THE POLITIZATION OF ANATOMY

PIERRE BAL-BLANC IN CONVERSATION WITH PRINZ GHOLAM, MARIE COOL FABIO BALDUCCI AND ANNIE VIGIER & FRANCK APERTET (LES GENS D'UTERPAN)

In her book *Political Anatomy*,[1] Nicole-Claude Mathieu contrasts sex as a matter of "biology" and gender as a matter of the "social." But she underscores that definitions of sex and the frontiers between sex and gender are not so clear in a number of non-Western societies and marginal territories of the west itself. The feminist impulse to which she contributed in the 1970s with the notion of social sex led her to theorize the notions of the "third sex" and "third gender."

Pierre Bal-Blanc is Curator of documenta 14. He was formerly Director of CAC Brétigny (Contemporary Art Center of Brétigny, greater Paris). From 2003 to 2014, he organized the *Phalanstère Project* (catalogue, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 2017), a series of site-specific proposals indebted to the theories of Charles Fourier and aimed at critically rethinking the logic behind the accumulation of works of art. His exhibition series *La monnaie vivante/Living Currency* (CAC Brétigny/Micadanses, 2005–2006; Stuk, Leuven, 2007; Tate Modern, London, 2008; MoMA, Warsaw, and Berlin Biennale, 2010) and *Draft Score for an Exhibition* (Le Plateau, Paris; Artissima, Torino; Secession, Vienna, 2011.

Her method consisted in thinking about representational phenomena that were matters of norms, "institutionalized deviance" or self-definition. Her analysis thus focused on the balancing act between norms and margins, sex and gender. This took three forms, in her view: gender translates sex; gender symbolizes sex and conversely; gender constructs sex. "The person is not only individually situated with respect to biological sex; personal identity is strongly linked to a form of group consciousness." Sex is not merely lived as an individual anatomical fate to be followed through the corresponding gender identity; gender is experienced as a sort of collective way of life. In conclusion, Nicole-Claude Mathieu identifies two, clashing tendencies in sexed identity: the anatomization of the political versus the politicization of anatomy.

In the course of the collective exhibition *The Death of the Audience*[2] at the Vienna Secession in 2009, I conducted a study of the behaviors of the various members – artists, attendants, audience members – who formed the body of the artistic scene. With the artists present, I drew out transversal figures that freed them from these assigned roles, as for example in the case of John Latham and his self-definition as a "Professional Outsider." The politicization of the anatomy of the artistic body undertaken by the "practitioners" of this exhibition (in the sense that these artists called into question the notion of the author) contrasted with an institutionally-imposed anatomization of the cultural field. The collective experiment of documenta 14, which invented itself on moving ground between Kassel and Athens, among other things, led me to look more deeply into these questions by inviting artists whose practice inscribed the metamorphosis of the individual body into a third entity. Via their names and above all through their practice, Prinz Gholam, Marie Cool Fabio Balducci and Annie Vigier & Franck Apertet (les gens d'Uterpan) express a third space or a politicization of anatomy that also has echoes in art history. Other examples of the emergence of hybrid practice and third spaces exist, from presenting the division of one into two, as in the case of the Italian artist Alighiero Boetti —or "Alighiero e Boetti" as he became known, inscribing this division within his very name—to the merger of two names, as in that of the French artists Bernard Bazile and Jean-Marc Bustamante, whose have joined their names in that of the public limited company BAZILEBUSTAMANTE. In these interviews, I attempt to engage in a discussion of these subjects in the context of the documenta 14 exhibition, which also takes place in a third space merging the cities of Kassel and Athens. To borrow the language of Guattari, it is an "Existential Territory"[3] that "does not give itself in itself, closed on itself, but rather as a precarious for itself: finite, finitized, singular, singularized, capable of bifurcating in stratified and deadly reiterations or opening up procedurally from a praxis that enables it to be made 'habitable' by a human project."

Opposite, from top - Prinz Gholam, *My Sweet Country* (still), 2017. Courtesy: the artists and Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris; Marie Cool Fabio Balducci, *Untitled*, desktop, chair office, window, rain, 2014. Courtesy: the artists and Marcelle Alix, Paris; Annie Vigier & Franck Apertet (les gens d'Uterpan), *Avis d'audition* performance at Theater Karolos Koun (Theatro Technis), Athens, 21 February 2017. Photo: © Stathis Mamalakis



PRINZ GHOLAM

Wolfgang Prinz, born 1969 in Leutkirch (Germany) and **Michel Gholam**, born 1963 in Beirut (Lebanon). They have been working together since 2001, they live in Berlin.

MARIE COOL
FABIO BALDUCCI



Marie Cool and **Fabio Balducci** (1961, Belgium - 1964, Italy) Recent exhibitions include *Contemporary Locus* at Area Tesmec (curated by Paola Tognon) and Granpalazzo—Lulu Mexico City. Projet. Zagarolo, (curated by Chris Sharp).



ANNIE VIGIER &
FRANCK APERTET
(LES GENS D'UTERPAN)

Annie Vigier was born in 1965 and **Franck Apertet** in 1966. They live and work in Paris. Under the title les gens d'Uterpan, they have developed creations focusing on experimentation. Their act on touches upon several points, by exploring, among other things, the limits of the human body and of representation on. This process implies redefining the practice of dance and the function of the dancer. Their work has been presented (selection on): Biennale d'art contemporain de Lyon 2007 (France), Project Arts Centre, Dublin (Ireland), ICA and Tate Modern, London (United Kingdom).

PRINZ GHOLAM

PIERRE BAL-BLANC
Is the fusion of your two names , Wolfgang Prinz and Michel Gholam into Prinz Gholam a statement about working in collaboration or a result of the work itself?

PRINZ GHOLAM
We can't say that our work is a collaboration. It is in its birth already one work, by one author, and the author is a couple. Being together is visible in the work itself. Seeing ourselves as dependent on a social and cultural environment makes it possible for two individuals to work together. It is not about the ego, but about dealing with the constraints to which both of us are exposed in the same way, because we live together under the same conditions. 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.

PBB
When did you start to work together ?

PG
We began working together in 2001 because our symbiotic existence could no longer be ignored. And this came gradually with our skepticism regarding how art is done. We trusted in the inevitable shift from planned artistic intention once one ventures into something incalculable, like placing oneself in front of the camera and judging results later when the moment is over. This is something we still feel very strongly in the live performances, where all preliminary preparations lead to the work. The symbiotic nature of this work has become a sort of intuition to both of us. This doesn't mean that the performances are spontaneous or improvised, but that our activity becomes effortlessly synchronized when following the requirements the work imposes.

Yet when the work is presented, it is released in a situation that cannot be controlled. And so we as performers do not know what it actually exactly looks like. We can only imagine how it should look. Systematically we apply all references to both of us. Equally we submit ourselves to a visual language formed in the performance. Both of us are equally absorbed in this activity.

PBB
What did the move to Athens give to your work?

PG
When we are in Athens for documenta, we are working in the exact place where antiquity happened. The ruins and remains symbolize and assert continuity of culture. The performative commitment on these sites, the pictorial source material and the local, cease to be merely cultural heritage; they become a nonverbal yet active language in use.

PBB
You embody different genders in your poses in the work; how does this affect your language?

PG
As for the transition of gender, we always have the feeling that we "neutralize" the gender roles in the figure constellations by doing them ourselves, with our two male bodies. This could then mirror any age or gender or type or physical characteristics. It is as if the corporeal representation we make would be a description in words (language) that each reader understands and emphatically imagines herself or himself doing (not knowing if this is possible).

We want to add here: 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.

PBB
Can you expand on this description to explain how you are working with the resources and context of Athens and Kassel?

PG (M)
I remember the moment we performed Rouault's *Mon doux pays, où* êtes *vous?* in the empty Olympieion. This was the first posture we took. We dwelled some time in this pose. This physical action of lying horizontally on the ground, the stomach tensed to be able to prop up the head, the shoulders pulling forward to the feet and the hand closed. We felt then, in that moment, the oppressive weight of the archaeological site. So it is an empirical experience that allows us to continue and reinforce the postures within the performance.

PBB
What was your inspiration?

PG
The word "inspiration" is very important, as we have very vivid memories of images, pictures, and especially paintings. This comes from a long process of self-education and a strong conviction that artworks matter in the lives of people. We do not mean the embellishment or prestige of being exposed to culture, but the idea that these artistic proposals are there and available for use by those who engage in controversy or confrontation with the artworks. So in the case of Athens and Kassel, the choice of the site for the work was very fast.

The performances in Athens and in Kassel have different titles: *My Sweet Country* and *Speaking of Pictures*. The performances revolve around (with slight differences) many similar sources. We want to explore different approaches. We see the postures as a visual language that can be composed and reorganized according to the needs we encounter.



Wilhelm von Plüschow, *Two nude youth in front of the Ancient Roman tomb of the Rabirii, along via Appia, Rome*, ca. 1900.
Photo: User: G.dallorto / Wikimedia Commons / CC-0

PBB
What materials do you work with in Athens?

PG (W)
We worked mainly with images that refer to Greek classical antiquity and which were used to create historic and cultural continuity. We wanted to deal with the fantasies, phantasms, and ideologies that were and still are attached to ancient Greek culture, which Roland Barthes called the "most cultured culture" in his text on Wilhelm von Gloeden. A Roland Barthes quote:

"These contradictions are 'heterologies,' frictions between different and opposed languages. For instance von Gloeden takes the code of antiquity, he overloads it, he displays it heavily (ephebes, shepherds, ivy, palms, olive trees, vine leaves, tunics, columns, pedestals) but (first distortion) he mixes up the signs from antiquity. He combines the vegetable Greece, Roman statuary, and the





Top - Prinz Gholam, *My Sweet Country* (still), 2017. Courtesy: the artists and Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris
Bottom - Prinz Gholam, *Speaking of Pictures* (still), 2017. Courtesy: the artists and Galerie Jocelyn Wolff, Paris

'antique' nude derived from the Ecoles de Beaux-Arts. But it seems that he takes without any irony the most worn-out of legends for cash value. And this is not all: antiquity thus displayed (and by inference the love of boys thus sponsored) is peopled with African bodies. Perhaps he is right: Delacroix used to say that one could find ancient togas to look good only on Arabs."

Barthes continues: "But since art is a field of recuperation (nothing can be done about it: art even recuperates challenges to it and makes new art out of them), it is better to see the photographs of Baron von Gloeden less as art than as strength: the thin, hard strength by virtue of which it resists all varieties of conformity, those of art, morality and politics (lest we forget the fascist codifications), and which may be described as its naiveté. Today more than ever, mixing the most 'cultural' culture with the most radiant eroticism is an act of great bravery. Sade and Klossowski did it. Von Gloeden tirelessly stirred this mixture without thinking about it. Thus the strength of his vision, which continues to astonish to this day: his naiveté, like his prowess, is grandiose."[4]

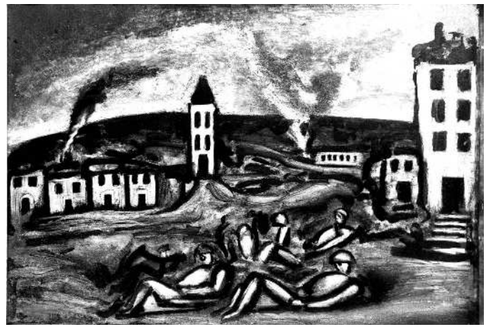
PBB Is it different to work around the real historical references compared with refrences mediated through books?

PG (W) Working in Athens on an archaeological site and in the Panathenaic Stadium (Kallimarmaro), we saw that the ancient ruins and the stadium appear inevitably as symbols of the identity of a country. In the Kallimarmaro we embodied images from Nelly, Wilhelm von Plüschow, and ancient Greek sculptures on the outer edge of the stadium with an asymmetrical perspective on the whole from an elevated viewpoint. Our performative activity for the video camera happened next to the joggers and the school kids doing sports down in the stadium. 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.



Eugène Delacroix, *The Entry of the Crusaders into Constantinople,* 1840.
Photo: User: Hohum / Wikimedia Commons / CC-0

PG (M) The osmosis of living figures with limestone.[5] Through the archetypes of depictions we are taught that there exists a closeness and a relationship to the human figure. An organic conviviality and dependence. The incompletion and fragmentary conditions of these cultural sites call for human intervention. At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, Wilhelm von Plüschow depicted (a rough rendition) young undressed men (or sometimes in white cloaks) snuggling themselves on or to the boulders of Greek and roman ruins. Holding hands, reclining on a ledge. The exchange that finds a place between different degrees of presence is very interesting to us. The Greek remains from several centuries before Christ, updated and added to at the end of the nineteenth century with figures of boys, now intervening there in the presence of the tourism industry. There is an enjoyment in performing. It is overwhelming and difficult to describe.



Georges Rouault, *Mon Doux Pays, Où Etes-Vous?*
(My sweet country, where are you?), 1948, "Miserere", Plate 44.
Collection of the Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University,
Milwaukee. Gift of Mr. Leonard J. Scheller

PBB You come from different cultures: German and Lebanese. Did this project offer a way to engage in a cultural dialogue?

PG (W) We do come from different countries, actually different continents, but neither of us is attached to a specific national context. It is more that we are able to avoid being the representative of a single country or culture, because otherwise it would not be possible to work together. For Michel, Athens felt very familiar, because of its strong similarities with Greek orthodox neighborhoods in Beirut. Actually Athens felt very familiar both of us—we were both able to relate to it very easily. One main reference for our work was Eugène Delacroix's *Entry of the Crusaders in Constantinople* (1840). We gave Athens the role of Constantinople in the painting. The columns in the background of the painting were replaced with the ancient ruins of the Temple of the ancient Zeus (Olympieion), which is one location of our performance and video.

PBB We should also discuss your inclusion of Delacroix in the daybook.

PG(M) Our work depicted in the daybook is from 2005, and only a fragment of Delacroix's painting. Yet the idea with the daybook made us look again at the large historical painting and consider it as a whole. And we found it very fitting. Because we are now more conscious of the conflict in the depicted work and its relevance for today. Michel Butor's analysis and interpretation made us feel as though we were entering the work and seeing the world out of it. We intend to depict almost all figures of the painting in our performance.

PBB You were inspired, I know, by the division of the exhibition into two locations, Athens and Kassel. Did this also confront you with your own dialectical play? Or if you don't define your play as dialectical, how does the framework apply to your practice?

PG (W) Kassel is for us in a way the opposite of Athens, because you see hardly any historical remains: a big part of the city was destroyed in World War II. Without looking for it, we found a location in Kassel with a strong neo-Gothic context: Lutherplatz. The remains of a neo-Gothic church, apparently neglected gravestones and monuments from the nineteenth century, surrounded by streets with a lot of traffic. We were immediately struck by it and decided to locate the performance there. We apply the references we already used in Athens to this place, adapting the Delacroix painting and the constellations of the photographs of Wilhelm von Plüschow. For us Lutherplatz appears as a culturally very typical place, especially when one thinks of the German Romantic movement, for example Caspar David Friedrich's depictions of graveyards. Paradoxically the references we are working with seem not to fit in this situation at all. This contraction is very interesting and motivating for us. Maybe it plays unconsciously with our backgrounds: northern Europe (German) and Mediterranean (Middle Eastern). There is also some irony and humor, which makes it possible to suspend or pervert all these cultural connotations of identity and nationality.

MARIE COOL
FABIO BALDUCCI

PIER BAL-BLANC You are Marie Cool and Fabio Balducci but your work is credited by Marie Cool Fabio Balducci, in one single name. How did you come to that?

MARIE COOL FABIO BALDUCCI We would like to answer first with a quotation :

"Bartleby is not the writer's metaphor nor a symbol of something else. It is a violently comic text and the comic is always literal. It is like the novels of von Kleist, Dostoevsky, Kafka or Beckett, with which it forms a subterranean and prestigious language. It only wants to say what is literally said. What it says and repeats is I WOULD PREFER NOT TO. This is its famous phrase and every keen reader repeats it in his turn. A lean and colorless man spoke this phrase and disconcerted everyone. But in what does the literality of this phrase consist?

One immediately has the impression that a certain mannerism, a certain solemnity is a work: to prefer is rarely used in this way and neither Bartleby's employer, the lawyer, nor the other 'writers' generally use it ('queer word, I never use it myself…') More commonly, one would say 'I would rather not.' But more than anything, the strangeness of this phrase goes beyond speech itself. True, it is grammatically and syntactically correct but its abrupt conclusion, NOT TO, which leaves what repels suspended in mid-air, gives it a radical aspect, a sort of liminal function. The repeated, insistent use of it makes it all the more perfect and unusual. Whispered by a soft, patient, expressionless voice, it becomes a type of insubordination, forming an inarticulate whole, a single breath. In this sense, it has the same power, the same function as an agrammatical phrase.[6]



Paul Thek, *The Fishman,* installation view of the courtyard
at Stable Gallery in New York, 1969. Courtesy: The Leo Baeck
Institute, New York. Photo: John D. Schiff

PBB How would you define your common work?

CB Our "community" in work is not a collaboration, it is an association of intents, that defines itself through the concept of competence. The allocation or responsibility of a role indicates the overall capacity of one or the other in dealing with a specific sector of the work. Competence, in itself unites a wide range of abilities: practical, individual knowledge acquired in other contexts and differences in attitude that indicate one's predispositions for a given task.

This community was founded with the "ruthlessness" thought we came upon one day, that we wouldn't be able to continue working and living without creating an association.



American movie poster of Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Teorema,* 1968

Distant from the elitism found in "Establishing a State and Republic" and following a modern idea of self-sufficiency of creating a homogeneous system, as autonomous as possible, with shifting borders in respect to the outside, we began to act, self-produce and spread the work.

PBB Only one of you is visible, Marie. Fabio, are you the hidden face of the works?

CB To use an expression from Morin, the impossible couple (reason-madness, order-disorder) is possible, in fact, it is necessary and sufficient for interpreting human as well as economic action, cohabitating with its entropic state and integrating in its very complexity.

Considering the esoteric aspect of number two, we put some segments side by side. Number two is depicted in origin by two parallel lines, in different traditions they may either be two vertical or horizontal lines. It is the first number that distances itself from unity and for this reason symbolizes sin. It is the first number that considers division symbolic of "corruptible things." The number two, which according to Jewish Kabala defines the line after a point and represents entry into time, after an indivisible and incorruptible unity.





Top - Marie Cool Fabio Balducci, *Untitled,* golden leafs, golden stars, sunlight, desktop, 2011. Courtesy: the artists and Marcelle Alix, Paris
Bottom - Marie Cool Fabio Balducci, *Untitled,* sheet of paper (A4), sunlight, desktop, 2007. Courtesy: the artists and Marcelle Alix, Paris

ANNIE VIGIER & FRANCK APERTET (LES GENS D'UTERPAN)

PIERRE BAL-BLANC Why did you create *les gens d'Uterpan ?*

ANNIE VIGIER & FRANCK APERTET A taste for challenge in the experience of our relationship disposed us to extend our creative confrontation beyond the couple we initially formed. The decision to continue elaborating a work corroborated the principle of reversibility that we had inscribed in *les gens d'Uterpan* (1994) as a project. Exceeding in order to invent, creating in order to exist, is a dynamic that we apply even in our way of being at a distance from one another in the third identity that is *les gens d'Uterpan*.

PBB What was the aim of the company?

VA Calling into question frameworks and conventions through the medium of the body, choreography as sociological interpretation and systems of exhibition may be understood as an artistic statement that has returned to the political. "It can obviously be said of our work that it is political but it is not just that. I have always had the impression (and feared) that categories become closed labels that once again prevent one from seeing."[7] But it also represents the consequence of a collaboration that has been freed and cast beyond intimacy in a transgressive project. "We felt and then addressed the role and frameworks imposed upon us as arbitrary—first as choreographers and then as artists. We have not adhered to the exploitation that accompanies the destinies attributed by the institution. We have reacted by granting ourselves a lot of freedom, enough freedom to work in any case."[8]

PBB Is it a dual formation?

AV It is an experience of duality that we reiterate and that is to be found in each work bearing this indefinite name, this patronym that includes and potentially exceeds us. On the basis of a conflict that is reciprocally acknowledged and accepted, it is less a matter of a creation than it is the result of a process of sapping opposition. "Working as two people is to already observe how discourse is accepted by and resonates with the other person, how thought is transformed."[9] Our creations are the positive precipitate of an opposition that remains unresolved as long as our relationship lasts. *Les gens d'Uterpan* is a space, a way of thinking that enables a game of overtaking.

PBB Has context played a role in the formation of *les gens d'Uterpan?*

AV The academicism to which we lay claim as a dance company simultaneously calls into question the conventions of the field of plastic arts, for which this status is not calibrated, and the field of dance and live performance, for which our work represents an anomaly, an imposture. In the plastic arts, it is a theme evoked by a community to such an extent that it sometimes seems a grotesque cult of the body, an effect that dispels the more appropriate concept of the collective.

PBB Is the company an anonymous society?

AV For us, the "company" identity counts for the organization it represents. A dance company manages people but the particularity that makes it interesting has to do with bodies. In this respect, its operation duplicates and exposes the hierarchized system of the distribution of roles and functions that society offers at the national and global levels. Like citizens exploited by a government in power, the dancers are totally involved in the service of the choreography. "During the 2007 contemporary art Biennale in Lyon, the presence of dancers over the course of four months rendered visible the chain of authorities—from the director to the delegated representatives, the invited representatives, the guards and the dancers of X-Event 2."[10]

PBB Is the company a tool or an organ, is it technological or organic?

AV For a choreographer, taking on a dancer is to radically possess a tool. Other situations of subjugated bodies exist but the dance company, because it conventionally acknowledges this, reveals the contract, the control and the objectification of these bodies and people more than elsewhere. In a part of our work, mainly the X-Event cycle, we transgress the potential that is the dancer by exceeding certain limits that remain problematical for dance. "The X-Event protocols were conceived in opposition to the idea of choreography, in an objective—that is, transgressive—use of the dancer and in a desire to exhibit the experimental act."[11] There, the dancer clearly appears as an exploited medium of our performance. This (always consensual) appropriation of the other's body was made visible as soon as we became involved in the field of plastic arts. *Les gens d'Uterpan* company is an administrative entity but it is above all the set of people who adhere to and produce these acts of excess.



Annie Vigier & Franck Apertet (les gens d'Uterpan), *Avis d'audition* performance at Theater Karolos Koun (Theatro Technis), Athens, 21 February 2017. Photo: © Stathis Mamalakis

1. Nicole-Claude Mathieu. L'anatomie politique. Editions côté-femmes, 1991 and iXe, 2013.
2. Pierre Bal-Blanc. Ver Sacrum / The Death of the Audience. Catalogue. Secession 2011.
3. Félix Guattari. Les trois Ecologies. Galilé, 1989.
4. Roland Barthes, *Wilhelm Von Gloeden. Interventi di Joseph Beuys, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Andy Warhol* (Naples: Amelio, 1978).
5. Limestone is a type of sedimentary rock composed mostly of calcite, a carbonate mineral. It also contains fragments of marine invertebrates such as coral. Limestone is abundant throughout the world, including in the Middle East and the Mediterranean.
6. Gilles Deleuze and Giorgio Agamben. Bartleby. *La formula della creazione*
7. Uchronia, duplicate > do not create, infiltrate > do not exhibit, exceed > do not belong, appear > do not claim, delegate > do not restrict.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.



Annie Vigier & Franck Apertet (les gens d'Uterpan), *Avis d'audition* performance at Theater Karolos Koun (Theatro Technis), Athens, 21 February 2017. Photo: © Stathis Mamalakis