

# THE EUROPEAN CAVE

## Jan Patočka and Cinema in Theo Angelopoulos's Film *Ulysses' Gaze*

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*Abstract: The image of a dismantled statue of Lenin from Ukraine being transported up the Danube in Theo Angelopoulos's 1995 film Ulysses' Gaze is the starting point for a discussion of the film's urgent resonance with the questioning of "Europe" in the present day. This image foreshadows the destruction of Lenin statues in Ukraine during the ongoing civil war and is more than a fortuitous indicator of the historical context of the present Ukrainian crisis in the aftermath of the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. Exploring the territory of seven post-Cold War Eastern European states and ending amid the rubble and destruction of the besieged city of Sarajevo, Ulysses' Gaze offers a panoramic, yet highly subjective, depiction of a Europe undergoing a painful and as-yet-undecided transition. This article will show the strong connections between the understanding of Europe that emerges from the film and that elucidated in the work of the Czech philosopher Jan Patočka. Both the film and Patočka's thought seek the European on a utopian level that transcends particular temporal and territorial borders, recalls Classical polity and philosophy, and consists primarily in introspective thinking. The recurrence, in today's Europe, of questions from the immediate post-Cold War era indicates that the work of definition undertaken after 1989 is not yet completed and suggests that films from that period may contain images that have the capacity to guide the process of understanding Europe in the present day.*

*Keywords: Patočka, Angelopoulos, Plato, Žižek, Iordanova, Ulysses' Gaze, Balkans, European, Cinema, Lenin, Ukraine, post-Cold War*

This article explores the highly subjective presentation of twentieth-century Balkan history in Theodoros Angelopoulos's *Ulysses' Gaze* (1995). In doing so, it calls upon the work of Jan Patočka and demonstrates the potential contribution of the Czech philosopher's interlinked thought on the subjects of "technical civilisation" and, especially, "Europe" to Anglophone film studies. Associating a post-1989 film with a philosopher who worked under, and frequently in conflict with, a Soviet-type socialist regime foregrounds the significant recollection that so-called "dissidence" in the Soviet sphere of influence was not restricted to resistance against "real existing" socialism but had the capacity to articulate a positive project for social reform whose universal aspirations underlie what, in the present, the critic Boris Groys terms "postdissident art." Groys sees in such work the legacy of "the independent, unofficial art of late socialism"<sup>1</sup> after the end of the socialist regimes themselves.

Dissident art, produced and distributed in conditions of the struggle not only for artistic but for actual survival, is seen as the initiator of the postdissident form which, rather than direct confrontation with existing regimes of sense and of political control, instead extraordinarily "clings to peaceful universalism as an idyllic utopia beyond any struggle."<sup>2</sup> Groys's examples include the Slovenian art group IRWIN, whose actions include the ongoing issuing of false "passports" for a non-existent state.<sup>3</sup> Such an action accords with Groys's interpretation of an art form dedicated "to expand the utopia of the peaceful coexistence of all nations, cultures, and ideologies both to the capitalist West and the pre-Communist history of the past."<sup>4</sup> The statement describes equally well the temporal and geographical scope of *Ulysses' Gaze*. Further, the same claim holds for Patočka's view of Europe, articulated in "dissidence" in private seminars and destined only for illicit transcription and publication, and for Angelopoulos's film, which ends by representing the desperate struggle for survival of the besieged city of Sarajevo.

This article, furthermore, takes the opportunity to link Cold War-era Czech philosophy with a film by a Greek filmmaker featuring American and Romanian leading actors and dealing with the aftermath of superpower conflict. Linking these works on conceptual ground is a means of showing that appreciation of the "postcommunist condition" or of "postcommunist film"<sup>5</sup> must encapsulate an appreciation of the transnational post-

<sup>1</sup> Boris Groys, "Privatizations, or Artificial Paradises of Post-Communism," in Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2013), pp. 165–173, here 170.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>3</sup> See IRWIN, *State in Time?: Minor Compositions* (online at [www.minorcompositions.info](http://www.minorcompositions.info) [accessed Oct. 25, 2018]).

<sup>4</sup> Groys, "Privatizations," p. 170.

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Aleksandra Galasinska and Dariusz Galasinski (eds.), *The Post-Communist Condition: Public and Private Discourses of Transformation* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2010) and Lars Kristensen (ed.), *Postcommunist Film: Russia, Eastern Europe and World Culture* (London: Routledge, 2012).

1989 world that bridges the former East and West. Such an appreciation understands that on both sides of the division, the longstanding traces of forty-five years of nuclear standoff remain present. This thought underlies, for instance, the stated intentions of the research project “Former West,” which ran from 2008-16. In a text published to accompany a conference at the *Haus der Kulturen der Welt* in Berlin and titled “Dissident Knowledges,” the curator Maria Hlavajova begins by insisting on a return to the past in order to understand the present, insisting upon a connection between the present time and the pre-1989 East-West division:

The contemporary moment [...] unmasks modernity’s misunderstandings about the place of the so-called West in the post-1989 world. [...] One among the places we could consider as a starting point [...] may be located within the way of the world since 1989 as we tend to understand it. In its creases and folds [...] we can seek the knowledges, thoughts, and interpretations that have been arrested by the political, social, and aesthetic prejudice of the prevailing consensus. We may recover documents – not yet known, or known and misunderstood – that lay bare the faultlines of ‘formerness’ and carry seeds of reorientation for our understanding of the prospects ahead.<sup>6</sup>

*Ulysses’ Gaze* observes the “prevailing consensus” as it was installing itself around its production and the very environment on which it turns its camera. Its “political, social, and aesthetic” position, in what follows, will be associated with the category of “dissidence” and the possibility that the utopia it sought has survived after 1989, albeit in another sphere of intellectual activity. The “dissident” movements that were the precursors of the 1989 revolutions, Charta 77, Neues Forum, Solidarność, and so on, could not sustain the more utopian part of their aspirations in the context of economic “transition” and the necessity of political compromise, but that does not mean that such aspirations were universally forgotten.

*Ulysses’ Gaze* will be approached as a “document” of the type Hlavajova proposes, carrying “seeds of reorientation” towards thinking about what happened to the utopian in Europe after 1989 as well as “knowledges, thoughts, and interpretations” of the state of such aspirations in that time and in the present day. There are positive reasons for associating the medium of film with these categories and possibilities, including its privileged relationship to modernity and historicity, which I will have cause to discuss in terms of Patočka’s writing.

<sup>6</sup> Maria Hlavajova, “Dissident Knowledges,” Mar. 18, 2013 (online at <http://www.formerwest.org/DocumentsConstellationsProspects/Texts/DissidentKnowledges> [accessed Oct. 25, 2018]).

### *Ulysses' Gaze* through the Balkans to Europe

There are three reasons for introducing the Czech philosopher's elaboration on the notion of Europe in order to interpret *Ulysses' Gaze* specifically, and these reasons suggest the potential utility of Patočka's thinking to studies of European Cinema. First, Patočka's definition relates only indirectly to the idea that Europe would be the boundary of a particular territory. Instead, it situates the European within individuals themselves. This is helpful because in *Ulysses' Gaze* the protagonist's search leads, through a transnational space, to the inside of his own personality and the recognition that the object of his Balkan-wide search is to be found there.

Secondly, that realisation takes place in the besieged Sarajevo of the winter of 1994, which functions as a spatiotemporal pivot point. The relationship between geopolitical realities and proclaimed European ideals and values having to do with universal human rights was tested, strained, and broken in the atrocious inhumanity of the Yugoslavian War. The non-existence of a coherent European intervention to prevent those atrocities was an integral part of this inhumanity. In that context, it becomes helpful to refer to Patočka's understanding of Europe as a means of cleaving to universal values in the face of desperate present circumstances.

Thirdly, Patočka describes a transcendental version of the European drawing on classical Greek philosophy, a conscious reference point for *Ulysses' Gaze* through a Platonic epigraph and through a moment in which nostalgia for the classical past is expressed. Within the classical framework, the characteristic upon which Patočka focuses most closely is the idea that human life is given underlying purpose by what is known as "care of the soul": "*The soul forms the centre of philosophy. Philosophy is the care of the soul in its own essence and in its own element.*"<sup>7</sup>

Sense can be made of the link between *Ulysses' Gaze* and abstract conceptual investigation of the European through its epigraph, taken from Plato's *Alcibiades*: "if the soul is to know itself, it must look into the soul." The evocation of Plato, and of the soul, is powerfully significant in a film which extrapolates a universal and abstract conclusion from its peripatetic movement, one couched in the specific terms of a utopian, transnational Europe. The platonic gaze into the soul, however, is only part of the definition of the film's title. The title simultaneously refers to the gaze of the eponymous modern-day Ulysses, played by Harvey Keitel. The gaze, therefore, is also that of the film camera lens, and the history of the capture of the moving image becomes imbricated with the metaphysical vision of the philosopher.<sup>8</sup> This is because the film raises the same terms

<sup>7</sup> Jan Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, trans. Petr Lom (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), emphasis original.

<sup>8</sup> It is also the gaze of one who has witnessed tragedy. Angelopolous's contribution to the 1995 anthology film *Lumière & co.*, shot with an original cinematograph, depicts Ulysses crawling from the sea and staring, fixedly, into the far distance. This is supposedly the fragment of film that Keitel's character has been searching for, the "first gaze."

which are pre-eminent in the work of a philosopher for whom the Platonic soul and its introspective cultivation, together with a transcendental interpretation of the cultural heritage which passes under the name of “Europe,” were of pivotal importance.

Travelling through a considerable area of European territory, *Ulysses’ Gaze* explores and presents real physical spaces only as a means of evoking the layers of imaginary, utopian space which saturate the experience of travel. The selection of places, far from arbitrary, groups together Balkan nation-states and autonomous Republics which, during the inception and production of *Ulysses’ Gaze*, were experiencing the aftermath of Cold War political upheaval (Greece), Soviet-type “real existing” socialist dictatorship (Albania, Bulgaria, Romania), and the collapse of an independent socialist federal state, (Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia), all simultaneous with the uncertain coalescence of a new Europe. The stakes of being classified “within” or “outside” this emergent political entity were in common measure with the level of uncertainty as to where the taxonomical, geographical, and economic boundaries would eventually be placed. The film ends in the besieged city of Sarajevo, where the deleterious consequences of being overlooked by the newly-formed European Union were made starkly apparent.

The film’s pretext for the journey, however, invokes the spectral presence of an entirely unofficial transnational space that drew within itself, during the twentieth century, the Balkans together with Western Europe. The protagonist of *Ulysses’ Gaze*, an expatriate Greek-American filmmaker named “A” by the closing credits, is supposedly looking for the first reels of film ever shot in the Balkans. The reels would have been shot by the pioneering Balkan filmmakers, the Manakia brothers, and the film explores the territory in which they lived and worked, superimposing its map onto that of the collapsed socialist republics and creating a territory which is explored temporally as well as spatially. In the course of his journey, A relives two past incidents as if they were his own present experience. One is Iannakis Manakia’s arrest and last-minute pardon from a firing squad at the Macedonian-Bulgarian border, the other is the deportation of A’s family as part of the forced repatriation of the Greek community in Constanța, Romania.

Between Florina and Sarajevo, the film generates its own representation of Balkan space and of twentieth-century Balkan history, carried forward through the exploration of the territory in which the pioneering filmmakers, Iannakis and Miltos Manakia, lived and worked. These photographers introduced the film camera to the Balkans. They were made official photographers to the Romanian, Turkish, and Bulgarian Royal courts, but lived for a long period in Bitola in the present-day Republic of Macedonia; thus, according to Marian Țuțui, “the attempt to establish their affiliation to one or another national cinema is foredoomed to failure.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Marian Țuțui, “Manakia Brothers, pioneers of Balkan Cinema, claimed by six nations,” in *Orient Express: Balkan Cinema versus Cinema of the Balkan Nations* ([no location indicated] NOI Press; Albanian National Film Archive, 2011) (online at [http://aqshf.gov.al/uploads/2.\\_\\_\\_\\_Manakia\\_Bros\\_Pioneers\\_of\\_Balkan\\_Cinema\\_Claimed\\_by\\_Six\\_Nations.pdf](http://aqshf.gov.al/uploads/2.____Manakia_Bros_Pioneers_of_Balkan_Cinema_Claimed_by_Six_Nations.pdf) [accessed Oct. 25, 2018]).

On a train from Macedonia to Romania, two characters share a speech which evokes the brothers' activity and the possibility it is made to stand for. In their films, "for over sixty years they recorded faces, events, in the turmoil of the Balkans. They weren't concerned with politics, racial questions, friends or enemies. They were concerned with people. They were always on the move, [...] recording everything: landscapes, weddings, local customs, political changes, village fairs, revolutions, battles, official celebrations, sultans, kings, prime ministers, bishops, rebels." Moreover, the concept of nationality itself is of limited usefulness when discussing the Manakia brothers. As well as being born in territory disputed between Greece and Macedonia, they were of Aromanian ethnicity, a group having its own language and living in parts of Albania, Macedonia, and Bulgaria. Using the brothers to evoke the transnational, multi-ethnic, Balkan culture of the pre-second World War era, the film proceeds to represent its dismemberment in the wake of that conflict, and the creation of what the historian Tony Judt called "a Europe of nation-states more ethnically homogeneous than ever before."<sup>10</sup> In the midst of the turmoil of Southeastern Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Manakia brothers carved out for themselves a cosmopolitan space, however precarious its existence and however dangerous it was to inhabit. The preservation of its record is, nonetheless, the peg on which *Ulysses' Gaze* hangs its plot, and a quest capable of making its central character (and the director of its fictional representation) undertake a long, difficult, and eventually dangerous journey ending in the heart of a war zone.

The world in which the Manakia brothers lived and worked, however, is hardly seen as the subject for wistful nostalgia, as the film is equally invested in showing how that world was destroyed in the wake of the Second World War by deportations and the closing of borders. It is the vanished socialist utopia, furthermore, that gives the film one of its most startling images, a sequence of film which is both a timely representation of the dismantlement of eastern European socialism and an untimely indication of the continuing influence of that historical era on present-day events. A significant and widely-reported aspect of the beginnings, in 2013-14, of the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, was the destruction of statues of Lenin.<sup>11</sup> Sergey Loznitza's documentary *Maidan* (2014) records the speeches made in the square of that name in Kiev, and the copious reference to "Europe" made in those speeches. The desire expressed by these Ukrainian citizens to be a part of "Europe" has meaning beyond the argument over closer diplomatic ties to the European Union that resulted in the secession of a part of Ukraine to the Russian Federation after its military occupation. The appearance, in a film from almost twenty years earlier, of a dismantled statue of Lenin from Ukraine being transported up the River Danube is more than an indicator of the historical context of the present Ukrain-

<sup>10</sup> Tony Judt, *Postwar* (London: Vintage, 2010), p. 27.

<sup>11</sup> Channel 4 News, 2013; BBC News, 2014.

ian crisis in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The camera of *Ulysses' Gaze* circles the toppled icon being transported from the former Soviet Union, through the former Yugoslavia, and on to a destination in the former West Germany. The questions asked of Europe after the series of revolutionary changes to which this sequence alludes, regarding its future form and its utopian possibility, have yet to find definitive answers; a re-investigation of films from that time can therefore illuminate the ongoing interrogation of the sense and direction of Europe in the present day.

In this regard, the ending of *Ulysses' Gaze* in a conflict zone whose significance for Europe was – I will have cause to show – seen as definitive by contemporary observers takes on an extensive signifying potential. Dina Iordanova has examined the bitterness of these closing sequences, in which A finds the developed reels of films he has been searching for only after witnessing a massacre in which children and women, including his recently-discovered lover, are murdered and the corpses thrown into the river. Coming at the end of a journey of regional discovery that is also one of self-discovery, these sequences force the realisation that “the return to one’s roots can take place, but it makes no sense: by the time one arrives, everything that mattered in the past is over, and things will never be the same again. The nostalgia is meaningless, and all that remains is the longing for something that is impossible to attain.”<sup>12</sup> In this context, she argues, “Balkan troubles are seen as problems of the world”, and Angelopolous “is the only [filmmaker] daring enough to suggest that problems of universal identity lurk within the peculiar Balkan universe.”<sup>13</sup> Such an interaction of particular and universal, of investigation into the self combined with the investigation of the condition of Europe, in a film which investigates the specific circumstances of post-communism is the point at which we are brought into contact with the Patočkan linking between “Europe” and “care for the soul.”

### Patočka among Versions of the European

Rodolphe Gasché identifies that, in Patočka’s *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* and *Plato and Europe*, “a truly new, and original, conception of what is European emerges.”<sup>14</sup> Gasché’s “study of a philosophical concept” accords Patočka’s work great significance in taking forward the notion of the European in terms of its place in interpreting “the present situation of Europe, and the world” and of the “urgent practical necessity”<sup>15</sup> that drives this interpretation. Despite its recognised importance within Gasché’s field of enquiry, scholars have yet to make the attempt to encapsulate Patoč-

<sup>12</sup> Dina Iordanova, *Cinema of Flames: Balkan Film, Culture and the Media* (London: BFI Publishing, 2001), p. 106.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>14</sup> Rodolphe Gasché, *Europe, or The Infinite Task: A Study of a Philosophical Concept* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 213.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

ka's thinking for the purpose of making sense of the conceptual understanding of the European that emerges from films which make that understanding their subject matter. I will have cause to refer to responses to Patočka's philosophy from Anglophone scholars, and from philosophers in France, where his work has been available in translation since the early 1980s. These scholars provide important syntheses and interpretations of the political and historical context for Patočka's thought, but here too the relationship between Patočka, the visual, and especially the cinematic, has been under-emphasised. The connection will be made through the significant difference Patočka identifies between the technologically-structured world of the present day and the Classical world in which myth determined perception, not the other way around. This point is central in Patočka's own interpretation of the role of art within his philosophical framework, as described in the essay *L'Art et le Temps*, which has not appeared in English translation but was originally a public lecture delivered in French.<sup>16</sup>

Patočka's thought is the basis for a strongly positive, but conceptual, understanding of the European that has found at best a peripheral role in the numerous, varied, and lucid scholarly approaches to the question of "European cinema." Work in this field has attempted to encapsulate the scale and diversity of film production in Europe, including its popular cinema and the attempt of its industries to rival that of Hollywood.<sup>17</sup> Other scholars have traced the genealogy of a strand of "European art cinema" that, existing in parallel with popular filmmaking but rarely crossing over with its infrastructure or audience, develops its own set of aesthetic and political preoccupations.<sup>18</sup> More recently, Marc Betz has pointed out that international co-production within that "art cinema" has always had the capacity to extract such films from closed national categories and therefore evokes the possibility for such films to encounter and to disturb the definition of the "European."<sup>19</sup>

Numerous scholars have commented that, in the wake of the Cold War, the institutions of the European Union have invested in film production programmes reflecting an official version of the idea of a European cultural heritage.<sup>20</sup> The language of the

<sup>16</sup> See Erika Abrams's notes to her edited volume *L'Art et le Temps* (Paris: P.O.L, 1990), pp. 369–370.

<sup>17</sup> See Thomas Elsaesser, *European Cinema: Face to Face with Hollywood* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> See David Bordwell, "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice," *Film Criticism* 4, 1979, no. 1, pp. 56–64.

<sup>19</sup> See Mark Betz, "The Name above the (Sub)Title: Internationalism, Coproduction, and Polyglot European Art Cinema," *Camera Obscura* 16 (2001), no. 1 (46), pp. 1–45.

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, Philip Schlesinger, "From cultural defence to political culture: Media, politics and collective identity in the European Union," *Media, Culture, Society* 19 (1997), no. 3, pp. 369–391; Luisa Rivi, *European Cinema after 1989: Cultural Identity and Transnational Production* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997); Mike Wayne, *The Politics of Contemporary European Cinema: Histories, Borders, Diasporas* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2002); and Randall Halle, *The Europeanization of Cinema* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

founding documents of those programmes echoes that of European Union documents and treaties more generally. The 1992 “European Convention on Cinematic Co-Production,” for instance, states that “the aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve a greater unity between its members in order, in particular, to safeguard and promote the ideals and principles which form that common heritage.”<sup>21</sup>

It is significant that the Convention does not name those values, a tacit acknowledgement that their very definition and current status were a matter of intellectual controversy. Not the least significant reason for this was the developing conflict in the former Yugoslavia, and, in representing this combat zone, *Ulysses’ Gaze* can clearly be distanced from an official rhetoric of European “values.” Although “unified” with a particular conception of the European relating to a cultural heritage shared across national borders, the film challenges the capacity of institutions to uphold the form of universality that it seeks and therefore takes a strong critical position, in spite of its having benefited materially from the existence of those institutions for its production.

Following Patočka, this article is focused on the European as a prefix that, in a select, self-reflexive narrative film, evokes a paradoxical intersection of the material-historical and the utopian-transcendental, the formless particular, and the hopeful universal. In the Patočkian conception of Europe, it is precisely by giving central, definitive status to that which appears as abject that a hopeful, utopian possibility for Europe can be articulated. This kind of Europe is a conceptual one whose definition can never be applied to a fixed territory in which nation-states do not form units that can be included and excluded but which, and this is most notable in its Patočkian version, resides in risk, contingency, adversity, and moral courage.

Where A’s journey concludes with a painful acknowledgement that his search for self-knowledge leads inwards, apparently towards a Platonic “gaze into the soul,” his end point is where Patočka’s definition of Europe begins. “[...] *only in Europe*,” he asserts, “or better said, in what was the embryo of Europe, Greece,” did philosophy initiate “an inheritance of thinking about the state where philosophers might live, about a state of justice founded not on mere tradition, but rather on *looking-in*.”<sup>22</sup> Such a form of introspection is clarified with reference to two closely-related principles: the care of the soul and the upholding of universal values. *Ulysses’ Gaze* displays interest in both principles, and, as for the spatiotemporal origin Patočka applies to them, classical Greece is held up less as the source of present-day civilisation and more as the avatar of its decay.

In the Albanian mountains, A and his driver are stopped by heavy snow. While they wait, the taxi driver laments, “Greece is dying. We’re dying as a people. We’ve come full circle. I don’t know how many thousands of years among broken stones and statues, and

<sup>21</sup> Council of Europe, “European Convention on Cinematographic Co-Production,” Strasbourg 1992.

<sup>22</sup> Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, p. 88.

we're dying. But if Greece is going to die, then she'd better do it quickly, because the agony lasts too long and makes too much noise." What is particularly agonising about this death, the speech implies, is the tantalising possibility inherent in the "broken stones and statues," the utopian and anachronistic longing for the classical *polis*. Within Patočka's thought, too, the classical *polis* is a touchstone of reflection. It is situated, within the broader framework of a historical movement, as the point of transition from mythological to a more analytically truthful understanding of human being as such. As a consequence, Patočka claims that "the Greek *polis*, *epos*, tragedy, and philosophy are different aspects of the same thrust which represents a rising above decadence."<sup>23</sup>

Such "decadence" and its resistance are an integral part of the conception of the European that Patočka himself calls "heretical," while it is in the "positive" opposition to contemporary decadence that his thinking takes its utopian form. The opposition, however, is the first in a cascading sequence laid out, for example, in the essay "Is Technological Civilisation Decadent, and Why?" The oppositions run: decadent/positive, everyday/holiday-exceptional, profane/sacred.<sup>24</sup> I will show through the example of *Ulysses' Gaze* that cinema has a meaningful place to take in addressing each of these three oppositions and in expressing their conflict and resolution within the modern world.

The "decadence" in modern civilisation resides in life losing "its grasp on the innermost nerve of its functioning, when it is disrupted at its innermost core so that while thinking itself full it is actually draining and laming itself with every step and act."<sup>25</sup> For him, this is the underlying situation which manifests itself in the fact that

European humanity and humanity as such simply are no longer capable of physically surviving but for the mode of production that rests increasingly on science and technology (and, of course, increasingly devastates the global planetary store of energy), so that rational domination, the cold 'truth' of the coldest of cold monsters, today wholly obscures to us its origin [...].<sup>26</sup>

Elsewhere, examining the "Wars of the Twentieth Century and the Twentieth Century as War," Patočka is even more explicit about the role of technology in "the transformation of the world into a laboratory for releasing reserves of energy accumulated over billions

<sup>23</sup> Jan Patočka, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History*, trans. Erazim Kohák (Chicago: Open Court, 1996), p. 97.

<sup>24</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 98–99. For a unpacking of these oppositions, and of Patočka's suggestion that they emerge with the passage from prehistorical to historical humanity, see Ivan Chvatík, "The Heretical Conception of the European in the Late Essays of Jan Patočka," Sept. 2003 (online at <http://www.cts.cuni.cz/soubory/reporty/CTS-03-14.pdf> [accessed Oct. 25, 2018]).

<sup>25</sup> Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, p. 97.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 111–112.

of years.”<sup>27</sup> What role could film, as a manifestation of the science and technology that Patočka sees at the root of this transformation and the heart of contemporary decadence, play in raising consciousness of the possibility that the classical Greek civilisation represented towards a foundation of life on more authentic grounds? An indication comes at the end of Patočka’s essay cited above, when he returns to the question “Is Technological Civilisation decadent, and why?” He concludes on an ambivalent note. First, he acknowledges that “the chief possibility, which emerges for the first time in history with our civilisation, is the *possibility* of a turn from accidental rule to the rule of those who understand what history is about.”

This would indeed be a “heretical” statement in the context of its being written in a country governed by those who claimed that the basis of their authority was precisely that they knew exactly what history was about. Patočka’s claim that their rule, and that of those on the Western side of the Iron Curtain, was “accidental,” points to his commitment to the need for philosophy as a foundation of political systems. He accelerates to the conclusion that “there is no civilisation as such. The question is whether historical humans are still willing to embrace history.”<sup>28</sup> Such an embrace, based on introspective enquiry into one’s own past and that of the history of civilisation, is what *Ulysses’ Gaze* appears to attempt.

### A Journey through Post-Communist Europe

In some of its images, none more so than that of the dismantled Lenin statue, the film has the ability to represent multiple layers of temporal fact and, in doing so, to generate a subjective view of the historical process which engendered the events referred to and, reflexively, the film itself. The sequence begins in a hotel room in Constanța. From its window, A sees the statue on a ship in the port. Subsequently, he becomes a passenger on the barge transporting the dismantled statue up the Danube, the toppled figure lying on its back, its raised arm no longer outstretched as if towards a crowd of assembled masses but instead directed purposelessly skyward.

Following the barge on its journey, the film creates an image of the post-Communist era which stands apart. Tearing the statue from its expected context, the film seeks to surprise and astonish the viewer, an effect which could have only been rendered more acute at the time of the film’s release when an era of entirely upright Lenins embodying the persistence of a political system and of an interpretation of the role and function of history was a very recent memory.

The barge passes a high-angled camera which follows it as it passes up the Danube, a contemplative shot which invites reflection on the historical circumstances. A relic of Eastern European Communism is being transported to the West where, apparently,

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

such a memento is in demand. The statue, A is told, was carried from Kiev down the Dniepr and across the Black Sea. After transshipment to the barge, it is being taken to Germany, with the implication – though never the statement – that this is the delivery of a prearranged purchase. In the shot which shows A jumping aboard the barge, a ship is seen in the background flying the Russian (as opposed to Soviet) flag and called *Mir*, the Russian word that means both “world” and “peace.” The juxtaposition is distinctly ironic for the beginning of a journey whose destination is a war zone.

The toppled and dismantled statue symbolises Communism’s defeat, and the image of the revolutionary leader is indicative of the failure of the ideals his statue was intended to incarnate. To emphasise the point, in a travelling shot taken from the barge the film shows crowds of people on the banks of the river making the sign of the cross as the statue passes. The film brings together two phenomena of the post-socialist moment: the commodification of socialism’s legacy and the resurgence of religious commitment. The sequence is accompanied by Eleni Karaindrou’s orchestral theme, which the film reserves for moments of contextual illustration rather than narrative development. David Bordwell compares the sequence’s aesthetics to “a weirdly sparse music video,”<sup>29</sup> a description which complements his classification of Angelopoulos’s style within the category of European art cinema he inaugurated as being of “severe, contemplative beauty.”<sup>30</sup> The generation of such an image, however, is far more than an exercise in the technically proficient development of a particular aesthetic norm. This moment of the film exists apart, as a fragmentary moment which, in its abandonment of verisimilitude, nonetheless relates to contextual facts and situates them in a historical context, creating the opportunity for its fortuitous resonance with the no less extraordinary images generated by the real-life destruction of equivalent statues in recent years in Ukraine.

The use of dismantled statuary as an emblem for the end of the Communist era is not in itself unique: *Goldeneye* (Martin Campbell, 1995), the first James Bond film of the post-Cold War era, is an example of the commercial cinema’s exploitation of the trope. Later, *Good Bye Lenin!* (Wolfgang Becker, 2003) features the dismantled top half of a statue of Lenin being carried around the former East Berlin suspended from a helicopter. This image itself recalls, perhaps intentionally, the closing sequence of Dušan Makavajev’s *Gorilla Bathes at Noon* (1993), whose plot revolves, precisely, around the demolition of such a statue in that city.

There are, however, far more precise and deeper intertextual connections underpinning the Lenin barge sequence that elucidate its capacity for being emblematic of

<sup>29</sup> David Bordwell, “Angelopoulos, or Melancholy,” in David Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 140–186, here 176.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

the ambivalent beginning of a new era. To begin with, there is the connection between *Gorilla Bathes at Noon* and *Ulysses' Gaze*. Angelopoulos disavowed the suggestion that he had taken inspiration from the Serbian director, claiming only to have found out about Makavajev's film when he met him in Belgrade during the filming of *Ulysses' Gaze*.<sup>31</sup> It may or may not be a case of "talented artists thinking alike,"<sup>32</sup> but a further connection with Makavajev's work exists – to *Sweet Movie* (1974). That film features a canal barge called "Survival," sailed by a woman called Anna Planeta through the canals of Amsterdam while blaring hippy folk-rock music. The barge's prow is formed by an enormous papier-maché head of Karl Marx, and, in an early scene of the film, Anna and a sailor from the battleship *Potemkin*, who only speaks French, stand proudly there and sing the Italian communist song "Bandiera Rossa." If the barge in Makavajev's film is farcical, an assemblage of symbols of communist propaganda and filmmaking, then it finds its melancholy counterpart in the dismantled Lenin of *Ulysses' Gaze*, appearing for the second time as tragedy. Inverting the Marxian formula on the repetition of historical events makes sense of the intertextual connection at work here and its critical position on ostensibly Marxist political regimes. The Lenin barge in *Ulysses' Gaze* appears elegiac because, situating itself in a lineage of European Marxist filmmaking, it clearly shows itself here as the end of that line, dismantling its remains and putting them, like the statue, to new purposes.

Horton points to the search, in *Ulysses' Gaze*, for "a relationship with the past of the Balkan cinematic community."<sup>33</sup> This community would link the various cities containing the archives, including the fictional one in Sarajevo, that A visits in search of the Manakia reels. It would also include those places whose history was recorded by the brothers, but furthermore extends through the twentieth century by means of intertextual references – especially those to the cinema of Makavajev.

In this film, which is described as a search for, and an exploration of, "problems of a universal nature" (as in Jordanova's interpretation, above), the question however does not stop at positing an integral Balkan community but extends outwards through "the question of the individual and the community" which is "at the centre of the ancient Greek experience" because "what the Greeks have given the world is, in large part, a concern for the *polis*, that is, the city-state, and an ongoing democratic dialogue on how that concern can best be expressed."<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Horton (ed.), *The Last Modernist: The Films of Theo Angelopoulos* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1997), p. 104.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

### The Twentieth Century and the Classical *Polis*

In spite of the reduction of the physical remains of the civilisation that engendered such dialogue to “broken stones and statues,” and in resistance to the “decadent” technological domination of the twentieth century, Angelopolous’s film here converges with Patočka’s work, evoking simultaneously the classical Greek concern for building a well-organised public realm and the sheer destructive force of the twentieth century. However, in its self-reflexive exploration of the cinematic heritage of that century that extends from the early Manakia reels through to Makavajev’s pan-European evocation of left-wing iconography and culminating in the emblematic image of the dismantled statue, *Ulysses’ Gaze* seeks to rescue film, and the practice of film-making, from the generalised technological destruction of that century.

Patočka prefigures Hobsbawm in setting the inception of the twentieth century in 1914, stating that “the first world war is the decisive event in the history of the twentieth century. It determined its entire character.”<sup>35</sup> *Ulysses’ Gaze* refers to that conflict chiefly through a sequence in which A relives Iannakis Mankia’s arrest and threatened execution by the Bulgarian authorities, an event from 1916. It places it within the narrative of the brothers’ career, suggesting an alternative beginning to the twentieth century in 1905, and the possibility of the twentieth century as belonging not to war but to the film camera. In a gesture which recalls Walter Benjamin’s assignation to cinema of the task “to establish equilibrium between human beings and the apparatus,”<sup>36</sup> *Ulysses’ Gaze*, through the figure of the Manakia brothers, suggests that cinema represents a bridge between technology and a peaceful alternative, an opportunity to resist rather than perpetuate “decadence.”

The film therefore ties together a search for a cinematic and for a philosophical heritage. Where the former draws the territories which the film visits into the “community” of European history, the latter is ascribed a universal dimension, a possibility for introspective thinking about polity. What is it about classical Greek civilisation that is so appealing and differentiates it so much from the present? According to Patočka, the answer lies in values inherent in that civilisation. In his description, the classical Greek city, as Plato relates it following the example of Socrates, was based on the principle that “all free noblemen upheld divinely sanctioned rules: not to harm others, not to interfere in their own private sphere, to leave them alone, not to enslave them, not to take, and not even to attempt to take what does not belong to one.”<sup>37</sup> More than the basic

<sup>35</sup> Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, p. 124. See Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994).

<sup>36</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction [Second Version],” in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 2002).

<sup>37</sup> Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, p. 83.

civility of these principles, the interest in such a formulation of the basic underlying form of classical Greek civilisation lies in its direct connection to introspective philosophical practice. The Socratic method would be aptly described as “what Plato says, following Socrates: the care of the soul.”<sup>38</sup> The centre of this practice, Patočka insists, is “looking-in,” and this consists precisely in Socrates’s inciting people “to *think*, that they think like him, that they search, that everyone responsibly examine their every thought. That means that they should not accept mere opinion, as if it were insight, as if it were looking-in.”<sup>39</sup>

The Platonic conceptual difference between “knowledge” and “opinion” is a significant one in terms of a connection between the classical philosopher’s well-known cave analogy and cinema. Stephen Rainey discusses the apparent similarity between the discussion, in Book 7 of the *Republic*, of a cave wall illuminated by fire, onto which shadows are projected, and the modern film theatre. Rainey’s conclusion is that, rather than imprisoned within the world of their perceptions like Plato’s cave-dwellers, film spectators are endowed with an extrinsic point of view which is susceptible to the attainment of knowledge. “The Platonic cave of the movie theatre,” he writes, “has its value precisely in its depiction of the shadowplay and the audience’s self-consciously aware release when the house lights go up. It is the suspension of disbelief while in the cave of the movie theatre that gains cinematic knowledge, as opposed to the apprehension of the immutable and indubitable that for Plato is the mark of knowledge.”<sup>40</sup> The possibility of attaining to “knowledge” in Platonic terms is a valuable one for the connection between Patočka’s Platonic thinking of the European and *Ulysses’ Gaze* since, for the Czech philosopher, knowledge and enquiry are conceptually intrinsic to the European. Furthermore, Rainey’s view helps us to see cinema, which is so importantly redemptive in *Ulysses’ Gaze*, as the bridge between Platonic “knowledge” and modern-day experience.

Thinking in this way opens the possibility of a reciprocal clarification of *Ulysses’ Gaze* through Patočka’s thought and, furthermore, of using an important strand in that body of work to think about the cinematic apparatus. To do so is to stretch the frame of reference of the philosopher’s writings on art, but to sustain his conclusions on art’s potential to further the purpose of philosophical enquiry. For all the importance that Patočka accords the historical epoch of the Classical Greek city-state, he acknowledges its incompatibility with our own era. “We do not [...] perceive in the same way as the ancient Greeks,” he observes, because we inhabit a world that is not simply materially

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>40</sup> Stephen Rainey, “Plato’s Cave and the Big Screen,” in Barbara Gabriella Renzi and Stephen Rainey (eds.), *From Plato’s Cave to the Multiplex: Contemporary Philosophy and Film* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), pp. 103–104.

different, but, in its technological secularity, affects our own perception. We “see not only different things, but see them differently.”<sup>41</sup>

The difference of our era in respect to preceding historical epochs is a crucial one for Patočka, especially when it comes to thinking about the historical aspect of art. He describes “classical Greek science which *saw* ideas,” and “whose very concepts were forms and the demonstrations of the architectures.”<sup>42</sup> By contrast, “art is no longer the air we breathe” in an era in which “the dominant spiritual character is the abstract intellectual knowledge which mathematical natural science, which has become one with technology, offers the most perfect model.”<sup>43</sup> Patočka’s concerns about this state of affairs have already been noted above. The attention paid to the “coldest of cold monsters” and its tendency to devour not only resources that sustain life but simultaneously the historical purpose of human life itself is iterated in his essay on *Art and Time*, in which the merger of techno-scientific knowledge with techno-industrial production is the “correlate” of a “reality” which “becomes the ‘natural’ environment of a humanity in continuous quest for the great reserves of energy needed to sustain production that can only continue on the condition of keeping up its growth.”

Patočka ascribes to contemporary art no lesser function than resistance to the instrumentalisation of humanity, precisely within the context of a technologically-dominated contemporaneity. In this timeliness, art, “precisely because it does not stay in the margins of what is happening presently, because it is not an artificial paradise, it can express the intimate distress of our time better than any other means” including, notably, philosophy.<sup>44</sup> There is an emphasis on the visual in Patočka’s emphatic affirmation of the possibilities for creativity that belies his overlooking of cinema, and indeed of photography, in his artistic references. Art nonetheless “expresses the creative force of humanity, that is to say, the human faculty to allow being to become visible.”<sup>45</sup>

In *Ulysses’ Gaze*, modern technology (cinematography) serves the purpose of rendering apparent the problematic of modern civilisation as Patočka sees it, namely the “decadent” separation of the material conditions of life from a real, introspective appreciation of the nature of being. The self-referential aspect of the film’s exploration of twentieth-century history through the history of the film camera takes on an additional function in this interpretation: the film is engaged in trying to convert the simple looking at the screen within the “cave of the movie theatre” into an authentic “looking-in.”

Suggested by the Platonic epigraph, the connection between A’s journey in *Ulysses’ Gaze* and the “looking-in” Patočka describes corresponds with Iordanova’s interpretation

<sup>41</sup> Patočka, *Heretical Essays*, p. 11.

<sup>42</sup> Jan Patočka, “Art and Time,” in Patočka, *L’Art et le Temps*, pp. 344–369, here 351.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 359.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 365–366, cf. 362.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 367.

of the film as making sense, through abstraction, of a convoluted individual identity. In doing so, it generates a situation – A’s experience in Sarajevo – which displays strong Patočkian characteristics.

### Sarajevo

The small, provincial city in which A arrives, the end of his journey, was at that time, and for the short period of the siege, occupying a uniquely central position on the imaginary European map. For instance, Slavoj Žižek in 1997 referred to “the recent pathetic statement of solidarity ‘Sarajevo is the capital of Europe.’”<sup>46</sup> He observed that this idea (which he assumed was sufficiently widespread as not to need to cite a source) “was also an exemplary case of [...] a notion of exception as embodying universality: the way the enlightened liberal Europe related to Sarajevo bore witness to the way it related to itself, to its universal notion.”<sup>47</sup> Placing Sarajevo in context by exploring the post-Cold War Balkans before visiting it, *Ulysses’ Gaze* culminates by showing what Žižek classifies as the “abject,” corresponding necessarily to “the only point of true universality, the point which belies the existing concrete universality.”<sup>48</sup> By means of this gesture towards the universal, coupled with its investment in the understanding and interpretation of a shared European cinematic heritage, *Ulysses’ Gaze* firmly counters another prevailing argument of the time, as summarised by Susan Sontag, herself present in Sarajevo at the time of the siege: “one of the main ways of understanding the war crimes committed in southeastern Europe in the 1990s was to say that the Balkans, after all, were never really part of Europe.”<sup>49</sup>

In placing Sarajevo at the culmination of its protagonist’s question, *Ulysses’ Gaze* seeks to assert that city’s paradoxical centrality to the questions being asked of Europe during the period of the early 1990s, and to show the seemingly hopeless situation there as one in which, in fact, the fundamental, “universal” characteristics associated with Europe were evoked with authentic force. In this final segment of the film, A appears for the first time as a naïve American in Europe, a tourist out of his element. Constant sniper fire can be heard, and the streets are deserted apart from white UN armoured cars and civilians on foot with water canisters, keeping low and moving quickly. They do not stop to answer A’s repeated question, “is this Sarajevo?” In these shots, he briefly appears in the role of “naïve Western outsider,” a common figure of 1990s films concerning the same war, whether ex-Yugoslav or foreign productions. Examples include the Anglophone correspondents living in the Holiday Inn in Michael Winterbottom’s

<sup>46</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism,” *New Left Review* I, no. 225 (1997), pp. 28–51, here 19.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>49</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 64.

*Welcome to Sarajevo* (1997) and Lisa Moncure's American aid worker trapped in a tunnel with a group of Bosnian Serb paramilitaries in Srđan Dragojević's *Pretty Village, Pretty Flame* (1996). What distinguishes *Ulysses' Gaze* from these filmic representations of the Yugoslav Wars is that it is not a film *about* those wars exclusively, and although the city is a point of narrative culmination the film as a whole makes no pretence of giving the viewer an insider's perspective on the events taking place there, the task of such films as *Shot Through the Heart* (David Attwood, 1998) and *Jours tranquilles à Sarajevo* (François Lunel, 2003).

Instead of focusing on the plight of the besieged, it has been noted above, *Ulysses' Gaze* is interested in the universal consequences raised by the state of siege and their resonance with a conceptual question which, I have identified, has to do with the definition of "Europe." In the context of intellectual outrage about the siege, which had been going on for two years and nine months by the time of the filming of *Ulysses' Gaze*,<sup>50</sup> desperation at the failure of European institutions and values took on a pre-eminent role. The Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo, visiting Sarajevo during the siege in the summer of 1993, observed that the city's inhabitants had drawn their own conclusions regarding the ideals of international institutions and their practicability. In an improvised cemetery where bodies from artillery and sniper attacks were buried, he observed:

One should add to this compacted harvest of funeral crosses and stelas another more monumental memorial, with the dates of the 1948 UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights, the 1956 UN Agreement on Civil and Political Rights, the 1990 Charter of the Paris Conference on European Cooperation and Security, the Founding Charter of the United Nations, and the renowned Geneva Convention with the inscription "here lie the dignity of the European Community and the credibility of the United Nations Organisation, perished in Sarajevo."<sup>51</sup>

If the citizens of the besieged city resented what they perceived as their abandonment by the hypocritical leaders of what Goytisolo termed "a thick-skinned, stonily selfish Europe,"<sup>52</sup> then certain outside observers had already taken the step of dismissing the atrocity by diminishing the claim on universal rights whose very universality, the Sarajevans were right to observe, could no longer remain credible while the siege went on. *Ulysses' Gaze* shows itself in agreement with the line of thinking that ties the state of Sarajevo to the question of Europe and of its relationship to protecting a universal

<sup>50</sup> The siege began with attacks by the Yugoslav National Army and Serb paramilitaries on 5 April 1992. In the film, the date of A's arrival is given as 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1994.

<sup>51</sup> Juan Goytisolo, *Landscapes of War*, trans. Peter Bush (San Francisco: City Lights, 2000), p. 16.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

humanity, and it is in this regard that the film demands to be interpreted in light of the elements which connect it both to Patočka's thinking and to the "dissident" political position which that thinking lead him to adopt.

### Europe and the Utopian

These begin with its place in the heart of European self-definition, as evidenced by the statements cited above from Goytisolo, Sontag, and Žižek. The latter in particular gestures towards Patočkian thinking in discussing the situation in Sarajevo in terms of different formulations of the universal. As has been seen, for Žižek the position of Sarajevo as the "abject" of universal values is the generator of its paradoxical centrality. Such a situation parallels Patočka's association of decline and decadence with the unique possibility of renewal; it is precisely in the position of abjection that the Czech philosopher identifies the emergence of resistance. Such a conception is in line with Patočka's own political activity of what was called "dissidence" in relation to the Soviet-type regime in Czechoslovakia. The connection has not escaped the attention, for instance, of Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, who in 1998 asked and answered the rhetorical question of dissidence: would it

no longer have anything to say at a time when the soldiers of peace can be reduced to assisting ethnic "cleansing" in Rwanda or in Bosnia? The Czech philosopher would doubtless have seen here one of the greatest expressions of the process of European self-suppression whose traces he had already indicated in the 1950s.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, Patočka's "dissident" writings point to the utopian hope for universal human rights officially enshrined in the various declarations and treaties whose mock tombs Goytisolo found in a Sarajevo cemetery. He saw in those values and their declaration the possibility to further the political project which emerged from his utopian interpretation of Europe. Writing in 1977, Patočka issued an essay in support of the recently-founded Charta 77 movement in Czechoslovakia.<sup>54</sup> In it, he reiterated the conceptual link between the foundation of society on principles of civility and the philosophical need for a coherent understanding of the nature of human existence:

No society, no matter how well-equipped it may be technologically, can function without a moral foundation, without convictions that do not depend on convenience, circumstances, or expected advantage. Yet the point of morality is to assure

<sup>53</sup> Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine, *Jan Patočka: L'ésprit de la dissidence* (Paris: Michalon, 1998), p. 68.

<sup>54</sup> The essay's description of the movement's basis and objectives was, according to Erazim Kohák, "privately circulated in typescript in Prague in 1977 and widely reprinted, in many variations of title and text, in the world press."

not the functioning of society but the humanity of humans. Humans do not invent morality, arbitrarily, to suit their needs, wishes, inclinations, and aspirations. Quite the contrary, it is morality that defines what being human means.<sup>55</sup>

Where Charta 77 represented the *de facto* opposition to the single-party state, negative critique of the system might have been expected. Instead, Patočka offered a positive articulation of the kind of society the movement hoped for, based on its stated purpose of enforcing the application of the 1974 Helsinki agreement.<sup>56</sup> Heralding such agreements, he did not hesitate to associate them with utopian possibility:

[...] we consider a time when it became possible to sign a Declaration of Human Rights a new historical epoch, the stage for an immense outreach, since it represents a reversal of human consciousness, of the attitude of humans to themselves and to their society. Not simply or primarily fear or profit, but respect for what is higher in humans, a sense of duty, or the common good, and of the need to accept even discomfort, misunderstanding, and a certain risk, should henceforth be our motives.<sup>57</sup>

Noting that risk is an integral part of the political project outlined here, its representation in *Ulysses' Gaze* is given additional significance. The film invokes the precarious creativity in adversity of the Manakia brothers, but over the course of A's journey it subjects him to the same risks: misidentification, superstition, censorship, accusations of espionage, and simply being an observer and bystander in the wrong place and at the wrong time. The film sets A's soul-seeking in an environment which constantly reminds the viewer of the political turmoil of its present and of its twentieth-century history. In the taxi driver's lament for the lingering death of classical Greece, the film makes reference to what Patočka calls the "embryo" of the decrepitude of the present. In the Lenin barge sequence, the film counterpoints the millennial "broken stones and statues" of the taxi driver's monologue with a highly contemporary image of a collapsed utopia. The superstition evinced by those on the banks of the Danube who cross themselves when the barge passes, the film suggests, is a last foreclosure on the ideals for which the statue once stood, before being reduced to the status of cargo.

*Ulysses' Gaze* itself, however, works to keep open the possibility, not for socialism as such, but moreover for the society existing in the welcoming of risk and in the up-

<sup>55</sup> Jan Patočka, "The Obligation to Resist Injustice," in Erazim Kohák, *Jan Patočka: Philosophy and Selected Writings* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 340–343, here 341.

<sup>56</sup> See Edward F. Findlay, "Classical Ethics and Postmodern Critique: Political Philosophy in Václav Havel and Jan Patočka," *Review of Politics* 61 (1999), no. 3, pp. 403–426, here 405.

<sup>57</sup> Patočka, "Obligation to resist," pp. 342–343.

holding of universal values in the face of that risk, which Patočka incited and that the Manakia brothers seemingly embodied. At the end, immediately before the massacre sequence, the film includes a scene in which there are only two players and whose action relates most closely to A's memory. In the midst of circumstances that relate to a specific historical moment and a specific place, and their relation to a universal value set that belongs to no historical epoch, the film draws a concrete situation towards the universal.

A meets a woman (Maia Morgenstern) who is simultaneously the daughter of the Sarajevo film archivist and the woman he left behind when he first left Florina. He finds her near a group of young people who have set up an outdoor disco, dancing to pop music on the snow-covered ground. After he enthuses that he "should have dreamed" of dancing in Sarajevo, a sudden change takes place in the scene. The camera's movement allows a change in the scene within the same shot.<sup>58</sup> In this case, a 180-degree pan to the right accompanied by a short forward track follows the characters as they move apart from the group of dancing youths. A change in the music indicates the alteration. As the piano begins to play a waltz, the drums, bass, and electric guitar of the disco music fall silent. The actor's body language changes rapidly. From dancing apart, they fall into a passionate embrace, holding each other closely as they follow the musical time. From brief sentences in broken English, she begins speaking Greek. It is the text of her speech which reveals what is happening to the viewer: she echoes almost word for word one of his speeches from the opening section of the film, complaining of the "rain and mud in winter – dust in summer" that characterised A's recollection of his time as a conscript stationed in Florina. A cuts her off to tell her that he can hear his train arriving, a sound inaudible to the viewer and therefore an indication that, decades later and hundreds of kilometres away, they are reprising a leave-taking and his promise to return and take her away, a promise that will remain unfulfilled for a second time as she is shortly to vanish into the fog and never return.

In juxtaposing and mixing a personal recollection with a politically-charged and emblematic location, *Ulysses' Gaze* implies the universal applicability of the state of siege: it could be happening to anyone, from anywhere, becoming intermingled with their own personal history and raising its uncanny recollection. More specifically, the film culminates here its point about the shared historical experience of the twentieth century in Europe. As I have argued, Sarajevo was seen, not least by its inhabitants, as a place where universal values were tested to destruction. Interpreting the way in which *Ulysses' Gaze* shows that city as a universal situation makes sense in light of the association made with the Patočkian understanding of the category of "Europe." In the midst of the turmoil of South-Eastern Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, the

<sup>58</sup> In a technique noted as typical of Angelopoulos's filmmaking style: see, for instance, Bordwell, *Figures*, p. 148.

Manakia brothers carved out for themselves a cosmopolitan space that the film implies has now become a utopian possibility as remote as the classical civilisation lamented by a Greek taxi driver. Within the film's panoramic view, the aftermath of the collapse of Soviet-type socialist regimes is an outstanding feature. Deportees from Greece to Albania, trudging home through the mountains, and the victims of the Yugoslavian wars as much as the dismantled Lenin statue that gives the film its defining image are all seen as aspects of a transnational situation whose historical antecedents, as well as its present effects, are shown to the viewer.

Just as Patočka did not simply critique that system when it was in place, *Ulysses' Gaze* does not simply bury socialism but instead looks for the possibility for something other than violence and fear to be installed in its place. Amongst the apparent ruin of the universal values in which Patočka placed so much hope, *Ulysses' Gaze* retains a trace of the longing for a society that would uphold those values. I framed the presentation of the film with the philosopher's idea of "Europe" through Groys' category of the "post-dissident." Where Patočka's philosophical convictions placed him in direct involvement with "dissidence" in its pre-1989 form, *Ulysses' Gaze* regards the post-1989 moment in the light of equivalent values, which are the ones Groys names: transnationalism, peaceful coexistence, cultural understanding, ideological flexibility combined with universalist commitment. The film serves as a reminder of the desire to make Europe a space for those values, as well as the suggestion that those values inhere in the very definition of Europe itself.