

*2008 Stavros S. Niarchos Research Fellowship Report*  
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In June 2008, the second set of screenings related to Gregory Markopoulos' *Eniaios* project were held in Greece. Conceivably the most demanding and intransigent of all twentieth-century avant-garde film projects, *Eniaios* was a monumental re-editing of the nearly 100 films that Markopoulos had made over the course of his five-decade career. Completed but not printed just before Markopoulos' death in 1992, the film was divided into twenty-two cycles running for three to five hours each, with a total estimated projection time of nearly 80 hours. Even more remarkable than its length was its dependence on the particular characteristics of its screening environment, the "Temenos." Markopoulos' Temenos was located in Lyssaria, a small hilly area located approximately 3000 feet above sea level on the western side of the Peloponnese. By choosing the mythic birthplace of lyric poetry and the home to hundreds of ancient houses of healing as the site for his Temenos, Markopoulos acknowledged that one of its functions was to isolate the viewer from the vagaries of ordinary time, purging him of media pollution and allowing him to reconnect with the rhythms of the natural world. The scale, ambition, and form of the Temenos project are without cinematic precedent. Yet in its harmonization of viewing space and image and its emphasis on the mythic resonance of particular locations, it also constitutes a radical reformulation of the issues that preoccupied Markopoulos throughout his career, one that gives new meaning to the landscape concerns that have periodically informed avant-garde filmmaking.

I was fortunate enough to attend the first set of screenings when I was an undergraduate student at Princeton University, thanks to a Stanley J. Seeger fellowship that I received from the Hellenic Studies Program during my junior year. Thanks to the generous support of the Stavros S. Niarchos Research Fellowship, it was also possible for me to attend the second set of screenings this past summer. The second set of screenings, along with the related archival research it was possible for me to undertake while I was in Europe, have made both the stakes and the nature of Markopoulos' project much clearer. Markopoulos' great achievement in the works he made from the 1940s through the 1960s (prints of which are available for research viewing at the Vienna Film Museum) was to develop montage clusters in which a dense network of associations are compressed. Since the images in these clusters are often scrambled out of sequence, they suggest the inter-related simultaneity of spatio-temporal events within the films and create an intensified viewing experience by encouraging the spectator to actively participate in the (re)construction of the narrative. The form of *Eniaios* takes this much further. In place of sustained shots, there are brief flashes of imagery, often single-frames, taken from either earlier Markopoulos films or one of the 60 works he made specifically for presentation in *Eniaios*. These images are separated by long sections of black leader which transforms these images so thoroughly that even when still images from the same film appear sequentially, they touch, but do not cross over, the threshold of narrative development. Markopoulos believed that the "basic clue of Revelation in film" was the space between frames and had emphasized marked separations between images as early as *Swain* (1950). In *Eniaios*, he takes his modernist reduction of cinema into its most fundamental elements to a limit point of stark simplicity in which the earlier relationship

is inverted. Tantalizing glimpses of imagery seem to flash weightlessly out of an enveloping field of darkness, invested with the hieratic power of hieroglyphs.

The conscious model for the Temenos was the special performance house that Wagner constructed in Bayreuth, and the second set of screenings made clear just how fundamentally musical the form of *Eniaios* is. The gradual form of imagistic development employed in *Eniaios* generates its own form of intensity, encouraging a diffuse attentiveness that makes it possible to take notice of otherwise-elusive structural elements. Once I became acclimated to the form and pace of *Eniaios*, for example, I began to notice the remarkable consistency of the gaps between images. By my count, they were often in 5, 8, 11, or 15-second increments, and the images themselves were further subdivided into groups of 3, 4, or 5 similar images with each cluster using a gap length that was consistent with the relative proximity of both the characters to each other and the camera to the characters and spaces on screen. Like more architectonic versions of the coded frame measures used in Markopoulos' earlier *Twice a Man* (1964), these are the temporal equivalent of Wagnerian leitmotifs, and they create a heightened awareness of the complex relationships developed in *Eniaios* between characters and landscapes.

The second set of screenings was also very helpful in clarifying the relationship of the work to its mythic sources and to the environment in which it was presented. Markopoulos' conception of the Temenos as a space outside of history with the power to smooth over the fissures of modernity is, of course, profoundly Romantic. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the central myth of *Eniaios* is that of Prometheus, with twenty-seven reels of imagery from *The Iliac Passion* interwoven throughout the twenty-two cycles at points of maximal intensity. At the same time, the sacred spaces depicted onscreen in many of the films Markopoulos shot specifically for *Eniaios* (of sites such as Delphi or the Asclepieion at Kos) are also linked to the journey required to see them, the functional equivalents of the Asclepian pilgrimages of ancient Greece in which patients traveled to therapeutic sites in remote locations to undergo sleep healing. In similar fashion, Markopoulos wanted to use the extended measures between the images projected at the Temenos to create an "intuition space" in the midst of the still-unsullied natural beauty of Arcadia that would unite "film as film" to the mythic landscapes of the ancient world and allow for spiritual renewal. What the second set of screenings, and in particular the 4<sup>th</sup> cycle entitled "Nefeli Photos," revealed, however, was the extent to which the entire work is invested in the communal nature of art making, an idea that includes not only the many people shown restoring the Florentine paintings depicted in *Cimabue! Cimabue!* or presenting their works in a series of portraits, but also the audience of international spectators who gathered to watch as the cycles of *Eniaios* were projected for the first time.

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