

Enduring Naïveté: Art & Hellenism in a Global-Turn

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Abstract

From the Renaissance to the present-day the cultural West has repeatedly confessed its Hellenist affinity – its approbation of ancient Greek culture and intellect. While by nature this implies a favourable image of Greece, these expressions often more accurately reflect a Neoclassical, idealized version of antiquity disseminated during the Enlightenment that has ties to colonial and cultural imperialism. This major research paper thus examines how continuations of Hellenism function today, specifically in their relation to the pluralistic ideologies of the art world in a global-turn. This will be performed through an observation of how Greek antiquity was enacted throughout the internationally recognized German exhibition documenta 14: “Learning from Athens” (2017), by expressly engaging the curatorial decisions to host *with* Athens, and the inclusion of artist team Prinz Gholam as models of study. It argues that documenta 14’s “naïve” integrations of Hellenism within their pluralistic frame, signify an enduring privileging of Western cultural and affective positions over their global equivalents – including those of Greece itself.

Keywords

Classics; Neoclassicism; Hellenism; Enlightenment; Western; Identity; Affect; Pluralism; Exhibition; Naïveté

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INTRODUCTION: FOUNDING NAÏVETÉ

This is, of course, a familiar narrative, and like all familiar narratives, it deserves close and careful reading.

–Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2012)

Consider the shared traditions in metaphysical works of Giorgio De Chirico, the abstract-expressionism of Cy Twombly, the White House, or perhaps even a local bank; time-again, within a multitude of varied means, Greek antiquity has been used in Western culture as a source of symbolic leverage. Often, this is done to represent some sort of definition against a contemporary problem or unknown. In general these Hellenisms – or admirations of Greek culture and intellect – demonstrate a desire on the part of the cultural West to position ancient Greece within its purview. Often this means positioning it as a place of origin to which etymological or ideal meaning can be traced. However, the use of antiquities are frequently simplified, mixed-up, conflated, or even inaccurate. This conflation represents an impediment of indistinct familiarity with antiquity that has been deeply embedded within the visual cultural production of the West. One of the most decisive instances of this comes from German art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann's (1717-1768) *History of the Art of Antiquity* of 1764. Written nearly two and half centuries ago, Winckelmann's book became widely accepted as an inaugural text of the discipline of Art history.

History of the Art of Antiquity is known for inspiring many influential scholars of the European Enlightenment to look at ancient Greece anew. As art historian Hugh Honour describes, by establishing a causal relationship between antiquity's matchless

visual form and the nature and milieu of its people, Winckelmann foregrounded its relevance in the contemporary by establishing an ideal to aspire towards. However, its reputation was not constructed entirely on its factuality, but rather its use of poetic, interpretative writing (58); Winckelmann's empirical Hellenism imaged a longing or melancholy directed towards the past, while concurrently thrusting it into the present. His unique style became highly influential – earning the likes of Lessing, Herder, Goethe, Schiller, and Nietzsche, to be only some of the names listed by historian Robert Aldrich as under the “sway of his ideas” (53-55). A bolstered German Hellenism led to an active resurgence and renewal of the Classical form across Europe during the Enlightenment, which historians now refer to as Neoclassicism.

During the Neoclassical movement, Western European writers, artists, and architects alike were producing classically inspired work that exhibited tropes of antiquity's code such as: colonnades, ivy, togas, “faultless” male forms, and more. While on the one hand the Neoclassicists saw their intimate relationship with the distant past as a movement toward an appeal universal to mankind (Honour 29), on the other, their dissemination of it was “naïve” (a portrayal I clarify below) since it conflated the complex histories of Greece, and selectively historicized its antiquities. In reference to Winckelmann, Alex Potts described this conflation of history, form, and idealization as something of an attempt to physically manifest the Enlightenment is ideological “fantasies of ideal oneness” (173) in ancient Greek form. It seems that what was in fact constructed as the universal ideal was, more accurately, an embodiment of the biased, ideological principles of the European Enlightenment. This imagined construction of

Greek antiquity becomes even further complicated by its association with European expansionism, which was spurred in part by its timeliness of its popularity. Thus, in a circuitous manner, Neoclassicism represents both a product of colonial and cultural imperialism, as well as – once absorbed as the popular style of the time and implemented globally – an emblem of it (Irwin 346). It would appear that the use of the code of antiquity, as it is bound to a hegemonic and Hellenist conception of Greece, represents more than an aesthetic gesture. Yet, even amidst a global-turn, and the prevailing pluralistic ideology of the contemporary art world, these gestures persist today.

This became the case in 2017 at the fourteenth iteration of Documenta (what has been often referred to as the paradigm-setting exhibition of contemporary art), when Hellenism became enacted in a few forms.¹ Under the artistic direction of Adam Szymczyk, this German-based, international exhibition made Greece a principal focus when it chose to dually host in Athens, in addition to the customary host city, Kassel. The exhibition was accordingly titled: documenta 14: “Learning from Athens.” While this was presented as a gesture towards global integration, documenta 14’s decision to cast Athens as shared host seemed to be a re-enlivening of a Hellenist symbolization of Greece historically instituted by the West. This particular sentiment was similarly embodied within the multifaceted practice of artist team Prinz Gholam. The practice of Prinz Gholam involves an embodiment of archival material, which is then performed, documented, and displayed alongside said archival referent, as a method of exploring and

¹ Throughout this discussion Documenta will appear both capitalized and not. Any reference with a capital ‘D’ refers to the overarching entity of its institution, whereas any mention without is made in specific reference to documenta 14, and is a reflection of the title written in the manner the exhibition team desired.

re-presenting the resonances of the archive upon the individuals. At documenta 14, Prinz Gholam focused on historic material pertaining to Greek antiquity, with a notable concentration on that not produced by the Greeks themselves. Thus, regardless of certain efforts towards criticality both Prinz Gholam and documenta 14 itself, seem to display an air of willful naïveté of the historic relationship between the West (and more specifically Germany) and Greece. I would contend that any focus on the aesthetic and affective quality of a Western affiliation with Greece and the code of antiquity, at a basic level simply re-imagines Greece's place within the cultural West.

This paper thus examines how continuations of Hellenism function today, specifically in relation to the pluralistic ideologies of the art world in a global turn. This will be considered through an observation of how Hellenism was enacted throughout documenta 14: "Learning from Athens," by expressly engaging the curatorial decisions to host *with* Athens, and the inclusion of artist team Prinz Gholam as models of study. I will come to argue that documenta 14's "naïve" integrations of Hellenism within its pluralistic frame, signify an enduring privileging of Western cultural and affective positions over their global equivalents – including those of Greece itself. My use of the term naïve follows that employed by Roland Barthes in an essay on nineteenth century photographer Wilhelm von Gloeden, wherein he attributed a "naïveté" to von Gloeden's un-ironic conflation of the complex foundations of antiquity's code (195). It is a helpful description because it allows for an element of unknowing or witlessness to be considered in how these overly familiar symbols become internalized and circulate. However, while Barthes does not imply this assessment as a criticism, but rather admiration of von

Gloeden's ability to step freely outside of art (197), I will observe it somewhat inversely, or with more apprehension. In the highly-constructed pluralist frame of contemporary art, the room for naïveté has become rather minute – particularly as it pertains to hegemonic narratives.

I. EMBODYING HELLENISM

i. Exposure Induced Melancholy

The effects of Neoclassical Hellenism enacted throughout the European Enlightenment should be considered in relation to how the West thinks about Greece in the present day. The timeliness of the Hellenic impulse in relation to European expansionism did not only cause the code of antiquity to proliferate widely and rapidly, but also, by some degree, to calcify. Consider the globalization of Neoclassical architecture, which remains evident today, after its initial construction in Western Europe and beyond during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Its presence is widely noticeable in North America as well, with a remarkable example found in the full-scale replica of the Parthenon in Nashville, Tennessee. Nicknamed “The Athens of the South,” it was constructed in 1897 as part of the Tennessee Centennial Exhibition as a symbol of their democratic self-image. This relationship to civic purpose is typical of Neoclassical architecture, as the style has been used on numerous occasions in the construction of buildings representative of state or culture. Thus, they stand to serve as long-term,

symbolic structures of civic identity, which quietly, but perpetually, allow the West an emblematic reflection of an origin.

Due to this symbolic nature however, the widely distributed presence of Neoclassical architecture globally can also be seen to act as a structural manifestation of Western identity and hegemony. Art historian David Irwin describes how, in being visible as far as India, Neoclassical architecture can serve as evidence of “colonial and cultural imperialism” (346) of the time.² As such, the Neoclassical presence becomes particularly notable in Greece itself since this very presence discloses Greece’s own subjugation to the cultural imperialism of the Western Europeans. For example, a major Neoclassical insertion in Greece occurred at the end of long-standing Ottoman rule following the Greek War of Independence in 1832, when Greece underwent what might be observed as its re-antiquation. Following the war there developed a group, largely comprised of Western Europeans, who considered themselves as allies or friends to the Greek political cause. This group is to be distinguished from the more culturally inclined Hellenists, and are referred to as philhellenes (the prefix of “*phil*” meaning a lover or friend). However, just as with the Hellenists, their love for Greece was largely rooted in biased presuppositions. Cultural heritage scholar Elizabeth Cohen explains that with aid of the philhellenes, who believed themselves to be protecting disregarded antiquities (95-96), Greece underwent a “spatial and mental de-Ottomanization” (86). That is, an eradication of the Ottoman presence followed by an active re-institution of a classical focus.

² For more on Neoclassical architectural proliferation in Europe and within its colonies, see Irwin “Washington to Sydney: Classical Triumph” 297-358.

The treatment of Athens presents a clear illustration of this. Even though Athens had been a significant town during the Ottoman Empire, according to Cohen, European accounts presented Athens “as dilapidated and empty” (87), or in some way tarnished:

The travellers’ philhellenic imperial gaze was largely fixed on the benchmark period of the classical era, and this perspective often shaped their perceptions and thus influenced their writings and drawings: they often overlooked other versions of Greece in search of classical originals, or deplored contemporary conditions as a ‘fall from grace’ (86).

This perception is confirmed in an essay about the contemporary relationship between Germany and Greece, where critic and curator Dieter Roelstraete cites Richard Clogg, a historian of modern Greece, as stating:

The choice of Athens as capital, a town dominated by the imposing ruins of the Parthenon and with its associations with the glories of the Periclean age but in the early 1830s little more than a dusty village, symbolized the cultural orientation of the new state towards the classical past.³

Building on this account, Roelstraete contributes: “i.e., *away* from either the Ottoman or Orthodox present and toward a past, once again, that had cast its spell on mildly delusional ‘Western’ imaginations first and foremost.” (A Mighty Forest n.p.).⁴ Cohen further corroborates this particular imagining of Greece, arguing that stakeholder groups within modern Greece had “worked toward identifying, defining, and creating a nationscape capable of endorsing a national and cultural identity that presented an unmediated Helleno-Christianity” (86). In essence, the actions of the philhellenes

³ For Clogg see *A Concise History of Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 49.

⁴ These excerpts come from an Roelstraete wrote for documenta 14 on the Grimm Brothers, while he includes a good amount of history between German and Greek relations, he takes no real stance on the topic, observing it to be a topic for another time.

comprised a physical and narrative re-construction of an origin, which directly appeased what the contemporary ideological desires longed after.

Thus, rather than strictly an originary Classical one, the antiquated Greece of modernity has become, at least in part, one ordained by a Western European (and implicitly German) Neoclassicism. Roelstraete affirms this, stating the great effort taken to “transform the former dusty village of Athens, home to little more than five to six thousand souls at the beginning of the nineteenth century, into a modern metropolis—as it turned out, one of impeccably German classicist design” (n.p.). Informed by an ideological construction, the Western mental landscape of Greece becomes geographically instituted. Of course, this is simply one facet of a complex phenomenon with concurrent treatments and appearances of antiquity appearing in art and writing, which took great effect over how the West positioned itself in relation to Greece. The ubiquitous Classical presence both at home and abroad bred an impression of familiarity, which allowed for its teleological associations to seem natural, authoritative, and realistic.

I would argue that the effect of this process could be measured as a type of familiarity affect, which could be considered through the following image of enchantment, or sense of allure, that is felt by a viewer when an artwork gives the impression that it somehow contains their reflection. This is not to refer to an imaged reflection like that which might be found in a mirror, but instead something internal; a reflection that fosters the sense of in some way being understood. It is the type of understanding which would cause the viewer to attribute to the art an oblique phrase like: “it gets me” because, regardless of its form – written, painted, performed – an indirect,

coded message between object and subject has transpired. I raise the image of self-reflection and understanding in order to present how a subject's degree of familiarity has an affective consequence over how the content is perceived. In essence, to inquire upon the relationship between "seeing" oneself in object or symbols, and whether this increases the inclination to appreciate it – or even call it beautiful. It appears that the simple answer is that it does.

In psychology, this experience has become referred to as the mere-exposure effect, or by others as the familiarity-affective link. Philosopher of psychology and aesthetics, Bence Nanay, has written on how the mere-exposure effect can function in relation to art and the idea of a canon. He argues that even more than just familiarity with a specific object, mere habituation with a typified formal property (*e.g.* impressionism, composition, linear style) can cause a person to develop an aesthetic preference to objects which share a quality in its likeness. Towards this end, Nanay presents the earlier findings of psychologist James Cutting, which he summarizes to claim: "what maintains the 'canons' of our artworld is not the quality of the artworks, but the fact that we are exposed to those artworks that are part of the canon, making us like them more, which reinforces their place in the canon" (62). Nanay agrees with Cutting, but takes the argument further, outside of strictly canonical art, to apply it within a broader context of formal or visual trends. Ultimately, this indicates how trends of collective preference, directed toward certain styles or forms, stand not as a product of any definite aesthetic realism (any quantifiable fact of aesthetic value), but instead as the result of a group's

perpetual exposure to those forms. At risk of a generalization, it is reasonable to suggest that familiarity breeds a form of positive affect.

This is similar to what interdisciplinary scholar Sara Ahmed describes as the “sticky” quality of affect. Ahmed defines this stickiness as a result of the pattern of use that objects accrue in their relation to individuals or collectives. Certain objects accrue a positive value as a result of their long-term promise for happiness, which she states can manifest in the form of sense of value, practice, and styles. She believes that if an object is perpetually presented as a source of happiness, it can develop an affective quality of being good in a manner that sticks (Happy Objects 41). In essence, since something has already become a pattern, inherent to its familiarity is its promise of longevity – *of its endurance*. Elsewhere, Ahmed clarifies that understanding “happiness,” or the role of emotions in society in general, is crucial since it “allows us to address the question of how subjects become *invested* in particular structures.” That emotions, through their ability to create social forms (and norms), generate the basis for “a form of cultural politics or world making,” (The Cultural Politics of Emotion 12). Thus, for the West, Hellenism represents how Greek antiquity embodied a familiarity, that became emotionally affixed to social norms. The continued repetition of this style and practice saw the further circulation of its idealized absence as well.

The norm-producing power of emotions suits the engagement and admiration of art and culture particularly well, even amidst its historicization. Art historian Michael Ann Holly argues this type of positioning towards a present absence to be what differentiates art’s historiography from that of the other humanities – calling

“melancholy” a disciplinary essential. Holly writes about her understanding of melancholy as expressing not only the “loss and resulting sadness” of an artwork’s original milieu, but also that melancholy can be creatively empowering, concluding: “The most poetic of writers must always labor to keep the work of art alive” (xxi). This pertains to the object-hood of something (typically aesthetic) remnant from another time, and how that feeling of longing or loss is mitigated in the present. Since Hellenism inherently represents an affected desire to imitate or enliven something of the past, its pervasion demonstrates Greek antiquity as an object of popularized melancholy, which poetic mediums have allowed to continue living.

Accordingly, the image of Greece today becomes a complicated one. The pervasive, and thus familiar, cultural presence of Greek antiquity in the West has influenced its ostensible authority as well as its embodiment. Over time, this has allowed Greece to appear both perceptually and geographically as an emblem of origin and identity; one that has been greatly idealized, and observed of almost as a base to which the West may return to understand or re-write the contemporary. However, this Hellenic or melancholic positioning towards Greece – inherently affected and embodied – reflects a history of cultural imperialism that developed out of a selective, ideological nature and an eradication of histories not deemed agreeable to this image. Due to the historic role of Hellenism within the cultural politics of the West – one deeply complicit in a hegemonic narrative of a world-making – the continuation of this affected treatment of Greece into the present-day must be carefully considered.

II. IDENTITY AND HEGEMONY IN THE GLOBAL-TURN

i. Selective Melancholy: documenta 14: *Learning from Athens*

The contradictory nature of antiquity in contemporary art requires an understanding of the complex and sometimes competing ideologies of the art world today in a global-turn. Easy access to travel and the internet has meant that events taking place globally comprise a larger portion of our lives than ever before. This shift toward itinerancy has also fostered a rise of site-specific art practices and exhibitions. However, this has not been without consequences upon the individuals involved. Contemporary art historian Miwon Kwon uses site-specific practices to explore the associated effects of such constant mobility. Starting with the city, she argues that increased contact has resulted in the increasing homogeneity of cities, which, due to the risk of uniformity, has spurred a competitive production of difference between them. In other words, in order to set themselves apart from increasing assimilation, each city places focus on attaining the best (or most unique), objects, ideas, people, or projects.

This process engenders a key mechanism of how the art world thrives today, and contributes towards the pluralist ideology that accompanies the global turn. On one hand, there are definite positive effects of such a shift, such as the increased representation, and knowledge of, multiplicitous subjectivities. However, as Kwon cautions, this production of difference also reveals an activity fundamental to the continuous expansion of capitalism. Essentially, the promotion of places in the “competitive restructuring of the global economic hierarchy” (54). The complicated nature of engaging art in the process of this restructuring is perhaps best understood through a comment by poet and scholar

Michael Davidson on poetics. Davidson suggests how their practice has become increasingly “‘ill defined,’ because it is the nature of globalized culture to hide the machinery that produces its effects” (2). The unique objects, ideas, people, or projects of art in a global turn thus could be considered to act as a sort of veil that discretely enfold an economic objective. Arguably, this process represents what could be observed as the aestheticization, or as the poetics, of capitalism.

In addition to this Kwon continues that the contiguous issue to this system is the great physical and psychical demand this places on the “nomadic” individual. She adds that continuous travel or global accessibility, beyond the basic associated exhaustion, can supply the belief that one always remains, in one sense or the other, “out of place” (159-160). As such, physical distances produce and encourage disjuncture in identity formation as a result of how it effects a person’s sense of situatedness. To elaborate on this I would turn to Kwon once more for her well-worded explication of the hidden properties and consequences animated by contemporary art’s ideological model of pluralism:

The advocacy of the continuous mobilization of self- and place identities as *discursive fictions*, as polymorphous critical plays on fixed generalities and stereotypes, in the end may be a delusional alibi for short attention spans, reinforcing the ideology of the new—a temporary antidote for the anxiety of boredom. It is perhaps too soon and frightening to acknowledge, but the paradigm of nomadic selves and sites may be a glamorization of the trickster ethos that is in fact *a reprise of the ideology of ‘freedom of choice’—the choice to forget, the choice to reinvent, the choice to fictionalize, the choice to ‘belong’ anywhere, everywhere, nowhere* (165). [Emphasis added]

Though a freedom to forget, or reinvent, fictionalize, or even belong anywhere has its own allure, this freedom does not belong equally to everyone. There is of course a

natural relationship between power (*i.e.* wealth, nationality, race) and the basic ability to deploy multiple, fluid identities *via* mobility (Kwon 165). As such, the disjuncture of identity formation raises corresponding issues with respect to Western subjectivities, or even more generally, those in positions of power. This applies most specifically within the avenue presented to forget, as it opens the potential for the disavowal of certain power relations. Discerning this can be extremely difficult in part due to the poetics embedded within the nature of art's presentation and its predetermined desire for affective engagement.

These issues of identity function in conjunction with parallel concerns that have formed around the apparent lessening of criticism. Speaking to the difficulties of criticality faced in the contemporary art world in the past decade or so, and particularly concerning identity, contemporary art historian Wes Hill proposes it to be symptom of what he calls the "folkloric" character of contemporary art within a "post-critical" condition. Hill believes this condition to have arisen in the twenty-first century amongst art writers and historians, and ultimately curators, who are unsure about how to navigate the "decentralized, heterogeneous, pluralistic and multiplicitous" nature of global contemporary art (4). He maintains this condition as folkloric since it represents not the "desire to eliminate critical perspectives," but instead the acknowledgement that each cultural practice "ha[s] the potential to be assessed aesthetically as being of cultural value" (173), which means objects of variable belief systems respond to their respective and different claims to authority. While the designation of folkloric becomes something of a misnomer, Hill does well to present how the largely Western-oriented critical

theories of aesthetics simply do not apply everywhere. However, it leads him to the issue of how one might “advocate for value without undermining such pluralistic and inclusive ideals” (165). Similarly, I wonder how can certain fictionalizations of identity be mediated without undermining similar ideals?

The dependent perspectives of Kwon and Hill offer an ideological basis that shepherds much of the call-and-response of art making, exhibiting, and writing today. With the many variables at play, conflicts of identity, itinerancy, and criticality pose difficult and diverse challenges to pluralist inclusivity that can hardly be resolved by any single answer. However, at the most recent Documenta the attempt appears to have been made. Moreover, observing these initiatives on the part Documenta is significant since it has been regularly referred to as the paradigm-setting exhibition of contemporary art. In 2017, in its fourteenth iteration, Documenta established numerous projects, platforms, and designs in an effort to meet the byzantine challenges defined by the decentralized, heterogeneous, pluralistic, and multiplicitous nature of contemporary art. documenta 14 was complex to the degree that it considered, at a minimum, different locational, racial, economic, social, and physical access points.⁵ An important example of such efforts can be recognized through the presence of multiple indigenous perspectives from globally disparate positions. A notable illustration of this was found in the presentation of Kwakwaka'wakw artist Beau Dick, whose work filled the entryway of documenta Halle

⁵ For more on the diversity in programming see Public Exhibition, Programs, Education, Radio, TV, and Publications sections at “documenta 14.”

in Kassel (Figure 1).⁶ However, other curatorial decisions of documenta 14 seem to disenchant its activations of the itinerant, multiplicitous global space.

While it is not an assessment of their respective cultural or aesthetic value, an important method for critically engaging the numerous perspectives can be found in weighing them against exhibit

as a whole. This scope allows for a critical value judgement as to whether these inclusive projects and displays can be considered actionable, rather than aesthetic. In other terms,



Figure 1: Beau Dick, installation view of select masks from series *Undersea Kingdom* 2016-17, documenta Halle, Kassel, documenta 14, photo: Roman März. Courtesy of documenta 14.

whether they really animate a decentralization or just act in

service toward the documenta 14's overall success. Similar to Kwon's analysis of localized production of difference, the purpose of taking this step back is to inquire who these activations are being performed for. In the case of documenta 14, the clearest answer might be defined through their decision to enact two separate locations as hosts for the first time ever.⁷ The two-part, single exhibition was titled "Learning from Athens," which foremost calls to question: why Athens?

⁶ documenta 14 curator Candice Hopkins of Canada, a member of Carcross Tagish First Nation, on working with Beau Dick in relation to documenta (written in memoriam after his passing), see Hopkins.

⁷ While others have experimented with off-site events, the core has previously remained in Kassel. As example: DOCUMENTA(13) under artistic director Carolyn Christov-

Since its 1955 inception, Documenta has been rooted in Kassel, Germany, and has come to represent a principal entity of the city's identity. The original Documenta was organized by German artist and curator Arnold Bode somewhat in response to World War II. Acting as a center of German airplane and tank production during the war, Kassel experienced widespread destruction by Allied forces, and out of this moment, amidst its reconstruction, Bode's Documenta arose. As a consequence, this establishes and defines a complex identity for Documenta and Kassel. In a lecture on postwar art, artist Ian Wallace described this as a German act of redemption and reintegration – a closing of a wound.⁸ Naturally Bode's efforts could never have wholly redeemed Germany's shame from WWII, but Wallace believes that this historic and temporal positioning of this effort inspired a different effect: "Occurring mid-year, mid-decade, mid-century, [the first Documenta] positioned itself as a fulcrum between the past and the future. It consciously historicized contemporary art in the process of its development and, in doing so, influenced all such exhibitions since" (65). More than sixty years later, with documenta 14, the orientation towards encapsulating and historicizing contemporary art appears to remain. In accordance with the global-turn, the expansion to Athens marks its latest endeavour.

Split between Kassel and Athens the "single" event was referred to by the artistic director, Adam Szymczyk, of Poland, as both "a play in two acts," and a "divided self"

Bakargiev in 2012, held an off-site exhibitions in Kabul, Afghanistan; an exchange program with Alexandria and Kairo, Egypt; and a "retreat" in Banff, Canada, while maintaining Kassel as the host.

⁸ For more on the urgency of the political and cultural climate encircling the first documenta in 1955, see Wallace.

(21). Taking what he termed as a “decidedly anti-identitarian stance,” documenta 14 provided a historicized view of contemporary art appears to form, as well as, possibly, a sustained endeavour at redemption (21). In light of this, it is increasingly important to return to the question, why Athens? A basic “About” statement on a widely-distributed exhibition brochure reveals this decision concerned more than strictly objective reasons:

The physical and metaphorical distance between Kassel and Athens fundamentally alters the process of the project’s making and the way visitors experience documenta 14 – bringing into play feelings of loss and longing while redefining their understanding of what such an exhibition can be (“About” n.p.).

The statement does not clearly define what it means by metaphorical distance, nor what exactly what is lost, or to be longed after, but this language embeds a particular quality of sentimentality into the decision. At least in part, this sentimental quality appears as a desire to aestheticize the nature of the relationship between the two cities, and to point out the inherent melancholy present in their disjuncture.

While it does not overtly explicate why Athens, it seems to appeal towards a (phil)Hellenist symbolization of this city, situating Athens as an epicenter of originary meanings eternally lost and reclaimed. Nevertheless, the same brochure also characterized the decision to host with Athens in a number of ways that do reflect the decentralized multiplicity expected of a present-day contemporary art exhibition, stating:

[Athens and Kassel’s] different locations and divergent historical, socio-economic, and cultural backgrounds inspire and influence the individual works of art. documenta 14 seeks to encompass a multitude of voices in, between, and beyond the two cities in which it is situated, reaching outside the European context from the vantage point of the Mediterranean metropolis of Athens, where Africa, the Middle East, and Asia come face to face (“About” n.p.).

Though these divergent geographical, historical, socio-economical, and cultural factors may have provided documenta 14 with good reason for selecting Athens, however it remains unclear who this ultimately benefits. In an essay Szymczyk wrote for the documenta 14 Reader, he further confuses this when he observes Athens as a place where:

we might begin to learn how to see the world again in an unprejudiced way, unlearning and abandoning the predominant cultural conditioning that, silently or explicitly, presupposed the supremacy of the West, its institutions and culture, over the ‘barbarian’ and supposedly untrustworthy, unable, unenlightened, ever-to-be-subjected ‘rest’ (27).

While it is not made explicit who defines “we” in that paradigm, or what exactly is implied by “again,” Szymczyk does seem to recognize the nuanced power structure of a continued hegemony. However, within the same text he works towards disavowing Documenta’s continued situation as such.

Szymczyk states his aim with documenta was to “blur accountable, predictable workings of the enterprise of a documenta exhibition, [or] of any exhibition” (39). According to Szymczyk the enterprise referred to as Documenta is more accurately to be seen as “[a]n elusive and haunting apparition, [as] a phantom of sorts that is never to be precisely located, existing in and between documenta’s thirteen consecutive iterations” (23); More explicitly he concludes, “documenta does not exist in the strong sense of the word” (40). In accordance with his pluralist aim, contemporary Athens offers “a place located forever between cultures, connecting three continents and holding multitudes, [remaining] the nexus of challenges and transformations that the entire continent is now

experiencing” (27). However, regardless of any desires toward the contrary, it cannot be disregarded that Documenta has always been, and remains, a German enterprise.

These constructions of language on the part of the artistic director appear to be an attempt to absolve Documenta’s very *German-ness*, its innately Western rooted gaze. It is reminiscent of Kwon’s aforementioned “ideology of ‘freedom of choice,’” which she has articulated as “the choice to forget, the choice to reinvent, the choice to fictionalize, the choice to ‘belong’ anywhere, everywhere, nowhere” (165). To this end, as a place to belong for the “non-existent” documenta, Szymczyk chose Athens. His method of self-positioning through this oblique language is problematic as it not only reflects the power to wield such fictionalizations, but tangentially makes determining the locus of this power difficult. Therefore, there are demonstrable potential layers to answering the question of *why Athens*, which seem to at once pertain to its affective symbolism, a Western expectation of belonging, as well as its actual geographic and cultural make-up.

In Szymczyk’s failure to directly account for the historic convergence between Germany and Greece, the choice could then be observed as another, albeit updated, Hellenic absorption of, or philhellenic implementation in Greece. A type of cultural intervention once again determined by what the West has selectively deemed culturally relevant. For, even if many facets of documenta 14 offered both Kassel and Athens mutual benefit, all progress ultimately becomes attributed to Germany, perhaps towards their own production of difference.⁹ One of documenta 14’s most dominant issues lay within the expressed desire to remain both relevant and attractive as an institution through

⁹ For information on numbers of attendance in both Kassel and Athens, see “newsletter.”

disavowal of being one. Documenta's move towards non-existence, bridging itself with Athens, appears an attempt to aestheticize its relationship to power in order to integrate globally with more ease.

The selection of Athens is not what is most problematic, but rather the duality of how it was made amenable to the Western audience. In this paradigm, Athens, and more broadly Greece and its symbolization, remains as something the West *feels* complicit within – but the focus is shifted. By epitomizing the contemporary political and geographic milieu of Athens as an idealized model of progressive pluralism, documenta 14 allowed its attendant Western audience to *feel* complicit in it. Thus, the model of pluralism presented by documenta 14 could be observed to privilege the affect of the Western audience and participants over their global equivalents. This is only further substantiated through some of the artists that documenta elected to feature. A primary illustration of this is found in the artist team Prinz Gholam, who, in the practice of “naïvely” re-enacting the embodied nature of the Hellenism in the West, contribute to its perpetual revival.

ii. Archetypal Subjectivity: Prinz Gholam at documenta 14

Similar to the trends presented by documenta 14 the work of Prinz Gholam seems intentionally obfuscating. Nominally simple in appearance their work does not reflect its measured preparation, which involves a process of embodying references from sourced archival imagery so that it can be performed, documented, and displayed. Ostensibly in

response to the frame of Athens the artist's used various devices, such as their archive and performance locations, to engage a theme of Greek antiquity. However, they observed a notable concentration on that which was produced not by the Greeks themselves. In fact, each reference they made to antiquity was complicit in its Hellenistic symbolization. On the surface this presents itself as a viable method for critiquing the affective mechanisms of antiquity's relationship to hegemony. But as I have attempted to illustrate with documenta more generally, Prinz Gholam seem to encode any criticality within the heightened presentation of their affected disposition toward Greece. By focusing on the aesthetic qualities of their presentation their practice perpetuates hegemonic Hellenist trends, and demonstrates how they are not only embodied through familiarity, but also decided, learned, and *taught*.

Artist team Prinz Gholam is composed of the couple Wolfgang Prinz and Michel Gholam, from Germany and Lebanon respectively. Since the discussion thus far has focused upon Western subjectivity, it is crucial to address that one counterpart of the duo, Michel Gholam, is of Middle Eastern descent. The artists have stated that this difference is a large part of what makes it possible for them to work together, as it allows them to avoid being representative of a single country or culture. However, the artists, who met in 1993 and have worked together since 2001, also present themselves as symbiotic, as if they act in unison (The Politization of Anatomy 316). While I do not hope to critique how they engage with their differences and similarities, I also believe their difference of origin does not do enough to resolve the specific nature of their elected subject matter. I would posit that it does not exclude the artist duo from being implicated in hegemonic

cultural politics associated with the type of “world-making” defined by Ahmed. This will be demonstrated through the artist’s choice to perform the melancholic effects Hellenism had over Western culture. By aestheticizing Hellenization as their subject, I would argue they accordingly play upon an embodied affect directed toward it. Therefore, regardless of whether they are not merely representative of a single country or culture, the elected subject matter of their practice remains affixed to Western culture nonetheless.

Performance could be argued as the essence of Prinz Gholam’s practice, though I would argue it to be more composite than that. More accurately, it consists of four cohesive stages, namely: archive and embodiment, performance, documentation, and display. Following Philip Auslander’s arguments for the inseparability of documentation and performance, I would underscore the unity of all stages of their practice. Auslander assumes performance documents to be analogous to the performance itself, as opposed to a declaration of its occurrence (5). For Prinz Gholam, I would not only attribute the documentation as inseparable from their performance, but the archival process as well. In this first stage of archive and embodiment the artists select figurative images, paintings, or drawings as inspiration from an art institution or book, and then study the figures and their particular arrangements, which they then internalize and embody. Following this, the artists select an appropriate location for the performance.¹⁰ After the performance itself, its documentation is then presented in a gallery setting alongside the primary archival references. As such, searching the archive not only offers the substance to which

¹⁰ For documenta 14 they had a vast number of choices but of course, if they are performing within a gallery, as they often have in the past, this element of location is likely more pre-determined.

their bodies become vehicles, but it initiates the act of the embodiment, which they then perform.

The nature of their performance has been best compared to a tableau vivant, living figures maintaining a fixed posture of a re-enactment (Lübbke-Tidow 55). In a publicly-accessible environment, the sometimes-indistinguishable Wolfgang Prinz and Michel Gholam gesture lethargically through a series of poses, often holding them at length once found. However, unlike a tableau vivant Prinz Gholam revitalize the immobile pose and shift inertly into another. In a sense, it is like watching a series of still frames. For the sake of an example, consider that the archival references they had selected for their performance were Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (1485) and Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* (1512). You might observe Prinz, in the role of Venus, standing listlessly in a contrapposto posture with one arm raised to his chest, while Gholam, taking the role of Adam, could be found in a reclined pose on the ground with his left arm outstretched, resting on his bent knee. Each would hold their pose for a seemingly indeterminate amount of time, until they slowly transition into a new one. The movements of the two actors do not necessarily occur in unison, nor do their bodies need to be in direct proximity with one another. With that said, it is typical for their gestures to eventually bring them together, so that their bodies are either in contact or mirroring one another.

Their transitory movement appear almost submissive to some imperceptible external force, effectively revealing their desire to portray, or imitate, an embodiment – a union of dissimilar figurations that documenta 14 repeatedly referred to as “corporeal constellations,” further stating how the artists used their bodies to perform a “corporeal

image repertory” (“d14: Prinz Gholam” n.p.). I observed the signature languid pace of their movements to achieve the feeling of an exorcized fragility, what I would describe as a constructed effort towards replicating a tenuous and embodied emotion. In other words, it indicates a performance of their affect – how they have internalized or been impacted by something. In addition to the movement, Prinz Gholam’s unremarkable street-clothes similarly divulge their difference from the archetypal high-ornamentation of a tableau vivant. As their clothing is simple and without any noticeable branding, the artists could seamlessly reintegrate into the daily activities around them upon completion. The careful documentation then substantiates the live performance by allowing its aesthetic contribution to be added to the continuum from which they derive their inspiration. It is circuitous and perplexing, rather laconic and unexplained, which, as is likely the point, makes it difficult for the spectator to garner any exact meaning.

While there were two distinct iterations of Prinz Gholam’s work between the Athens and Kassel exhibitions of documenta 14, this discussion will revolve around two independent displays located in documenta Halle of Kassel.¹¹ However, though grounded in Kassel, the displays selected within documenta Halle include documentation from performances executed in Athens.¹² The two separate but interrelating displays in documenta Halle of Kassel aid to further illustrate this. Each display was placed

¹¹ Documenta Halle serves as a hub for documenta exhibiting as well as short-term exhibitions in the interim.

¹² In Kassel, Prinz Gholam also had an exhibition featured in the Museum für Sepulkralkultur, a museum dedicated to the culture of death, which I have opted to avoid including both for the sake of repetition, and because the performances used in this exhibition were filmed in Kassel – though still utilizing references to Greek antiquity for their figural inspiration.

independent from one-another and featured one video alongside its respective archival reference material as it has been organized by the artists. The presentation of Prinz Gholam's work was in no way ornate or particularly eye-catching. Placed in small rooms on their own, each display comprised a moderately-sized wall-mounted TV monitor, a bench for viewing, and an adjacent arrangement of archival objects (Figure 2). A somewhat active engagement was required on the part of the viewer in order to garner a basic understanding of the work's intent. The modestly sized monitors and the slow pace of the performance necessitated a long, paused look to even see a completed gesture or movement. The proximity established by the otherwise empty room placed the video and archives in conversation with one another, which was significant as they were otherwise difficult to connect.

Due to the relationship established with Greece by documenta 14, all of Prinz Gholam's revolved around Greek antiquity – even if only loosely. Accordingly, the



Figure 2: Prinz Gholam, *My Sweet Country (Olympieion)* (2017), Digital video, color, sound, 35 min., installation view, documenta Halle, Kassel, documenta 14, photo: Mathias Völzke. Courtesy of documenta 14.

inclusion of Prinz Gholam was curious in relation to the overall curation of documenta 14 since their displays were enfolded within a wide-ranging array of non-Eurocentric artworks and narratives. For example, to arrive at either of these displays the trajectory curated for the

visitor first passed through a display of the masks of Beau Dick. Beyond this, the path to Prinz Gholam's *My Sweet Country (Olympieion)* (2017) had the visitor move past works such as: the installation of archival materials related to Malian musician Ali Farka Touré by Igo Diarra and La Medina (2014/2017); the large fiberglass and wooden boat remains of *Fluchtzieleuropahavarieschallkörper* (2017), which Guillermo Galindo uses as instrument to perform "odes for border crossers" as a comment on migration; or the sprawling embroidered work of Britta Marakatt-Labba, *Historja* (2003-07), which guides its viewer through Sámi epistemology and storytelling.¹³ As each of these works were an activation of the itinerant, multiplicitous global space that Szymczyk's project of documenta vied to be, the encounter with Prinz Gholam at the culmination this path was quite distinctive in relation. The pluralistic advocacy of documenta 14 was decisively in contrast to the simple presentation of Prinz Gholam's Hellenic content found at the end of this path.

My Sweet Country (Olympieion) (2017) was the first work of Prinz Gholam that I encountered. This work was conceived for documenta 14, and was performed during its first phase in Athens at the Temple of Olympian Zeus throughout a series of five live performances. What is observed throughout the thirty-five minute video documentation on display in Kassel, is a performance by the artists in front of the columns of the Temple of Olympian Zeus, some of which are collapsed in ruin (Figure 3). As the camera pans, the Acropolis becomes visible in the background as well, explicitly denoting their locale by revealing a glimpse of the Parthenon. Although some hints of modern infrastructure

¹³ For more on artists work in documenta Halle, see "documenta Halle."

litter the frame, the focus of built landscape is manifestly that of ancient Greece. However, that's not entirely true as the Temple of Olympian Zeus demonstrates its own early Hellenist history, as it represents most obviously through its Corinthian columns its Greco-Roman origins. The temple was first planned at the beginning of ancient Greece's Classical era in 515 BCE but, as documenta's site-description explains, the construction was "stalled" for over six centuries until the command of Roman emperor Hadrian ("Temple of Olympian Zeus" n.p.). Some of the earliest Hellenist inclinations are thus present in the site itself, evident through its dedication to the Greek god Zeus, but ultimately it was a construction for the purpose of reinforcing Roman identity. Prinz Gholam insert themselves into this continually resurgent narrative, and re-present it.

Though set in another location, the second work, *Speaking of Pictures (Kallimarmaro)* (2017), contains ostensibly similar content to *My Sweet Country*. This thirty-seven minute video shows a performance staged in the Panathenaic Stadium, also called Kallimarmaro, of Athens. Daily activities such as people casually walking by transpires around the performers, yet as with *My Sweet Country* no visible audience is featured. At all times throughout the video the tiered rings of the Kallimarmaro remain visible in the distance



Figure 3: Prinz Gholam, *My Sweet Country (Olympieion)* (2017), Digital video, color, sound, 35 min., installation view, documenta Halle, Kassel, documenta 14, photo: Kate Kolberg

behind them, and this milieu makes evident an effect present in both videos. If observed at length or caught at the correct intervals an after-effect on the video fills the screen solid black, masking the image except for an arc, which acts almost like a window through which their performance can still be observed (Figure 4). In relation to *My Sweet Country* on its own, this effect is unclear but with the rings of Kallimarmaro it becomes unmistakable that the semi-circular shape mirrors those of the stadium. Therefore, in addition to their embodied movements and the placement, the documentation itself layers another device of meaning. As a familiar trope of antiquity, it would appear that the purpose of this window is to encourage the symbolization of the tiered stadium seating – of the locale.



Figure 4: Prinz Gholam, *Speaking of Pictures (Kallimarmaro)* (2017), Digital video, color, sound, 37 min., installation view, documenta Halle, Kassel, documenta 14, photo: Kate Kolberg

In an interview with a documenta 14 curator Pierre Bal-Blanc for *Mousse Magazine*, Wolfgang Prinz confirms this sentiment when he directly states that they “saw the ancient ruins and the stadium appear inevitably as symbols of the identity of a

country.” However, he tangentially implicates their own identity into the stadium, and demonstrates knowledge of the cultural imperialism related to its past:

Our pursued continuity with the ancient past was evident when we were in direct bodily contact with a monument. Especially seeing the kids, who were brought there in order to experience this historical stadium (which is a nineteenth-century classicist reconstruction of an ancient structure), to cultivate their national identity (316).

This complicated statement presents the stadium both as part of a localized contemporary Greek identity, as well as part of a broader, more complex cultural continuity. Prinz Gholam’s attempts to embody Greek antiquity is demonstrative of antiquity’s distributed “descendents” and the melancholic relationship taken to this perceptual and geographic place.

The already complex and heterological nature of this dislocated cultural continuity becomes further emphasized upon examination of the archival reference material selected to be embodied for the performance itself. Each video offered its own set of objects, and each of these



Figure 5: Prinz Gholam, *My Sweet Country (Olympieion)* (2017), Display arranged by the artists. Two etchings: Alphonse Lamotte, *Entrée des Croisés à Constantinople* after Eugène Delacroix (1889, Réunion des musées nationaux), and Georges Rouault, *Mon doux pays, où êtes vous?* (1927, Fondation Georges Rouault, Paris), installation view, documenta Halle, Kassel, documenta 14, photo: Kate Kolberg.

objects were presented as artworks in their own right. For *My Sweet Country* two etchings were situated on the wall opposite the video: Alphonse Lamotte’s, *Entrée des Croisés à Constantinople* after Eugène Delacroix (1889), and Georges Rouault’s *Mon*

doux pays, où êtes vous? (1927) (Figure 5). Rather directly, the artists employ a contraction of Rouault's title "mon doux pays" (meaning "my sweet country") to offer their video its own. The use of Delacroix was more obscure, but a prolonged viewing of the video could allow the viewer to connect the kneeling, hunched over pose taken by Wolfgang Prinz to mirror that seen to the right of Lamotte's reproductive print after Delacroix.

The connection of either reference within the video work was rather ill-defined, particularly for any spectator who does not complete any additional inquiry. For example, the dissimilar environment of Constantinople featured in the Lamotte print, to that of the Temple of Zeus in their performance contribute to the challenge of discerning the relationship between the archive and the performance itself. However, in an interview external to documenta Prinz Gholam overtly state the role of Constantinople was to be performed by Athens, noting that the columns in the background of the print were to be replaced by those featured of the ancient ruins (The Politization of Anatomy 316). Thus, the artists encourage the ruins to act as a type of moderator for the performance – a symbol that absorbs the multiple languages. On the surface, the title, "*My*" *Sweet Country*, would seem to imply their belonging or ownership of this space. Similarly, their gestures seem to express an inarticulate longing that assumes the ancient Greek temple to be the "object" of that regard.

With *Speaking of Pictures* the presented archival objects were more overt in their relationship to antiquity. They were composed of a series of black-and-white photographs taken by Turkish photographer Nelly featuring nude subjects set atop the

acropolis, alongside a spread from a 1947 *Life* magazine. The organization of the archival documents appeared relatively adventitious, insofar as they were presented in a loose and unbalanced manner, yet the table-top museum vitrine indicated this reading as likely false (Figure 6). The presentation ordained by Prinz Gholam was comparable to the method that German art historian and cultural theorist Aby Warburg employed to create his *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1924-29). For this project, Warburg cut out images from their diverse, original contexts and pinned them somewhat untidily onto large black boards. The images were organized into groups based primarily on their visual content, rather than the dominant method at the time, which was by their geographic or cultural origins.¹⁴ This type of organization is relevant as it relies on a certain poetics of



Figure 6: Prinz Gholam, *Speaking of Pictures (Kallimarmaro)* (2017), Display arranged by the artists: Eight photographs by Nelly's (1923–30, Benaki Museum Photographic Archives); *Life* magazine (July 14, 1947); Yannis Tsarouchis, *The Fan, Spring and Eros* (n. d., Yannis Tsarouchis Foundation), gouache on paper. Installation view, documenta Halle, Kassel, documenta 14, photo: Kate Kolberg

interpretation; a system of organization that anticipates the observer will not only connect the similarities between images, but also invoke a meaning from this latent association.

This layering makes their work inherently difficult to read beyond its aesthetics. In fact, though there is little written on Prinz Gholam, the critical potential of their practice

¹⁴ For more on Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* see, Michaud 28-32.

has stumped their critics before. In an article for Camera Austria Maren Lübcke-Tidow tries to offer Prinz Gholam a relationship to the “political” position of Appropriation art. As we can see expressed in the same Mousse interview, Prinz Gholam seem to encourage this type of reading:

Appropriating and embodying already-existing works of art in a very precise manner allows us to see our dispositions and work as inextricable from our identity and the conceptions we unconsciously internalized through education. It is a kind of exorcism, a way to liberate oneself from these almost primordial constraints (314).

Nonetheless, Lübcke-Tidow ultimately concludes that, unlike disenchantment of the original provided by Appropriation art, Prinz Gholam’s attempt to issue a revival emphatically affirms the utopian ideals of the paintings. While I would agree with this initial conclusion, Lübcke-Tidow looks to a different means for defining their critical potential (66). She comes to determine that perhaps the critical potential of Prinz Gholam to exist within their “gender difference,” which is an inference I must subject to question.

Lübcke-Tidow views the gender difference to exist in the artists’ method of superimposing of their non-heteronormative relationship upon the heteronormativity of the original images acts as a negation of a social norm. Lübcke-Tidow believes that by upsetting this supposed “traditional principle of identification,” that an “anarchy of genres and their traditional themes and interpretations” (56) thus appear in the reading of Prinz Gholam’s work. In relation to documenta 14, Prinz Gholam essentially reiterate this belief, stating: “we always have the feeling that we ‘neutralize’ the gender roles in the figure constellations” (314). So while I would agree with Lübcke-Tidow that their work affirms a sort of utopian ideal, I disagree that there is any critical potential to be found in

their “gender difference.” By contrast, I would argue that their “gender difference,” as non-heteronormative couple is by no means overtly stated enough in their actual performances to serve as an edifying disruption. Similarly, I would refute Prinz Gholam’s concept of “neutralizing” gender roles, as two cis-gendered gay males this seems dismissive a multitude of underrepresented gender identities.

Since their gender difference does not serve as an edifying disruption, I will attempt Lübbke-Tidow’s inquiry into their critical potential once more. So far, what has been presented are the multiple interconnected layers of Prinz Gholam’s practice, and though these are rife with potential meaning their exhibition hardly resolves the meaning of this work – particularly in relation to documenta 14. One potential approach to finding resolve is presented through a closer look at the *Life* magazine that was featured as part of the *Speaking of Pictures* archive. The magazine lay open to an article that spoke of Nelly’s photographic practice, and how it apparently functioned to repudiate the Nazi claim that contemporary Greeks were “hybrids” while Germany was “true successor of Greek greatness.” With the insertion of this contentious article Prinz Gholam enclose a commentary that goes beyond the re-enactment of the archive. It establishes a certain critical and *knowing* (hence, not naïve) perspective of the artists in their construction of visual and contextual heterologies between antiquity, art historical discourse, and the contemporary. Yet, even with the inclusion of critical commentary like that within the *Life* magazine, on the surface, the affective relationship to the forms of Greek antiquity is nonetheless presented as the focus. In other words, what could potentially be read as their resistances to hegemonic narratives is masked by the aesthetics of their presentation.

As a consequence, the inclusion of Prinz Gholam in documenta 14 would seem to function against its suggested pluralistic frame. What these knowing, critical hints disclose is that Prinz Gholam's practice is not naïve of its complex, historic continuity, and its relationship to narrative. In fact, Prinz Gholam articulate an awe towards naïveté seemingly inspired by that of Barthes which I presented at the outset. Alongside excerpts from Barthes's essay on von Gloeden, they name naïveté in a list of things they hope to engender through their practice, which involves: "mixture, confusion of genres, inevitable oddity, ambiguity in meaning, off-ness, weirdness, un-fitting, unlikeliness, naïveté (if possible), provoking discontinuity and a new image, a lost continuity" (The Politization of Anatomy 314). However, while they seem to infer its ability to provoke discontinuity, I believe their work achieves the opposite. In their approbation of naïveté, they, somewhat paradoxically, pre-meditatively construct an attempt to feign it.

If there is any suggested criticism of antiquity's familiarity affect or its melancholic position in the West, they render it mute by encapsulating the unknowing, and presenting themselves as caught up in the illusion. As such the artists portray themselves as cognizant of its affective powers born of its familiarity, and of how this affect contributed to the West's Hellenist molding of Greece. In their gestural and symbolic embodiment of the Hellenism, Prinz Gholam could be considered to present an active attempt to imitate and aestheticize the processes of hegemonic cultural narrative production. As they transform themselves into an expressive vehicle for Greek antiquity's enduring presence, they encourage the sticky, melancholic nature of Hellenism by further beautifying and obscuring it. However, for the purpose of this discussion, I

would argue the value of Prinz Gholam's practice resides in its illustration of affect's complex structure. Their complex practice of embodying and performing the archive demonstrates how the link between emotion, form, and bodies can be used as a tool to facilitate the perpetuation of hegemonic narratives.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: ENDURING NAÏVETÉ

In the preface of her text *Eros the Bittersweet*, poet and classicist Anne Carson presents the ineluctable desire of the metaphor:

The story is about the delight we take in metaphor. A meaning spins, remaining upright on an axis of normalcy aligned with the conventions of connotation and denotation, and yet: to spin is not normal, and to dissemble normal uprightness by means of this fantastic motion is impertinent. What is the relation of impertinence to the hope of understanding? To delight? [...] Beauty spins and the mind moves. To catch beauty would be to understand how that impertinent stability in vertigo is possible. But no, delight need not reach so far. To be running breathlessly, but not yet arrived, is itself delightful, a suspended moment of living hope (xi).

While it might not comply with the ideology of the global-turn, I believe the West resists “catching” the code of antiquity because of the affect, or hope, *felt* through the continual suspension of its metaphoric meaning. In its embodiment of the ideologically ideal Western self – democratic, artistic, rational – the symbol of ancient Greece and its antiquities represents much more than an aesthetic triumph. As a set of symbolic forms found in art and architecture that informed Western narratives of identity, Greek antiquity became an absent object of collective melancholy, which its distributed presences strive to keep alive.

In light of this, there is an element of irony at play in the language Szymczyk used to speak of the institution of Documenta. His avowals somewhat mirror how we might conceive the code of antiquity within present-day Western consciousness; it appears as something of an elusive, haunting phantom, without a precise location, and which, ultimately, does not “*exist*.” However, regardless of their precise location, Documenta’s institution and the imperial history of Hellenism *do both exist*. Similar as to the philhellenic re-antiquation of Athens, an aestheticized understanding of Greece is part of a larger imaginary that distorts real, lived histories in the creation of a particular ideological one. The continued treatment of Greece as a mediator or metaphor plays into its long-standing aestheticization rooted in, and emblematic of, historic colonial and cultural imperialism. In the discourse and practice of art in a global-turn, a Hellenistic inclination to antiquity may then offer insight into the complex image of the West’s “naïve” conflict with itself. At its core, I believe the presence of Hellenism in a pluralist frame to represent a conflict of aesthetics, that opposes a new ideal by an old, internalized and unshaken one. Or, the desire for pluralism without a thorough attenuation and criticism of practices designed for, and oriented towards, the West.

A call for the total suppression of Hellenist representations of Greece would be not only unrealistic, but also unproductive. Instead, with the aforesaid critiques of Prinz Gholam and Documenta, I hoped to raise this conflict presented by Greek antiquity in the pluralist frame of contemporary art to demonstrate the discrete, but powerful role affect plays in the narrative mechanisms of cultural production. Barthes’s concept of naïveté in relation to the sustained dissemination of an ill-formed image of Greek antiquity is

helpful as it demonstrates the suggested innocence of this continued practice. In the case of documenta 14 and Prinz Gholam I would push for its recognition as *willful* naïveté. The vitality of this recognition is repeated in Sara Ahmed's approach of using emotion as a basis of analysis. Ahmed argues that "Attention to emotions allows us to address the question of how subjects become *invested* in particular structures such that their demise is felt as a kind of living death" (12). Since it is within these investments that the cultural politics producing norms develop, questioning affective and aesthetic relations such as Hellenism are necessary. If pluralism is indeed the ultimate objective, there is little room for such naïveté surrounding the sustenance of the affective, emotional investments of any hegemony. Decolonial processes involve recognizing the affective influence familiar forms have over the continual re-establishment of any norm, otherwise there remains an enduring naïveté.

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