

Multiple Lives of the Machines: Memory, Topography and Film Archaeology in Thanassis Rentzis's Films *Bio- graphy* (1974) and *Silent Machines* (2000)

Ioannis Paraskevopoulos

Independent researcher

ABSTRACT

This article discusses two films by filmmaker Thanassis Rentzis, Bio-graphy (1974) and Silent Machines (2000), which explore the concept of memory through time, from the industrial revolution to the post-industrial era. Bio-graphy is an epopee of the western world, whereas Silent Machines focuses on Greece's industrial heritage. Rentzis acts as an archaeologist both of the present and of the past either by reenacting, through a series of simulacra, the transformation of the human being into homo industrialis or by testifying of the decay of that formation and contemplating on the relationship of the narrating subject with the past in the post-industrial era. Through the method of film archaeology Rentzis traces the aforementioned eras of transition and represents the end of experience in the West. The article explores how the films create a virtual image and construct a topography of time, thus providing an overall epopee of the last two centuries of industrial civilization.

KEYWORDS

Film Archaeology
Filmic space
Memory,
Ruinology,
Thanassis Rentzis
Virtual Image

This article discusses Thanassis Rentzis's filmic discourse in *Vio-grafia/Bio-graphy* (1974) and *Siopiles michanes/Silent Machines* (2000). Although there is a time lapse of 26 years between the two films, their common denominator is the formation of memory by extending concepts that relate to philosophical archaeology. My main argument is that Thanassis Rentzis focuses on the formation of a virtual image through the process of reflection upon the image by the means of speech. In both films Rentzis explores the past through the figure of a narrator who serves as the protagonist and at the same time as the guide of the films. Through the narrator, the filmmaker attempts to establish a cartography of the past and to situate his own identity in the present time of each film. It is on this basis that the concept of the formation of memory is used and it is argued that Rentzis attempts to form a cinematic Mnemosyne as it has been analyzed by Georges Didi-Huberman (based on Aby Warburg). According to Didi-Haberman the Mnemosyne project is "a knowledge-movement of images, a knowledge in extensions, in associative relationships, in ever renewed montages, and no longer knowledge in straight lines, in a confined corpus, in stabilized typologies" (Didi-Haberman 2007: 10).

Bio-graphy forms the first chapter of a trilogy along with *Corpus* (Rentzis, 1979) and *Ilektrikos angelos/Electric Angel* (Rentzis, 1981). Whilst the other two films are studies of the human body and of sexuality, respectively, *Bio-graphy's* intention is to depict the golden age of Capitalism, an era of transition and change, and the rise of a new type of man in the 19th century. Based on the book of drawings by Chumy Chúmez *Una Biographia*, it is an animation film, composed entirely of shots of still drawings. 26 years later, with *Silent Machines*, the filmmaker establishes a dialogue with his first film. While in *Bio-graphy* he presents an epoch that is founded upon the human being's belief of an everlasting power and omnipotence, in *Silent Machines* – an exploration of Greece's industrial heritage – in a striking elegiac form, Rentzis deals with the decline of that same era, the loss of a world. The title refers to industrial equipment as well as to industrial infrastructure that have not been destroyed, demolished or broken but have ceased to produce. The film traces the various industrial installations and production units that have been active during the 19th and the 20th centuries depicting different geographical locations and presenting briefly the various products that have been produced. Whilst *Bio-graphy* is a film about the formation of new identities that arose during the Industrial Revolution, *Silent Machines* is a film about the loss of that identity, predicting the radical changes that take place in contemporary Greece and the transition to the post-industrial era. In that way both films are (re)presentations of two different eras of transition in the West.

Rentzis undertakes the realization of an immense project: The construction of a "virtual image" that transcends cinema thus enabling the realization of a present

beyond images. My main argument is that Rentzis performs the work of an archaeologist in the way that has been depicted by Giorgio Agamben. In analyzing the work of philosophical archaeology Agamben argues that “archaeology moves backward through the course of history, just as the imagination moves back through individual biography” (2009: 107). The archaeologist comes across the facts and documents of the past and through his imaginary tries to reestablish a connection with a historical epoch. It is a method of gaining access to history. “In this way”, Agamben states, “the relation between archaeology and history becomes transparent” (2009: 107) while the access to the past that the archaeologist gains consists in forming a relation with the present and the future.

Film archaeology attempts to define a form-of-life that has been created by the potentiality of the virtual in cinema. Such an attempt escapes the established aprioris of the normative and focuses upon the construction of a form-of-life that is not visible or identifiable. With his two films the filmmaker reestablishes a critical position to a knowledge of the past through a new cartography. The work of the archaeologist – and consequently of the film archaeologist – consists in the close examination of the historical epoch in question in order to reveal the multiple layers of the formation of a specific knowledge. Although Rentzis does not go back to the original beginning of the rise of the industrial era in *Bio-graphy* or to the beginning of its end in *Silent Machines*, he manages to testify of two different historical epochs, and to present a knowledge which is immanent to those eras, in a way that it is legitimate to perceive the two films as filmic documents of the archaeological method of research.

RUINOGRAPHY: FILM AS TESTIMONY, FILM AS MONUMENT

The title of *Bio-graphy* is composed of two Greek words: *bios* (life) and *graphy* (writing). In the film a whole century of transformations is indicated through the manifestation of parallel lives, of the multiple forms of *bios* that are presented through the narrator’s voice. Rentzis characterizes *Bio-graphy* as a film-testimony and an elegy about the destructive forces of the technical civilization that deployed itself in the 19th century and thus managed through the machines to accelerate the flow of time (2017: 16). The disembodied voice, which accompanies the film’s still images, functions as an imaginative testimony of this civilization in an elegiac manner. Speech in that particular case produces memory: it is a manifestation of a personalized vision of History since the voice-over narration appropriates the archive and manages to transform it into an auto-biography. Rentzis talks about a ‘homo gravis/risens’ that speaks and at the same time is silent (2017: 15). The subject of *Bio-graphy* exists in a dream-state, in an in-between that manages to transform temporality into an entity. The subject/narrator collects fugitive pictorial moments that are (re)presented to us as memories.

The subject of *Bio-graphy* personalizes History and speaks of the past imaginatively, in a poetic and allusive manner whereas the subject-that-speaks in *Silent Machines* is a present-time narrator who develops his thoughts in a realistic manner. In contrast to *Bio-graphy*, the narrator of *Silent Machines* is present in the film's shots. Rentzis uses the figure of a historian in order to present a journey through the industrial remnants of Greece. By using a speech, which is at the same time elegiac, scientific and personal, the filmmaker manages to build the narrative of a History. The film's cinematography aestheticizes the remnants while it is through montage that the different locations are being fused together, thus creating the idea of monumentality. The film is composed entirely of shots of highly aestheticized industrial landscapes in way, that I would characterize *Silent Machines* as a film-monument.

Silent Machines constitutes a cinematic ruinology. This means that it has as a starting point the examination of the past both aesthetically (as far as the audio-visual poetics are concerned) and archaeologically. The archaeological term *relicta* (relics) establishes the basis and the material for the aforementioned method of vision. *Relicta* literally means material remnants: "It is that which remains of the past and at the same time that which survives the past" (Siniosoglou 2017: 44). Material remnants are fragments of a past experience. They belong to a different image of the world than that of the present, meaning that once they had a specific function in the social organization of space. They state their presence in time in the form that they have been delivered to the present day. Their decomposed material form in the present means that once they have been attributed with a positive quality – a value – only afterwards to be devalorized by a new value that emerges into the historical landscape.

The emergence of memory is the main preoccupation of both films. I argue that it is through his historizing of the past and thus through its revalorization through a narrative that Rentzis manages to produce a new cartography of time that relates the past to the present. This work takes place through the construction of the filmic hypertexts that act as film-testimonies. The historizing of the past in both the films is constructed through the use of sound and more specifically through the human voice. The formation of the filmmaker's discourse is strongly linked to the use of the voice-over narration in both films, which are highly vococentric. According to Michel Chion's definition, cinema as a purely vococentric medium, derives from the human being's habitual behavior to focus solely on explicit human voices, and accordingly, to interpret the meaning of words (1994: 6). This process of revalorization takes place through the use of Rentzis's oral commentary over the images.

THE LOSS OF EXPERIENCE

Rentzis situates the loss of the oral tradition in the age of modernity, since community in its archaic form and content ceases to exist. Modern Times is an era in which oral tradition collapses as a form of knowledge and typography acquires all the more an eruptive power (Rentzis 1980: 72). It is an era of transition from the oral civilization to the rise of Western democratic societies where knowledge is being diffused in written forms. That is due to the fact that the rise of the new type of man –homo capitalisticus, homo industrialis – marks the establishment of a new reality that has completely eliminated the archaic value of the notions of authority and authenticity thus leading them to acquire a new value. Georges Bataille argues that “authority and authenticity are entirely on the side of things, of production and consciousness of the thing produced” (1992: 97). Rentzis situates *Bio-grahy* in that era, in a period of humanity where the sovereign construction of the bourgeoisie unfolds its new mythico-ideological net. According to Rentzis the product of this grid is “the myth of the atomized experience” (1980: 72), the newly constructed myth of modernity.

Rentzis is focused upon the conception that the work of science, as a process of reducing all life to the order of things, allowed the formation of the new consciousness. That new order is the world of industry. According to Georges Bataille “the reality of a profane world, of a world of things and bodies, is established opposite a holy and mythical world” (1992: 37) on which Western society has based its notion of experience and communication, and consequently the communication of experience. Walter Benjamin argues emphatically that humans used to know in the past what experience exactly was. Always the elders transmitted it to the younger, furtively, with the authority of age, in the form of proverbs; at length, with its loquaciousness, in the form of stories; sometimes in front of the fireplace whilst reciting stories of faraway countries, in front of children and grandchildren. And he continues by wondering: “Where did all that go? Are we still able to find people capable of reciting a story?” (Benjamin 2000: 364-365). With the above words, Benjamin describes in a vivid manner the meaning of the oral communication of experience, the ritual of storytelling and most important of all, the community that was being formed by the storyteller as the authority and the children and grandchildren as the subjects of that authority in the connection between generations. In his book of lectures *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* Gershom Scholem cites a Hasidic fable which expresses the loss of oral tradition and consequently the corruption of tradition:

When the Baal Shem had a difficult task before him, he would go to a certain place in the woods, light a fire and meditate in prayer-and what he had set out to perform was done. When a generation later the ‘Maggid’ of Meseritz was faced with the same task he would go to the same place in the woods and say: We can no longer light the fire, but we can still speak the prayer-and what he wanted done became reality.

Again a generation later Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov had to perform this task. And he too went into the woods and said: We can no longer light a fire, nor we do know the place in the woods to which it all belongs-and that must be sufficient; and sufficient it was. But when another generation had passed and Rabbi Israel of Rishin was called upon to perform the task, he sat down on his golden chair in his castle and said: We cannot light the fire, we cannot speak the prayers, we do not know the place, but we can tell the story of how it was done. And, the storyteller adds, the story which he told had the same effect as the actions of the other three (1974: 349-350).

According to Scholem (1974: 350) this anecdote symbolizes the decay of the movement of Hasidism as well as the transformation of its values, its immanent loss of the sacred experience and the destruction of a great tradition. I would extend the reference of this anecdote and I would argue that it symbolizes the general loss of oral tradition and experience in many western nations. It is a procedure that started at the 19th century and was completed in the first decades of the 20th century. Walter Benjamin situates the loss of experience in the First World War, between the years 1914-1918. He argues that the return of the soldiers from the war was accompanied by a muteness, a profound loss of communication; they came back “not richer, but poorer in communicable experience” (Benjamin 2000: 365). The cause for this loss was the terrifying deployment of technology, a new form of barbarism that apart from bodies in the trenches, also, destroyed communication.

Heracles Logothetes thinks of *Bio-graphy* as a depiction of the conversion of the Homo Universalis of the Renaissance to the Homo Industrialis of the capitalist era (2013: 50). He argues that the later, in his newly formed image of the world, restructures the classic myths into myths of the bourgeoisie, thus enabling the new historic era to construct its own variation of those myths (ibid). In *Bio-graphy*, Rentzis exposes this procedure of self-justification of the Homo Industrialis whilst he depicts in a mythico-historical way the rise of the new man. By contrast, in *Silent Machines* he testifies of the destruction of that myth and speaks of the loss of identity that this destruction entails, by establishing a cartography of the present.

THE IMAGE: SIMULACRA AND SPECTACLE

In a recently written text (2017), celebrating the forty-year existence of *Bio-graphy*, Rentzis situates himself in the tradition of the cinematic school of filmosophes, following up Jean Epstein’s 1946 declaration that “cinema is not only a medium of art, but also of a philosophy” (quoted in Rentzis 2017: 2). I would extend this characterization further, by arguing that Rentzis is not only a film-philosopher who contemplates through the audio-visual but also that, as a filmmaker, he is following the 20th century tradition of the avant-garde. This is

clearly visible in *Bio-graphy*'s division in chapters where each title is followed by a quote from Guy Debord's book *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) and from Rentzis's variations on the thought of Debord.

According to Agamben, the avant-garde of the 20th century through the method of quotation and appropriation tried to reconstruct a relationship with the past (2007: 160). The thought of the 20th century avant-garde is an extreme attempt to relate to the past, to be associated with it and finally to discover its truth. Since there is a break in the oral tradition and in the communication of experience, the artist of the 20th century appropriates the past in his own way in order to historicize it. This process has to do with the way in which the artist reconstructs the world. That leads to the second word that forms the title *Bio-graphy*: Graphy namely writing. The images that Rentzis constructs in *Bio-graphy* are not exactly representations of the era that the filmmaker refers to, but rather simulacra of that represented era.

According to Gilles Deleuze the simulacrum "posits the world itself as phantasm" (1990: 262). In its deleuzian conceptualization the power of the simulacrum resides in its ability to appropriate the Same and thus de-establish its original quality. In the film under discussion, the historical epoch of Modernity has been delivered to us through a series of representations that form our knowledge of it. Modernity appears to us through the process of selection and hierarchized knowledge. Rentzis manages to produce an effect through the use of simulacra since the historical era in question no longer exists. In that way he posits his vision of the world and forms his personal idea of cinema. Nikos Panayotopoulos notes that "the images of *Bio-graphy* are dead, [...], because what is being 'represented' belongs to the past; it has already passed" (1974: 14). Thus, Rentzis through his simulacra appropriates the past in order to present his own construction of memory. Moreover, he constructs a filmic text where the viewer cannot identify with the subject of the story. The filmmaker divides the film into seventeen chapters: 1. "Genesis", 2. Mitrolagnia, 3. Escape, 4. Submergence, 5. Emergence, 6. Elevation, 7. The Capital, 8. Civil War I, 9. Civil War II, 10. Eros, Experience as Spectacle, 11. The Spectacle as Experience, 12. Idealism, the wondrous is spectacular-the spectacular is wondrous, 13. The decision, 14. Death... another spectacle, 15. The afterlife, 16. The Future, 17. The Moral. Those chapters depict and (re)present the different lives of the narrator while Rentzis engages with a variety of subjects in his narration.

At this point it is important to refer to Debord's theses which function as the starting point of the conceptualization of *Bio-graphy*. In thesis 29 from the *Society of the Spectacle* Debord claims that the spectacle originates from the loss of the unity of the world and that the gigantesque expansion of the modern spectacle is the expression of that loss (2006: 774). Debord notes also that the star in cinema is the spectacular expression of the represented life that

concentrates the characteristics of banality (2006: 785). The star identifies with life, leaving no space to the living. Life in the 20th century is experienced through its representation; the star identifies with life to that extent that life is identified with the star.

Based on the above conception, Rentzis tries to reestablish the unity of the world through the voice of his narrator. The filmmaker's method in that sense is to employ an anti-star, a disembodied voice that no identification on the part of the viewer is possible. The parallel lives of the subject are fragments of a (hi)story that has never completed itself. These fragments are discontinuous to the extent that they form the different lives of the subject and present a whole that is elliptical and at the same time full of these lives that contradict each other. That is happening due to the fact that Rentzis does not (re)present a hierarchized historical knowledge. Rather, he simulates History. In the following quote, Deleuze speaks of this applied effect of the simulacrum:

The same and the similar no longer have an essence except as simulated that is as expressing the functioning of the simulacrum. There is no longer any possible selection. The non-hierarchized work is a condensation of coexistences and a simultaneity of events. (1990: 262)

The different events that are depicted in the story form the experiences of the narrating subject. Thus, the simulation of the images creates an effect of unity; it acts as a unifying code of communication. We are coming across to the reversal of official History through the cinematic medium.

The division of the film into chapters reflects the changes in the new historical epoch; at the same time each chapter is a constant death and rebirth of the subject. In other words, the film is in a constant process of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction. The narrative follows a constant flow of time where images melt into one another thus creating a pictorial osmosis. Logothetes notes that "the hero-narrator lives and then relives his own life, that is formed each time from the change of course of his reminiscences and desires; their direction is often without return" (2013: 49). At the same time this animated hypertext seems to be parodying the representation of that era. The film represents the periodization of history through the simulacra but also it presents a contradiction through the construction of a personal story that dissociates itself from History. The first chapter, for instance, has a biblical reference, the second Mitrolagnia (the Lust for the Mother) a psychoanalytic one. In the second chapter of the film, after the title, we read Debord's first thesis from the *Society of the Spectacle*: "All that once was directly lived has receded into representation". It is followed by a mythical portrayal of a small child that seeks for his mother. That image is covered by the narrator's voice that exclaims:

“For a long time I was longing for my lost embrace” and it is followed by a shot of a woman that is the mother-figure, whereas we can find in chapter one the image of a dead woman on the beach where the narrator mentions: “I remember that among the several dead bodies there were lots of half-naked drawn women. Sometimes I weep because I think that among them I had recognized the face of my dead mother” (see Fig. 1). Chapter four, which is entitled ‘Submergence’ begins with the shot of a woman’s womb, whilst the narrator exclaims: “Suddenly I found myself in a world that I could barely remember”. It is through this construction of discontinuity in the filmic text that Rentzis manages to portray a unified vision of the examined historical epoch.

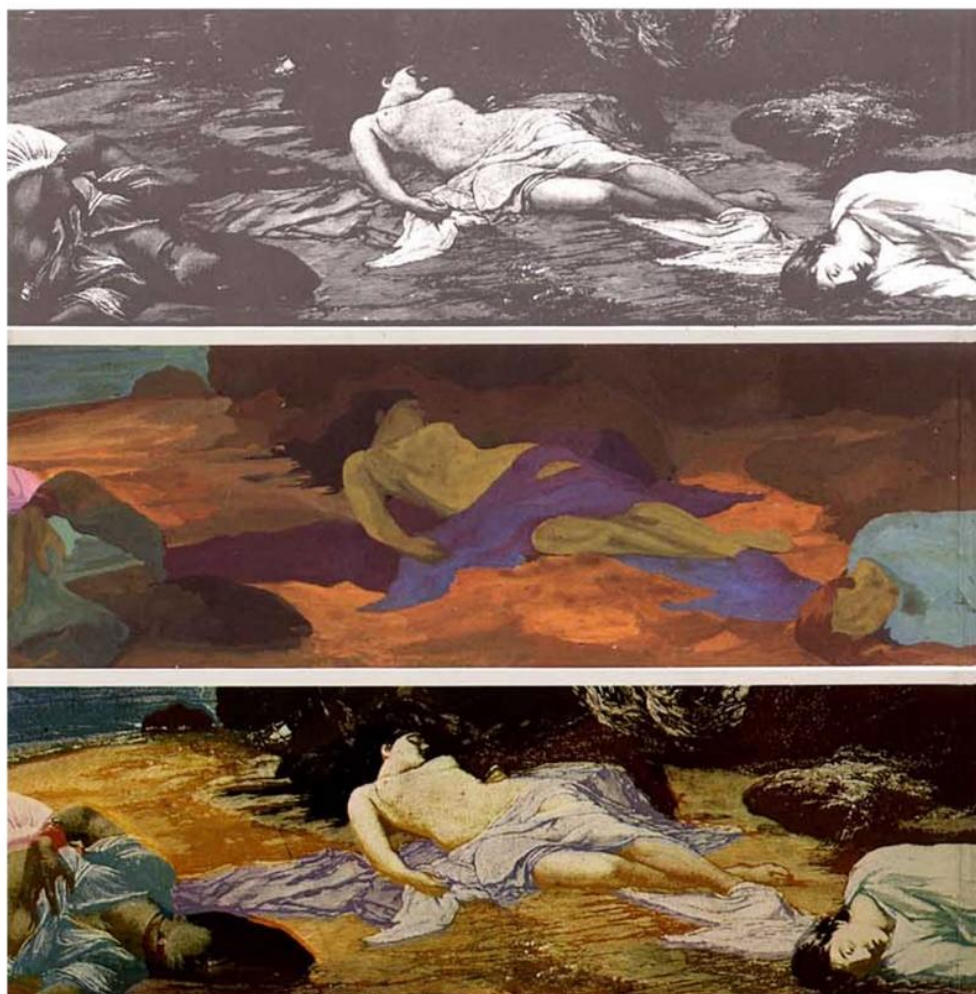


Fig. 1: *The half-naked drawn women and The Mythical Mother in Bio-graphy*

MONTAGE: A TOPOGRAPHY OF TIME

Bio-graphy presents fragments of temporality that are composed together as a unity. The subject of the film’s story lives a multiplicity of lives that could be characterized as fragments of History. At the same time we come across a fusion that is being created through the spatio-temporal multiplicity of the lives of the narrating subject. Just as each fragment presents one of the lives of the narrator,

it also presents his death. Therefore the life of the subject is presented as an idea that flows in time and in space while the constant change of temporal coordinates and of various places is presented as a dream-like journey. The fluidity of the narration benefits the depiction of Rentzis's exploratory journey, since *Bio-graphy* is composed entirely of still images which are being characterized by a vivid color (Fig. 2). It is through montage that the filmmaker creates the idea of time and of relocation that are taking place in the film.



ΒΙΟ-ΓΡΑΦΙΑ του Θανάση Ρεντζή

Fig. 2: *The dream journey: Still Images and Color.*

Rentzis organizes his material around the idea that montage is the constitutive power of cinema. Following Eisenstein's theory of montage Philippe-Alain Michaud argues that "the essence of cinema resides not in images but in the relation among images, and the dynamic impulse, or movement, is born of this relationship" (2007: 282). The overall structure of *Bio-graphy* is centered around

the effect that montage produces on the viewer. The two key elements of the film create the potentiality of the virtual image that through montage will manifest itself: the voice has the power to encompass through language the experience that it exclaims; the image, through the representation of space, acts as the setting of the subject's experiences. The two elements combined together in each shot are fragments of temporality. The employment of montage aims at directing the story to the unfolding of History, to its rediscovery and thus to the creation of memory. Rentzis's montage is concentrated on the creation of the "virtual image", which in Eisenstein's terms is called the "whole image" (1986: 23).

In his text "Word and Image" (ibid.: 22), and more particularly in the chapter on Memory, Sergei Eisenstein refers to the concept of the whole image that is being designated by montage. His theory focuses on the way that memory can assemble all the characteristic elements in one single image. Eisenstein presents the example of the difficulty of recognizing New York streets, arguing that designations such as 'Forty-second' or 'Forty-fifth' street failed to concentrate his perception on just one singular street and thus not enabling him to obtain a specific memory of them. According to him, the process of obtaining a true perception arises in two stages: The first is composed of the verbal designation, which is the actual naming of the street. This stage is composed of the different characteristics of the street and it has to do with a purely visual perception of the different parts that the filmmaker observed. The second stage consists of a fusion of all the elements of the street into a single image. This fusion creates a new image, which is a virtual one. Through this process, Eisenstein passes from the visual image, that is from the various details that constitute a street, to something which is single. According to Eisenstein this singularity emerges "as a whole characterization of the street, as its whole image" (ibid.: 23). It is only in the second stage, Eisenstein explains, that he actually manages to perceive a single image of the street. When he mentions the existence of one single image, the filmmaker refers to the fusion of all the elements that constitute that image. To use the same example, the elements of the street (for instance the theatres, the shops) do not constitute a chain of events but they form instead a constitutive fusion of elements that form the whole image (ibid.: 22-23). I am arguing that Rentzis's images of the fugitive moments of History are the characteristic elements of one singular image – and that is the virtual image – that forms his idea of Cinema.

Extending Eisenstein's theory, Michaud refers to an "overall global image effect" (2007: 283). This dynamic of montage, which finds its expression in Eisenstein's "montage-collision" (2007: 285), expands the actual image, since there is a movement of constant decomposition and recomposition, as is the case in *Biography*. According to Michaud the effect of montage-collision is the following:

Here we have not a concatenation but a shock between elements, one that presupposes a movement of decomposition and recomposition. And the phenomena of montage are not limited to a general articulation of shots; they manifest themselves within the isolated image, in the very continuity of the shots. In its deployment, the image collides with the boundaries of the frame, which it explodes in order to propagate itself through a dynamic impetus [...]. (Michaud, 2007: 285-286)

As in *Bio-graphy*, the same idea of montage is applied in *Silent Machines*, which traces the various industrial installations and production units that have been active during the 19th and the 20th centuries gathering together images from twenty different industrial spaces/monuments around Greece. The film depicts the different geographical locations of those industrial units and presents briefly the various products that have been produced there. Having as a guide, throughout the film, the image of a historian that is at the same time the narrator, the film wanders around in various abandoned industrial locations reflecting upon their disuse in the present. Trying to recapture their use in the past, he exclaims: "We will be close to a world that we do not ignore completely but at the same time we do not have an absolute knowledge of it". The filmic text is divided into two parts: 1) Memory and History, and 2) Traces and Monuments along with a Prologue and an Epilogue.



Fig. 3: *Ruinography*

The aim of the filmmaker is to focus upon the ruilonogy and thus to transform it into a ruinography of present-day temporality through his cinematic writing

(Fig. 3). He does so by going back into the beginning of things and examining their genesis. In the beginning of the first chapter of the film the narrator asks the questions: “How did it all start? How did they progress? How did they restart? And tomorrow? What happens tomorrow? Time changes, but things never go back. In view of tomorrow. We shall see what will happen tomorrow”. Those are questions that establish the basis for a research of the origins, of an *archè* that will lead to the deployment of an archaeological research of the genesis of those Monuments. Those questions are followed up by shots of the sea, – a lyrical comment on the origin of things, since the sea has neither memory nor history (at least the visible traces of them).

The filmmaker transforms himself into a flâneur following the street of History. As Walter Benjamin mentions in the *Arcades Project*: “The street conducts the flâneur into a vanished time. For him, every street is precipitous. It leads downward – if not to the mythical Mothers, then into a past that can be all the more spellbinding because it is not his own, not private” (2002: 416). The filmmaker follows the Greek roads in order to discover that “vanquished time” and by wondering around the landscapes of History, he re-appropriates objects and spaces, thus turning them into material for a personal vision of the world. He transforms those public remnants into expressions of his personal mythology.

THE PROCESS OF REVALORIZATION

As I have mentioned earlier, Rentzis uses the narrator’s discourse in order to redefine and rediscover past experiences through documentation and reflection (Fig. 4). Since objects and spaces exist in a state of muteness and silence, the narrator is the one that through his imagination reestablishes a past long gone. His words that are projected upon the objects and landscapes give a specific meaning. The objects are the carriers of memory of the human experience and testify of a human being’s life and labor. The narrator-archaeologist of *Silent Machines* contemplates on the relationship between the subject and the monument: “The idea that preoccupies me is that they are monuments of human activity, monuments that have been created by the desire of wealth and of heroic materialism whilst their recognition takes place in an era of deep transformation of human existence”.

The revalorization of the industrial remnants takes place through the film’s audio-visual language, which is based upon two key elements that co-exist, but only in relation to time. Firstly, the aestheticization of the remnants designates the present time of the film. Secondly, the gesture of the filmmaker is to reformulate upon the present his relation to the past, which is the ethical aspect of memory that the filmmaker is trying to point out. Thus the aestheticization of the remnants can only function in its relation to the ethics of the present, which is memory. Moreover Rentzis’s way of presenting the ruins is highly reminiscent

of European romantics. Just as the romantic thought of the 18th and 19th centuries used to seek its identity in Greece's ancient ruins, the same process is suggested by Rentzis elegiac tone. The narrator of the year 2000 searches his identity in the industrial ruins of the present in the same way that the romantics of the past centuries searched in the aesthetics of ruins their own identity in relation to History (Fig.5). A particular example of the effects of revalorization of the remnants are the shots of the engine rooms that are highly aestheticized. In this particular case, aesthetics function "as a way of searching diachronic values" (Zafiropoulou 1998: 24).



Fig. 4: *The narrator's quest*

What concerns Rentzis is the transformation of those aesthetics into ethics. The diachrony of values seeks a meeting point in the present that can only take place through synchrony. If the original places of production are phantasms of human activity, then the living are the ones that give a value to that activity. The formation of that value is the meeting point of diachrony and synchrony, it is the point where the discontinuous fragments of time – the past, the present – meet in order to form the future. The systematic rediscovery of the industrial past through the industrial archaeology derives from the today's changes in the West, passing from the industrial era to the post-industrial one. The narrator argues "that the year 2000 has always been a vision for humanity. A limit in the course of History as well as a vision of deliverance from human labor". In that intermediate zone the filmmaker-archaeologist tries to redefine himself in the midst of those changes, since cinema is also an industry. As the narrator states:

“I’m wondering about my identity”. This kind of problematic expresses both the personal search of the individual as well as the collective seeking of identity in our era.



Fig. 5: *The aesthetics of the machines*

The fulfillment of the seeker’s quest is inseparable from the historization the past. As the narrator states:

A plenitude of experiences refolds in various ways. Memory takes the place of reality. The sense of loss leads, gradually, to an attempt to withdraw to the recent past and try and rescue it. Finally, everything finds its pattern in the process of historicizing, an action that reshapes life. Apart from the necessary documentation, History needs the points of reference, which are the Monuments.

We can observe here, that the narrator’s deeper quest for identity is linked to the past. The memory of the past experiences is what sharpens and refolds the human bios. The historic being needs to historicize past experiences and thus to create History in order to feel autonomous and authentic in the present. By reflecting upon the past, he identifies with what has been left of the past, thus forming his identity in the present. In that way, the narrator refolds as a historic being that redefines the past through Memory, in order to live in the present. The narrator continues: “Tangible signs that resist oblivion. How can anyone imagine history without monuments, or monuments without history?” Words that are accompanied by a shot of the immensity of the sea, leading us to think of the utopian quest of the reconstruction of the past. Material remnants are the

carriers of memory. History cannot exist without them, since those remnants state of their previous uses in their specific spatio-temporal moment in time.

Shots of the abandoned engine room of Ermoupolis in the island of Syros accompany the narrator's voice that wonders: "What will happen next? What will become of the machines? What will become of that place?" in order to answer later on: "Another destruction. We do not have the right to destroy or the time to neglect". It seems that the narrator points out the ethical aspect of memory, which is to preserve both the material and the intellectual aspects of the past. His revalorization of the past and his writing of History is an affirmation of the past, not a negation of it: "Things are here. They are waiting for us to discover them and to reanimate them again. By having different goals. By having different motives".

In the second part of the film, the narrator deploys his thought concerning the new way of thinking:

Something changed deep in us. Something like an overthrowing of the poles of conscience. That which was led to oblivion is noting not only its existence but it is also managing our system of values. The repressed comes on the foreground, oblivion turns to memory, archaeologia industrialis.

That kind of change is established through the discovery of the archive. The archaeologist focuses on uncovering the past which is included in the archive. Thus, the structure of the film becomes an immense archive which is composed by ruins and fragments of the past, while Rentzis's methodology uncovers that archive through speech; it enunciates the existence of the relictia. Foucault argues that the archive cannot be described in its totality; and in its presence it is unavoidable. It emerges in fragments, regions, and levels, more fully, no doubt and with greater sharpness, the greater the time separates us from it: at most, were it not for the rarity of the documents, the greater chronological distance would be necessary to analyze it (1989: 147).

Rentzis's collection of images is an attempt to present the archive and thus to form memory. The Postmodern rediscovery of the romantic interest in ruins as well as in the preservation of industrial monuments leads to a new map, a new cartography of the present. The emergence of the analysis of revalorization designates the reappearance of those relictia and their becoming of monuments. Subjects to change and of change, the monuments become the objects of the analysis of transformation, while the work of the archaeologist-filmmaker consists of the analysis of that change. As Michel Foucault states: "archaeology tries to establish the system of transformations that constitute 'change'" (1989: 191). The filmmaker describes the revalorization of the monuments as a passage

from oblivion to memory. During the process of revalorization those material remnants acquire a new use since they reappear as remnants of that that once were, but with a new use. They do not return identical to their first function, but they acquire a new use. For example, some of them become cultural centers or museums but Rentzis does not rest upon this newly acquired function. In the end of the film Rentzis refers to the remnants as “industrial cemeteries”. According to the filmmaker their rediscovery is their “resurrection” meaning that their re-appropriation took place by the formation of a new value. Finally, it is pointed out that their current appropriation takes a place in the transition from an era to another, from the industrial-classical era of capitalism to the newly formed era of Western post-industrial societies. The filmmaker supports the idea that in that era of transition the forces of the present search for new values in the past.

Silent Machines transmits a sentiment of melancholy to the viewer and it poses a problematic that concerns mostly the present. It is concerned with the identity of the subject in the new millennium in relation to the space that the subject inhabits. Through the exploration of the spaces the filmmaker poses questions, without giving answers, and he underlies the need to create meaning out of the past and to contemplate on our relationship with space and the human identity and activity. In contrast, although *Bio-graphy*, articulates a more abstract rhetoric, it is more politically oriented, given the spirit of the 1970s, which is the period of its creation. The references to Guy Debord and the final image of the film with the raised fist of the Left characterize the film’s politics, without needing the filmmaker to make explicit political suggestions. Finally, what the two films underline is the necessity of memory in the modern world and the need for the subject to determinate the circumstances in which s/he lives. Both films achieve a monumentality, in the strict sense of the term, not only because of the themes that discuss and have in common but also because of their form.

REFERENCES

- Agamben, G. (2002), *Moyens Sans Fins, Notes Sur la Politique*, Paris : Rivages.
- Agamben, G. (2007), *Infancy and History, On the Destruction of Experience*, London: Verso.
- Agamben, G. (2009), *The Signature of all things, On Method*, New York: Zone books.
- Agamben, G. (2015), *The Use of Bodies, Homo Sacer IV, 2*, California: Stanford University Press.
- Bataille, G. (1992), *Theory of Religion*, New York: Zone Books.
- Benjamin, W. (2002), *The Arcades Project*, London: Harvard University Press.
- Benjamin, W. (2000), *Œuvres II*, Paris : Gallimard.
- Chion, M. (1994), *Audio-Vision, Sound on Screen*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Debord, G. (2006), *Œuvres*, Paris: Gallimard.

- Deleuze, G. (1990), *The Logic of Sense*, London: The Athlone Press.
- Eisenstein, S. (1986), "Word and Image" in *The Film Sense*, London and Boston: Faber and Faber, p.p. 2-68.
- Foucault, M. (1989), *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, London: Routledge.
- Zafeiropoulou, S. (1998), "Aesthetics and Industrial Equipment", in Christina Agranioti (ed.), *Istorikos Biomhchanikos Exoplismos sthn Ellada /Historical Industrial Civilization in Greece*, Athens: EMP/Odusseas, p.p. 41-51.
- Logothetis, H. (2013), *E Aesthetich Anthropologia ston Kinematographo toy Thanassi Rentzi/ The Aesthetic Anthropology in the Cinema of Thanassis Rentzis*, Athens: Quinta.
- Michaud, P.-A. (2007), *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, New York: Zone books.
- Panayotopoulos, N.E. (1974), "Gia th Vio-graphia/ On Bio-graphy" in *Bio-graphy, A Film by Thanssis Rentzis*, Athens: Exantas, p.p 9-17.
- Rentzis, T. (1980), "Ena Isterographo gia to Chroma sthn Bio-graphia/ Post-scriptum on colour in Bio-graphy", *Film*, 01:07, p.p. 71-75.
- Rentzis, T. (2017), *Eikasmatoptasia h to eikastiko-afigmatiko blemma dia tou nohtikou montage sthn Vio-Grafia/ Virtuality or the the visual-narrative gaze through the virtual montage in Bio-Graphy*, Unpublished text.
- Scholem, G. (1974), *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York: Schocken Books.
- Siniosoglu, N. (2017), *Allokotos Ellinismos/Uncanny Hellenism*, Athens: Kichle.