

TOURISM

We've heard a lot about tourism lately. Throughout the summer, the media, domestic and foreign, followed the tourism statistics intensely. We were repeatedly told that this year's tourist season was to be a bumper crop, more people than ever were visiting Greece, which played a key role in the 'success story' narrative the Samaras government was trying hard to create. The idea was that if the tourists are back and in greater numbers than before, surely this proves that Greece is moving out of crisis? We can see clearly then that tourism has a political role to play as well as being an important pillar of the economy.

Yet there is relatively little criticism or analysis of tourism from a radical perspective. It is a difficult subject to address in a constructive way. This difficulty comes from the fact that tourism, or at least the ability to travel, is one of the few positives of this modern world. Just as with other aspects of the capitalist consumer economy, criticising tourism would also leave someone open to charges of hypocrisy as most of us have been, will be, or are now, tourists. While

it's easy to get behind slogans such as 'let's destroy work', many would be reluctant to get behind 'let's destroy tourism' (though 'Fuck Tourism' is growing in popularity). In addition, there is the ever present danger of slipping into the ethical tourism argument which is as much of a dead-end as other versions of ethical consumerism.

That being said, we can't ignore tourism as an increasingly vital part of the economy and as a political tool. Its impact on people and places is also significant. With this in mind let's have a look at some aspects and thoughts on tourism. First, let's consider the effects of tourism on a place and on the people who live there and those who visit. After that, I will look at the uses of tourism for the state.

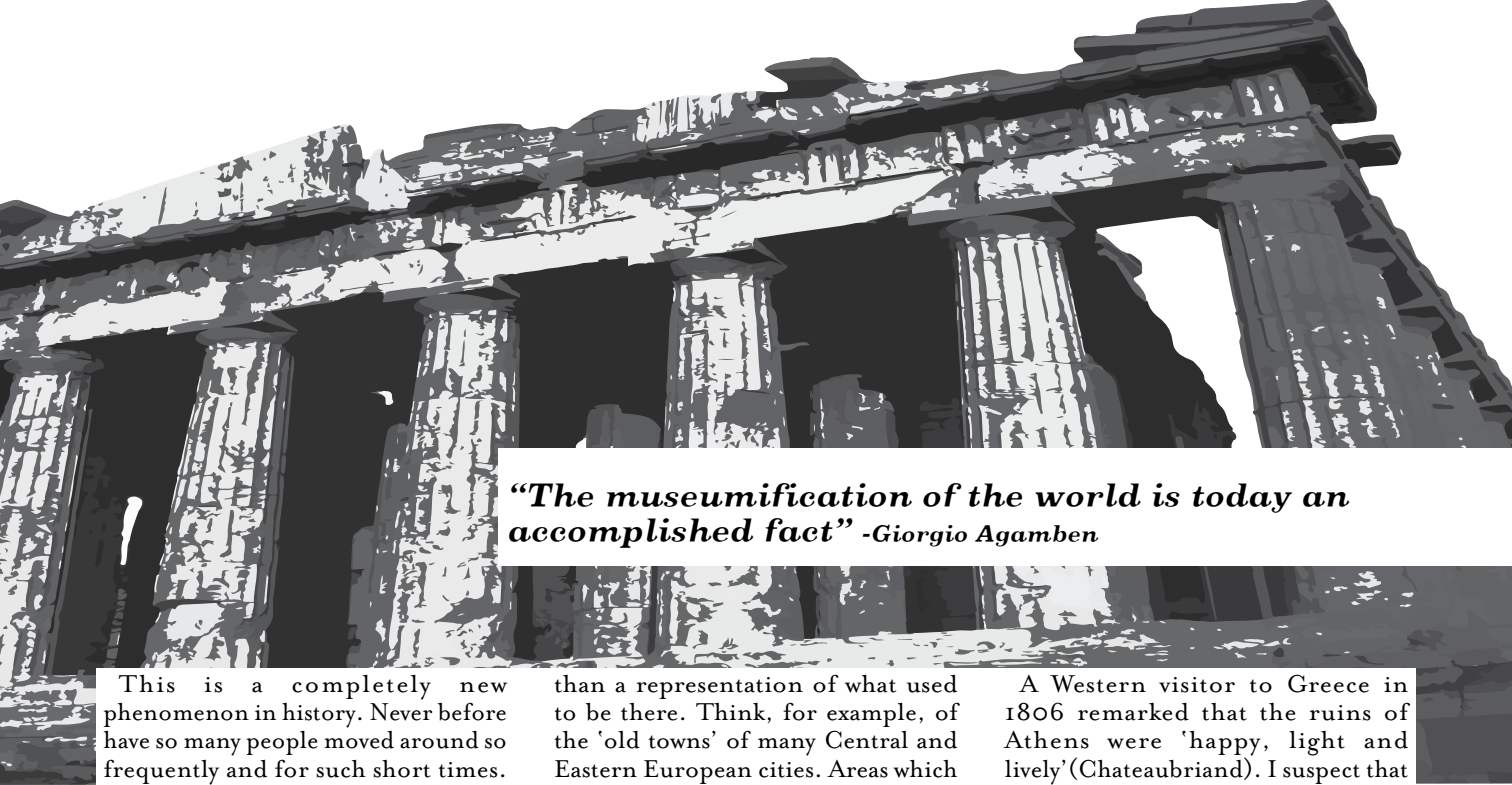
PEOPLE AND PLACE

Tourism is another aspect of the consumer capitalist economy and can not be separated from it. While having obvious benefits at an individual level, it damages the world in the same ways as the rest of the consumer economy.



It is damaging to the environment, to culture and to people's minds. Globally, tourism is part of the drive towards a capitalistic monoculture and locally plays an instrumental role in gentrification. I want to focus here on the effects tourism has on people, tourists and inhabitants, and the places they visit.

The first thing to note is the scale of modern tourism. Gone are the days when just a few eccentrics, lost idealists or peddlers and merchants were the only ones travelling. Gone too, in many parts of the world, are the domestic holidays in some beautiful local spot. Modern tourists are counted in the millions, with this set to increase once the aspiring middle classes of China and Asia begin to enjoy the consumer lifestyle. A few examples demonstrate the current scale of tourism. Barcelona, a city of 1.6m inhabitants, receives an estimated 7.4m visitors a year with plans to increase this still further. Venice can host up to 60,000 visitors a day during peak season, more than the entire population of the city itself. Greece, a country of roughly 11m, hosts around 17-19m annually.



“The museumification of the world is today an accomplished fact” -Giorgio Agamben

This is a completely new phenomenon in history. Never before have so many people moved around so frequently and for such short times. Such large numbers of people create a great amount of environmental stress and strain. Airplanes bring pollution and the need for ever more and bigger airports. There's the constant need to build more and more unsightly hotels and hostels. Large sections of the coastline of countries like Spain have been 'developed' into a horrid concrete mass by modern tourism. Such a large number of people cannot pass through a place without changing it in some way. Every major city and tourist destination now has a constant population made up of temporary people with no connection to the place they are in, and are engaging in a form of hyper-consumption.

'MUSEUM CITY'

It is a sad fact that many once vibrant and living places around the world have become little more than stale museums. In some cases whole swaths of a once crucial and central area in the life of a community have lost any living presence and become little more

than a representation of what used to be there. Think, for example, of the 'old towns' of many Central and Eastern European cities. Areas which once were the heart of the community that formed the city are now open-air museums filled with cafes, craft shops and tourist traps. In many cases, the real city was destroyed during the twentieth century, so the ancient city people walk around today is often little more than fifty years old.

Athens has largely and luckily escaped the worst of this as it is essentially a young city and until now tourists have viewed it as a place to pass through rather than a destination in itself. Still though, when you walk around the ancient monuments of Athens you cannot help but feel that you are in a dead area, and not just from an historical point of view. Historical monuments were naturally the first part of a city to be declared a museum. From the late nineteenth century onwards they were separated off from the city around them and declared to be special areas which were not to change or interact with the space around them. Organic life was to stop and nothing allowed to change.

A Western visitor to Greece in 1806 remarked that the ruins of Athens were 'happy, light and lively' (Chateaubriand). I suspect that this lively sense came from the fact that what we would call the ruins of Athens were part of the fabric of the city with people living in and around them. The ruins had popular folk tales or superstitions attached to them and in many cases they were respected though not revered like today. Athens would have displayed the continuity of human life as Ancient Greek and Roman foundations shared the same space with Byzantine, Frankish and Turkish buildings.

In contrast, the ruins of Athens, which had always served as an active part of the community for thousands of years, are now sealed, preserved and sold. In this case not only did time stop but it was sent backwards as the Greek state wished to create an ideal Greece. Remains later than the Classical and Roman periods, e.g Turkish and Frankish, were removed to create a pure, artificial monument to the reborn Greek nation which was itself something of an artificial construct.

So, under the cloak of protection, places are removed from everyday life. Much like picking a flower ultimately kills the object of beauty, the heritage industry ultimately kills what it seeks to protect. The tourist industry does the same to whole cities. Tourists are drawn to a place by a series of images which they wish to see before them on arrival. This slowly expands the museum from the historic site to the surrounding old neighbourhoods until large parts of a city are preserved tourist zones. The historical site, traditional restaurant, authentic craft shop and old town are all places designed to fulfil the wishes of visiting tourists- not the residents of a place. In cities with a large tourist industry more consideration is given to the tourist than the local resident.

In some places, such as Athens, this is mitigated by the tourist's behaviour. Basically, a tourist doesn't visit a whole place, just select parts of it. In effect, tourists live within a series of bubbles-the airport, the bus/metro from airport to city, the hotel, 'old town'/tourist attraction. Outside of these bubbles normal life continues while tourists are encouraged to stay in their safe zones. This is facilitated by the official tourism infrastructure. For example, this summer saw the creation of a new bus line which runs directly from the port of Pireaus to the Athens' Acropolis and so allows tourists to quickly cut through the city, get to where they want and back again with the minimum of interaction. The danger to a place is when tourist numbers become so great that these bubbles expand to take in more and more of the city. In Athens we see this process in areas like Monastiraki and Psirri.

Tourism's need for a place and its people to match a certain popular and reproducible image along with the need for it to be clean, safe and

efficient is changing the nature of many places. Instead of the places we live in being evolving, chaotic and habitable, they must become preservable, 'timeless' and safe. In terms of tourism, countries and cities are no longer places where we live, but quite explicitly talked about as something to sell. A place is now a brand and must now be concerned with its brand image. Modern tourism, with its reliance on brand image, cleanliness and safety, expands the atmosphere of the airport to the rest of the city. In some small popular places this process is already on the verge of completely changing the nature of a city. Venice, for instance, is said to be running out of Venetians as the inhabitant population goes into decline and is replaced by rotating bands of tourists.

We should add to this that not only are places becoming museums but, just as modern museums must focus on entertainment and interactivity, these museum cities are also becoming theme parks. The theme park of Rome already has its characters as the men dressed as gladiators and Roman soldiers pose outside the Colosseum. In Athens, the number one and number two attractions on a popular international tourism website are the new adventure and escape room theme park games. In these games you get locked in a room and have to solve some crime or mystery to get out, allowing people to play out their TV-induced fantasy of being a cop for a day. The Acropolis Museum, which for all of its justifiable criticisms, at least has something to do with Athens and its history, comes in at third place behind these games.

People can at times take action to prevent their city becoming a museum. Note for instance the actions of the local assembly of Petralona some years ago. A plan to fence off and

enclose the Philopappou area close to the Acropolis would have changed the right of access to this wonderful and beautifully hidden area. Local residents tore down the fences after they were erected and after a sharp struggle succeeded in keeping the hills open to public access. Had the fences been allowed to stay, perhaps this area would now form a part of the Acropolis landscape, another tourist bubble all but lost to those who live around it.

BANALITY

'Tourism, human circulation considered as consumption, is fundamentally nothing more than the leisure of going to see what has become banal' -Guy Debord

The ease of visiting foreign places has robbed the action of any adventure and romance. It used to be that a visit to a new place could fundamentally alter someone's view of the world, could even change the course of history. In contrast, we often now know exactly what we will see, experience and feel in a place before we get there, with the result that the once miraculous act of travel has been reduced to a standard commute. The often repeated phrase that 'travel broadens the mind' doesn't quite fit with the modern tourist experience which is more likely to narrow the mind. When it is an image of a place constructed for consumption that is being visited, little can be gained from this. Take, for instance, the British tourist that goes to the coasts of Greece, Turkey, Spain, Cyprus etc. Sleeping in large concrete resort hotels, drinking in British pubs and eating British food, all with as little interaction with the local environment as possible. The



exposure to the sun may fry their minds but there's little opportunity to broaden it.

There is a story, perhaps not completely truthful but useful none the less, that as the rulers of the Slavic peoples of Europe were deciding which religion to adopt, they sent ambassadors around the known world to investigate different faiths. Upon reaching Constantinople these ambassadors were so overwhelmed by the sight of Hagia Sofia, a building they could never have seen nor expected, they decided the Orthodox Christian faith was the way forward and so the Russians became Orthodox. Whereas my first reaction to the sight of Hagia Sofia as the tram glided down the main road of historic Istanbul was more along the lines of 'it's not as big as in the pictures'.

To counter this over-familiarity, the tourist is always seeking to get off the 'tourist track' and find the new and next undiscovered place. An area without much tourist infrastructure and where the local population have not become disillusioned after waves of tourists, is hailed as the place to get to before it is 'discovered'. The number of untapped fresh places is

rapidly dwindling however. There is a limit to how many new places can be found, though frequent wars recreate some older destinations. There was even some surprise this year when a photo of people queuing up to climb Mount Everest was published.

So, unfortunately, the way in which places are presented and sold to us has changed the nature of going somewhere different. Generally, we already know what to expect from a place we visit and will likely find it served up to us when we arrive. Often we have already seen the place we go to and can only confirm the image we have.

COLONIAL TOURISM

The flow of tourist traffic is generally from rich countries to poor. People from the poorer parts of the world and its societies don't get the opportunity to be tourists. With much of the work in the tourist industry being based around service- cooking, cleaning, driving and generally looking after people- a place where tourism is a leading industry will see the creation of a large group of people dedicated to serving their often richer customers.

These workers are then often told how they must be respectful and maintain the good brand image of the country in order to attract more tourists.

This can create a situation whereby the rich enjoy their visit to a place while the people who live there can do nothing but serve them. Greece's impoverishment through its current crisis has the potential to turn the country into little more than the holiday resort of the wealthy world. Amongst the media articles and reports on tourism last year there were some hints in this direction. Firstly, we had the opinion writers of some media lamenting not the quantity of tourists but their quality. Greece, it seems, is not attracting people of the 'right quality', the writer of course took wealth to be a marker of quality. So, as well as planning to increase the overall number of tourists, the government would also like to attract more luxury tourists who would need high quality resorts, hotels and restaurants which would be served by, but be beyond the reach of, the local population.

Within the various tourism facts and statistics from last year it was revealed that while tourist arrivals are up as expected, the number of domestic holidays was down. It is not surprising that with money running out and becoming scarce fewer Greeks are able to take a holiday within their country. Put these two things together, the desire for more and higher quality tourists and less domestic tourism, and we see the direction Greece may take. The Greek territories will still be beautiful, if increasingly blighted by luxury resorts, but will be for the enjoyment of the rich primarily.

Greek domestic tourism is a curious mix which shares many of the characteristics of international



tourism I've mentioned so far. One positive strand of domestic Greek tourism is the tendency of people from the cities, principally Athens, to go back to the countryside for holidays. With many Athenians being at most three generations removed from the countryside it's not unusual for families to keep a house or land in the family island/village which is often the destination for holidays. Beyond that, Greek tourists have played a considerable part in the changes brought about by the tourism industry.

In the summertime, Greek islands are often colonised by mainland Athenians. The various social groups of Athens move *en masse* to the islands with the different social groups setting up on their own island, Ikaria for the Leftist, Donoussa for the 'alternatives', etc. While a bunch of free-campers partying and whatever on a beach (apparently with the same kind of drunken abandon and lack of clothes so often lamented in foreign groups) is less damaging than a heavily built up tourist industry, the Greek islands are clearly now dependent on tourism - a process begun and continuing through Greek domestic tourism just as much as

international tourism. The islands are going from distinct communities to glorified hotels for the transported social milieu of Athens, often with the willing acquiescence of many business-minded islanders.

As I said above, modern tourism is a new phenomenon in human history. As such, we can't really say what its full effects will be. What I've tried to say so far is that there are a number of features which are considerably altering the world in a negative direction. Far from a great enlightening experience, modern tourism is creating and spreading a world based on dull and shallow imagery. With tourism becoming increasingly important to capital and state this trend is set to continue and expand.

ECONOMY

***'I have noticed that only in Europe is hospitality put up for sale.'*-Rousseau**

Well not exactly just Europe, but everywhere hospitality is up for sale and makes a substantial profit. Globally, tourism contributes around 9.5% to world GDP, generating \$7tn.

In Greece, tourism accounts for 16.4% of GDP and employs around 1 in 5 people. Additionally, the government plans to increase tourism over the next years with hopes that tourist arrivals will reach 27m by 2021. Whilst always taking the Greek government's future plans with a pinch of salt, it's clear that tourism is seen as a major growth sector of the economy.

A country with few industries and little to export, Greece will increasingly have to sell itself to bring about this economic growth. We have already had some hints of what this will look like. During the summer, the Samaras government floated the idea of selling off parts of the Greek coastline in order to pay bills and develop the tourist industry. 'Greece has such a lot of coast line just waiting there to be developed - why not sell some of it?' one foolish minister thought aloud. Large sections of coast could be sold off to private groups to build luxury resorts with private beaches and then charge people for access to the beach. The result would be a blighted environment and a blow to the quality of life as something once free and open becomes closed and monetised.

When faced with the reality of selling the coastline and turning it into something similar to the concrete mess of the Spanish coast (a project started by the fascist government), a large number of people were appalled. Sensing resistance, the government quickly backed down and limited itself to tacking on some minor changes to building regulations to a later bill. If governments are to follow through on their plans to increase tourism and generate more money it will be done through schemes such as this.

We should not underestimate the short-sightedness of governments and economists in their attempt to drum up money with tourism. Previously,

I mentioned the example of Venice, a city in danger of becoming a theme park as its inhabitants leave and waves of tourists arrive. It took several rounds of legal challenges and disputes for the inhabitants to stop a line of super-cruise ships (known as skyscrapers of the sea) sailing up close to the city. The gigantic ships carried thousands of tourists at a time, were so large they towered over the city itself and moved so much water they were a danger to the floating city's foundations. Still, despite the clear danger they presented to the fragile city the cruise industry was able to continue sailing directly into Venice for some time due to the money they produced. As of now, the larger ships are banned from a close approach to the city but can still sail through the area.

This is the reality of economic growth through tourism. As one of a declining number of areas of growth, it will be pursued with little regard to the consequences, environmental and social. However, projects such as these do present opportunities to derail the tourism drive and mobilisations against aspects of the tourist industry are likely to increase. The benefit of this is that halting the further development of the tourist industry in addition to protecting places will cause damage to the economy.

TOURISTS AS A HUMAN SHIELD

Aside from the economic benefits, tourists can be used by the state as a form of human shield. Since few people really want to hurt tourists, who are, after all, innocent if naïve people, governments can wheel them out at times of need to protect its interests. We recently saw China criticising pro-democracy protestors in Hong Kong for damaging the city's tourist image. Right-wing commentators in Greece, when adding up the number

of demonstrations since the Crisis began (20,000 and counting), lamented the fact that during all this demonstrating no one was thinking about the poor confused tourists and what they made of all these people demanding their lives and freedoms.

This played a factor in the DEH (Greek national electricity company) strike during the summer. In response to a demand that part of the DEH be privatised, the union representing the workers declared its intention to strike. Such a strike in one of the key pieces of infrastructure had the potential to bring blackouts and cut power across the country and clearly carried a considerable threat. As the dispute was in July, the height of a critical tourist season, the economic impact of the strike would be doubled. In reply, the government brought out the tourists. The minister of Tourism warned that such a strike would badly damage the country's tourist image and the ever entertaining spokeswoman, Voultepsi, stated 'you cannot have 20 million tourists coming to the country and deprive them of air-conditioning'.

This barrage of criticism, using the tourists as its main ammunition, did its job. The union carried out a few days of rolling controlled and scheduled blackouts in suburbs and

remote areas which cut power for a few hours at a time, though supplies were always maintained to key tourist destinations. The union, having given away its key leverage, was soon issued mobilisation orders and its members forced back to work. Syriza's games in parliament were batted away, the DEH sold-off and the tourist season saved.

TOURISTS AS PROPAGANDA

As well as being a useful aid in specific disputes, tourism can also help government narratives. The return of the tourists in 2014 gave a significant boost to the Samaras government's attempts to spin the current disaster in Greece as a 'success story'. Throughout the past year, foreign and social media were full of posts and articles proclaiming that Greece was fully recovered, safe to go back to and apparently cheaper than before. At times, it felt almost like a concerted effort to direct tourists to Greece as article after article followed the same line. If the crisis was mentioned in these articles and promotions, it was as a creative force which allowed young hipsters to become ever so creative and more hip.

The fact that Greece has fallen off the international media agenda in recent years has allowed the government to fix the





country's brand image. With fewer riots and strikes in central Athens, and conversely increased images of violence from rival destinations such as Egypt, Tunisia, Israel and Turkey, tourists felt that Greece was safe again. Images that contradict this were brushed aside, riots in Keratsini were isolated incidents, a bomb in the centre of Athens was a footnote to a successful return to the markets and several ministers rushed to the bedside of the tourists the police had shot while arresting Maziotis.

On the ground this is backed up by attempts to fix the centre of Athens. So we saw the restoration of Syntagma, partly paid for by the luxury hotels lining the square. Around Omonia and Viktoria the police sweeping operations have 'cleared away' (who knows where exactly?) the drug addicts, homeless and prostitutes that tourists often had to step over to get to the Acropolis. And so tourism is part of the cycle of propaganda. Good news is created and spread around international media which encourages more tourists to come. This in turn puts money in a few pockets and helps create and spread

a positive image. This cycle fixes Greece's damaged brand image and backs up the 'success story'.

CONCLUSION

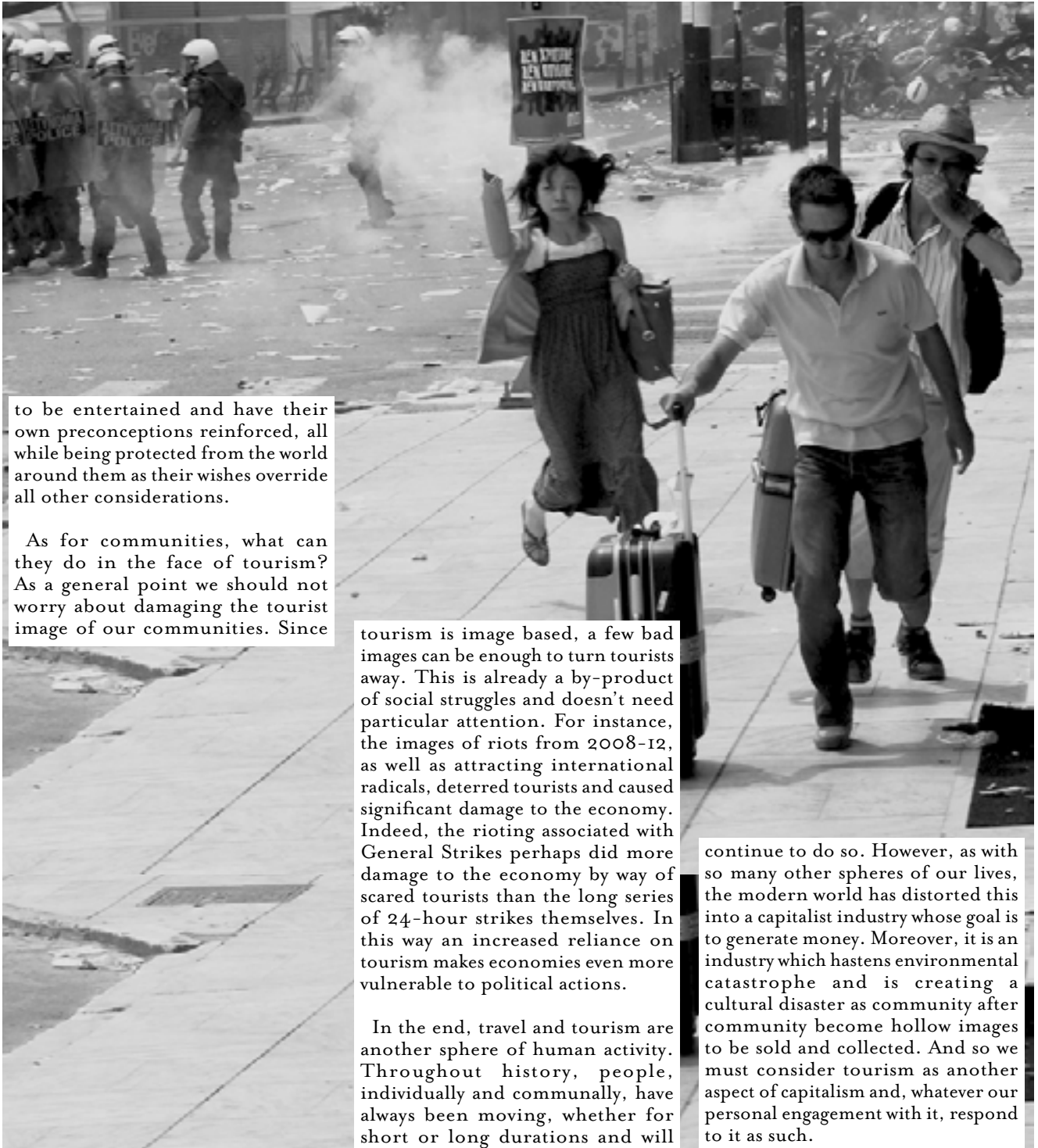
In conclusion, we can see that modern tourism has a number of negative effects the consequences of which we are only beginning to see. Despite these negative effects, tourism is an important sector of the economy and serves an increasingly important practical and propaganda role for the state. Given this, what attitude to tourism can we take? To dismiss tourism completely would basically make us reactionary as we would have to say that everyone must stay where they came from and not move. A more direct targeting of tourists would quickly turn into an ugly radically accepted form of racism.

Ultimately, I believe we must take the line I've adopted above; tourism is travel in a consumer capitalist form. It is a symptom of a situation not the cause of it. Therefore it will only go away when capitalism itself goes away. In a post-capitalist world where our lives can be an adventure instead of

a horrid day-to-day drudgery maybe we will feel less of a need to turn to tourism for a packaged and acceptable adventure in order to stop us blowing our brains out at home. Just from a practical point of view, in a future with fewer and fewer natural resources the transport infrastructure of modern tourism will likely not last for ever. So, the phenomenon of tourism is something which will pass, though we have to wonder how much the world will change before it does.

Individually, perhaps we can try and bring the adventure of travel back out of the tourism industry. Travelling to and visiting new places are, after all, not bad acts in themselves, as what I have been criticising here is the mass industry which seeks only to do this in the quickest, shallowest way possible. I would say, where possible go slowly, avoid as much of the tourist industry infrastructure as possible, travel for ideas, for love, for revolution, or just to go for a walk. Overall, travel as an observer, look at the world around, interact with it and learn what you can from it. A tourist travels





to be entertained and have their own preconceptions reinforced, all while being protected from the world around them as their wishes override all other considerations.

As for communities, what can they do in the face of tourism? As a general point we should not worry about damaging the tourist image of our communities. Since

tourism is image based, a few bad images can be enough to turn tourists away. This is already a by-product of social struggles and doesn't need particular attention. For instance, the images of riots from 2008-12, as well as attracting international radicals, deterred tourists and caused significant damage to the economy. Indeed, the rioting associated with General Strikes perhaps did more damage to the economy by way of scared tourists than the long series of 24-hour strikes themselves. In this way an increased reliance on tourism makes economies even more vulnerable to political actions.

In the end, travel and tourism are another sphere of human activity. Throughout history, people, individually and communally, have always been moving, whether for short or long durations and will

continue to do so. However, as with so many other spheres of our lives, the modern world has distorted this into a capitalist industry whose goal is to generate money. Moreover, it is an industry which hastens environmental catastrophe and is creating a cultural disaster as community after community become hollow images to be sold and collected. And so we must consider tourism as another aspect of capitalism and, whatever our personal engagement with it, respond to it as such.