

Branding the ‘White City’: touristic films and the portrayal of modern Athens in the 1950s and 1960s

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Abstract

‘White City’, Christian’s documentary commissioned by the Greek National Tourism Organisation, emphasises the bright sun and the bright marble so as to rebrand the Greek capital as a modern tourist utopia. The cinematic portrayal of modern Athens in touristic films offers a rich cultural database for drawing conclusions about film-induced tourism and city branding policies for the metropolis of the future. Investigating the processes involved in reinventing identities for historical cities, via the moving image, for the tourist, lies at the very heart of this paper’s aims. This analysis proposes a toolkit for tracing transformations that have to do with the shifting mentality of the times: moving from culture to recreation. Architecture portrayed in touristic films provides a familiar backdrop for the international audience and propagandises national continuity. Christian’s film is used advisedly as it proposes a critical reconsideration of policy-making for the branding of historic cities and mature destinations.

Keywords: city branding, film-induced tourism, propaganda, creative geography

Introduction

‘White City’, John Christian’s 1968 documentary commissioned by the Greek National Tourism Organisation (G.N.T.O.), emphasises the bright sun –a crucial, immaterial component of Greek architecture– and the bright, white marble –a common building material both with the antiquities and the modern city– in order to put forward a coherent cinematic argument for rebranding the Greek capital as the ‘white city’. Christian’s film is last –for the period under consideration– in a relatively long line of documentary films with similar scope but diverging aesthetic means of expression and narrative devices. These include international productions as prestigious as Carl Dudley’s 1951 and 1965 films and Basil Wright’s celebrated ‘Greece: The Immortal Land’ (UK, 1958), as well as a series of low-key domestic documentaries. The cinematic portrayal of modern Athens and its tourist infrastructure (monuments, nature and architecture) in touristic films –along with domestic and international feature-length movies, shot on location in Greece, which became major worldwide box-office hits in the 1960s– offer a rich and so far inadequately explored cultural database, from which one can draw valuable conclusions about film-induced tourism and city branding policies for the modern metropolis and the recycling of historical tourism. Investigating the processes involved in inventing and reinventing identities for historical cities, via the moving image, for the modern tourist, lies at the very heart of this paper’s aims. The detailed shot-by-shot formal and stylistic analysis, annotation and statistical processing of suggestive moving image works with a special focus on architecture and urban space –based on on-going research conducted at the School of Architecture, National Technical University of Athens– constitutes a potent and original research toolkit for tracing vital transformations that take place in a brief span of twenty years. These transformations have to do with the shifting mentality of the times: roughly speaking, moving from culture to recreation. As far as film style and content are concerned, depicting the city’s modern

amenities, transportation and urban infrastructure alongside the ruins of a glorious past on the one hand and complementing off-screen narration with more immersive dramatization on the other, are two of the most distinct formal changes that take place in this phase. These changes corroborate a distinct break with the past, particularly with pre-war documentaries. In this respect, modernist urban architecture portrayed in touristic films –the Greek idiom of ‘critical regionalism’ in particular– possesses unintentionally a dual role: a. it provides a reassuringly familiar backdrop for the international audience, and b. it serves as yet another agent –along with Greece’s official advertising campaigns for tourism– for propagandising historical and cultural continuity. Both are crucial in this era of competing national identities for an emerging tourist market. In the light of the recently launched ‘You in Athens’ campaign by G.N.T.O., Christian’s relatively unnoticed case from the 1960s –popular culture and travel literature hardly ever refer to modern Athens as the ‘white city’– is used advisedly, as it proposes a critical reconsideration of the means and modes of policy-making for the rebranding of historic cities and mature destinations.

Which ‘White City’?

One of the earliest references to Athens’ whiteness comes from Barrows’ 1898 travel accounts: “Seen from either hill, Athens is a clean, white city, its atmosphere unpolluted by smoke or fog” and “[t]hese square, solid white buildings are a trifle monotonous; but they are relieved here and there by others, such as Schliemann mansion and some new houses on Kephisia Street, in which there is a union of mass and elegance” (pp.155, 157). However, in late 19th and early 20th century city-planning theories and practices, whiteness had become synonymous with utopian visions of the future embodied in the eclectic architecture of great exhibition spaces such as those designed for ‘Chicago’s World Columbian Exposition’ in 1893 (Hall, 1994, pp.176-183; Larson, 2004) and ‘London’s Franco-British Exhibition’ in 1908, ‘a city of delight’, a veritable city of pleasure’ with ‘gleaming white palaces’ (Unknown Author, 1908, p.20). As the City Beautiful movement moved away from the turn-of-the-century romanticism and adopted to inter-war pragmatism, early Bauhaus city-planning traditions took the factor of pleasure out of the equation of the ‘White City’ and replaced it with heavy dosages of functionalism, purism and even brutalism. Berlin’s ‘Weiße Stadt’ suburb –erected in the 1920s– and Tel Aviv’s ‘White City’ –constructed in the 1930’s– bear witness to this shifting mentality. Furthermore, the hegemony of white in modern architecture appears to be based on a long history of misconceptions. One of the earliest ones has to do with the misappropriation of the Parthenon and its sculptural decoration’s bright whiteness. Mark Wigley observes that: “[t]his ideology of the white has been much more successful than even the architects imagined. It has become the invisible norm. People really do think that white transcends time” (Wigley, Eliasson and Birnbaum, 2006, p.242). This probably constitutes Athens’ strongest claim on the legacy of the ‘White City’ as Christian’s film invests in the notion of modern Greece’s continuity with the past.

Whose ‘White City’?

In the 1950s, G.N.T.O.’s Directorate of Promotion was probably one of the most vibrant and productive departments of the Organisation, paired only by the Directorate of Planning, Design and Construction, which was burdened with the production of novel tourist infrastructure. Instead, the Directorate of Promotion was responsible mainly for the design and circulation of printed advertisements about popular tourist locations (the port of Kastella in Athens; the islands of Corfu, Rhodes, Mykonos, Andros; the archaeological sites of Mycenae and Cnossos; the spa at Loutraki; the monasteries of Mount Athos; Athens and Epidaurus Festival; etc.) in the form of posters and brochures, in Greek, English, French and German. Surviving examples from the remarkable output of the times demonstrate a significant break from the artistic explorations of the past. This included colourful ‘art déco’ style graphic design posters with representational compositional elements –mainly stylised ancient monuments and idyllic landscapes– where sophisticated typography does not play a major role (Lazaridou, 2007, p.38). In the 1960s, as printing technology with lithography and offset evolves, graphic design gradually gives way to photographic posters, without altogether forsaking graphic compositions with vivid colours, modern

design and strong elements of abstraction (Lazaridou, 2007, p.58), particularly present in the work of M. and A. Katzourakis and F. E. Carabott (2008, pp.36-60 and 104-125).

A close study of the minutes taken at G.N.T.O.'s Board of Directors meetings discloses that, throughout the 1950s, advertising campaigns were carried out primarily through printed media (posters, brochures, classified advertisements both in Greece and abroad, banners at major railway stations and airport terminals, etc.). These were distributed via G.N.T.O.'s Tourist Offices abroad (London, Paris, Brussels, Frankfurt, Rome, Stockholm, New York and Tokyo), American Express Travel Offices, Greek Embassies and other private Travel Agencies. There is little evidence to suggest that a systematic exploitation of the moving image for propagandising tourist attractions in Greece, both for domestic and foreign potential visitors, was being seriously considered. In these early, formative years, the Organisation expressed interest in film, as a medium for tourist propaganda, at least on two occasions. Professor of History of Art A. Prokopiou and filmmaker G. Hoyningen-Huene's 'Daphni, The Virgin of the Golden Laurels' (Greece, 1951), a film about Daphni –an 11th century, Byzantine Monastery on the outskirts of Athens and a U.N.E.S.C.O. World Heritage Site since 1992– first caught the attention of the Board in 1953, following its screening in Athens. 'Daphni' was probably the first documentary on art and architecture in Greece. It was produced by Notos Pictures, with the collaboration of Aldous Huxley for the adaptation of Prokopiou's screenplay in English, which was narrated by actors Maurice Evans and Ethel Barrymore. This twenty-minute-long documentary was awarded first prize at two international film festivals in 1952, New York Film Festival and Edinburgh Film Festival. The less celebrated documentary 'Hydra' (Greece 1957), produced by Diana Films, was purchased in 1957 for 25.000 drachmas and was intended for public screenings at G.N.T.O.'s Tourist Offices abroad. Although the film itself was not particularly accomplished, G.N.T.O.'s decision marks a significant shift of mentality, as it constitutes the very first attempt towards establishing a specialised collection of tourist short films for public display. Suggestive of this shift is G.N.T.O.'s initiative to commission a short promotional movie in order to advertise, in open-air movie theatres, the programme –comprising mainly of performances of ancient Greek drama by the National Theatre of Greece– of Athens and Epidaurus 1957 Festival. Archival material reveals little about the Directorate of Promotion's motivation to embrace the moving image as a valid means of tourist propaganda. However, the fact that certain Greek feature films and several foreign productions shot on location in Greece found wide favour with western audiences must have had something to do with this newly established advertising policy. Early in the 1960's, the G.N.T.O. begins to commission its own projects rather than buying independent productions. One might claim, even though this could be difficult to substantiate, that these actions are prompted less by touristic films' actual impact on tourism growth – the G.N.T.O lacks both the tools and the resources to assess their commercial success– and more by the ephemeral international fascination with Greek cinema and Greece on film.

The case of touristic films in Greece presents an interesting paradox for the historian of the future: the G.N.T.O. was fairly avant-garde as far as printed advertisement is concerned –the Organisation commissioned contemporary artists who experimented with modern techniques and media– but somewhat slow in its appropriation of film for the purpose of tourist propaganda. The latter could be partly attributed to the backwardness of the film industry in 1950s Greece. Lack of funding, contemporary studios, up-to-date equipment and specialised personnel on the one hand and government censorship and an influx of foreign movies –mainly American– on the other, hindered the development of the domestic industry (Rouvas and Stathakopoulos, 2005, pp.72-73). Despite their inherent differences –documentaries answer to different budgetary restrictions and are less dependent on studios than narrative cinema– non-narrative cinema suffered more or less from the same backwardness. Never the less, as extensive archival research in the Greek Film Archive and the National Audio-visual Archive demonstrates, there is at least a hand-full of noteworthy Greek productions that are on par with a couple of dozen foreign documentaries shot in Greece in the 1950s. Among the latter, Basil Wright's 'Greece: The Immortal Land' (UK, 1958) sets the benchmark for its aesthetic accomplishment and poetic vision. Wright collaborated with English sculptor and painter Michael Ayrton, to whom he was indebted for his 'ability unerringly to plunge in medias res'

and bring about a greater understanding of Greek art (Nyenhuis, 2003, p.15). Wright's Greek colleagues claimed greater insight of the land and its people. Indeed, Greek documentaries displayed a wide range of sub-genres that included, but were not limited to, travelogues, art films and, predominantly, ethnographic movies, some of which showed great merit. A great deal of this can be attributed to the efforts of filmmaker Roussos Koundouros, the brother of the renowned director Nikos Koundouros, who –among his other accomplishments– singlehandedly transformed the face of Greek newsreels from 1961 onwards (Kimionis, 2011, pp.73-85). In 1959, Koundouros founds the 'Institute for Cultural and Scientific Cinematography' and establishes the 'Group of Five' –a team of young filmmakers and critics– with the aim of promoting Greek documentary cinema. In 1961, the Institute organises, with great success, the first international 'Festival of Ethnological and Sociological Cinema' in Athens, under the aegis of the G.N.T.O. The then Chairman of the Board of Directors, G. Plitas, received his distinguished local and foreign guests at an official reception held in the newly erected, ultra-modern, state-run 'Mont Parnès' hotel. The hotel was designed by a team headed by architect P. Milonas and inaugurated on 17 June 1961 by none other than the Greek Prime Minister K. Karamanlis, accompanied by G.N.T.O.'s General Secretary Nikolaos Fokas. The moving image is now seriously considered as a valid means for putting forward an alluring image of modern Greece for an international audience of potential visitors.

Koundouros was one of the first film directors to work for the G.N.T.O. Some of his early touristic films survive even today, though in poor condition. 'Argolis' (Greece, 1964) and 'Crete' (Greece, 1964) are suggestive of this period of experimentation with non-narrative form, inspired by John Grierson's writings, the works of the General Post Office Film Unit from the 1930s and the Soviet School of montage, especially the works and writings of Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov (Kimionis, 2011, p.80, n.11). 'Argolis', in particular, employs what Bordwell and Thompson term 'rhetorical form' (1993, pp.112-119), where, instead of a story with characters and the habitual causal linking of sequences that one comes across in narrative cinema, there is the gradual unravelling of a potent visual argument. The topic of this thirteen-minute-long documentary is the tourist promotion of Argolis, a region at the eastern peninsula of the Peloponnese, 130km south of Athens. The aim is to establish the archaeological sites of Mycenae and Epidaurus, Epidaurus Festival –opened in 1954 and officially inaugurated in 1955– and the regional capital of Nafplio as major tourist destinations for the refined visitor, who wishes to combine education and culture within a brief span of time and space. Koundouros' cinematic argument achieves this by foregrounding the rough beauty of the unspoiled landscape with wide shots of barren land –reminiscent of the photography employed in Cacoyannis' 'Electra' (Greece, 1962)– and eerie views of archaeological sites devoid of any human presence. Soon, the theme of G.N.T.O.'s progressive efforts is subtly introduced with shots of ships, buses and cars carrying spectators to Epidaurus, where they are about to enjoy a unique performance of ancient drama. After the performance, as the spectators depart for Nafplio, once more the filmmaker portrays with astonishing brevity –a hand-full of shots discreetly summarise G.N.T.O.'s accomplishments– the work produced under the auspices of the Organisation. One of the first projects undertaken by the G.N.T.O. in 1951 was the utter refurbishment of the tourist infrastructure in Argolis. This involved constructing tourist pavilions at Mycenae and Epidaurus, electrifying the ancient, open-air theatre, repairing and widening the local road network, deepening the small port at Epidaurus, running regular services by coach and ship between Athens, Epidaurus and Nafplio and, most importantly, constructing one of the first 'Xenia' state-run hotels in Nafplio by architect K. Krandonellis, in 1953. Therefore, Argolis –alongside Corfu, Rhodes and the various thermal spas, whose infrastructure gradually developed during the interwar period– spearheaded G.N.T.O.'s efforts towards attracting foreign visitors and precious foreign currency to Greece, with modern facilities and up-to-date services. This notion reverberates in Koundouros' documentary both as film form and as film content. The director's formal choices describe a laconic screen language, very much befitting of the theme: 'voice-of-God' narration, third person point of view camera work, medium and wide shots, long takes, minimum camera movement, wall-to-wall music, limited source sound (at the performance of ancient drama) and extensive use of the tripod. Content-wise, photographing G.N.T.O.'s newly erected establishments –particularly architect I. Triandafillides 1958-61 hotel at Akronafplia– is not Koundouros'

primary preoccupation. Whenever this happens, these structures are positioned slightly off-frame or in the context of their immediate environment. The documentary concludes with a brief sequence that depicts a group of young, vibrant and contented tourists enjoying the bright sun, the blue sky and the vastness of the sea. Koundouros' work for the G.N.T.O. characterises a whole period of Greek documentary tradition soon to be abandoned for more immersive narrations, along the lines of narrative cinema. However, his early endeavours coincide with a period of bold experimentation with non-narrative form that gave a great boost to Greek documentaries and touristic films in particular. This drive culminated with 'Souvenirs de la Grèce' (Greece, 1964) by F. E. Carabott representing Greece at the 1965 Cannes Film Festival.

The Creative Geography of Athens

Greek film director John Christian brings his experience with narrative cinema to the job, when he starts working for the G.N.T.O. His career sets off in 1943 and comes to an end in the early 1970s with a total of nine, not particularly distinguished feature films, whose subject-matter ranges from dramas to war films and historical movies. In 1967, he directs two documentaries for the G.N.T.O.; 'Once Upon a Bus' and 'Modern Odyssey'. In the latter, Christian displays the full extent of his screen language –the visual vocabulary and formal syntax– which distinguishes his work from Koundouros' earlier approach. A year later, Christian produces and directs 'White City', featuring M. Sakka and T. Iasonides, photographed by M. Andriopoulos, on a script by J. Kenas, narrated by A. Tex and furnished with various musical themes by Manos Xatzidakis. 'White City' is a scale-down version of 'Modern Odyssey' inasmuch as it reproduces the same storytelling mechanism –developed in his earlier projects– for a smaller and much more easily controlled area of application. Instead of employing the American couple from 'Modern Odyssey' in order to tell his story, Christian now recruits two teenagers –Maryanne, a young Greek girl who sells flowers on the street and Johnny, a same age visitor from the States– as a vehicle for introducing the viewer and potential tourist to the amenities of modern Athens. From the very beginning, it becomes apparent that the documentary targets the vast American tourist market, especially those mid-bourgeois families who wish to spend their vacations in a care-free, safe and fairly economical place. Drachma had always been a rather soft currency that sustained several devaluations in order to counter inflation and boost exports. Furthermore, by the mid-1960s, both Olympic Airways and several other airline companies run direct transatlantic flights to Athens. In particular, Greek ship-owner A. Onassis' Olympic Airways inaugurated on 7 July 1966 daily, direct flights between Athens and New York, with three new Boeing 707-384 aircrafts. Hence, Olympic Airways was attempting a strategic move towards claiming a substantial portion of the 150.000 Americans –from a total of 750.000 tourists– that visited Greece via Ellinikon International Airport in 1964 (Unknown Author, 1965, p.9). It comes as no surprise that Christian's documentary sets off at Ellinikon International Airport, where we first meet one of our protagonists, Johnny. As soon as Johnny and his mother arrive at the city centre –only a short bus-ride away– the real adventure begins!

Johnny and Maryanne, the two main characters of this twenty-three-minute-long tourist documentary, meet in front of the Archaeological Museum. He is accompanying his mother to the museum for his first encounter with the marvels of antiquity. She sells flowers to the visitors. The two of them decide to embark on an exploration of the city on Johnny's five dollars. Their spontaneous decision functions as a weak excuse for an eclectic cinematic journey across the urban landscape of modern Athens. Christian combines extremely engaging cinematography inspired by narrative cinema –point of view shots, over the shoulder shots, shot/reverse shot techniques, first person narrative mode– with third person, off-screen narration in impeccable American-English. Most of the time, the voiceover reproduces aurally what the viewer watches on the screen. Unlike Koundouros' solemn descriptions of the sites and their history, Kenas' light-heartedly text foregrounds the main characters' juvenile enthusiasm as they discover the splendours of this modern, easy-going city and tells the viewer surprisingly little about the actual environment. Clearly, the focus here is the filmic reconstruction of such a genuinely pleasant experience as exploring an exciting and at times exotic, for most Westerners even in the 1960s, touristic destination.

Some of the lines in the commentary can be construed as humorous, enigmatic or even embarrassing: “Parthenon is brilliant. With sun glasses, it’s even more dramatic.” or “One thing is certain, where there are tourists there are souvenirs.” or “When a woman has an idea, it’s time to keep an open mind.” and “Athens is rich in two things, lovers and natural sponges.” The aim is to portray Athens as an extremely safe and tourist-friendly place, ideal for a relaxed and comfortable short stay, full of pleasant surprises.

In terms of its formal structure, the documentary consists of two hundred and sixty four shots, arranged in sixteen sequences, bookended by a brief intro shot at the airport, which includes the opening titles in the style of G.N.T.O.’s 1960’s posters, and a corresponding outro, or recapitulation, that combines footage from the Archaeological Museum and the airport. Each one of the sixteen sequences is fairly monothematic, that is to say, it corresponds to a single –different each time– shooting location and, consequently, a different tourist attraction. The average shot length (A.S.L.) of the movie is 5.3 seconds. This means that the cutting rate of Christian’s film is faster than our average documentary. In fact, its editing rhythm corresponds to an action or adventure movie. Indicatively S. Spielberg’s ‘Indiana Jones: Raiders of the Lost Ark’ (USA, 1981) has precisely the same A.S.L. (Tsivian, 2005, on-line database). This fusion of techniques, an amalgam of narrative cinema and traditional documentary strategies, with its typical –both with narrative and non-narrative cinema– episodic structuring, brings about a peculiar cinematic geography of Athens, one that vaguely resembles Kevin Lynch’s mental mapping tradition (Lynch, 1960). The whole film stands for an idiosyncratic moving image mental map of Athens from the perspective of a –rather young and inexperienced in this case– tourist. Naturally, the flagships of the Athenian tourist landscape are there: the Acropolis and the near-by hills of Pnyx and Philopappos, the traditional settlement of Plaka, Herod Atticus open-air theatre, Lycabettus hill, Syntagma Square, Panathenaic Stadium, the National Archaeological Museum and, of course, the celebrated and fairly recently erected (April 1963) Athens Hilton Hotel, the first international hotel chain –that is, if one excludes Club Mediterranee’s holiday camp in Corfu, established in 1951– to begin its business operation in Greece. Alongside these unrivalled hotspots of local tourist development, Christian presents us with a number of less known and rather odd options for sightseeing. These include destinations as mundane and unimpressive as an organised beach at Vouliagmeni or Glyfada, the coastline between Piraeus and Glyfada, an open-air food market at Kolonaki, the Meat Market at the city centre, architect Ernst Ziller’s Presidential Mansion –then serving as the Royal Palace until the abolition of monarchy in 1974– and a rather indifferent café at the pedestrian street of Fokionos Negri. These lesser places –a fraction of the city’s unacknowledged areas that remain obscure and out of fame because they happen to be situated off the touristic bitten path, outside the imaginary triangle denoted by the Acropolis, Lycabettus hill/Athens Hilton and the National Archaeological Museum– punctuate the main narration in a way that appears to be dictated neither by the physical layout of the urban landscape nor by the particulars of Christian’s scenario. Instead, the succession of the movie’s episodes –and their corresponding shooting locations– constructs an expressionistic map of the city –a creative geography of the urban terrain– destined to nourish the fantasies, the collective illusions and the preconceptions about the image of the city of Athens, of those unacquainted with the actual topography of the city. The terms ‘creative geography’ and ‘artificial landscape’ were coined in the 1920s by theoretician and film director Lev Kuleshov –the founder of the Soviet School of montage– so as to describe the process of constructing celluloid, interior or exterior spaces in narrative cinema that do not exist in real life. These are not to be confused with set designs or computer generated, digital spaces. Artificial landscapes are shaped simply by filming successive pieces of action in different locations of the city that are miles apart, or in different cities, or even in faraway countries (Kuleshov, 1974, pp.4-5). These spaces come to life in the editing suite, when the editor and the director put together the different shots that comprise each sequence of the film. More importantly, cinematic creative geographies appear as unified, flowing spaces to the untrained eye. As a matter of fact, they are designed and produced with this in mind: being understood and appreciated as one, unified and meaningful space. Christian exploits to the utmost the possibilities of this technique. He leaves tedious and unflattering chunks of urban fabric out of his cinematic narration and concentrates on the commercially exploitable neighbourhoods of the city, which have grown to become Athens’ touristic

trademarks over the years. The movie replicates rather accurately a sad realisation that may be true for other cities as well: museums and archaeological sites appear to create a vacuum in their vicinity, leaving other districts of the city with less than a fighting chance, as they compete for this ambiguous minority of alternative tourists, who are out to get a sense of the real city. At the same time, major tourist attractions suck the wealth and diversity of daily urban life from their immediate environments and replace it with short-lived or periodical, tourist-related commercial activity. The latter eventually fades out, as it tends to generate kitsch, skin-deep décors that fail to meet the expectations and satisfy the growing demands of the informed visitor. On the one hand, the space in-between tourist attractions in Christian's film –residential, commercial or administrative districts and so on– is of little interest to the potential visitor, in accordance to the 1960s mentality about mass tourism growth and promotion policies. This could explain why there is so little of it in the movie. On the other hand, Christian compensates for the lack of live urban tissue on the screen by introducing a small percentage of alternative urban sideshows, such as the open-air food market or the Meat Market. This happens in controlled dosages only, as the documentary addresses the average American or Northern European city dweller, who is not expected to be primarily concerned with anything less than the mainstream tourist deal. Contemporary documentaries, such as the Lonely Planet TV series, provide interesting alternatives to this out-dated model, by pulling the focus from mainstream tourist attractions to fringe urban phenomena, specifically designed to meet the special requirements of particular types of tourism (business, conference, gastronomy, religious, culture, gay and lesbian).

The Legacy of the 'White City'

The close study of John Christian's 'White City' enables us to draw valuable conclusions about promotional policies for mature tourist destinations such as Athens. Some of these inform the way contemporary researchers understand the various ways the moving image had been utilised as a potent medium for tourist propaganda in the 1950s and 1960s. Part of this discussion branches out into a formal enquiry into contemporary cinematic practices about tourist destinations. Other conclusions feed into the current debate about film induced tourism and city branding. These can be summarised accordingly:

1. 'White City' was commissioned by the G.N.T.O. in order to construct an appealing cinematic image of Athens for the average foreign visitor, but fails to depict any of the Organisation's local, tourist-related building projects. Most of the footage portrays recently completed works conducted under the aegis of the Ministry of Public Works (landscaping of the area around the Acropolis, Philopappos and Pnyx hills by architect D. Pikionis, between 1951 and 1957), the Ministry of Education (excavations and restorations at the Acropolis and the Ancient and Roman Agorae of Athens) and Banks (organised beaches at Glyfada and Vouliagmeni in 1959). The only exception is the controversial project atop Lycabettus hill (1965), which involved the construction of an underground funicular that leads to a café and a restaurant with a panoramic view of Athens. All criticism subdued when, on the opening day, 18.000 Athenians made the short trip to the top to enjoy the view and familiarise themselves with G.N.T.O.'s new tourist assets. One plausible explanation for this phenomenon is that G.N.T.O.'s extensive building programme, inaugurated in 1951, had reached a state of financial and administrative maturity by the time Christian produced his film. Therefore, the director needed to concern himself only with the creative reworking of a more or less fixed pool of tourist attractions, a handful of sites, monuments and public buildings, such as Danish architect Christian Hansen's 'Athenian Trilogy' (The Academy, the University and the National Library).

2. The study of the film can help us reach yet another realisation, that the touristic landscape of Athens appears to have changed very little from the 1950s till now. Christian's monothematic sequences depict most major archaeological sites and tourist attractions available to local and foreign visitors in late 1960's Athens. If one were to repeat this cinematic experiment today –almost half a century later– one would have a hard time figuring out what else to include in the touristic, filmic narration of the city. A quick look at 'Breathtaking Athens' tourist portal's top ten attractions –run by the Municipality of Athens– bears witness to this disconcerting truth. The new Acropolis Museum, designed by B. Tschumi and M.

Photiadis and inaugurated in 2009, presents an interesting exception to this generic rule. The museum constitutes a significant addition to the touristic infrastructure of the city. However, it failed to invigorate less tourist-exposed areas of the city, as it is placed –for reasons that are totally justifiable– along the edge of the aforementioned imaginary triangle. Furthermore, it failed to create a ‘Bilbao effect’, although there was never an official or unofficial request for something like this. What about Christian’s selection of choices for alternative sideshows? Over the years Fokionos Negri has fallen out of favour even with the locals, most of the city’s organised beaches have been left unattended and today look rundown and overcrowded, open-air food markets lost their originality and appeal, the central Meat Market has been marred by the notoriety of nearby Omonia Square and the Southern coastline of Athens –probably the most tragic loss for the city– still awaits the so much needed urban-scale revitalisation, originally scheduled to coincide with Athens 2004 Olympic Games, but never executed. Naturally, some fine examples of cultural infrastructure have joined the touristic grid: Athens Concert Hall, Onassis Cultural Centre, New Benaki Museum, etc. Nevertheless, their impact on tourism growth has fallen short of the original expectations, if any. Instead, Barcelona’s Olympic works, the grand projects of Paris and the central features of London’s millennium celebrations have brought about the utter refurbishment of their tourist infrastructure, which played a major role in their repackaging for future generations of tourists. Athens has done none of the above and the fact that Greece ranks 10th in the chart of most popular tourist destinations in Europe for 2011 (UNWTO, 2011, p.6), appears to be symptomatic of the unstable political situation in the Southern Mediterranean rather than the result of careful and laborious planning in the direction of reinventing an identity for such a mature destination as the city of Athens and Greece in general. Coming back to the previously mentioned, hypothetical experiment with the cinematic image of Athens, G.N.T.O.’s contemporary touristic films –nowadays in the form of brief TV adds– appear to employ novel representational strategies (aesthetic or formal) but share a painstakingly familiar thematic triptych with their predecessors: the blue sky/sea, the bright sun and the antiquities.

3. In the early 1920s, Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov was responsible for the ‘Cine-Truth’ and ‘Cine-Eye’ newsreels. Vertov was seeking to achieve a novel, ground-breaking cinematic language by utilising montage –a non-narrative formal system– as a means for describing the dramatic transformations Soviet society was undergoing under the Bolsheviks (Hicks, 2007, pp.5-21). There was no better way for capturing the ever changing status of everyday life in the Soviet Union than by filming the metamorphosis of Russia’s urban landscapes. Views of the busy streets of Moscow with a special interest in transportation infrastructure –electric trams, buses with petrol engines and automobiles– often made their way in Vertov’s newsreels and later works. The idea was to force an image of radical modernity out of an out-dated urban fabric –mainly consisting of 19th century eclectic architecture– so as to signify progress and the promise of prosperity (Alifragkis and Penz, 2011, pp.117-141). Vertov’s bold experimentations with elaborate montage techniques became synonymous with the cinematic genre of ‘city-symphonies’ –a filmic ode to the city from the 1920s and 1930s– where sequences devoted to street life formed the backbone of the films’ narrative structure. Christian’s ‘White City’ contains two consecutive sequences –almost 15% of the total number of shots– and a number of transitional shots –brief insertions that mediate between sequences– that deal with different modes of transportation in Athens. These sequences contradict one another. The former –shot in Plaka– depicts the difficult coexistence between pedestrians and cars as they struggle to reclaim the limited public space of the street, each for their own good. The latter –shot at Omonia Square, inaugurated in 1959 on an avant-garde design by sculptor G. Zongolopoulos and architect K. Bitsios– is a montage extravaganza that celebrates street life in the modern city of Athens. Essentially, Christian attempts to construct a cinematic binary opposition on the dichotomy of past and present, where the medieval urban tissue of Athens –with its picturesque winding roads and numerous cul-de-sacs– is set against those bursting with activity, highly efficient, wide avenues of downtown Athens –a visual assertion of the promise for progress and modernity– in a dialectic argument that idealises the integral contradictions of the city. In this respect, ‘Christian’s tourist propaganda is as much about reassuring potential visitors that they will receive every possible convenience offered by other European capitals as advertising the wealth and breadth of the city’s historic

background. 'White City' conveys a potent, clear-cut message: in Athens, outstanding scenic beauty and neon-light, curtain-wall modernity are a few blocks away from one another.

4. Christian's experience with narrative cinema fed into the style of the 'White City', where he exploited the whole range of shot scales in order to make his cinematography more engaging for the average viewer. His medium shots, close-ups and extreme close-ups focus almost exclusively on the film's young protagonists as the camera closely follows them in their romantic adventure across the landscapes of Athens. Occasionally, when the camera steps back to allow for brief intrusions by the cityscape, glimpses of modern Athens appear along the edges of the frame. These views of modernity –consisting almost exclusively of high-rise apartment blocks– become more frequent half way through the film and eventually dominate the screen space of Christian's documentary. In fact, residential, multi-storey buildings, whose structural framework replicates Le Corbusier's 'Dom-ino' house (1914-5) scheme, constitutes the single most widespread system of housing development in Greece from 1950s onwards. This phenomenon motivated Kenneth Frampton, the renowned critic and historian, to declare that "Athens is most certainly a modern city par-excellence" (1981, p.14). This informal modernist tradition is often looked down upon or even overlooked by the man on the street and remains largely unacknowledged by researchers, especially abroad. This custom, though, is more honoured in the monotonous repetition of a downgraded version of the original paradigm, than in the refinement of each project's architectural style, in spite of the fact that some fine specimens of Greek modernism and 'critical regionalism' adorn the Athenian landscape. This practice creates a dense, uniform body of built form – uninterrupted by natural (rivers, parks) or manmade (walls, highway intersections) elements– that functions as an extra layer, a new artificial terrain above ground. It is precisely due to the dominance of white marble, light-coloured stucco and cement surfaces that modern Athens creates the illusion of a 'White City'. Christian's film sets out to reinvest in this unconventional modernist tradition by means of the moving image. In the 1920s and 1930s, as Athens was leaving its neoclassical tradition –with Bavarian origins– behind her and was starting to embrace modernism, professionals began to vest early Greek modern architecture with metaphorical, allegorical and other symbolic constructs in order to facilitate this transition. Some of the most popular constructs dealt with the reinterpretation of the elements of classical and traditional architecture and their creative reintroduction into a distinctly modern architectural vocabulary. Recognising familiar patterns amidst formal elements that have been imported from the technologically advanced West conveys a sense of continuity to the average Athenian, who witnesses such a drastic remodelling of his/her immediate urban environment as the one Athens underwent in the 1950s. At the same time, tourists in 1960s Athens found themselves immersed in an all too familiar environment of International Style architecture.

Christian may not be held responsible for 'White City's false allusions to the utopian vision of 19th and early 20th century exhibition spaces architecture and the whiteness of puritan spirituality and purist modernity, however, he has knowingly infused his work with the dynamics of modern, everyday life. This triptych –utopianism, purism, and modernity– constitutes the precious legacy of the 'White City'. G.N.T.O.'s recently launched 'You in Athens' campaign could have benefited immensely from the aforementioned triptych. Greek tourist propaganda has finally caught up with Barthes' 'death of the author' concept. This year, the Organisation asked contented visitors to upload their experiences from Athens –and other tourist destinations in Greece– to a designated website. G.N.T.O. aired a handful of prototypes –to attract people's attention and invite them to participate– that appear to suffer from a lack of vision, an overly stylised appearance that is unbecoming of the times and a certain detachment from the current reality of Greece. Christian drew from the curious by-products of Greek modernisation and produced a cinematic landscape that succeeded in neatly arranging the past, the present and, quite possibly, the future of Athens in a single, meaningful, unified narrative. Similarly, contemporary, fragmented, subjective, official or unofficial touristic narrations are better off seeking to reconfigure –in any capacity they may see fit– new, multiple, complementing or contradicting identities for the city of Athens, rather than constantly reproducing old, worn-out and faded urban cinematic formulas.

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