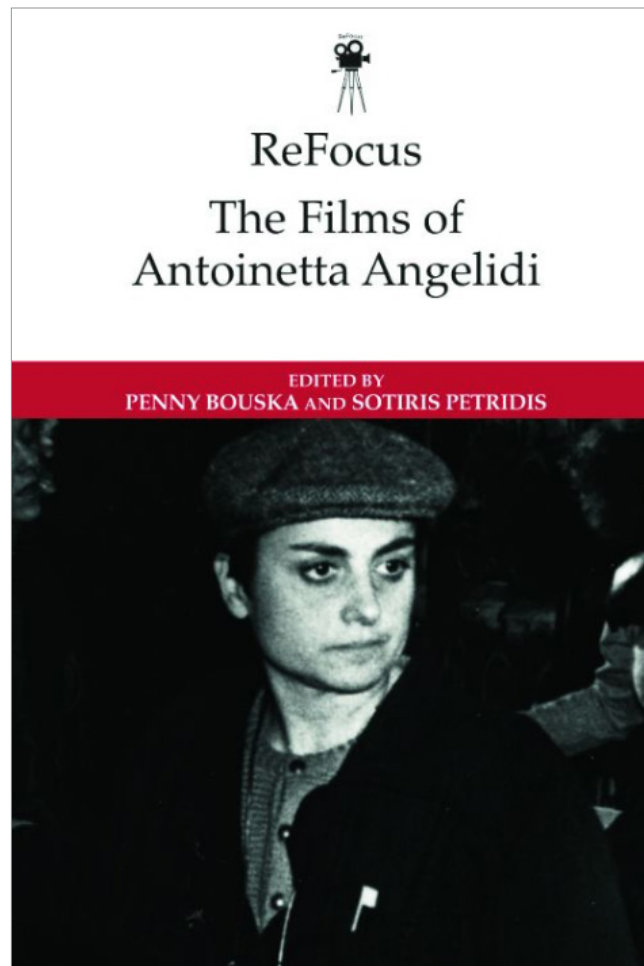


A Review of *ReFocus: The Films of Antoinetta Angelidi* edited by Penny Bouska and Sotiris Petridis

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Antoinetta Angelidi's films transcend the confines of traditional cinema, boldly exploring the frontiers of experimental filmmaking. Within the many styles of filmmaking and film theory, the genre of experimental film—often associated with the terms *avant-garde* or *underground*—encompasses a diverse range of technical approaches aimed at shattering the restrictions and stereotypes of traditional genres. It beckons the audience to venture into uncharted territories of cinematic techniques and visual expressions, liberating them from the boundaries of the mainstream commercial film industry. The goal is to re-evaluate cinematic conventions by exploring film outside of traditional narrative forms with the use of abstract techniques such as rapid changes in image size and style, sound manipulation, and alternating film rate. “Experimental cinema is more than an artistic practice of expression, more than a technical method of cinema” (1) Penny Bouska contends. In fact, these films strive to illuminate certain issues and topics expanding across themes of time, space, dreams, and perception, while executing them through unique sound and image stylistic choices that promote the vision of the filmmaker in ways that spectators may not get from commercial films. It is “[this] distinctive and exceptional [style of] filmmaking that Antoinetta Angelidi introduced to Greek cinema” (1). Not only did her work reshape the perceptions of film enthusiasts and critics regarding *avant-garde* works, but it also forged a path for numerous women filmmakers to share their narratives and leave an indelible imprint in an industry traditionally dominated by men. Penny Bouska and Sotiris Petridis's *ReFocus: The Films of Antoinetta Angelidi* breaks down the legacy of this Greek filmmaker and feminist. The text is divided into three parts with about three chapters per segment. Each part focuses on a different aspect of Angelidi's style and works. The text brings together a variety of film scholars to analyze Angelidi's artistic contributions, including her roots in Greek diaspora, her start in the visual arts, a thorough break down of the feminism and the *avant-gardism* within her works, and a look at the sound and visual techniques she established in the industry. With references to many of her films, a specific focus on *Topos* (1985) and *Idées Fixes / Dies Irae* (1977), Angelidi's obsession with the feminist uncanniness, motherhood, and the correlation to psychoanalysis and Freudian theory are just a few among numerous recurring themes and ideas.



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There are many other aspects of Angelidi's filmmaking that aim to defamiliarize the audience. Angelidi takes them into a "transformation of the familiar [and] into the uncanny as the base of an alternative poetics of cinema, where films are no longer simple audiovisual representations of linear stories but function as artistic articulations between the imaginary and the symbolic order" (106). Angelidi's unique take on sound and visuals are some of the elements that make her films stand out here. Chapter Seven, "From Orchestrated Noise to Elaborated Silence: The Audiovisuality of Antoinetta Angelidi's Films" by scholar Electra Venaki addresses how the "immersive audiovisual experience [of Angelidi's films guides the] audio-spectator consciously or unconsciously [to follow] the seemingly parallel flows of two bifurcated worlds, that of the visual and that of the sound, to reach a perception of all the cinematic elements as a whole" (143). It is throughout all Angelidi's films that spectators can see how "voices, sounds, music, moving images and written texts—are [all] intertwined" (143). Additionally, in Chapter 9: "Antoinetta Angelidi: The Visual Gaze," art historian Calliope (Pepy) Rigopoulou dives into the influence of Angelidi's visually artistic childhood, showcasing the history of her love for the visual long before she got behind the camera. The chapter considers the various works such as her films *The Hours* (1995) and *Hanging Water* (1988) to analyze how geometry, colour, and frame manipulation coincide to craft "an austere fluidity [that] permeates [the] landscape [of the frame] . . . [wherein] [p]laces/soulsapes emerge from her visual and cinematic work" (192). All elements of the *mise en scène* express the innerworkings on Angelidi's artistic mind, highlighting how her "visual gaze relates not only to her visual art, but to her oeuvre as a whole" (193). The distinctive qualities and components that distinguish Angelidi's films in such a remarkable manner are intricately tied to her significant role within feminist film theory. Her portrayal of themes such as female sexuality, motherhood, and heterogeneity are uncanny, exemplifying her exceptional talent and artistic vision. Part One: "Feminism and the Avant-Garde" goes "through [Angelidi's] interpretive concept of uncanniness, viewed as a feminist avant-garde strategy" (15) in more depth.

When thinking about how Angelidi "exemplifies both avant-garde and feminist filmmaking, [her films *Topos* and *Idées Fixes / Dies Irae* help highlight] the distinctiveness of Angelidi's poetics" (15). "Weird Mothers: The Feminist Uncanniness of Antoinetta Angelidi's *Topos*" by Rea Walldén explores the use of the term avant-garde as a form of revolution. Walldén discusses the history of the French Revolution in relation to this art form in the early twentieth century. As Walldén notes, the revolution initiated a "function of avant-garde [that] was claimed by both political parties and artistic movements; and, in the context of art, it has since become a historical determination (16). It was this turning point that shifts Walldén's focus of the chapter from history to scholarship as it includes Laura Mulvey, Tania Modleski, Mary Ann Doane, and Teresa de Laurentis to illustrate the "views on avant-garde cinema as . . . rely[ing] heavily on psychoanalytic theory" (20). The complexity of

psychoanalytic theory is touched on by many scholars interested in feminist theory—particularly in the realm of feminist film theory. Angelidi is a feminist who also incorporates the concept of psychoanalysis in her filmmaking. Walldén's chapter delves into how Angelidi makes reference to feminist philosophers, such as Cixous and Luce Irigaray, to critique patriarchal ideologies most commonly addressed within psychoanalytical theory. Similar ideologies are also exposed within her works as well. Her reference to these philosophers comes with acknowledging how "Cixous deconstructs the founding dualities of gender and posits the possibility of 'feminine writing' [while] Irigaray opens up the Freudian text, revealing its blind points and their – not so hidden – implications, and the possibility of a gender and subject formation" (21). Within this chapter, Walldén interweaves history and theory to address Angelidi's positioning of women as filmic subjects and portraying the Mother as the most controversial figure. The idea of the "Mother is considered the paradigm for female sexuality, as the other for her son or for her husband who sees in her his own mother, and who can give her what her father can't, a penis" (21), which are concepts Angelidi does not shy away from.

These philosophical theories are further enhanced in reference to Irigaray within *Idées Fixes / Dies Irae*, a striking audiovisual about intellectual and political extremism. This connection comes from Irigaray's words that a mother/woman is a

Womb—earth, factory, bank—where the semen-capital is entrusted so that it germinates, manufactures, bears fruit, without the woman being able to claim its property or even its usufruct, being only 'passively' submitted to reproduction. She herself is possessed as a medium of (re)production. (22)

In Angelidi's works, it is evident that her central focus revolves around the politics of feminism. Throughout the various films explored in this text, a distinct theme emerges: "Women who destabilize the system are perceived as strange" (Walldén 24) —a motif that Angelidi fearlessly embraces and attempts to bring to light. The film mentioned within this chapter, *Topos*, highlights Angelidi's "poetics of feminist uncanniness reach[ing] its full maturity in her distinctive style" (15), as it adeptly portrays women who are

[t]hreatening to patriarchy but not to men: women who desire but don't need men, or women; who may become mothers but don't need to be; who don't desire to be their lovers' mothers; who when becoming mothers don't cease to be subjects; who search for their own origins and love their mothers; who love their daughters as much as their sons; who claim the authorship of their words and their works; and who . . . re-define what subjectivity and authorship may be. One may think of this new subject as a weird mother. (24)

In particular, it is "[t]he figure of th[is] uncanny mother [that] is used as a multifaced simile for an unconventional

structuring of women's subjectivity, which resists and refutes patriarchal trope" (15). For instance, *Topos*, with its run time of 85-minutes, jars spectators for its raw look at the way women have been treated and depicted within Western Art. With a soundtrack composed exclusively of human noises and a visual play with light and darkness to embody a dream-light atmosphere, *Topos* succeeds at creating an uncomfortable and destabilizing experience for the spectators. Angelidi projects the ultimate fear of the patriarchal society, a "wom[a]n who do not conform to the patriarchal system and act[s] as reminders that the system is neither natural nor eternal" (23), and anyone, or anything that destabilizes this system is the muse for this groundbreaking filmmaker.

Angelidi embraces uncanniness. Within the personal interview provided at the end of the text, "An Interview with Antoinetta Angelidi" with Rea Walldén, Angelidi says she was never "satisfied with any woman's body in any kind of cinema,

whether mainstream, auteur or avant-garde" (205). Her work "speaks [on] women's experience[s]" (205) and this obsession with how "women's bodies [are] represented" (205). The pervasive discontentment and harmful misconceptions that plagued women in such a constrictive society served as the impetus for Angelidi's unwavering determination to explore uncharted territories and give voice to unique narratives that had remained unseen until now. The invaluable concluding discussion gives readers a glimpse into the inner working of this Greek feminist and the connections she aims to make within her narratives, all of which feature in some form "no greater scandal than a woman who loves herself and exists, as a subject" (24), Angelidi has never backed down from experimenting with the "game of art" (221). It is through her cinematic endeavors that Angelidi not only establishes an enduring legacy but also shapes an ongoing narrative in the realm of film. ■