulysses’ Gaze, 1995*), or Bruno Ganz’s Alexander (*Mia Enotiita ke Mia Mera/Eternity and a Day, 1998*) – all ageing leftists reflecting on a past increasingly irreconcilable with the present – follow the narrative trajectories of an individual protagonist and represent a deflection away from the formal and political aesthetic of films such as *The Travelling Players*.

This shift in emphasis from a Marxist perspective which, in Brechtian style, sought to block and de-emphasise psychological identification in order to draw out collective structures of representation and narration, is generally attributed to the auteur’s disenchantment and cynicism towards politics (see, for example, Bordwell 1997). On the evidence of the films cited above – whose main protagonists share a not dissimilar profile to that of their creator – these political considerations clearly have considerable bearing. However, whilst commentators have quite rightly drawn attention to this two-part periodisation, there has been little attempt to examine critically the spatial and geographical bases by which such a shift may be more broadly understood.

With the exception of Fredric Jameson, who argues that ‘the later films drift decisively away from Greece towards some transnational situation which they cannot properly fix or identify’ (1997: 92), stud-

ies have tended to overlook the importance of place and space in the work of Angelopoulos. While more readily assessed in terms of their temporal and formal modalities of history, mythology, and memory, his films have nevertheless retained a unique and palpable geographical imagination. Proceeding from this spatial perspective, this article sets out to explore a shifting politics and poetics of location which, as I shall argue, can be traced to real and imagined geographies of the non-place.

**Spatial Turn**

By examining some of the key theoretical discussions around space that have emerged in recent years it is possible to explicate certain of the issues that have a bearing on what I provisionally refer to as the ‘spatial turn’ in Angelopoulos’s work. Foremost amongst these is the privileging of time over space in critical discourses of the left. Reflecting on this temporal bias, Foucault has remarked that ‘[s]pace was treated as the dead, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the contrary, was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic [...] if one started to talk in terms of space that meant one was hostile to time’ (1980: 70). Despite the immeasurable influence of Henri Lefebvre’s seminal study, *The Production of Space* (1991), this deep and lingering suspicion towards the spatial is still evident amongst writers arguing within a Marxist tradition. Laclau, for example, argues that space is an ‘impossibility’ by virtue of its contingent erosion by history: to ‘fix’ space (as a theoretical construct) is to deny the porosity of its otherwise constitutive frontiers. Seen in terms of a frozen dialectic, the ‘spatial’ is a realm of stasis – a negation of historicity, the fluidity of identity and the possibility of politics (Laclau 1990; Massey 1993). Indeed, looked at from this perspective, it could be argued that the space represented by the floating raft in *Voyage to Cythera* provides a cinematic affirmation of such a position; Spyros is reduced to little
more than a relic, akin to the politically neutered statue of Lenin transported along the Danube in Ulysses’ Gaze.

By contrast, for others writing from a Marxist background, such as Soja, and Jameson, space has proved neither marginal nor theoretically suspect. Drawing on Lefebvre’s ideas of social and dialectical spatialities, these authors have all sought to emphasise the significance of space in contemporary analyses of postmodernity, globalisation, and what Jameson refers to as multinational, or late capitalism. Space, for these writers, represents a key factor in the putative epochal distinction between the modern and the postmodern. Jameson, for example, sees this ‘spatial turn’ (Jameson 1991: 154; Soja 1999: 261) as constituting an ontological shift from ‘[an] experience of temporality – existential time, along with deep memory – [which] it is henceforth conventional to see as a dominant of the high modern’ (Jameson 1991: 154).

Given this scenario, at first glance it may seem reasonable to suggest that Angelopoulos’s later films can in some way be labelled as ‘postmodern’, the underlying premise being that the determinacy of the historical has given way to the indeterminacy of shifting borders and geographies of displacement. Such a conclusion would be misplaced on two counts. First, as I shall argue, a concern with space and place is by no means absent from the early films; nor, indeed, is it the case that later films, such as Ulysses’ Gaze or Eternity and a Day, dispense with a notion of the historical narrative or the mappable, essentialist subjectivities of alienation and nostalgia. Secondly, the extent to which a postmodern reclamation of space holds up, in terms of its supposed epochal conditionality or epistemological sustainability is itself open to question. Indeed, the geographer, Edward Soja, the most fervent of champions for what he himself calls ‘the reassertion of space in critical social theory’ (1989), advocates, in his Postmodern Geographies, the more central incorporation of ‘the fundamental spatiality of social life’ (ibid: 137, my emphasis). The spatial determinism that seems implicit in this quotation seems desirous of a displacement of the temporal, rather than envisaging a corrective role for space. Gregory, in an extended critique of this work, argues that Soja’s ‘single-minded determination to expose one “hidden narrative” – the subordination of space to time – runs the risk of inviting a simple reversal of time to space’ (1995: 282). Furthermore, spatial concepts, deemed ‘postmodern’ in terms of their empirical or theoretical specificity, might well have a bearing on historical analyses of modernist spaces, as Kevin Hetherington’s study (1997) of eighteenth-century ‘heterotopias’ (literally ‘places of otherness’ – see Foucault 1986) has shown.

Given these caveats and reservations, the notion of a ‘spatial turn’ as the basis for claiming a two-part periodisation in the work of Angelopoulos may appear questionable. The differences, however, although in no way connoting a clear and unambiguous transition from the temporal to the spatial, are nevertheless such that a growing preoccupation with geographies of displacement and tropes of travel does connote a formal and narrative departure from ‘historical’ films such as The Travelling Players. Jameson (1997), arguing along similar lines, suggests that the later films can be characterised in terms of a ‘spatial’ aesthetic, an epithet he qualifies in such a way as to distinguish an ostensibly ‘postmodern’ spatiality from that which, as he concedes, constitutes the no less spatial or geographical nature of the earlier work. Whilst there is certainly a qualitatively different spatial imagination starting to emerge in Voyage to Cythera, to label this as specifically ‘postmodern’ is, I would argue, misleading. There are few, if any references to postmodern techno- or city-scapes in Angelopoulos’s films, no hypermodern spaces such as airports or shopping complexes; and the border and frontier, central to To Meteoro Vima tou Pelargou (The Suspended Step of the Stork, 1991) and Ulysses’ Gaze, are hardly celebratory ‘spaces of radical openness’, as writers such as hooks (1990) and Anzaldua (1987) would contend, but abstract spaces of despair, alienation, and fragmentation.

A more instructive approach would be to stress the essentially postnational or transnational modalities of this new spatiality. To subsume this ‘dissolution of an autonomous Greek story’ (Jameson 1997: 91) within the rubric of the ‘postmodern’ not only runs the risk of obscuring the specific form and materiality of these social and cultural geographies, but also fails to account fully for any continuity of style and content that might otherwise be traceable in Angelopoulos’s work. With these discussions of space, place, and landscape in mind, I am suggesting that the work of this late modernist director is essentially
peripatetic in its formal and narrative properties. The continuities of this ‘peripatetic modernism’ and the discontinuity of the ‘spatial turn’ evoke the restlessness of a camera’s eye and director’s vision whose travels – from place to non-place – have steadily traced the dissolution of an idea of the nation.

Peripatetic Players

Studies of walking in nineteenth-century English literature have designated the ‘peripatetic’ as a unique literary mode in which a poetics of wandering constitutes appropriations of the English landscape; a metaphorical ‘gathering up’ of a pastoral vision of nation and identity under threat of erasure. Wordsworth’s walking poetry, for example, occupied an ideological space that ran counter to the appropriation and industrialisation of the landscape under the enclosures (Wallace 1993: 11). This peripatetic mode, as Anne Wallace argues, ‘represents excursive walking as a cultivating labour capable of renovating both the individual and his society by recollecting and expressing past value’ (ibid).

Similarly, the ‘cultivating labours’ of Angelopoulos’s peripatetic players represent a reappropriation of the cultural, historical, and political landscapes of what he calls an ‘Other Greece’ (Horton 2001: 88) – a structuring absence of rural authenticity towards and through which these travellers and wanderers roam. That the earlier films, in contradistinction to the later, may be deemed political, is largely a question of whether this process of reappropriating the past through travel is understood as a politically viable vision of collective agency (The Travelling Players), or as the nostalgic and melancholic reclamation of a fragmented individual, cultivating the seedbeds of memory and of time past (The Beekeeper, Eternity and a Day).

To account more fully for these narrative and spatial practices of what can perhaps best be described as ‘temporal cartography’ we should not underestimate Angelopoulos’s own odyssey in search of this Other Greece, a process which began with the making of his first feature film Anaparastasis (Reconstruction, 1970), based on the true story of a Gastarbeiter (guest-worker) who was murdered by his wife and her lover upon his return home to his native village after years spent abroad in Germany. On his search for possible locations for the film, Angelopoulos explored the remote mountain villages of Epirus, near the border with Albania in northern Greece. Both the experience of travelling around this region, and later of shooting Reconstruction within its barren landscapes and remote villages, made a profound impression on the director. As he explains:

I came across an interior space – which can be called an inside Greece – which was unknown to most people of my generation, people born and raised in the city. Today, except perhaps for professional geographers, I am one of the most extremely travelled Greeks... not just city by city, but village by village... It was a true discovery for me. (Horton 1997a: 65)

Despite the region’s geographical proximity to Albania and the former Yugoslavia, Angelopoulos’s gaze in his early films is not turned outward towards the borders, but rather inward to the ‘interior space’ of an ‘inside Greece’.

That Angelopoulos finds his Other Greece in this rural, almost holistic vision of Greek village life may in part be attributable to his disappropriation of urban or, more specifically, Athenian Greece, which he describes as ‘a deformed image of Greek life’ (in Horton 2001: 88, emphasis in original). The village, on the other hand, is seen by him as:

a complete world in miniature. The old Greek villages had a spirit, a life, full of work and play and festivity. Of course Greek villages began to depopulate by the turn of the century, but it was really World War II and the subsequent civil war in Greece that completely destroyed that reality and concept of the Greek village. (in Horton 1997b: 206)

The reality behind this nostalgic depiction of a national-cultural gemeinschaft idyll had, as Angelopoulos conceives, already begun to be eroded under the dual impact of modernity and industrialisation, which forced rural populations to migrate to the cities or abroad in search of work. The destruction of the concept of the Greek village,
however, invokes a sense of nostalgia more firmly rooted in the political upheavals of 1939–1952, the historical ‘terrain’ of The Travelling Players, Angelopoulos’s third and, to date, most celebrated film. Exile, displacement, alienation, and loss are scorched on its cinematic topographies. Isolated, seemingly autonomous villages and towns, strewn across empty landscapes, or dwarfed by the vast greyness of the sea; crumbling facades overlooking deserted town squares; bleak, wintry mountain terrain — this ‘sadness of the north’, as Angelopoulos describes it (in Ciment 2001: 55), contains the mere vestiges of a sense of national belonging and political identity.

The players in question are members of an itinerant theatrical troupe that travels the small towns of rural Greece, their performances (of the popular nineteenth-century pastoral melodrama, Golfo the Shepherdess) continually interrupted by the historical events unfolding around them. Picking over fragments of myth and history, these peripatetic players unearth both the irretrievable landscapes of a mythical, nostalgic — and tangibly real — past, and lay bare the foundational elements of Angelopoulos’s Other Greece, in which the ghosts of the past, long since banished to the peripheries of place and memory, find routes back from the nostalgic raury of exile to confront a ‘deformed image’ of Greek national identity, spatialised and temporalised in the contemporary urbany of the city.

Thus, in many ways, the cinematic topography of The Travelling Players is the fruit of the director’s on-going search for this Other Greece. Looking for locations for the film, Angelopoulos visited almost every town and village in Greece, and took more than two thousand photographs. He then embarked on two further trips around the country, accompanied by his director of photography, Giorgos Arvanitis (Horton 1997b: 121). The thorough, almost obsessive nature of this research is commented upon by Arvanitis: ‘Finding locations with

Theodoros is always an adventure. I don’t think there is a corner of Greece which we don’t know. Imagine driving for fifteen days, fourteen hours a day without saying a word’ (quoted in Rear Window 1993).

In extending the literary mode of the peripatetic to encompass the spatial and narrative practices of cinema-poets such as Angelopoulos, our discussion perhaps inevitably leads to the question of the extent to which such a cinematic aesthetic would be applicable in broader terms. Although such considerations take us beyond the scope of this paper, the work of directors such as Wim Wenders offers a potentially fruitful area of enquiry in this regard. Indeed, comparisons have been drawn between Angelopoulos’s trilogy of silence (Voyage to Cythera; The Beekeeper; Topos in Omichiil/Landscape in the Mist, 1988) and Wenders’s 1970s road trilogy (Alice in den Städten/Alice in the Cities, 1974; Falsche Bewegung/Wrong Movement, 1975; Im Lauf der Zeit/Kings of the Road, 1976) (Horton 1997b: 79). Despite the obvious crossovers with genres such as the road movie, the peripatetic questions the implicit linearity of cinematic tropes such as ‘the road’, and allows for the consideration of alternative geometries of displacement that might otherwise be traceable in these and other so-called ‘road’ films.

In films such as The Travelling Players, the notion of the peripatetic could also be said to extend to the formal temporality and movements of Angelopoulos’s trademark sequence shot. In one ten-minute scene, for example, the troupe begins to walk through a town in northern Greece, the camera slowly tracking their progression along the street. It is 1952 and canvassing for a forthcoming election is taking place. By the time they reach the end of the street they are in 1939 and have arrived at a rally for General Metaxas. This shift in time, conducted solely at the level of mise-en-scène, establishes, within a

1 The cinematography of Giorgos Arvanitis, Angelopoulos’s long-standing collaborator, is a crucial factor in this atmospheric evocation of place. The exterior shots (which constitute nearly two-thirds of The Travelling Players) are filmed on location, during the winter months, using the natural light of dawn and dusk, and assiduously avoiding bright, sunny weather in favour of overcast skies and rain. As Georgakas points out, this is a conscious reversal of the sun-kissed, touristic images of Greece found in travel brochures (1997: 33).

2 Angelopoulos himself questions the labelling of his films as ‘road movies’, since he sees these as films in which characters wander without a purpose. By contrast, the heroes of his films, he asserts, are all on some form of quest, ‘for a lost paradise, a lost innocence, a lost reference point’ (see Petrides et al. 1998: 7).
single spatiality, the historical and political contingencies of a pre- and post-war military regime.

Like the Ulysses/Spyros character of *Voyage to Cythera*, the travelling players also wander from film to film, venturing beyond the diegetic space of the 1975 film to reappear in the 1988 in *Landscape in the Mist*. In this later work, these bearers of history, now ‘ravaged by time’, can no longer find a venue to perform their play, nor an audience receptive to the antecedent trajectories of nation and narration. Reduced to performing on the beach to anyone who will listen, the recital given by the players has now become little more than a cacophony of monologues, overlapping fragments of a grand narrative (quotations taken from *The Travelling Players*) bereft of place or formal structure. These peripatetic players inhabit a diegetic space where travel is less a movement between places (either historically or geographically adduced) than a journey between the real, empirical non-places of waiting, transit, and refuge, and the imaginary, non-spatial, and non-temporal ‘landscapes in the mist’.

Non-places in the Mist

This journey, as we have seen, begins with Spyros’s raft. In the light of recent debates on the politics of asylum, it is difficult not to draw comparisons between the plight of this dispossessed Ulysses and that of the economic migrants and refugees who inhabit the non-places of a Fortress Europe (cf. Roberts 2002). In Britain, for example, the opposition Conservative party, following the example recently set by John Howard’s administration in Australia, have advocated that asylum seekers be housed on what they euphemistically term ‘offshore havens’, basically floating, or actual, islands on which claimants are detained pending the decision of the authorities as to their fate (Travis 2003).

The plight of the refugee and migrant within the re-imagined geographies of a post-communist Europe is a theme that is confronted by Angelopoulos in his three most recent films. In *The Suspended Step of the Stork*, a village called ‘The Waiting Room’, visible on the far side of a river marking the border between Greece and Albania, is the temporary ‘home’ of thousands of displaced persons, each waiting for the chance to start a new life ‘somewhere else’; in *Ulysses’ Gaze*, as ‘A’ embarks on his journey into the heart of darkness that is the former Yugoslavia, he passes groups of refugees embarked on a reverse odyssey, heading back towards the border with Greece; and in *Eternity and a Day*, the ghostly silhouettes of bodies, barely visible in a misty wintry landscape, cling to a tall border fence marking the same real and imaginary zone of suspension and stasis.

All of these films employ the central trope of the border in their respective mappings of exile, migrancy, and displacement. Yet despite the very tangible and material status of the border zone in the films cited, for Angelopoulos these non-places of waiting and refuge function less as geo-political or sociological entities than as metaphors mapping the broader, metaphysical geographies of the human condition: the barriers to communication and empathy; the estrangement of the self; or the boundaries between life and death, being and nothingness. Exile and migrancy, in this sense, are closer to Heidegger’s notion of existential homelessness, reflecting a (post)modern condition which Iain Chambers describes as, ‘a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation. Always in transit, the promise of a homecoming [...] becomes an impossibility’ (1994: 5).

It is worth noting that this turning away from the interiority of an ‘inside Greece’ towards these real and imagined borders coincides with the start of Angelopoulos’s collaboration with the Italian screenwriter Tonino Guerra who, to date, has co-scripted all the screenplays from and including *Voyage to Cythera*. Known more famously for his work with Antonioni, Guerra has played a central role in the development of Angelopoulos’s ideas. Indeed, the director has likened their work together to the ‘ancient “peripatetic” philosophers’ who would walk around as they discussed and formulated their arguments (Fainaru 2001: 114). Released in the same year as *Voyage to Cythera*, Andrei Tarkovskii’s *Nostalghia* (*Nostalgia*, 1983) was also written in collaboration with Guerra, a process recorded in the documentary
Viaggio di Tempo (Andrei Tarkovskii, 1983); and it was while visiting the exiled Russian director in Rome that Angelopoulos first met the screenwriter. In an interview discussing the ideas behind Tarkovskii’s film, Guerra explains that ‘It is the nostalgia for a world without frontiers [...] for a world which is disappearing [...] Nostalgia for a life which we do not have and perhaps we never had’ (Biarese 1983); sentiments which could easily have been expressed by the later Angelopoulos.3

These more metaphysical and humanistic themes notwithstanding, tropes of the border and frontier in Angelopoulos’s most recent work form part of a broader politics and poetics of the non-place that had already begun to emerge in the earlier trilogy of silence. In Voyage to Cythera, the intermediary space (both diegetic and geographic) between the city and Spyros’s home village is represented by a Mobil petrol station, into which Alexander calls en route to and from the mountain village. A Guido to Angelopoulos’s Fellini,4 Alexander, the filmmaker-cum-Telemanchus character, is at home neither in the ‘deformed image’ of the city nor in the lost ‘reality and concept’ of the Greek village, symbolised by the homecoming Ulysses. As such, he finds himself drawn to this ambivalent zone of stasis and transition where past and present, centre and periphery are diegetically interwoven – a discontinuity in space and time from where narrative and creative mobilities are potentially resumed. Like the trope of the motel, the petrol station represents what Meaghan Morris describes as the ‘metaphorai of the pause’ (1988: 41), where movement and metaphor come together, etymologically and cinematically, in narrative spaces of arrival and departure.5 This real and imagined non-place of identity, adrift in the contingent geographies and temporalities of the nation, provides a contemporary mirror to that represented externally by Spyros/Ulysses’s raft, drifting slowly out of history and locality. In both instances, we witness a movement away from an idea of ‘inside Greece’, towards, on the one hand, chronotopes of the transitory, processual, and contingent, and, on the other, the frontier zones of transnational space. Like the casting of negative space by the artist Rachel Whiteread, these negatively reconfigured places inscribe inverse geographies of absence and displacement: an ‘inside Greece’ turned inside out.6

The increased centrality of non-places of travel, such as service stations, roadside cafés, motels, and railway stations which, alongside actual modes of transport (trains, buses, ships, ferries), are a dominant feature of the later films, opens up the seemingly autonomous spaces and towns of The Travelling Players to expose a world where ‘home’ is a landscape suspended between destinations. This shift towards cinematic topographies of the non-place echoes those reflected in empirical disciplines such as anthropology. For Marc Augé, the non-place is defined in opposition to a Durkheimian notion of anthropological place – i.e. an organic sociality rooted in space and time – and is ascribed to a world ‘where transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating [...] where a dense network of means of transport which are also inhabited spaces is developing; [...] a world thus surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral’ (1995: 78). Sterile, inert spaces of transit and circulation, such as airports, supermarkets, high-speed roads and railways, as well as transit

3 In a discussion on the meaning of ‘home’ in his films, Angelopoulos recalls how he and Tarkovskii would argue over the cultural origins of the concept of ‘nostalgia’, Tarkovskii claiming it as a Russian word, while Angelopoulos maintained that it was derived from the Greek ‘nostos’, meaning homecoming (Horton 1997a: 106). Despite their etymological disagreement, however, both directors share a concept of home that is inextricably linked to feelings of yearning and absence.

4 A reference to Fellini’s Otto e Mezzo (8½, 1963), which, like Voyage to Cythera, is a self-reflexive enquiry into the creative process of filmmaking, in which the central protagonist (played by Marcello Mastroianni) is the alter ego of the (real) film’s director.

5 In Greece, vehicles of public transport are called metaphorai, from the ancient Greek for transfer, or transport. A dovetailing of travel and metaphor in recent poststructuralist theories has yielded a complex circularity of tropic displacement and displaced tropes: travel, argues van den Abbeele, ‘becomes the metaphor of metaphor while the structure of metaphor becomes the metaphor for the travel of meaning’ (1992: xiii).

6 In Whiteread’s cast of the interior contours of a Victorian living room (Ghost, 1990), and her later and more ambitious House (1993–4), the emptiness of negative space is given form, and the intimate spaces of memory and time are rendered tangible.
camps and holding areas for refugees, asylum seekers, and other displaced persons: these shifting geographies of late capitalism are, for Augé, increasingly central to an understanding of what he describes as 'supermodernity' (ibid: 34).

Given the complexity and density of these ethnographic spaces, at first glance it may seem tendentious to reconcile such a vision with the sparse landscapes and remote locations of Angelopoulos’s ‘Other’, i.e. non-urban, Greece. Despite their association with urban spaces and places such as airports and shopping complexes, Augé’s ideas are, however, no less applicable to non-places of transit and refuge in peripheral and industrial-rural landscapes and communities. More crucially, though, in approaching the later films, an idea of the non-place reflects not only these more material and social concerns, but also provides an insight into the inverse geographies of ‘home’ and placement that lie at the heart of Angelopoulos’s modernist vision.

In the film following Voyage to Cythera, Spyros, the peripatetic beekeeper of the film’s title, sets off with his bees on a final migration, heading south across Greece towards his childhood hometown. Unlike the teenage drifter who joins him intermittently throughout his journey south, Spyros’s odyssey has purpose. Mapped in advance, it traces what the novelist Bruce Chatwin has described as ‘songlines’ of tradition (1987): a quest for the vanishing routes/roots of personal and collective memory. When asked by the girl-drifter where they are going, Spyros, in one of his few utterances in the film, replies, ‘To the other end of the map’. The girl, who is given no name, has no awareness of history or memory: ‘Mr “I remember”,’ she retorts at one point, ‘look at me! I don’t remember anything.’ As a personification of the present, she inhabits the numerous roadside stops and motels of Angelopoulos’s Other Greece, drifting from non-place to non-place, seemingly unaware of their absenting traces of the past.

7 As the geographer Doreen Massey has noted, questions of place and space in relation to film typically presuppose a link between cinematic space and urban space at the expense of other, less ‘concrete’ geographies of mobility and transit. She argues that this tendency to restrict discussions of space, place, and film to geographies of the city runs the risk of essentialising ‘the urban’ to the detriment of a broader field of enquiry, ‘the relation between film and spatiality in general’ (Lury and Massey 1999: 230).

For Augé, a central paradox of the non-place is that, ‘a foreigner lost in a country he does not know (a “passing stranger”) can feel at home there only in the anonymity of motorways, service stations, big stores or hotel chains’ (Augé 1995: 106). Increasingly estranged from the landscape he passes through, Spyros recognises and identifies the present only by accessing its empty spaces. Stopping off at a petrol station where his daughter works, Spyros is told of plans for the expansion of the site, which are to include the building of a supermarket. The idea of ‘home’ that he has come to recognise is one that is silently colonising the organic places of a real or imagined past.

Upon reaching ‘the other end of the map’, Spyros wanders through the haunts and ruins of his former hometown; the house where he was born and raised is now crumbling and deserted; a rundown cinema is to be sold off through lack of interest. Now and again, a train, one of the few signs of life and movement amidst these relics of the past, passes back and forth in front of the cinema, on its way to some other place and time. Dominating the frame, the train’s effect is like that of film moving rhythmically through a projector.

With this image in mind, we observe the initiation of another transitional passage between films. The opening shot of Landscape in the Mist, the third of the trilogy of silence, is of two children standing on a railway platform in front of a stationary train bound for ‘Germany’, a mythical place where the children believe that their father, whom they have never known, can be found. As the train starts to pull away, leaving the children behind, the camera zooms in so that once again the carriages dominate the frame. In a reversal of the Beekeeper shot, the two protagonists are now on the near-side of the train/film, sharing the viewers’ perspective of the narrative journey, or metaphor, which is about to unfold.

In this film we witness the emergence of a further manifestation of the non-place, one more closely tied to its translation from the Greek ou-topos (literally ‘no-place’). The landscape in question is a utopia; one arrived at through, and inhabited in, film itself. In this regard, Angelo-poulos subscribes to the persistence of a modernist vision of cinema’s exalted and utopian role in modern society:
The world needs cinema now more than ever. It may be the last important form of resistance to the deteriorating world in which we live [...], you see, 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, emphasis in the original).

The director’s unwavering and Eurocentric vision of a humanistic, universal language of cinema is highly problematic and, given the political subject matter of his more recent work, the avoidance of a critical or historicised standpoint betrays a certain impotence and bad faith in the face of the contingencies of conceptual or ideological form. The mastery of a complex formal technique of cinema is no substitute for a mapping of the complexities of post-Marxist political subjectivity.

By far the most interesting aspect of this retreat to a disengaged utopianism is the number of spatial contradictions that emerge in the double-play between the notion of the non-place, as described by Augé, and the structuring absence of an imaginary non-place or utopia.

The journey that structures Landscape in the Mist, like that of The Beekeeper, is an odyssey that largely unfolds in the sedentary spaces of travel, such as railway waiting rooms, truck stops and roadside cafés, as well as the actual spaces and modes of travel themselves (train, bus, lorry, and motorcycle). It is also a journey that traces absent geographies, both real and imaginary, that are situated outside the diegetic and geographical space of the film. Travelling from south to north – in a reversal of the beekeeper’s journey – the two children, Voula and Alexander (also the names of the brother and sister in Voyage to Cythera), embark upon an odyssey in search of their father, a journey that takes them to an imaginary border with what they believe to be Germany. We never discover the identity of the father; all we know of him is his absence, somewhere ‘across the border’ in Germany. That Angelopoulos chose this particular country, a nation whose real borders do not, of course, coincide with Greece, suggests a deliberate ‘placing’ of the father amongst the many economic exiles that were forced to abandon their homeland and to become Gastarbeiter in Germany. This inverse mapping of an Other Greece is that of a diasporic nation; themes which form the basis of the director’s latest work, a trilogy of films (The Weeping Meadow, The Third Wing, Eternal Return), which, at the time of writing, are scheduled for production in Greece, countries of the former USSR, and the USA. On the various train journeys north, Voula composes imaginary letters to her father. The absent replies, which Voula receives from the sound of the train moving along the tracks, are from another, as yet unspecified, space and time; diasporic landscapes to which these most recent films, having literally ‘stepped across the border’, attempt to give voice and substance. Yet these epistolary narratives are also sent to and from a landscape outside history; utopian non-places of the imagination that are given flesh in the cinematic image.

A traveller not only from the pages of Greek myth, but also from Angelopoulos’s 1975 film, Orestes, who befriends the children and gives them a lift in his travelling home, finds himself, along with his fellow travelling players, at the end of the road. Soon to join the army, he tells the children that he is ‘a snail slithering away into nothingness’, no longer knowing where he is going. Bending down, he picks up a small piece of thirty-five-millimetre cine-film. As he holds it to the light, the camera zooms in to reveal an empty frame. Orestes tells the children that he can see a tree – a landscape in the mist.

When they finally reach the border, Alexander and Voula step from the darkness of night into the blinding light of a misty landscape. ‘Wake up, it’s light. We’re in Germany’, Alexander tells Voula. The tree that Orestes has described slowly comes into view. The children have entered the fragment of film and found their ‘father’. Absence and presence, place and non-place, past and present are all reconciled in this organic vision of authenticity and autochthony; reconciliation with a father which the Voula and Alexander of Voyage to Cythera watched drifting out to sea. For Angelopoulos, the contradictions of space and the dialectical ebbs and flows of history can only be resolved by entering the utopian dream-spaces of film. This non-place in the mist has become the realisation of a vision of Cythera. The voyage, for the time being at least, is over.
Conclusion

For the peripatetic players of Angelopoulos’s later work, ‘home’ is a destination that can only ever be reached through the medium of film. The further they drift towards this cinematic ou-topos, the further they expose place; these films are political in that they measure the gap between the real and the imagined, and find it wanting. At the same time, however, a rejection of the political in the more prescriptive or ideological sense, coupled with a shift towards personal narratives and existential themes, denotes a marked departure from the formal and narrative strategies adopted in films such as The Travelling Players.

The ‘spatial turn’ which marks this transition reflects not so much a shift towards some generalised condition of postmodern spatiality, as Jameson suggests, as to a dialectics of movement and fixity, transition and stasis which have gathered pace around tropes of the border, frontier, and the non-place. Despite their adherence to a modernist aesthetic, reminiscent at times of Antonioni and Guerra’s studies in alienation, the later films are no less progressive in that they distill and refract the spatial contradictions at the heart of an emergent politics of mobility and migration (cf. Hardt and Negri 2000: 212–4). Looking back at traces of history and memory, and forward to the transnational and diasporic spatialities of the border zone, the trilogy of Voyage to Cythera, The Beekeeper, and Landscape in the Mist represents a transitional phase – a spatial turn – in the director’s career. ‘What’s the border?’ asks Alexander in the last of this trilogy of absence. From the waiting room of a remote railway station somewhere in northern Greece, it is a question to which each of the subsequent films, in their different ways, has sought to provide an answer.

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Evgenii Tsymbal

Andrei Tarkovskii: From ‘Sculpted Time’ to ‘Inspired Nature’

Editors’ Introduction

Evgenii Tsymbal: Film and Identity

As an undergraduate, Evgenii Tsymbal studied history at the University of Rostov on Don. He subsequently worked as a sociologist, an experience which would later prove useful in his own documentary work. From 1982–4, he was a student on the Higher Course for Scriptwriters and Directors in Moscow, but by that time he had already been working at Mosfilm for some eight years, and in the period from 1975 onwards he had acted as assistant director to a range of important figures such as Andrei Tarkovskii, Larisa Shepitko, Nikita Mikhalkov and Eldar Ryazanov.

His first short film, Zashchitnik Sedov (Defence Counsel Sedov), was made in 1988. Shot in black and white, the film’s narrative recounts the experiences of a lawyer who is hired to defend four men who have been unjustly condemned to death for sabotage. The film provides a striking combination of fictional narrative and archival footage, and offers an acute and highly disturbing portrayal of ordinary life during the Stalinist 1930s, with scenes that evoke the terror and vulnerability of individuals living under such a regime, but also their strength and their courage. Widely screened in important international festivals, the film was hugely successful, and the numerous awards it was given included the Best Short Film award at BAFTA in 1989.

Tsymbal’s second film, Povest’ nepogashennoy luny (The Tale of the Unextinguished Moon, 1990), was also set during the Stalinist