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Classical antiquity as humanitarian narrative: The Marshall Plan films about Greece

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A growing number of studies have argued for a historical and historicised understanding of global humanitarianism and humanitarian intervention.¹ However, the history of the interdependence of humanitarianism with media campaigns and the wider visual culture of each period remains an underexplored field, as the few studies in this area highlight.² The Marshall Plan films stand for a landmark moment in the long history of this relationship; they were part of one of the first post-Second World War audio-visual campaigns to promote a humanitarian cause at a transnational level.

The Marshall Plan (MP) is the widely used term to describe the European Recovery Program (ERP), that is the material aid that the United States sent to the devastated economies of Western Europe to help them with the reconstruction process after the Second World War.³ Overseen by the US State Department and the Department of Commerce, it was executed by a newly established agency, the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA), which had offices in Washington and in each of the eighteen Western European countries that received the aid. It became known as the 'Marshall Plan' after Secretary of State General George Marshall, who spearheaded its conception, implementation and publicity campaigns from 1947 onwards.

Having persuaded President Harry Truman of the need for the United States to boost European economies with immediate material aid, on 5 June 1947 General Marshall made the initial announcement with a speech that was imbued with the rhetoric of impartial humanitarianism: 'our policy is not directed against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation, and chaos'. This set the tone for the ensuing pro-MP campaigns to persuade the US taxpayers of the plan's worthiness and necessity. For example, on 17 November 1947 the newspaper of the US Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), a federation of industrial unions, featured pro-MP articles, in one of which the CIO president described the MP 'not merely as a gesture of humanitarianism'; 'hunger' was 'a threat to the peace and security of the world'. The very use of the term 'humanitarianism' and

its connection with geopolitics was thus very much in the air during this period of intense public debate about the parameters of the MP's implementation. The main area of disagreement within US political circles had to do with the MP moving away from the internationalist cooperation approach of previous relief schemes, such as that organised by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) (1943–7), towards adopting the mantra: 'The United States must run this show', as the Undersecretary of State for Economic Affairs put it in 1947.⁴ And, the 'Marshall Planners' ensured that 'this show' received more visibility and media presence both in the United States and in Europe than in previous cases of the United States offering loans and aid that remained under the radar.

General Marshall's predilection for film was instrumental to this end, adopted as the ideal medium for propagating the 'benevolent' nature of the ERP. Marshall had expressed his staunch belief in the dramatic power of cinema to promote the US cause in 1942, when he personally hired renowned fiction film director Frank Capra to work on the *Why We Fight* non-fiction film series (1942–5). Marshall even publicly defended his mobilisation of cinema at the Senate in response to accusations of trivialisation of the war effort.⁵ While the *Why We Fight* series was produced for US audiences, the MP documentary films were commissioned exclusively for European ones, while a parallel and distinct pro-MP media campaign was running for the US public.

During a short period (1948–52), the MP-sponsored European Film Unit produced approximately 300 documentaries, newsreels and informational films, alongside press releases, posters, photographs and exhibitions.⁶ MP historian David Ellwood has recognised this as 'the greatest international propaganda and information programme ever seen in peacetime' and has claimed that 'the film program was at the heart of [the ERP] effort'.⁷ Indeed, high expectations had been invested in the MP films, viewed at the time as the beginning of a 'European film movement'.⁸ Though funded by the United States, the European Film Unit had its headquarters in Paris and ensured that the films about the eighteen Western European countries that received the MP aid were directed by European filmmakers in multi-lingual versions intended for both national and transnational exhibition. Alongside documenting and reporting on the uses of the MP aid, these films were defined by a humanitarian discourse that foregrounded what political scientist Michelle Cini has called 'the language of altruism'.⁹ This discourse was deemed necessary for attracting support for an aid programme whose multi-layered economic, geopolitical and military motivations and its subsequent impact have for long been debated. As Cini has put it:

The humanitarian motive behind American involvement in the Marshall Plan is perhaps hardest to demonstrate ... The Marshall Plan's 'fleeced factor', which was important in ensuring the support of U.S. public opinion and Congress, was a necessary

if not sufficient element in the promotion of a political consensus on Marshall Aid. It is not surprising, then, that the European Recovery Program should be couched in the language of humanitarianism.¹⁰

But in the case of the campaign for the persuasion of the European public, the mobilisation of the humanitarian discourse operated against a very different geopolitical landscape. Scholarship tends to agree that the MP was a response to the pre-eminent fear of Truman's administration that communism would expand to Western Europe, accentuated by the prospect of a Communist electoral victory in Italy in 1948, and even more urgently with the ongoing Civil War in Greece, which had erupted very soon after the liberation of the country from the Nazis. The Greek Civil War (1945–9) was fought between the Greek Government Army (backed by the United Kingdom and the United States) and the Democratic Army of Greece (backed by the USSR).¹¹ The MP publicity campaign in Europe was thus addressing a much more divided public.

Scholarship on the MP films and the media campaign is a more recent addition to the long-standing discussion of the MP's impact and its history. The MP films re-emerged in the public sphere after almost half a century of neglect. Since the first screening of a selection at the 2004 Berlin Film Festival, public and scholarly interest in these films has expanded. Thanks to the *Selling Democracy* project and the expanding filmographic record, the MP films have attracted the interest of archivists and historians.¹² With public events and digitisation projects, these films have found new audiences after almost sixty years in the United States, where they were banned from public viewings until 1990, because of a 1948 bill 'that prevented their being shown to American audiences (who were not to be "propagandized" with their own tax dollars)'.¹³ Although in Europe such a ban did not exist, they quickly fell into neglect. The *Selling Democracy* project has generated a process of unearthing the MP films in various European film archives, which is ongoing, especially in the case of the non-English versions and the trans-European ones.

The majority of writings about the MP's publicity campaign and the MP films tend to focus on national case studies, such as Ireland, Austria and Italy, and an emphasis on narratives of reconstruction, productivity and national identity.¹⁴ The case of Greece and the humanitarian narratives of the MP films at large have been underexplored so far. By concentrating on the MP films about Greece, my aim is to correlate their discourse of reconstruction with the narrative of humanitarianism and to complement my previous work in this field that explored the geopolitical and military contexts of the MP propaganda.¹⁵ This is particularly relevant for the case of Greece, where the Civil War quickly acquired international dimensions, as had been the case with the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s. For Amikam Nachmani, historian of international relations, 'few if any twentieth-century civil wars involved greater

foreign intervention than that in Greece'.¹⁶ The country became the first 'hot spot' of the Cold War, with stark contradictions characterising this international intervention, the emphasis of which shifted from militarism to humanitarianism almost overnight. For example, in August 1949, the US Air Forces, with the collaboration of the Greek Government Army, dropped large amounts of napalm in the northern regions of Greece to wipe out the Democratic Army and to bring the civil war to an end.¹⁷ And in December 1949, the millionth ton of ERP aid arrived at the port of Piraeus and the Greek Army paraded it in central Athens with formal ceremonies.¹⁸ Until October 1949, when the Civil War ended, approximately 80 per cent of the MP aid to Greece had been channelled to support the Greek government's military operations against what Truman called the 'armed minorities' of the Democratic Army.¹⁹ The MP thus secured that Greece 'more than any other European country' retained 'its Western orientation by playing an integral role in the termination of the Civil War'.²⁰ Within this post-Civil War context, humanitarian aid became even more urgent in terms of relief and reconstruction, but even more crucially, in terms of implementing an ideology of humanitarian values that were aligned with the US foreign policy.

The majority of the MP films about Greece mobilise a particular kind of humanitarian narrative, one that evokes the ancient Greek heritage in such a way that it stands not only for Greece's reconstruction but also for Western Europe's future and its alignment with the US vision of a geopolitical 'pax Americana'. My argument is that the MP films inaugurated the visual politics of what historian of international affairs Michael Barnett has called 'the age of neo-humanitarianism', the period from the end of the Second World War up to the end of the Cold War. This period was characterised by a new 'architecture of humanitarianism', dominated at large by the patterns established by the United States during the Second World War, which were 'increasingly planning-minded and influenced by states and their interests'.²¹ It was within such a context of 'mutual aid' and long-term planning that the target audiences in Western Europe experienced the MP films, often as part of the full MP package. As Sandra Schulberg has put it: the MP's 'genius lay not in sending money but in shipping tangible goods — fuel, fertilizer, food, farm animals, machinery — that were essential for life and for economic recovery'.²² These products bore the ERP logo and the American flag, and their delivery was often accompanied by formal ceremonies and non-theatrical screenings of MP films. While such ceremonial display framed the United States as provider of material goods, the rhetoric of the MP films sought to win over local audiences by engaging with the target country's history, while presenting the goods brought by the United States as essential to peacetime prosperity.

The projection of ancient Greece onto post-Second World War neo-humanitarianism

Notions of national cinemas and national historiography are inadequate methodologies to tackle the challenges of the complex network of production and exhibition

and transnational narratives of the MP films. With on average nine different language versions produced of each documentary and with an extensive network of theatrical and non-theatrical distribution, the MP filmography must be one of the most expansive manifestations of 'the process of matching geo-political scale [with] language' and cultural heritage.²³ Even if the funding originated from the United States, it was European filmmakers and production crews, deployed across the eighteen Western European recipient countries of MP aid, which produced the first purposeful cinematographic discourse of Europe for the Europeans.

The arrival of the MP films in Greece, where the experience of cinemagoing was rather limited, had a particular resonance in terms of showing Europe and Greece to the Greeks. Apart from newsreels, hardly any Greek documentaries about the country exist from before the mid-1950s, let alone documentaries about this crucial historical conjuncture, the immediate aftermath of the Civil War (1949–52). Up to the mid-1950s, Greek film production and exhibition were under huge financial strain.²⁴ Moreover, non-fiction cinema about Greece was sparse, mainly taking the form of travelogues.²⁵ The MP films, therefore, can be considered amongst the first documentaries about modern Greece. If there is a common thread in their narratives, it is the referencing of classical antiquity as an anchor of transhistorical continuity between ancient and modern Greece, thus offering a unifying rhetoric to the deep post-Civil War political and ideological divisions. Such is the case with the following MP films: *Victory at Thermopylae* (David Kurland, 1950); *Marshall Plan at Work in Greece* (James Hill, 1950); *The Corinth Canal* (John Ferno, 1950); *Island Odyssey* (1950); *A Doctor for Ardaknos* (John Ferno, 1951); and *The Good Life* (Humphrey Jennings and Graham Wallace, 1951). While direct references to classical heritage are not prevalent in the other films about Greece – *Return from the Valley* (John Ferno, 1950); *Mill Town* (David Kurland, 1950); *Story of Koula* (Vittorio Gallo, 1951) – there is still a particular emphasis on history and the pastoral.²⁶

Due to Greece lacking both a tradition of and an infrastructure for documentary production at the time, the MP films about Greece were directed by non-Greek filmmakers from the ECA-sponsored units of London (*The Good Life*), Paris (John Ferno's films) and Rome (*Story of Koula*). This was another facet of the 'Greek exception' (alongside it being the only post-Civil War European country to receive the MP aid), because most of the MP films about a specific country were directed by national filmmakers, sometimes building on the country's cinematographic and documentary tradition, as in the cases of Italy (neorealism) and the UK (the British Documentary Movement). Many MP films – such as the ones about Austria – mobilised national culture and identity politics in their audio-visual rhetoric.²⁷ Although the MP films about Greece follow this trend, their projection of a 'humanitarian narrative' is consistently related to a historical dialectic between modern and classical Greece that positions the MP aid within a dual perspective of national reconstruction and universal necessity.

The sociologist Nicos Mouzelis has discussed this attachment of modern Greece to its classical past as a form of cultural imperialism. For Mouzelis, this re-appropriation of the ancient Greek heritage as a vehicle for the formation of modern Greek identity was a non-Greek invention, 'imported from abroad, as developed by the Europe of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment', creating thus what he calls a condition of 'disarticulation', a negative and artificial mapping of Greece's distant past onto its modern nation state.²⁸ The MP films about Greece conform to this discourse, directly aiming to bridge the country's glorious past with the promise of an equally glorious future that is more aligned with the US vision for Western European unity as the stronghold to contain the expansion of communism. This is particularly prevalent in the films *Corinth Canal*, *Victory at Thermopylae*, *Island Odyssey* and this chapter's case study, *The Good Life*, initiated by renowned British documentary filmmaker Humphrey Jennings. My aim in what follows is to relate this process of 'disarticulation' with the way that *The Good Life* constructs its humanitarian narrative and audio-visual rhetoric.

To disentangle the complex geopolitical context within which this film was produced, I am drawing on what film historian Antoine de Baecque calls the 'cinematographic form of history'. Building on long-standing debates about positioning cinema *in* history, de Baecque argues that 'the historical operation—from archive to narrative—and the cinematographic process—through the aesthetic chain that transforms recorded material into a film ... produce a sensible experience of reality, past or present, by giving it form. This sets up historiography and cinema as two parallel phenomena, at once intellectual *and* aesthetic.'²⁹ The MP-sponsored cameras recorded material that filmmakers and editors shaped into the intellectual and aesthetic discourse of filmic historiography.

The notion of a 'cinematographic form of history' offers a more nuanced understanding of the intense interaction of the documentary's filmic discourse with the reality it responds to than analytical models that tend to reduce culture to a supplement or mere ideological reflection of hard politics.³⁰ Cinema, as an intellectual *and* aesthetic enterprise, mobilises visual signifiers to create an open-ended and fluid language of historiography. In this light, it is worth foregrounding a statement by the Director of the American Historical Association, who in 1988 made a case to end the prohibition of the MP films in the United States by describing them as 'an important visual record of American foreign policy *in action*' (emphasis mine).³¹ It is not, therefore, a question of whether the filmmakers and producers of the MP films were consciously enacting a predetermined US foreign policy, but a question of how the films were offering a parallel discourse about a reality being shaped by the impact of the ERP.

This framework is particularly apt for *The Good Life*, a documentary conceived and partly directed by Humphrey Jennings, an accomplished filmmaker with a central position in the influential British Documentary Film Movement. By 1951, Jennings had forged one of the most sophisticated approaches to cinematographic 'polysemy'

and ‘iconographic displacement’ in the documentary film mode.³² *The Good Life* shares a common aesthetic trait with the majority of the MP films about Greece: the referencing of the country’s ancient heritage, intertwined with the contemporaneous geopolitical landscape. But *The Good Life* stands out for its treatment of this trope in a similar way that Jennings’s wartime propaganda films – *Words for Battle* (1941), *Listen to Britain* (1942) – occupy a distinct place for their poetic treatment of life at the British Home Front and for bringing to the fore ‘the cultural plurality of the wartime totality.’³³ Similarly, Jennings brought a visual and intellectual sensibility to the mapping of classical antiquity onto Greece’s post-war modernity and precarious state of affairs.

The Good Life was produced as part of the MP film series *The Changing Face of Europe* (1951), with each film focusing on one country and one theme (e.g. agriculture, health), but within the framework of European and international co-operation.³⁴ Apart from this common thread, each film in the series has a distinctive approach ranging from the informational to the poetic. *The Good Life* seems to veer towards the latter and the final film might have been a fully poetic one, had it not been for Jennings’s sudden death in Greece during the film’s production. Although it is impossible to determine which scenes were directed by Jennings himself, film scholar and Jennings biographer Kevin Jackson has claimed that the film bears Jennings’s signature throughout: ‘Few other directors would have chosen to begin and end their films with evocations of the Homeric world, or to film pastoral scenes of a shepherd boy with his pipes or his flock, let alone doff the hat to Lord Byron.’³⁵ Jennings would have been motivated by his romantic vision of Greece, as the land where Byron died, an interest that dated back to the late 1930s, as evidenced by his painting a cubist rendition of Byron dressed in characteristic early nineteenth-century clothes of Greek fighters of Independence, and his poem *The Boyhood of Byron*.³⁶ Jackson has noted that during his travels in Greece, the director was carrying a copy of Edward Trelawny’s *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron* (1858).³⁷ Alongside his philhellenism, Jennings’s intellectual baggage played a key role in constructing the film’s depiction of humanitarian intervention as ‘simultaneously universal and circumstantial’.³⁸

Moreover, Jennings’s assistant director, Graham Wallace, who completed the film, had already worked in the same capacity on previous Jennings films. One of these was *The True Story of Lili Marlene* (1944), a dramatised documentary about the remarkable story of the song ‘Lili Marlene’ becoming a hit with soldiers from both sides of the war in Europe (Germans, English, Russians). Wallace was therefore well versed with the ‘Jennings text’, its carefully crafted dialogical sequences and ‘inter-media linkages’.³⁹ Either because of this dual authorship or because of the wider neglect of the MP films, *The Good Life* was for long forgotten even amongst Jennings scholars, with extant prints held in the Imperial War Museum’s Film Archive and in the US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), until its recent digitisation and inclusion in BFI’s comprehensive Jennings DVD collection (2013).

Jennings's final film maintained the exploration of the pastoral-modernist dialectic prevalent in most of his films.⁴⁰ According to film historian Philip Logan, *The Good Life* could be seen as a continuation of Jennings's previous Festival of Britain film *Family Portrait* (1951), which ends with a recognition of 'the Cold War climate and the international programme for political reconstruction of post-war Western Europe'.⁴¹ Indeed, one of the concluding voiceover comments in *Family Portrait* depicts Britain as 'too small, too crowded to stand alone. We have to come both inside the family of Europe and the pattern overseas'. This duality is continued in *The Good Life*'s commentary on Greece, a country that was heavily under an Anglo-American influence. And despite the film being sponsored by the US-funded European Film Unit, its perspective is informed by a British point of view with references to Byron's devotion to and death for the 'Greek cause' of independence. But this philhellenism had more recent roots in the UK, with Oxfam (Oxford Famine Relief Committee) having been set up in 1942 in response to news of mass starvation in Nazi-occupied Greece. It was solely on Greece that Oxfam focused its charitable activities until the end of the war, before moving on to other territories and causes.⁴²

Moreover, in the summer of 1944, the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge opened an exhibition with the ambitious title 'Greek Art: 3000 B.C.–A.D. 1938'. This show was the result of political collaboration between the British and the Greek government in exile, with the motto 'everything good we stood for'. Greek art was hailed as the emblem of democracy and freedom in the fight against the Nazis. Historian Abigail Baker has analysed the propaganda value of this exhibition for both the British and the Greek governments, which resulted in a paradoxical 'celebration of Greek independence as dependent on foreign imperialism': 'The idea of a debt owed to Greece for its cultural influence pervades the material relating to the exhibition. Even the poster used to advertise the exhibition credited ancient Greece with "all modern civilisation in Europe and America"'.⁴³ Jennings would have taken note of this exhibition, considering the significant publicity and press coverage it received, and he had been a frequent visitor to the Fitzwilliam since his student days in Cambridge, often finding it a source of inspiration.⁴⁴

The Good Life was only the second film that Jennings made with a non-British subject matter, the first being *The Defeated People* (1947) about post-war Germany. Jennings's films have in general been analysed within the history of the Documentary Film Movement, tightly associated with notions of Britishness. In a sense, this was inevitable, since its origins lay in powerful British institutions of the 1930s and 1940s, such as the Empire Marketing Board (EMB), the General Post Office (GPO), and the Crown Film Unit. However, after the Second World War key players of the Movement moved on to projects and positions associated with newly formed international organisations and 'universalist' ideologies. For example, John Grierson became UNESCO's Head of Communications (for a short spell), while Basil Wright and Paul Rotha directed and produced the UNESCO film *World Without End* (1953).

In this context, Jennings's move to make a film that promoted the ERP can be seen as part of the British Documentary Movement's shift towards internationalism and global humanitarian causes. *The Good Life* documents aspects of the post-war reconstruction of the health system of Greece, as part of the wider European and international 'grand design' to eradicate disease through international collaboration. The film foregrounds images of children who become the first beneficiaries of the international humanitarian interventions and of the MP aid that helps Greece to build new and modern hospitals. Thomas Laqueur, historian of humanitarianism, offers an apt description of nineteenth-century literary manifestations of the 'humanitarian narrative' as focusing 'on the personal body, not only as the locus of pain but also as the common bond between those who suffer and those who would help'.⁴⁵ This kind of narrative has forged one of the central paradoxes of humanitarianism: the tension 'between emancipation and domination'.⁴⁶ This acquires powerful and dramatic connotations once transposed into a nonfiction audio-visual discourse of factuality and direct address.

The MP films about Greece were produced after the end of the Civil War. Although some MP-sponsored reconstruction work had started in early 1948, when the Civil War was in full flow and the Greek film production in disarray, the ECA film units did not arrive in Greece until late 1949. By then, there had not been significant visible progress in the reconstruction work to record. It is mainly in photographic records, rather than in the MP films, that researchers may find visual evidence of the actual construction of new buildings, bridges, hospitals and factories.⁴⁷ This thematic is therefore less prominent in *The Good Life*.

Instead, the camera focuses on 'bodies', on the actual recipients of humanitarian aid, and on what Laqueur calls 'the common bond' between givers and receivers of humanitarian aid: children inoculated against tuberculosis in the remote villages of Greece; patients recovering from illnesses; and orphan girls and boys at summer camps and orphanages supported by the MP aid. Moreover, the film's narrative situates the MP within the context of other recent and concurrent humanitarian interventions in Greece: the Red Cross's inoculation campaign against tuberculosis; United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) posters, which feature in shots of children receiving the necessary nutrition; and the operations of the World Health Organization (WHO), which is shown crossing international borders and reaching the malaria-inflicted areas of mainland Greece, near Missolonghi where Byron died, as the film's voiceover reminds its viewers. It is only halfway through the film's narrative that the first direct mention of the MP aid occurs, in a shot of an ECA sign that both in Greek and English language acknowledges the source of funding for the new hospital shown in the background. Sequences of doctors treating patients with modern equipment are introduced with the voiceover remarking, 'Today, help is coming too, from America. This new sanatorium at Lamia in Greece was built as part of the European Recovery Programme'.

This contextualisation of the MP aid was a reminder of how Greece had become the epicentre of expansive international humanitarian aid throughout the 1940s. UNRRA had, for example, offered the immediate emergency support towards the end of the war, while balancing ‘political impartiality’ with ‘military exigencies’.⁴⁸ However, the MP’s humanitarianism is not only promoted with reference to contemporaneous international organisations, but most crucially in relation to the universal principles of ‘impartiality’ and ‘neutrality’, which have historically ‘rendered humanitarians apolitical’ (and that Marshall himself was keen to emphasise in his initial declarations of the Plan’s purview).⁴⁹ References to ‘classical antiquity’ achieve this: the film opens with a long panning shot of the ancient site of Delphi, ‘the navel of the Earth’ as mythically known, followed by a montage of closer shots of the surrounding ancient ruins and shots of young shepherds and their flock. This bucolic imagery offers the visual cue for actor Leo Genn’s carefully delivered voice-over to commence the film’s opening commentary:

Whoever shall have taught me the art of healing, with him will
I share my substance. I will regard his offspring even as my own
brethren. I will impart the knowledge of healing by precept, by
lecture, and by all other manner of teaching. So ran the oath taken
by the physicians of Ancient Greece. The root of all good life lies in
good health. This they believed here on the slopes of Mount Ida
2,000 years ago. ‘Whatsoever house I enter’, the Greek doctor solemnly vowed, ‘I will
enter for the benefit of the sick’.

These lines set the film’s tone, with Genn’s delivery maintaining a reassuring register throughout the film and particularly when the motto is repeated (‘The root of all good life lies in good health’). But the viewer is quickly transferred to the urgency of the present with an abrupt cut from the bucolic landscape to a close up of a Chevrolet with the Red Cross sign speeding up across the bumpy roads of rural Greece to deliver anti-TB vaccination to remote villages. And Genn’s ‘voice-of-God’ narration sums up the introductory part with this line of transhistorical universalism: ‘From Ancient Greece, this humane teaching spread across all Europe. Today, Europe returns her thanks to Greece in kind.’

The choice of Genn, renowned for his ‘velvet’ voice, to deliver the introductory commentary was well considered. An established actor by then, albeit largely in minor roles, his voice had accompanied a good number of nonfiction British wartime propaganda films and he had also featured in Laurence Olivier’s acclaimed fiction propaganda *Henry V* (1945). The choice of an actor for the voice-of-God narration also chimed with the British documentary’s tradition of treating voice-over narration as a form of soundtrack with its own musicality and tonality.⁵⁰ Genn’s professional and impassioned delivery accentuates the core theme of *The Good Life*, which is to balance the particularity of the Greek situation with the impartial and universal beliefs of ancient Greek physicians.

If the opening narration and imagery stand for the universal humanitarian message, then what follows is the historical present. The Red Cross Chevrolet carrying the red sign 'International Tuberculosis Campaign' enters the village and the voiceover narration shifts to a point of view mode, as it is delivered in a female voice by one of the village's children: 'We could see that something important was going on and we children were all trying to find out what it was.' The Greek girl's point-of-view accented narration introduces the viewer to the village's life and the positive reception of the Red Cross by the children who all turn up at the central square to be vaccinated. During the vaccination sequence, Genn's voice returns to repeat the opening lines 'Whoever shall have taught me the art of healing ...'. The repetition offers a sense of rhetorical unity. This sound montage of the male professional voiceover narration with the young girl's consolidates the dialectic of the 'universal with the circumstantial'. Both sound and image carry the dialectic of the classical with the modern. The contrast between the assured male voiceover standing for the 'European-cum-British point of view' with the accented child's voice representing Greece could be interpreted as patronising, infantilising the Greeks as the ignorant natives who suffer from diseases that the more civilised Europeans will eradicate. The line 'Europe returns her thanks to Greece in kind' is an instance of what Mouzelis calls 'disarticulation': the ancient Greek heritage returns to Greece via a foreign voice that possesses the knowledge of millennia and brings it back to its homeland.⁵¹ Similarly, in his innovative study *The Nation and its Ruins*, Yannis Hamilakis has demonstrated how classical antiquity stood for Greece's alliance with the West and the so-called 'free world' during and after the Civil War.⁵²

The child's point of view, though, could also be seen as representing the future of the country. As Frank Mehring has noted in his comparative study of MP films, children and young people were an attractive and popular theme, featuring prominently in many MP films to project the future of Europe.⁵³ *The Good Life*, however, is not oblivious to the predicaments of the Greek orphans, victims of the vicious Civil War. In an ironic and rhetorically self-conscious mode, the film's narrative appears to turn against its own discourse and to question the relevance of the ancient Greek classical heritage with a shot of a boy labouring as a shoe polisher with the Parthenon in the background (see figure 2.1). This shot is the 'climax' of a sequence, introduced with discomfiting questions that implicate the viewer:

all across our ancient continent, we Europeans dwell surrounded by much of the greatest that life can offer, fashioned by our forebears, bequeathed to us and our children. Have we nothing to hand on but this? [a shot of run-down dwellings] ... Will those who follow say we left them this? [a shot of children playing and sorting out rubble from damaged buildings] ... those without inheritance, selling peanuts, shining shoes beneath the glories of our common past [a shot of a boy polishing shoes at the foot of Acropolis].

Figure 2.1 *The Good Life*. The plight of impoverished children in Greece, as framed against the weight of the country's heritage and the dehumanised leg of the present, a synecdoche for the indifferent wealthy

If there is one sequence with Jennings's signature throughout, then this should be a strong candidate: it bears the director's predilection for treating landscape as a found object to comment critically on the current state of a nation. In *Spare Time* (1939), for example, Jennings had famously framed the statue of Richard Cobden, manufacturer and advocate of a free-trade liberal capitalist ideology, against the grim and desolate landscape of factory chimneys.⁵⁴ Similarly, in *The Good Life*, the revered pictorial motif of the Acropolis is subverted by the very presence of the impoverished child; the framing throws into question the contradictory meanings of what classical antiquity could stand for within the context of the early stages of the Cold War: as an apolitical cultural terrain, potent enough to conjure up sentiments of national and trans-European unity; and as what Alexander Kazamias has called 'a Greek version of anti-communism' exploited by the royalist, right-wing government to promote a new discourse of 'national mindedness (ethnikofrosyni)'.⁵⁵ This shot subverts both discourses through the sheer powerful juxtaposition of the new (a child in a state of exploitation and precarious existence) and the old (the celebrated Parthenon, standing as an impassive reminder of how history can too often be indifferent to its 'lesser' characters). The positioning of the child in the frame creates a sense of

entrapment – caught hopelessly, both between the indifferent foot of the well-off customer and the architecture of the powerful past, and between the materials of modernity and the past.

A similar vein of cautiousness can be detected in the film's concluding sequences, which in a way share similarities with Jennings's *A Diary for Timothy* (1946), in which the director had warned against the dangers of complacency and triumphalism in post-war Britain. The village girl's accented voiceover returns to introduce one of the film's last sequences, in which three teenage girls are shown sewing in a cheerful mood. But the voiceover reminds the viewer that their reality is harshly different: 'Koula has no parents, they were shot outside her home; Parisi and Maria have never been to school. A shell hit it.' This is followed by a long shot of teenage girls exercising outside a brand new school and here the girl's voiceover directly interpellates the adult viewer: 'Perhaps *your* children do this at school every day ... But don't forget that millions of us haven't had time to think about keeping clean or being well since I was born.' The film concludes with visual rhymes: a montage of shots of the famous wall paintings of the Minoan women dancers of Knossos Palace intercut with shots of modern Greek teenage girls dancing along a traditional folk song (see figure 2.2). A sense of empowerment is conveyed as the modern young Greek women are compared with the ones of the Minoan society, where women occupied privileged, visible positions.

The Knossos sequence leads to a succession of shots of Delphi, the Acropolis and the Parthenon, followed by shots of modern hospitals and an expansive bridge in an unnamed Northern European country, with the voiceover narration delivering the concluding unifying message: 'In the Europe of today, we are striving towards a better life for all our people, young and old, striving to blend the best of our past with the best that the present can offer, building as it were a grand design for the future of our continent. Let us be sure it rests upon that firm foundation: the harmony of the human mind and body in full health.' This sequence and the voiceover re-affirm the film's audio-visual rhetoric, which strives to establish the ERP as part of

Figure 2.2 *The Good Life*. Montage sequence that sets the young orphans of the Greek Civil War in dialogue with their 'ancestors'

a universal humanitarian order. It does so by appropriating the ancient Greek heritage as the ERP's forbear. And this results in shaping the narrative of the US aid as a benevolent force that helps Western Europe to overcome its dividing recent past.

Conclusion

The Good Life is heavily implicated with the US-led 'neo-humanitarian' discourse of the post-Second World War era. But the director's agency for a poetic cinematographic discourse lends the film a humanitarian narrative that veers towards romanticism with its focus on children – 'the living spirit of today', as the voice-over narration emphatically reminds the viewers. Logan has drawn an interesting parallelism in relation to Jennings's being caught in the maelstrom of the geopolitical forces of the time: 'International politics had contributed to Byron's accidental death while in Greece and so it was for Jennings ... as in his other films, through cultural and social references and its implicit political commentary, *The Good Life* would have provided both witting and unwitting testimony to a greater international story.'⁵⁶ This 'international story', however, needs qualifying. If Byron stood for one of the earliest cases of humanitarianism and humanism that permeated the early nineteenth-century philhellenic movement and its concomitant rebellion against the Ottoman Empire, then Jennings's film was implicated in a matrix of geopolitical forces, where the humanitarian cause was implicated with the US foreign policy to contain the Soviet Union away from the Mediterranean and Western Europe.

Jennings's and Wallace's creative choices chime with the wider ideological construct of the time that linked the notions of universalism and internationalism with Greece, a country that in post-Enlightenment Europe stood for the source of such aspirations. For example, UNESCO, upon its establishment in 1945, had adopted a minimalist rendition of the Parthenon as its visual logo, manifesting thus the endorsement of a Eurocentric iconography. Often with a critical undertone, the filmmakers structured *The Good Life* around relationships and contrasts between the Greek classical heritage and the post-Civil War present. The humanitarian aid that the MP brings to Greece is very different from the one of urgent relief from starvation that Oxfam had offered during wartime. The humanitarian intervention, as represented in the MP films, and in particular in *The Good Life*, has more to do with reasserting the newly re-invented universal values of humanism, impartiality and individualism. Whenever the film's motto is repeated ('The source of good life lies in good health') it is visually associated with the individual bodies of young men and women and with international organisations aligned with the West (the likes of Geneva, Italy, Austria and the United States). The more apolitical the discourse is, the more powerful the humanitarian narrative becomes.

The invocations of the classical past are inflected by the US liberal humanist ideology of the time, which projected a teleological line of continuity from the dictum of impartiality, as advocated by the ancient Greek physicians, to the

American promise of a 'free world.' The vehicles for this narrative are the bodies of the children and the young people who are inoculated and provided with welfare, through a process of building a new Europe of liberal ideology and Western-centred civilisation, and by the exclusion of all the other Eastern European countries that Cold War politics had excluded from the MP's reach.⁵⁷

Notes

- 1 See M. Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); B. Simms and D. Trim (eds), *Humanitarian Intervention: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
- 2 K. Rozario, '“Delicious Horrors”: Mass Culture, the Red Cross, and the Appeal of Modern American Humanitarianism', *American Quarterly*, 55:3 (2003), p. 417–55; M. Hilton, 'Ken Loach and the Save the Children Film: Humanitarianism, Imperialism, and the Changing Role of Charity in Postwar Britain', *The Journal of Modern History*, 87:2 (2015), pp. 357–94.
- 3 Throughout the chapter, I use both abbreviations (ERP and MP) as synonyms to refer to the European Recovery Program and the Marshall Plan respectively.
- 4 The source of all quotations in this paragraph is G. M. Fujii, 'Selling the Marshall Plan in the United States', in G. Bischof and D. Stiefel (eds), *Images of the Marshall Plan in Europe* (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2009), pp. 40–1.
- 5 R. D. MacCann, *The People's Films: A Political History of US Government Motion Pictures* (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1973), p. 156.
- 6 A. Hemsing, 'The Marshall Plan's European Film Unit, 1948–55: A Memoir and Filmography', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 14:3 (1994), pp. 269–97.
- 7 D. W. Ellwood, '“You Too Can be Like Us”: Selling the Marshall Plan', *History Today* (October 1998), p. 33; D. W. Ellwood, 'Film and the Marshall Plan', in G. Bischof and D. Stiefel (eds), *Images of the Marshall Plan in Europe* (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2009), p. 61.
- 8 A. Knight, 'Documentary – Rallying Point for Europe', *Saturday Review* (17 February 1951), p. 42.
- 9 M. Cini, 'From the Marshall Plan to EEC: Direct and Indirect Influences', in M. Schain (ed.), *The Marshall Plan: Fifty Years After* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 16.
- 10 Cini, 'From the Marshall Plan to EEC', p. 16.
- 11 H. Jones, *A New Kind of War: America's Global Strategy and the Truman Doctrine in Greece* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); R. J. McMahon, *The Cold War: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 27–8.
- 12 S. Schulberg, *Selling Democracy: Films of the Marshall Plan, 1948–53* (New York: Schulberg Productions, 4th edn, 2008); L. Christenson, *Marshall Plan Filmography*, www.marshallfilms.org. Accessed 20 July 2016.
- 13 S. Schulberg, 'Selling Democracy Worldwide', www.sellingdemocracy.org/worldwide.html. Accessed 20 July 2016.
- 14 B. Whelan, 'Marshall Plan Publicity and Propaganda in Italy and Ireland, 1947–1951', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 23:4 (2003), pp. 311–28; G. Bischof and D. Stiefel (eds), *Images of the Marshall Plan in Europe: Films, Photographs, Exhibits, Posters* (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2009); R. Longo, 'Between Documentary and Neorealism: Marshall Plan Films in Italy (1948–1955)', *California Italian Studies*, 3:2 (2012), <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/odqo394d>. Accessed 10 February 2015. The first book-length study that examines the MP films from a transnational perspective is the recent publication by Maria Fritzsche, *The American Marshall Plan Film Campaign and the Europeans: A Captivated Audience?* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018).

- 15 K. Loukopoulou, '“A Campaign of Truth”: Marshall Plan Films in Greece', in Wasson and Grievson (eds), *Cinema's Military Industrial Complex* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), pp. 321–37.
- 16 A. Nachmani, *International Intervention in the Greek Civil War: The United Nations Special Committee on the Balkans, 1947–52* (New York: Praeger, 1990), p. 3.
- 17 Jones, *A New Kind of War*, pp. 217–18.
- 18 A photograph of this parade is available at the online archive of the George C. Marshall Foundation, <http://marshallfoundation.org/library/photographs/millionth-ton-of-margcm00174>. Accessed 10 May 2015.
- 19 S. Zachariou, 'The Dichotomy of Projecting the Marshall Plan in Greece: The Ideological Battle vs. the Rehabilitation Effort', in Bischof and Stiefel, *Images of the Marshall Plan in Europe*, p. 108.
- 20 S. Zachariou, 'Struggle for Survival: American Aid and Greek Reconstruction', in M. Schain (ed.), *The Marshall Plan: Fifty Years After* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 160.
- 21 Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, pp. 7, 108.
- 22 Schulberg, *Selling Democracy*, p. 10.
- 23 N. Đurovičová, 'Vector, Flow, Zone: Towards a History of Cinematic Translatio', in N. Đurovičová and K. Newman (eds), *World Cinema, Transnational Perspectives* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), p. 98.
- 24 V. Karalis, *A History of Greek Cinema* (New York: Continuum, 2012), pp. 44–50.
- 25 A. Pagoulatos and N. Stabakis, 'Greece', in I. Aitken (ed.), *The Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 324–33.
- 26 The main source for identifying these MP documentary films about Greece is the Marshall Plan Filmography, www.marshallfilms.org/mpf.asp. Accessed 25 March 2015. No director is credited for *Island Odyssey*: the only existing information is that it was produced by the ECA Paris for the ECA Greece. Viewing copies for all nine documentaries about Greece are available in English at the US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and information about them is included in the aforementioned MP Filmography website. This is a comprehensive list as per the following criteria: viewing copies available; confirmed MP sponsorship; documentary mode of production. However, it is possible that more MP films about Greece and other European countries could be identified in the future. No copies have been located so far in Greek or with Greek subtitles. Digital files of a selection of MP films (including a few about Greece) in German and French can be viewed at the following online collections: Deutsche Historische Museum (DHM), www.dhm.de/filmarchiv/die-filme; Institut National de l'Audiovisuel (INA), www.ina.fr. Accessed 20 July 2016.
- 27 R. Reichert, 'Culture and Identity Politics: Narrative Strategies in Austrian Marshall Plan Films', in Bischof and Stiefel, *Images of the Marshall Plan in Europe*, pp. 129–38.
- 28 N. Mouzelis, *Modern Greece: Facets of Underdevelopment* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1978), p. 145.
- 29 A. de Baecque, *Camera Historica: The Century in Cinema*, trans. N. Vinsonneau and J. Magidoff (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 19.
- 30 The work of Guilbaut and Saunders is pioneering in terms of foregrounding the ideological uses of cultural diplomacy during the Cold War; but their methodological approach for analysing the relationship between culture and US foreign policy is reductive, with little consideration of aesthetic choices and the agency of the artists. See S. Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom and the Cold War* (Chicago: University

- of Chicago Press, 1983) and F. S. Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta Books, 1999).
- 31 Letter (20 April 1988) from Samuel Gammon, the Executive Director of the American Historical Association, sent to Senator John Kerry, supporting the introduction of legislation that would eventually lift the prohibition against domestic screenings of the Marshall films, quoted in Hemsing, 'The Marshall Plan's European Film Unit', p. 276.
 - 32 D. Mellor, 'Sketch for an Historical Portrait of Humphrey Jennings', in M. L. Jennings (ed.), *Humphrey Jennings: Film-Maker, Painter, Poet* (London: British Film Institute/Palgrave Macmillan, 2nd edn, 2014), pp. 106, 121.
 - 33 Mellor, 'Sketch', p. 117.
 - 34 See www.marshallfilms.org/filminfo.asp?id=GL-5&enlarge=False. For further information about the series *The Changing Face of Europe*, see the DHM entry www.dhm.de/filmarchiv/die-filme/changing-face-of-europe. Accessed 20 July 2016.
 - 35 K. Jackson, 'The Good Life', *The Complete Humphrey Jennings*, Vol. 3, DVD Booklet (London: British Film Institute, 2013), p. 27.
 - 36 Mellor, 'Sketch', pp. 107, 111.
 - 37 Jackson, 'The Good Life', p. 26.
 - 38 Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, p. 11.
 - 39 Mellor, 'Sketch', p. 106.
 - 40 P. Logan, *Humphrey Jennings and British Documentary Film: A Reassessment* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 338; Jackson, 'The Good Life', p. 27.
 - 41 Logan, *Humphrey Jennings*, p. 337.
 - 42 Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, p. 17.
 - 43 A. Baker, '"Everything good we stood for": Exhibiting Greek Art in World War II', *Classical Receptions Journal*, 8:3 (2016), pp. 414–15.
 - 44 Mellor, 'Sketch', p. 106.
 - 45 T. Laqueur, 'Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative', in Lynn Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1989), p. 177.
 - 46 Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, p. 11.
 - 47 A photographic collection of the MP in Greece is held at The Historical Archives of the Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation, Athens, www.piop.gr/en/istoriko-arxeio.aspx. Accessed 20 July 2016.
 - 48 F. Tsilaga, 'UNRRA's Relief Efforts in Late 1944 Greece: Political Impartiality versus Military Exigencies', in R. Clogg (ed.), *Bearing Gifts to Greeks: Humanitarian Aid to Greece in the 1940s* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 189–211.
 - 49 Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, p. 2.
 - 50 M. Stollery, 'The Newsreel Commentator, the Actor, the Intellectual, and the Broadcaster: Celebrity and Personality Voices in Classic British Documentary', *Celebrity Studies*, 4:2 (2013), pp. 202–18.
 - 51 Mouzelis, *Modern Greece*, p. 145.
 - 52 Y. Hamilakis, *The Nation and its Ruins: Antiquity, Archaeology, and National Imagination in Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
 - 53 F. Mehring, 'The Promises of "Young Europe": Cultural Diplomacy, Cosmopolitanism, and Youth Culture in the Films of the Marshall Plan', *European Journal of American Studies*, 7:2, Document 11 (2012), pp. 1–28, <http://ejas.revues.org/9701>. Accessed 10 April 2016.
 - 54 Mellor, 'Sketch', p. 116.

- 55 A. Kazamias, 'Antiquity as Cold War Propaganda: The Political Uses of the Classical Past in Post-Civil War Greece', in D. Tziouvas (ed.), *Re-imagining the Past: Antiquity and Modern Greek Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 128.
- 56 Logan, *Humphrey Jennings*, p. 338.
- 57 Research for this chapter was funded by the Action 'Supporting Postdoctoral Researchers', supported by the European Union's National Strategic Research Framework (NSRF, 2007–2013, www.espa.gr/en), administered in Greece by the Secretariat of Research and Technology (www.gsrt.gr) and by the Research Office (ELKE) of Panteion University that hosted the Fellowship. For advice and support, I thank the project's Scientific Advisor at Panteion, Dr Yannis Skarpelos. For help with the archival research, viewing MP films and contextual information, I thank: Linda R. Christenson, the MP filmographer, and the staff at: the Imperial War Museum Film Archive, London; the EYE Film Archives, Amsterdam; and the Historical Archives of the Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation, Athens.

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