

# Papatakis, Nico (1918-2010)

## Identification

**Classification mark:** 736PPT/1 - 35

**Description level:** Collection

## Context

**Producer:** Nico Papatakis

**Historical/biographical note:** Film director, screenwriter, and producer, Nico Papatakis was born in Addis-Ababa to a Greek father and an Ethiopian mother. His intense and singular body of work - five films with intent to reconcile modern cinematic language with antic tragedy - is haunted by the question of social domination and subjugation.

Nico Papatakis is also the producer of *Un chant d'amour*, in 1950: the only film ever made by Jean Genet, with whom he had deep ties, and of  *Shadows*, John Cassavetes's first movie, in 1959.

At the age of 16 he is already actively involved against fascism. The invasion of Ethiopia by the troops of Mussolini forces him to flee, first in Greece, then in France, where he settles in 1939. He soon meets and befriends Jacques Prévert and plays small parts in several films directed by Marc Allegret and Marcel Carné. In 1943 he joins André Virel's resistance network. After the war, in 1947, he opens and manages - first rue de la Harpe, then rue de Rennes à Paris - La Rose Rouge, the legendary Parisian cabaret-théâtre in Saint-Germain des Prés, frequented by Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacques Prévert, and Jean Cocteau. Boris Vian - Juliette Greco, and the Frères Jacques, amongst many others, made their stage debut at La Rose Rouge. Celebrated playwrights such as Jean Tardieu had his first play *Un mot pour un autre* staged there, so did Raymond Queneau, with his *Exercices de styles*.

In 1951 he marries the actress Anouk Aimée. However six years later, his political activities in opposition to the Algerian War forces him into exile, in New York, where he meets John Cassavetes and becomes involved in a relationship with Christina Păffgen who, borrowing his first name, so becomes known as *Nico*: Andy Warhol's muse, and the singer of the Velvet Underground.

Back in Paris, he directs, in 1962, his first film *Les Abysses*, based on the real-life story "l'Affaire Papin"- a famous murder case during the 1930's in France –and adapted from a screenplay by Jean Vauthier.

When the film causing a resounding scandal gets removed from the initial program of the French selection of the 1963 Cannes Film Festival, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, André Breton, Jean Genet et Jacques Prévert take a public stand in defending the film in the newspaper *Le Monde*.

In 1967, under the regime of the Colonels, he clandestinely films in Greece his second long feature: *Les Pâtres du désordre*. Set in a Greek village under the military dictatorship, the lead role is played by his new wife, Olga Karlatos.

His third film, *Gloria Mundi* (1975) - from which he made a second version released in 2005 - deals with the question of torture during the Algerian War and, as such, is violently attacked by former members of the O.A.S: two bomb attempts are deployed in the theater where the film is screened.

In 1986, he directs *La Photo*, on the theme question of immigration and exile, and for which he receives an award at the Thessaloniki International Film Festival. In 1991, his second to last film *Les Equilibristes*, with Michel Piccoli in the rôle of Jean Genet, is screened at the Venice Mostra.

Besides being the author of several unpublished screenplays, he wrote and published, in 2003, a revealing autobiographical novel with regard to his origins and his life: "*Tous les désespoirs sont permis*" (©Librairie Arthème Fayard).

He passed away on the 17th December 2010, at his home, in Paris.

**Mode of creation:** Collection entrusted to IMEC by Nico Papatakis's daughter, Manuela Papatakis, heir, beneficiary and legal representative of his estate.

## Contents

**Analysis:** The Nico Papatakis archives comprise the manuscripts and typescripts of his autobiographical writings, his screenplays (whether already filmed or not produced), as well as files for each of his films (directed and/or produced). These files contain synopses, shooting schedules, rehearsing documents, contracts, promotional materials, photographs, press kits, as well as essential professional correspondence. Finally, some biographic files preserve elements of his political, artistic and intellectual activities.

**Augmentation:** the collection is closed.

## Conditions of access and use

**Access:** the donor or right holder grant transmission after authorization.

**Notes on transmission:** the correspondence and some unpublished documents are transmissible only after specific authorization from the donor or right holder.

**Language:** French/English/ Modern Greek.

**Search Tool:** Directory

## Additional Sources

**Bibliography/ Filmography:** Nico Papatakis DVD, Blu-ray, Boxset: *Les Abysses; Les Pâtres du Désordre; Gloria mundi (1975); La Photo; Les Équilibristes; Gloria Mundi (2005)*: 1963-2005, including a booklet under the editorial management of Manuela Papatakis. – Paris, Gaumont: 2015

**External sources:** archival documents related to Nico Papatakis are also to be found in the Barney Rosset Collection ([The Grove Press Film Collection/Harvard Film Archive](#)).

**Cross-references to other IMEC collections:** [Jean Genet](#), [Henry Chapier](#), [Jean Tardieu](#), [Jack Lang](#), [Jacques Audiberti](#), [Michel Foucault](#)

## Notes

**Date of description:** 2016-11-15

**Category:** Author

**Themes:** Cinéma