



PAUL B. PRECIADO AND
GEORGIA SAGRI IN CONVERSATION

EXPOSED TO

An explanation of why the public programs at documenta 14 are not a side-event to comment on or document the exhibition, but are one of the fundamental devices of the exhibition, and a feminist, anti-racist and anti-fascist front, within culture and the arts.

GEORGIA SAGRI
How did you come to conceptualize the public program for documenta 14?

PAUL B. PRECIADO
I'm not used to working in the framework of a mega-exhibition and wasn't interested until Adam Szymczyk told me that it would happen in both Athens and Kassel, and that part of the curatorial team would move physically to Athens to live here. For some of my colleagues, Athens has been very far away from their usual context and kind of exotic, whereas for me it was like coming home. I am originally from Spain, and as soon as I arrived here I felt like, okay, this is part of the Mediterranean, a culture that I know well. An uncanny feeling of knowing and not knowing, like speaking the same language and not really. I felt immediately welcome in Athens as I've never felt before anywhere, and I want to stay here after documenta is over. I was infused with a strong feeling of inscribing the public program within Athens, having it grow from the city of Athens.

I have been transitioned for about eight years now, from female to transsexual or whatever, and the last, crucial part of this transition happened in Athens. For me, making the public program and coming to live in Athens was learning to be trans in a city that doesn't have a lot of trans or queer visibility, and it was really, really strong. I felt incredibly welcomed and protected and hosted by the artists and the different activist movements and groups here. I thought about how making documenta 14 in Athens was itself about transitions in a way—Kassel transitioning in Athens. The exhibition is not just nomadic, but rather transitioning. The world is transitioning, but our institutions resist this transition. The museum, the school, the hospital need to transition.

GEORGIA SAGRI
Syriza, a left party, has been elected but there is a blockade regarding what a political party can do. So we are all in the transition together right now to understand what politics can be if it isn't representative politics.



THE UNKNOWN



Paul B. Preciado is a philosopher, curator and transgender activist and one of the leading thinkers in the study of gender and sexual politics. An Honors Graduate and Fulbright Fellow, he earned a M.A. in Philosophy and Gender Theory at the New School for Social Research in New York where he studied with Agnes Heller and Jacques Derrida. He holds a Ph.D. in Philosophy and Theory of Architecture from Princeton University. His first book, *Contra-Sexual Manifesto* (Columbia University Press) was acclaimed by French critics as "the red book of queer theory" and became a key reference for European queer and trans activism. He is the author of *Testo Junkie*, *Sex, Drugs and Biopolitics* (The Feminist Press) and *Pornotopia* (Zone Books) for which he was awarded the Sade Prize in France. He has been Head of Research of the Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona (MACBA) and Director of the Independent Studies Program (PEI). He teaches Philosophy of the Body and Transfeminist Theory at Université Paris VIII-Saint Denis and at New York University. Some of these projects are: Rhetorics of gender/Politics of Identity (BNV, UNIA, 2003), Postporn Marathon (MACBA, 2004), PornPunkFeminism (Arteleku, 2008), Art after Feminism (MACBA, 2008), IM/MUNE (Emmetrop, 2011), Cuir International (MNCARS, 2011), Gender Lab (Emmetrop, 2012), The Beast and The Sovereign (MACBA/Kunstverein Stuttgart 2015). He is currently Curator of Public Programs of documenta 14 (Kassel/Athens).

Through different values, can we visualize what this transition could be? This could be the purpose of the public program.

PBP I totally agree. The public program is called *The Parliament of Bodies*, and this title came about right after the EU elections in which the Greek people basically said no to the European community and the bailout and austerity measures, and yet in spite of what the people said, politics continued in automatic neoliberal mode. This was the beginning of the program, the idea that the parliament is in ruins and a new parliament must be constituted, not through representative politics but as a Parliament of Bodies. A parliament where people are not thought of as citizens because they have a certain nationality or belong to a certain group. The idea of parliamentary bodies involves a framework *beyond* identity politics.

GS Exchanges.

PBP In looking for a site for our activities here, we found this place, one of two buildings that served as the headquarters of the military police during the junta years of the 1960s and 1970s, during the dictatorship. It's very interesting, and historically and politically charged. It was subsequently transformed into a white-cube gallery. The other building houses the museum of resistance, dedicated to those who fought against the dictatorship or who suffered torture during those years. These buildings both belong to the ministry of defense, but have been treated very differently: one holds the memory of the resistance, and in the other, history was literally erased.

Greece, Portugal, Spain—they all moved from dictatorship to what was supposed to be democracy but in reality was neoliberalism. This was one of the main ideas we wanted to work on when we conceived the *34 Exercises of Freedom*: how to speak about freedom in a context in which we went from dictatorship into the global free market. For us, all we know about freedom is the free market. I started to think about Michel Foucault's idea that freedom is not a natural right or a quality that you can possess, but something that has to be exercised.

Speaking with many of the artists working with us for the exhibition, and also with many different local groups and movements and associations and international artist people as well, I wanted them to come and exercise freedom with us in a place that is marked by a history of dictatorship and oppression. I didn't want any kind of hierarchy among the participants. And I didn't want to have keynote speakers like sociologists and historians, and then an artist, and maybe at night a party. Rather, everything was an unconventional mix.

And you said, "I want to do a twenty-four-hour performance."



GS And you replied, "How are we going to do that?" The twenty-four-hour performance piece titled *Attempt.Come* wasn't only an exercise in regard to premise of endurance but a way to acquire experience for the piece that I will present during documenta 14 in June. *Askisi* is the Greek word for "exercise," but implies something beyond. How to acquire intelligence through honing. I'm saying to some of the students and participants in the piece I'm going to do: imagine that there is a war, with thought on one side and action on the other. One side thinks it is more important to think than to act. The other side thinks you need to act first and then think. So we are kind of like little sensitive animals, in the center of the war, and because we exercise, because we are in the process of *askisi*, we are able to manipulate this process of the fight in a context a-day-by day practicing, where we open up space for those who don't want to participate in the either/or. This is for me freedom. You need to acquire intelligence of not going to the totalities, the extremes. Not to the extreme of thought nor to the extreme of action—so this is *Askisi*, the day-to-day practice.

PBP I think the traditional left has arrived at its contemporary condition of near bankruptcy because of its inability to critically face the colonial history of Europe and the consequences of colonialism, which constitute capitalism as we know it. It's not just a critique of labor but a critique of the colonial reason, the consequences of colonialism, in the sense of Achille Mbembe. And not just colonialism in relation to Africa or South America, but also internal colonialism within Europe itself. Then there is feminism. The left has difficulties thinking beyond the male, heroic body, as this kind of savior of the nation. The worker figure is necessarily masculine. Traditionally the left has naturalized the difference between production as male and reproduction as female. We need a feminist anti-colonial critique of reproduction of capitalism: health care, education, sexual minorities—all of these are blind spots within the discourse of the left.

We need a new narrative, a different way of telling ourselves the history of Europe, because if we continue telling the story as leading from the mythical time of Greek democracy to the European Community and the Euro and the troika, this is a catastrophe, right? Some of the artists working with us come from indigenous backgrounds, for instance Niillas Somby, a Sami activist from the far north who was in prison in the early 1970s—exactly at the same time Antonio Negri was in prison in Italy.



I thought it would be fascinating to bring together this tradition of indigenous communities fighting against the way in which they were the object of genocide within what was supposed to be at that time the most advanced democracies of the north, and then a counterpart in Italy, which had a strong tradition of the social-democratic left, yet imprisoned lots of people from the radical left (not just Negri).

So my beginning of this new opera for Europe involved bringing these two traditions together, which are completely heterogeneous and do not speak the same language. That was pretty clear at the opening, seeing these two figures, from the same generation, talking. Those are the conversations we need to have; we need to invent languages in which these conversations can happen.

Also important was trying to make feminist-queer traditions more visible within the public sphere here in Athens. This proved complicated, as it meant we lost some of the Greek sponsors. Immediately after the announcement of the program they wrote letters saying they could not align with us because by speaking about homosexuality, we were necessarily promoting homosexuality. Another topic that is absolutely not present within the discourse of the left.

GS We need to envision a different way of organizing as well as to transform our relationship to the material world, that does not involve a central figure. A leaderless organization, which is very difficult given the parameters we were educated—the political subject is always either a voter or a leader. We envision an organism that is not only formed by the needs of the self but also temporality through others. It's not easy to imagine something like this when we are embedded in a construction based on a masculine, patriarchal model. You wanted to create an organism of multiple factors, multiple participants, who are not necessarily constructed through the hierarchies that we already know. This is difficult, so we need to exercise another notion, to exercise the self, take care of the self. We need to envision a planetary politics, which is based on revolutionary animism. We can't only think of how we organize each other but also how we relate to elements, spirits that they are part of this planet, that we also struggle with them against patriarchy, against capitalism.

PBP Antonio Negri and Niillas Somby are both political revolutionaries, but they use different languages, different tools. Some kind of mutual deconstruction happened from putting them together. The Parliament of Bodies doesn't have a common language that leads to common decisions. Many languages and many methodologies proliferated in the *34 Exercises of Freedom*. We started creating a series of societies, with different artists and different people, each one completely different from the rest. For instance, with Angelo Plessas we started working on alternative technologies consciousness, meditation, and

detoxifying from electricity. It was interesting to see people coming together into what I like to call synthetic alliances, alliances not based on identity politics. We are not here because we're all Greek or German or gay or women. We are here because we need to do something together. The exercises that we undertake together will make us transform, transition. The whole program is transitioning into something we can't predict.

GS You need to have a sense of what goes on, but at the same time you have to make up what you want to be, and be a part of. And we should not lose the force and energy—not only of this program but of many other programs around the world. If we give up, it's a victory for neofascism!

PBP Maybe this explains what is coming next. After the opening in Athens, the last week of April we'll take the public program to Kassel to create an antifascist front. We are trying to bring together many different institutions, mostly from the southern European and Mediterranean countries but also from indigenous communities around the world, and trying to make an anti-fascist, feminist, anti-racist front, within culture and the arts. Around fifty people from all over the world will engage in a kind of manifesto encounter, titled *How does it feel to be a problem?* which comes from W. E. B. Du Bois. He was talking about how it felt to be part of the black community at the beginning of the twentieth century. The problem now is what Achille Mbembe is calling this process the "devenir negre", the becoming black of the world. 99% of the inhabitants of this planet, we have become a problem for necro-capitalism.

GS —this totalitarian capitalism.

PBP Exactly.

GS When an economic system also becomes politics, we are in totality.

PBP We are seeing now, for instance with Donald Trump, the coming together of a new form of national neoliberalism. This will be the new fascism.

GS To have an existing state means that people can contradict the state, they can reflect in regard to what a state is. If the state is on autopilot in regard to what the people want, you have a dictatorship. Or an oligarchy. We have oligarchic capitalism. We need to reconsider what we need. We need the state to not kill people on the street because they are reflecting against it or criticizing it, and we need an economic system that can provide a place for us. You cannot work only for the sake of the state or for the sake of improving capitalism. You need to either dissolve both of them, or live with totalitarian



All images - Georgia Sagri, *Attempt. Come.*, 2016, performance, duration: 20 hours, *Exercises of Freedom*, documenta 14: Public Programs, Parko Eleftherias, Athens, 2016. © Georgia Sagri. Courtesy: the artist. Photo: Stathis Mamelakis





capitalism. This is what's going on right now. The old left wants to improve the state without making any critique of capitalism, and then you have economic experts, also leftists, who say we need to improve capitalism and then the state will automatically improve itself. No.

PBP When Adam Szymczyk invited me to do the public program at documenta, no matter how crazy this sounds, I was tempted by *failing*. I know it's utopian, it cannot succeed, but I want to feel that we can still have some kind of public debate. I think that's what an exhibition can offer—the possibility of reconstructing the public sphere in a critical way. I don't see the public program as a footnote to the exhibition or as documenting or commenting the exhibition. Absolutely not. It is one of the devices of the exhibition, and in this case, it started first. We began seven months ago, and we will continue in this public service even when documenta is over. The exhibition can become an apparatus for constructing collective desire, for transforming what we understand as a public desiring something. I think this is ultimately the problem with capitalism.

GS You have fixed desires.

PBP Exactly. We already think we know what we desire. This is for me also the problem of identity politics: we already know too well what we are and what we're supposed to desire. If you're a woman, if you're a man, if you're Greek. Journalists ask us this question all the time: how many Greek artists, how many German artists, how many men, how many women? The aim of this exhibition is precisely about questioning the certainty of these fixed identities. That is why we moved documenta to Athens.

For me, freedom in this respect has to do with being exposed to the unknown, being ready to get into a process of becoming without knowing where it will take you. What have we “learned from Athens”? I think that it's precisely *not* so much about learning. It has nothing to do with a pedagogical turn of the arts, or all the artists learning something. We have to *un-learn*, *de-link*, from normative ways of thinking, specialized ways of thinking, in order to be open to something that can happen that is unknown.

GS When you learn a musical instrument, for example, you start out knowing you're going to do a very boring thing—practice, I mean—for many, many years before you are able to play something. This is the *askisi* I was talking about before. We need to get accustomed to doing a lot of boring things. Capitalism doesn't allow the time or the space to do the really boring things. The boring thing means that it doesn't sound exactly the way it should sound, it's not easy, it's not accessible in the fast and consumable sense. In my opinion, this is why performance is super important as a medium right now, because it requires you to give yourself over to something that you don't know how it's going to sound until you sound it. It has to do with training, with not being afraid to sound incorrect, with knowing that there is no “correct” or “right” in this situation. It's more about the pleasure of finding something that is not even yet there, and making it possible. This is very beautiful.

PBP Related to that, for the public program, I was interested in temporality. It's not the same as that of the exhibition. Constituting the Parliament of Bodies through societies obviously takes time, and for much of the time there is nothing to see. It has to do with thinking outside the aesthetics of capitalism, which is one of the

risks of making a big exhibition like documenta: everything has to do with the exhibition, with its own production times, forcing you to produce, to make this show. Whereas the public program has a different temporality, with a different mode of production, that prevents us from getting into “show mode.”

GS Also, multiple instruments require different temporalities, different sounds, so I cannot insist on the concept of an exhibition or a show that is productive, visible, perfectly tuned. In an exhibition you are not part of the public—you are the one speaking. Whereas I do a performance because I want to also be part of the public, I want to be the public.

PBP You tried to do a twenty-four-hour performance and basically collapsed after eighteen!

GS I didn't collapse I simply stopped because I don't want the public seeing me as the performance artist, so I cannot give a gift of myself to the public because I am part of the public, there to do a piece. I'm performing to make possible this pleasure and desire to be exposed to all of us, and to myself. If it's not like this, then the piece is over. It's the collapse of identity.

PBP In recent years Athens has been represented in the media according to two parameters: the economic crisis and the refugee crisis. Many institutions have been addressing those topics, and when I was putting together the public program, everyone was asking, “Oh but are you going to speak about the crisis? The refugees?” And I thought, you know, I'm going to propose an apartheid society, talking in a critical manner about the conditions of losing citizenship within contemporary capitalism. I want to see the people actively engaging with these questions. I don't want to have a conference without refugees, but I also don't want the refugees to be there as victims of something. This is not my way of doing politics.

Further, I don't want to be rehashing this “crisis discourse,” which is mostly coming from northern European countries who are trying to reassure themselves that things are going better there than elsewhere. I realized that the discourse of fear is much stronger in Germany than in Greece itself. How can they not see it?

GS We are struggling to shift the languages. Strategy is not just action, it is also language. We need to acquire certain tools of speaking the way we want to speak, voicing what we actually want to do or think, and it's quite difficult. In politics, even in the most radical groups, in order to be a part of the group, you need to speak its language. We must try to understand other types of cognition, open ourselves up, let each other in, and even if we don't understand, we have to be okay with it. What's happening right now is not a fear of a crisis or a fear of an other, it is a fear of cognition. How is it possible to know if you are unable to speak what you want or who you are? It's a contradiction.

PBP The idea that European society will be destroyed and colonized by the immigrants is nonsense, a fake idea. I'm for totally open boundaries and frontiers. I am for the end of Europe as a fortress. Fully.

GS Open doors. Windows, boundaries, borders. Open sea, sky.

Georgia Sagri, (1979, Athens) lives and works in Athens and New York. She studied music at the National Music School of Athens; she holds a diploma in cello, a BA from Athens School of Fine Arts, Athens, and an MFA from Columbia University, New York. At the center of her practice lies the exploration of performance as an ever-evolving field within social and visual life. Most of her work is influenced from her on-going engagement in political movements and struggles, on issues of autonomy, empowerment, and self-organization. From 1997-2001 she was a member of Void Network a cultural, political and philosophical collective operating in Athens. Later in 2011 she was one of the main organizers of Occupy Wall Street movement in New York. Since 2013 she has been a member of the assembly of Embros Theater Occupation. She is the founder of the audio-only magazine *FORTÉ* and *SALOON*, an ongoing curatorial project. In 2014 she initiated *YanImatter/HYLE* a semipublic space in the heart of Athens. Her participation in documenta 14, titled *Dynamis* consists of twenty-eight sculptures and ten breathing scores and a performance that will take place simultaneously and in continuum in both cities Athens and Kassel for six days, June 7-12. Recent group exhibitions include: Public Programs documenta 14; *Exercises on Freedom* (curated by Paul B. Preciado), Manifesta 11, Zurich, Switzerland; *The Eccentrics*, Sculpture Center, New York; *Secret Surface*, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin; *Bread and Roses*, Museum of Modern Art Warsaw. She participated in the 14th Istanbul Biennial (2015), Biennale de Lyon (2013), ProBio, Expo 1: New York, MoMA PS1, New York (2013) and the Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2011).