THE MODERN URBAN LANDSCAPE

AS A LANDSCAPE OF

VISUALIZED MESSAGES

THE MODERN URBAN LANDSCAPE AS A LANDSCAPE OF VISUALIZED MESSAGES

Sofia Strati

Assistant Professor, Department of Graphic Design, Technological Educational Institution (TEI) of Athens, Faculty of Fine Arts and Design, Email: sost@teiath.gr

Abstract

The modern image of the city is defined by the quality and quantity of redundant and ephemeral projections of multiple messages that surround space. In the past decades, the correlation among individual elements of urban space went through a radical change due to the amassing of a multitude of mostly commercial messages, without prior study and design. This change appears to develop only on the surface; however, it evolves from a physiognomic transformation into an actual transubstantiation, since the articulations of these messages appeal to the human community and have a critical cultural impact. The change is a determinant of how the city is experienced and evaluated. In our opinion, it leads to a social transformation, because as a spatial cover it carries, projects and communicates emphatic concepts, discrete values, specific objectives and explicit or implicit intentions.

Through its elements, the image of the city provides a reliable indicator of the residents' culture, an expression of their daily life. Its external elements-urban characteristics, stemming from the social life, are in a reciprocal relationship with this image.

The social identity of advertising messages as a phenomenon, from its emergence to the present, is determined by the adaptation of spatial organization to the input and structure of the phenomenon.

From all the expressions of communication in public space, the function that dominates modern cities is that of advertising.

Keywords

urban landscape, Athens, urban space, Urban landscapes in the movies, advertising presentation of movies, advertising messages, urban space and visual communication

THE MODERN URBAN LANDSCAPE AS A LANDSCAPE OF VISUALIZED MESSAGES

The modern image of the city is defined by the quality and quantity of redundant and ephemeral projections of multiple messages that surround space.

In the past decades, the correlation among individual elements of urban space[1] went through a radical change due to the amassing of a multitude of mostly commercial messages[2], without prior study and design.

This change appears to develop only on the surface; however, it evolves from a physiognomic transformation into an actual transubstantiation, since the articulations of these messages appeal to the human community and have a critical cultural impact[3].

The change is a determinant of how the city is experienced and evaluated. In our opinion, it leads to a social transformation, because as a spatial cover it carries, projects and communicates emphatic concepts, discrete values, specific objectives and explicit or implicit intentions.

The recording of information and projection elements is an integral part of modern reality in the everyday landscapes of the urban environment.

"(...) new civilization realities of space and image, (...) have intervened persistently since the end of the 20th century and develop a constant and dynamic presence."[4]

In our era, we could say that advertising messages within urban space often function as landmarks

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1. This change is combined with the domination of technocratic views, as a result of technological progress. For the negative effects of uncontrolled technological development on people, the civilization and culture, see the following analyses:

    MARCUSE, H., "*Cultutre et société*", Minuit, Paris, 1970;

    -//-   , "*Ο μονοδιάστατος άνθρωπος*" (One-Dimensional Man), Papazisis Publications, Athens, 1971, (Original work: *One-Dimensional Man*, 1964);

    -//-   , "*Αρνήσεις*" (Negations), Ypsilon Publications, Athens, 1983, (Original work: *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, 1968).

2. According to L. Goldmann, all social events are fully dominated by the form of the merchandise.
    GOLDMANN, L., "*Recherches dialectiques*", Chapter: "Reification", Gallimard, Paris, 1980.

    For the effects of the above view on art and aesthetics see:
    GOLDMANN, L., "*Pour une sociologie du roman*", Gallimard, Paris, 1980.

3. The merchandise incorporates an ideology that cannot be isolated from the **"structure of the merchandise form".**
    ADORNO, Th., "*Modèles critiques*", Payot, Paris, 2003, σελ.23, (Original work: *Eingriffe. Neun kritische Modelle*, 1963).

    Theoretical discussion on civilization and, specifically, the spreading of commercialized cultural production in:
    BECK, U., "*Τι είναι παγκοσμιοποίηση*" (What is Globalization), Chapter: "Preface", Kastaniots Publications, Athens, 1999, (Original work: *Was ist Globalisierung?*, 1997).

    Th. Adorno and M. Horkheimer refer to the opinion of M. Scheler: **"(...) humanity appears (...) to sink deeper into a world of media, which is less and less dominated by and maneuvered towards its spiritual purposes, but more and more dominant over human life and humanity itself."**
    SCHELER, M., "*Vom Ewigen im Menschen*", 4th edition, Bern, 1955, in:
    ADORNO, Th.- HORKHEIMER, M., "*Κοινωνιολογία. Εισαγωγικά δοκίμια*" (Sociology. Introductory Texts), Kritiki Publishing, Athens, 1987, p. 126 (fn.16), (Original work: *Soziologische Exkurse*, 1956).

4. FATOUROS, D., "*Η επιμονή της αρχιτεκτονικής*" (The Persistence of the Architecture), Kastaniotis Publications, Athens, 2003, p. 20.

The incorporation of new data into the image of a modern city that goes hand in hand with the growth and progress of the wide spectrum of visual arts, is brought to the fore and emphasized in movie scenes. There, we looked for relevant elements, which we evaluated both in a complementary and in a comparative manner. Some movie scenarios presume that urban landscapes in the future will probably also entail a corresponding communication function (pp. 2-5). Movie representations of cities promote ideas and concepts regarding urban environment.

Through the narrative of every-day activities they project values that, emerging from individual experience, social relationships and human communication, are captured onto the space reflecting them. These entries bring to mind rhetorical schemes for the city.

**Incorporation of advertisements into the image of the city,
as reflected in movie scenes:
Octopussy, Brazil, The fifth element, Minority report**

OCTOPUSSY

United Kingdom, 1983

Director   :   John Glen
Producer   :   Albert R. Broccoli
Production :   Eon Productions

Octopussy is a British action adventure thriller movie.

A fake Faberge egg and a fellow agent's death lead James Bond to uncover an international jewel-smuggling operation, headed by the mysterious Octopussy, being used to disguise a nuclear attack on N.A.T.O. forces.

Octopussy (1983) is the thirteenth entry in the Eon Productions James Bond film series, and the sixth to star Roger Moore as the fictional MI6 agent James Bond.
All of the James Bond movies are based, in some part, upon novels by British author Ian Fleming [1908-1964]. The title Octopussy comes from Fleming's posthumous collection of short stories in Octopussy and The Living Daylights (1966). However, very little of the short story "Octopussy" is featured in the film. The short story "Octopussy" deals with Bond and a character called Major Dexter-Smythe. This character turns out to be the father of Octopussy who, in one scene, recaps the events of the original short story to Bond. The scenes where Bond is bidding on the Fabergé egg at auction are taken from "Property of a Lady."
Much of the film was shot in Udaipur, India.In England RAF Northolt, RAF Upper Heyford and RAF Oakley were the main locations. Railways scenes were shot at the Nene Valley Railway, near Peterborough, while studio work was performed at Pinewood Studios and the 007 Stage.

It certainly pays to advertise.

United Kingdom, 1985

Director   :   Terry Gilliam
Producer   :   Arnon Milchan
Production :   Embassy International
                         Pictures
                         Brazil Productions

Brazil is a British dystopian science fiction film.

A bureaucrat in a retro-future world tries to correct an administrative error and himself becomes an enemy of the state.

Jack Mathews, film critic and author of The Battle of Brazil (1987), described the film as "satirizing the bureaucratic, largely dysfunctional industrial world.
The film is named after the recurrent theme song, Ary Barroso's (Brazilian composer, pianist, soccer commentator, and talent-show host on radio and TV) "Aquarela do Brasil", as performed by Geoff Muldaur (American musician).
Terry Gilliam (American-born British screenwriter, film director, animator, actor, comedian and member of the Monty Python comedy troupe) has stated that Brazil was inspired by George Orwell's 1984–which he has admitted never having read –but is written from a contemporary perspective rather than looking to the future as Orwell did.
Gilliam described the film's setting like this: "It is neither future nor past, and yet a bit of each. It is neither Eastnor West, but could be Belgrade or Scunthorpe on a drizzly day in February. Or Cicero, Illinois, seen through the bottom of a beer bottle."

THE FIFTH ELEMENT

France, 1997

Director   :   Luc Besson
Producer   :   Patrice Ledoux
Production :   Gaumont

The Fifth Element is a English-language French science fiction action film.

In the colorful future, a cab driver unwittingly becomes the central figure in the search for a legendary cosmic weapon to keep Evil and Mr Zorg at bay.

Jay P. Telotte, writing in the book Science Fiction Film, credited the film with exploring the theme of political corruption.
In the book The Films of Luc Besson, Susan Hayward considered the issue of environmental damage, in so far as waste and pollution are visible throughout the film.
Comics writers Jean "Moebius" Giraud and Jean-Claude Mezieres, whose comics provided inspiration for parts of the film, were hired for production design.
The Fifth Element is amongst the minority of science fiction films that "hold up a mirror" and show humankind as responsible. The film was said to be skeptical of capitalist consumerism, in so far as the gadgets in Zorg's office make an unhealthy obsession of his lust for technology. The tension between technology and man is treated as a problem requiring a final resolution.
Besson wanted to shoot the film in France, but suitable locations could not be found; filming took place instead in London and Mauritania.
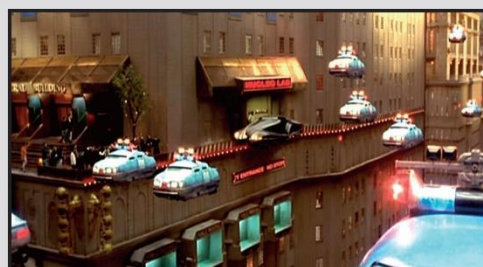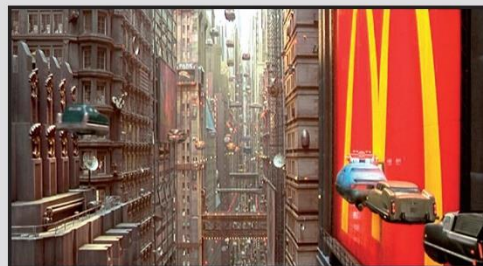
MINORITY REPORT

United States, 2002

|		
Director	:	Steven Spielberg
Producer	:	Gerald R. Molen,
		Bonnie Curtis,
		Walter F. Parkes,
		Jan de Bont
Production	:	Amblin Entertainment,
		Cruise/Wagner Productions

Minority Report is a American cyberpunk action mystery-thriller film.

In a future where a special police unit is able to arrest murderers before they commit their crimes, an officer from that unit is himself accused of a future murder.

The film combines elements of tech noir, whodunit, thriller and science fiction genres, as well as a traditional chase film.

Minority Report has a unique visual style. It uses high contrast to create dark colors and shadows, much like a film noir picture. The film's overlit shots feature desaturated colors which were achieved by bleach-bypassing the film's negative in post-production.

The film's central theme is the question of free will versus determinism. One of the main questions the film raises is whether the future is set or whether free will can alter the future. Cooper feels Minority Report emphasizes the future importance of the control over imagery.

During pre-production, Spielberg consulted numerous scientists in an attempt to present a more plausible future world than that seen in other science fiction films, and some of the technology designs in the film have proven prescient."2054 bible", an 80-page guide created in preproduction, listed all the decided upon aspects of the future world: architectural, socio-economical, political, and technological.
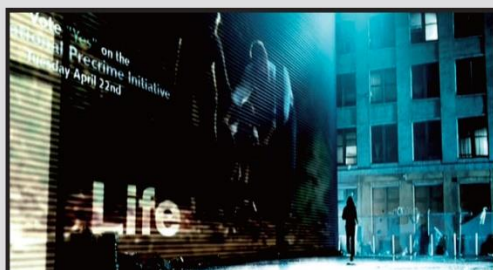
The image of the urban environment takes on a familiar[5] or unprecedented character for the modern viewer. Urban landscapes in the movies sometimes function as a plain background for fiction to evolve, and other times participate as protagonists. They elicit experiences of transcending reality.

The idea of the city is praised[6] or condemned[7] as a place of individual exclusion and social marginalization.

Stimuli arise to examine issues associated with spatial forms and structures, to inspire the production of urban assemblies and the creation of individual spaces.

Conceptual fields with diverse content – related to the cultures of their respective viewers – are composed by interconnecting and interacting elements from the intentionally concocted compositions and framed images of all visual media.

The analysis of the meaning of their expressions is about how these aspects of the ideas promoted by the visually projected messages are comprehended.

For instance, certain movie scene conceptions[8], as well as many advertisement presentations, bring to mind Freudian ideas. They evoke the censoring function of the conscience that becomes threatening when contradicting the mythology of the unconscious and could acquire a dream-like expression.[9]

Moreover, the advertising presentation of movies often differentiates from and readapts to the changing space-time givens of the projected movie. The respective choices offer an interesting subject matter for reflection, considering the conception of the notions presented by the movie image-scene, together with the sense arising from the advertising material selected and construed as representing it.

The manifestations of projected content can vary remarkably, from total deviation to insightful convergence towards the desired notions, objectives, and the sense of the plot.

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5   "*Blade runner*", [Motion picture], director: R. SCOTT, U.S.A., 1982.

6.   "*Ο άνθρωπος με την κινηματογραφική μηχανή*" (Man with a Movie Camera, original title: *Человек с киноаппаратом*), [Motion picture], director: Dz. VERTOV, U.S.S.R., 1929.

7.   "*Μητρόπολη*" (original title: *Metropolis*), [Motion picture], director: Fr. LANG, Germany, 1926.

8.   By keeping their distance, through fine irony and finesse, they criticize our society, revealing its subculture. They tack together its prejudices, its "waste".
     Let us bring to mind A. Hitchcock, particularly his movie "The birds," which appeals to modern man:
     "(…) wants to frighten, to incriminate, in other words to shake the audience up, in order to create ─ or to recreate ─ within them a human sentiment, a metaphysical anxiety, (…)."
     TRUFFAUT, F., "*Χίτσκοκ-Φρανσουά Τρυφώ*" (Hitchcock-François Truffaut), Ypsilon Publications, Athens, 1986, (Original work: *Le Cinéma selon Alfred Hitchcock*, 1967);
   EMMANUEL, A. (ed.), "*Alfred Hitchcock*", Plethron Publications, Athens, 1985, p. 132.

9.   According to S. Freud: **"The first dream which we have considered was the fulfilment of a wish; another may turn out to be the realization of an apprehension; a third may have a reflection as its content; a fourth may simply reproduce a reminiscence."**
   FREUD, S., "*Η ερμηνεία των ονείρων*" (The Interpretation of Dreams), Epikouros Publications, Athens, 1995, pp. 129-130, (Original work: *Die Traumdeutung*, 1900).

It becomes rather obvious that careful conceptual control of advertising messages is necessary. This calls for a serious critical approach with full awareness of the scenario structure and plot, as well as a consistent composition process together with an intelligent combination of what movie agents intent to show and what advertisers aim to promote.

Perception of the meaning conveyed by the movie image-scene in the advertising promotion of movies
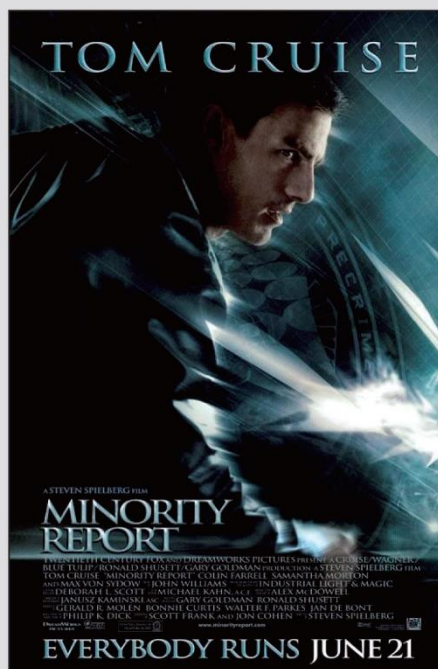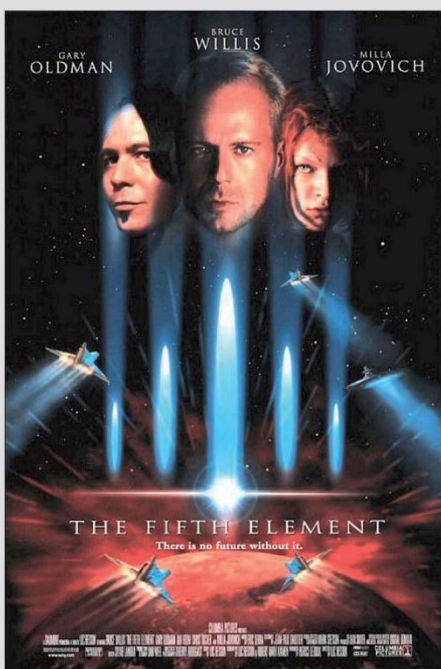
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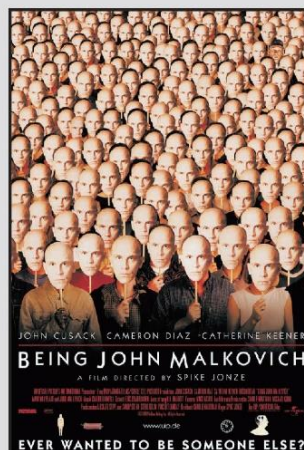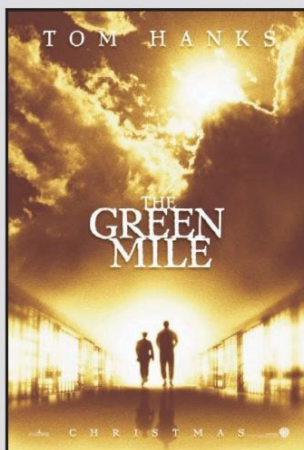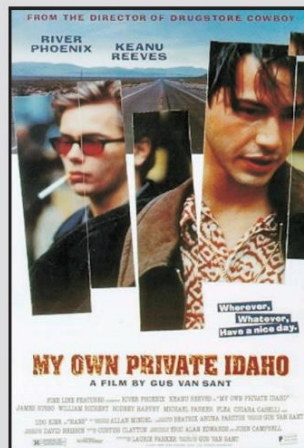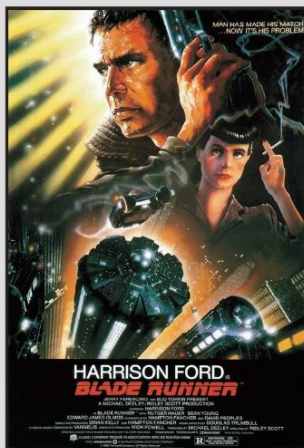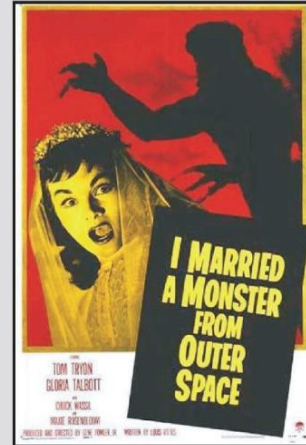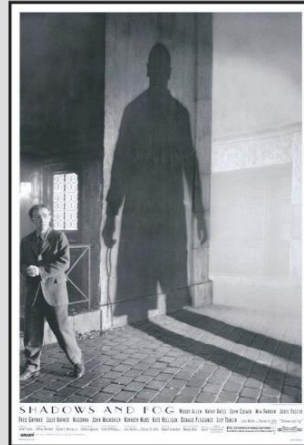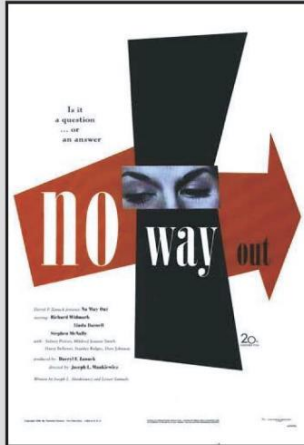
The image of the surrounding space in everyday life – communication channel

The image of a structured space is not only a representation of its external aspect, but also an effigy of the social space.

The social space is the field of action, living and occurrence of functions, activities and events of its residents. It incorporates the relationships between social classes and groups, individual institutions, perceptions, cultural values.

The two representations are comprehended as one image of the surrounding space stemming from the constant simultaneous projection. The image of the environment has a dynamic participation in shaping daily life, inducing or precluding thoughts, actions, feelings, individual and social behaviors.[10]

Thus, the landscape of a modern city functions not only as a mirror of its profile, but also as a reflection of the agents that created it and engraved their characteristics on it. It reflects the structure[11] *of ideological, political and cultural relationships.*

Through its elements, the image of the city provides a reliable indicator of the residents' culture[12]*, an expression of their daily life. Its external elements-urban characteristics, stemming from the social life, are in a reciprocal relationship with this image.*

They reproduce it, affecting its inclinations, provoking or preventing its expressions and development. The composition of the "face" of the city is determined by the residents' material living conditions, the level of production, the degree of economic growth.

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10. **"Although the view that social contrasts are projected in space is undeniable, commonplace even, this should not make us underestimate the future outlook. That is, that space itself does not simply function as a projection of the "social action", but rather has its own dynamics; it shapes daily life, it determines or excludes behaviors."**
    VRIHEA, A., "*Κρίση Κατοίκισης*" (Habitation Crisis), Scientific conference: "Social inequality and social exclusion", Karagiorgas Foundation, Athens, 1996, p. 4, 3rd clarification.

    St. Stavridis refers to the **"(...) presumptuous power of modern images (...)"** and explains that **"(...) they not only function as advertising traps of the desire to escape to a glamorous "elsewhere" but also, for those who eventually do take the trip, shape the standards of tourist consumption in foreign lands."**
    STAVRIDIS, St., "*Από την πόλη οθόνη στην πόλη σκηνή*" (From City-Screen to City-Scene), Ellinika Grammata Publications, Athens, 2002, p. 137.

11. The sociologist G. Simmel analyses the function of social and spatial structures. Expanding on his thoughts about the big city, he connects the subject's psychological motives and pace of life with economic structures, as well as the public space and its profile.
    SIMMEL, G., "*Πόλη και ψυχή*" (City and Soul), Erasmos Publications, Athens, 1993, pp. 14-17, (Original work: *Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben*, 1903).

12. About "civilization", Th. Adorno and M. Horkheimer mention that: **"(...) modern civilization has been linked, first, to the extraordinary growth in population since the industrial revolution at the beginning of the nineteenth century and the changes associated with this.", and that: "Civilization often stands opposed to culture, as a fully meaningful and structured human symbiosis."**
    ADORNO, Th.- HORKHEIMER, M., "*Κοινωνιολογία. Εισαγωγικά δοκίμια*" (Sociology. Introductory Texts), Kritiki Publishing, Athens, 1987, pp. 114-115, (Original work: *Soziologische Exkurse*, 1956).

Big political, economic[13] *and social*[14] *changes associated with technical development*[15] *and technological progress convert structured space from a social good to a tradable and profitable product*[16]. *The produced spatial forms-expressions of cultural activities that carry new characteristics obtain a more composite and complex substance. The urban space of trade and the market is where society takes shape*[17].

The relatively recent changes in the city, as a result of the gigantification of the mechanics that move information around, also include the introduction of machines, which adds on the environmental burden and the problems associated with public space.

The social identity of advertising messages as a phenomenon, from its emergence to the present, is determined by the adaptation of spatial organization to the input and structure of the phenomenon. We fully agree with the argument that spatial organization:

> "(...) illustrates decisions made by closed groups, with the objective to manipulate the many. This manipulation is a result but also a means to maintain ignorance among the many, regarding the environment they live in, as well as its impact on them."[18]

From all the expressions of communication in public space, the function that dominates modern cities is that of advertising.

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13. The tradition of international economics is related to commercial policies in the modern world: **"(...) The 19th-century trade theory of David Ricardo and even the 18th-century monetary analysis of David Hume (...)."** This, as well as the analysis of current issues in economic relations and the effects of trade, are the subject matter of a book by the economists P.R. Krugman and M. Obstfeld, professors in M.I.T. and Berkeley.
KRUGMAN, P., OBSTFELD, M., "*Διεθνής Οικονομική, Θεωρία και πολιτική*" (International Economics, Theory and Policy), vol. A', Kritiki Publishing, Athens, 2002, (Original work: *International Economics, Theory and Policy*, 1998).

14. For detailed information on the spread of social stratification, the creation of sub-groups and the elimination of classes, see the sociology book:
OSSOWSKI, St., "*Η ταξική δομή στην κοινωνική συνείδηση*" (Class Structure in the Social Consciousness), Kalvos Publications, Athens, 1984, (Original work: *Struktura klasowa w społecznej świadomości*, 1957).

15. In view of general developments, as far as architecture is concerned, the use of new materials and ways of construction was revolutionary, with consequences in shaping the modern living environment.
GIEDION S., "*Space, Time and Architecture, The Growth of a New Tradition*", Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1982.

16. **"(...) the center and the whole city serves as a lackey for economic processes, (...). Thus the human factor continues to weaken and is slowly pushed to the sideline."**
ARAVANTINOS, A., "*Η ανάγκη για μια σύγχρονη ανθρωπιστική πόλη*" (The Need for a Modern Humane City), Αναζητήσεις 2 (Explorations 2). Hellenic Humanistic Society - International Centre for Humanistic Research, Athens, 1979, p. 209.

17. About changes in social relationships in space after the industrial revolution see:
NIKOLAIDOU, S., "*Η κοινωνική οργάνωση του αστικού χώρου*" (The Social Organization of Urban Space), Papazisis Publications, Athens, 1993, pp. 164-168.

18. LAZARIDIS, P., "*Η εμπορευματοποίηση της ποιότητας*" (The Commercialization of Quality), Paratiritis Publications, Thessaloniki, 1979, cc p. 3.

Advertising is a manipulative effort of presenting a convincing message to sell a consumer product or a service provided to the public.

> "Advertising is summarized in a kind of philosophical system. It explains everything in its own terms. It interprets the world. (...) it has a huge impact and is a political phenomenon of great importance."[19]

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19. BERGER, J., "*Η εικόνα και το βλέμμα*" (The Image and the Glance), Odisseas Publications, Athens, 1993, pp. 149, 153, (Original work: Ways of Seeing, 1972).

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Images

Pages 2-5: Images taken from the movies by the author.

Pages 7-8: *Octopussy* movie poster. Available at
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Σύγχρονο αστικό τοπίο, ένα τοπίο που οπτικοποιεί μηνύματα

Περίληψη

Η εικόνα της πόλης σήμερα καθορίζεται από την ποιότητα και την ποσότητα πρόσθετων και εφήμερων προβολών πολλαπλών μηνυμάτων που επενδύουν το χώρο. Τις τελευταίες δεκαετίες, ραγδαία μεταβολή του συσχετισμού των στοιχείων του αστικού χώρου προκάλεσε η χωρίς πρόβλεψη μελέτης και σχεδιασμού προσθήκη πληθώρας μηνυμάτων, κυρίως εμπορικού χαρακτήρα. Πρόκειται για αλλαγή που μοιάζει μόνον εξωτερική, όμως από φυσιογνωμική μετάπλαση καταλήγει να γίνεται πραγματική μετουσίωση, αφού οι διατυπώσεις τους απευθύνονται στην ανθρώπινη κοινότητα με κρίσιμη πολιτισμική απήχηση. Είναι καθοριστική για το πως η πόλη βιώνεται και αξιολογείται. Κατά τη γνώμη μας προκαλεί κοινωνικό μετασχηματισμό, αφού ως χωρική επένδυση φέρει, προβάλλει και κοινωνεί εμφατικά νοήματα, διακριτές αξίες, συγκεκριμένους σκοπούς και διαυγείς ή υποθάλπουσες προθέσεις.
Η εικόνα της πόλης δίνει με τα στοιχεία της έναν αξιόπιστο δείκτη του πολιτισμού των κατοίκων της, εκφραστή της καθημερινής ζωής τους. Τα εξωτερικά της στοιχεία-αστικά χαρακτηριστικά που προέρχονται από την κοινωνική ζωή βρίσκονται σε αμφίδρομη σχέση μαζί της.
Η κοινωνική ταυτότητα του φαινομένου των διαφημιστικών μηνυμάτων, από την ανάδυσή του μέχρι σήμερα, ορίζεται από την προσαρμογή της χωρικής οργάνωσης στην τροφοδότηση και οργάνωση του φαινομένου.
Από τις εκφράσεις επικοινωνίας στο δημόσιο χώρο, η λειτουργία που κυριαρχεί στην πόλη σήμερα είναι εκείνη της διαφήμισης.

Keywords: