

Time Travel as Homecoming

A Journey for ETERNITY AND A DAY (Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998)

Abstract

Time is an essential issue in phenomenology and existential philosophy. In this article, I argue that *Μια αιωνιότητα και μια μέρα* (ETERNITY AND A DAY, Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), the masterpiece of the understudied auteur, contributes to this scholarship by showing us two modes of time experience: depressive time and narrative time. In the light of Paul Ricœur's, Matthew Ratcliffe's, and Thomas Fuchs's phenomenologies of time, I will show how the film delineates the phenomenological contours of depressive time and narrative time with the protagonist poet Alexandros's last day sojourn in the world on the one hand and a series of his time travels on the other. Overall, I frame this new phenomenology of time with Angelopoulos's cinematic thinking on home. I argue that depressive time underlies the time experience of homelessness while narrative time reorients us towards homecoming. Hence, ETERNITY AND A DAY not only contributes to the phenomenology of time but also constitutes an existential philosophy that addresses and redresses what Georg Lukács calls "transcendental homelessness", the fundamental alienation of modern humanity.

Keywords

Theo Angelopoulos, Phenomenology, Existential Philosophy, Time, Home, Paul Ricœur

Biography

Haotian (Walden) Wu is a doctoral student in Film and Screen Studies at the University of Cambridge, UK. His research focuses on film and philosophy with an emphasis on phenomenology and existential philosophy. He works with philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricœur, and Hans-Georg Gadamer as well as global auteurs like Werner Herzog, Theo Angelopoulos, Wong Kar-wai, Jia Zhangke, and Hirokazu Koreeda. He is particularly interested in how cinema contributes to our existential-ontological homecoming.

Introduction: An Odysseus of Time

At the end of *Μια αιωνιότητα και μια μέρα* (ETERNITY AND A DAY, Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), the poet protagonist Alexandros (Bruno Ganz) shouts towards the sea three words he learned from a little boy: *Korfulamu*, *Xenitis*, and *Argathini*.¹ “*Korfulamu*” literally means “heart of a flower”. As Angelopoulos explains in an interview with Gideon Bachmann, “in Greece the word is used to express the feeling of a child when it sleeps in the arms of its mother”,² continuing, “it stands for everything that is love, closeness, intimacy, with whoever it may be, your mother or your lover”.³ Conversely, “*Xenitis*”, a word Angelopoulos learned from an old sailor, means “a stranger, but a stranger who is a stranger everywhere [...] it describes the feeling of being a stranger. Or a feeling of exile.”⁴ The final word, “*Argathini*”, means “very late at night”⁵ and “expresses time”.⁶ These words, Angelopoulos says “actually express the essence of the film”,⁷ which I interpret as a dialectics between being-at-home (*Korfulamu*) and homelessness (*Xenitis*) taking place in time (*Argathini*), a homecoming journey through time travel.

The film as a journey in time is not only indicated in its title but manifests at its very beginning: engulfed by the rhythmic sound of waves and facing a pale-yellow mansion, we hear a conversation between two boys – the young Alexandros and his friend – talking about a trip to “the island”. There is “the ancient city”, “a happy city” which “has slept under the sea for centuries”; “it comes out of the water once a month and for a very short time”, when “all stops ... time also stops”. Alexandros asks, “Time ... what is it?” His friend says, “Grandfather says that time is a child that plays dice on the shore.” Thus, this mythopoetic beginning introduces the film as a time travel that

1 This article is an offshoot of my ongoing doctoral research, generously funded by the Queens'-Daim Zainuddin Scholarship. The resonance between my doctoral project and this Time Travel special issue is miraculously generative. The comments of my doctoral supervisor Isabelle McNeill, advisor Catherine Pickstock, and the anonymous reviewer have been most insightful. Where I have failed to incorporate their suggestions, I have done so at my own risk. The article is dedicated to the late Theo Angelopoulos, whose cinematic vision deserves far more attention than acknowledged in the English-speaking world.

2 Angelopoulos 2001, 108.

3 Angelopoulos 2001, 108.

4 Angelopoulos 2001, 108.

5 Angelopoulos 2001, 108.

6 Angelopoulos 2001, 110.

7 Angelopoulos 2001, 108.

overcomes time, towards the sunken city of bliss, “Home” in the existential-ontological sense.

In this article, I argue that *ETERNITY AND A DAY* articulates an existential philosophy of homecoming in terms of time. The film first initiates us into depressive time, an experience of time as decaying and out-of-joint with other people, which characterises the temporality of *Xenitis*. Then, via a series of time travels, it reorients us towards narrative time, time configured and reconfigured as a meaningful whole, which generates the temporality of *Korfulamu*. This is a film-phenomenological argument that draws insights chiefly from Matthew Ratcliffe’s and Thomas Fuchs’ phenomenologies of depression and Paul Ricœur’s study of narrative and time. I will show how the film motivates a synthesis of their ideas on time and develops a philosophy of homecoming that addresses and redresses the modern malaise of “transcendental homelessness”, an expression coined by Georg Lukács,⁸ which I will discuss later in light of *Xenitis*.

***Xenitis*: Transcendental Homelessness as Depressive Time**

The film tells the story of Alexandros’s last day, in which he seeks to sort out his affairs before he enters the hospital the next day due to his terminal cancer. This one-day journey is intercut with several time-travel sequences, during which he meets his late wife, Anna, when she is still young. The film was awarded the Palme d’Or and the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury at the Cannes Film Festival in 1998. Unanimously recognised as Alexandros’s masterpiece, it epitomises a perennial issue in his filmmaking: the dialectics between homelessness and homecoming. This sentiment of nostalgia, understood in its Greek etymology as *nostos* (return home) + *algos* (pain), is rooted in the director’s self-perception. As he told Bachmann, “I feel somehow like a stranger in Greece. I live here in a situation that is as if my house wasn’t here, as if this wasn’t my home”, a point he reiterates with Gabrielle Schulz and Dan Fainaru.⁹ More paradoxically and intriguingly, most of his films are shot in northern Greece, while he is from the South.¹⁰ “This sadness of the north”, he says to Michel Ciment, “is so essential for me.”¹¹ This twofold

8 Lukács 2006, 41.

9 Angelopoulos 2001, 77, 109, 122.

10 Angelopoulos 2001, 56.

11 Angelopoulos 2001, 55.

geographic dislocation registers the poetic oxymoron of homelessness at home in Angelopoulos's cinema, of feeling at home "in a car passing through a landscape".¹² It echoes the mutual enfoldment of the *Heimlich* (homely) and the *Unheimlich* (unhomely/uncanny) explored by Martin Heidegger as a universal human condition. "What is worthy of poetising in this poetic work is nothing other than becoming homely in being unhomely", says Heidegger when discussing Sophocles' *Antigone*.¹³ No less can be said of Angelopoulos's cinema, and the director references Heidegger's thinking on home as a crucial motif of *ETERNITY AND A DAY*.¹⁴ Although there is a clear division between the early political and the late philosophical Angelopoulos,¹⁵ an "existentialism" of home runs across his corpus.¹⁶ His early films, like *Ο Θίασος* (*THE TRAVELLING PLAYERS*, Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1975), have a strong Marxist undertone that criticises the bleakness of modern Greek history and society while gesturing towards a communist utopia. *Οι Κυνηγοί* (*THE HUNTERS*, Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1977) becomes a turning point, deconstructing power and disenchanting the utopian fantasy.¹⁷

Consequently, the homecoming theme in the late Angelopoulos takes on a more decided metaphysical and existential turn. Most memorable is the line delivered by Marcello Mastroianni in *Το Μετέωρο Βήμα Του Πελαργού* (*THE SUSPENDED STEP OF THE STORK*, Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1991), self-quoted many times by Angelopoulos: "How many borders must we cross to reach home?" It also inaugurates his "The Border Trilogy", which includes this film, *Το βλέμμα του Οδυσσέα* (*ULYSSES' GAZE*, Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1995) and *ETERNITY AND A DAY*. If home is, as Angelopoulos tells Fainaru, "that privileged place where we can be finally at peace with ourselves and with the rest of the world",¹⁸ then the borders that separate us from home are explored in an increasingly ontological manner throughout this trilogy: "THE SUSPENDED STEP OF THE STORK deals with geographical borders separating

12 Angelopoulos 2001, 90.

13 Heidegger 1996, 121.

14 Angelopoulos 2001.

15 A framing unanimously accepted although variously evaluated by Angelopoulos scholars. See Jameson 1997; Bordwell 2005; Rushton 2015; and Karalis 2021. The reevaluation of the late Angelopoulos as the more aesthetically and philosophically robust corresponds with this order of scholarship.

16 Angelopoulos 2001, 77.

17 Karalis 2023.

18 Angelopoulos 2001, 100.

countries and people. ULYSSES' GAZE talks about the borders, or one could say the limits, of human vision. ETERNITY AND A DAY discusses the borders between life and death."¹⁹ That which lies between life and death is time.

ETERNITY AND A DAY can be viewed as a phenomenology of time, namely, a study of the experiences of time, of how we live with and within it. The film explores homelessness and homecoming as different takes on time. Time is an essential issue in phenomenology and existential philosophy. As Heidegger argues, "the meaning of Being is Time"²⁰ and *Dasein* (human existence) is always being-in-time.²¹ In Merleau-Ponty's words, "We must understand time as the subject and the subject as time."²² The film contributes to this exploration of existential temporality by showing us two modes of being-in-time, depressive time and narrative time, what they mean and what kinds of subjectivity they generate.

With "depressive time", I draw attention to the similarity between one mode of time in this film and the temporal experience of depression. My aim is neither to reduce the film to the symptomology of a mental illness nor to suggest that the director or the protagonist are depression patients. Rather, it is to use the phenomenology of depression to characterise the temporal experience of homelessness that the film articulates. Characteristic of depressive time is the experience of time as decay and dying. It is "the feeling that it is running out, that death is approaching at high speed", as Matthew Ratcliffe writes in *Experiences of Depression*.²³ This experience permeates the film as its overall temporal milieu. It incarnates in Alexandros's cancerous body. As we follow him on his last sojourn before hopeless hospitalisation, we also experience the passage of time as an irreversible devolution. His life is terminating as the day draws on to its end. As in almost all films of Angelopoulos, ETERNITY AND A DAY embeds itself in a wintry and barren landscape, immersing in rain and mist against an overcast sky. Asbjørn Grønstad calls this Angelopoulos's "meteorological aesthetics" and remarks, "After all, this is a filmmaker who was known to cease shooting if the weather got too nice."²⁴ Thus, the temporal flow of the day is bereft of the de-light of the

19 Angelopoulos 2001, 117.

20 Safranski 1998, 153.

21 Heidegger 2001.

22 Merleau-Ponty 2005, 490.

23 Ratcliffe 2015, 176.

24 Grønstad 2015, 273.



Fig. 1: The dying poet and his stray dog. Film still, ETERNITY AND A DAY (Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), 00:29:30.

sun's rise but solely coloured by the gradual fall of the night. Unusual sunshine does occur in the film's time-travel sequences, which escape from and redeem this depressive time, a topic I will explore in the next section.

The depressive time announces itself early in the film. After Alexandros leaves his apartment and tries to find someone to adopt his dog, we follow him in a long shot and long take as he walks on a seashore in a dark, heavy coat (fig. 1). This image of a dying, old, and lonely man contradicts the playful boy invoked in the myth at the film's beginning as the personification of time. There, time is young, vital, and innocent. Here, time is experienced as disease and enfeeblement. The mournful music composed by Eleni Karaindrou, which repeats throughout the film, amplifies the melancholy of the scene. With Bergson's philosophy, a melody has become a primary example of time, especially time as *durée*, duration and flow. As Bergson says, "*Real duration is what we have always called time, but time perceived as indivisible [...] When we listen to a melody we have the purest impression of succession we could possibly have [...] it is the very continuity of the melody and the impossibility of breaking it up which make that impression upon us.*"²⁵ In this scene, time manifests as a duration of sorrow to be endured as an irrevocable disintegration.

25 Bergson 1946, 176, emphasis in original.



Fig. 2: Before infinitude. Caspar David Friedrich, *The Monk by the Sea*, oil on canvas, 110 × 171.5 cm, Sammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie / Photo: Andres Kilger, Public Domain Mark 1.0.

The visuality of the scene mirrors this durational aspect of time. It lasts for almost two minutes and consists solely of a long take, a trademark of Angelopoulos. “The long shots, sequence shots, slow pans and long takes”, remarks Wolfram Schutte, “are scenes from a voyage through the world. Their complex structure sends the viewer on his own inner journey” and shows that “his poetic medium is time”.²⁶ Here, the long take effects “an increase in the perceived duration of events”, as Ratcliffe writes about “time consciousness in depression”.²⁷ Its integrity keeps the duration of melancholy intact without breaking it apart or diluting it with any cuts. In terms of its formal composition, the scene looks like Caspar David Friedrichs’ *The Monk by the Sea* (fig. 2) set in motion. Heinrich von Kleist describes his feelings before this painting as an “infinite solitude by the sea, under a sullen sky, to gaze off into a boundless watery waste. But this has to do with having travelled there, having to return, yearning to cross over, finding one cannot.”²⁸ The film explores Kleist’s hesitant crossover with its moving images.

26 Schutte 1991, cited by Horton 1997, 8.

27 Ratcliffe 2015, 175.

28 Kleist 1810, cited by Miller 1974, 208.



Fig. 3: Family disintegration as intersubjective desynchronisation. Film still, *ETERNITY AND A DAY* (Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), 00:24:04.

As Alexandros journeys on, the time as decay ripples from the personal and reverberates on an intersubjective level. When he goes to his daughter's place and tries to entrust the dog to her, we see that he does not tell even her about his terminal illness and that he is leaving for the hospital tomorrow. The daughter (Iris Chatziantoniou) tells him that her husband, Nikos, does not like animals. The man (Vassilis Seimenis) is also in the apartment. Appearing in a bathrobe, he looks at Alexandros disagreeably. He informs Alexandros that they have sold his seashore house, the yellowish mansion appearing as the film's opening shot. Nikos's nonchalant gestures and distance show his disrespect and disdain for the old man (fig. 3). Here we witness a disintegration of personal connections between the father and the daughter, mediated by the unwanted dog, and a decomposition of family traditions and ethics, symbolised by the sold house. "Tomorrow morning, I'll give them the keys, and the bulldozer will start working", the son-in-law tells the father-in-law.

Thus, this scene presents two parallel temporal schemes: Alexandros retreating from the world and approaching death, and his daughter moving towards a new life and away from the old family. Thomas Fuchs' term "intersubjective desynchronisation" helps illuminate this aspect of depressive time in the film.²⁹

29 Fuchs 2013.



Fig. 4: Reading a letter, recollecting a past, recomposing a time. Film still, ETERNITY AND A DAY (Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), 00:16:37.

It indicates a sense of temporal alienation, a loss of contemporality with one's fellow human beings, which is a common symptom in depression and other mental illnesses. Although Fuchs' usage of the term is specifically clinical, I believe it can have a wider application, and the film presents this intersubjective desynchronisation not as a psychopathological but as a cultural and social symptom of the generational gap, the passage of time. Tellingly, the *mise-en-scène* foregrounds the motif of time by putting a clock in the background, a backdrop to Alexandros and his daughter's conversation (fig. 4).

These two aspects of depressive time, time of decay and intersubjective desynchronisation, are most poignantly summarised by an intensely poetic moment in the film. It comes from a little boy (Achilleas Skevis), an Albanian refugee and orphan whom Alexandros saves first from some policemen and second from a gang that kidnaps and sells children to well-to-do families. As Alexandros looks for the little boy who has been scared away by two policemen, he hears the boy singing a ballad, punctuated by the chimes of a clock from afar:

If I send you an apple, it'll rot.
If I send you a quince, it'll dry.
A bunch of white grapes will lose its beads along the way



Fig. 5: "I'll send you a tear in a...". Film still, ETERNITY AND A DAY (Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), 00:44:40.

The ballad ends with an unfinished line – “I’ll send you a tear in a...” – as if nothing sustainable and reliable can be found to contain this tear, this genuine expression of sorrow. The poetic imageries of rotting apple, drying quince, and shrinking grapes evoke the experience of time as decay. At the same time, the consequent impossibility of gifting mourns the loss of intersubjectivity and synchronicity. It laments the no-longer-possible interactions because of desynchronisation, as if the giver is in fast motion whereas the recipient is in slow motion. Crystallised here, depressive time unfurls throughout the film as the old man and the young boy journey together. Their helplessness, precarities, and vulnerabilities mirror and amplify each other. With one’s youth and the other’s age, they present time at its beginning and end as equally hopeless and aimless journeys in different ways, though both lead to decay and homelessness. Visually, this sense of destitution is conveyed by the desolate urban landscape where the above scene takes place and the melting snow on the street (fig. 5). Overall, *Xenitis* is this resonance between the homeless individuals and the unhomely world; both are in a time of disintegration.

This phenomenology of the depressive time enriches Lukács’ conception of “transcendental homelessness”, an existential feeling of estrangement that plagues modern humanity.³⁰ According to Lukács, the time as decay

30 Lukács 2006.

underlines this *Grundstimmung* of modernity. In his words, “The most profound and most humiliating impotence of subjectivity consists [...] in the fact that it cannot resist the sluggish, yet constant progress of time [...] that time – that ungraspable, invisibly moving substance – gradually robs subjectivity of all its possessions and imperceptibly forces alien contents into it.”³¹ Not only does the film show this time of decay characteristic of transcendental homelessness, but it also re-cognises this temporal experience in a larger *Gestalt* of depressive time and explores its intersubjective dimension, which Lukács neglects.

Korfulamu: Transcendence of Homecoming through Narrative Time

The achievement of the film goes even further. While Lukács’s *The Theory of the Novel* points out some redemptive aspects of novels in passing moments,³² his main argument is about diagnosis, not therapy. Namely, he considers novels as symptomatic or diagnostic of transcendental homelessness but not as substantial solutions to it. By contrast, I believe in the redemptive and therapeutic function of art, a belief that goes back to Aristotle’s theory of tragedy and is rehabilitated by phenomenology and hermeneutics.³³ I argue that *ETERNITY AND A DAY* brings about such a therapy: it not only addresses but also redresses the temporality of transcendental homelessness. This argument resonates with what Karalis calls “the most pertinent question of Angelopoulos’s ontological thinking: *what kind of redemption can we find in a historical reality without transcendental horizons?*”³⁴ The answer can be found in the time travels that break from depressive time and move towards narrative time.

By narrative time, I mean the experience of time as a configuration and reconfiguration of individual, heterogeneous, and fragmentary events in life into a meaningful, holistic, and dynamic *Gestalt*. Holistic in that the individual elements are coordinated and reconciled with each other and become a whole. Dynamic in that such a whole is not a fixed totality but a perpetual transformation process. Moreover, a narrative is intrinsically intersubjec-

31 Lukács 2006, 120–21.

32 Those moments include his analysis of Flaubert, Goethe, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

33 Gadamer 1986.

34 Karalis 2023, 20, emphasis in original.

tive, for a story necessarily entails at least a narrator and a listener. Hence, narrative time is intersubjectively synchronising; it brings us back in sync with other people. I derive this concept of narrative time chiefly from Paul Ricœur's research into the correlation between time and narrative. In his words, "*Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.*"³⁵ In essence, narrative time redeems the depressive time of transcendental homelessness by providing such a humanistic and meaningful experience.

Fuchs' and Ratcliffe's studies on depression confirm this redemptive aspect of the narrative. Both scholars notice that depressive patients suffer from a lack of self-narrative that constitutes the "*personal-historical or biographical time*" to make sense of their lives.³⁶ In Fuchs' words, the depressive time needs a "synthesis [...] which is performed through *the active personal fulfilment of time*, namely through the ever renewed integration of a projected future and an appropriated past".³⁷ However, they do not tell us how to create such redemptive narratives. This is where, I argue, psychopathology ends and artwork begins. An examination of time travels in *ETERNITY AND A DAY* in the light of Ricœur can fill in the gap.

There are two types of time travel in the film: a personal one and a historical one. Personally, Alexandros travels back to an early day in his life, a day celebrated as one month after his daughter's birth. Historically, Alexandros and the little boy travel back to 19th century Greece, where Solomos is active, whose unfinished poem *Free Besieged Alexandros* seeks to complete. Both time travels manifest the structure of narrative time I aim to describe. Here, I will focus on analysing the personal one while pointing out the parallelism in the historical one. The pragmatic reason for this choice is the limited space of the article. More substantially, the historical time travel engages more with political and social issues, a dimension of the film already well explored.³⁸ Conversely, the personal-existential side of the story is less told, although, as Angelopoulos says to Bachmann, "I no longer deal with politics, with generalisations. I have stopped understanding them."³⁹

35 Ricœur 1984, 52, emphasis in original.

36 Fuchs 2013, 80 emphasis in original; Ratcliffe 2015, 146.

37 Fuchs 2013, 101 emphasis in original.

38 See Thomassen 2005; Celik Rappas/Phillis 2020.

39 Angelopoulos 2001, 111; for a critique of the overemphasis on political commentaries at the expense of philosophical reflections in Angelopoulos scholarship, see Karalis 2023.

The personal journey embarks from the apartment of Alexandros's daughter when Alexandros invites her to read a letter written by her mother, Anna, on the date of that full-month-after-birth celebration. This letter, recording and recalling the events of that day, brings Alexandros back to the seaside house where the party took place. Here, we experience time according to Ricœur's first order *Mimesis* or *Mimesis 1*.⁴⁰ According to a simplified version of Plato, *Mimesis* is usually translated as "imitation" and reductively understood as reproduction or photo-copying of reality. Ricœur returns to Aristotle and discovers a much richer connotation of *Mimesis*. He argues that the reductive understanding of *Mimesis* is only its first and most shallow dimension, a dimension that nonetheless has value. The first step of creating a narrative, according to Ricœur, is *Mimesis 1*, that is, episodic recording of events, which brings forth a chronology. It is time and narrative in their rudimentary stage, as prefigured time comprising pre-narrative events. This proto-narrative-time already moves away from depressive time as a time of decomposition and gestures towards a time ready for composition.

Moreover, objectivity plays a key role in *Mimesis 1*, as Anna's letter is objectively there, passed between Alexandros and his daughter. Ricœur's understanding of objectivity is not bogged down by a post-Cartesian subject-object divide as something anti-subjective. Instead, it is informed by the tradition of phenomenology as an outcome of intersubjective interactions. As Ricœur puts it, "to act is always to act 'with' others", and "in this sense, all the members of the set are in a relation of intersignification".⁴¹ Thus, *Mimesis 1*, inaugurating an *ensemble* of events and their intersignification, lays the foundation of narrative time.

This first episode of time travel initiates the *Mimesis 1* of narrative time in ETERNITY AND A DAY. At least three perspectives inform the journey: Anna's letter and her continuous voice-over, Alexandros's recollection of the event, and their daughter's simultaneous reading of the letter. The film's audio-visual images, which bring us back to the time-space of the seaside house, synthesise all these perspectives. Similarly, the historical time travel starts with Alexandros telling the story of Solomos to the little boy, hence implicating two perspectives. As Anna's voice narrates the past, the camera gradually bypasses the daughter reading the letter and focuses on Alexandros's meditative posture and introspective gaze, foretelling that the coming vision is

40 For the discussion of Ricœur on *Mimesis* that follows here, see Ricœur 1984, 52–87.

41 Ricœur 1984, 55.



Fig. 6: Yesterday once more. Film still, ETERNITY AND A DAY (Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), 00:17:42.

a collective recollection. With Anna's gentle voice saying, "I went to the veranda", Alexandros also moves towards the curtains. In the next scene, he comes through the curtain and back to the balcony of his old seaside house and encounters the Anna of the past. A conversation ensues between them. However, Alexandros does not speak with any hindsight. Rather, he seems to play-act his younger self (fig. 6). This juxtaposition of the present man and the past identity is a key aspect of the time travels in ETERNITY AND A DAY. It highlights, in Ricœur's words, "pastness as such, what we call in ordinary language the reality of the past, or better yet, the real in the past, the *having been*".⁴² What is thus re-presented and respected is the objectivity of the past and its discordance with the present, crucial to *Mimesis 1*.

In ETERNITY AND A DAY, this objective and discordant dimension of time, co-confirmed and co-constituted by multiple perspectives, plays a significant role in Alexandros's confrontation with his past guilt. He was too engrossed in his writings to be properly available to his family. In Anna's words, "I am trying to kidnap you between two books. You live your life close to us, your daughter and me, but not with us." That is why he finds Anna has been crying before he joins her on the balcony. He forgets that the

42 Ricœur 1991a, 349.

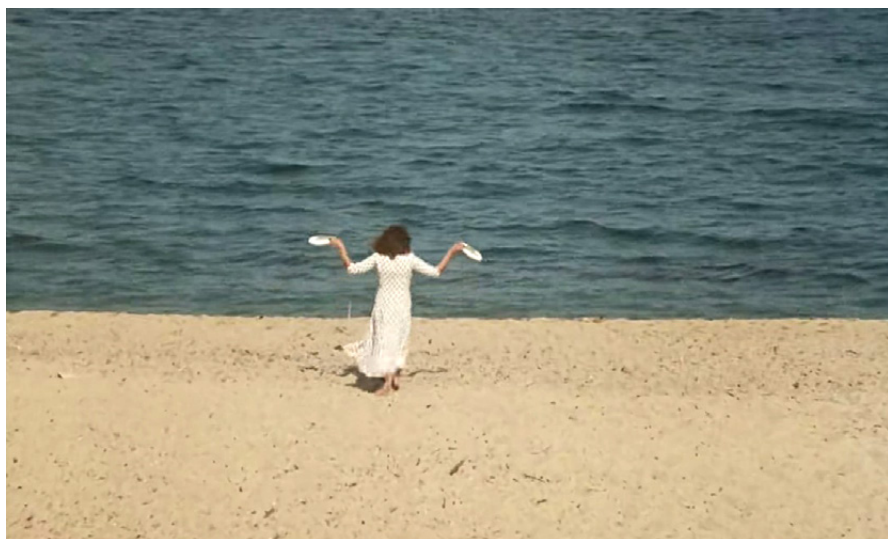


Fig. 7: Like a white bird flying away. Film still, ETERNITY AND A DAY (Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), 01:17:20.

dress she put on is a gift from him. When he comes to apologise and console the disappointed Anna, we hear her voice-over saying, “If only I could keep that moment, pin it up like a butterfly to prevent it from flying away.”

Intriguingly, this figure of flying-away is pinned down as the cover of the film’s DVD version, depicting another moment when Alexandros’s guilt of unavailability is re-experienced. The celebration party is journeying to a nearby island, the same island that young Alexandros and his friends visited to seek the sunken city, as indicated at the film’s beginning. Alexandros has promised Anna to spend the day with her. Yet, instead of swimming together, he decides to climb a cliff to revisit the names he and his friends left on a rock there and re-instantiate the ritual of waving to ships passing by. Despite her protests and obvious anger, he betrays her again. Calling him “traitor” with chagrin, she turns to the beach and removes her shoes. In a transitory moment, her spreading arms and the shoes in her hands evoke the figure of a seagull flying away (fig. 7). So beautiful is this composition that we are compelled to rewatch this scene or screenshot it and pin it up like a butterfly. But its beauty is intermingled and intensified with pathos: rage and disappointment from Anna and regret and guilt from Alexandros.

Alexandros’s imagination has left an indelible mark on this composition because Anna’s figure echoes back to the film’s beginning, where the



Fig. 8: Time as a child playing on the beach. Film still, ETERNITY AND A DAY (Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), 00:04:28.

young Alexandros runs to the sea to meet his friends for their adventure (fig. 8). This visual alignment of past events and the thematisation of the past guilt elevate us to the second level of narrative time. It is of *Mimesis 2*, the emplotment of discordant events in *Mimesis 1*, to endow them with a coherent narrative and a definite theme. As Ricœur puts it, “A story, too, must be more than just an enumeration of events in serial order; it must organize them into an intelligible whole, of a sort such that we can always ask what is the ‘thought’ of this story. In short, emplotment is the operation that draws a configuration out of a simple succession.”⁴³ Thus, the narrative time of *Mimesis 2* is a “concordant discordance”, “a synthesis of the heterogeneous”.⁴⁴ With this emplotment, Alexandros’s regret is articulated and put into perspective. Comparing and connecting Anna’s disappointed figure with Alexandros’s childhood memory of adventure, the film puts forward a narrative that makes sense of Alexandros’s guilt of unavailability in terms of the ambivalent figure of a child. On the one hand, a child is “child-ish”, emotionally immature and reckless, yet to learn to care for others. It is the child as “‘His Majesty the Baby’, as we once fancied ourselves”, as Freud

43 Ricœur 1984, 65.

44 Ricœur 1984, 66.

puts it.⁴⁵ This interpretation is facilitated by Alexandros's uncontrollable desire to ascend the cliff and his mother's remark when he comes back: "You'll never grow up."

On the other hand, childhood can also be interpreted according to what Hannah Arendt calls "Natality", the childlike capacity to redeem the past and begin something new.⁴⁶ This alternative interpretation motivates a redemptive narrative and resonates with the glorious and extra-ordinary sunshine engulfing Anna's body. It also brings us to the final aspect of Ricœur's *Mimesis*, or *Mimesis 3*. *Mimesis 3* opens time and narrative, configured in *Mimesis 2*, to reconfiguration. Regarding narrative, this comes with readers' unpredictable receptions and interpretations, which Ricœur, following Gadamer, regards as the open-ended completion of a narrative.⁴⁷ This open-endedness resonates well with Angelopoulos' filmmaking. As he says, "You will have noticed, if you look carefully, that my films never really end. To me they are all 'works in progress.'"⁴⁸ So is time, which can always be redirected by newcomers. In Arendt's terms, it concerns the natality of humanity, namely, humans are always already bringing new ideas and actions into history, which is thus never determined or predictable.⁴⁹ This unpredictability and changeability of the future also make the past malleable. This is not to say we can fabricate and manipulate past events as we wish, which would violate *Mimesis 1*, but to recognise that those past events can take on different meanings by constantly reconfiguring into new narratives.

In this way, the past can always speak to the present differently. Merleau-Ponty expresses a similar point when he says, "time, in short, needs a synthesis. But it is equally true that this synthesis must always be undertaken afresh, and that any supposition that it can be anywhere brought to completion involves the negation of time."⁵⁰ For Ricœur, this ever-renewed synthesis of time depends on the paradoxical co-existence of concordance and discordance essential to time and narrative, a paradox that keeps them *alive*.⁵¹ In *ETERNITY AND A DAY*, this concordant discordance incarnates in the child, juxtaposing childish immaturity and childlike natality.

45 Freud 2018, 91.

46 Arendt 1998.

47 Ricœur 1984, 70.

48 Angelopoulos 2001, 102.

49 Arendt 1998.

50 Merleau-Ponty 2005, 482.

51 Ricœur 1984.



Fig. 9: Seaside house revisited. Film still, ETERNITY AND A DAY (Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), 02:01:40.

The transformative revival of the past comes at the film's end. The next morning, Alexandros revisits his seaside house before its demolition. As he makes his way across the empty rooms, his dark overcoat mirrors the surrounding door frames, while the desolation of the place echoes his inner despair (fig. 9). Both the house and the man will be gone soon. However, with a melody entering the scene, he travels back to that celebration day for the last time. But this time, it is the past that travels back to Alexandros's present. As Anna's voice-over pleads, "Share this day with me", Alexandros turns to the balcony. We, thanks to the point-of-view shot, see with his eyes across his mother caring for the baby on the balcony, across the unglazed palisade and the deteriorated veranda, and find the entire party congregating on the beach and singing (fig. 10). Alexandros goes down to the beach, and Anna comes to greet him, her youthful figure defying the dilapidated veranda, the debris of time around the place (fig. 11). They start dancing with the whole party. As the camera closes on them in each other's arms – *Korfulamu* – he tells Anna, "I won't go to the hospital... I'd like to make plans for tomorrow." Unlike the previous time travels in which Alexandros repeats his old self, this time, the past Anna responds to his present question: "How long will tomorrow last?" Anna says, "Eternity and a day." This past-coming-to-life motif also takes place in the historical time travel with



Fig. 10: Anytime Door. Film still, ETERNITY AND A DAY (Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), 02:03:58.



Fig. 11: Tomorrow once more. Film still, ETERNITY AND A DAY (Theo Angelopoulos, GR 1998), 02:05:19.

the 19th-century poet Solomos stepping onto the bus where Alexandros and the little boy spend their last time together. Alexandros asks the poet the same question and gets the same answer.

***Argathini*: A Day More than Eternity**

Thus, we are brought to the enigmatic title of the film. To conclude this article, I will interpret this enigma in terms of *Argathini*. The words “very late at night” evoke Hegel’s owl of Minerva, which “begins its flight only with the onset of dusk”.⁵² It is a metaphor for his preceding sentence: “When philosophy paints its grey in grey, a shape of life has grown old, and it cannot be rejuvenated, but only recognized, by the grey in grey of philosophy.”⁵³ Allen Wood, the editor of the Cambridge edition of Hegel, interprets this metaphor negatively, as the unavoidable belatedness of philosophy: “A culture’s philosophical understanding reaches its peak only when the culture enters its decline.”⁵⁴ Conversely, the popular and positivistic reading of Hegel would take this owl of Minerva as the metaphor for the grand philosophical synthesis at the end of history, culminating in “absolute knowledge”.⁵⁵ The philosophy of time in *ETERNITY AND A DAY* is neither of them. Its phenomenology presents time as neither too late to be redeemed nor so comprehensive as to be finished. Instead, the film points towards a tomorrow, a discordant concordance of eternity and a day.

“Eternity” stands for the eternal resurrection of the past, for the repetition of yesterdays which confront us and force us to recognise them in their undeniability, heterogeneity, and incommensurability, a past that is falling apart. Wallowing in such an eternal past, of time as eternal passing, is the time experience of *Xenitis*, of transcendental homelessness as depressive time. However, the past does not come back unchanged. Each time, it is configured and reconfigured into a different narrative. Because of this narrative openness, time is teleological without a definite telos. It points to an undefined tomorrow that is one day more than eternity, a journey of homecoming that navigates through depressive time and narrates time, a journey for eternity and a day.

52 Hegel 1991, 23.

53 Hegel 1991, 23.

54 Wood 1991, 392.

55 Ricœur 1991b, 98.

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