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‘Begin, slowly, at noon’: Rhythmic Attunements at *documenta 14*

On June 23, 2017, writing from Athens, philosopher Paul B. Preciado penned a short text titled “The South Does Not Exist.” As curator of Public Programs for the art exhibition *documenta 14*, Preciado’s assertion partook in a fragile doubleness. Following decolonial thinkers like Aníbal Quijano, Walter Dignolo, and Silvia Chusicanqui, Preciado argued that the South is not a place but an invention—one used to justify centuries of brutal extraction. The South, like all binaries Preciado argued, was thus at once powerfully determining and wholly arbitrary. And so, Preciado went on, “Not only does the South not exist [but] the North doesn’t exist either” (2020: 243). All that was required, he claimed, was to change one’s perspective: “Turn your head. Hack the vertical axis. Consume the map” (2020: 244).

My paper will join Preciado in writing from the South, but also away from it. While acknowledging that “the South” holds profound descriptive power of the vastly unequal material conditions that continue to accrue across the world, I want to ask: what if we loosen our fixation on place and position? In my paper, I will shift my orientation away from geographic signifiers, drawing on queer and affect theorists Eve K. Sedgwick, Lauren Berlant, and Kathleen Stewart to focus on experiences of rhythm and tempo. In doing so, I seek not to efface space entirely, but to steadily expand our sense of place through sustained attention to attunement.

Anchoring these efforts is the Athenian artist Georgia Sagri’s work *Dynamis*, “six days of demonstration / performance simultaneously and in continuum, in Athens and Kassel” (2017). Comprised of 28 metal sculptures of organs, ten hand-blown glass breathing scores, and a 14-person chorus spread across two cities, the work linked a series of imperfect binaries through breathing and movement practices. Over six days, pairs of lungs, pairs of performers, pairs of sculptural organs, and a pair of cities lying 1,000 miles apart wavered and synchronized. Following Sagri, I will “observe the rhythms, listen to the tempos, look at the moves” (2021: 17) in order to soften the rigid entrenchment of two long-opposed cardinal directions. Per the conference’s title, this paper is a “work in progress”—but one I hope gestures toward fruitful new approaches. Balancing queer theory’s commitments to elsewhere and otherwise with art historical attention to material details and site-specific particularities, I aim to unsettle the ground on which Athens has long been understood.

References

- Preciado, Paul B (2020), *Apartment on Uranus* (trans. Charlotte Mandell), London: Fitzcarraldo Editions.
Sagri, Georgia (2017), *Dynamis: Invitation to the Demonstration* [C-print].
Sagri, Georgia (2021), *Stage of Recovery*, Brussels and London: Divided Publishing.

Alexander Strecker is pursuing a Ph.D. in Art, Art History and Visual Studies at Duke University (Durham, USA). His dissertation is tentatively titled “Oscillating Practices: Fluid Figures of Athenian Contemporary Art.” The project reconsiders three of the city’s defining cultural institutions of the past decade—*documenta 14*, the National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMST), and the “maritime capital” foundations of Onassis, Niarchos et al.—through the lens of three different figures: the continuum, the subterranean, and fluidity. At Duke, he is a graduate research fellow in the Laboratory for Social Choreography. He has presented his research at College Art Association, the American Comparative Literature Association, the Modern Greek Studies Association, the Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts, *transmediale*, and the *École normale supérieure* in Paris. He has collaborated with arts organizations in Athens and across Europe: Onassis Stegi, Paris Photo, Art Basel, ARTWORKS, VOID, Kunst Haus Wien, Depression Era, locus athens, Onassis AiR, Athens Photo Festival, MISC, and Zoetrope, as well as Yo-Yo Ma’s Bach Project.