

*This summer, our paths crossed in Athens, where the air was thick with referendum and its aftermath. Rebekah Rutkoff was completing a stint in Athens as an Onassis Foundation fellow, and Toby Lee, who has been researching and living in Greece on and off since 1998, was on the latest of countless returns to the field. Back in New York, we share some ruminations on the return of the radical repressed.*

**Toby Lee:**

Johannes Fabian writes that we construct our own positionality as here-and-now, and that of our others as there-and-then. Fixing them in the past, we thus banish them from the contemporary, from the realm of power, agency, and change. A kind of timelessness.

I am looking at a postcard. On the front, an iconic view of Santorini: white church, blue dome, winding path, sun-kissed sea. On the back, a handwritten note: Wish you were here. Here, and now. The picture-perfect postcard is another othering, a different play on time. The there-and-then is rehabilitated into a here-and-now. One you can visit, photograph, purchase, disseminate in perpetuity. One that will always be here, now, for you.

In the opening scenes of *Theraikos Orthros* (1967, Kostas Sfikas & Stavros Tornos) the ghost of that postcard view returns, now offered up to us here, but *in time* and multiply so. Today's Cycladic iconography leaves no room for collapsing walls, crumbling whitewash, abandoned homes, but here they are, haunting our familiar vistas — that church, that path, but now (then?) bearing the marks of time, war, natural disaster; marking the arrival of tourism and dictatorship. And as a moving image. The mobile camera and the shaky frame insist on a being *in time*, resist the timelessness of the postcard view, and tumble toward us in 2015, erupting into the here-and-now with the obstinate presence of the there-and-then.

Of all these films, it is this one, the oldest, the furthest from us in time, that feels the most radically present. History does not just remind us. It displaces us. And in doing so, perhaps it points us to an other future.

**Rebekah Rutkoff:**

Perhaps actress and poet Katerina Gogou, as ushered into the twenty-first century by director Antonis Boskoitis and those who knew her - activists, singers, directors, actors - is an emissary of just such a possibility. "I am glad that Katerina Gogou is in my memories and a part of my life," her co-star Loukia Michalopoulou says, speaking of the past in the present-tense. "I remember her as if it was yesterday."

Gougou is unfixable as a picture. Nearly every recollection of the actress in *Katerina Gogou: Reinstating the Dark Side* (2012) dwells on some essentially uncontainable or rebellious element

in psyche, body or performance. It is alternately called “spunk,” “freedom,” “comic relief,” or impossibly located in her “wonderful body” and “that smart little nose of hers.” She is the singular “female clown” who does not exist otherwise in the history of Greek cinema; she is identified as an unwitting foil to the conventions and rigidity of classic Greek film, under-used compositionally and gesturally and yet potent for just this reason: an enticement only partially encountered.

It is with Gougou’s rage, however, that Boskoitis brings us into the most full-bodied encounter. Its origins are identified as simultaneously private (her father’s violence) and communal (she grew up under Nazi occupation and she was forever cast in the role of a servant, a dilemma she shared with masses of poor Greeks after the Civil War). We mustn’t dwell on bemoaning the historical failure of directors to promote her gifts and strangenesses, Boskoitis seems to say. His film sends us directly and immediately back to her poetry, where the stream of her radical consciousness awaits more deeply-impressed transcription onto the present-tense.

**TL:**

Is rage what remains? Is it Gogou’s rage, channeled through Boskoitis, that wakes our own? Jane Gaines makes the case that radical documentary incites action through political mimesis — bodies onscreen moving bodies in seats (in streets, in squares, in occupied spaces) through the force of affect, a sympathetic magic.

What, then, do we make of Marina Gioti’s post-apocalyptic tour of Athens in *As to Posterity* (2014) or Yorgos Zoi’s silent billboards in *Titloi Telous (Out of Frame)* (2012)? Nearly devoid of human bodies, they show us a present future of what we are in the process of leaving behind: metal, concrete, plastic, wind, and light. The only bodies in our likeness, mannequins frozen in a moment of economic promise, silently watch over our material remains. What kind of magic would be needed to animate those — our — inanimate bodies?

**RR:**

We sometimes forget the psychic labor of facing rage — it must be converted from impulse into full-fledged feeling and thought that can be known and used. Rage is not so much what naturally remains but rather what must remain by great effort. It is always present and always repressed and therefore we need ongoing reminders from others to keep it active, to “wake” it, as you say, in ourselves.

What’s striking to me about Gioti and Zoi’s pieces is that very “present future” you invoke. Even though absent of humans, nodding toward some not-too-far-off, sci-fi dead end, they capture a distinct and always stymying experience I’ve had in Athens: walking for many blocks without seeing more than one or a couple of other people. It might be a certain moment on a Sunday afternoon. I might be walking through a neighborhood where more than 80% of shops have had to shut down. So ironically my embodied sense as spectator is acute in watching those pieces. I

imagine the line of transmission that reaches my own body as stemming not from bodies represented on-screen but from a combination of the artist's animating concept and her own occupation of space in the act of making the film.

**TL:**

Speaking of bodies and sci-fi dead ends: *Flying Anarchists* (2014), of all the films in this program, resembles most closely the look of a traditional radical film, with bodies in protest amid a city on fire. But here, the glowing figures throwing rocks — bricks, chairs, Molotovs — are penned in by the roof edges, and pinned down by the police camera. The video transforms them into flickering ghosts, eerily transparent. Maybe that's all the undead eye of surveillance can capture — rage registered as heat.

**RR:**

The most obvious rage repressed by the camera and then re-ignited when it's ushered onto a new screen. It reminds me of Gogou's rendering of her revolutionary heroine from *Idionimo* (1980): "She is dangerous – when god is bringing down the world with hail and rain she comes out on the streets without socks and whistles at the men she throws stones at the police cars and lies like a squirrel on trees lighting her cigarette with thunders."