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FROM TRANCE TO MYTH

In Los Angeles in 1947, while Kenneth Anger was editing *Fireworks*, Gregory Markopoulos began to shoot *Psyche*, the first film of his trilogy, *Du Sang de la Volupté et de la Mort*. He was at the time a film student at the University of Southern California, and he had made films before. A short and rather charming version of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, which he made when he was twelve, was exhibited briefly in the mid-1960s, and an autobiographical outline from 1954 says, "Upon entering Woodward High School I began making some very bad 8mm films. . . . During my second semester at USC I made a short film in experimental form based on Hudson's very handsome tale, *Green Mansions*." Markopoulos' filmography nevertheless begins with *Psyche*, his first 16mm film and the first film he put into distribution.

A few months before he began shooting *Psyche*, he had assisted Curtis Harrington in making his first film, *Fragment of Seeking*, where a young man pursues an elusive blonde girl through a maze of corridors reminiscent of Maya Deren's pursuit of the mirror-faced figure in *Meshes of the Afternoon*, to discover in the end that she is a skeleton with a wig. In this pure example of the trance film, Harrington wanted to play the young man himself. He enlisted Markopoulos to help him. Markopoulos has always scrupulously declined any credit for the film: "I photographed the film, exactly following his directions. Everything was done by him: all I did was to push the camera starter. Curtis took all the exposures." Three years later, when Markopoulos was to make his own version of the psycho-dramatic trance film, *Swain*, he would enlist the aid of his friend Robert Freeman to do precisely the same for him.

Psyche has no parallel among early American avant-garde films. For

Markopoulos is at once the film-maker most attracted to narrative of his generation (he has adapted several literary works to film) and one of the most radical narrative film-makers in the world. He took such extreme liberties with Pierre Louys's unfinished novella, *Psyche*, that one would hardly recognize it as the source of his film. Nevertheless, he took just enough to give his film a cohesion and a tension that make it a continually fascinating work.

In *Psyche*, as in his later, narrative-based films, Markopoulos dispenses with speech without giving up the intricacy normally found only in the talking film; although he absolutely relies upon visual means—his soundtracks, even in the rare cases where words are involved, never explain the visual dimension—he does not simplify. Three interrelated characteristics define Markopoulos' style: color, rhythm, and atemporal construction. Color, rather than story, has been the emotional vehicle of his films. Although his control of rhythm and of atemporal construction has gradually evolved from *Psyche* in 1947 to *Gammelion* in 1968, his handling of color has been sure and consistent from the beginning. As Markopoulos made more films, the complexity and scope of his rhythmic invention increased. In his later films, his shots are either much shorter or much longer than in his early works; his rhythm becomes progressively more independent of the subject. What I have called his atemporal construction can be more amply described as a dialectic of time, where the shots of a film sometimes fall into a temporal order and sometimes cluster together in a plastic unity divorced from sequence and causality. As Markopoulos' art developed, the distinction between imagination and actuality dissolved completely and several "shimmering threads" of continuity began to appear simultaneously, sometimes interweaving into a fine net. Nevertheless, the extent to which *Psyche* forecasts one whole line of Markopoulos' evolution, as the second film of his trilogy, *Lysis*, does another, is extraordinary.

Psyche opens with a statue of Mercury pointing upward and toward a field as if beckoning the spectator into the film. A door opens on a figure shrouded in black, whom the film-maker has called both "a specter" and "the unknown" in his paraphrases of the film. There are blossoms scattered on the floor, and a hand offers flowers to the figure. This specter will reappear at crucial moments in the film. In a lecture delivered in Athens in 1955, the film-maker publicly rejoiced in the ambiguities of his film: "A hand offers flowers. The film spectator may assume what he will. The shrouded figure may be Psyche."[1]

The sudden intrusion of a hand-held shot looking down at walking legs introduces the meeting of the male and female protagonists. They pass each other in the street; they then turn around and begin to talk and laugh familiarly. "Why should the words be supplied?" the film-maker asks. "The film spectator, thrust into the film by the film creator, supplies the thoughts and feelings which make up the dialogue."

Markopoulos frames his shots just behind the head, or over the shoulder of the listener, so that with the intercutting of faces in this unheard conversation, he maintains a view of both speaker and hearer and a sense of their relative distances from the camera. Throughout *Psyche* the framing and moving of the camera are dynamic and interesting. Markopoulos paid particular attention to compositions-in-depth, with details both in the foreground and background of his image. His awareness of the composition of the individual frame was the most acute of the avant-gardists of his generation, save perhaps for Broughton's in *Mother's Day*. Markopoulos' life-long devotion to Josef von Sternberg, who taught at USC while Markopoulos was studying there, centers perhaps upon that director's attention to the frame. Yet the photography of *Psyche*, especially in its play of depth and movement, seems to owe more to Welles's *Citizen Kane* than to anything in von Sternberg.

Together the couple climb an outdoor staircase to a terrace from which he points out a house and in particular a window with its blinds half-closed. As she stares up at the window the wind blows her hair. In his lecture, Markopoulos speculates about this moment: "It is, perhaps, Eros being born again from the West Wind? Who knows? Let us not forget, though, that the West Wind is of a jealous nature." Then, just as suddenly as the man's legs appeared, Psyche is seen standing on a beach dressed in a long white gown; then, kneeling near the camera, she moulds a mound of sand, seaweed, and rocks, until a shadow falls across it and her. She looks terrified as a male hand touches and twists her hair as the wind had a few moments earlier in the film. Into the montage of this caressing and terror the film-maker weaves his first atemporal construction, mixing flashbacks in a stream of consciousness that suggests the whole beach episode was a dream, a fantasy, or perhaps an archetypal memory triggered by the movement of wind through her hair.

Immediately after the shot of his hand touching her hair comes an image of his face, not on the beach but on the terrace before the window. Their exchange of looks, hers from the beach and his from the terrace, initiates a brief recapitulation in which two strains—one of their meeting,

climbing the stairs, and pointing to the window, the other of Psyche's run, building the mound, and the sea itself—are both scrambled out of sequence and intermeshed in checkerboard fashion. For a moment this abstract cascade of images halts with both figures again on the terrace. Then the first reappearance of the specter serves as a buffer shot in a transition to a new scene.

This montage of abstraction and recapitulation is an essential of the Markopoulos style. In *Psyche* there is another, longer, such sequence at the end of the film. Similar constructions are crucial to the structures of the later films *Swain*, *Serenity*, and *Twice a Man*. In the films made after that, particularly *Himself as Herself*, *The Illiac Passion*, and *Gammelion*, temporal order becomes so ambivalent that recapitulation ceases to be meaningful in the world Markopoulos evokes. Yet even in the late works brief clusters of images are used to execute the secondary function they have here: making a graceful and abstract transition of scenes.

At the end of the section just described, after the shot of the specter, we find ourselves in Psyche's bedroom. A slow dolly toward her sleeping on her couch is interrupted twice by images of the hero in a costume suggesting his transformation into Eros. In this dream he embraces her. When he caresses her black gloves, she laughs in her sleep and awakens.

She examines a marble bust, which Markopoulos tells us is of "Psyche herself," touches her face, then kisses the statue. She spins around gaily, the twirl of her dress intercut six times with a hummingbird buzzing at a flower. Her happiness seems to extend through the beginning of the next scene in which we find her at the end of her twirl. She and the man are walking hand in hand through an exotic garden, smiling, and giving each other flowers to smell. When they come to a hilltop, she walks forward to the camera, while he remains behind, framed over her shoulder in the background. Her gaiety is gone. A shot at the level of their knees shows him approach her from the distance. The wind has caught her hair. When he touches her shoulder and gently sniffs at her hair, she turns to him in fear and recoils back out of his reach, falling out of frame. The music of the soundtrack stops. We are plunged into a blue-tinted superimposition of waves, seagulls, the rays of the sun, palm leaves, and two indistinct figures on a beach. Markopoulos described this elusive episode in his article, "Psyche's Search for the Herb of Invulnerability": "The erotic nightmare continues. A hand is placed on Psyche's shoulder. She shudders, for she is in that other country and it is cold. The fingers of Eros are like frost. Unsuspectedly the film spectator and the silver screen, bathed in blue, be-

come submerged with Psyche upon the borderline of her fears."

From a pure blue the color switches to orange. It is sunset as she regains consciousness. As she breaks away from the man, the specter approaches the camera and the image is flooded with an orange sunburst. The startling transition to blue and its resolution in orange are examples of the emotional use of color in this, as well as in all of Markopoulos' films. The orchestration of color is by no means limited to solid screen dominants; it operates in his choice of setting and clothing for his characters as well. For example, in the scene immediately following the appearance of the specter, Psyche descends the steps of a church wearing black; she is obviously very upset. She momentarily and vainly seeks comfort and steadiness by caressing the base of a black metal lamp-post. She reads a letter, crumples it, and thrusts it into the camera lens. The sudden change of scene, the omission of what led her to the church or of what happened in it, and the withholding of the text of the letter, make this the most enigmatic and elliptical episode in the film. But the choice of color and the heroine's reaction to the letter provide enough information for us to assimilate the scene into the highly ambiguous context of the film as it has been evolving.

The reader of Louys's novel will have an advantage over the untutored spectator of the film at this point, although that advantage might just as easily be called a hindrance within the logic of the film experience. In the novelette, Psyche asks her priest's advice about whether or not she should accept her lover's invitation to visit his estate. He tells her not to go, but she goes nonetheless. It would be futile here to embark upon a discussion of the relative merits of psychological clarity (the novella) and poetic ambiguity (the film). The essence of Markopoulos' skill as an abstract, narrative film-maker resides in his ability to present events in a richly ambiguous context without sacrificing the illusion that there is a fictive scheme, however elusive, holding them together. This discretion is the aesthetic justification for his cavalier treatment of literary works.

Returning to the film itself, at the end of a transitional passage, we see Psyche in red in a Japanese garden, before a red bridge. She seems very happy. As she strikes a large gong, there is a brief montage of a path, the gong, an eye, an ear, and the closing of a door. A passage of darkness ends with a moving shot of a row of candles being snuffed out by an unknown hand. The camera moves in on Psyche naked on a bed. The bare legs of a man come forward. As they embrace we see clouds shift from blue, green, yellow, to red. An image of water dripping into a pool suggests the climax

of the lovemaking. A stone shoulder and a stone foot are intercut with the final images of their embrace. A clock appears. Then the man, dressed in a suit, appears smoking in the Japanese garden. An oriental or Negro woman walks through the garden, smiling at him. He smiles back at the woman; then he tosses his cigar into the pool (the camera set-up is the same as at the end of their lovemaking) and follows her. The specter appears again. Psyche, lonely in a white dress, presses her face to the large window of a hallway. At night, in the next shot, there is a man, perhaps the hero, sitting at supper.

In the final montage the specter nods its head; then, in quick succession, images appear of an old lady who glared at the couple when they first met, the laughing pair, their kiss at the train station, statues, Psyche naked in bed, the laughing pair. After a final image of the specter, the door closes, and the film ends.

Markopoulos made *Psyche* under conditions of incredible austerity. He borrowed a camera, used money that was sent for his school tuition to buy film, and when it came to editing, he put the film together with Scotch tape because he had no rewinding or splicing equipment. That he had to shoot only 1200 feet of film for a work that runs 835 feet when edited is another testament to his economy.

In the years since the film was made he has offered many and even contradictory clues to the film's interpretation. The lecture of 1955 which I have quoted frequently here returns again and again to an Orphic interpretation of the film as a rite of initiation both for its heroine and for the film spectator. In reference to Psyche's dream he writes, "Day and Night no longer exist. Like Hercules, Psyche has begun her search for the *herb of invulnerability*. In order to discover this *herb of invulnerability*, she must journey to another country, she leaves behind her body, and now travels boldly into the unknown with the film spectator." About the meeting at the train station, he adds, "Psyche actually believes that through Eros she will be able to discover the *herb of invulnerability*." He implies her search was in vain. The climax of his lecture is deliberately obscure: "Swiftly, with the furious symbols of the stone foot, the stone shoulders, the film reveals the theme of *Psyche* and rushes like the *psyche* towards its completion. Events appear in retrospect, until once again the spectator realizes that he has returned to the original point of departure." The most evocative, and perhaps the most helpful idea of Markopoulos' article, appears in the second paragraph: "Color is Eros."[2]

An earlier document from 1952 again raises both useful and baffling

points. Like the later lecture, he couches his analysis in ambivalent phrases:

> The specter throughout is what Pierre Louys meant by "the unknown," perhaps it is the young film creator, who did not know the film's final outcome, similar to Jung writing one of his books and spending years deciding exactly what he said. Or it may be the author Louys, who never finished the book *Psyche*. But I would like to think that it is all three of the above. Fourthly, it is the clue to my cutting technique and film construction.

In elaboration on the last point, Markopoulos recently wrote that the veiled figure in *Psyche* functioned like a fade-out.

Other statements in this text are more puzzling, such as one that the film is "a study in stream-of-consciousness narration of a *Lesbian Soul*, who in abandoning her own *psyche* destroys herself." He asks us to notice how in the train station episode the color is drab before they kiss and with the meeting of their lips becomes bright.

Markopoulos' notes equate the film *Psyche* with the human psyche. The source of Markopoulos' distinctive montage, and hence of the structure of his films, is not a literary tradition of stream-of-consciousness writing, but the source shared with that tradition, his study of how the mind thinks. The ultimate aspiration of Markopoulos' form has been the mimesis of the human mind. In different degrees and different ways this might be the aim of the American avant-garde film-maker in general. In that case the realm of Markopoulos' distinction has been the investigation of memory, personal and archetypal. His films lay bare a way of visionary thinking affirming the perpetual present tense, in which causality and linear time are secondary discontinuous modes of experience.

After completing *Psyche*, Markopoulos left Los Angeles for his home town, Toledo, Ohio, where he completed his trilogy. He called ***Lysis*** "a study in stream-of-consciousness poetry of a lost, wandering, homosexual soul. There is a symbolic birth in the opening scene; the wanderings; the reincarnations of one soul into a still greater soul, until in the final cycle the soul of immortality or of UNDERSTANDING is given to the wanderer; we see him going toward the far city."[3]

The film's title comes from a Platonic dialogue on the nature of friendship. Set to Honegger and Claudel's oratorio, *Dance of Death*, the film begins with a rapid succession of static images (Chinese figurines before a tapestry, a photograph of mother and child, a painting), which may be

read as the thoughts of the artist as he stands by a river. After a second burst of mementos, in which the juxtaposition of childhood photographs with delicate toys and laces suggests a formative period under strong feminine influences, the rhythm of the film evens out to an almost metronomic pace. A series of tableaux form the body of the film: an ugly woman pops from one tree to another in jump cuts; a young man lying in bed rubs his feet against streamers; the artist, played by the film-maker himself, wanders through a graveyard; a nude man, hanging by his wrists, is stabbed in the back; a Negress plays with a swan; a boy in toga jumps, through stop photography, among the columns of a neo-classical building; another youth sleeps in a tree. At the end of this series the artist follows railroad tracks away from the camera.

Markopoulos' note for ***Charmides*** includes a virtually complete synopsis of that brief film:

> A concluding cinematic statement to the film trilogy. By no means, though, the final statement of the film author on the major theme employed in the trilogy. The locale is a midwestern college campus. A lone youth on the campus green is scrutinizing a tiny ceramic horse whose one leg is broken. Next a walk into the woods, but where? Nowhere. Two coffins, one right after the other, appear, a superimposed cemetery, a young child running to her grandmother by a grave. The trilogy is at an end. The spectator's mind keeps probing . . . what?[4]

The title again comes from Plato. In this particular dialogue Socrates inquires who is the most beautiful boy in Athens, and then gives his views on temperance. If the toga-clad youth and the allusion to the classical myth of Leda and the Swan gave *Lysis* a tenuous connection to its Platonic source, the relation between *Charmides* and the original dialogue is even more ephemeral. The three parts of the trilogy *Du Sang de la Volupté et de la Mort* show a diminishing intensity. The play of nearness and depth, the orchestration of colors, and the complexity of montage which distinguished *Psyche* are gone in the two subsequent films, and the formal invention of *Lysis* and *Charmides* was not to mature in Markopoulos' work until the mid-sixties.

The film-maker edited his film in the process of shooting. The only splices occur at the joining of the one hundred-foot rolls of film which fit into the camera he borrowed from Carter Wolff, in gratitude for which he dedicated the whole trilogy to him. The experimental eschewing of post-photography editing and the idea that a film could be shot and con-

structed at the same time show Markopoulos' commitment to cinema as an instrument of discovery.

Throughout his entire career, even when he prepared elaborate scenarios, he approached his materials with an extraordinary freedom from preconception, so that the first complete print returned from the laboratory would always be a revelation to him. Furthermore, no Markopoulos film has ended up looking like its original outline. Even when he undertook the commission of recording the play of his friend George Christopoulos, *The Death of Hemingway*, he completely restructured it in the editing (which he tends to do sequentially, from the beginning of the film to the end, without revisions) by incorporating in that color film a black-and-white ice floe, which happened to be left over at the editing table from Adolfas Mekas' *Hallelujah the Hills*.

It was in 1950, again in Toledo, that he made his version of the trance film, ***Swain***. His collaborator Robert C. Freeman, Jr., chose the locations and mechanically operated the camera, as Markopoulos himself had once done for Curtis Harrington.

Swain is a film in three parts or movements with an elusive frame. It is part of what was to have been a much longer film called either *Rain Black, My Love*, or *Poème Onerique*, and it is a remarkably oblique distillation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's first novel, *Fanshawe*. The transformation is so drastic that no one could guess the source. In the first part of the film, the protagonist, played by the film-maker, rushes through the woods, climbs an embankment, discovers and then enters a mysterious house. In the middle section, a woman appears. Following the path of the hero, she pursues him through the house and subsequently disturbs his reverie in a greenhouse. As before, he flees from her. In the final part of the film, they meet briefly and awkwardly before a climactic recapitulation of images. The frame of the film appears piece-meal, first in the opening shots of the hero studying himself in a mirror. It is forecasted, though we cannot realize it at the time, in a series of architectural shots in the middle of the film, and again in a brief cut very late in the work, from the hero discovering a woman's stocking to a different view of him, dressed in pajamas, ripping up decorations or flowers. At the end of the film these elements are resolved: the hero in his pajamas opens his curtains, which disguise a windowless brick wall; the architectural details were those of an insane asylum, and we see his pursuer leaving it after paying him a visit. Like *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, the whole of *Swain* is framed within the mind of the inmate of an institution, but unlike

Weine's film, there is no great overhanging question. We can infer that the patient is institutionalized only because of his refusal to accept a sexuality he finds foreign and gross and which society insists upon as a norm.

In an essay which Markopoulos has called "perhaps the only perceptive article concerning my work," Donald Weinstein says, "*Swain* is an evocation in gentle images and visual symbols of a subconscious rejection of the stereotyped masculine role that society and women insist upon. This rejection takes the form of escape: flight in fantasy from what is visually conceived as crude, repelling sexuality into the purity of creative activity, of nature, and of individual personality left inviolate."[5]

Swain is rich in metaphors. In the run of the hero through the woods and up a hill, quick interjections, first of a worm crawling on the wing of a dead bird, then of an alligator trying to mount another in a mud wallow, provide the first suggestion that his running might be a flight. The precise nature of that flight is further hinted at by his encounter with the marble head of a satyr on the road to the house. Inside the house, the woman encounters the hero sleeping on a bed. As she leans over to kiss him, the montage shows a black bug crawling within an exquisite white flower, a metaphor which also forecasts the scene in the greenhouse. Later the image is reversed: the bug crawls back out of the center of the flower when the heroine continues her pursuit into his floral sanctuary. The last in this series of animal and statuary metaphors is the image of a ram gargoyle intercut repeatedly with the heroine during her meeting with the hero in the last part of the film.

As in *Psyche*, **costume** plays an important function in *Swain*. The hero's elegant robe in the opening shots at the mirror and his pajamas at the end are the uniforms of his narcissistic imprisonment. The woman first appears in a white wedding dress, following the trail of the hero. When she encounters him in the house, he is asleep in a military uniform. At their final encounter, both are dressed in suits, suggestive in this context of the formality and the strain of their meeting. Sudden changes of clothes give the linearity of the film an elliptical texture. The hero alternates between a gray and a brown suit in the final section without apparent purpose.

A simple contrast is made throughout the film between the handsomeness of the hero and the homeliness of the heroine. Their comparative sensitivities are measured by his gentleness and curiosity in the greenhouse and her rough brushing of her hand over the flowers as she rushes through in pursuit of him. But as Weinstein has observed, there are

visions which are hers, not his. When he first looks in the window of the house, he sees only his own image in the glass. Looking in the same window, she sees the face of a senile man—another forecast of the climax. "Mirrors," Weinstein writes, "rather than windows are [the hero's] interest."

At the end of the film, while the heroine and hero are talking before a small colonnade, a rapid recapitulation moves the film to its conclusion. Forty very quick shots, ranging from three to eight frames long and each, on the average, on the screen for a quarter of a second, recapitulate the whole film, mixing shots of the hero from various points in the film with buildings, statues, and the gargoyle. This spectacular summary of the film changes to images of the hero confined and of the heroine walking away from the institution.

In terms of its speed and scope of images, the clustered recapitulation of *Swain* is a great advance over that of *Psyche*, where the shots were for the most part a second and a half in length (the shortest being twenty-seven frames, or just over a second). The image cluster does not figure in the construction of the two short films Markopoulos completed in the early 1950s, *Flowers of Asphalt* (1951) and *Eldora* (1952). Between 1954 and 1961, he worked in Greece, Italy, and America on *Serenity*. The film had only a half-dozen screenings before it was stolen by its producer and disappeared. I did not see it and do not know the pace or form of the final montage, where the film is said to end "with a clip from every scene in the picture following each other in lightning sequence."[6] Thus the technique of *Swain* extends through *Serenity* to *Twice a Man*.

Swain, with the title *Rain Black, My Love*, ran for about an hour when Markopoulos left in 1950 for his first trip to Europe. When he returned, Brandon Films offered to distribute it if he would cut out half an hour. Markopoulos removed a long section in which the hero wandered within the house, which Amos Vogel of Cinema 16 once considered the most exciting scene in the film. Unfortunately, he destroyed what he removed.

Swain was not so much based on Hawthorne's *Fanshawe* as a project that originally began as an adaptation of *Fanshawe*. Hawthorne's novel describes the adventures of three college students—two men, Walcott and Fanshawe, and a girl, Ellen Langton. The first radical alteration of Hawthorne came when Markopoulos decided to combine the two males. In an interesting article on the film, "From *Fanshawe* to *Swain*," he admits it was the early description of Fanshawe that inspired him, not the plot: "a ruler in a world of his own and independent of the beings that surrounded him." That article continues with a set of quotations from the journal of Freeman, his collaborator, who writes: "Early we dropped this and gradually most traces of Fanshawe."[7] Unlike *Psyche*, *Swain* does not yield a literal paraphrase when compared closely with the novel; Hawthorne illuminates none of the difficulties in the film, although one might have wished for an insight into the enigmatic meeting of pursuer and pursued near the end of the film.

Nor does the film-maker use a novelistic form or novelistic intricacy in *Swain*. The complexity of *Psyche* derives, in part at least, from the artist's desire to condense the events of a novella into a short cinematic form and create a network of associations in portraying the affair of two active participants. *Swain*, on the other hand, is a trance film. Its hero is passive; its development is linear, with elaboration by metaphor rather than by the interaction of events. The trance film is by nature an erotic quest, and its quest figure is either a dreamer or in a mad or visionary state. In *Swain* the search through the imagination for a sexual identity takes a negative form; flight replaces quest, and the film resolves itself in narcissism and in a portrait of society's imprisonment of the self.

Twice a Man loosely follows the myth of Hippolytus. In Euripides' play, his stepmother, Phaedra, tries to seduce him. When he spurns her, she falsely accuses him to his father, by whose curse he is driven into the sea and drowned. In the opening of Frazer's monumental study, *The Golden Bough*, we find the subsequent legend that through the aid of the goddess Artemis and the physician Asclepius, he was resurrected and lived immortally in the sacred grove of Nemi. Frazer says he was called "Twice Born" there, and it is from this legend that Markopoulos adapts his title.

In the film, Paul, a contemporary Hippolytus, makes a visit to his mother's house after crossing New York Harbor to Staten Island. As he wanders through the house, mixing memory with prophecy, he envisions scenes of his life with his mother and with a male lover, whom the film-maker calls the Artist-Physician, a representation of the creative self.

The montage of the film interweaves the thoughts and memories of four people—Paul, his lover, and two versions of his mother, one as a young woman, the other very old. The point of reference shifts from one *persona* to another in an interlocking set of framing structures. The specificity of the reference point looms at one time and fades away at others. Paul exists both before and after his death; once, when entering the house, he sees glimpses of the young men come to mourn his death.

The film opens with an imageless screen. For a long time, it is totally

black and only the sound of rain is heard. The first shot we see is of the Artist-Physician sitting sadly on the deck of the slowly moving ferry. One could view the film as if it had evolved entirely through his mind. The opening shot is interrupted six times by split-second flashes of the New York skyline. The interruptions grow longer and more frequent until the skyline is the dominant shot, and a single very short echo of the first shot punctuates it. This form of cinematic enjambment distinguishes the change of shots throughout most of *Twice a Man*. It offers the film-maker nearly infinite variations for telegraphing his next image and for sustaining the overtones of the previous one. To the eye quickly trained by a few minutes of watching *Twice a Man*, a direct cut, without forecast or recall, is a visual shock.

A second shot of the Artist-Physician on the ferry prepares us, through its interruptions, for the introduction of the hero, Paul. In the first elaborated sequence of the film, Paul seems to contemplate suicide. He stands at the very edge of a roof looking down. His isolation is emphasized by a rhythmic intercutting of his ascent to the roof by climbing a ladder, as seen through a slowly following zoom lens mixed with shots of the movements of dancers at the party he has just left, shot from above. The Artist-Physician, his lover, appears on the roof, framed in the distance behind Paul. He places his hand on Paul's shoulder in a shimmering montage of intercut close-ups of hand, shoulder, and lips. In his article on the production and the structure of the film, "The Driving Rhythm," Markopoulos refers to this episode as the earliest meeting of Paul and his lover.

Paul, too, leaves Manhattan and embarks on the ferry. His trip moves through day and night simultaneously, combining sunset, moonlight, and dawn, and includes such shadowy images of other passengers that it distinctly suggests Hades and the crossing of the Styx. Within the course of the crossing several brief episodes occur, for the reference has shifted now from the mind of the lover to that of Paul. The interspersed events are social gatherings—two unresolved scenes with different girls and a group listening to a man recite—of which Markopoulous writes, "These are the nameless who are without destination." Their sudden occurrence electrifies the texture of *Twice a Man*, and the spectator is continually led to expect new developments and to retain in his mind fragmentary scenes for a possible resolution later in the film.

After the ferry lands, Markopoulos gives us another scene of rhythmic and intellectual counterpoint before Paul goes to his mother's house. In the episode in question, he cuts between Paul sitting among giant marble

slabs of a public monument and his lover pacing on the marble terrace of a museum as the sun fades and shines again in synchronization with his movements. The montage contrasts the calm waiting of one and the anxiety of the other, but still more interesting is the atemporal juxtaposition of the two scenes.

The house of Paul's mother is the climax in a line of mysterious or enchanted houses in Markopoulos' work—the house which the couple in *Psyche* point at and observe, the house in *Swain*, whose exploration the film-maker unfortunately removed—and in other early American avant-garde films. The ultimate source and most fabulous example of this motif was the Hotel des Folies-Dramatiques in Jean Cocteau's *Le Sang d'un Poète*. As Paul wanders through the rooms, scenes with his mother as a young woman inside the house and scenes with his lover outside take shape. The mother as an aged woman remains throughout *Twice a Man* an indistinct figure. She incarnates the spirit of memory and of loss which pervades the film.

Alternately, the house is empty and inhabited. As Paul first enters he sees, almost as if they were mirages, two young men crying. They are his mourners. He calls out, and we see quick flashes of the young and the old mother and hear a human voice for the first time in the film. Although we might expect to hear the hero at this point, each time he calls it is a young woman's voice that calls his name.

In the early digressions from the action in the house, Markopoulos gives us three scenes of the Frazerian Hippolytus in inverted order. In one we see him ritually cut a lock of his hair while kneeling on a city street and "offer" it in a mailbox. The second, through a breath-taking cut from the purple and rose interior of the living room to the yellows and oranges of a forest in autumn, shows us Paul caressing the trunk of a tree, presumably in his sacred grove.

The last of the three, which by chronology would be the first, shows his rebirth in the heavens. This episode is fused with the interior action, while the other two had been sudden ruptures. The reincarnation comes at the climax of a scene in the kitchen where the young mother seems entranced. She speaks through billows of smoke. The words that she speaks on the soundtrack are physically fragmented by the film-maker's cutting into the sound tape and deleting parts of the utterance: "Our air/ sent thro . . . sun's golden/ por . . . and descended/ invi . . . move . . . lea. . . ." The words "through," "pores," "invisible," "movement," and "leaves" have been fragmented. First we see brief flashes of his navel (two frames)

and of the Milky Way (two frames). Very gradually the length of these shots increases, and they vary so that in superimposition Paul unravels from a fetal position in the Milky Way and in Saturn. His chest and back appear in the disk of the sun, then his head. The images of astronomical rebirth are scattered through the scenes of the mother in smoke, so that they appear as illustrations of her prophecy.

Before the scene of the hero's heavenly regeneration, the voice of the mother had asked him why he kept seeing the Physician. The remaining digressions, or framed episodes as he wanders through the house, are, as if in response to the question, a review of the encounters of the two men meeting in the rain, walking together, and visiting the classical sculpture gallery of a museum.

Within the house the numerous murals, richly painted walls, velvet and elegant wooden and straw furniture, golden cupids in relief, and other decorations of a visually lush nature form the background for the hero's wanderings. The transitions to bright exterior scenes or to subdued interiors, such as his lover's blue apartment, create a dynamic visual counterpoint.

At one point we see Paul asleep in a chair. A book, *Prince of Darkness*, lies in his hand. What follows may be his dream: his young mother in a white wedding dress hovers over his dead body, which is stretched out on a rock beside the sea. Part of her dress covers his naked loins. At the point when her lips touch his face in a kiss, the film-maker cuts to an extreme close-up of a white cat licking his chops. The death by sea is one specific reference to the imagery of Euripides. On the other hand, the presence of his mother in her wedding dress recalls the pursuer of *Swain*. In the next scene, we find Paul stretched out on a bed, stroking the cat; a further indication that the previous image was his dream. Yet in *Twice a Man*, past, present, and future, dream and waking, are so fused that they dissolve as distinct categories of experience or thought; they exist within the perspectives of the film as flavors of experience.

From the scene in the bedroom to the end of the film, the center of reference oscillates between the Artist-Physician and the two mothers. The old one appears more frequently now. At one point both mothers even appear on the bed with Paul.

That shot is interrupted by a spectacular recapitulation of seventy-seven shots, each only two frames long, of clips from the beginning of the film up to that point, more or less in the order they had first appeared. The entire passage blazes by in less than seven seconds. This sudden explosion

of images initiates the drive toward the climax of the film. At the end of it, the montage slows down for a moment, briefly reorienting itself in the house as Paul comes out of a bath, but within a few seconds the scene shifts again to the corridor of an opera house or theater, where Paul sits at the top of a staircase, his lover beside him. As the lover's finger traces the line of the hero's profile, from his forehead past his nose, a second recapitulation occurs, this time of thirty two-frame elements in a somewhat more scrambled order. His lover takes his hand. While a new sequence from the mother's house begins to assert itself, we see Paul simultaneously standing up and collapsing to the ground, as bits of each movement are intercut.

Back in the house, the bathroom episode is intercut with a complex scene of the two mothers, seen individually, and reflected through a mirror, reaching out to touch the hero's cheek as he shaves. The scene gradually shifts from the mirror to a final location, an empty ballroom. Here we see Paul dancing by himself, with a superimposition of shimmering crystals as if from a chandelier above his head. His lover is reflected in the glass of a mirror column. He dances until he collapses. His lover comes to kiss him, as his mother had done. As he lowers his head toward the protagonist, whom we assume to be dead now, his face completely intermeshes with his in superimposition, so that we see two people but one face. He kisses him. When the Artist-Physician lifts his head away, the image of the hero's face cracks, like broken glass, and the pieces fall away leaving a white screen, where at first there had been only black.

Markopoulos conceived *Twice a Man* as a film with synchronous dialogue. Throughout the film we see people talking, but cannot hear them. In *Film Culture* 29 he wrote up some of his notes from the shooting in the form of a tentative script. Here is part of the scene of the two mothers by the mirror:

> Cut to the young Olympia and her son seen through a magnificent mirror. We see the son's face and Olympia is a hazy image in the background. We hear her ask:
>
> Why do you keep seeing the physician?
>
> The son, Paul, in the same composition, turns and looks towards the sun's rays—a long ray glistens to one edge of the film frame, and we hear him say:
>
> When you get to like a man's face,
> There's nothing you can do about it.
>
> The scene changes to the aged mother before the mirror. Now she is seen through her mirror. Slowly, exquisitely, in profile she raises her hand as if

to touch Paul—he falls into frame. In the mirrored shot we see his face covered with shaving cream. The aged mother's hand touches his face, and draws away. Cut to the young Olympia. There is cream on her fingertips. Paul is by her side. Slowly she goes to touch his lips. As she turns her hand away towards the rays of the sun, Paul grabs it, and as if in a dream, tilts it toward the camera lens. He holds her outstretched hand, saying:

Mother!

Cut to Olympia, the younger. She raises her hand. Cut to the aged Olympia. She is alone before the mirror, her hand held high in the air. There is no one there.[8]

He edited the film sequentially from beginning to end without revision. Markopoulos had the cosmic rebirth scene printed first "to see if it would work." Then he ordered the whole silent print. By this time, he had decided to discard synchronous sound and use the voices of Paul, his young mother, and perhaps his lover. When his protagonist failed to show up for a recording session, he decided to use only the single woman's voice. Finally he hit upon the idea of fragmenting her words. In "The Driving Rhythm" he describes this process more dramatically: "Originally dialogue was to be utilized, until I decided in favor of the more powerful motif of thunder."[9]

He does use several claps of thunder in the film, as well as bursts of rain, and the sound of shattering, cracking ice in the final image. He also placed snatches from the third movement of Tchaikovsky's *Manfred* at several points in the film. Earlier in *Psyche*, he balanced silence and sound by stopping the music for the blue reverie; in *Swain* he keeps the film silent until the hero approaches the house, and then the music begins.

The words of *Twice a Man* begin as Paul enters his mother's house. They continue through the various scenes in the house as if it were haunted by fragmentary echoes. Rather than making the words meaningless, the fragmentation creates new ambiguities and an aural tension. The ear rapidly reconstructs the broken words.

Markopoulos completed *Twice a Man* in 1963, just in time to enter the third Experimental Film Festival at Knokke-le-Zoute in Belgium, where he won a $2000 prize. The film came at the high point of the mythopoeic development within the American avant-garde. Brakhage had finished and was exhibiting the first two sections of *Dog Star Man* by then; Jack Smith was still exhibiting the year-old *Flaming Creatures*; *Scorpio Rising* appeared almost simultaneously with *Twice a Man*. As I have written elsewhere, the shift from trance film to the mythopoeic film can be viewed

as a shift from a cinema rooted in Freudian psychology to one related to Jung. I do not mean to imply that these film-makers all read Freud at one time, then read Jung and changed their films. The shift from an interest in dreams and the erotic quest for the self to mythopoeia, and a wider interest in the collective unconscious occurred in the films of a number of major and independent artists. The mythopoeic film need not evoke a classical myth or compare different myths, although it may do either or both. Mythopoeia is the making of a new myth or the reinterpretation of an old one. In the world of myth, which all these films share, imagination triumphs over actuality, and this imagination is unqualified by the perimeters of dream or delusion, as it is qualified in the trance film.

So strong was the impulse to create a mythic cinema that all the artists I have just mentioned immediately plunged into new myth films after completing the films named. Brakhage continued to work on the three remaining sections of *Dog Star Man* until 1966; Jack Smith shot *Normal Love;* Anger sought to repeat *Scorpio Rising*'s form in *Kustom Kar Kommandos*. Finally Markopoulos, now confident in the maturity of his form, began the Prometheus project which he had wanted to make since his U.S.C. days.

During the making of *Twice a Man*, Markopoulos began publishing his most important theoretical articles. He had written and published on film throughout his career, but it has been the articles since the early 1960s that embody his mature vision of cinema; he has tacitly recognized this himself by including nothing written before 1962 in his collected articles, *Chaos Phaos* (Temenos, Florence, 1971).

In "Towards a New Narrative Film Form," he discusses the montage system of *Twice a Man*. After criticizing the conventional sound cinema for its neglect of the "film frame" and for its failure to achieve a "poetic unity" of word and picture, he speaks of his newly-created editing style:

> I propose a new narrative form through the fusion of the classic montage technique with a more abstract system. This system involves the use of short film phrases which evoke thought-images. Each film phrase is composed of certain select frames that are similar to the harmonic units found in musical composition. The film phrases establish ulterior relationships among themselves; in classic montage technique there is a constant reference to the continuing shot; in my abstract system there is a complex of different frames being repeated.[10]

Earlier in the article he had rejected the use of filters, anamorphic lenses, laboratory effects, and even costumes as significant elements in

the formal organization of films. Thus he grounds his polemic in the central theoretical dialectic of the American avant-garde film. Deren, as we have shown in the second chapter, sought the essence of cinema in the very mechanics of the filmic materials and equipment. She defined the art of cinema as the manipulation of space and time as it was recorded by the camera. For her, fast and slow motion and the use of negative were legitimate tactics, while graphic imagery and anamorphosis were not, because the former were tied directly to the conventions of the camera and the latter were expressionistic or surrealistic distortions of its function.

Although he did not elaborate his opposition to this position in theoretical articles, Sidney Peterson in practice made a cinema in which the representation of space was purely a function of the will and the imagination of the film-maker rather than a given of the lens. Polemically, Stan Brakhage became the theoretical expositor of this position, as we shall see in the next two chapters. For Brakhage, indeed, one primary responsibility of the film-maker as an artist is to overcome imaginatively the built-in predispositions of the equipment as it is standardized and manufactured.

The argument about the ontological status of the spatial image in cinema has animated most of the theory of the American avant-garde. For instance, when James Broughton wrote, in his note to *Mother's Day*, that "from the beginning I accepted the camera's sharply accurate eye as a value rather than a limitation . . . I decided to make things happen head on, happen within the frame, without vagueness, without camera trickery . . ." he aligned himself with Deren's position and implicitly distinguished himself from his former collaborator, Peterson. Anger never took a public stance on this issue, but his films, through *Scorpio Rising*, depend upon a spatiality that originates with Deren. In fact his most Deren-like construction, *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*, marks a turning point in his practice. In the original version from 1954, montage and the correlation of offscreen vectors perform the whole work of synthesis; but when he re-edited it in 1966, the elaborate use of superimposition introduced a new type of synthesis, within the spatial dimension, which he continued to explore in his later film, *Invocation of My Demon Brother*.

Markopoulos has always focused his energies on the reconstruction of time in his films, and has tended to accept the givenness of cinematic space even when his work on single-frame montage within the camera led him to superimposition. His theoretical exploration of the operation

of the single frame begins with the investigation of its representation of psychological complexities and subtleties, but it quickly moves beyond that. In the later essays he assigns it an hieroglyphic significance which puts into question the authority of cinema's representation of movement itself. For instance, when he introduces the category of the "Invisible" into his theories, in "The Event Within the Camera," he is reviving, consciously or not, the theory of the *Interval* of Dziga Vertov. Vertov called attention to the differential between film shots (not frames) as the most significant element of montage. He was, of course, arguing with Eisenstein's concept of synthesis between shots. Markopoulos would have had access to Vertov's speculations on the *Interval* when a collection of Vertov's writings was printed in *Film Culture* while *Twice a Man* was being shot.

Unfortunately, Markopoulos' theoretical formulations have not received the degree of attention they deserve, even from the critics most sympathetic to his films. This is due in part to their elliptical and often hyperbolic style. A considerable hermeneutic effort is often required to isolate his insights and set them within their proper context in the history of film theory.

The evolution of his thought on the function of the single frame corresponds to a change of its function within his work. In *Twice a Man* the single-frame montage grows out of the recapitulatory passages in *Psyche*, *Swain*, and *Serenity*. Since the whole film is inscribed within the memory of the Artist-Physician, the single-frame clusters tend to represent complexes of his remembered past, while the variations which mark the transitions between shots can be interpreted as proleptic movements in the mind's narration to itself of its own history. In the later films this psychological representationalism disappears. In *Himself as Herself* and *The Illiac Passion* this method of montage will undercut the illusion of the temporal autonomy of a scene or the narrative autonomy of a single mythological episode. In *Gammelion*, Markopoulos abolishes the "continuing shot" as a matrix for the single-frame cluster and invests totally in the "hieroglyphic" power of the static frames. In these later works the film-maker continues to see cinematic structures as a model for the human mind but he no longer accords a privileged place to the category of memory within that model.

Among the polemic reductions common to the film-makers of the American avant-garde, although not universally true of them, a new attention to the single frame, the one twenty-fourth of a second unit of cine-

matic experience, is foremost. As early as the mid-1950s, Peter Kubelka, in Austria and then unknown to any of the American film-makers, was affirming the dominance of the single frame in his films and in his utterances on cinema. Markopoulos is correct when he writes that for the commercial film-maker the fact that cinema is a rapid succession of still pictures "has been understood only as a photographic necessity." The illusionism of conventional cinema depends upon the obscuring and erasing of the single frame to heighten the novelistic identification of the viewer with the characters filmed.

In forthcoming discussions of Stan Brakhage, Peter Kubelka, Robert Breer, and Hollis Frampton, the question of the approach to the single frame will be considered more fully. What is interesting and unique in Markopoulos' formulation is not so much the attention to the frame that he shares with others, but his attack on the classical notion of the "shot," which must be defined as a given camera take whose length is determined by the number of its frames before the interruption of a splice. In its place, he substitutes the more elaborate notion of the "complex of frames," or the conventional shot together with its echoes of the previous images and its forecast of the next. In Markopoulos' system the change of elements would not occur at a precisely defined instant—the appearance of a splice—but at the more diffused moment when the previously interrupting image becomes the dominant one. Thus he replaces the concept of editing as a "collision" of images, to use Eisenstein's phrase, with the more musical notion of a sequence of accented shots. He need not give up the sense and power of "collision" montage in so doing, since it remains one option of the joining of frames in the interruptions or the meeting of the dominant with its minor images.

Markopoulos continues his essay with a discussion of the visibility of the single frame. Then he enumerates its advantages:

> Limitless change in rhythm, or the sudden interjection of alliteration, metaphor, symbol, or any discontinuity introduced into the structure of the motion picture, makes possible the arrest of the film spectator's attention, as the film-maker gradually convinces the spectator not only to see and to hear, but to participate in what is being created on the screen on both the narrative and introspective levels.[11]

In "The Filmmaker as the Physician of the Future," he suggests a spiritual force within the avant-garde film movement tantamount to its having curative effects: "the New American Cinema Film-maker is a

physician of images, the first of his kind." The characterization of the lover in *Twice a Man* as the Artist-Physician comes to mean more in this context than the fusion of the idea of the film-maker with the myth of Asclepius. "From film to film," Markopoulos writes, emphasizing the continuous process of the artist's work, "the creative film-maker as opposed to the commercial film-maker, offers to the creative film spectator (a recently realized species) with each film conception that murmuring vibration which after a time, from film work to film work (I think of Brakhage, of Harrington, of Stroheim, of [Jack] Smith) becomes the congeries which reveal this self-same film spectator's Being."[12] He offers two instructions for the audience in viewing his films (this essay was read as a lecture before a screening of *Through a Lens Brightly: Mark Turbyfill* and *Himself as Herself*):

> A—Do not attempt to single out any one film frame or series of film frames passing across the screen, and thus neglect others. Such abstraction would lead to a total misunderstanding of either film.
>
> B—To view the film as image composed to image, regardless if it is only a single frame. It is the Invisible that the film spectator must seek. This Invisible will lead him forwards and backwards and ultimately towards the Future: the future in this case is the understanding of the films.[13]

The application of his confidence in the montage of *Twice a Man* came with the making of *The Illiac Passion* and *Himself as Herself*. Although the latter film was made and edited after the former, it was printed and released first. Before either film was released, the film-maker finished and showed *Galaxie*, a collection of thirty portraits, and *Ming Green*, a study of his apartment.

In *Himself as Herself* Markopoulos offers a tour-de-force concentration for one hour of film on a single character, who manifests alternately a male and a female *persona*. Perhaps the limitation to a single figure was a reaction to the handling of almost thirty characters in *The Illiac Passion*.

Himself as Herself takes Balzac's *Seraphita* as its source, reducing the five characters to one and transferring the action from the Norwegian coast to an elegant quarter of Boston. Balzac's novel, his most occult work, describes the union of Seraphita and Seraphitus in a single body, feminine and masculine, and his eventual ascension into a Swedenborgian heaven.

The film proceeds statically with some thirteen major scenes, or loca-

tions, edited in the same way as *Twice a Man*, but without any recapitulation or framing devices. It opens with the protagonist dressed in a tuxedo, as he is through most of the film, and operating an electron microscope. The repeated and puzzling alternation of a beautiful fan and a gilded human foot punctuates the scene. The interior scenes of *Himself as Herself* are as elegant as those of *Twice a Man*, but they suggest much greater wealth. We first see the hero inside, beside a fireplace, where he finds a ring and reaches out as if to embrace someone who isn't there. Our first view of his female manifestation occurs next when his intercut ascent and descent in a hand-operated elevator shows him alternately in his tuxedo and in a woman's sari. He lightly touches stuffed birds and cowers in fear as a live parrot looks on. Then, in a central and revealing scene, the protagonist crawls undressed under a fur piece to sleep. A mysterious hand strokes his hair; unidentified lips kiss him.

The transition from one episode to another is gradual. The use of single frames prolongs the change of scene which by contrast had been relatively rapid in *Twice a Man*. The occasional choice of close-ups, such as the foot and the fan near the beginning, as the central shots of a scene, further separates the significant actions of the protagonist and gives the film a static quality despite the flickering of its montage. A fine glass is broken on the rug, and a bobby pin appears in one such scene of close-ups. Furthermore, the sensual attention to objects by both the camera and the protagonist reinforces the stasis. He sits next to a glass cabinet in which a wedding dress (again!) is displayed. He is handling a woman's white shoe.

Markopoulos makes more use of the off-screen look and gesture as a force unifying the different locations in this film than in any other. The protagonist finishes writing a letter, signs it with the pressing of a flower on the page, and reaches out off-screen, as if to the single-frame echoes of his female self in the previous scene in the garden. In the climax of the film, both male and female *personae* seem to come together and embrace on a staircase. Markopoulos achieves this while maintaining a sense of their individuality by very rapidly intercutting from the masculine to the feminine as they move toward the same point on the staircase. A final scene brings the hero to a religious ecstasy as he falls to his knees, beating his heart and apparently crying, in New York's Trinity Church. The *Gloria* of Poulenc, heard before and during the titles, accompanies this scene.

Robert Lamberton has found sources for the images of *Himself as Herself* in Balzac's novel, from which he offered the following excerpts:

> It always hurts me to see you use the monstrous wisdom [science] with which you strip all human things of the properties conferred on them by time, space and form, to consider them mathematically under I don't know what pure expression, just as geometry acts upon bodies whose solidity it abstracts from them.
>
> . . .
>
> Seraphitus undid his sable-lined cloak, rolled himself in it, and slept. . . . To see him thus, wrapped in his usual garment, which bore as much resemblance to a woman's peignoir as to a man's coat, it was impossible not to see the delicate feet which hung below as those of a girl . . . but the profile of his head must have seemed the expression of human force brought to its highest degree.[14]

In a note for the Film-Makers Cooperative catalogue, the film-maker refers to the theme of the film:

> The film's point of departure and inspiration is from de Balzac's famous novel *Seraphita*. While de Balzac's novel depicts with grave Swedenborgian overtones the ecstasies of a hermaphrodite, Markopoulos' own *Himself as Herself* depicts the tragic situation, typical to the day, and one might say especially of the American scene of that black-tie Athenianism that is prevalent on the Eastern Seaboard. Indeed, a denial of one's self. *Himself as Herself* begins in the laboratory which contains an electronic microscope at Boston University and ends at Trinity Church.[15]

And in an interview with Jonas Mekas he says, "The clue to the whole film is the tuxedo that the protagonist wears. You see, it's a certain strata of society. That's my first social comment." *Himself as Herself* is Markopoulos' most mysterious film. These clues hardly clarify the mystery. They refer, I believe, to a level of the film which can be paraphrased as the spiritual crisis and revelation of a man who at the beginning lived and thought superficially. The film moves from science (the electron microscope) to religion (the church), and its turning point is a scene of ambiguous love-making (the fur piece). Markopoulos once contrasted the revelations of American avant-garde films with those of science, saying that the viewing of certain films "becomes an inevitable religious act: containing all that the Sciences, various as they are, very often do not contain, and often as not do not communicate to the average spectator."

The "clue" to *Himself as Herself*, despite what its maker has said, is not the tuxedo or the social status of its hero. Its mystery is more fundamental than that and rests in the end upon Markopoulos' unique conception of the relation of cinema to literature. When asked, for what must have been the thousandth time, about the relation of his films to the French *nouveau roman* by the Voice of America he answered:

> I don't think it's the film-makers that are being inspired by the latest gimmickry of the French novel, such as Robbe-Grillet and company. I think what is happening is the image which, you know, for thousands of years was trying to replace the use of the word has done that, and the novelists just have no way out. They have to imitate film. . . . You have to go all the way back, you know, to hieroglyphics. We're back at that interesting stage, and I think that's where vital communication can come into effect. . . . A film is made up of a series of frames. These frames can be used to a psychological purpose. I mean, literally, the single frame—and they do not become subliminal. You can actually see a single frame on the screen. It's just a matter of, you know, even the theatre-going film spectator becoming accustomed to this sort of thing. But, you see, in my kind of work, in about . . . two seconds, I can release how many frames and reveal an emotion, an idea, or anything you can think of.[16]

In his references to hieroglyphics, Markopoulos is suggesting that picture narrative ontologically and historically precedes verbal narrative and that the invention of the motion picture camera made possible a revival of this ancient and fundamental form of expression. The novel, then, would be a secondary attempt to translate cinema, even before its mechanical invention, into words.

In *Himself as Herself* Markopoulos has relied more than in any other film on the "hieroglyphics" of cinematic imagery to assume the burden of narrative. Its companion piece, *Eros, O Basileus* (Eros, The King), was made shortly after *Himself as Herself* and released at the same time. Although the film-maker has never formally coupled the two films, they complement one another. *Eros, O Basileus,* too, has only one character, who appears naked in most of the film's nine tableaux. His sexual presence and confidence on the screen are very much the opposite of the introspective androgyne of the other film. The objects he touches—books and paintings—are the icons of the creative spirit; there is also a camera and rewinding equipment in the film. When the protagonist slowly strikes the pose of Eros and shoots imaginary arrows from an invisible bow, one feels not so much the presence of the god as a Mannerist tension between the naked youth and his role, a tension reminiscent of the grinning nude San Giovanni Battista of Caravaggio.

Before he shot *Himself as Herself* Markopoulos said it would be edited in the camera. Later he changed his mind. *Eros, O Basileus* was constructed while shooting with a small amount of editing afterwards. The formal innovation of that film for Markopoulos is its punctuation by

fade-outs made in the camera, not as terminal points, but as phrase-markers within a single camera set-up or shot.

The film-maker resurrected the discipline of making films without post-editing in 1966 when he shot his collection of portraits, *Galaxie*. The previous year Stan Brakhage had completed and screened a series of portraits of his family, other artists, poets, and ending with a portrait of the film-maker Jonas Mekas—all in 8mm. That collection of portraits, called *15 Song Traits,* was incorporated within his serial film, *Songs*. Somewhat earlier Andy Warhol had put together two sets of short facial portraits—one take to a person—called *13 Most Beautiful Boys,* and *13 Most Beautiful Girls;* he had also done a feature-length, full-size portrait of Henry Geldzahler, the art critic and curator, smoking a cigar. Of the forty portraits Markopoulos shot, thirty were incorporated into his finished film. A year later he did a single portrait, about twice as long as the others, called *Through a Lens Brightly: Mark Turbyfill* (1967).

In making the portraits his method had been to select an object or an activity with personal significance to the subject. Carefully watching the frame-counter on his camera, he would expose a number of takes of one image interspersed with blackness, achieved by simply covering the lens for as long as he wanted. He would then rewind the film and expose the units of the next view, detail, or object. In the finished portraits, each of which lasts for three and a half minutes, or the time of projecting 100 feet of film, each image has its own metrical pace, which alternates with or is superimposed upon the others. By gradually increasing the length of an image from a single frame to a long take, and then diminishing it correspondingly, he could create an effect similar to the editing junctures in *Twice a Man* and *Himself as Herself*. Three factors determine that a film made this way will have a texture more muted and less marked by "collision" montage than the post-edited films. First, a certain calculus of change is inherent in the method; its limits are controllable, but as the control gets more and more precise, the subject must become more static and the intervals more regular. Second, the inevitable superimposition of junctures makes for softer transitions. Third, the method from the first implies a stationary subject, while it absolutely excludes such radical collisions as change of film stock, mixing black and white with color, and switching to negative, all of which Markopoulos has done at one time or another in his career.

In *Ming Green* (1966) Markopoulos gives us a portrait of his apartment. Through the window we see trees. After a short moment of black-

ness we see the trees again, with still other trees superimposed. Then a view looking down at the garden below is intercut with blackness (eleven frames of the garden eight times, with a variation of nine to thirteen frames of black in each interval), giving the impression of a winking image. On the eighth view of the garden the trees reappear in superimposition.

Within the room, a close-up of the buds of a flower in a vase quickly fades in and out. A bright red chair at a typing table alternates in flashes, at times in superimposition, with books on the window sill. Then several views of the window appear at the same time in a flood of light. A composition with record jackets, two red chairs, and a lamp alternates with a rose. The rhythm varies in overlapping waves from long holds to quick flashes. Several compositions of the full room show the ming green walls from which the film takes its title. A bookshelf, a red drum, and an orange drape "wink" in syncopation on the screen. Then a different bookshelf appears with superimpositions of the plaster texture of the wall and a close-up of a casually thrown white shirt. Finally, over recurrent flashes of the orange drape, a framed photograph of the film-maker's father appears. The white shirt appears in eight-frame-long flashes over a dim photograph of the film-maker's mother. The superimpositions end; there is a clear hold on this photograph. When it goes out of focus, the film ends.

Ming Green is silent until the final photographs. At that point Wagnerian music can be heard. The orchestration of color, the controlled metrics of the flashing and superimposing images, and the sureness of the compositions, make this film one of Markopoulos' most successful achievements of in-the-camera editing. With unusual structural control he builds the intensity of his images from the opening with trees and garden, through the pivotal introduction of the red chair, to a sentimental but in no way maudlin climax with the shirt and photographs.

In his article, "The Event Inside the Camera," he reminds us of the technical achievements of George Méliès and D. W. Griffith in creating effects within the camera. He lists the advantages of this method of working:

> The event inside the camera leads, according to the technical and aesthetic skills of the filmmaker, to: (a) editing; editing directly in the camera; (b) creating effects, filmic nuances, with the camera itself. The advantages of editing in the camera have economic and aesthetic values; for by editing in the camera one must be more and more exact; the idea and the image more concentrated; the result a more brilliant appeal to the mind and dormant senses.[17]

As Markopoulos indicates, one cannot discount the economic advantage of editing within the camera. By comparison to any other genre, school, or period of film-making, the new American film artist creates his works with an astounding economy. Still, if one is faced with the burden of paying laboratories to print films (and Markopoulos had his splicing for *Twice a Man, Himself as Herself*, and *The Illiac Passion* done in a laboratory according to his precise indications on the frame) and after the expense of raw materials, developing, and renewal of equipment, the financial burden on an individual without outside aid is enormous and often defeating. Thus for the prolific artist, editing within the camera has a decided financial advantage; particularly for Markopoulos, who had first used this method in *Lysis* and *Charmides*. He revived this method after editing *The Illiac Passion* and while that film was sitting in the laboratory awaiting splicing and a complex form of printing that would have cost tens of thousands of dollars if he had not reformulated his conception and relinquished his desire for certain special effects.

The Illiac Passion culminates fifteen years of successive projects for a film based on the Prometheus myth. The first script the film-maker prepared for it appeared as early as *Swain*. At the beginning of that film the hero picks up the script in a field and dances with it in fast motion, just before the intercutting of the dead bird and mating alligators.

In a text written around 1949, he speaks of his aspiration toward "my ultimate universal films":

> "Prometheus" would be in color. In the opening scene a figure of "Prom" would appear alone in a great valley and there he would symbolically nail himself to the "world" by raising his hands to the sky—many figures would come to see him—Poseidon, Io, Hermes, etc. "Prometheus" scenes would be filmed in one locale—the various other sections would be filmed in various countries. Io in Egypt, Hermes as a medieval figure in England, etc. All of these would be spliced together and we would have a truly "universal" film. There would be no dialogue except at the end, when the camera sinks into the ocean. Prometheus will say, "Behold me, I am wronged." Not only would he say it in English but other voices would be heard as if echoes in other languages.[18]

The title goes back to the mid-1950s, to the section title of his long poem, *Angelica Clamores*. There it was spelled "The Iliac Passion." It re-

fers, of course, to the iliac region of the body where the liver is found, the source of Prometheus' "passion" and the object of Zeus' torture.

His note for the New York premiere of the film will be the starting point of my analysis:

> *The Illiac Passion* is the odyssean journey of a film-maker amongst the characters of his imagination. That is to say, Markopoulos used as his point of departure the Greek myths, universal in essence, even to the present day, and from these was inspired to discover the various personalities inherent in these mythic themes from everyday life. For his characterizations he selected the exciting personalities which were in the scene, circa 1964-66 in New York City.
>
> *The Illiac Passion* retells the passions of one man, the figure who crosses Brooklyn Bridge at the beginning of the film, comes to the Mother Muse, then proceeds to the forest in the tradition of, say, all heroes, perhaps, Zarathustra, and there under an apple tree communes with his selves. These selves are recreated by some twenty-five characters; and each character or set of characters relate a complete situation. Yet each situation is summed up as the very Being of the only protagonist in the true sense of the word, the hero of *The Illiac Passion*, who is without name. It is as if the characters were the very molecules which made up the protagonist. It should be noted that Markopoulos continues his intricate and basic compliment to classic editing, in his further use of the single frame, as an equally important component in editing: better yet, in telling his story to the New Cinema Film Spectator. As for the narrative: it is taken from the translation of the play *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus. Not only is the text read by Markopoulos in a highly original manner which enhances the theme of the film, but he also, at the same time, frequently appears in the film himself. Always urging the film to its natural conclusion. It is like Andre Gide in his most famous novel, *Les Faux Monnayeurs*, reviewing his characters.
>
> Richard Beauvais—*Prometheus*; David Beauvais—*his conscience*; Robert Alvarez—*Narcissus*; Taylor Mead—*the Demon or Sprite*; Sheila Gary—*Echo*; Mrs. Peggy Murray—*The Muse*; Tom Venturi—*Hyacinthus*; Tally Brown—*Venus*; Kenneth King—*Adonis*; Margot Brier—*Pandora*; Paul Swan—*Zeus*; Wayne Weber—*Icarus*; Carlos Anduze—*Hades*; Stella Dundas—*The Moon Goddess*; John Dowd—*Endymion*; Philip Merker—*Apollo*; Beverly Grant—*Persephone and Demeter*; Clara Hoover—*Io*; Gregory Battcock—*Phaeton*; and the Film-maker Markopoulos.[19]

Like Anger in his notes for *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*, Markopoulos has several figures in his film whom he does not identify in this note. This may be only marginally successful because, again like Anger, he has sometimes changed the identification from one god to another during the shooting or editing. Finally, in a film with so many characters

flashing on the screen in simultaneous groupings, it is not easy to be confident one has correctly identified each figure every time he appears.

One should say at this point that the sorting of the pantheon is not essential to the experiencing of the film. In fact, as the note suggests, the fusion of the gods is more significant than their separate characters, and the form of the film promotes that fusion. Nevertheless, in a descriptive analysis, the individual identifications save lengthy paraphrases and follow the plan of the film-maker.

The whole film is rounded by an image of an iron fence at dusk, which appears at the very beginning and the very end. The permutation of characters in between is the most complex of Markopoulos' career and one of the most elaborate in all of the cinema.

Like *Himself as Herself*, *The Illiac Passion* has no recapitulation; instead, Markopoulos created several brief scenes in which sets of figures come together in the same frame although their myths are not related. One such scene in the middle of the film shows several characters crossing paths in Central Park; another shows Pandora, Orpheus, the Muse, Adonis, Phaeton, and others doing a slow, circular dance.

For the most part the film presents each myth individually, sometimes intercut with one or two others. In waves all the way through the film, parts of several myths come together, then separate. The action of the myths is continually punctuated by images ranging from very brief to whole episodes of Prometheus and his counterpart, his naked, writhing "Conscience." To a lesser but still great extent, it is also punctuated by the recurrence of the Muse or Sprite (a composite for Markopoulos of Aeschylus' Force and Might); and finally the film-maker makes sudden incursions into the film: disentangling Persephone's scarves; taking a light-meter reading on a grand staircase; filming in a broken mirror; or tapping a lamp to give it a pendular swing.

After the initial shot of the fence at dusk, a series of fades introduces many of the pantheon as they walk through New York's Central Park in a montage that uses imagery interwoven from all the seasons. In flashes, the costumed Persephone runs through the landscape with flowing crepe scarves. Markopoulos decided to introduce the fades after he saw how they worked in *Eros, O Basileus*. The fading continues to the end of the film and assumes a formal role almost equal to that of the single-frame transitions of images.

On the soundtrack we hear the film-maker's voice reading from Thoreau's translation of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*. He selects words for

repetition as he reads, making the literal sense of the text thoroughly abstract. Markopoulos' rendering begins: "I, I, I, I contemplate far bounding earth, earth, earth, earth unapproached, approached, unapproached, approached solitude, solitude unapproached, solitude, to the unapproached solitude." The primitive, incantatory quality suggests the mysterious reception of the gift of language which Prometheus gave to man more than the complex word formation and periphrasis of Aeschylus' style.

A figure crosses Brooklyn Bridge, whose "adamantine structure" of stone and cable suggests to the film-maker the binding of Prometheus. In a transition of quickly intercut flames (recalling another of the god's gifts to man, fire) the figure encounters the Muse, a middle-aged, benevolent-looking lady posed on a rock. Prometheus himself appears in a three-piece suit and assumes a position as if bound to a tree, strikingly reminiscent of the Proustian "Prometheus" in Max Ernst's collage novel, *La Femme 100 Têtes*. The Sprite, or Demon, the most humorous character in the whole of Markopoulos' work, appears on a rock, hooting and gesturing; then he descends to taunt Prometheus at his tree.

Some of the characters of *The Illiac Passion* dress conventionally, while others assume exotic costumes or appear primarily in the nude. The costumes, such as the Sprite's streaming red tassels, Icarus' mosaic wings with encrusted film strips, Poseidon's silver suit, or Io's hieratic dress, were created by Jerome Hiler in close collaboration with the film-maker.

I do not have the space in this book to begin an extensive analysis of *The Illiac Passion*. As an index of its complexity, I shall simply enumerate the mythic allusions in the order in which they occur in the film and the montage of parallels, anticipations, and returns by which they are joined.

The first of the myths to be elaborated is that of Narcissus. Here, as with most but not all of the other myths, the presentation is schematic, with narrative dependence on both explicable and inexplicable objects. Narcissus is seen in a bath. A bronze bug appears on his body. He studies his face in a mirror of mica. Narcissus shares his cinematic time with another young man (Hyacinthus?), who is first seen eating an egg. For a few moments the rush of myths runs together; there are flashes of Orpheus, Persephone, and the Muse within the continuation of Narcissus' self-contemplation. Persephone and Hades making love gives way quickly to the introduction of Daedalus, an artisan with a goatee, who first appears smoking. The last stage of the Narcissus myth occurs with a superimposition of several views of his nude form dancing and writhing against a background of newspapers. The presentation of his body here, as elsewhere in the film with other figures, conforms to the postures of mannerist painting.

Between scenes of Daedalus in his workshop and a somewhat later scene of him collapsing in the snow as he looks up and off-screen, presumably first at the flight and then at the fall of his son Icarus—between these fragments there are flashes of the female figure Markopoulos calls Echo, wandering in a yard among piles of desks and chairs, and of the Sprite confronting Prometheus. After Daedalus' scene in the snow, we see the body of Icarus lying on a beach as a storm whips up the waves in breakers and foam. Another juncture of myths brings Daedalus, Icarus, Persephone, and Hyacinthus, who is throwing a pencil instead of the traditional quoits, together with a figure of Eros stretching red ribbons like a bow. Out of this cluster, scenes of Icarus come to dominate. We see his wings; then an apple is rolled over his naked body.

The image of the apple found its way into the film through an interesting set of associations, rather typical of the aesthetic transition from literary to cinematic in Markopoulos's work. A friend told him of the Propertius poem (*Book I, Elegy* 3) in which the drunken poet returns home to find his mistress asleep. He playfully rolls an apple over her torso until she awakens and immediately begins to criticize him. In Markopoulos' use of this image, the apple is sensually rolled over the body of Icarus by the film-maker himself. In "The Adamantine Bridge" he miscredits it to Catullus. Before beginning almost every film, Markopoulos undertakes an extensive reading, spends weeks in the library, researching sources, versions, analyses. Perhaps he never did so as extensively as for *The Illiac Passion*. An alchemy such as the incident above suggests has been the typical fruit of his researches.

Like *Twice a Man*, *The Illiac Passion* has scenes shot for synchronous sound and later used silently. The nude figure of Prometheus' Conscience writhes and speaks, punctuated in the film by the droll image of the Sprite swaying and hollering at the top of a tree. At this pivot, which is the psychological as well as the temporal center of the film, the figure of Prometheus is replaced more and more by that of his Conscience. We see no more of Narcissus, Daedalus, Icarus, Echo, Hyacinthus, or Apollo. New figures are introduced, and some who briefly appeared before, such as Persephone, are elaborated later.

Switching between her earthly role as Demeter and her subterranean guise as Persephone (Markopoulos compounded the two), the twin goddess appears superimposed under a fountain. Dressed in brown, she wan-

ders through a forest, makes love with Hades, and feels her way through the mist. Her unearthly movements continue into and through the several scenes of Aphrodite and Adonis, which are the longest in the film. Aphrodite, with obese sensuality, was inspired, Markopoulos has said, by Shakespeare's version of the myth in his poem "Venus and Adonis." Adonis is by contrast a thin youth. We see them in bed, in a quarry where Adonis is sun-bathing, performing a ritual marriage in an empty church, and smoking a hookah. When she kisses him, the film-maker intercuts the colored flares that occur at the end of a roll of film from overexposure to the light. It is in the midst of their story that we see several figures as if dancing on the beach—the Muse, Pandora, Adonis, Orpheus, Eurydice, and Phaeton. The conclusion of Aphrodite and Adonis coincides with the end of Persephone/Demeter's appearance on the screen.

The recurring image of Prometheus' Conscience at this phase suggests a painting by Magritte: fire is superimposed as if in the foreground and deep through the outline of his nude back a street receding into the night can be seen. Briefly, an aged Zeus accepts a cup from the naked Ganymede. Poseidon, played by Andy Warhol before a backdrop of two of his large flower paintings, furiously pumps an Exercycle and talks to the naked Conscience of Prometheus on the floor in front of him.

With the introduction of his hieratic Io, the film moves toward its end. The scenes of Orpheus and Eurydice are intercut with her unheard speech. Orpheus walks out of a tavern in a panic. He and Eurydice appear walking as if out of Hades, with black veils over their heads; when they prematurely remove them, she disappears from his embrace in a series of jump cuts. Io and the Conscience of Prometheus meet at a lighthouse in the winter, while Orpheus and Eurydice appear in a kitchen eating melon. A hand rests on the fence of the opening shot; when it leaves the frame, the film comes to its end.

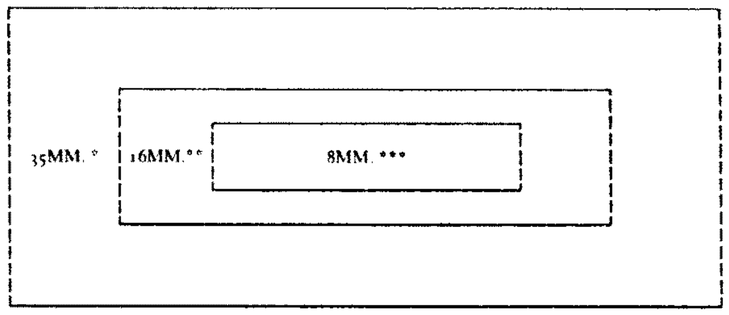
The Illiac Passion is clearly Markopoulos' most ambitious achievement so far. To sustain and control such a large and diversified form he called upon all his powers of formal invention. Numerous plans, techniques, and strategies were tested and discarded. Early in the planning of the film he wrote:

> *Prometheus*, that project of many years, seems to be growing heavily. I think of making each of the characters in *Prometheus*, creating them out of single frames. The Character of *Prometheus* would appear at such a rapid pace that the audience might sit through the filmic movement of the character for an hour and not realize it! Then would follow the movements of the other characters; and finally the final movement, the emotions, interrelated of all the characters, that is the theme, visually, cinematic with sound, would be expounded.[20]

During the first weeks of shooting, he collected leaves, rocks, objects from the scene, which he planned to collage into the film stock as Stan Brakhage had done in *Mothlight* and *Dog Star Man: Part Two*, but the plan was dropped.

All through the editing he wanted to print the film on 35mm with different screen portions assigned to Prometheus and to the myths around him. This plan underwent its own variations, and I do not know what version of it the laboratory was instructed to execute. In a letter of June 26, 1964, long before the shooting was complete, the film-maker drew me the following plan for the printing which will suggest the complexity and expense involved:

> Now, I am so pressed for time; but I do want to show you a diagram of how my film will look on the screen; and hope you will be able to figure it out. Here it is:



* The 35mm. will at times appear as single or longer shots: sometimes superimposed. Both color and black and white. At times the 16mm. frame will be enlarged: and at times the 8mm. frame which will make it grainy: the 8mm.
** The 16mm. will be in color and the heart of the film with the greatest variations occurring in that section of the screen.
*** The 8mm. will be like the most inner consciousness which probably is unreachable.

The laboratory told the film-maker that his plan would cost tens of thousands of dollars to realize. He tried to raise the money. Then, at the end of 1967, just before the fourth Experimental Film Festival in Belgium, he returned to the United States—he had left after making *Eros, O Basileus*—and very quickly got the footage into shape for conventional printing. In this last-minute change, a film that went to the laboratory originally as three hours long came out lasting ninety minutes. The difference between the film as now seen and the staggeringly ambitious montage that went to the laboratory in 1966 will always be a mystery.

When Markopoulos obliquely writes in his introductory note that "each situation is summed up as the very Being of the only protagonist in the true sense of the word," he identifies himself with the Romantic tradition. That tradition, as I have already stated, and will continue to amplify throughout this book, dominates the aesthetics of the American avant-garde film. It manifests itself differently in the works of the different artists (Anger and Markopoulos are less reluctant than others to embrace Romanticism without reconstruction), but it manifests itself persistently. As Harold Bloom observed of the twentieth century tradition in English poetry, "every fresh attempt of Modernism to go beyond Romanticism ends in the gradual realization of the Romantic's continued priority."[21] Even in his approach to Hellenic mythology Markopoulos follows the strategies the Romantics found most successful; *The Illiac Passion* has less in common with Aeschylus' play than with Shelley's vision in *Prometheus Unbound*, particularly with the symphonic rapture of its apocalyptic final act. Shelley too saw Prometheus as the unitary man tormented by his divided selves, and he interiorized the Aeschylean conflict. In Markopoulos' modernist inflection of the Romantic Prometheus, the whole struggle with Zeus (Aeschylus' one surviving play of the trilogy; Shelley's First Act) disappears. In the vacuum he has supplied a new dimension: the relation of the film-maker to his film.

The Romantic posture did not rest well with Maya Deren. She struggled against it in her own films, and labeled them "classicist." She opposed Anger and later Brakhage when his work veered toward Romanticism. Her contact with Markopoulos, though, was minimal. When she was exercising some limited power through the Creative Film Foundation, he was in Greece making *Serenity*; she died soon after he returned. They, more than any other two film-makers I shall be considering, attacked the dialectics of narrative time in their films. Maya Deren devoted meticulous attention to the subversion of sequence and space-time connections. But ultimately her aesthetic of transfiguration is an affirmation of the presence of time in its logical order. Markopoulos cut the Gordian knot; the simultaneity of his narrative structures abolished or at least scorned time. The first approach is a modified classicism, the other purely Romantic.

Harold Bloom has used Hart Crane's phrase "the visionary company" to call attention to the confidence of the major English Romantic poets of the nineteenth century that they were the inspired prophets of a tradition stemming from the Bible and continuing through Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton to them. In Markopoulos' article, "Projection of Thoughts," one finds the following enthusiastic appraisals of the role of the American avant-garde film-maker:

> The film-makers who have banded together under the auspices of the Film-Makers Cooperative have each and every one of them that divine fire and confidence which the ancient Greeks called *thrasos*. . . . Furthermore, I would venture to suggest that only in the motion picture as an art form and that means immediate and continued experimentation/creativity/inspiration while at work, is there the truth of what we enjoy naming Reality.[22]

Taken as a whole his writings are a continued ode to the process of film-making in itself and as a source of revelation to the film-maker. Everything else, from the audience's comprehension to the finished work of film, is secondary. One is reminded of Sidney Peterson's "A Note on Comedy in the Experimental Film," when Markopoulos describes in "Institutions, Customs, Landscapes" the projection of the rushes of *The Illiac Passion* for the cast and friends:

> This festival of the emotions of the spirit, of the mind, continues week after week. Its intention is perhaps Dionysian, and the New Cinema Spectators enter as freely into it as the ancients entered into their Dionysian revels. . . . Often, when the footage projected is a work in progress . . . the New Cinema Spectator finds himself engulfed with a divine frenzy or enthusiasm, sharing the excitement of the film-maker himself.[23]

The first film Markopoulos made after moving to Europe was *Bliss* (1967), a study of a small church in Greece, edited in the camera and reminiscent of *Ming Green*. His next was a long film, *Gammelion* (1968). That film had its origin in a visit he paid to Caresse Crosby's castle Roccasinabalda in 1961 while *Serenity* was being shown as part of a New American Cinema Exposition at the Spoleto Festival. Soon after visiting the castle he prepared a meticulous adaptation of Julien Gracq's novel, *Le Château d'Argol*, with Roccasinabalda in mind. Like all of his detailed scripts, of which this was the last, the film was never made. He wanted to shoot *Eros, O Basileus* there before he settled upon a New York loft as the location.

In the summer of 1967, with enough money for only two rolls of color film—about seven minutes' running time—he went to the castle and shot very short shots of the surrounding valley, the walls, ramparts, gardens, corridors, a red spot that might be blood on the road, the frescoes, etc. Out of that material he made one of his major works.

Gammelion takes its title from the ancient Greek month suitable for marriage. The film is structured by a thousand slow fades in and out of black-and-white leader, which extend its time to 59 minutes. As the screen slowly winks from light to dark and the reverse, tiny shots—sometimes just single frames—are interjected of the landscape around the castle. We gradually move closer and closer to it, view the corridors, glimpse a nude couple in the frescoes, and then move outside again. On the soundtrack there are snatches of music from Roussel, the sound of horses' hooves over pavement, and the voice of the film-maker reading Rilke's lines: "To be loved means to be consumed. To love means to radiate with inexhaustible light. To be loved is to pass away, to love is to endure."

The impression of *Gammelion* is unlike that of any other Markopoulos film. It is at once terribly spare and very rich. The unmoving images (there may be a slight flutter in the castle's flag, but that would be all), the lack of figures other than the couple in the fresco, who first appear so quickly they might be actual, and the total lack of incident in the film create the aura of a fiction without elaborating any specific fiction. Markopoulos wrote that before going to Roccasinabalda he thought he would make a film that suggested in pictures the sense of smell (as his and other silent films have suggested sounds), but that he gave the idea up before shooting. *Gammelion* does not evoke odors and perfumes; yet it reverberates with a vitality beyond what it explicitly shows. It suggests, through the possibility of blood on the road, through the very emptiness of the castle which is obviously not abandoned, and above all through the sound, a permutation of novelistic situations as the film progresses. Again the artist seems to have returned, always in fresh ways, to the enchanted house of *Psyche*, *Swain*, *Twice a Man*, and *Himself as Herself*.

The making of *Gammelion* in Italy coincided with the emergence in America of a new form, the structural film. In that form the over-all shape of a film is its predominant characteristic, as the even sequence of fades is the overriding formal principle of *Gammelion*. The structural film represents in the history of the American avant-garde film as important a development as either the trance film or the mythopoeic film.

In the late 1960s the structural film, and its derivative, the participatory film, followed the mythopoeic form. The causes of this evolutionary shift are too complex to pinpoint. It is certainly not a case of one artist creating something which others imitate. The emergence has been too general and has been manifest in the works of too many otherwise opposed film-makers for that to be the case, although the question of temporal priorities seems

to be an obsession of the film-makers themselves. Regardless of the cultural factors causing these shifts, we can see in the films of Gregory Markopoulos both an internal consistency and an evolution parallel to the general evolution of the avant-garde tradition.

Gregory Markopoulos has been, from the beginning of his film-making career, an erotic poet of the cinema. If we consider his long films in the order of their making (not their release)—*Twice a Man*, *The Illiac Passion*, *Himself as Herself*, *Eros*, *O Basileus*, *Galaxie*—leaving a question mark for the unseen *The Divine Damnation*—, and finally *Gammelion*, we can trace the gradual diminution of narrative, but we see (with the portraits as an exception) a sustained dedication to the definition of physical and spiritual love in cinema.