SIGNS OF A CRISIS: SEEKING NEW FORMULAS FOR UNDERSTANDING AND PRESERVING ATHENS CITYSCAPE'S IMAGERY OF CRISIS

Panagiotis A. FERENTINOS
University of Southampton, Faculty of Arts & Humanities, Winchester School of Art, Winchester, United Kingdom

Abstract: Following on from the inroads the advancement of new technologies has made into the study of urban landscapes, this article set out to examine the visualised activities over the surfaces of the Greek capital, Athens, during Greece's economic crisis. The contemporary detritus of the recession – walls, massive closed stores and their shopfronts, carcasses of kiosks and various urban volumes – has been gradually transformed into a skeleton, an armature where socio-political echoes come into existence through an inscriptive, adding and mark-making process. Taking into consideration that this alternative narrative of the crisis through the public surfaces has been perpetuated, comprising a visually saturated and omnipresent skin, new formulas can emerge and seek out an understanding and preserving this imagery. An attempt to seek these formulas is primarily based on fieldworks in Athens in various chronological phases during the crisis, observation and wandering, as well as photographic charting, archiving and scanning methodologies. The employed apparatuses indicate how novel approaches to new technologies may evidence twofold significance: on the one hand, how they can contribute to an alternative "reading" of the traces, while moving along their frequent reception as "acts of vandalism", stains or smudges; on the other, how the scientific progression, e.g. 3D scanning, in terms of recording and image making, can be enriched, become widely used, and provide new perspectives in the field of urban landscape and its study. The resulted body of this project can be applied to the direction of a chronicle; a historic evidence identifying the crisis and Greece's contemporary period. This approach has the potential to reveal new insights into a wider context of activities surrounding the urban visual interventions. Besides, it may finally be applied as a methodology to other cases of cityscapes similar to Athens or responding to their particularities.

Keywords: Athens, economic crisis, cityscape, new technologies, photography, 3D scanning

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of Greece's economic crisis, Athens has gradually become a centre of overmarking activity over its surfaces, testifying a multi-layered inscriptive and adding process of the socio-political developments subject to the recession. Indeed, even in the early years of the crisis this overwhelming appropriation of the cityscape was unavoidably noticed. Within two to three years of the crisis outset, the phenomenon was already undeniable. In fact, already in 2011, it is noticed that the visual urban forms…"have boomed over the last years, transforming the fixed landscape of a city [Athens] into a platform for negotiation and dialogue".[1]

These visualised voices appeared as:

"a visual marker of the shifting, complex discourses of power struggles, marginality and counter-cultures that establish a new reality that must be seen and heard"[2].

Just as a crisis takes up time to be developed, urban writing proliferation was a long process and has taken years to be spread out; it cannot be examined as something that happened in a specific moment or within some months.[3] The present article, therefore, discusses this "new reality", focusing on the extension of this phenomenon in time and space, namely throughout all the recent years of the crisis (2008–now), and its deployment as a "contagious" and dominant form.

For this purpose, a fieldwork in Athens was necessary comprising meticulous observation while wandering around the city. This field-based research took place in various phases, including 2008 (at the beginning of the crisis), 2011, 2012, 2016, and on a more regular basis since 2018.

The initial engagement was realised through a simple digital camera, and the employment of the mobile camera later on. The essential introduction to this approach (and the facilitation provided by the mobile camera) is relevant to scanning methodologies necessary for a more detailed approach to the particular Athenian landscape. Thus, in this article I discuss how new technologies such as 3D scanning, as an extension and development of the photographic image, may function as an innovative way to chart the surfaces of the urban space of Athens over the years of the economic crisis. The prominence of preserving this iconography during this period draws on the fact that the act of marking walls has been the way for groups and individuals to express "demands, needs and hopes" transmuting the urban volumes into sentient settings.[4]

Indeed, the overwriting activity throughout the Athenian cityscape has taken place to such an extent so that we could unavoidably discuss a distinctive urban "skin" rather than mere inscriptions such as graffiti or slogans. I will thus examine and elaborate on how this "skin", which embeds and reflects Greece's socio-political conditions over this period of crisis, requires a particular apparatus to be recorded and documented in a wider scale than what a photograph can provide.

---

1 M. Tsilimpounidi and A. Walsh, "Painting Human Rights: Mapping Street Art in Athens", in: *Journal of Arts and Communities* 2(2), ed. St. Knight, Bristol: Intellect, 2011, 111.

2 *Ibid*.

3 O. Pangalos, "Testimonies and appraisals on Athens graffiti, before and after the crisis", in: *Remapping 'crisis': a guide to Athens,* eds. M. Tsilimpounidi & A.Walsh, John Hunt Publishing: Zero Books, UK: Winchester, USA: Washington, 2014, 161.

4 K. Avramidis, "'Live your Greece in myths': reading the crisis on Athens' walls", in: *Regards on Crisis in Europe,* Trento, 2012, 1.

In photographic cases such as Jonathan Miller's, where the photographer was recording "negligible things to which one would normally pay no attention at all"[5] during his wanderings for almost 30 years, we notice a lack of potential to reconstruct a greater area of the urban setting in detail and in depth. The rebuilding of scenic evidence able to include the immediate surroundings of a trace is almost impossible[6]. Considering that the evolution of technology has provided intelligent means for visual documentation over the last 20 years, I focus on how the documentation of this visual imagery of crisis can be preserved for a future historical and social understanding.

The necessity of this decision lies in the fact that urban inscriptions are fated to annihilation and their power as messengers is gradually blurred.[7] How photography can be the fundamental tool both for this technological exploration and emergence of social-historical evidence is witnessed in persistent photographic capturing since 2009, e.g. the case of the photographer Takis Spyropoulos. Spyropoulos's photographic interest in writings on the walls started when he moved his studio to Athens city centre, Exarhia district, some years before the publication of his book [a "scrapbook"] full of numerous collected slogans and graffiti (from 2009 to the end of 2012), found in the area. He thus began to wander (so, a flaneur) in the streets and notice the omnipresence of slogans, like "a live broadcast of a 'socio-political diary' unravelling every day".[8] The urban evidence functioned as "public notebooks" for recording Greek's everyday contemporary life and the endless crisis we are experiencing, but also the aesthetics and an early archaeology of the crisis.[9]

At the same time, and in particular at the very beginning of the crisis (late 2008 – early 2009), my engagement mostly included slogans collected in the aftermath of numerous demonstrations that took place in Athens at that time. At a later stage, especially from 2011 on, I centred on the visual appropriation of the closed stores and the massive layers of posters that covered them. The relentless stratification was always updated with information relevant to protests, calls for struggle, or simply events occurring in the city. Mere photographic representations of time-lapses (affiliated with the transformation of the same spots or others) relied on a digital camera and mobile camera setting out to immediate capturing in a stealthy way, without tripod or other "heavy equipment".

However, since 2018 I have improved my approaches and included scanning methodologies, while crossing from a single (or a few) photographic proof per subject to a detailed archive. Scanning gave prominence to the apparently invisible detail, enriching my visual vocabulary with a charting attempt, thereby a cartographic process.

My methodological vehicle for this exploration has been Photoscan (Agisoft Metashape) used as a tool of generating 3D spatial data, and having an application in numerous contexts and fields such as GIS application, preservation of cultural

5 J, Miller, "A scavenger's hoard", in: *The Independent*, 1999.

6 *Ibid.*

7 K. Avramidis, "'Live your Greece in myths': reading the crisis on Athens' walls", in: *Regards on Crisis in Europe,* Trento, 2012, 1.

8 T. Spyropoulos, X-ARXEIA unsensored – The slogans and graffiti of Exarcheia 2009 – 2012, Athens, 2013, 12.

9 Σ. Ε., Μπουράτση, «Τετράδια των δρόμων. Τα συνθήματα και τα graffiti των Εξαρχείων», 2nd Street Art Festival Patras – Artwalk 2, Art in Progress. Text of the exhibition at Archaeological Museum of Patras. The Best, 2016.

heritage and objects in diverse scales.[10] Relying on the utilisation of Photoscan as a research tool, one can understand that a means used for scanning "cultural heritage documentation"[11] may provide a cultural value to the ephemeral urban inscriptions. However, scanning parts of a city in crisis and their incessant change may not offer accuracy in shape, so the resulting 3D model is always different, albeit unique.

Thus, with regard to the appropriate use of 3D scanning and how "fast and highly accurate"[12] the software being introduced itself is, the applied technology may appear to be used wrongly. Nonetheless, this article will achieve to demonstrate that through producing fragments from glitches and deliberately misusing the technology, an appropriate method for preserving the Athenian trace of crisis emerges. The various perspectives of 3D models bring to light new shapes, virtual sculptural volumes, additional skins and textures, collage compositions, etc. As examined below, all these forms contribute to an imagery of ruins, the detritus of the crisis translated into a virtual space, producing an additional body of iconography of the Athenian landscape in crisis.

THE URBAN LANDSCAPE OF A CITY IN TURMOIL

At first, it is essential to understand and frame what a landscape is. How individuals interact with their surrounding milieu, so do both space and people shape one another. Along these lines, we will be able to conceive how the cityscape of Athens was shaped by the individuals who have experienced the crisis, and simultaneously how it reflected on them through its produced imagery.

The word *landscape* is used as a term in many and diverse disciplines, such as geography, archaeology, architecture, history, or philosophy. What we call *landscapes* is created when people engage with their environment and the world around them. A landscape is, therefore, the outcome of understanding, experience and engagement, relying on "human consciousness and active involvement".[13] If these three notions – understanding, experiencing, engagement – comprise a landscape, three basic questions may emerge at this early stage of the present investigation. First: are we able to "read" the visualisation of human necessities on public surfaces, abstaining from easily perceived interpretations about "vandals" and "barbarians"? Second: can we use or record the visualised experience of austerity and impoverishment for a future historic purpose to identify a crisis? And third: how does a marking engagement (and any interwoven plethora of echoes) produce a whole skin? – Namely, a relentlessly reformed "fabric", covering the city with the aesthetics of crisis. The Athenian landscape and its skin are based on the ephemeral and, in turn, produce the ephemeral.

Landscapes are always being changed, being present at this moment but also in a process of dynamic change and thus are always temporal; it is a process of "being shaped and reshaped".[14]

---

10 Agisoft, *Metashape – photogrammetric processing of digital images and 3D spatial data generation*, 2019.

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Ibid.*

13 B. Bender, "Place and landscape", in: *Handbook of material culture*, eds. C. Tilley, W. Keane, S. Küchler, M. Rowlands, P. Spyer, London: Sage, 2006, 303.

14 B. Bender, "Time and Landscape", in *Current Anthropology*, ed. L. Ralph, The University of Chicago Press Books, Volume 43, Supplement, Chicago, 2002, 103.

Hence, we can recognise that although a cityscape is unavoidably structured of concrete volumes, it is finally instable and understood in terms of the given conditions. Even the same place in a different time is experienced in a different way by the same individual; the same person may even, at a given moment, hold conflicting feelings about a place.[15] This quality of a landscape may account for how the individuals sensed it when they optically experienced the detritus of the crisis, and an image of abandonment in the place of the prior Athenian city centre and the past flourishing of commerce. The saturated image of Athens public space has potentially made people feel angry at those who produced this imagery: the "vandals". However, it was the crisis and its consequences that led an actor to intervene and alter the body of the city itself. Thereby Athens obtains corporeality, a bodily existence, embodying voices and echoes of how individuals reflect and respond to the imposed recession. Its architectural shapes are the armatures, the skeleton, on which this body and skin take place.

The term "embodiment" is central in a phenomenological experience of the landscape; as it occurs through the medium of the individuals' "sensing and sensed carnal body".[16] The city itself becomes the medium, and the human subjects enter into it and allow it to have "its own impact on their perspective understandings".[17] When people in Athens were gradually experiencing the massive closures of stores, and the new reality of ruins was enforced on the commercial vibrancy of the city, they were able to conceive the crisis through its visualised form. It is the human subject's immersion in a space, the experience of it that allows insights to be achieved, so that we claim that a space has agency in relation to persons.[18]

However, the conditional character of the urban space stresses its dynamic; it is constantly under construction, forged and remoulded based on the different experiences and actions of the subjects who come in contact with it. The space is never stable and homogeneous, but ceaselessly changing, alive and polyphonic and reflects the interventions of subjects as they are at the same time reflected in it.[19] By that means a landscape is a subjective concept, and "being subjective and open to many understandings it is volatile".[20] The subjectivity and volatility render the landscape of Athens during the crisis a contested space, where power-resistance relations intertwine. The geographical areas within the city (buildings, roads, neighbourhoods, monuments, parks, etc.) or even the city as a whole, are fields of manifestation of social and cultural conflicts aimed at control, use, management and their appropriation.[21] In fact, the reference to particular spaces within the city ("geographical regions") and the transition to the "city as a whole" corresponds to my main intention to seek formulas able to preserve the different

---

15 B. Bender, "Place and landscape", in: *Handbook of material culture*, eds. C. Tilley, W. Keane, S. Küchler, M. Rowlands, P. Spyer, London: Sage, 2006, 303.

16 C. Tilley, "Phenomenological approaches to landscape archaeology", in: *Handbook of landscape archaeology*, eds. J. Thomas and B. David, London: Sage, 2008, 271.

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*

19 P. Karathanasis, "Οι τοίχοι της πόλης ως 'αμφισβητούμενοι χώροι': Αισθητική και αστικό τοπίο στην Αθήνα", in: *Αμφισβητούμενοι χώροι στην πόλη [Contested spaces in the city]*, eds. Κ. Γιαννακόπουλος & Γ. Γιαννιτσιώτης, Athens: Alexandreia. 2010, p. 316.

20 B. Bender, "Place and landscape", in: *Handbook of material culture*, eds. C. Tilley, W. Keane, S. Küchler, M. Rowlands, P. Spyer, London: Sage, 2006, 303.

21 Κ. Γιαννακόπουλος and Γ. Γιαννιτσιώτης, «Εισαγωγή: Εξουσία, αντίσταση και χωρικές υλικότητες», in: Αμφισβητούμενοι χώροι στην πόλη» [*Contested spaces in the city]*, eds. K. Gianakopoulos and G. Gianitsiotis, Athens: Alexandreia, 2010, 12.

Fig. 1

and gradual stages of transformation examined as a distinctive skin, rather than a mere inscriptions case study.

THE SKIN, THE BODY: ATHENS AS A CONTESTED SPACE

In fact, Athens in crisis has provided a unique case of the public's engagement with the cityscape to the extent that one could discuss the existence of a distinctive city skin. This skin has been covering the architectural volumes with always updated political information, cultural data, colour, texture and various matters.

The "graffiti epidemic in Athens", and the reasons why the coverage of the city is so widely spread are "complex and can be related to current events and general situation in the period before the crisis".[22] Hence, the examination of a skin can be seen as "sedimentary strata", embodying various stages of the city's evolution connected up in a palimpsestic process. Public writing and graffiti have politicized the city's cultural palimpsest, codified forms of protest against dominant political narratives, and also turned the traumatic experience of the crisis into a source of inspiration and cultural creation.[23]

A "collaged skin" that makes room for any echo, accommodates and respects any voice that is visualised through politicised urban crafts and slogans of struggle. It is also essential to point out what kind of spaces (surfaces) the crisis allowed for interaction to the actors, leading entire blocks of abandoned – ruined – closed stores to a visual appropriation (Figure 1). Indeed, not only regions – that may imply local impoverishment or marginalised groups living in an area – but also

---

22 O. Pangalos, "Testimonies and appraisals on Athens graffiti, before and after the crisis", in: *Remapping 'crisis': a guide to Athens*, eds. M. Tsilimpounidi & A.Walsh, John Hunt Publishing: Zero Books, UK: Winchester, USA: Washington, 2014, 161.

23 Γ. Ζαϊμάκης. «Φωνές Διαμαρτυρίας στους Δρόμους της Πόλης. Προσλήψεις της Κρίσης μέσα στο Πολιτικό-εκφραστικό Γκράφιτι», in: Κοινωνιολογική Επιθεώρηση [*Greek Sociological Review*], eds. Χ. Ζάχου, Σ. Κονιόρδος, Ν. Φωτόπουλος, Μ. Αλεξάκης, Περιοδική Έκδοση της Ελληνικής Κοινωνιολογικής Εταιρίας 2(3), 2015, 119.

Fig. 2   December 2011   February 2013   December 2018

urban objects (pillars, metal boxes, post-boxes, etc.) were included and absorbed in this broader idea of a skin (Figure 2), denoting a greater and wider necessity of space; both for expression and control. If Baudrillard, referring to May '68 in Paris, remarked that "the real revolutionary media were the walls and their speech",[24] in Athens instead we notice an appropriation of any available public space. However, the necessity is the same: the individuals seek a space (or spaces) where discourse could begin and be an exchange; for them, the immediate inscriptions are "given and returned, spoken and answered, mobile in the same place and time, reciprocal and antagonistic".[25]

The city constitutes a predominantly "contested space", namely a privileged place of study relevant to the construction of spatiality linked to the relations of power and resistance.[26] Cities are dynamic, living organisms in which space and people mutually create one another. The visual appropriation of the city, through for instance graffiti and street art, captures these socio-spatial interactions between the placing of people and the ways humans inhabit and (in)form their spaces. Thus, while looking at the marks and writing on the walls, valuable insights emerge witnessing the polyvalent character of our urban realities.[27]

The multivalent nature of Athens in crisis may address how its urban imagery is arranged and re-arranged in a way that can be seen through various angles of a collage. In the twentieth century collage prevailed both as a medium and an idea,[28] played the role of "a major turning point in the whole evolution of modernist art",[29]

24 J. Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign,* New York, 1981, 176.

25 *Ibid.*

26 Κ. Γιαννακόπουλος and Γ. Γιαννιτσιώτης, «Εισαγωγή: Εξουσία, αντίσταση και χωρικές υλικότητες», in: Αμφισβητούμενοι χώροι στην πόλη» [*Contested spaces in the city*], eds. K. Gianakopoulos and G. Gianitsiotis, Athens: Alexandreia, 2010, 12.

27 K. Avramidis and M. Tsilimpounidi. "Graffiti and street art: reading, writing and representing the city", in: *Graffiti and street art: reading, writing and representing the city*, eds. K. Avramidis and M. Tsilimpounidi, London, New York, 2017. 1–23.

28 K. Hoffman, *Collage: Critical Views*, Michigan, 1989, 7.

29 C. Greenberg, *Collage. In Art and Culture*, Boston, 1961, 70.

while it was "the single most revolutionary formal innovation in artistic representation" [of the century].[30] The references to the medium as a "turning point" and "revolutionary innovation" seems to be promising for examining the field of a crisis, Athens, through the notion of a collage in the twenty-first century.

Once the term is opened up, it stresses how forms with different initial function can obtain new identities or functionality through collaged compositions, given that:

> "a collage may be seen as a quintessential twentieth-century art form with multiple layers and signposts pointing to a variety of forms and realities, and to the possibility or suggestion of countless new realities".[31]

In the Athens case, this can be explained through how indifferent and unnoticed urban objects (such as in Figure 2) are transformed into mediums, which I mentioned before as "armatures" over which the development of a skin with socio-political connotations has taken place. If we rely on the definition of collage as a work of art where various materials normally disconnected are adhered on a single surface,[32] the importance of an artist's involvement in the process is necessary to perceive.[33] "A collage is clearly identified as and unequivocally a work of art", where the compositional random elements are produced elsewhere and the creation is an outcome out of them.[34] Certainly, in Athens no actor is consciously engaged in an intentional collage process as an artist. An individual who writes a slogan on a wall may not be an artist. Those who stick posters are not artists either; they are just employees paid some euros per hour. We could thus admit that skin-fabrication embeds the qualities of a collage, but it crosses the threshold of a deliberate collage. Yet, can we recognise art qualities in the city's visual narratives so that we can refer to an urban, self-managed collage? How can it be preserved through art practices as proof of the current era?

A potential answer may lie in the powerful dynamic of public surfaces as bearers of history that no art would compete against.[35] For instance, this historic testimony is evident in Jacques Villeglé's *décollages*, where the artist's work is "part of the history of the city, putting a face on what did not make history".[36]

It is therefore the artist's translation of the city, the utilisation of its pieces as historic evidence through preservation, as is, in my case, the recording and further prominence of Athenian fragments of crisis. Just as in Villeglé's work, collecting urban data can function as:

> "a sign of everything visual, of the perishable, ephemeral diaries of walls, of their wordless story, of the heavy, earnest history that would smother any art that tried to look it straight in the face".[37]

---

30 G. Ulmer, "The Object of Post-Criticism", in: *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture,* ed. H. Foster, Port Townsend, Washington, 84.

31 K. Hoffman, *Collage: Critical Views*, Michigan, 1989, 7.

32 *Collage,* Dictionary.com, 2021.

33 M. Kjellman-Chapin, "Traces, Layers and Palimpsests: The Dialogics of Collage and Pastiche.", in: *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift/Journal of Art History 75.2,* Ed. J. Sjöholm Skrubbe, Taylor & Francis, London, 2006, 90.

34 Ibid.

35 F. Bon, "Peeling back the Layers of Time", in: *Jacques Villeglé,* eds. N. Bourriaud, F. Bon, K. Cabanas, Paris, 2007, 166.

36 *Ibid.*

37 F. Bon, "Peeling back the Layers of Time", in: *Jacques Villeglé,* eds. N. Bourriaud, F. Bon, K. Cabanas, Paris, 2007, 166.

The urban surfaces functioned as a stimulus for me, namely to choose and conserve this self-arranged reality. I was inspired to record the various "time-lapses" of Athens that witnessed this process of metamorphosis. Each stage provided particular socio-political information, material of the events taking place in the city, and colourful posters always remodelling the image of the city. It was, therefore, essential to approach and build up a formula to examine the cityscape's body, and see how Athens in crisis develops its own imagery or, in other words, how the crisis is narrated through this imagery.

NEW RESEARCH RECORDING TOOLS: DIGITAL MEANS AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES

New technologies are used in my attempt to uncover ways to record, archive, and further study the diverse ephemeral traces spread throughout the city of Athens. These means include digital photography and landscape documentation software (scanning), assisting in breaking the temporal and ephemeral barrier through 2D and 3D techniques. As I mentioned before, my intention to seek alternative means came out as a result of long-lasting wandering and observation of Athens' urban landscape, and in particular while noticing the embedded manufactured objects spread throughout the city. Thus, even if a wall could apparently be documented with a few images, these three-dimensional urban volumes (that equally hosted the produced skin) required their own formula and methodology.

These normally invisible objects, in a permanent place for years or even decades, are in a constant "metamorphosis" acting as signboards or "calls" for various public interventions. Post-boxes, metal boxes for telephone or electricity cables, pillars and columns, in variable geometrical shapes (cylinder, rectangle, square), only retain their initial manufactured structure or colour (for instance in Figure 2, the bright red of the post-box). Yet, their surface is in a relentless transformation: stickers and posters are stuck on them, then ripped off, and new ones take their place, in a permanent gluing and ungluing process. In addition to this, traces from the makers compete the glued paper persistence. Although these "physical" objects have their practical uses, they may also fulfil a role of urban sculptures, unintentionally including collaged and décollaged (peeling away) qualities. Even if they tend to be unseen as camouflaged and absorbed into a similar surrounding space, they silently contribute to the skin making.

FIRST METHODOLOGICAL TOOL: THE DIGITAL CAMERA

During my fieldwork, the digital camera of the mobile phone becomes an initial "sketch book" aiming at an immediate documentation and instant capturing of massive material. I usually arrived at a place, taking pictures fast within some minutes (or even seconds) and then disappeared. My initial role is that of someone who digitally (photographically) saves the particular historical moments of the city, and has no interventional role to alter and physically obtain the city material. This profit is certainly attributed to new technologies, and the invasion of the digital in our everyday life. In contrast, in cases such as Jacques Villeglé's, the artist could, without doubt, be called "Jack the Ripper" of post-war Paris walls, given that his connection with the urban material was "to cut, rip and tear posters, then remount them onto canvas in his studio".[38]

---

38 E. Guffey, *Posters: a global history*, Chicago, 2014, 89.

Thus, half a century ago we notice that the idea of utilising a fragment of the urban reality in total, such as a piece of a street poster introduced by collage and décollage methodologies, embraced physical appropriation and material revival. Based on a short Pathé newsreel, in 1962, we easily perceive a kind of performativity in Villeglé's effort to take advantage of the cityscape's material:

> "The man [Villeglé] deftly runs the knife along the surface of the wall; with a few precise jabs, slashes and tugs, he pulls a large chunk of posters off the wall, hoists the fragments over his shoulder and briskly walks away. By his clandestine actions and quick pace, we sense that we have just witnessed a crime"[39].

Instead, in my case, I avoided any performativity. Just the mobile camera was employed, and no other apparatuses that could make me be noticed, such as tripods, lenses and filters. Besides, no prior professional knowledge and skills of photography were necessary. It seems to be quite similar to Jonathan Miller's case when he worked with a cheap automatic camera as the only medium. Miller sought to read and record "bits and pieces" found in the street. He only attempted to show things which may usually escape our attention and interpret them through his presentation in a challenging new way for the viewer.[40]

SECOND METHODOLOGICAL TOOL: PHOTO-SCANNING SOFTWARE
Photoscan as a tool of reviewing conceptual elements of the practice

For my research, I adapted and have been relying on digital media and "recent technologies". I call them "recent" due to their rapidly transformative character. Technology develops fast, and new software is always being adapted anew. Computer applications and programs evolve dynamically and have their own life cycle.[41] Again, we grasp the nature of the ephemeral even in digital means and technologies. On the "about photoscan" section of Agisoft's webpage,[42] it is stated that the "cultural heritage documentation" is one of the roles that this software has played so far. However, I have been using it as a fundamental tool of recoding and keeping track of the ephemerality of the urban space and its expressed culture.

In fact, *Agisoft Metashape* (previously known as Agisoft Photoscan) has been a principal tool for my research. By tapping into a scanning tool that also offers a virtual environment of the scanned referent, I intended to periodically record spots in Athens, urban walls and city objects. Opting for regular documentation of the same subjects every three of four months permitted me to achieve a visual mapping of their evolution and transformation. Due to the city's size and the immense extension of the urban visual culture throughout its centre, I only worked on some fragments and recorded the history of these. What differentiates the virtual model from a mere photography is that it may offer an immersive experience, while zooming in and out on the image, as one were part of the urban landscape.

The introduction of this programme on Agisoft's official page is as follows:

39 Ibid and J. Villeglé, "Headline People" (video). British Pathé. 1962.

40 J. Miller, "A scavenger's hoard", in: *The Independent*, 1999.

41 M.M. Lehman. "Programs, life cycles, and laws of software evolution", in: *Proceedings of the IEEE*, 68(9), 1980, 1060.

42 Agisoft, *Metashape – photogrammetric processing of digital images and 3D spatial data generation*, 2019.

Fig. 3

"Agisoft Metashape is a stand-alone software product that performs photogram-metric processing of digital images and generates 3D spatial data to be used in GIS applications, cultural heritage documentation, and visual effects production as well as for indirect measurements of objects of various scales".[43]

The reference to "stand-alone" also marks a conceptual engagement of my research with it, beyond any technical and practical embrace. While I gradually adopted it, I perceived that I was relying on it both as a process and the given outcome, as if it were a "partner" and we were working as a duo. More specifically, I accepted and adapted its results without any intervention during the digital process or transferring its exported files into another programme (Illustrator, Photoshop, etc.) in order to

---

43 *Ibid*.

modify the image. In some cases, I only converted the image into grayscale mode (Photoshop) for examining the black-and-white option. Apart from this aesthetic and modal accordance, I was impressed and further interested in the intelligence of the programme; for instance, how the different stages were built, how it decided to compose, recompose or decompose the given reality, how it treated fragmentation, etc.

CONNECTION OF A DIGITAL PROCESS WITH THE URBAN EPHEMERALITY

I will attempt a connection between Photoscan's process – in particular, the gradual steps I follow while using it – and a conceptual extra dimension which enables it to become a research tool for both practice and theoretical exploration. For this approach, I relied on a project of documenting an urban object in Piraeus Street, one of the central avenues in Athens. The object of study was two outdoor communication cable cabinets stuck together (Figure 3). Their surface was full of various material and typographic ingredients: hints of posters and stickers ripped apart situated on top of a prior layer of a deteriorated spray-painted message; tagging, a character graffiti, numerous writings made with markers and spay-paints were also included.

ALL THE SUCCESSIVE STEPS: THE 'WORKFLOW'

The term "workflow" means the sequence of processes needed to see a piece of work from the beginning to its completion. The "workflow" menu is part of the
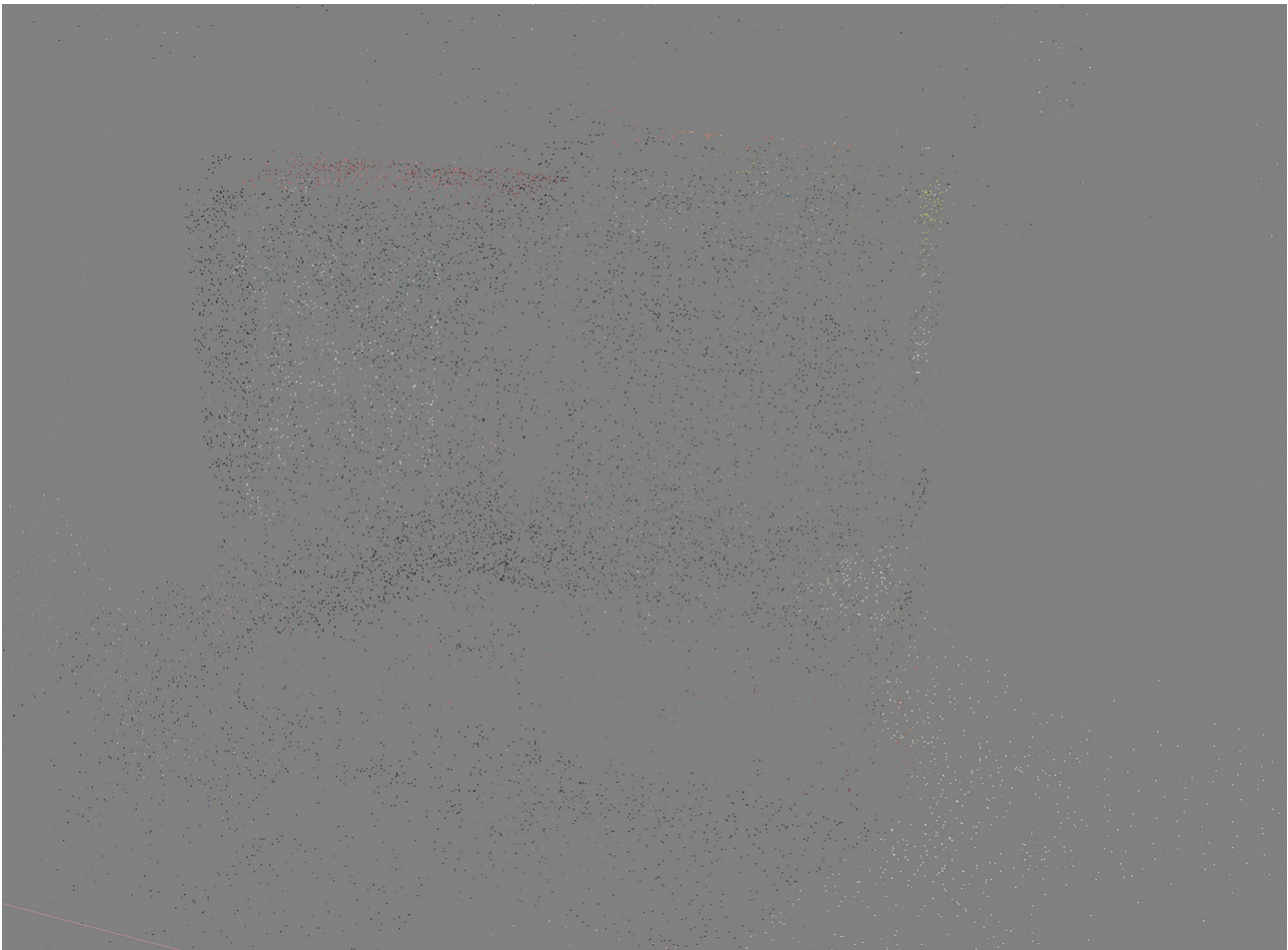
Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Metashape software and includes functions for the creation process, each one also with the potential to be translated into a conceptual part of the process-research towards capturing ephemerality.

"Add folder": Once a folder containing an ensemble of photos (in .jpeg format) of the referent – mural spot, object, etc – from various viewpoints is added ("Add a folder") the second stage is to **"Align photos"**. When the process of aligning the photos is completed, numerous colourful dots appear (Figure 4). These dots look like floating "dust" due to the random way the programme decides to unveil this first layer of building up the referent. This set of dots has a random placement on the screen; the programme does not decide on a frontal, profile, or ¾ representative view.

Only when the "navigation" tool is used one can start seeing a more shaped form, yet pale and not condensed (Figure 3). This fluidity between the given grey background and the photos translated into dots at this stage, offers a conceptual nuance of ephemerality: things are made of matter, of dust; they remain things for a while, and then return to matter, to dust. This stage is a liminal space between the object and what the object consists of. It is also an ephemeral stage due to its transient functionality; the project is still under development towards its completion, albeit not completed. (Figure 5)

Next stage: "**Build Dense Cloud**". Once we click on this option, we are asked for the quality to be given to our model: five options, from "Lowest" to "Ultra high". Once applied, the programme begins to 'reconstruct depth'. The highest quality required the longest time. At this stage, quality is a matter of time: from some min-
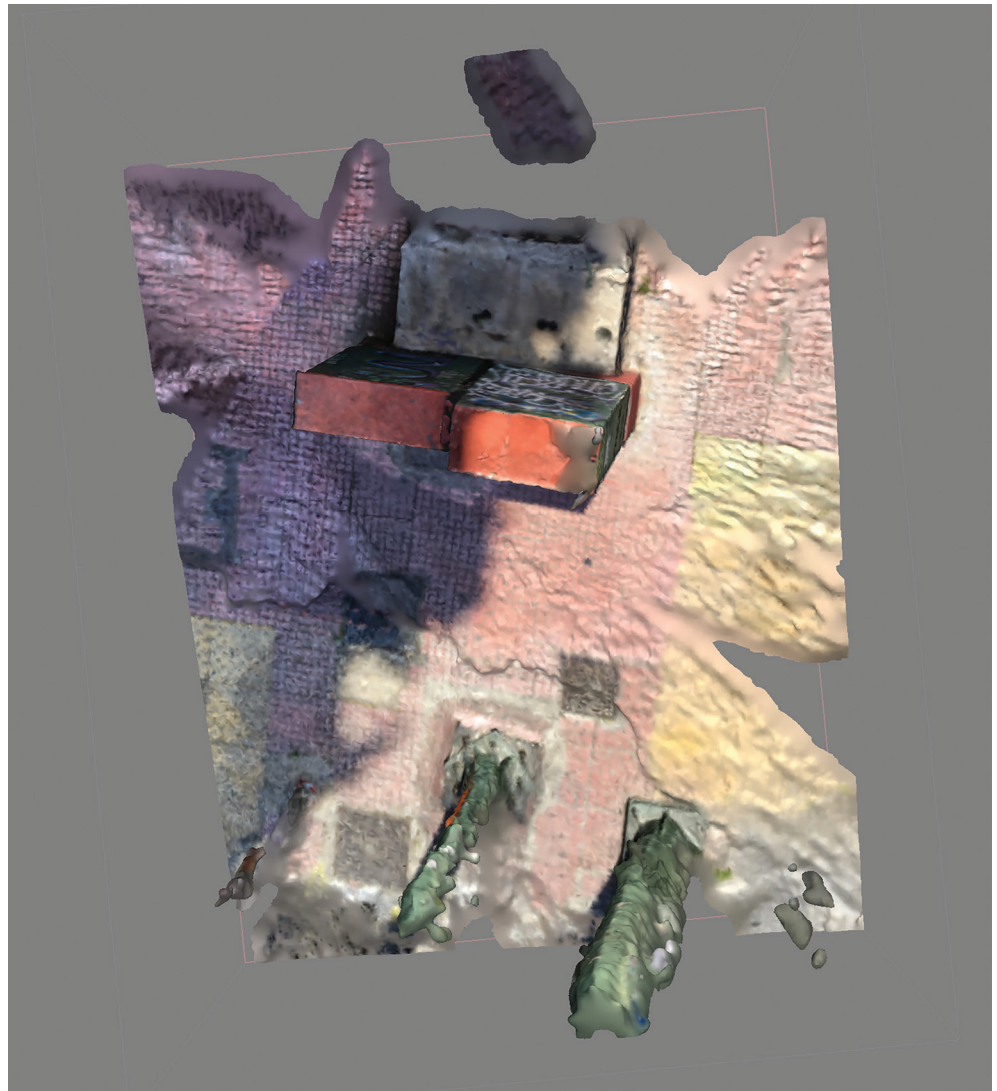
Fig. 6

utes to hours for just a stage of the configuration. In some unknown spatiotemporal future, a metadata of the present data – or a new programme – might offer the same result in less time. This fact also embeds a temporality of the medium itself. Once "depth" is completed we still see dots, but now the form is slightly denser. While using the "navigation" tool, the referent is perceived more clearly than before, from various points of view.

    "Build Mesh" is the following stage: when we opt for it, the programme generates a mesh ("generating mesh"). Once completed, our referent now has flesh. In a similar manner, the resulting object has a random placement on the screen, at first glance appearing as a different object from that in our initial photos (Figure 6). This random perspective results in an illusionary fragment although the real object is there, full of details.

    Via "navigation" tool, one can see the initially photographed subject. Yet the outcome is still a fragment of the reality, as the programme decides what the final form of the whole volume will be; a shape we could not have foreseen or anticipated when we had taken the initial multifaceted photos. Certainly, one could trim and alter this shape, yet in my research, I am interested in retaining and benefiting from this shape given by the artificial intelligence of the programme. It is the fragment that
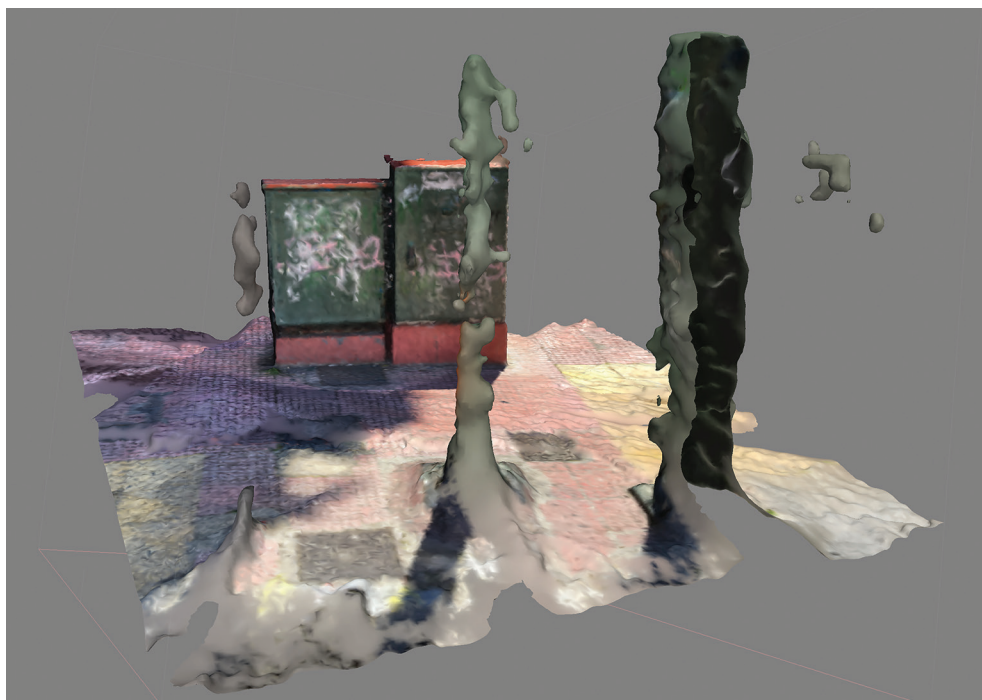
Fig. 7

a digital medium decided to create in response to my initial digital images from the digital camera (Figure 7).

Different options on the tool bar ("shaded", "solid", "wireframe") can provide a different visual substance of the project. I refer to some of them below, in particular those closer to the question of the skin and aesthetic interests within my research.

"Shaded": the project shows a range of colours that correspond to some extent to the initial photos used for it. However, they are blurry; the texture looks swollen, as being covered with a sort of hoarfrost (see Figure 7). **"Solid"** conceals the referent from any visual detail, as it is represented by a solid mauve-blue hoarfrost mass.
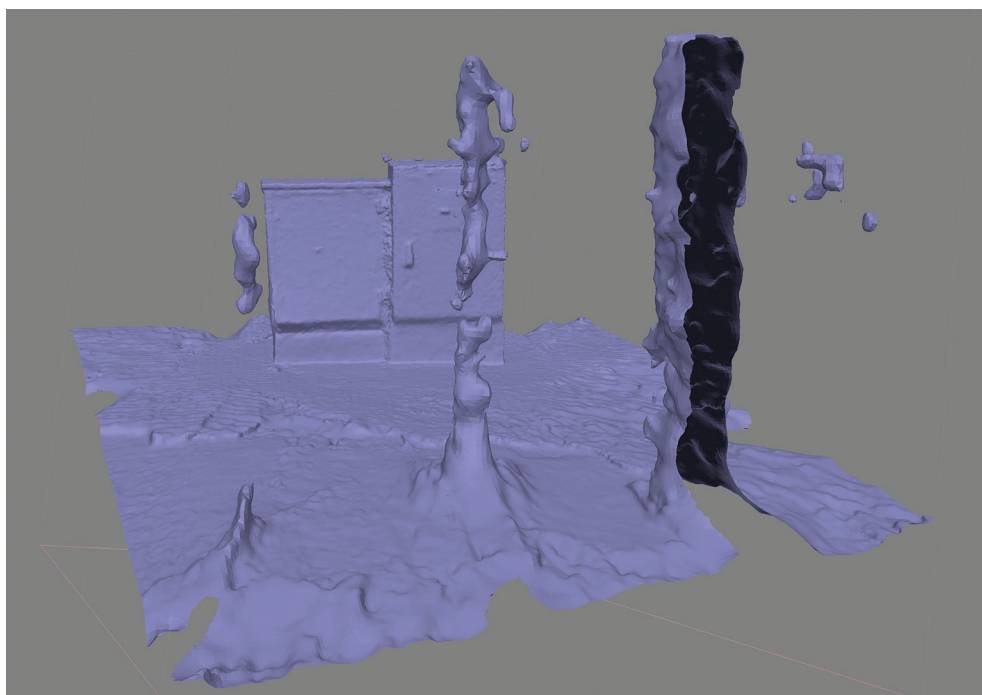
Fig. 8

Fig. 9

That is an interesting result as the emphasis is put on the general fragment, as the object is deprived of any identical component of its idiosyncrasy, apart from some nuances of plasticity (Figure 8). However, by using the "navigation" tool, the back of it unveils the reflected image of the project, as an emboss print, and the whole fragment is covered by a velvet solid black with some light glances (Figure 9).

   "Wireframe" is how the object is built from numerous mesh and wires while zooming in. That is the skeleton and from different perspectives the multiple layers of wires coincide showing an interesting drawing. This drawing relentlessly changes whereas we change our point of view. The object always transforms into something new (Figure 10).

   Next stage: **"build texture"**, when the programme blends textures. We can now see the result of one more option on the tool bar, "textured". A more detailed image is offered, closer to the reality and the initial photos we provided to the programme (Figure 11).

   In the end, this virtual fragment is not like an individual and solid piece of stone or marble (similar to ancient fragments). The digital fragment alters its form and any new status is a fruit of different positioning. The particularity of a digital fragment lies in the fact that each element of the surrounding space – captured compulsorily during the photographic process – also accompanies the subject of interest and appears to be
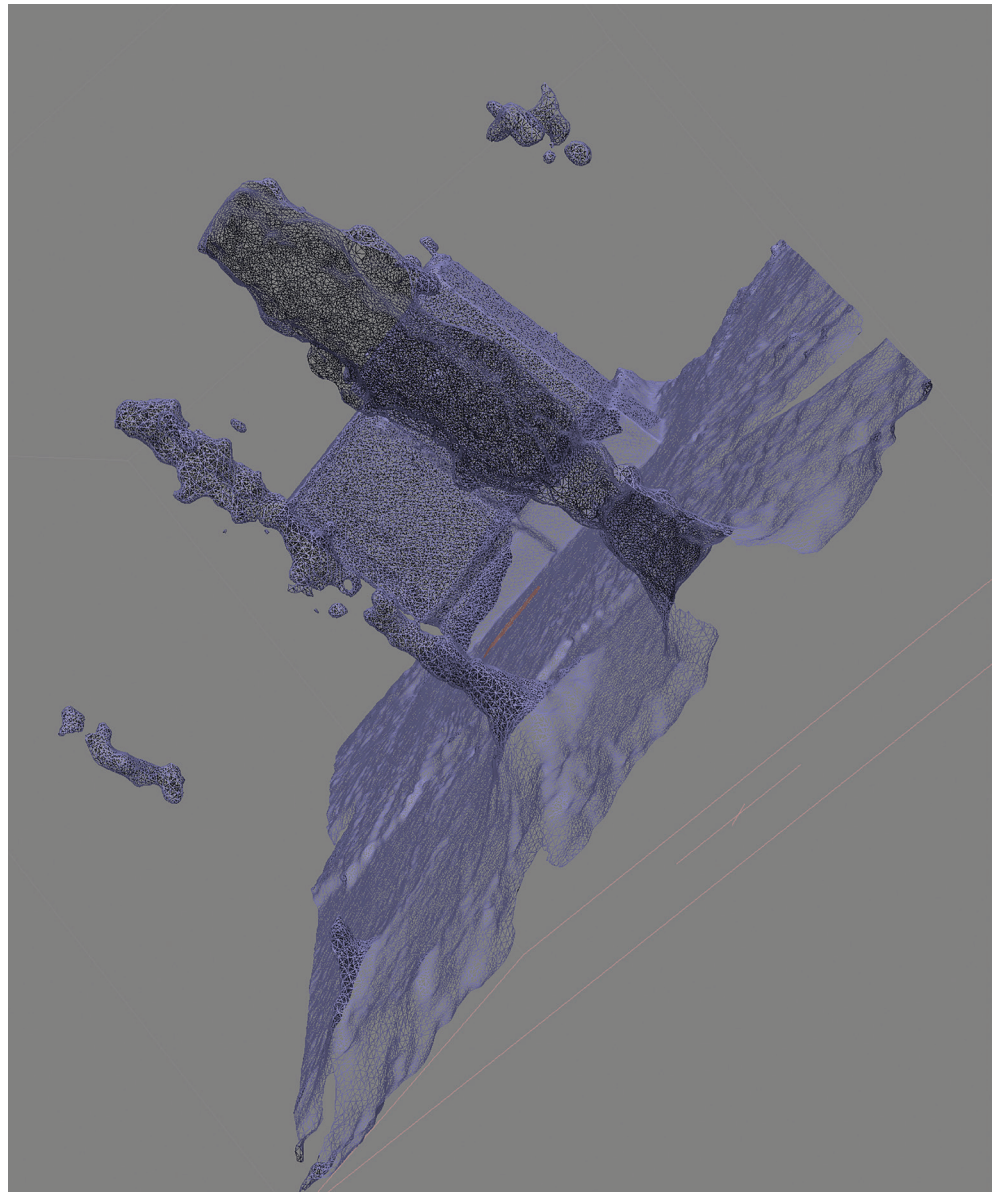
Fig. 10

three-dimensional (another secondary object, the floor, indications of trees around, etc), even elements that are not directly connected to the dominant form.

THE EXPORTED DIGITAL FILE TYPES AND THEIR POTENTIAL

Two types of files may be exported from the 3D-modelling process providing new iconographies that allow room for further interpretation.

The **.jpeg** exported files (Figure 12) offer the texture and colour of the surface (skin). If they could be put on top of or next to each other, they would make the provided elements (initial pictures) as a blurry world – a cloudy cosmos due to the fuzzy areas that link the more realistic fragmentary pieces. The fragments are unified but still in one new combination: some elements are becoming a vague cloud and the forms appear melted in a new syntax, as if the generator of their new composition follows a new grammar structure for recomposing.

This collaged condition transforms the image into an illusion, and the viewer's experience is rather illusory. In fact, it provides an experience closer to Cubism, which
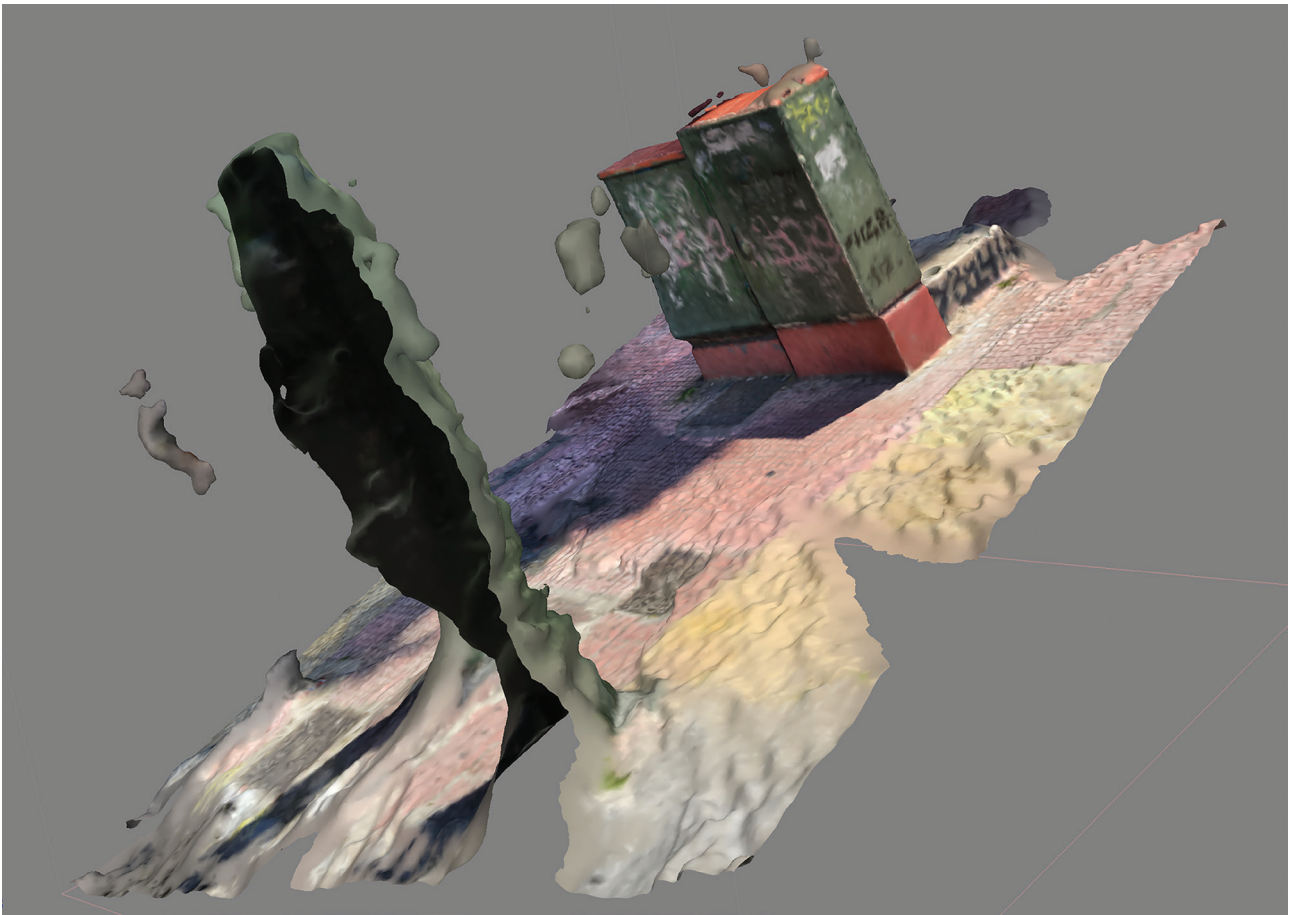
Fig. 11

rejects the rules of perspective. For example, Picasso's engagement with collage was a challenge towards the painting's *status quo* until then, as perspective ruled painting, and he intended to trigger the viewer by recognising and giving attention to the strangeness of the world.[44] Picasso's cognizance of this new condition was later explained [to Francoise Gilot, as he mentioned that] as the "world was becoming very strange and not exactly reassuring".[45]

> "The purpose of the *papier collé* was to give the idea that different textures can enter the composition to become the reality in the painting that competes with the reality in nature. We tried to get to rid of *trompe-l'œil* to find *trompe l' esprit.* We didn't want to fool the eye any longer: we wanted to fool the mind".[46]

In the case of .jpeg exports, this digital *papier collé*-like composition, as a new reality competes the reality of the urban landscape. This digital collage is like a post-cubistic or neo-cubistic collage, where different angles and perspectives of the same subject meet at the foreground level. In the illusory notion of the image, any verbal trace (messages, writings, letters from the posters, etc.) seem to dissolve and the linguistic element – often used in collages – becomes a preverbal form, a new trace.

---

44 R. Cran, *Collage in Twentieth-Century Art, Literature, and Culture: Joseph Cornell, William Burroughs, Frank O'Hara, and Bob Dylan.* London & New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group. 2016. 7.

45 F. Gilot and C. Lake, *Life with Picasso* [1st ed.]. New York: McGraw-Hill. 1964, 70.

46 *Ibid.*

Fig. 12

The **.tiff** exported files (Figure 13) offer individual fragments, separated one from the other. There is no connection or intersection amongst them, apart from a blank space that flows in between. In contrast to the .jpeg images and the fluid idiosyncrasy of their unity, this white space in .tiffs restrains the pieces and keeps them in a stable place as if they were immovable. In this individuality, each fragment looks unique, has its own size and layout, and the edges that delimits its endpoints are also distinctive. It is essential to refer to the nature of the edges, as the way that the programme defines them looks like a tearing-apart process, a way alike that of collages and décollages made by hand. This feature makes each piece unique, just as any torn piece (by hand) is dissimilar to any other.

Fig. 13

CONCLUSION

Through a temporal visual reading and recording of the Athenian urban surfaces, we can proceed to an understanding of the socio-political and spatial-geographical realities of Athens in the context of the specific period of economic crisis. In fact, the overwritten surfaces of Athens during this period offer a rich variety of "traces" that emerge from human interactions with everyday urban environment. In this way, the public spaces accommodate and reflect the human echo, transforming the urban sphere into a narrative of the current Greek socio-political context. For empirical and practice-based research, the initial engagement included periodical fieldwork in Athens, photographic documentation and archiving. Central to the practice element is the utilisation of novel approaches to expand the field of photography, relying on 3D visualisation software used in documenting the cityscape.

It shifts the photographic detail of the fieldwork (multiple overlapping images of a location) into a new fragmented digital reality, and represents it in detail as well. In the material sense, even a physically collected torn piece of Athens imagery would not be able to redefine the scene of reality. Instead, 3D-modelling directs the details to a scene-making and finally achieves it. The developed practice of wandering, collecting data, and utilising 3D-modelling may contribute to potential knowledge as a visual production and its methodology, and may be applied to other similar cases of cityscape preservation.

ILLUSTRATIONS

1: Panagiotis Ferentinos, *A closed store in Vouliagmenis Ave, Athens, covered with numerous layers of posters*, 2012, digital photography, Athens, Greece.
Панајотис Ферентинос, *Затворена продавница у Авенији Вулиагменис, Атина, прекривена бројним слојевима плаката*, 2012, дигитална фотографија, Атина, Грчка.
2: Panagiotis Ferentinos, *A red post-box: three chronological phases of its appropriation and metamorphosis*, 2018, digital photography, Athens, Greece.
Панајотис Ферентинос, *Црвено поштанско сандуче: три хронолошке фазе њене апропријације и метаморфозе*, 2018, дигитална фотографија, Атина, Грчка.
3: Panagiotis Ferentinos, *The object of study located in the urban landscape, 2019, digital photography*, Athens, Greece.
Панајотис Ферентинос, *Објекат проучавања који се налази у урбаном пејзажу*, 2019, дигитална фотографија, Атина, Грчка.
4: Panagiotis Ferentinos, *Align photos: the object consists of numerous dots at this stage*, 2019, Photogrammetry – 3D scanning, Athens, Greece.
Панајотис Ферентинос, *Поравнаше фотографије: објекат се састоји од бројних тачака у овој фази*, 2019, фотограметрија – 3Д скенирање, Атина, Грчка.
5: Panagiotis Ferentinos, *Using the navigation tool, the object's volume is slightly clearer*, 2019, Photogrammetry – 3D scanning, Athens, Greece.
Панајотис Ферентинос, Коришћењем алатке за навигацију, волумен објекта је нешто јаснији, 2019, фотограметрија – 3Д скенирање, Атина, Грчка.
6: Panagiotis Ferentinos, *Build mesh: the object has now 'flesh'*, 2019, Photogrammetry – 3D scanning, Athens, Greece.
Панајотис Ферентинос, *Грађење модела: објекат сада има „месо"*, 2019, фотограметрија – 3Д скен, Атина, Грчка.
7: Panagiotis Ferentinos, *Using the navigation tool: the object is seen from different views*, 2019, Photogrammetry – 3D scanning, Athens, Greece.
Панајотис Ферентинос, *Коришћењем алатке за навигацију објекат се посматра из различитих праваца*, 2019, фотограметрија – 3Д скенирање, Атина, Грчка.
8: Panagiotis Ferentinos, *The object is represented by a solid mauve-blue hoarfrost mass*, 2019, Photogrammetry – 3D scanning, Athens, Greece.
Панајотис Ферентинос, *Објекат је представљен чврстом масом иња љубичасто-плаве боје*, 2019, фотограметрија – 3Д скенирање, Атина, Грчка.
9: Panagiotis Ferentinos, *The backside is covered by a velvet solid black*, 2019, Photogrammetry – 3D scanning, Athens, Greece.
Панајотис Ферентинос, *Задња страна је прекривена баршунастом црном бојом*, 2019, фотограметрија – 3Д скенирање, Атина, Грчка.
10: Panagiotis Ferentinos, *Wireframe*, 2019, Photogrammetry – 3D scanning, Athens, Greece.
Панајотис Ферентинос, *Шематски приказ*, 2019, фотограметрија – 3Д скенирање, Атина, Грчка.
11: Panagiotis Ferentinos, *Build Texture*, 2019, Photogrammetry – 3D scanning, Athens, Greece.
Панајотис Ферентинос, *Грађење текстуре*, 2019, фотограметрија – 3Д скенирање, Атина, Грчка.
12: Panagiotis Ferentinos, *The .jpeg exported file as an illusory cosmos*, 2019, Photogrammetry, Athens, Greece.
Панајотис Ферентинос, *Извезена датотека у .jpeg формату у облику илузионистичког космоса*, 2019, фотограметрија, Атина, Грчка.
13: Panagiotis Ferentinos, *The .tiff exported file as a fragmented map*, 2019, Photogrammetry, Athens, Greece.
Панајотис Ферентинос, *Извезена датотека у .tiff формату у облику фрагментиране мапе*, 2019, фотограметрија, Атина, Грчка.

REFERENCES

Agisoft. Metashape – photogrammetric processing of digital images and 3D spatial data generation, 2019. https://www.agisoft.com/ [retrieved 10 June 2020].

Avramidis, Konstantinos. "'Kon your Greece in myths': reading the crisis on Athens' walls"., in: *Regards on Crisis in Europe*, Trento: Professional Dreamers, 2012, 1–18.

Avramidis, Konstantinos and Tsilimpounidi, Myrto. "Graffiti and street art: reading, writing and representing the city", in: *Graffiti and street art: reading, writing and representing the city*, eds. K. Avramidis and M. Tsilimpounidi, London, New York, 2017. 1–23.

Baudrillard, Jean. *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, St. Louis, Telos Press Publishing, New York, 1981.

Bender, Barbara. "Time and Landscape", in: *Current Anthropology, ed. L. Ralph,* The University of Chicago Press Books, Volume 43, Supplement, Chicago, 2002, 103–112.

Bender, Barbara. "Place and landscape", in: *Handbook of material culture*, eds. C. Tilley, W. Keane, S. Küchler, M. Rowlands, P. Spyer, London: Sage, 2006, 303–314.

Bon, François. "Peeling back the Layers of Time", in: *Jacques Villeglé,* eds. N. Bourriaud, F. Bon, K. Cabanas, Paris, 2007, 161–188.

Collage, Dictionary.com, 2021. https://www.dictionary.com/browse/collage [retrieved: 22.5.2021].

Γιαννακόπουλος, Κώστας and Γιαννιτσιώτης, Γιάννης. «Εισαγωγή: Εξουσία, αντίσταση και χωρικές υλικότητες», in: Αμφισβητούμενοι χώροι στην πόλη» [*Contested spaces in the city],* eds. K. Gianakopoulos and G. Gianitsiotis, Athens: Alexandreia, 2010, 11–57.

Greenberg, Clement. *Collage. In Art and Culture*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1961.

Guffey, Elizabeth. *Posters: a global history,* Reaktion Books, Chicago, 2014.

Hoffman, Katherine. *Collage: Critical Views*. UMI Research Press, Michigan, 1989.

Karathanasis, Pafsanias. "Οι τοίχοι της πόλης ως 'αμφισβητούμενοι χώροι': Αισθητική και αστικό τοπίο στην Αθήνα", in: *Αμφισβητούμενοι χώροι στην πόλη [Contested spaces in the city],* eds Κ. Γιαννακόπουλος & Γ. Γιαννιτσιώτης, Athens: Alexandreia. 2010, pp. 315–348.

Kjellman-Chapin, Monica. "Traces, Layers and Palimpsests: The Dialogics of Collage and Pastiche.", in: *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift/Journal of Art History 75.2*, Ed. J. Sjöholm Skrubbe, Taylor & Francis, London, 2006, 86–99.

Lehman, Meir M. "Programs, life cycles, and laws of software evolution", in: *Proceedings of the IEEE* 68.9, 1980, 1060–1076.

Miller, Jonathan. "A scavenger's hoard", in: *The Independent*, 1999. https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/a-scavenger-s-hoard-1116630.html [retrieved 30 January 2020].

Μπουράτση, Σοφία Ελίζα. «Τετράδια των δρόμων. Τα συνθήματα και τα graffiti των Εξαρχείων», **2nd Street Art Festival Patras – Artwalk 2, Art in Progress.** Text of the exhibition at Archaeological Museum of Patras. The Best, 2016. https://www.thebest.gr/article/390690- [retrieved 10 June 2020].

Pangalos, Orestis. "Testimonies and appraisals on Athens graffiti, before and after the crisis", in: *Remapping 'crisis': a guide to Athens,* eds. M. Tsilimpounidi & A.Walsh, John Hunt Publishing: Zero Books, UK: Winchester, USA: Washington, 2014, 154–176.

Spyropoulos, Takis. 2013. *X-ARXEIA unsensored – The slogans and graffiti of Exarcheia 2009–2012*, Rakosyllektis, Athens, 2013.

Tilley, Christopher. "Phenomenological approaches to landscape archaeology", in: *Handbook of landscape archaeology*, eds. J. Thomas and B. David, London: Sage, 2008, 271–276.

Tsilimpounidi, Myrto and Walsh, Aylwyn. "Painting Human Rights: Mapping Street Art in Athens", in: *Journal of Arts and Communities* 2(2), ed. St. Knight, Bristol: Intellect, 2011, 111–122.

Ulmer, Greg. "The Object of Post-Criticism", in: *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture,* ed. H. Foster, Port Townsend, Washington, 1983. 83–110.

Villeglé, Jacques. "Headline People" (video). British Pathé. 1962. https://www.british-pathe.com/video/headline-people/query/Headline+People [retrieved: 7.6.2020].

Ζαϊμάκης, Γιάννης. «Φωνές Διαμαρτυρίας στους Δρόμους της Πόλης. Προσλήψεις της Κρίσης μέσα στο Πολιτικό-εκφραστικό Γκράφιτι», in: Κοινωνιολογική Επιθεώρηση [*Greek Sociological Review],* eds. Χ. Ζάχου, Σ. Κονιόρδος, Ν. Φωτόπουλος, Μ. Αλεξάκης, Περιοδική Έκδοση της Ελληνικής Κοινωνιολογικής Εταιρίας 2(3), 2015, 119–143.

Панајотис А. ФЕРЕНТИНОС

ЗНАЦИ КРИЗЕ: ТРАГАЊЕ ЗА НОВИМ ФОРМУЛАМА ЗА РАЗУМЕВАЊЕ И ОЧУВАЊЕ ИМАГИНАРИЈУМА КРИЗЕ АТИНСКИХ ГРАДСКИХ ПЕЈЗАЖА

Резиме: У овом чланку расправљам о томе како нове технологије, попут 3Д скенирања, као проширење и развој фотографске слике, могу функционисати као иновативан начин за исцртавање површина урбаног простора Атине током година економске кризе. Од 2008. године, од почетка грчке финансијске кризе, Атина је постепено добијала изразиту телесност. Ово телесно постојање оличава визуализоване гласове и одјеке о томе како су појединци и групе реаговали и одговарали на наметнуту рецесију. Архитектонски облици града променили су се у „арматуре“, скелете на којима се сместило ово тело и његова „кожа протеста“. Стога је неопходно приступити начину на који су урбане површине Атине визуелно еволуирале током економске кризе и која се формула на њих, свесно или ненамерно, примењује. Могућа је појава низа хипотеза које треба да буду испитане. На пример, какве активности, отисци или поруке се на њих додају и изражавају, и како је свака од ових визуализованих радњи повезана са одређеним периодом кризе. На каквим је просторима (површинама) криза омогућила простор за интеракцију „актерима“, доводећи, на пример, чак читаве блокове напуштених-уништених-затворених продавница до визуелне апропријације. Како је екстензивна експанзија кризе, оптички евидентна и искусна, постепено формулисала атинско ткиво, „кожу“, чинећи од ње посебан пример за истраживање економске кризе? Испитивањем градског пејзажа можда ћемо моћи да видимо како Атина у кризи развија сопствене слике и како се о овој кризи приповеда кроз тај имагинаријум. Ослањајући се на практично истраживање, започео сам са теренским снимањима у Атини од децембра 2018. до децембра 2019. године, а такође сам користио и раније документовани материјал из 2008. године. Ове узастопне фазе теренских радова и коришћење снимљеног материјала и архиве довеле су ме до испитивања и доказивања ширења феномена. У почетку сам се ослањао на фотографије снимљене помоћу једноставног дигиталног фотоапарата, а касније сам користио и мобилну камеру. Међутим, постепено сам формулисао нову методологију документације, користећи фотографије градских лутања и периодичне теренске радове за израду 3Д приказа, 3Д модела-фрагмената са прецизним детаљима, проширујући оквир на просторно документовање.
Кључне речи: Атина, економска криза, градски пејзаж, нове технологије, фотографија, 3Д скенирање