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Sci-Fi Face(s) of Athens

Nikos Nikolaidis' *Morning Patrol* (*Proini Peripolos*, 1987)

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A *Dark Vision of the Future*

It's dawn. A dim morning light reveals a mountain road covered with downed power lines and blocked by an empty car that seems hastily abandoned. "Last night I dreamed of Manderley,"[1] says a female voice as she recounts her dream for the viewers, situating them within the film's strange universe where different geographies coexist, or better, blend together. Just above the top of the car the film's title appears: "*Morning Patrol*" ("*Proini Peripolos*"), and then, a title states that "the film was shot in Athens from October 1985 to February 1986". If a reference to a film's shooting location was a common habit at the time,[2] a token of gratitude or an obligation to cities tolerating the nuisances of shootings that can last weeks or months, reading these lines at the very start of the film draws the viewer's attention to the strangeness of the city that appears in the following sequence. At first glance, no viewer would be able to recognize the Greek capital on the basis of these images. One might even wonder whether this "cinematic city"[3] is indeed Athens, or whether some strange joke is at play. Gone are the typical shots of the ancient heritage, the hill of the Acropolis, the ubiquitous image of the Parthenon visible from every corner of the city center, or the white marble so prevalent in Athenian films, postcards and the daily lives of Athenians. Nor is there anything left of the city's neoclassical attempts in the 19th century to revive the grandeur of the past and shape a modern city inspired by classical antiquity.[4] Even the sun, the national trademark, has faded away. Instead, Athens is depicted as a nightmarish industrial city in ruins, with large glass and metal constructions, factories, underground passages, staircases, corridors, barbed wire, and automatic machines. A city where rain pours down incessantly.

Morning Patrol, released in 1987 and directed by Nikos Nikolaidis, who is often considered a cult director, imagines and constructs one of the few cinematographic science-fiction (sci-fi) faces of Athens. Urban environments have often inspired visions of ruin and destruction, which have in turn influenced works of fiction in all forms and fields. Whether it is about aliens demolishing the built environment, plagues infecting the living and turning the city into a death trap of zombies lurking at every corner, or

(anti)hero super-cops who must defeat crime by blowing up anything that moves, film genres such as sci-fi, horror or action use urban spaces as their playground. Marked by ruined, alienating, and overpopulated spaces, the imagery of the end of the world (as we know it) is tied to cities, and more specifically to the modern metropolis. A product of the industrial revolution and the concurrent growth in both population and size, the modern city has been erected through a swift and effective eradication of the "traditional city" ("killed by rampant capitalist development" as per David Harvey's words)[5] and an unprecedented domination over nature. The fictional destruction of our modern habitat, our "familiar skylines and recognizable landmarks" that succumb to "any number of potential apocalypses, both natural and human-made",[6] has been especially relevant to American cinema.

An initial response to the question of the "how and why" of artworks presenting us with visions of the American city in ruins is provided by Robert Yeates, who suggests that these visions provide a "unique" opportunity to explore "complex, contemporary urban issues".[7] Post-apocalyptic sci-fi can thus be a means for launching a provocative social critique, whose force lies in our affective responses, the uncanny and eerie feeling produced from seeing our own cities in ruins, or from witnessing a different world, a variation that might derive from the one currently existing. This mixture of fear and excitement may provoke our (collective) imagination about the possibilities of the future, or cast light on existing contradictions and dilemmas. As one of the world's major cultural exporters, American cinema has spread visions of dystopian urbanities worldwide, which have merged with local cultural contexts in different geographies. Consequently, a socio-filmic analysis linked to the urban specificities of a given country would examine the conditions that led a specific director (or society) to produce a specific image of urban disaster.

Morning Patrol, surprisingly perhaps, does not seem to care much for the destruction of the familiar, nor for the uneasy feeling that could provoke on-screen images of ruined architectural landmarks (and Athens is certainly not short of them). A different kind of imagery appears to be at play here. Much like the genre of sci-fi (as discussed in the next section), *Morning Patrol* expresses social fears and anxieties that concern contemporary Athenian society at the time of its making, but through a playful use of an imported imagery, one that comes from American films and novels.

This essay therefore has a double objective. First, to trace the urban and cultural issues that preoccupied Athens at the time of shooting and that are reflected in the film. Second, to examine how *Morning Patrol* is visually and thematically linked to a postmodern reading of cities in American sci-fi cinema and, specifically, in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982).

Science Fiction in Greece

In 2020, the Thessaloniki International Film Festival hosted a special tribute to sci-fi films. Among the 20 films selected, *Morning Patrol* was the only Greek film.[8] Apart

from reflecting the film's enduring appreciation among cinephiles, the fact that a film festival known for its ambition to promote Greek cinema only programmed a single sci-fi Greek film in this tribute attests to the genre's limited currency in the country.

Sci-fi is widely regarded as a genre that originated in literature before gaining visibility in cinema and other art fields. "Genre" has been one of the most "useful" concepts in cinema, employed for all kinds of purposes, whether it is about classifying art objects into distinct categories, establishing common vocabulary for film criticism, serving a film's commercial success, or shaping the viewers' expectations and tastes. The label "sci-fi" attached next to a film's title forms a set of anticipations for viewers. They expect to see a cinematic universe that departs from realism, images that vary from deserted wastelands to densely populated areas – metropolises in distant galaxies –, and witness specific themes associated with the genre, such as the corrupting – or liberating – role of technology, interstellar and time travel, or moral dilemmas humanity may face in the future.

In genre theory, the particular branch of critical theory that focuses on the way genres operate in culture and art, the concept of genre was initially thought as "a principle of order",[9] in other words, an attempt to identify patterns, narratives and specific structures that can justify the affiliation to a specific genre and diachronically classify artworks according to their form and narrative. In that sense, the notion of genre is created through repetition, and is therefore "strictly opposed to originality".[10] This means that the theorization of a specific genre's fundamental elements and structure is done retrospectively (once enough artworks have been produced and discussed), something that makes the identification of the "true origins" of sci-fi a debatable issue.[11] To complement this first approach, John Rieder describes a turn in genre theory towards a "historical approach" (he labels the first approach a "formalist" one), which was introduced in 1991 and treats genre as a "fluid construction" whose meaning changes over time according to changes in society, art production and academic perceptions.[12] This second approach is more interesting when trying to understand how a specific genre is historically constructed and modified by discursive claims.[13] It allows one to closely examine the distribution and reception of a genre, as well as its appropriation in different cultural and geographical contexts.

The advent of technology that led to the industrialization of Western societies is closely linked to sci-fi, and many of its most popular and early works (e.g. Isaac Asimov's

Foundation series) dream of technological expansionism and the (colonial) conquest of the other planets. In reaction to such narratives, sci-fi developed a critical dimension, a counterpoint presenting a different point of view, either in post-colonial contexts (with cultural movements such as African-futurism) or with writers that shed light on gender and race (such as Samuel R. Delany, Octavia Butler, Joanna Russ, and Ursula K. Le Guin).[14] In Greece, however, a country that was neither fully industrialized nor caught up in post-colonial dynamics, sci-fi remains, to this day, a marginal genre that was imported by translations or imitations of (mostly) American authors. Today, Greek sci-fi counts few local writers and even fewer films.[15]

An Urban World in Ruins

Morning Patrol follows a character named "The Woman" on her journey through a devastated urban landscape. The Woman often narrates her thoughts in voice-over, informing the viewers of the current state of her world that is now a "tomb in whose foundations lie our pain and fear", a place that is "no longer ours", a city situated "miles from home", in a country "that seems foreign".[16] The city's infrastructure is still standing. The Woman walks through flashing neon shopping streets and past tall buildings with lit windows, but everything is now empty as if the city's residents had vanished. The Woman informs us that asking "how we got here" is meaningless, since everyone seems to be suffering from a loss of collective memory and the past has thus disappeared along with their identities. People are now ready to kill one another for a bit of food or a drop of water, and any car, phone booth or movie theater may be a deadly trap. At the same time, death seems imminent as everyone appears to be suffering from a strange sickness. Rumor has it, however, that there is still hope of survival beyond the city limits, in the direction of the "West" where the "Sea" still exists. Escaping from this particular "Athens" (with the exception of the initial mention of the shooting location, the cinematic city and its protagonists remain nameless) is not a simple task though since the city is monitored by the guards of "Morning Patrol", a military-style organization that roams the streets, killing the last survivors on sight.

Along the way, the Woman meets one of the Morning Patrol guards, code-named 33. By depriving him of the drugs that treat the sickness that has afflicted most city-dwellers, she forces him to help her escape the city. Their mutual distrust eventually grows into the closest thing to love imaginable under these circumstances, and the couple decide to escape together. The urban cityscape is then transformed into a strange labyrinth of crossroads, dead-ends, barricades, tall buildings equipped with vantage points for observing the street level without being seen, neon lights, metal staircases and abandoned buildings, while water seems to penetrate every crack in the ceiling of the vast industrial spaces the film has chosen as its backdrop.[17] The story that began as a tale of "survival of the fittest" thus turns into an urban chase.

In a text published before the shooting of the film, Nikolaidis describes it as a "disaster *romantzo*" (*romantzo* being a term borrowed from the Italian term for "novel" that in Greek refers to cheap romance novels). His text also highlights a central theme that

appears throughout the film: the impossibility of communication.[18] In the film, the question of communication is linked to some of its most enigmatic and memorable scenes. In this devastated urban society, televisions and cinemas run old films in loops and screens extend a strange attraction to the Woman who often stops to watch them.[19] In a sequence that is repeated multiple times throughout the film, she picks up a phone in her proximity at the same time as a phone rings in the film she watches. While the fictional character on-screen proceeds with the expected phone discussion, the Woman only listens, as if she hoped that some voice will transcend the screen and reach her, or, vice versa, that her voice will reach the cinematographic universe. This action, which is never discussed or explained, is perhaps a visual way of expressing the society's desire for interaction and the disappointment when faced with failure. It also brings to light the character's relation with the past, which here takes the form of older cultural objects. In this, images have a key role to play. Having lost their memories, the only possible contact the films' characters may have with the society that once was is through films. It is surprising though that books are never seen or mentioned even though an important part of the film's script is taken from literary references, as mentioned in the credits (i.e. Philip K. Dick, Daphne du Maurier, Raymond Chandler and Herman Raucher).

One could thus argue that two of the film's key themes (a past that has been replaced by cultural objects and mainly images, and the difficulties of communication and human connection) can be linked to both the postmodern city and the history of Athen's urban development, which faced a serious crisis in the early 80s.

The Cultural Context of Urban Development in Athens

After the Greek revolution of 1821 and the declaration of Greek independence, Athens was far from becoming the de facto capital of the modern Greek state. When it became the capital under the Kingdom of Greece in 1834, it was a deserted town whose population amounted to just 20 000 people.[20] The choice of Otto, the newly appointed king of German-Bavarian descent, was not accidental. The modern Greek state needed a strong national identity to unite its heterogeneous population, a result of centuries of blending and interacting with the Ottoman Empire and Asia Minor, and to dismantle the various local powers that still held significant political influence and military force following the armed revolution. Modern Greece was thus founded by proclaiming ethnic continuity with ancient Greece, and by building on the "Great Idea" project,[21] a military expansionist plan aimed to annex cities and areas in the region populated by Greeks, with Istanbul (Constantinople) being the ultimate goal. Athens was to become the embodiment of this identity, a westernized and modernized European capital in the heart of Asia Minor, the irrefutable center of the new State, a city that would express the national values and accumulate political, financial and cultural capital.[22] These national ambitions became the driving force behind the design of the new capital as architecture became an essential instrument to visually express the country's break with Asia Minor and reinvent the grandeur of the ancient past. Between 1830 and 1900, buildings of symbolic importance (i.e. universities, academies and theaters) were

constructed in the city center in the Greek Revival style (neo-Hellenic classicism) under the direction of the Danish brothers Theophil and Hans Christian Hansen and, later, the German architect Ernst Ziller. The expansionist visions of the "Great Idea" came to an end in 1922 when the Greek army was defeated in a military campaign against Turkey and an exchange of populations was ordered. Athens took in the majority of Greek refugees from Asia Minor and saw its population more than double in the span of two years, approaching one million by 1930. According to Greek urban theorist Georges Prévélakis, the abandonment of the expansionist myth also disrupted the capital's urban development, which no longer followed a centralized plan.

After the Second World War, Athens underwent a large-scale urban reconstruction. Following massive internal migration from the countryside, its population grew at an unprecedented rate, something that led to a major housing problem.[23] With neither the means nor the vision to provide housing for the new residents, the Greek state allowed the proliferation of slums as well as "*antiparohi*", an improvised, informal and self-regulated construction system that required minimal capital.[24] Post-WWII Athens witnessed the massive demolition of neoclassical buildings constructed in the 19th century, which were replaced by identically looking apartment blocks, mostly built with cheap materials that soon started to deteriorate. In addition, the old tramway system was dismantled in a single night in 1953 to make way for private automobiles and to symbolically break with the slow rhythms of the past. The decision to abandon public transport in favor of private cars ultimately led to Athens' suburbanization (following the urban model of the American cities) and the deterioration of its inner city. By the 1980s, the new architectural face of Athens bore little resemblance to the city existing before WWII.

Densely populated, aesthetically degraded, with crowded schools and polluted air, suffering from traffic jams and a lack of public spaces and parks, by the time when *Morning Patrol* was shot, Athens was confronted with the consequences of an improvised and chaotic approach to urban development that led to socio-economic divisions and tensions.[25] The sense of loss and alienation brought on by the new fast rhythms of modernity, the anonymity of crowds, the fragmentation of urban space and the total disappearance of the previous city and way of life, were themes that appeared in Greek cinema in the post-war period.[26] Considering the urban identity of Athens as part of a historical process linked to the country's identity, Prévélakis went so far as to briefly evoke, in the late 90s, a possible transfer of the capital to Thessaloniki, before dismissing the idea, instead opting for a symbolic reinvention of Athens by (re)asserting its role as a crossroads of cultures and research.[27]

A (Post-)Industrial City That Never Existed

It's hardly surprising, then, that alienation (lack of real communication) and a problematic relationship with the past (loss of memory and fascination with old films) are central to Nikolaidis' cinematic Athens. What is surprising is the setting chosen for these themes, a radically unfamiliar post-industrial version of Athens. This choice

recalls a series of American films shot in the 70s and 80s, which treat the urban landscape as a deserted industrial space filled with slowly crumbling debris, or include elaborate chase scenes that wreak havoc in the built environment. This post-industrial face of Athens feels unique precisely because it presents a sharp contrast with most cinematic representations of Athens in local and international productions. Foreign productions filmed in Athens, in particular, have focused on the West's relationship with antiquity, or have used the Greek capital as a recognizable destination for their cinematic characters, going so far as to feature the Parthenon on film posters.[28] Local productions usually offer a wider variety of images that go beyond the theme of antiquity.[29] Nevertheless, *Morning Patrol*'s radical visual treatment of Athens is unprecedented, and the visible influence that American cinema had on the film may explain the source of this post-industrial image of a city that has never in fact been industrialized to that degree.

Pinpointing the exact cinematic references and sources of inspiration would require a comparative analysis beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice it to mention, John Carpenter's *Escape from New York* (1981), Richard Fleischer's *Soylent Green* (1974), and Boris Sagal's *Omega Man* (1971) all come to mind upon closer viewing. These films made use of a complex and strange built environment and may be considered representative for the dystopian and utopian sci-fi setting that proliferated in American cinema. In the course of the development of American cities, the decay of inner cities, the loss of industry and the rapid growth of suburbs in the post-war decades and, later, the regeneration, gentrification and redevelopment of inner cities in the 80s, created significant urban and social transformations. Cinema has observed, recorded and participated in these transformations, highlighting under-represented urban issues and areas and helping to shape the (visual) identities of cities,[30] to the extent that Baudrillard's remark "The American city seems to have come out of the film"[31] has become a commonly accepted reference point in the study of the cinematic American city.

One could argue though that *Morning Patrol*'s most visible influence is Ridley Scott's sci-fi/noir film *Blade Runner*.[32] Their visual similarity becomes apparent in *Morning Patrol*'s very first shot of the city. The Woman walks down an empty street at night, where bright neon lights of commercial stores reflect on pallets of rainwater all around her, a mixture of water, lights and reflections that would appear in most *Blade Runner* stills (next to supercars). *Blade Runner* is mentioned in most discussions on the

cinematic postmodern city (often defined as a city in ruins, a pastiche of heterogeneous geographies and temporalities suffering from a growing accumulation of information, from debris and waste) to the extent that it is today considered a "canonical postmodern cultural artifact".[33] Like Scott's version of Los Angeles (a city that looks like a combination of Hong Kong, Tokyo and New York), Nikolaidis' Athens is a collection of different Attican geographies. While Greece never became an industrial state, both light industry (textile and manufacturing) and heavy industry (chemicals, oil, steel) were a significant financial sector that accounted for 40% of the country's GDP in 1970. The first industrial areas were built near the center of Athens but industrial production expanded at the outskirts of the capital after WWII, especially in the Eleusis bay where a large petrol refinery complex, a shipyard and steel mills operated.[34] Although the exact shooting locations are not mentioned in the film, one can guess that Nikolaidis filmed *Morning Patrol* both in the older industrial areas located in the proximity of the city center and the newer industrial spots constructed at the time.[35] Assembling images of those otherwise marginal and unfamiliar sites, Nikolaidis manages to shape a new geography of the city. This cinematic Athens is an excellent playground for pursuing and being pursued, hiding, seeking and looking without being seen. As they move between apartments, alleys, parking lots and abandoned industrial complexes, the Woman and Guard 33 exploit a complex network of underground passages that connects places that are otherwise separated on the street level, at a time when Athens did not yet have an underground transport system.

Morning Patrol's fascination with the *Blade Runner* universe is also reflected in the film's script, which uses direct textual references to Philip K. Dick's work. As mentioned above, *Morning Patrol*'s society holds a special relationship with its past. Amid a collective memory loss, the past has become a collection of cinematographic and televisual images that constantly screen all over the city. The importance of memories (real or artificial) in the making and unmaking of the sense of self, is a theme that runs through Philip K. Dick's work and is clearly underlined in Scott's film. The replacement of history by fiction and the fascination for photography are elements that, in *Blade Runner*, determine the Replicants' relationship to their past.[36] They are also often discussed in relation to the "postmodern condition". "In the postmodern era, memories are no longer Proustian madeleines, but photographs," notes Giuliana Bruno while discussing *Blade Runner*.[37] In both films, the past is reclaimed through images, something that Bruno associates with the loss of history, since, the "real" is replaced by a representation and the historical referent is replaced by a photographic one.[38] One could argue though that the different themes and ideas present in *Morning Patrol* build towards a search for one's identity within an urban space that no longer provides meaning, a common trope when discussing the "modern city", revisited through a postmodernist prism.

The question of what constitutes the new subject of the postmodern city runs through sci-fi works produced in the 80s. After all, cities are considered a major determinant in the making and unmaking of identities, and the modern metropolis was depicted in cinema as a place of "kaleidoscopic delirium and delight, a place of breakdown and rebirth", as George Simmel described it in 1903.[39] On the question of sci-fi and the

postmodern city, Scott Bukatman uses the term “terminal identity” to refer to the “end of the traditional subject and the emergence of a subjectivity constructed at the computer station or the television screen”.[40] In their psychoanalytic reading of *Blade Runner*, Doel and Clarke also focus on the construction of subjectivity in postmodern society, which they link to the question of death. They associate the postmodern condition with instability (as opposed to the “order, hierarchy and stability” of modern society) and argue that most readings of *Blade Runner* fail to take into account the importance of choosing the conditions of one’s death when discussing the Replicants’ ontological status.[41] *Blade Runner*’s plot starts from the fact that Replicants have a life span limited to a few years, and they thus rebel against their creators in order to obtain “more life”. Their temporality differs, “a candle that burns too fast but too bright”[42]. In their analysis, Doel and Clarke draw on Baudrillard’s definition of two forms of death: on the one hand, a slow death of economic slavery and, on the other, a sudden and sacrificial one.[43] Baudrillard describes those two forms of death as part of his theory of symbolic exchange. This refers to an archaic society outside capitalism that is based on exchange, a circulation of gifts and counter-gifts, and where people are defined not in biological terms, but through forms of initiation that produce meaning. In this, life and death are not mutually exclusive. Life is exchanged with death and death gives meaning for the living. Baudrillard focuses on death as a social relation (instead of a material or natural condition), something that is given and received, a ritual of sacrifice.[44] This comes to play in both films. The relationship the Woman and Guard 33 have with their death is similar to that of the Replicants.[45] In a sick and dying city, they are aware of the fact that their death is imminent and inevitable.

What kind of death is therefore possible for the two protagonists of *Morning Patrol* who have no memories of their pre-apocalyptic selves and live with full knowledge of their imminent deaths? First, their fascination with screens and old films may be seen as an ultimate attempt of escapism, to dream, if only briefly, of another timeline not (yet) destroyed, where death remains exorcised from everyday life. This kind of escapist denial, the slow death of a passive spectator, is impossible to be sustained in a post-apocalyptic wasteland where every screen and movie theater have become death traps. A version of Baudrillard’s concept of slow death by economic slavery can be found in the operational logic of the Morning Patrol. When the Woman meets Guard 33, he is sick and needs drugs to prolong his life. These drugs, distributed by the Morning Patrol, enable the system to exert control over its agents who, aside from the occasional pleasure of violence and murder in a lawless land (a theme found in most post-apocalyptic stories), must work (and kill) to preserve their own lives. The status of the guards thus closely resembles Baudrillard’s definition, as beings bound to a slow death by this strange form of (unproductive) labor.[46]

For Doel and Clarke, the leader of the Replicants, Roy, is the only character in *Blade Runner* who manages to assert his individual subjectivity, first by killing his own creator, then by giving life to Deckard, ensuring that his own death, filmed as a white bird released into the sky, is a conscious choice. A similar link between individual subjectivity and the choice of one’s death can be found in *Morning Patrol*. Guard 33

defies the system and helps the Woman escape the city, even though this choice deprives him of his drug supply and ultimately leads to his (sacrificial) death. Again, this choice is linked to the urban space. This kind of salvation can be found only outside the city, and the final scene is shot in a forest river, where the drug-deprived Guard 33 dies at the hands of the Woman. A frozen image captures this frame for several seconds, before the film fades to black for the end credits to roll. The Woman's journey to the "Sea", the main narrative drive, is no longer the focus of the film.

This blurry relation between life and death, or the difference between a person's physical death and the death of their individuality (their death as a subject), is also hinted at in the script. On different occasions, the Woman and Guard 33's monologue includes different variations of an enigmatic text that approximately reads: "I'll help you get out of town / dead or alive it makes no difference / I'll reach the sea / dead or alive it makes no difference." The final repetition of these lines comes just before the death of Guard 33, a monologue that ends with a question addressed to the Woman: "Do you have a name?" When Nikolaidis rhetorically asks in the film synopsis "a story of love in an unbearable world, surrounded by violence and death… What point can it have?"[47], the only answer is that salvation in this devastated society is only possible through love *and* death, as Guard 33 and the Woman share a final moment of true connection where they (almost) regain their right to self-determination, their identities and even their names. In other words, the salvation of one's individuality, for Nikolaidis, is placed outside the city and its spectatorial habits and in the search for a direct connection with others – even if that means death, or precisely *because* that is a conscious choice of death.

A Different Face of Athens

The narrative themes and visual treatment of *Morning Patrol* therefore align with those often attributed to the postmodern cinematic city. This refers to a place shaped by different geographies, with a problematic relationship with its past that has been replaced by images. Faith in metanarratives, some kind of universal truth that would provide historical continuity and meaning, is lost as its habitants are trying to understand what constitutes them as (human) subjects. At the same time, a postmodern cinematic city is fragmented and looks more like a collage of different cities than a coherent whole. *Morning Patrol* shapes a post-industrial image of Athens as early as 1987, which is *also* postmodern even if the film seems to reject it as an impossible place to live in. As mentioned in the introduction, this particular depiction is made possible by the use of another kind of imagery, through the assembly and creative appropriation of urban themes and visual references from American cinema and its (dystopian) cities. Here, of course, the future does not look anything like the postmodern seduction and chaos of "Los Angeles 2019", the setting of *Blade Runner*. It depicts the collective death of everyone, the end of all society.

This particular face of Athens presents a radical departure from typical cinematic images of the city, which mainly refer to its antiquity. Interestingly, a new face of

Athens became particularly visible internationally during the events of the last decade, commonly referred to as the "Greek crisis". In cinema, due to the massive protests that took place between 2010 and 2015 against the imposed austerity measures, film productions came to Athens to shoot riots and action films.[48] At the same time, Greek and international photographers observed the city from a new angle, publishing numerous photographic views of a "city in crisis", including many black-and-white images of deteriorated buildings.[49] More recently, Eleusis and its now-abandoned industrial complexes were the setting of the only sci-fi film shot in Athens after *Morning Patrol* that attracted worldwide attention: David Cronenberg's *Crimes of the Future* (2022). In his film, Cronenberg uses the industrial infrastructure of Eleusis and some visibly run-down Athenian buildings (hotels and public infrastructure located in the center of Athens) to shape a strange future urban society, while the film opens with a wide shot of the famous Eleusis shipwreck (a ship half-submerged in water), an image also used to symbolically refer to the crisis.[50]

Sci-fi is often considered a product of the same industrialization process that produced cinema and modern urbanism. From utopian to dystopian visions, fully mechanized artificial cities to urban spaces expanding in all directions and cyberpunk cities with an endless flux of information, sci-fi in cinema has depicted numerous images of the (urban) future. *Morning Patrol* corresponds to one of the most radical desires of sci-fi, at least at the time when it was made, to narrate "the dissolution of the most fundamental structures of human existence" and shape "a world that behaves differently – whether physically or socially – from this one" so as to denaturalize our own world.[51] Its pessimism and existential anguish, however, are linked to specific problems relevant to the new society of post-WWII Athens, which is caught between its own past and the increasingly influential imported Western culture and way of life. Nikolaidis, whose fascination with American pop culture is reflected in his other works and particularly in his novels,[52] responds by creating a heterogeneous mix of personal fears, dystopian visions of a city in ruins, texts from American novels and images of cinematic post-industrial cities that give the city of Athens a sci-fi face, a unique addition to the cinematic visions of the Greek capital. Whether contemporary Athenian viewers perceive the sci-fi urban concerns depicted in the film as a distinct moment in their city's development, or as the director's personal demons, remains an open question.

References

1. "Manderley'' refers to the fictional estate described as being located in the south of England and imagined in the novel "Rebecca'' (1938) by Daphne du Maurier, later adapted for the screen by Alfred Hitchcock.
2. Nowadays, most films that mention their location usually avoid doing so at the beginning of the film. If listed at all, it appears at the bottom of the end credits.

3. The term “cinematic city’’ is used to describe the fictional representations of cities in film and has been increasingly in use since the 90s. See David B. Klarke (ed). The Cinematic City. Routledge, London and New York, 1997; LU, Andong. Urban cinematics: Understanding urban phenomena through the moving image. Intellect Books Ltd, 2011; Penz, François, Koeck Richard (ed). Cinematic Urban Geographies. Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2017.
4. Take the buildings of the Academy of Athens, the National and Kapodistrian University and the National Library located in downtown Panepistimiou Street.
5. The term refers to a traditional spatial organization of a city with a walkable, multi-purpose city center. It is also used as a contrast to the anonymity of modern cities, as a place of familiarity and tradition that uses symbolic forms of a particular culture. For instance, David B. Clarke argues that “whereas the social and physical spaces of pre-modern society formed an intimately related, lived totality, modernity brought about their colonization by a thoroughly abstract space, which ensured their fragmentation and disjuncture […]. A world that was once perceived `as a living whole’, so to speak, could no longer be experienced as coherent and complete’’ (Clarke 1997, 4).
6. Robert Yeates, American Cities in Post- Apocalyptic Science Fiction, UCL Press, London, 2021, 2.
7. Yeates 2021, 2.
8. For a brief presentation on the tribute’s program, see: https://blog.tiff.gr/sci-fi/ [accessed on 13 October 2023].
9. John Rieder. “On Defining SF, or Not: Genre Theory, SF, and History’’. Science Fiction Studies, Vol. 37, No. 2, July 2010, 193.
10. Rieder 2010, 196.
11. The origins of sci-fi are often attributed to Mary Shelley’s “Frankenstein’’ (1818), H.G. Wells’s “The Time Machine’’ (1895), or Hugo Gernsback’s “Amazing Stories’’ (1926).
12. Rieder 2010, 191-201.
13. Typically, such claims originate in academic and literary circles, but in the case of sci-fi, the discussion also takes place in journals, pulp magazines, sci-fi fan clubs, etc.
14. See for instance the photographic coverage of Nikos Pylos published in the New York Times in 2014: https://archive.nytimes.com/lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/06/25/crisis-greece-photos-recession-economy/; the photograph series of Enri Canaj (2010-2013): https://www.enricanaj.com/aa#0; and the Milos Bicanski photographs published on Dodho: https://www.dodho.com/living-laboratory-milos-bicanski/ [accessed on 3 August 2022].
15. According to Panos Stathatos, “until today, sci-fi doesn’t appear in histories of Modern Greek Literature, having only a brief entry in the Encyclopedia of Bruce Merry’’ (Stathatos 2021).
16. These excerpts are taken from the film’s script.
17. Some of the film stills depicting this urban space can be seen in the collage of images published with this essay.
18. “It is certain that we should remain silence of a while, to have a chance of

hearing the voices of our few friends whom we need and who need us so badly''. Quote from: Nikos Nikolaidis. "Proini peripolos'', ena romantzo katastrofis. First published in Eleftherotypia, 14 July 1985, retrieved from http://www.cinephilia.gr/index.php/keimena/pressclips/2922-proini-peripolos [Accessed on 13 Otctober 2023].

19. Some of the images that screen in loop in this devastated city are taken from Joseph H. Lewis' "The Big Combo'' (1955), Charles Vidor's "Gilda'' (1946) – particularly the film's hit song "Put the Blame On Mame'' –, and Fred Astaire dance scenes.
20. According to various sources presented in Kaika, Maria. City of Flows: Modernity, Nature, and the City, Routledge, 2012, 94.
21. Also known as the "Unification of Greece''.
22. Georges Prévélakis. Athènes: urbanisme, culture et politique. L'Harmattan, Paris, 2000, 64-70 [translation by AL].
23. According to the Greek Statistical Authority (ELSTAT), the Athenian population grew at a stable rate of 3% between 1950 and 1970, doubling its population in 20 years. See data and tables on the "World population review'': https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/athens-population [accessed on 10 July 2022].
24. In the framework of an "antiparohi'', a contractor would approach the homeowner and offer to demolish his house and build an apartment block in its place. In exchange, the owner would receive a certain number of apartments while the contractor would sell the remaining apartments before construction even began, enabling him to gradually finance it. In general, no contract or exchange of money was necessary to start constructing.
25. Also see: Guy Burgel. Croissance urbaine et développement capitaliste: Le Miracle Athénien. éditions du CNRS 1981, Paris.
26. For instance, Magic City (dir. Nikos Koundouros, 1953) sought to reveal the geographical inequalities of the new urban development and its "Americanization'' and revisit a nostalgic, politicized image of urban neighborhoods with strong social ties.
27. Prévélakis 2000, 110-130 [translation by AL].
28. For the Western gaze, see for instance Jules Dassin's "Never on Sunday'' (1960), Jean Negulesco's "Boy on a Dolphin'' (1957), Donald Petrie's "My Life in Ruins'' (2009) or Hossein Amini's "Two Faces of January'' (2014).
29. Many Greek films focus on underrepresented neighborhoods and city spaces (Siamak Etemadi's "Pari'', 2020) or use Athens as a setting for genre films such as film noir (Alexis Alexiou's "Tetarti 04:45'', 2015).
30. Lawrence Webb. The cinema of Urban Crisis. Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 2014, 3.
31. Clarke 1997, 1.
32. An obvious reference is the use of water, which is constantly falling from the ceiling during the chase scenes just like in Scott's film.
33. Marcus A. Doel and David B. Clarke. "From Ramble City to the Screening of the Eye: Blade Runner, Death and Symbolic Exchange''. Clarke 1997, 42.
34. Today, according to the latest data available from the World Bank, industry

accounts for 15% of the country's GDP and manufacturing for 8%, see https://wdi.worldbank.org/table/4.2 [accessed on 13/10/2023]. The transformation of Eleusis bay would include, among other things, the port warehouses and the factories in Piraeus (chemical industry), the shipyard in Skaramagas and the petrol refineries in Corinth.

35. I was unable to locate archives that record them.
36. In the film, Replicants are humanoid robots that rebel against their creator and are hunted down by the Blade Runners. The mission of Deckard (Harrison Ford) is to hunt them down.
37. Giuliana Bruno. "Ramble City: Postmodernism and `Blade Runner.''' October, vol. 41, 1987, 73.
38. Bruno 1987, 73.
39. "The Metropolis and Mental Life'' as cited in Scott Bukatman. Blade Runner. BFI, London, 1997. Here one can also add Jonathan Raban's personal account of London in the early 1970s that celebrates the urban environment and the modern metropolis as a heterogeneous place, a repository of multiple identities and limitless possibilities from Jonathan Raban. Soft City. Hamish Hamilton UK, London, 1974, 9-10.
40. "The purpose of much Science fiction in the 80s, especially cyberpunk, was to construct a new position from which humans could interface with the global, yet hidden, realm of circulation; a new identity to occupy the emerging electronic realm. I call this new position terminal identity, which refers both to the end of the traditional subject and the emergence of subjectivity constructed at the computer station or the television screen'' in Bukatman 1997.
41. Cf. Doel, Clarke 1997, 141-168.
42. A line from the film's script spoken by the head of the Tyrell corporation that created the Replicants.
43. Baudrillard sees the possibility of change in sacrificial death, since it may abolish the established order and existing power relations. According to Doel and Clarke, "in murdering Tyrell, Roy performs the symbolic act of liberating himself from the gift and the taking of labour [which] function directly as the code of the dominant social relation, as the code of discrimination' […] thereby gaining a kind of subjectivity, defined in relation to his own death''. In contrast, "Deckard and Rachel are given (borrowed) time, and are thereby obligated to live to the full the life that is credited to them on account of their enslavement to a slow death'' (Doel, Clarke 1997, 160-163).
44. Jean Baudrillard. Symbolic Exchange and Death. SAGE, (1993), 2017, 220-270.
45. The question of a limited life span was not invented by Scott, of course. Many literary works and films raise this issue (e.g. Michael Anderson's "Logan's Run'', 1976), addressing it in different ways.
46. Doel, Clarke 1997.
47. The synopsis along with stills and other materials can be found on the directors' website: https://nikosnikolaidis.com/morning-patrol/ [accessed on 13 October 2023].
48. The most famous sequence being the "Athens Escape'' in Paul Greengrass' Jason Bourne (2016).

49. See for instance the photographic coverage of Nikos Pylos published in the New York Times: https://archive.nytimes.com/lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/06/25/crisis-greece-photos-recession-economy/; the photograph series of Enri Canaj: https://www.enricanaj.com/aa#0; and the Milos Bicanski photographs published on Dodho: https://www.dodho.com/living-laboratory-milos-bicanski/ [accessed on 3 August 2022].
50. For instance, an impressive picture of the shipwreck is included in the Burnout photographic series of Dimitris Michalakis.
51. Bukatman, 1997, 8.
52. This particular link between Nikolaidis and the American culture imported in Greece through cinema can be seen in his novel "Pigs in the Wind'', whose main character was born "inside Roziclair'' (a famous cinema in Athens that no longer exists)'' and "under the planetary constellation of Glenn Miller and Benny Goodman''. See https://nikosnikolaidis.com/books/pigs-in-the-wind/ [accessed on 13 October 2023].