

## Summary of my time at the Danish Institute at Athens, October 9<sup>th</sup> – December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2014:

My interest in Athens as a site started as I learned about the Eurozone crisis. I was curious to see what was happening on the ground, as I had read much about Athens going into a depression but wanted to understand it further, especially as it relates to contemporary art. How was the economic crisis affecting society? Moreover, part of my artistic research is currently looking at the intersections of culture and economy, art and capital, or more specifically contemporary art and neoliberal capitalism. From these interests, I began in Athens by doing research on the Eurozone crisis in Athens, what caused it, what is it doing to the people of Athens, and what the total effects were. I went to lectures hosted by other institutes such as the Dutch Institute's lecture on *The Asymmetry of the Eurozone and What to Do About It* by Pavlos E. Masouros. Also, in relation to understanding theory of current forms of capitalism and a history of the circuits of capital I also read *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism* by David Harvey, *The Making of the Indebted Man* by Maurizio Lazzarato, and began reading *Capital Volume II* by Karl Marx to develop a better theoretical framework as it relates to these issues.

Transitioning from capital to culture, to help synthesize these current thoughts and historical frameworks as it relates to what is happening on the ground, I began going to several art shows, exhibitions, and museums to understand the broader current cultural position of Athens as it relates to contemporary art as well. I visited State of Concept's *Panda Sex*, MACA's *Opening Event of a home for art*, Kunsthall Athena, National Gallery of Greece, National Contemporary art museum, Benaki Museum's exhibition about the crisis "Depression Era" and many more. The more art venues I visited the more I began to realize that I needed more time and effort to gather data for a larger sample size to see more of the gallery scene before deciding on what I thought about it or making more accurate conclusions.

However, I began another thread of research by accident when I stumbled upon the institution NEON, which organizes temporary art performances and exhibitions in public spaces in Athens. It was there where I saw for the first time, a live performance by Tino Seghal - an important artist whom I had studied extensively in graduate school. I attended his performances at the Archaeological site of the Roman Agora and at the NEON building near the Roman Agora. This performance inspired me to visit more archaeological sites both in relation to performance in public space (which I have already been doing in my last few projects) and to see the archaeological history for itself as it relates to art history, architectural history, as well as notions of the spectacle, commodification of cultural experiences, and tourism in culture. So I began visiting many archaeological sites, as part tourist, part art sociologist attempting to better understand how these sites operate commercially, aesthetically, and as sites of potential art production.

As I began to visit these sites I also began to think about ruins in general. What are the contemporary ruins of Athens? I looked for answers by visiting perhaps Athens' biggest white elephant, the contemporary ruin of the 2004 Olympic games' Site, as well as other ruins such as the coast up and down Attica toward Sounio, and various urban areas and neighborhoods in Athens. These contemporary ruins of the Eurozone crisis helped me to re-frame and think about the ancient ruins, the relationship between the two, and how they are (re)presented.

As I was visiting these ruins and attempting to reconcile them in relationship to the crisis, both the ancient ruins as archaeological sites and the contemporary ruins of vacant and condemned areas in the city, I turned from the economic question to another question that is very much apart of my practice, that of the role of education in the arts as it pertains to pedagogical, and philosophical methods. This was peaked after my visit to Plato's Academy. After visiting the out of the way and decrepily drug-ridden yet beautiful Plato's Academy, I also went to Aristotle's Archaeological Site of Lykeion, which was contrastingly very well kept. Keeping these archaeological sites in mind as the stalwart darlings of western civilizations academic, pedagogical, and philosophical history, I stumbled upon another treasure while hiking near Philopappos – the Deme of Melite.

What is so special about the Deme of Melite is this is where less idolized philosopher, Epicurus, had his house and where he developed his own unorthodox pedagogical way of modestly teaching at his home, *the garden*, about a life of pleasures. I was interested in this site as it represents the location and beginning of a lesser-known philosophical school of thought very important to western civilization that isn't as revered as Plato or Aristotle, that of Epicureanism.

To tie it all back to Tino Seghal's performance *This is Progress* at the Roman Agora, I began looking at the Deme of Melite as a site for a series of temporary public performances exploring the Epicurean tradition. Instead of inserting a pre-existing artwork into an archaeological site as Seghal did at the Roman Agora with only the smallest and most generic connections to that site and Seghal's practice (and with a performance originally made specifically for Frank Lloyd Wright's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City), I was thinking of a more *extensive* and *specific* project at the Deme of Melite in the vein of Seghal's performance at the Roman Agora but in a more thoughtful and site-specific fashion, as it relates to the concerns of my artistic practice locating appropriate work in the corresponding appropriate sites.

An idea I have been experimenting with is on-site readings, critiques, discussions, and conversations of spatial and social structures. Instead of just writing about something, why not present writing as performance at the site as a more concretized way of understanding the subject matter as real practice *and* as theory. Classrooms still have their function for specific things, but have too long been fetishized as the penultimate site of knowledge production, exchange, and distribution. Hence, I have begun to formulate a proposed project to conduct readings and discussions about *the Epicurean tradition* at the (apparent) site of its creation. How does this change being on the hill at the Deme of Melite ruins in a beautiful Greek setting discussing the life of pleasures in relationship to the current state of the city? Is it a failed philosophy? What are its benefits? Its successes? How is it better-experienced and discussed on site vs. the classroom? What is it like participating in the Epicurean tradition today, at this site, via education as performance, at its point of origin? How does this relate to the contemporary construction of an artist and their role in society?

In relation to the Deme of Melite, and Epicurus' house, this is where I stand at the end of my time in Athens, asking, reading, and writing about this performance among my other research conducted while there. I did many other things while in Athens, but this is what stands out for me as the most significant breakthrough, which, I plan to continue researching.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Rune, Niki, Soren, Lone, and everyone else for helping me and making the residency possible and a successful for me. I'll keep in touch and look forward to continuing to dialogue about my project as it evolves. It has been a very important developmental time for me as an artist, and I would like to again thank everyone involved for the opportunity.

Sincerely,  
Scott William Raby