



Mnemotechnics and other Psychogeographies of “Flying.”

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ABSTRACT

This meditation on how the spaces of cities can carry and activate cultural and political memories was inspired by the memory of Zak Kostopoulos, a queer activist who was murdered in Athens in 2018.

KEYWORDS

Urban architecture, urban spaces, cultural memory, political memory, mnemonics



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MNEMOTECHNICS AND OTHER PSYCHOGEOGRAPHIES OF "FLYING" NORMAL STYLE.¹

In her book *The Art of Memory* Frances A. Yates discusses the history of mnemotechnic, the exercise of memory through various techniques of connecting places with images, so that urban spaces, architecture, and geographies are used to preserve and summon memories.

It was the poet Simonides who first linked memory with spatial visualization. During a dinner party where the roof fell, crushing the table and the people dining, Simonides managed to identify the disfigured corpses by recalling and indicating the places where they had been sitting.

Ancient orators based a mnemonic system on architecture. They imagined a building with many rooms, and in each room, they placed an image associated with what they wanted to remember. As they used their imagination to walk through the building and visit the rooms one by one, they were able to recall the sequences of arguments and narratives they wanted to deliver. The process is described by the Roman orator and pedagogue Quintilian in his *Institutio oratoria*:

*"(...) Places are chosen, and marked with the utmost possible variety, as a spacious house divided into a number of rooms.(...) The first notion is placed, as it were, in the forecourt; the second, let us say, in the atrium; the remainder are placed in order all-round the impluvium, and committed not only to bedrooms and parlours, but even to statues and the like. (...)"*²

What I have spoken of as being done in a house can also be done in public buildings, or on a long journey, or in going through a city, or with pictures."

Can we think of Athens as such a city? Can we imagine walking these streets where Zak³ walked, hid, and then was beaten and murdered, so that our walking becomes a way of constantly tracing this memory?

The demonstrations, the bodies, the voices, the repetitive slogans accompanied by voguing, the tags that are constantly written on the walls, the parades of girls with their own silly walks and rhythms, the performance of the Chilean women Las Tesis, who gather in public spaces of different cities around the world, pointing their fingers at the buildings of police departments and shouting "The rapist is you!"—all of these features of life in the city can mark and hold what needs to be remembered.

We can perhaps imagine a new psychogeography of mnemotechnics in the city, in Gladstonos street, Patission street, Omonia square, with our bodies, perhaps with 12cm high heels, perhaps kicking the

buildings, perhaps with the heel wedged between the paving blocks and the guillotines of the heavy-duty shutters of the shops and the security doors.

Perhaps we can imagine other psychogeographies of "flying," such as those of the witches depicted in an engraving in Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch*. In this engraving, the witches smear their bodies with magical pomades (maybe it was glitter) and fly their brooms over houses. Over the stores and buildings of the city so that they won't become sanctuaries for Zak.

A little further north of Kirra in Phocis, the village where Zackie oh was buried, one can find a cluster of mountains called Vardousia. The two villages that face the mountain from one side and the other call it by different names. For the villagers in Pendagi it is called the mountain of the dead while for the villagers of Mavro Llthati it is the sleeping beauty mountain. Zak is both, the sleeping beauty who takes on her shoulders as she sleeps the rest of the dead, defining a new geography of memory.

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¹ Reprinted from A. Athanasiou, G. Gougousis, D. Papanikolaou (eds and introduction), *In Queer Politics/ Public Memory: 30 Texts for Zak*. Athens: Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Athens.

² *Institutio oratoria*, XI, ii, 17-22, as quoted, Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, 1966, Routledge & Kegan Paul, p. 22

³ Zak Kostopoulos was a queer activist that was murdered in Athens in 2018

