Chapter 14

The Geography of Neo-Realism in Greece: City Images, Urban Representations and Aesthetics of Space

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Introduction

This essay discusses the imagery of urban landscapes in Greek cinema and the role of space representations in defining neo-realism in Greece. After WW2 the Athenian cityscape was radically transformed, as a result of the building boom that took place between 1950 and 1970. The notion of ‘reconstruction’ was at the centre of the political discourse, while the construction industry became the most important sector of the national economy. Greek cinema engaged with the rhetoric of reconstruction, and projected an idealized view of Athens as a locus of modernity and prosperity, a symbol of national unity, and a showcase for the development of the tourist industry.

However, a small group of 1950s and early 1960s films that have been characterized by critics as ‘Neo-Realist’ avoid celebrating Athenian modernity and focus on marginal urban and rural spaces that were normally unacknowledged by official discourses. This essay will demonstrate that the neo-realist films introduce a new geography of the periphery in Greek cinema that contests the rhetoric of the reconstruction period, while also developing an influential iconography of alternative and marginal spaces. This iconography was further explored in New Greek Cinema as after three decades of idealization of the capital by popular films, a new generation of directors in the 1970s also turned its back to the city, opting to set their films in peripheral, rural or suburban spaces.

The first part of this essay examines the use of the term neo-realism by Greek film critics and historians, with an emphasis on its reception and definition(s), in order to show that representation of space is the most important common element linking such films. The essay will then move to discuss, arguably, the two most important examples of this trend, _Magiki Poli/Magic City_ (Nikos Koundouros, 1953) and _Sinikia to Oniro/Dream Neighbourhood_ (Alekos Alexandrakis, 1961), two films that were actually censored because of their socio-spatial representation and the negative image of Athens they presented. In this respect, the essay will focus on the elements that compose the cinematic geography of these two examples, paying particular attention to the relation between the narrative and filmic space; the use of real locations; and the choice of urban places, monuments, sites, districts, architectural landmarks and their social representation. It will argue that that these films foreground images and representations that contradict the dominant image of the cinematic idealization of Athens. Thus, on the one hand, they question the ‘economic miracle’ of the urban reconstruction of the capital, while, on the other, they provide glimpses of an
‘alternative’ reality, the reality of the peripheral spaces that characterized both large parts of the nation’s capital and of the rest of the country.

The Map of Neo-Realism in Greece: Critical Reception

Despite the fact that what critics labelled as Italian neo-realism emerged during WW2 and the early post-war years (1942–1948), the term only began to be used with reference to Greek films in the early 1950s, by which time the proponents of the Italian neo-realist movement had already moved on to other aesthetic and social concerns. In 1951, many critics in Greece unhesitatingly identified the film *Pikro Psomi/Bitter Bread* (Grigoris Grigoriou, 1951) as the first expression of Greek neo-realism and labelled its director ‘the father of Greek Neo-Realism,’ even though Grigoriou himself did not accept that designation (Grigoriou 1988: 166). The reviews of the time freely used the term neo-realism to describe the film, emphasizing its difficult subject matter and its emotional impact on film audiences, while also comparing it directly to *Ladri di biciclette/Bicycle Thieves* (Vittorio De Sica, 1948), which they considered the model for Grigoriou’s film. Interestingly, however, this comparison is not based on the grounds of similarity of subject matter, but rather on the fact that De Sica’s film was released in Greece in the same year as *Bitter Bread*, making it the most direct and recent example of neo-realism accessible to the film-going Greek public.

On the basis of this comparison, the early 1950s critics asserted the birth of a new perspective in Greek cinema, which of course linked it with aesthetic developments in European cinema. In the following years they were to identify a number of Greek films as neo-realist, including *Nekri Politeia/Dead City* (Frixos Iliadis, 1951), *Mavri Gi/Black Earth* (Stellios Tatassopoulos, 1952), *To Xipolito Tagma/The Barefoot Battalion* (Greg Tallas, 1954), *Magic City, O Drakos/The Ogre* (Nikos Koundouros, 1956), *I Arpagi tis Persephonis/The Kidnapping of Persephone* (Grigoris Grigoriou, 1956) and a few others. These films shared a number of aims and characteristics that included direct references to the social problems of the post-war period; artistic ambition despite the absence of state-of-the-art technical equipment; the use of natural locations; a non-idealistic representation of everyday life; non-melodramatic plots; and the use of non-professional actors so as to avoid theatricality. The filmmakers behind these films intended to create a cinema both popular and artistic that would be situated on the sidelines of the commercial Greek studio system. However, with a few exceptions, the results were rather disappointing, as the above aims were not always achieved and the public generally stayed away.

Nonetheless, it is evident that the critical reception of the time tried to encourage this neo-realist tendency and attempted to present this group of films as a veritable ‘school’ or movement, despite their commercial failure and their technical, aesthetic or narrative faults. As Babis Aktsoglou notes, believing that neo-realism might engender a cinema of artistic quality in Greece, many critics overrated every film that resembled even remotely the aesthetic of neo-realism (Aktsoglou 1996: 87). Indeed, in the following years the use
of the term became exaggerated and was further expanded. As mentioned earlier, Grigoris Grigoriou rejected such categorization, stating that he was instead more influenced by French social realism, and particularly by the films of René Clair, and noted that ‘the only Neo-Realist sequences [in his film] were the ones that were shot on the street’ (Grigoriou 1988: 116).

In addition to highlighting a particular critical agenda, Grigoriou’s statement clearly emphasizes the importance of spatial representation and choice of locations as the only features that imitate the aesthetics of neo-realism. Furthermore, this view also coincides with influential ideas that were expressed in Italian film journals of the time such as Bianco e Nero and Cinema, namely that ‘Neo-Realism is a cinema that goes out into the street’ (quoted in Prédal 1994: 10), a metaphor for a cinema of protest or ‘an experiment of a social cinema’ (Borde/Bouissy, 1960), literally a cinema that escapes from the studio and enters the streets in order to capture the reality of everyday life. Given their significance in the literature of the time, this essay would like to argue that the two main features that define neo-realism in 1950s Greek cinema are precisely these: the representation of the cityscape and the references to the social problems of the period.

Problems of definition returned in the late 1960s, during the formative phase of the New Greek Cinema. The film theory journal Sinhronos Kinimatografos [Contemporary Cinema] debated the subject and explored the influences of neo-realism in Greece in a series of essays, discussions and interviews. Films by a new generation of directors, including Tzimis o Tigris/Jimmy the Tiger (Pantelis Voulgaris, 1966), O Kleftis/The Thief (Pantelis Voulgaris, 1965), Mehri to plio/Until the Ship Sails (Alexis Damianos, 1966) and Evdokia (Alexis Damianos, 1971) were praised as a return to neo-realism and as the accomplishments of a neo-realist movement in Greece. Similarly, in her history of Greek cinema, Aglaia Mitropoulou identified a ‘Neo-Realist school’ in Greece and enumerated more than twenty films of that designation (Mitropoulou 1968: 45–71). By underscoring the role of neo-realist films in Greek cinema and by widening the corpus of works deemed to belong to that school, Mitropoulou constructed a ‘genealogy’ of New Greek Cinema, thus establishing an aesthetic continuity throughout the decades following the end of WW2 and until the late 1960s.

The difficulties involved in defining neo-realism were not only particular to the Greek context, but echoed a long-established debate among international critics exemplified primarily by two tendencies: a Marxist approach expressed mainly by Carlo Lizzani (1954), Raymond Borde and André Bouissy (1960); and a humanist and religious approach, articulated chiefly by André Bazin (1958), Patrice Hovald (1959) and Amedée Ayfre (1970). The first group considers neo-realism the result of twenty years of struggle against fascism, and privileges an ideological reading of the films as social depictions of the period, insisting on the representation of themes such as the results of the war, urban unemployment and poverty. The second group defines neo-realism through its emphasis on the human condition and common suffering, and relates this thematic perspective to an aesthetic analysis of the formal elements of these films (use of deep focus cinematography, long takes, etc.)
Furthermore, critics like Pierre Sorlin emphasized the difficulty of defining a corpus of neo-realist films, suggesting that the application of precise criteria, such as the use of non-professional actors, would reduce it to only twenty films in total (or 4 per cent of the Italian production during the 1940s). On the other hand, if the broader criterion of attention to social problems of the post-war period were applied, half of the Italian production of the time could be included in the corpus of relevant films (Sorlin 1994: 70; Shiel 2006: 5). In the context of such conflicting definitions, Greek film historian Yannis Soldatos’ exclusive use of the term neo-realism with reference to space and its representation in order to describe an aesthetic maturity in the construction of the filmic urban geography in Greek cinema is an important critical decision for the Greek context. As he puts it in his discussion of *Magic City*:

The camera insists on the description of the space in the manner of the Italian directors of Neo-Realism. In every shot, the space reveals a new wound: these intense wounds become themselves the protagonists of the film (1999: 121).7

Other efforts to define neo-realism in Greek cinema include the 1985 retrospective on ‘The Influences of Neo-Realism in Greece’ organized by the Association of Greek Critics, which utilized a very open and inclusive approach that was not restricted to chronological or narrative criteria and which proclaimed key New Greek Cinema films such as *To Proxenio tis Annas/The Engagement of Anna* (Pantelis Voulgaris, 1972), *Anaparastasi/Reconstruction* (Theo Angelopoulos, 1970) and *Evdokia* as examples of neo-realism. In contrast, film scholar Maria Paradisi has examined five films considered neo-realist by the critical consensus,8 through the application of a small set of strict criteria (chronology, subject matter, narrative strategies, space, actors). As her discussion points out, none of these films can actually be said to fulfil all the criteria of neo-realist aesthetics (Paradisi 1994: 123–146). However, three of the criteria she applied, the use of space, the practice of shooting on location and the construction of filmic geography, are more or less fulfilled by her five examples, making these space-related criteria a good starting point for any critical consideration of neo-realism in Greek cinema.

As this brief literature review clearly demonstrates, all these different approaches to the definition of neo-realism do share a common characteristic: they take into consideration the use of space. In the Greek context, this use of space is articulated in terms of an image of the urban landscape alternative to that associated with the popular films of Old Greek Cinema; the presentation of a problematic relationship between centre and periphery; and the introduction of a new cinematic geography for Greece. The following sections will examine these key issues with reference to two of most celebrated examples of Greek neo-realism, *Magic City* and *Dream Neighbourhood*. 

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The Frontiers of the City: Magic City

The 1953 film *Magic City* presents a rare image of the Athenian slums, offering a unique, for its time, representation of urban space, and consequently playing an important part in debates about Greek neo-realism. Director Nikos Koundouros reports that after he was released from the ‘exile camps’ of Makronissos, where he was sent after the Civil War, he visited a slum called Dourgouti in order to deliver a letter from a still imprisoned comrade to his mother. Struck by the poverty and the living conditions there, he decided to present these in a film (Soldatos 1999: 119). He collaborated with the writer Margarita Limberaki, spent time with the inhabitants who appeared in the film, and undertook ‘field research’ about this ‘urban village’, which is the real protagonist of *Magic City*. In this respect, the film’s narrative, which revolves around the efforts of a poor truck driver to keep his truck in the face of debts and other adversities, becomes a secondary concern.

In 1954, *Magic City* was the first Greek film chosen to participate in the official programme of Mostra in Venice. However, the Greek Committee for the Control of Films (Epitropi Elenhou Kinimatografikon Tenion) refused the exportation of the film and its participation in the festival, under the pretext that it presented a negative image of Athens, which could affect the country’s tourist industry at the crucial moment when this major sector of the national economy was about to develop. According to *Kinimatografikos Astir*, after more than ten days of deliberations, an exportation visa was finally granted to the film, on the condition that it would be ‘improved’ with additional shots (Sifaki 2004: 326). Among these shots, the committee demanded the inclusion of shots from the capital’s centre, and especially from Vasilisis Sofias Boulevard, an upper-class residential area that had been recently reconstructed.

As the bulk of the film was shot in Dourgouti, it was impossible to remove these sequences and the poverty they represented. Koundouros then had no other option but to add shots that would diminish the effect of the miserable neighbourhood. These shots were placed in the opening sequence, and form a direct contrast to the space depicted by the rest of the film. However, due to the delay caused by these procedures, the film could not officially participate in the festival after all, and was instead shown out of competition. Even in that category, the Italian press noticed the film and considered it a surprise. In an article published in *Bianco e Nero* about this ‘Anti-Mostra’ or ‘Mostra semi clandestine’, a critic of the time justified the role of this parallel to the main competition event, which discovered new directors and national cinemas. As the critic put it, ‘the new Greek cinema was revealed to us ‘in the dirt’ with the film *Magiki Polis* by Nikos Koundouros’ (Cincotti 1955: 87). The same article compares *Magic City* with the film *Los Olvidados / The Forgotten Ones* (Luis Buñuel, 1950), also screened out of competition previously. In this respect, the efforts by the Greek Committee for the Control of Films to reduce the roughness and the ‘dirt’ of the images essentially failed, especially as another article, also published in *Bianco e Nero*, was quick to note that ‘the action of the film is located in Athens, but the city of the Parthenon and of other classical monuments does not appear. The official image of Athens, then, was
reconstituted by the huts and slums of the periphery.’ (Saladini 1954: 39–40) It is time to have a closer look at the film’s depiction of the city.

The opening sequences of the film consist of shots added at the request of the censorship committee. The first is a fast montage of short takes comprising images from the centre of Athens. The sequence is filmed early in the morning, showing the city waking up, a common motif in City Symphonies or other cinematic city representations that describe the city as a living organism and draw anthropomorphic parallels. We see a shot of Vasilisis Sofias Boulevard, an upper-class district with luxury buildings and a shot of the equestrian statue of the national hero Theodoros Kolokotronis on Stadiou Boulevard, followed by the Royal Gardens. The next image depicts Panepistimiou Boulevard with the neoclassical university building filmed in a low angle shot and with a ‘no entry’ road-sign in prominent position, dominating the frame and capturing the attention of the spectator. The same composition with another ‘no entry’ sign is also found in the following shot, showing a narrow street near the monumental building of the Bank of Greece. Generally, all the locations of this introductory sequence can be mapped in the central districts, and mainly on the main traffic arteries of the eastern city centre, where the parliament and most services of the state are situated, alongside emblematic buildings and monuments. As the sequence continues, the significance of this introduction becomes clearer: the beautiful ‘official’ centre is inaccessible to the heroes of the film. In contrast to other opening sequences of this type, these shots lack emphasis or enthusiasm and are accompanied by nerveless music, while the view of the empty streets in the morning creates a rather depressive and lifeless effect.

The last shot of the sequence depicts a street in front of the Acropolis hill. However, the most important feature of this landmark, the Parthenon, remains off-screen. The frame is composed in such a way that the spectator can recognize part of the Acropolis walls, but without being able to see the most emblematic monument of the city. This followed the practice of films aiming at social critique, including Italian neo-realist films –especially those set in Rome – in that they did not depict the official city centre or the city’s monuments (Sorlin 2004: 191). Furthermore, as Marcia Landy remarks, on the rare occasions when ancient monuments or tourist locations appeared, they were not represented as monumental, emblematic or exotic, but as common and everyday places (Landy 2000: 137). Interestingly, Alekos Alexandrakis in Dream Neighbourhood uses the image of monuments in a different way, underscoring the disturbing proximity of the slum to the historical areas and tourist districts, as the next section will show.

After this additional introduction, the film continues with the real incipit that introduces the spectator to the principal filmic space, Dourgouti. In the 1950s, Dourgouti was a typical case of a refugee settlement. It was one of the largest among the slums that developed spontaneously in 1922, housing refugees from Asia Minor in improvised constructions built of low-quality materials (Biris 2005: 284). Although created as temporary shelters for the new population, these refugee settlements quickly took on the character of a permanent solution, surviving as late as the 1960s. The inhabitants suffered not only from low standards of housing and bad living conditions, but also from social segregation between the natives
and the refugees, which was further reinforced by their geographical separation. Dourgouti was an area of extreme poverty located close to the centre of Athens, but hidden from the inhabitants’ eyes because of its location close to the highway. According to Friedrich Engels, this ‘invisible’ character is a main feature of urban spaces of poverty that are hidden from outsiders (Engels (1844) 2007: 51–98). In her study of working-class spaces in Athens, Lila Leontidou showed that these slums remained totally invisible even when they were situated in the centre of Athens, hidden behind hills, in hollows, in drained riverbeds, or other topographical frontiers (Leontidou 2001: 39–40). These socio-spatial elements are represented prominently in the construction of the cinematic geography of Magic City.

Manos Katrakis appears as an extra-diegetic narrator (the alter ego of the director) who describes the neighbourhood through an internal monologue. As his voice is heard, the film shows a sequence of point-of-view shots depicting the shabby huts and the dirty streets of Dourgouti. The description of the filmic space is very accurate:

I love this neighbourhood; here, as it is; stuck into the city; jammed; close to the highway; ready to burst. Every house squeezed onto the other, with only a plank to separate them […]. When you go out by the highway, you can smell the sea; when you go downhill, you can taste the salt. When you go uphill, it’s like entering the city’s heart. You can smell the asphalt, the gardens. Lights, cars, it’s nice.’

In addition to corresponding to the images of Dourgouti, this monologue makes some interesting remarks regarding its topography. The narrator underlines the fact that the slum is a part of the city centre, rather than being located far from Athens. He also uses the highway linking the city centre with the sea as a recurring motif throughout the film. Leoforos Singrou was a major traffic artery of 1950s Athens. As a symbol of dynamism and speed, it occupied a prominent place in the modernist art of the 1930s, especially in futuristic poetry.12 On the other hand, the districts flanking the highway lack character, orientation or landmarks, what Kevin Lynch would call ‘legibility’, or the ability of the landscape to create clear forms in coherent patterns and to generate powerful images in the mind of any observer (Lynch 1960: 11). Close to this impressive highway, which is a symbol of urban modernity, is Dourgouti with its location hidden and ‘invisible.’ A couple of decades earlier, in 1935, a witness had described it as follows:

You can travel the beautiful highway that links Athens with Faliron a hundred times and ignore the misery that takes place two steps away, a dramatic situation such as we see rarely in Europe. Eight thousand refugees have been jammed into Dourgouti for twelve years (quoted in Leontidou 2001: 217–219).

This reference underscores the double function of the highway: on the one hand, it represents escape towards the sea and the city centre, while, on the other, it constitutes the border that cuts this area off from the rest of the city. In other words, the highway is the geographic,
social and symbolic frontier of the slum. The neighbourhood is filmed from various angles: from the streets in low-angle shots or from above with camera movements that reveal a panoramic vista. Detailed close-up shots frame the architectural features of the houses, the dirty watercourses and dusty streets, and alternate with many long shots that show clearly the disposition of the huts, the organization of the alleys and the large size of the district. This variety of points of view, the poor quality of the image and the improvised framing lend the film a strong documentary character, which once again links it to the aesthetics of neo-realism.

A View of the West Side Districts: Dream Neighbourhood

Dream Neighbourhood was the first film directed by the actor Alekos Alexandrakis, who described it in the titles as a ‘Neo-Realist satire’, while critics considered it a late example of Greek neo-realism (Mikelidis, Floritis, Makris, Skalioras, quoted in Soldatos 2001: 239). The film has many elements in common with Magic City. Filmed in a refugee settlement called Asirmatos near the centre of Athens,13 Dream Neighbourhood presents a violent image of social exclusion, with a number of characters, including Rikos, the main hero of the narrative, failing to escape the misery of the slum and therefore remaining excluded from the rest of the world. Furthermore, and like Magic City, Alexandrakis’ film also experienced problems with censorship. The film was selected for participation in the Thessaloniki Film Festival of 1961 but was excluded after an intervention by the Organisation of Greek Tourism [Ellinikos Organismos Tourismou]. Its distribution in cinemas was also prohibited for a short period of time. Attempting to boycott the film, the government permitted only a few screenings in big cities. However, after reactions by the press, the film was finally distributed widely a few months later. The reason for its banishment was that it did not contribute to the tourist image of the capital (Douin 1998: 223), exactly as in the case of Magic City. Despite its commercial success, many critics believe that it was overrated by the press, which wanted to see the film distributed against the wishes of the state, and that it owes its reputation only to these censorship issues (Soldatos 1999: 322; and 2001: 239), while others remark that irrespective of its evident neo-realist influences, the film remains a mediocre commercial melodrama (Mitropoulou 1968: 66) and an imitation of Magic City (Paradisi 1994: 131). These criticisms notwithstanding, the film does make use of a very elaborate fictional geography and presents a disturbing and shocking image of the Greek capital in the 1960s. For such reasons it constitutes an interesting case study for this essay.

The opening sequence shows the main character being released from prison and rejoining the ‘free’ world. He is walking on the hill of Philopapou, a location that offers the most emblematic view of the Acropolis monuments and a common site for tourist pictures. The sequence is accompanied by the music of Mikis Theodorakis, a typical vivid and joyful ‘sirtaki’. The camera follows the character in a long shot, with the Parthenon visible in the background. He finally stops at the edge of the hill. Suddenly the camera pans and reveals

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the other side of the hill, the slum of Asirmatos. In parallel, the music shifts into the more bitter and serious popular song ‘Vrehi sti Ftohoyitonia’ [It rains in the Poor Neighbourhood] by Mikis Theodorakis. As the lyrics of this well-known song refer to the ‘narrow and shady alleys’ (‘mikra ke aniliaga stena’) of the neighbourhood, the song underscores the setting and complements the visual depiction of space. The shift to the depiction of the main filmic space is sudden and unexpected. This feeling of surprise is due not just to the image of poverty of the Asirmatos district, but even more so because of the proximity of this misery to the centre of Athens, to the emblematic monuments and the tourist spaces. The extreme long shot reveals the significant size of the slum and shows a panoramic view of the western districts of Athens, including the urban villages of ex-refugee settlements, the slums developed around the industrial zones and the new working-class districts under construction. This view of an ‘urban sprawl’, very rare in 1960s Greek cinema, covers a large area reaching from the edge of the city centre across the suburbs and ending beyond Piraeus.

The next shot shows the main street of the slum from inside. Here, we are surprised by the order that dominates the frame: a strict spatial disposition arranged on a central axis with two rows of huts on either side, creating a clear and elaborate image with an austere framing and well-defined lines. The work of the film’s set designer, Tasos Zografos, is evident here, as even though the film was shot in real locations in Asirmatos, he added some constructions at the edges of the neighbourhood (Siafkos 2009: 150–152). This combination of reality with additionally constructed sets is moving away from the aesthetics of immediate recording that characterize Magic City and more generally neo-realism. Instead, Alexandrakis used all available means to create a provocative and violent image of misery in order to underline the contrast with the model of the modernized capital of the 1960s. This combination is represented not only in the set design, but also, more broadly, in the film’s construction of a fictitious geography that does not always coincide with the real situation of the locations. For example, an imaginary geographical continuity – achieved by editing – creates the impression that Asirmatos is situated beside Dionisiou Areopagitou Street, which is not the case.

Another significant sequence takes place in Peristeri. A young couple plans the construction of a new house on a plot of land they dream of buying. This is a reference to the practice of building illegal improvised structures (called ‘afthereta’) as the main form of housing for internal immigrants coming from the provinces. The low price of the building areas was due to the fact that they were situated outside the urban plan of the city, where all construction was illegal. Thus, the film provides a rare allusion to the chaotic manner in which the western districts of Athens were expanded, without any organization or supporting infrastructure. The variety of locations is enriched by using images of a modern villa situated in an upper middle-class suburb (Ekali) and of a mansion in an old upper-class neighbourhood outside Athens (Kifisia), contrasting with the poverty of Asirmatos. In general, it can be concluded that the protagonists of Alexandrakis’ film circulate between the desolate Asirmatos and an imaginary periphery of the city, avoiding the official centre of Athens, which is marked as absent.
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The absence of Athens and its centre is not only evident in Dream Neighbourhood, but in a significant number of films that seem to emphasize the periphery as opposed to the centre. Barefoot Battalion is set in the impoverished old city of Thessaloniki; The Ogre takes place in the red-light district around the port of Piraeus; and I Agni tou Limaniou/Agnes of the Port (Yorgos Tzavellas, 1952) depicts an industrial area on the island of Salamina. This negative image of the periphery continues in the films of the New Greek Cinema. The mountain villages of Epirus, depopulated by emigration, play a major part in the films Until the Ship Sails and Reconstruction. I Voski/The Shepherds of Calamity (Nikos Papatakis, 1967), censored during the dictatorship, was shot in a Thessalian village and represented a pre-modern herding society dominated by superstition, faith in witchcraft and metaphysical phenomena. Locations in the urban periphery around the capital are also shown in the films by New Greek Cinema filmmakers: the industrial area of Drapetsona in The Thief, the port of Piraeus and the illegal structures in Perama in Until the Ship Sails, and many others, while according to Tzirtzilakis, the most emblematic representation of the desolated peripheral areas can be found in Evdokia (2002: 203–207). Set in the areas of Aspropirigos and Haidari, the film is clearly influenced by a Pasolinian filmic geography where every relationship or communication with the centre of Athens is impossible and where the notion of urbanity has lost every sense.

Conclusion

All the above films and especially the two main case studies examined in this essay demonstrate a will to contradict the dominant image of a cinematic idealization of Athens. They project peripheral spaces and stress the extremely uneven development during the ‘economic miracle’ of the urban reconstruction of the capital and the evolution of the Greek tourist industry. The relationship between the first Greek attempts inspired by Italian neo-realism in the early 1950s and the first films of the New Greek Cinema in the late 1960s is confirmed by the imaginary geography that both filmic groups propose: a geography of the periphery that constitutes an objection to the Athenian hegemony and deals with issues such as the devastation of the periphery, rural exodus and internal migration. It also deals with the expansion of the slums around the capital, depicts isolated suburbs, shows the modalities of improvised and illegal housing, and finally creates an image that contrasts sharply with the discourse on the reconstruction and modernization of Athens. In these films, we find intermediate spaces, ports, stations, peripheral highways, urban spaces without identity, name and function (what Marc Augé [1995: 94–107] was to call ‘non-places’), provisional constructions and forms of a spontaneous urbanism at the limits of the extension of the city as a primitive form of urban sprawl. All these new elements of a spatial iconography mark a shift from the traditional representation of the city to a transition towards a more elaborated image of the urban landscape. Finally, each one of these films could be read as a social, geographical and architectural map of the
capital and its periphery, which rejects the traditional image of Athens, and replaces it with an alternative view of the urban landscape.

Note: All translations from Greek are by the author.

Notes

1. A review by I.D.P. in *Estia* reads, “The film *Bitter Bread* is of course deeply influenced by the films of the Neo-Realist school that makes the spectator’s heart bleed through the depressive ambiance of the plot”. See also the review by Rosita Sokou in *Vradini* (quoted in Soldatos 2001: 118).
2. For example, the reviews by Kostas Stamatiou in *Dimokratiki* and Manolis Peranthis (Soldatos 2001: 118).
3. Many of the emblematic films of Italian neo-realism were released in Greece a few years after they gained international acclaim, which explains the delay in terms of their aesthetic influence on Greek film production. In the years between 1940 and 1955, only two Italian films reached the annual Top Twenty at the box office: *Bitter Rice* (de Santis, 1949) reached 4th place in 1950, and *The Bicycle Thieves* ranked 16th in 1951 (Sifaki 2004: 413–416).
4. For instance, *Bitter Bread* was ranked at number 12 at the Greek box office out of 15 Greek film productions in 1951 with 33,824 tickets, and does not appear in the Top Twenty at the general annual box office. Similarly, *Black Earth* was ranked at number 13 at the 1952 Greek film box office with 27,489 admissions, while a few years later *The Ogre* was ranked 12th with 35,784 admissions and *The Kidnapping of Persephone* 15th with 21,603 tickets. *Magic City* with 67,770 tickets and *Barefoot Battalion* with 85,394 tickets are the exceptions. Both reached 3rd place at the Greek film box office, while *Barefoot Battalion* features in 10th place at the general annual box office for 1954 (Soldatos 2001: 114–150; Sifaki 2004: 410–416).
5. See in particular the long discussion between Theo Angelopoulos and Vassilis Raphailidis about the past and the future of Greek cinema and the role of Italian neo-realist films in offering a model that could link Old and New Cinema (Angelopoulos/Rafailidis 1969: 20–29). See also an essay by Nikos Nikolaidis condemning the comparison between Greek and Italian cinema as absurd and criticizing the notion that the period 1950–1955 was the ‘lost chance’ of Greek cinema (Nikolaidis 1970: 10–19). See also Ayfre (1970: 43–50); and Pasolini (1970: 22–24).
7. A similar approach can be seen also in his discussion of *The Ogre*, ‘Neo-Realism is always present, an important factor for the recording of space’ (1999: 126), and of *Dream Neighbourhood*, he considers that with the exception of the description of the slum, which is indeed influenced by Neo-Realism, ‘the film does not achieve to reverse melodramatic codes and traditional morality’ (1999: 322).
8. The five films examined by Paradisi are *Bitter Bread, Barefoot Battalion, Black Earth, Magic City* and *Dream Neighborhood*.
9. This was also the cause of the banishment of another film by Koundouros, a documentary about the earthquake that devastated the Ionian Islands in 1953. The government of Marshal Papayos confiscated the material shot by Koundouros and did not allow the film’s production to continue (Soldatos 1999: 122).
10. See, for example, the introductory sequences in *Kiriakatiko Xipnima/Sunday Morning* (Cacoyannis, 1954) or *To Soferaki/Taxi Driver* (Tzavellas, 1952), which provide an enthusiastic, cheerful and vibrant image of the official city centre and its middle-class districts.
11. Writing about Rema, a slum that was close to Dourgouti, sociologist Theos Zissis notes that the conditions of life did not change in the 40 years since its creation in 1920 and until 1964, when the Greek State gave the inhabitants land to build new houses at their own expense (Zissis 1980).
12. For example, see the poems by Yorgos Seferis *Leoforos Singrou* or *Logos gia ena Kalokeri*. See also Margariti (2002).
13. Asirmatos is situated in upper Petralona. Today the area is called 'Hill of the Nymphs'. For more information about this neighbourhood, see Biris (2005: 286–289).

References

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