THE AVANT-GARDE FILMMAKER and American expatriate Gregory J. Markopoulos devoted the decade before his death in 1992 to reediting almost all of the nearly forty films he had made since 1947 into a single, monumental work, *Eniaios* (1947-91), which, when it is completed, will run approximately eighty hours. Many of the films Markopoulos made in the 1970s were edited but unprinted—and therefore unseen even by him in their original forms—when he restructured them into the twenty-two cycles, or “orders,” that constitute *Eniaios*. In 1980, he and Robert Beavers, Markopoulos’s companion for nearly thirty years and an important filmmaker in his own right, carefully chose a field outside Lyssaraia, the Peloponnesian village where Markopoulos’s father was born, as a temenos, or sacred zone, to which pilgrims would journey to see the film in a situation evoking the ritual healing centers devoted to Aesculapius in ancient Greece. This was the only way Markopoulos wanted his work to be seen. In this spirit, the Temenos proposes not only to exhibit the most extraordinarily ambitious film ever made but to offer a cure for media pollution.

On three successive nights this past June (the 27th through the 29th), the Temenos presented the second installment of *Eniaios* to an international audience of about two hundred spectators, with large contingents from the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and Greece. Some had come as far as Brazil and Australia. Every hotel in the region was filled to capacity with Temenos pilgrims. Replicating the conditions under which the first two orders, and part of the third, had been unveiled at the same outdoor location in 2004, Beavers screened Orders III, IV, and V, each running three to four hours.

Through his dedicated efforts, and the work of the Temenos Association, the film is being carefully restored and printed order by order; but at the current quadrennial pace the whole film will not have been seen until 2028.

The remarkable visual style of *Eniaios* is a radicalization of the editing techniques the filmmaker developed over the span of his career. At nineteen, when he made *Psyche* (1947), Markopoulos explored the dynamics of rapid editing. Three years later, he extended his initial discoveries into the extensive montage sequences of his film *Swain* (1950), idly recapitulating images from shots seen earlier in the film. In 1963 he gave his editing style a theoretical basis in the essay “Towards a New Narrative Film Form” (*Film Culture*, Winter 1963-64), in which he argued for “the use of short film phrases which evoke thought-images.” In *Twice a Man* (1963), these brief phrases could be as short as single frames—shots lasting only one twenty-fourth of a second. Enthusiasm for this mode of editing, both in the camera and on the editing table, inspired an astonishingly fecund period of filmmaking for Markopoulos. He made his densest and most complex films between 1963 and 1968. Yet at the same time he began to make extraordinary works filmed in a single session-portraits (thirty of them are collected in *Galaxie* [1966]) and evocations of places, such as his apartment on West Eleventh Street in New York (*Ming Green* [1966]) and the Church of St. John on Hydra, in Greece (*Bliss* [1967]).

From the start of his career, the filmmaker had liberally drawn upon literary models: Plato, Aeschylus, Euripides, Pierre Louys, Hawthorne, Balzac. After visiting Caresse Crosby’s Italian castle, Roccasinibaldina, in...
1961, he wrote an adaption of Julien Gracq’s novel *Au château d’Argol* (1938), which he intended to film there. However, when he revisited the castle in 1967, he shot two one-hundred-foot rolls of film—approximately five minutes—of the building, its interior details, and its environs, without a narrative or people. Then he edited them into a fifty-five-minute-long film, *Gammelion* (1968), by placing very brief images amid a thousand fades to black or white leader. I believe this transformation of five minutes of imagery into a nearly hour-long film was the germ of the style of *Eniaios*, in which brief glimpses of places, people, and actions appear amid passages of white and black. For hours, the screen flashes and winks with gorgeous vestiges of ancient ruins, mythical narratives, and figures from the art world.

On the basis of the five orders that have been seen so far and the schematic outline of the whole film, it appears that Markopoulos reedited all of his films separately, embedding single frames and very short fragments in carefully constructed rhythmic patterns of black and white leader, without fades or dissolves. Although he had used music and occasionally voiceover speech in most of the initial versions of his films, he wanted *Eniaios* to be entirely silent. While reediting the individual films, and apparently shooting many new ones—predominately portraits and films of ancient sites—specifically for it, he assembled the twenty-two orders, dispersing the longer films throughout the work. There are parts of *The Iliac Passion* (1964-67) in all twenty-two orders, with four sections of it in the finale. *Eros, O Basileus* (1967) appears in eight orders, with three segments alternating with the four of *The Iliac Passion* at the end. *Twice a Man* and *The Mysteries* (1968) each participate in four orders but never together; *Himself as Herself* (1967) is likewise in four. Five other films appear in two parts each.

MARKOPOULOS CONCEIVED of the Temenos long before he began to create *Eniaios*. By 1971 he had started to speak and write of the project of creating a unique screening facility and a library for his films and those of Robert Beavers. He withdrew his films from most of the distributors who had been renting them out to museums, theaters, universities, and film societies. In 1980 he held the first of seven annual outdoor screenings in the chosen field in Lyssaraia, which attracted a few dedicated viewers eager to see a selection of his and Beavers’s work. During this period he was reediting his films and constructing the cycles of *Eniaios*, but he did not live to see any of the work printed or projected. (Even Beavers, who is overseeing the completion of the film, would only see the first five orders for the first time along with the Temenos audiences in 2004 and 2008.) The shock and wonder provoked by the resumption of the Temenos and the premiere of *Eniaios* in 2004 was a measure of just how successful Markopoulos had been at reimagining and revitalizing his life’s work, and of how much the ritual pilgrimage site enhanced the experience of the film.

Temenos 2008 demonstrated the abiding power of *Eniaios*; the three evenings in which Orders III, IV, and V were screened revealed the continuity of the vast project and the aesthetic autonomy of its parts. Even the disappointment of a truncated Order IV, seen without the concluding three reels—the first segments of Eros, O Basileus, Chronion (an undated and previously unseen film of the Aesculapian ruins on Kos), and Twice a Man—which could not be printed in time, failed to diminish the triumph of the event. *Eniaios* sustained its initial authority in exalting the purity and glory of the cinematic experience. A pattern of construction across the orders began to appear: Each comprises between four and eight elements. Portraits tend to appear near the beginning of a cycle, with segments of the mythical narratives appearing in the second half. Depictions of places can appear in either half. The short fragmentary shots from the narratives are often longer than the rapid-fire flashes from the portraits and places. The
combination of these genres sets in motion elaborate thematic reverberations that, along with the rhythmic orchestrations, contribute to the tonal identity of each order.

Beavers wisely began the first session of Temenos 2008 by screening the dedicatory preface to the whole work: Pyra Heracleous, a minimalist representation of the ruins traditionally attributed to the funeral pyre of Hercules (Heracles), with the title flashed in a code of white frames representing different letters of the Greek alphabet. Of course, viewers could not decipher the cryptogram, but the cinematic rhythms it produces tutor the eyes for the hours to follow. In the case of Order III, a complex series of portraits precedes two installments from the longer films—the third fragment of The Illiac Passion, Markopoulos’s elaborate version of the Prometheus myth interlaced with many other mythical vignettes, and the first glimpse of The Mysteries, originally a Huysmansesque psychodrama.

A witty double portrait of Gilbert & George as “living sculpture” opens the order. It is followed by Genius (1970), in which portraits of the artists David Hockney and Leonor Fini are intercut with one of art dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler. Initially Markopoulos shot three autonomous portraits, but he quickly came to believe that he had been making a version of Faust without realizing it. He first called the film The Illuminations of Faust and later settled on Genius. In his essay “The Redeeming of the Contrary,” published in the Spring 1971 issue of Film Culture, Markopoulos stressed the ambiguity of his creation and the intuitive nature of his working processes: “I had no idea that these three figures of the art world... would become the very elements of my Faust. And yet they did. They evolved, once the decision was made, effortlessly.” The spontaneity of this evolution from autonomous portraits of figures “sitting in their own rooms” lies at the core of what Markopoulos took to be his gift to his future audience:

Beloved spectators of my distant Temenos, what evolved was the ultimate concern for the medium of film. A continuous working decision not to betray you as film spectators: not to impose a message in your laps. But to deposit before you on a virile screen the very depths which concerned the present work in such a manner that you might one day at its presentation realize that I have been concerned always for you. I now repeat again the word, an effortless illusion and triumph with the legend of Faust; and, with the future film spectator of the Temenos supplying the very brilliance.

I find it unlikely that any of us watching the film in Arcadia thought of Kahnweiler as a figure for Faust, Fini as Mephistopheles (despite the clue of her cat in her lap), or Hockney as the servant, Wagner. Rather, I would take the Whitmanian expression of affection and confidence in “the future film spectator” to suggest that the tonality of each of the orders frames and guides the range of associations stirred up as we watch the cycles and gauge the nuanced relationships of the filmic elements to one another. Thus, in the first five orders, Markopoulos locates himself and his artistic ambitions amid distinguished artists, critics, and collectors and situates his work in the context of ancient art and religion. Within that schema, the third order, subtitled Schemata tou stomatos (Shapes of the Mouth), suggests undercurrents of an uncanny disturbance within Promethean creativity, for which the legend of Faust would be an appropriate analogue, but not an allusion essential to catching the tone of the cycle. Beavers, offering a rare insight into the organization of the order, pointed out the predominance of Promethean fire in the cycle. It is particularly dominant in the segment from The Illiac Passion.

The cumulative effect of the portraits of Gilbert & George, the triad of Genius, and the subsequent portraits of ballerina Marcia Haydée, sculptor Barbara Hepworth, collector and restaurateur Huida Zumsteg, and poet/critic Edouard
Roditi introduces uncanny, disturbing moments within the Aesculapian dreamscape—under the veneer of serenity. The ironic displacement of violence becomes most apparent when Roditi seems to kiss or lick a skull. Like the “unsuspecting figures” of Genius, who, Markopoulos asserted, “represent, in their own milieu, the crises of our times,” in the context of this order Roditi bridges the portrait series and the fragmentary narratives that follow it; his gesture anticipates the antics of Taylor Mead as the “Demon or Sprite” of The Illiac Passion, crystallizing the order’s critique of homosexual postures in the art world.

Nephele photos (Cloud of Light), as Markopoulos titled the fourth order, shifts the tone. A somber, regal portrait of Giorgio de Chirico precedes the religious imagery of the reedited Bliss, in which the play of light within a Byzantine church allows us to glimpse the iconic representations of the prophet Jonah, St. John the Baptist, and the Virgin Mary. Redemption and rejuvenation would seem to be the theme of the order, although without seeing the three concluding reels we can only speculate about its ultimate impression. The aged figures of de Chirico and Alberto Moravia (whose portrait occupies the fourth segment) would contrast with the youthful images of the teenage Beavers, whom Markopoulos filmed, nude, as the god of love in Eros, O Basileus. Furthermore, that is the theme of the final reel of the order, the opening of Twice a Man, which retells the myth of Hippolytus and his resurrection by Aesculapius.

The most impressive revelation of Temenos 2008 occurred within the fourth order. The hitherto unseen Cimabue! Cimabue! (1971) followed the reel of Bliss. The original version was probably the most complex of the films Markopoulos completed but never printed before he began Eniaios. In its elaborate editing, with extensive use of upside-down shots, it interweaves images of several of the filmmaker’s friends and supporters in Florence—the portrait painter Pietro Annigoni, the poet Carlo Betocchi, the painter Silvio Loffredo, and the art restorer Umberto Baldini, whom we glimpse restoring Cimabue’s great Crucifix, damaged by the Florentine flood of 1966. Following the religious exultation of Bliss, the film celebrates both restoration and film editing as if they were modes of prayer, while it treats the new friends the filmmaker found in relocating to Europe as saints in a Byzantine mosaic. The “cloud of light” from the subtitle of the order simultaneously refers to traditional halos and the emulsion of the colored frames of film embedded in the flashing passages of white and black leader. Cimabue! Cimabue! is clearly the companion piece to Robert Beavers’s first masterpiece, From the Notebook of . . . (1971/1998), which he made in Florence during the same period. Both films rejoice in wonder at the artistic traditions of Florence and mark the time of their creation with enthusiasm for working within that city.

The title of the fifth order, To mega chasma (The Great Chasm), seems at first to refer to the gap of time between the present and the Grecian past, for two of the four elements of the cycle (Hagiographia [1973] and Epidaurus [n.d.]) depict the ruins of the Byzantine city of Mistra and the Aesculapian clinic of Epidaurus. The fifth segment of The Illiac Passion and the second of The Mysteries constitute the other parts. Instead of reediting the original version of Hagiographia (1970) for Eniaios, Markopoulos returned to Mistra in 1973 to remake a one-hundred-and-fifty-minute version of the original sixty-minute film. The Great Chasm continues the religious/Byzantine strain of Cloud of Light, emphasizing the vestiges of religious and sexual agony amid evocations of transcendence and cure. Markopoulos uses the film screen as an iconostasis. For him, the temporal chasm was not a simple matter. At the very start of the 1970 essay “Towards a Temenos,” printed in the elegant brochure distributed to all the spectators of Temenos 2008, he posed the question: “What is a vision?” and answered
it: “A vision is always the future. The moment we consider the past or the present we are consumed by the constant future.”

Having hoped to screen the completed work over a period of several weeks in the ‘90s, Markopoulos would not have envisioned the labor and expense of restoration required—after the original edited reels of film sat untouched for up to twenty years—to make any of the orders of *Eniaios* finally visible. Nor would he have conceived of the temporal scale of a commitment to see the work in ritualized intervals of four years per installment. Yet his film implicitly, and the accompanying text explicitly, dwells on the extraordinary structures of time at the heart of the Temenos experience. The film repeatedly invokes the monumental history of Greek civilization, showing at once the deterioration of its cultic centers and the survival of ruins. It hammers home the mechanical limit of cinematic time—the single frame of one twenty-fourth of a second, on the very threshold of visibility—against the nocturnal rotation of the fixed stars and wandering planets, perceptible only when the spectators, turning from the flickering screen to the surrounding sky, recall the positions of those celestial bodies the last time they looked away. Thus, this remarkable experience of the cinematic sublime raises the question of whether any of us will live to see the work in its entirety.