



Erik Tängerstad

When the Story Hides the Story: The Narrative Structure of Milcho Manchevski's *Dust* (2001)*

In August 2001 crowds in Lido were eagerly awaiting the film that was to open the 58th Venice Film Festival. Seven years after Milcho Manchevski's renowned debut film *Before the Rain* (1994), his long expected second feature, *Dust* (2001), was to have its world premier. *Before the Rain* had stunned audiences in Venice, partly because of its topic, partly because of its innovative narrative format. That film, about the break up of a Macedonian village, was seen to illustrate the then ongoing dissolution of Yugoslavia. But more than its theme, it was its intriguing three-part composition that shook audiences. The film's narrative followed a spiralling trajectory that defied established film conventions. Yet again, it was so smoothly edited that one could see it without having to consciously reflect on the fact that its narrative undermined the conventional notion of the cohesion of time and space. *Before the Rain* presented a narrative film format that appeared new and refreshing while showing a side of Europe that was deeply shocking and distressing. It won the Golden Lion at the festival in 1994. After that, *Before the Rain* went on a celebrated world tour, in the end reaching the status of a contemporary film classic. Would Manchevski's second feature repeat the success of his first? As it turned out: No, not really. While *Before the Rain* had had audiences astonished and impressed, *Dust* made them confused and hesitant. Many viewers were simply put off. Almost a year later, when *Dust* opened in Britain, Peter Bradshaw a reviewer from *The Guardian*, wrote: 'This very tiresome, overblown piece of machismo from director Milcho Manchevski made a terrible beginning to last year's Venice film festival, and looks no better now' (Bradshaw 2002).¹

* The author would like to thank Milcho Manchevski for his personal engagement in this work, for his constant support when providing background materials, as well as when answering questions during the long-drawn-out research period that preceded the writing of this chapter. The author would also like to thank Iris Kronaur, John Moore, Marina Kostova, Branko Petrovski, Zoran Petrovski, and the Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art in Skopje for invaluable help and support during the research for the chapter

1 Other British reviewers were not as brutally dismissive as Bradshaw, but for example Tom Dawson, who reviewed the film for *BBC Movies* (17-04-2002), was not too impressed either: 'The Macedonian director Milcho Manchevski's long-awaited follow-up to "Before the Rain", "Dust" replaces the earlier film's powerful solemnity with overblown excess. A variation on the Cain and Abel story which borrows heavily from the action scenes in Peckinpah's "The Wild Bunch", "Dust" is explicitly concerned with the process of storytelling' http://www.bbc.co.uk/films/2002/04/17/dust_2002_review.shtml [07-09-2008].

Since its first release in 2001, reviewers and critics have had a hard time making sense of *Dust's* narrative. No matter whether they have liked or disliked the film, the common opinion has been that *Dust* is an ambitious film project that fails to succeed. For example, one online reviewer, the pseudonymous *Dr Kuma*, seems to have been in pains when trying to tell why he/she didn't like the film:

The main problem is that although the film has many great ideas it really doesn't hold together. It's like a jigsaw with the corners missing. Although you can see exactly what it's supposed to be, it never looks complete. [...] Although I didn't particularly like the film, some of it's [sic] images really do stick to mind, especially the way that the director links the story to the modern day robbers pilgrimage to the place he has heard so much about at the end of the film. It really is very clever and visually striking. This really should merit a good review but all I'll say is that it tries too hard to please. [...] A good idea, but dust crumbles (Dr Kuma 2002).

In 2003, *Dust* had a limited US release, opening at the same time in New York and Los Angeles. The reviewer in *New York Times*, Elvis Mitchell, seems to have struggled to find a positive angle:

Mr. Manchevski demonstrates his gifts as a visual stylist and a filmmaker in command of the technical aspect of the medium. [...] [He] employed a similar splintered-storytelling approach to insinuate the plot of his ingeniously realized "Before the Rain", in which the slivers of apparently haphazardly scattered plot all came together. (In that film the Godardian cubist style was buttressed by titles that acted as chapter headings.) 'Dust' takes this ghost story approach while simultaneously trying to limn a film rife with dovetailing displays of devices like parallels and metaphor, trying to use all these elements to explicate character. [...] It is overly convenient, and such an underexplained mystery that it never makes any sense. There's enough culture clash that 'Dust' doesn't need the equivalent of a Zen koan (Mitchell 2003).

On the same day, Kevin Thomas (2003) wrote a review for the *Los Angeles Times*:

'Dust' is a bust, a big bad movie of the scope, ambition and bravura that could be made only by a talented filmmaker run amok. Macedonian-born, New York-based Milcho Manchevski, whose first film was the elegiac 1994 'Before the Rain,' attempts a Middle Eastern western, a fusion suggesting the timeless universality of chronic bloodlust. It's a potent visual idea, full of darkly amusing irony but undercut by wretched excess, underdeveloped characters and a queasy mix of sentimentality and violence. [...] 'Dust' is a great-looking film of vast scope, and cinematographer Barry Ackroyd brings it a rich texture and bold panache, which could also be said of David Munns' imaginative and detailed production design and Kiril Dzajkovski's score. The passion, free-spiritedness and vision that Manchevski brings to 'Dust' makes his self-indulgence all the more depressing.





Commentators who explicitly liked the film claimed, too, that they could not make sense out of its narrative. On the film blog *Film as Art: Daniel Griffin's Guide to Cinema*, for example, one can read:

Milcho Manchevski's Dust is a gloriously uneven, deliriously delightful film about the emergence of the Old West mentality into contemporary times. At least, I think that's what it's about: It is so convoluted and choppy that it doesn't even pretend to make a lick of sense [...] Yet these frustrations with the story make the film fascinating rather than distracting. I think this is because Manchevski seems so confident in his storytelling abilities that we trust him even when we don't understand him. There is never a dull or belabored moment here (Griffin 2003, emphasis in original).²

Even film scholars analyzing *Dust* claim that its narrative structure is a failure. For example, in her article 'Historical Narrative and The East-West Leitmotif in Milcho Manchevski's *Before the Rain* and *Dust*', Vojislava Filipčević (2004: 4) writes:

*I argue that Manchevski constructs a novel East-West 'encounter' and uncovers new meanings of 'in-betweenness' in the Balkan cinema through advanced visual grammar and powerful iconography of interlinked reverse exiles and crossings (in both *Dust* and *Before the Rain*), and though a hybrid genre, cinematic critique of Balkan historical narratives (albeit with several plot shortcomings, especially in *Dust*).*

These examples should illustrate a broad consensus on the narrative structure of *Dust*. Even though the film is recognised to be technically well made and to contain many interesting passages, in the end practically every commentator claim that it does not make sense.

Here, however, it seems important to question this consensus. The claim this essay is making is that *Dust* intentionally challenges established film conventions and narrative theories. It should come as no surprise that when analysing the film by using the very same conventions and theories that it is designed to challenge, the outcome will appear flawed. This film is ambitious in so far as it does not invite conventional understandings of how to see and understand feature film. Instead, it actively tries to provoke spectators to develop a new film perception, and thus a new film theory. More relevant than seeing *Dust* as a conventionally told film narrative that does not work is critically analysing whether Manchevski's approach to film narrative—an approach that he calls 'Cubist storytelling'—can generate a new understanding of film narrative at large. Could a film like *Dust* provoke the formation of new film conventions and new narrative theories? Could it make us see and understand feature film in a new way?

As will be demonstrated here, *Dust* can be viewed and understood as one whole, functioning narrative that makes sense—but only when using a different theoretical approach than that usually applied when seeing and understanding feature film, and only when critically revising established film conventions.

² Griffin presents himself as a university staff member with a personal interest in film analyses, not as a professional film critic. Griffin gave *Dust* 3 ½ stars of 4 possible.

Synopsis of *Dust*

To create a point of reference for the following discussion, a synopsis of *Dust* needs to be laid out first. At the close of the twentieth century in New York, a small-time thief, Edge, has to repay a debt to some gang members, but lacks the means to do so. To get money, he breaks into a flat, only to be caught by the tenant, an elderly woman. The woman, Angela, does not call the police. Instead, she keeps Edge at gunpoint and promises him a gold treasure if he hears her story to end, so that, she says, he will know where she was born and where to bury her. Then she starts telling him a story about two Oklahoma brothers at the turn of the twentieth century, Luke and Elijah. In her convoluted story these two brothers go from West to East, and end up fighting each other in war-torn Macedonia, where they try to track down a local rebel leader called 'The Teacher'. In talking about them, she does not say anything about where she was born or where she wants to be buried, nor does she say anything about her gold treasure. When Angela collapses in the midst of her story, Edge represses an impulse to run away and instead takes her to the hospital. Edge is in desperate need of money, and since he has reason to believe that Angela is in possession of gold, he returns to her apartment to search for it. When he does not find it he returns to the hospital to make Angela tell him where it is. She doesn't. Instead, she continues her story: Elijah almost kills Luke, who is saved by a pregnant peasant woman, Neda, who then takes Luke to her village. There, Luke witnesses atrocities taking place during the ongoing uprising against the Ottomans. He sees, for example, how an Ottoman officer shows the villagers the decapitated head of 'The Teacher'. When asked to save Neda and the village, Luke abandons both her and the village, although he keeps the gold coins he has been offered. As Angela's story is interrupted again, Edge goes back to her apartment once more, and he eventually finds her gold. He then returns to the hospital, only to find Angela dying. Angela dies without having told him where she was born or where she wants to be buried. Edge nevertheless concludes that she was born in Macedonia and that she wanted to be buried there. He takes care of her remains, personally making sure they are buried, presumably in Macedonia. In an airplane, with the urn in his lap, he retells Angela's story to a fellow passenger. But he does not stop at the point where the story was interrupted by Angela's death. Instead he concludes it in his own way with his own words, saying that Luke eventually did go back to the village to save Neda. According to Edge, Luke dies in a shootout and Angela was the orphaned baby of 'The Teacher' and Neda, whom Elijah adopted and brought with him back to the United States. The film ends with a scene in which Elijah, with a baby in his arms, watches the sky and sees an airplane. Possibly, it is the same airplane in which Edge sits with Angela's ashes when adding his own ending to her story. If so, the film ends when the narrative of the film and the narrative of the story told within the film merge.







Challenging Established Narrative Conventions

This synopsis, naturally, is a simplified version of the actual film, which should hint at the film's complex narrative. At first it could appear as a conventional movie. But only a second look is required to notice that this film departs from established narrative norms. In a mainstream film, for example, the story told by Angela would perhaps be framed within the film narrative as a whole, so that one would have a story within a story. In *Dust*, however, the concluding sequence shows the story told by Angela and the story told by the film as a whole as appearing on the same narrative plane. Suddenly the story within a story has been transformed into two distinct stories laid beside one another and placed on the same narrative plane. When Elijah looks to the sky and sees the airplane, not only is our notion of a time and space cohesion short-circuited, but conventional narrative logics also rupture.

In this film, there are frequent examples of such rupturing of established narrative conventions. That becomes especially notable in the way photos are treated in the film. Usually one thinks that feature films show reality in the same way that photographs depict their motifs. The motif of a photo is generally thought to be independent of the photo itself, leaving photographs to be more or less consciously stylised images of independently existing reality. In the same way, a film is understood 'to be about' something: it is supposed to be depicting some kind of reality (whether realistic or fantastic) beyond the actual film. After having seen a film, conventionally, we are expected to be able to tell 'what it was about', not 'what it looked like' or 'how it was made'. As film viewers, we also expect a film to visually tell a narrative. Because we are tacitly trained to think that a film is a visual narrative, we expect it to be telling us a story through visual means, not using random story fragments as prerequisites for displaying visual effects as such. In short, we expect the film imagery to be a means to help us reach the goal of getting and understanding the story, not the other way around. Precisely in this way, *Dust* challenges our expectations.

Photographs play a crucial role in the narrative of *Dust*. The story told by Angela is at times illustrated by old photographs, and also presented through a voice-over placed over film imagery. This would lead the uncritical viewer to believe that the photographs and the film imagery illustrate her story. But it is not as simple as that. Often photographs change during the run of the film. More than that, the photographic imagery has a tendency to diverge from the story she tells, rather than to support it. The most obvious example of this unconventional use of photographs appears at the end of the film. Although Edge is shown not to have any pre-knowledge of Luke and Elijah – the film clearly shows how Angela has to point out to him who is Luke and who is Elijah when they watch her old photographs together – Edge, nevertheless, at the end of the film shows an old photograph with himself standing in between these long since dead brothers. By this means Edge is shown to exist within Angela's story, rather than being positioned exclusively as its external audience. When actively short-circuiting different narrative levels, *Dust* goes against basic conventions and, thereby, our expectations. It then should come as no surprise that bewildered viewers, who depend on these conventions when interpreting film, find difficulty in understanding *Dust*.

The gold treasure at the centre of the film is key when understanding how its narrative works. Angela hints that she is in possession of a gold treasure. Because Edge believes that she indeed has such a treasure hidden somewhere in her apartment, he sticks with her even after she has stopped holding him at gunpoint. Angela talks about a gold treasure in the telling of her story, as well. So, in the film, a gold treasure is shown both in her story and in her apartment. Following established film narrative principles, the treasure she is talking about should be identical to the one she keeps hidden. Since the same set of coins were used in the film when shooting the scenes where the gold treasure appears in her story and those where the gold treasure appears in her apartment, the spectator actually sees the same coins--the same filmic devices--twice. But following the film narrative, there is no affinity between the treasure in her story and the treasure in her home. Angela tells how dying Luke, alone on a Macedonian hilltop at the early twentieth century, spatters the gold coins into the wilderness around him. How could those very same gold coins almost a century later appear in a refrigerator door (where Angela has hidden them) in Brooklyn? The only reasonable answer is that they could not: there is no affinity between one gold treasure and the other. The narrative of *Dust* never even indicates that there should be such an affinity, even though the film imagery of *Dust* suggests otherwise. Through the usage of this narrative device--the notion of the gold treasure--*Dust* explicitly shows the problem of the affinity of identity. At the same time, the film also openly challenges the fundamental film norm that if a thing is shown twice in the same film, the viewer should be able to conclude that it is exactly the same thing.

Dust explicitly puts forward the point that images can 'lie' in the same way that a verbal voice can. In that sense, this film challenges the basic notion of 'seeing is believing', a convention that states that a viewer should be granted the privilege of taking film imagery at face value. In *Dust*, the viewer should never uncritically take the imagery, or for that matter the narrative as such, at face value. That point is made explicit in a sequence in which Edge objects to the number of soldiers in Angela's story, an objection that leads to a negotiation about story content. The narrative is not an object that the active narrator hands over to passive audiences. The narrative, instead, is made up in the encounter when active audiences make sense out of what the narrator tells. This point is explicitly brought forward in *Dust*. It is, therefore, somewhat ironic to see how reviewers and commentators, when trying to make sense out of *Dust*, take their point of departure in the idea that films contain fixed story contents that are transmitted to passive audiences. This film is actively and explicitly taking that idea to task.

The story is never to be found in a film itself. It is, instead, to be found in the active encounter between the film and the interpreting audience; through the audio-visual information provided by the film, the audience conceives the story. If one uncritically takes the film imagery of *Dust* at face value, then the film will hardly make sense. But if, instead, one critically revises the complex and contradictory relationship of film imagery and film narrative, then its logic suddenly appears. In short, *Dust* is a film that challenges well-established film conventions to such an extent that it is almost condemned to be misunderstood by audiences bound by traditional narrative standards. If the basic film convention rules that 'what you see is what you get', Manchevski has made a film in which 'what you see is NOT what you get'. There is no self-evident identification between what is shown and what is told. There is not even any self-evident identification between different segments of imagery within the film, as seen in the example of the gold treasure.





Cubist Storytelling

When working on *Before the Rain* Manchevski started to develop a new approach to narration. His experiments with circular and slightly fractured narrations when making that film required that he develop his own approach. Later, he began to call it 'Cubist storytelling'. However, he never has turned this approach into any explicit theory or working method. Instead, it has remained a catchword he uses when talking about his films. In an interview from 2003, for example, he both propagated his notion of Cubist storytelling and contrasted it with mainstream feature film:

I am interested in Cubist storytelling – when the artist fractures the story and puts it back together in a more complex (and, thus, more interesting) way. More importantly, when the artist keeps shifting the emotional tone of the film, bringing a narrative film closer to the experiences of modern art. [...] Mainstream narrative cinema is all about expectations, and really low expectations, to that. We have become used to expecting very little from the films we see, not only in terms of stories, but more importantly and less obviously in terms of the mood, the feeling we get from a film. I think we know what kind of a mood and what kind of a feeling we're going to get from a film before we go see [sic] the film. It's from the poster, from the title, the stars, and it's become essential in our decision-making and judging processes. I believe it's really selling



ourselves way too short. I like films that surprise me. I like films that surprise me especially after they've started. I like a film that goes one place and then takes you for a loop, then takes you somewhere else, and keeps taking you to other places both emotionally and story-wise... [emphasis in original] (quoted in Raskin 2003).

This quotation sums up two recurring themes in Manchevski's presentation of his work. He wants to connect to modern art, and he criticises mainstream feature film for its lack of artistic ambition, or even, at times, explicitly anti-artistic tendencies. The term Cubist storytelling can therefore be seen as a marker that he uses when distancing his own work from other films--both mainstream movies and art film--as well as when connecting it to modern art. Over the years, Manchevski has often presented himself as writer, storyteller, or photographer with a deep interest in art, both classical and contemporary. In a 2002 interview made for the Macedonian journal *Golemoto Staklo* ('The Large Glass'), Manchevski gave journalist Sonja Abadziewa detailed answers on his notion of Cubist storytelling and how that notion has influenced his film *Dust*. Some excerpts will be given to clarify the intentions behind its narrative structure. After having told Abadziewa that he liked art exhibitions better than film screenings, Manchevski stated that feature film could be something other than what it now is:





The text has not been imposed by the nature of the medium, nor by the conventions of the particular medium. You see, film doesn't have to be the way we see it today: to last two hours, to have a beginning, middle and end, leading and supporting roles, three acts, a closed, defined ending, with catharsis and happy ending. But the convention is so strong and we have so clung to it - like little children - that we expect to see all of this. If the film lasts one hour, we feel as if something is missing. [...] For me "Dust" is close to cubism mostly in how it deconstructs the material when re-presenting it. But, whereas in painting cubism refers to visual material, in film, or in "Dust" at least, we have narrative material, decomposed and recomposed in time whereas [sic] time is a category used in the artistic expression. This was not planned. I did not set off with idea of making a cubist film. But, I did intend to play with time and structure, and after having walked three quarters of the road, I realized that "Dust" is maybe transposition of a cubist view to film-making. [...] [Narrative film is] supposed to be entertaining, but that does not mean it should be stupid. I tried to make "Dust" entertaining, rather than "art film" torture; yet I didn't want to give up on the artistic ambition. A film should and can be both entertaining and artistic.

The point exemplified here is that Manchevski actively and consciously tries to break loose from established narrative film conventions by challenging those conventions from within. When doing that he wants to produce work that can be regarded as entertaining contemporary art, rather than contributions to an existing tradition of experimental film art. When making sense out of a film like *Dust*, one has to accept its challenge to produce new narrative theory with which film is to be seen and understood. A spectator who tries to apply those existing film theories and conventions that *Dust* is designed to challenge will only be confused – and eventually will dismiss the film as a narrative failure. Yet, when managing to break away from established narrative film conventions, it appears as anything but a failure.

The Alter Ego

The lack of affinity between the gold in Angela's apartment and the gold in Angela's story is only one of the film's numerous examples of applied Cubist storytelling. For example, the film indicates that Angela should be the biological daughter of 'The Teacher' and Neda, and the adopted daughter of Elijah. Still, Angela does not concentrate her story on any of the people whom the film depicts as her parents. Instead, it clearly shows that Angela keeps talking about Luke. This instance is even more noteworthy since, according to Angela's story, Luke died before she was born, so there cannot have been any personal relationship between the two. Furthermore, Angela adds information about Luke's life that she cannot possess, such as Luke's thoughts and dreams.

It appears as if Angela is telling Edge a complicated saga instead of handing him the factual information he needs in order to do that which she asks (or even demands) him to do. According to the way she tells her story, the manner in which Elijah comes across Luke in Macedonia is highly unlikely. It should be noticed that when Elijah leaves Luke dying on the

hilltop he cries out 'You never were! You never were.' Here a question becomes pertinent: What if indeed the character Luke never was? At the same time that Angela says that Luke dies, she has a heart failure and dies too. In this sense, *Dust* shows Angela as identifying completely with Luke, the character she is telling Edge about: when she tells about his death, she dies too. Luke appears to be Angela's alter ego.

If indeed Luke is Angela's fantasy character, then her story about him should be understood as a metaphoric self-depiction of her own life. If so, nothing that Angela tells Edge has happened in the way she is telling it. Nothing of that which we viewers see is to be taken at face value, while it--all of it!--has to be taken metaphorically. Here, Manchevski's Cubist storytelling technique of 'what you see is NOT what you get' should be kept in mind. Contrary to conventions stating that feature film is a fiction that mimetically represents reality, *Dust* is a fiction that mimetically represents another fiction--but at the same time emphasising that fiction itself is one of reality's basic elements: it is not possible to draw a clear line of demarcation between facts and fiction. Art is fiction, and as such not a statement presenting truth *per se*. Art is but a 'lie' that enables the critical spectator to encounter truth. Or, in Manchevski's own words: 'The narrative film is not CNN. By way of lying, the narrative film tells a truth, which is sometimes more relevant than facts, as opposed to CNN which tells lies through facts' (quoted in Abadzieva 2002).

In *Dust*, Angela appears to have made up the story of Luke in an attempt both to conceal her own life story and, at the same time, to hint at basic traits of that life story. In that sense Angela's whole approach is self-contradictory: at the same time, she hides and negates while she opens up and tells. As a compromise in between these two incompatible and contradictory acts, she tells the story of Luke. According to Angela's story, Luke was a villain that betrayed everyone, including himself. Luke being Angela's alter ego, she would regard herself as a villain who throughout her life has betrayed everyone, including herself. The film shows how she is deceiving Edge. By promising him something that she apparently is not going to give him, she deceives and betrays him. She has promised him her gold, but not even at her moment of death does she intend to hand it over to him. Instead, she is relieved when Edge tells her that he has discovered her secret. Only then she can die in peace. And he, interestingly enough, is shown never to recognise that she is using him when playing a game of double standards--the character Edge thereby hinders spectators from seeing and understanding that the story Angela tells hides the story she hints at: the story hides the story.

But if Luke is Angela's alter ego, what has she done that is so awful that she cannot talk about it, even though she apparently wants to talk about it and constantly hints at it? *Dust* does not offer much of a clue. Bewildered spectators are left guessing. The only thing that seems clear is that Angela accuses herself of some kind of hideous crime. The gold treasure that she keeps hidden symbolises that terrible and covert criminal act. In this sense, the gold symbolises guilt, not wealth. Gold here is a metaphor for sorrow and restriction, not for happiness and freedom. Consequently, Angela is shown to be living in a state of guilt, not in one of wealth: she is poor, even though her gold should make her rich. Why is this? When the film ends, spectators are left uncertain. We will never know what kind of hideous crime she tries to repress, even in her moment of death. Actually, spectators will not even know whether there has even been a crime committed in the first place. The only thing that seems certain is that there is a guilt complex at play, even though it is impossible to trace the origins of that guilt complex.



The Difference Between History and the Past

At one level *Dust* can be said 'to be about' storytelling as such, especially feature film storytelling. Arguably, however, the film makes an even more complex claim. It questions the possibility of knowing past events that never became part of recorded history. In essence, Manchevski's film is conceived at the rupture between the past and history. Since that past is that which has happened, and since history is latter-day notions of that which has happened, there is no affinity between the past and history: latter-day notions of the past are not and cannot be identical with the past as such. How are we to deal with this complicated relationship of past and history? This question is made explicit in *Dust* when Angela, alone at night, cries out: 'Where does your voice go when you are no more?'

What happens with all those events, or actions, or human beings that once were, considering they never became recorded, and therefore forever elude every living memory? The test case of *Dust* is the atrocities that took place during the Ilinden Uprising, a Macedonian revolt against the Ottoman Empire. Behind the Ilinden Uprising stood Macedonian nationalists who wanted to break loose from the Ottoman Empire and to form a sovereign Macedonian nation state. The revolt occurred on the day of Saint Elijah (Ilinden) during the summer of 1903, though the Ottomans soon ruthlessly put it down. The atrocities carried out during the crushing of the uprising were notorious, even though they to a large extent only lived on in the minds and memories of survivors.

Many of the Turkish officers that led the campaign against the Macedonian rebels were themselves Turkish nationalists, who opposed the then-current state of the Ottoman Empire. Together with young intellectuals in the empire, these officers formed a reform movement, popularly called the Young Turks. In 1908 these Young Turks started a revolution to reform the disintegrating Ottoman Empire. Their revolution further weakened the empire and triggered the two Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, which in turn paved the way for the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. The brutal atrocities committed during the Balkan Wars can only be described in terms of ethnic cleansings and genocides (plural). And again, many of these atrocities never became part of recorded history. They passed without leaving traces of their occurrence (except for painful voids) or remained exclusively in the minds and memories of the perpetrators, since their victims had been wiped out. If these past atrocities were living and continually transmitted through tellings of history, it would be in the format of unresolved guilt complexes and questions of how later generations would deal with these guilt complexes.

When actively forming the present-day Turkish nation state during the break up of the Ottoman Empire in the wake of the First World War, Turkish veterans from these Macedonian and Balkan wars involved in committing the genocide of the Armenian people. Genocides that have taken place later during the twentieth century can be more or less directly linked to the atrocities committed in Macedonia during the years before the outbreak of the First World War. Although the past has happened, it has only been represented in the format of history to a limited extent. And the question remains with regard to the extent to which it really could be represented in that format. This topic is explicitly brought forward by Manchevski's *Dust*. When the film is seen as a way of working out the question of how to deal with the differences between the past and history in the wake of genocide, it starts to take on great significance

Conclusion

At the very centre of the narrative of *Dust* one finds Angela's cry in the middle of the night: 'Where does your voice go when you are no more'? That question crystallises the problem of how to deal with our own perishableness in the face of a present that is in constant flux, and a past that has never become part of recorded history. This problem becomes both urgent and delicate when dealing with past genocides. In order to understand this problem, one has to make a clear distinction between the past and history. However, the conventional notions that history equals the past, and that feature film mimesis can show the past through its imagery, obscure this crucial distinction. To better understand our existential conditions, we have to critically revise established narrative theories and well-known film conventions. Through his film *Dust*, Manchevski has offered a weighty contribution to this important debate. When viewers find the film flawed, it is not necessarily because its narrative fails. It could just as well be that it is the applied theories and norms used when interpreting and making sense out of the film that are flawed and insufficient. If so, *Dust* is a film that provokes us to reconsider our understanding of feature film narratives, as well as the validity of commonly applied narrative theories.

References

- Abadžieva, S. (2002) 'Milcho Manchevski: "We Were Explaining Joseph Beuys' Performance to a Live Rabbit"', interview with Milcho Manchevski, translated by Aleksandra Ilievska, *The Large Glass (Golemoto staklo)*, issue 14 -15. Online. Available: http://www.manchevski.com.mk/html%20en/m_writings_sonja.html [07 September 2008]
- Bradshaw, P. (2002) 'Dust' (film review), *The Guardian* (03 May). Online. Available: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2002/may/03/culture.peterbradshaw4> [07 September 2008]
- Dr Kuma (2002). 'Dust', *Phase 9 Movies* Online. Available: <http://www.phase9.tv/moviereviews/dust.shtml> [07 September 2008]
- Filipčević, V. (2004). 'Historical Narrative and The East-West Leitmotif in Milcho Manchevski's *Before the Rain* and *Dust*', in *Film Criticism* (29.2; Winter 2004-05): 3-33.
- Griffin, D. (2003). 'Dust', *Film as Art: Daniel Griffin's Guide to Cinema*. Online. Available: <http://uashome.alaska.edu/~dfgriffin/website/dust.htm> [07 September 2008]
- Mitchell, E. (2003) 'FILM REVIEW; Gunfight at the Old Macedonian Corral: A Western With a Flexible Compass', in *New York Times* (22 August 2003). Online. Available: <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C00E2DD1639F931A1575BC0A9659C8B63> [07 September 2008]
- Raskin, R. (2003) 'On unhappy endings, politics and storytelling. An interview with Milcho Manchevski', in *P.O.V.* No 16 (December; the interview is dated 'New York, 11 October 2003'). Online. Available: http://pov.imv.au.dk/Issue_16/section_1/artc9A.html [07 September 2008]
- Thomas, K. (2003) "'Dust" - "Dust" stretches to set a visually gripping but unrealistic and overtly violent gun-slinging showdown in Macedonia', in *Los Angeles Times* (22 August 2003). Online. Available: <http://www.calendarlive.com/movies/reviews/cl-et-dust22aug22,2,2447833.story> [07 September 2008]

