

CRITIQUE OF IDEOLOGY THROUGH TEMPORAL JUXTAPOSITION IN *ORFEAS2021*

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The film *ORFEAS2021* by the group FYTA reimagines Claudio Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* and takes advantage of the change in medium from a staged opera to a "video-opera". Multiplicity of time and space are represented through visual and auditory techniques and effects, primarily the visual technique of quickly shifting between multiple scenes. This effect is not used without purpose; through this technique, a character can appear in multiple places or times in quick sequences. Similarly, two distant characters, places, or times, can be connected and compared through this technique. In this paper, I will argue that *ORFEAS2021* successfully utilized the digital format to explore contemporary issues of ideology and queer liberation through the use of temporal juxtapositions on multiple levels: short-term, historical, and meta-referential.

Act I features the broadcast of government propaganda on television with four ministry leaders alongside Orfeas and Euri. This broadcast scene is littered with symbols representing corporate and ideological co-opting. The car brand logos of Citroën, Honda, and Audi are printed on the government ministry officials' uniforms, both representing car companies from around the globe in a nod to liberal internationalism and the singular centered Audi logo on Orfeas' chest being a symbolic juxtaposition of the government in the film to the company's past ties to Nazi Germany, as well as a larger critique of corporations' ideological transmutability. It is important to note Orfeas' outfit stays the same through his character development. Another prominent symbol is the neon pink fixture. This can be seen as a combination of Orpheus' lyre and the "Three Arrows" symbol used by the Iron Front to deface swastikas in Germany. Finally, we have the juxtaposition between lyrics and set design. The Minister of Utopia sings that "our ally is unity",

but is contrasted with a sterile white background. The audience is shown an absence of culture where a more authentic unity would be visualized with a melting pot of global and local culture.

With this scene established, three new scenes begin to emerge through an exponentially increasing speed of cuts between scenes. First, we see cuts to a boardroom with the four ministry official and Orfeas; notably, Euri is not present in the boardroom. This scene is an example of short-term temporal juxtaposition, where we see a pre-recorded television broadcast and their reactions. As the film's audience, we see them nod in approval and laugh while watching the broadcast, but we're not shown the facial reactions of the Greek public. As the film progresses, they grow increasingly upset and weary in the boardroom, being met with hateful comments online, growing into an emotional climax in Act II with the ministry officials blaming Muslims and right-wing extremists on Euri's death in an ironic twist of their call for unity. This comments on the chorus of L'Orfeo being all we have to contextualize Orfeo's character.

The next scene that emerges is the "REVOLUTIONARY INTERLUDE", where three activists hack into the broadcast to critique the ministries' stance on unity by calling it "unity built in concrete", another reference to the sterile and impenetrable visual broadcast and metaphorical government ideology. This is then juxtaposed with another pre-recording of a reformist pop-song. The short-term temporal juxtaposition between these two scenes emphasizes the difference in access to technology between the two groups. While they both utilize aesthetics of early internet culture (underground hackers with the revolutionaries and early 2000's HTML websites and pop-ups with the reformist), one group must go through the effort to illegally broadcast their message to the public while the other has pre-recorded responses on stand-by. One can imagine an upset civilian at the premiere of Monteverdi's opera that enters the stage to complain about the socio-economic class hierarchy of the time. To learn about such socio-economic issues to put

Monteverdi's opera into context, one must research on their own; *ORFEAS2021* includes that context in the film itself.

The next level of temporal juxtaposition is seen in Act III when Orfeas goes to enter the Museum. Just like in Monteverdi's version, Orfeas' first attempt at convincing the Poet-Guard does not work. He attempts to use logic and history to convince the Poet-Guard by using a projector and posterboard to showcase the Stonewall Riots and later pride events. This scene emphasizes the unnatural and performative action Orfeas is doing; the imagery of him going through the effort to set up a projector and hold a posterboard is reminiscent of Instagram influencers and infographics gaining clout from those who are demonstrating and rioting on the ground. This projection can be seen as Orfeas' "lyre", using history as an instrument or completely utilitarian weapon. After failing to convince the Poet-Guard, Orfeas sings a second verse about his early memories with Euri. This deeply personal and emotional lament "bored [the Poet-Guard's] cruel heart". This historical temporal juxtaposition showcases a critique of humanism and the idea of museums. The past and its artifacts have no use for the individual human. It is a collection of weapons that different ideologies can position differently to achieve wildly different goals.

Historical temporalities of different degrees are explored in Act IV within the virtual reality museum. More recent history is represented through the VR "wormhole" Orfeas goes through, which shows vaporwave aesthetics, a popular LSD AI image generator, and most significantly, Pepe the Frog. This symbol, originally an ideologically-pure comic strip character, has seen manipulation from all points of the political spectrum. It was hijacked by far-right groups in the 2016 election, to be "officially" killed off one year later in the comic by its creator "in an attempt to reestablish control over his beloved character" (Pelletier-Gagnon, 16), making its inclusion in the VR museum significant in identifying this museum's ideological function; killing off what it

cannot control. More distant history is explored through the characters of Hellas and Oxi. This scene explores the juxtaposition of traditional and modern thoughts on gay marriage. Hellas gives Orfeas the condition that Euri can return as long as they don't marry. Euri recognizes that Orfeas will want to marry him still, and leaves by saying "you are cursing me to die again".

In his mindless path to sacrificing Euri, Orfeas is acting under Slavoj Žižek's analysis of cynical ideology; "They don't know what they are doing but they are doing it nonetheless." Since reason has replaced any spiritual power of music in the role of Orpheus, Orfeas has no reason to believe that his love will overpower tradition. His statement that he will marry Euri despite Hellas' condition is one that he *must* make as an essential reaction to his environment, not a conclusion arrived at through logical thought. Alongside his recollection of memories with Euri at the museum entrance, Orfeas begins acting outside of his government's ideology. This is a brutally poignant adaptation of the sound that causes Orpheus to look back at Eurydice in the original myth. Here, we see a queer accelerationist analysis arguing for the desertion of traditional marriage and government. This interpretation suggests that gay people who wish to uphold the tradition of marriage and liberal democracy are doomed to remain at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy. Hate crimes, murders, and injustice will continue under such a system, no matter how much symbolic reform is given.

In the final level of meta-referential temporal juxtaposition, the film uses both itself and Monteverdi's work to explore the continuum from religious thought to the European enlightenment to what can come next. It is here where the choice to change the character of La Musica to Logic is crucial to any grand analysis. While Logic insists that they will always stand by Orfeas' side, it is clear that they represent a delusional authoritarian talking-head by Act V. Orfeas realizes that no amount of reason or logic will fix the cruel injustice that Euri faced. Logic

is used to represent humanism and the European enlightenment. (Ironically, the voice of Logic is run through a vocoder, and, until the end of the film, is visually multiplied, showing that logic in this situation is more of a robotic response than a human one.) This is a stark contrast to Monteverdi's character of La Musica, which symbolizes a spiritual power. This conscious change by the film's writers highlights the progression from religious thought to humanism, but if one is to interpret the end of the film as Orfeas abandoning Logic, what comes next? In "Labor of the Inhuman", Reza Negarestani states "Rationalism as the compulsive navigation of the space of reason turns commitment to humanity into a revisionary catastrophe." (Mackay, 450). Orfeas stands frozen in shock in the final scene after experiencing such revisionary catastrophe.

This final scene highlights the real-world connection that *ORFEAS2021* has, and the two different possible ways we can deal with it as a collective society. Since this film is a response to Zak Kostopoulos' murder, there are no metaphorical costumes to remove or sets to take down at the end; this is reality. The rest of the cast undergoes group schizophrenia, savagely smearing themselves with blood and ice cream, taking selfies, and savagely ripping apart their clothing. This can be seen as a confrontation with the absurd, either the acceptance of it or death by it. In contrast, Orfeas is still. If this is to be connected with the Bacchantes in the original myth, it can be seen as the society Orfeas created as president being eaten and destroyed. To amplify this, the film overlays audience applause without any audience visually present. This applause transitions from a standard applause to a collective beat. This critiques us as the film's audience; we are here to witness the spectacle of collapse. Regardless, if what comes next wishes to address queer liberation, it must not come out of the ruins of the film's government. A newly constructed society that has the ability to address ideological contradiction, instead of claiming an impossible unity of

all ideologies, is necessary, or the story of Euri's death will cycle in adaptations forever, with new minority identities taking his place.

In conclusion, *ORFEAS2021* explores temporal juxtapositions between characters, events, and places on different levels to highlight and critique ideologies shown in the film. The medium of video is highlighted through cinematographic techniques, such as rapid scene changes, as well as auditory effects, such as virtual instruments and manipulations. The film never abandons its connection with the original myth, nor does it ever deny its existence and context in the present real-world. The reimagining of the myth as an ideological analysis in the lens of queer liberation speaks as a meta-commentary on the fate of minority identities and a warning that this story will need to be told for eternity under new lenses of liberation.

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