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Subversive Compliance in a Precarious Nation: Camp in the Skopje 2014 Project

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ABSTRACT

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To promote their desired national identity, the North Macedonian government funded the *Skopje 2014 Project*—an initiative including abundant statues, architectural façades, and other structures that depict Ancient Macedon as North Macedonia's heritage. This project received copious amounts of criticism on two central fronts: first, that its allusions to Ancient Macedon are a false depiction of history; second, that its aesthetic is tacky. While valid arguments are made on each of these fronts, I argue that the latter complicates the former when analyzed in the context of North Macedonia's precarity. In this analysis, I employ the work of Judith Butler and Liron Lavi as a theoretical backdrop to interrogate the nature of North Macedonia's precarity. Analyzing political negotiations between North Macedonia and Greece surrounding *Skopje 2014*, I introduce the term *persistent infelicity*—a type of precarity in which the validity of an identity performance is made inaccessible for a given entity. Further, the commodification of the Ancient Macedon narrative has transformed North Macedonia's identity performance from an iterative production to an instantaneous transaction, limiting North Macedonia's opportunity to challenge its infelicitous state. However, I assert that the aesthetic of *Skopje 2014* creates space for subversion even considering these limitations. Expanding upon the work of Susan Sontag, I identify *Skopje 2014*'s aesthetic as camp and delineate its function in the project as one of subversive compliance. Camp as a rhetorical tool allows North Macedonia to perform a bifurcated identity—one identity that is insincere yet appeases its international audience and another that is more authentic yet controversial directed toward an intra-national audience. While this has modestly empowering implications for *Skopje 2014*, this analysis concludes that the identity performance of North Macedonia has been propelled into the realm of simulacra—a realm ultimately and perilously untethered to the "real"—and prompts further consideration for other precarious nations whose identities may be fated to persistent infelicity.

Keywords: camp, performativity, precarity, national identity, simulacra, North Macedonia

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Introduction

The nation of North Macedonia is, as one local put it, "really having an identity crisis" (Crevar).[1] This is really no surprise given the nation's dynamic history. It achieved independence less than 35 years ago after breaking away from Yugoslavia in 1991. Less than 30 years before that, in 1963, a massive earthquake destroyed approximately 80% of Skopje, North Macedonia's capital. Historically, the land was subjugated by the Byzantine, Bulgarian, Serbian, and Ottoman Empires. This complex national history serves as the exigency for strategic "nation branding"—an attempt to fortify a cohesive culture and identity throughout North Macedonia (Graan 164). Other post-Yugoslav nations have found themselves with similar exigencies, employing a wide variety of strategies to establish a "suitable past and a believable future" for themselves as they transition into independence (Mistzal 17). To curate a suitable past that suggests a believable future, North Macedonia did what many nations before it have done: it constructed artifacts of public memory to depict a cohesive national narrative. This initiative—entitled the *Skopje 2014 Project*—is characterized by prolific allusions to history, particularly to the ancient kingdom of Macedon, that assert themselves as the foundation upon which North Macedonia can reform its identity. What is unlike most other nation branding initiatives, however, is the quantity and cost of these public monuments and structures. In the single initiative of *Skopje 2014*, then-Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski allocated over $700 million to an estimated 1000+ statues, architectural façades, and various other structures in and around Skopje's city center.

While it is hardly a novel strategy to use public monuments as a tool for national identity maintenance, *Skopje 2014*'s formal choices to this end seem, in a word, absurd. In the architectural façades adorning the government buildings, *Skopje 2014* utilizes a mix of the Baroque, neoclassical, and ancient Greek traditions in a way that is both anachronistic and

anatopistic. The monument of Alexander the Great on his horse, Bucephalus, clearly evokes the classical tradition as a bronze equestrian statue with military friezes on its base column, but the addition of multicolored lights and speakers for music completely disrupts the illusion. In addition to the countless allusions to antiquity, *Skopje 2014* also includes several pieces that are anomalies both conceptually and aesthetically: a bronze fish with what looks like human legs; three full-sized pirate ship replicas sitting in the River Vardar; a bronze bull that is nearly identical to the *Charging Bull* near New York City's Wall Street; and a plaque that reads "'Најголемата закана за мирот во светот е абортусот!!!' - Мајка Тереза" ("'The greatest threat to world peace is abortion!!!" - Mother Teresa"). Nikos Causidis, author of *Macedonia: Cultural Heritage*, accurately summarizes the public's perception of *Skopje 2014* when he states that the project seems to have "no common master plan that unites all the separate parts into one unified and meaningful whole" (Causidis, qtd. in Marusic, "Skopje"). In short, if *Skopje 2014* is really an effort in national identity formation, it is extremely difficult to articulate the identity that is being formed.

If the criticism received by *Skopje 2014* in regards to its formal conventions were not enough, the project's historical content has also faced significant backlash. Greece's national leaders have been especially critical, demanding that North Macedonia alter or rescind certain portions of *Skopje 2014* due to alleged "falsification of history" ("FYROM"). Amid *Skopje 2014*'s efforts in national identity formation, at its core it contributes to a concrete and long-lasting debate—one which can reductively be called a custody battle between Greece and North Macedonia over the ancient kingdom of Macedon. Both nations want to claim Ancient Macedon as their national heritage, and both nations assert this claim by publicly using symbols that represent Ancient Macedon: Alexander the Great, the Vergina Sun, and the name "Macedonia."

After *Skopje 2014* immortalized these symbols in monuments throughout the Skopje city center, this debate came to a head: Greece declared that it would veto North Macedonia's plea for EU and NATO accession unless they conceded that these symbols were Greece's rightful heritage. Given North Macedonia's precarious state as a newer nation in need of financial and relational stability, the government altered several of the Ancient Macedon symbols and promised to alter the rest in the future so that Greece would revoke its veto. As such, the *Skopje 2014* identity performance can be divided into two distinct acts: the first act encapsulating the project as it was initially conceived and constructed, and the second act referring to the revisions that were made in accordance with Greek demands.

The two predominant responses to *Skopje 2014* claim, on the one hand, that its form is "kitsch" and even "ugly," and, on the other, that its content is "provocative" and "counterproductive" (Graan 163-165; Clapp 9, 13). Neither the first act nor the second are respected on an international or scholarly level; the consensus seems to be that *Skopje 2014* is a "fail[ed]" attempt at nation branding and little more (Čamprag 195). This conclusion, however, makes several assumptions of which I am not convinced. First, it assumes that acts of nation branding must be internationally accepted to be successful. While the international realm calls the project a failure, personal correspondence has confirmed that many local Macedonians see it as a positive, even beautiful, depiction of their national identity. Second, it assumes that *Skopje 2014*'s bizarre aesthetic is inadvertent and careless—something so void of meaning that it warrants only disapproving evaluation rather than rhetorical analysis. In response to this assumption, I would echo William Yeats: "How can we know the dancer from the dance?" (Yeats). How can we separate the aesthetic form from the historical content? While the project is criticized for both its form and its content separately, few have sought to understand how an

analysis of one might elucidate the other.[1] The form and content of *Skopje 2014* beg to be analyzed by nature of their incongruence. If the project is supposedly pursuing the concrete goal of "usurp[ing]" the content of Ancient Macedon from Greece's historical heritage, what function do the bizarre formal choices fill—the multicolored lights or the anachronistic architecture, for example? ("Foreign Ministry"). Working under Michael Leff's assertion that form and content are "cooperative," the scholarship surrounding *Skopje 2014* certainly falls short (Leff 260).

This oversight has led many scholars to oversimplify the aesthetic of *Skopje 2014*. Words like "artificial," "exaggerated" and "theatrical" are regularly employed as descriptors, but few have acknowledged that this aesthetic has a name—that is, *camp* (Janev 119, Pompeani 205, Warner 19). Susan Sontag, the seminal authority on the camp aesthetic, describes camp as an aesthetic of "artifice and exaggeration" and the "theatricalization of experience" (Sontag, "Notes" 61). Giving the aesthetic of *Skopje 2014* a name is significant because it establishes the scholarly foundation upon which this analysis will build. While scholarly conversations surrounding camp could not yet be considered robust, there is general consensus that it is subversive by nature (Sontag, "Notes"; Booth). Camp places artifacts of "low" culture into contexts where "high" culture would be expected. It thus challenges norms and draws attention to the marginalized. Applying this to *Skopje 2014* prompts the questions: what are the norms that the camp aesthetic is subverting? If the form of *Skopje 2014* is subversive by nature, how can it add nuance to the project's provocative content? The answers to these questions will provide an alternative perspective on *Skopje 2014* as an identity-performing artifact.

This language of *identity performance*, *norms*, and *subversion* call to mind Butler's theories of performativity, which analyze the ways in which identity is "manufactured through a sustained set of acts" against the backdrop of iterating "norms" (Butler, "Gender" xv-xvi). As

Skopje 2014 sustains a set of acts that contradict audience expectations—namely, the expectation that national identity formation should be more stabilizing than provocative and more refined than camp—it violates the established norms of identity performance. J. L. Austin calls these established norms "felicity conditions." A nation's identity performance is *felicitous* insofar as it is accepted as intelligible and valid by its inter- and intra-national audiences; conversely, that performance falls into *infelicity* when it fails to iterate the conditions that those audiences deem necessary for intelligibility and validity (Austin 14-15). By these standards, *Skopje 2014* would be considered an *infelicitous* identity performance due to its overwhelming international rejection. Some instances of infelicity have relatively minor consequences; a promise that becomes infelicitous when it is broken, for instance, has the potential to be forgiven and quickly forgotten. In the case of identity performance, however, the consequence of infelicity can be severe because, as stated by José Medina, it qualifies "not only speech acts but also speakers" themselves as unintelligible or invalid (Medina 7). This leads to a state of *precarity*, in which that entity is perceived as "deviant or transgressive" and thus becomes "differentially exposed" to various kinds of violence or discrimination (Medina 8; Butler, "Performativity" ii). Accusations against the *Skopje 2014* identity performance are therefore much more significant than, say, accusations of a broken promise; these accusations target the validity not only of the project as a "speech act" but of North Macedonia itself as the "speaker" (Medina 2). It is within this state that North Macedonia may seek to subvert or challenge the norms that consigned it to precarity. Considering that North Macedonia is not the only nation that has worked to strategically reconstruct its identity in the context of international constraints and intra-national tension, *Skopje 2014* serves as an ideal site to analyze subversion within a precarious nation's identity performance.[3]

To interrogate the nature of North Macedonia's precarity and subsequent subversion, I will first delineate the felicity conditions that prompted these accusations as well as North Macedonia's attempts to reconcile. Using the work of Liron Lavi, I will explore historicity and chronology as felicity conditions for national identity performance. These are well-established strategies of identity performance, and yet they prove to be distorted in their application to *Skopje 2014* due to North Macedonia's political negotiations with Greece. I will use my analysis of the records of these negotiations to introduce the term *persistent infelicity*—a type of precarity in which the felicity of an identity performance is inaccessible for a given entity. Second, *Skopje 2014*'s "Warrior on a Horse" monument suggests that the felicity conditions of historicity and chronology have become commodified in a way that further disrupts the identity performative. Building on this distortion of felicity conditions, I reframe *Skopje 2014*'s design from an unfortunate (and expensive) failure to "subversive play," specifically utilizing a camp aesthetic to resist established conditions of identity performance. Expanding upon Sontag's notes on camp, I illustrate how camp as a rhetorical tool allows the nation to perform a bifurcated identity—one identity that is insincere yet appeases its international audience and another for an intra-national audience that is more authentic yet controversial. While this reframing does have modestly empowering implications for *Skopje 2014* specifically, this analysis concludes that the identity performance of North Macedonia as a precarious nation has been propelled into the realm of simulacra—a realm that is ultimately and perilously untethered to the "real."

Identity Negotiation and Persistent Infelicity

In the wake of Judith Butler, scholars have become accustomed to the idea that identity is performative in nature—and in order for a performative to be received as intelligible and valid, J. L. Austin clarifies that it must meet certain felicity conditions (Austin 14-15). While the exact

conditions of identity performance are much more difficult to pin down than the conditions for, say, a marriage ceremony, scholars have long since agreed on the importance of a chronological national narrative.[4] The formation of a chronological national narrative is achieved through what Liron Lavi calls "Chrono-work," a process that consists of two key components: first, national moments that occurred "in concrete time and space;" and second, repetitive performance—or what Butler calls "ritualized production"—of those moments in a way that sequences them within a cohesive chronological narrative (Lavi 701; Butler, "Bodies" 95). Ritualized production of national moments can take many different forms—"political speeches" and all the strategies of identity construction they contain, the "indefinite material presence" of public monuments, even the "banal nationalism" of daily routine (Banjeglav 860, Balzotti 329, Billig). However the national moments may become ritualized, this process of Chrono-work is an "essential condition" for a felicitous national identity performance (Lavi 709). In other words, a nation's identity will not be received as intelligible or valid unless it is supported by ritualized production of national moments along a chronological continuum.

Instances of Chrono-work are plentiful in the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav era. For example, we can turn to Aleksandar Ignjatović's analysis of a tomb for an unknown soldier near Belgrade, Serbia. Carole Blair would call this site a "memory place," as it invites visitors to "participate" in a national memory in a particular way (Blair 26). The tomb was originally dedicated "to an unknown Serbian soldier fallen in the First World War," but King Alexander I of Yugoslavia chose to add an inscription that stated, "Aleksandar, Kralj Jugoslavie, Neznanom Junaku" ("Alexander, the King of Yugoslavia, to the Unknown Soldier") (Ignjatović 651). Ignjatović argues that this change contributed to an identity that was "Yugoslav, not Serbian, in character," as it emphasized unification rather than differentiation between the Yugoslav

republics. This unified identity was subsequently repeated "constantly . . . in public discourse" (Ignjatović 627). In this way, Yugoslavia practiced Chrono-work by incorporating the national moment of this soldier's death into the Yugoslav (rather than Serbian) chronological continuum, creating a strategic Yugoslav identity. Representative of many other instances of Chrono-work throughout Eastern Europe, the evolution of this tomb illustrates the opportunities and constraints of this felicity condition: a nation may exercise creativity in its framing of national moments—including which perspectives it will emphasize and which it will disregard—but it is only through a repeated expression of these moments within a chronological narrative that the corresponding national identity will take root.

While this felicity condition on its own may seem straightforward enough, *Skopje 2014* reveals that Chrono-work in nations like North Macedonia becomes an international negotiation rather than an intra-national expression. National identity is still regularly assumed to be an intra-national project first—only taken to the international realm in temporary states of negotiation. Tamara Banjeglav discusses Croatia's journey toward EU membership in these terms: during the time when Croatia was "negotiating its membership in the EU," it engaged in Chrono-work to highlight a "democratic" identity "founded on the rule of law and respect" according to EU values. After its accession into the EU, however, Banjeglav observes that this aspect of the nation's identity was "no longer an issue that had to be addressed for the sake of the international public." Croatia was thereafter free to emphasize and develop an identity of "national uniqueness" (Banjeglav 872, 876). Although this negotiation may initially seem comparable to negotiations between North Macedonia and Greece, there is a significant difference: while Croatia was compelled to temporarily highlight one facet of its identity over another, North Macedonia has been asked to permanently sacrifice an aspect of its identity from its

chronological continuum—namely, its claims to all national moments related to Ancient Macedon. Even after North Macedonia's hypothetical accession into the EU, it would remain legally bound to deny all identification with these national moments.[5] In other words, while Croatia simply "negotiat[ed] its *membership* in the EU," North Macedonia is negotiating its very *identity* as a means of achieving membership (Banjeglav 871). This is not to say that North Macedonia's national identity will completely solidify after these international negotiations, but the negotiations will limit and supplant some of the space that might otherwise be used for intra-national identity expression.

Identity as a negotiation rather than self-expression complicates characterizations of "felicity" versus "infelicity"—or validity versus invalidity—in national identity performance. Austin categorizes potential infelicities into two types: "misfires" and "abuses." Misfires refer to those performatives that were not carried out appropriately or completely according to that performative's conditions. A misfired performative occurs when "the procedure which we purport to invoke is disallowed or is botched" (Austin 16). For example, an identity performance might be considered a misfire if it were initiated by one national leader but then never repeated again. Abuses, on the other hand, refer to those performatives that were carried out appropriately and completely but were done so insincerely or under false pretenses—resulting in a performative that is '"professed' or 'hollow'" (Austin 16). An identity performance could be an abuse if it involved a public commitment to democracy, for example, while the nation privately maintained a dictatorship. A felicitous performative, therefore, is one that is neither misfired nor abused—one that is carried out appropriately, completely, and sincerely. Analyzing *Skopje 2014* as a two-act identity performance—one act preceding international negotiation and the other act following it—I will characterize the first act as a *misfire* and the second as an *abuse*. By

juxtaposing the project's initial identity performance with its post-negotiation performance, I will detail a phenomenon that I will term *persistent infelicity*, which occurs when identity is treated as a negotiation.

The first act of *Skopje 2014*—the act preceding international rejection and subsequent negotiation—qualifies as a *misfire*. The project's monument of a quadriga driven by Nike, the goddess of victory, epitomizes this claim (see fig. 1). Built on the grounds of Zena Park, the city's most central park, the quadriga is one of *Skopje 2014*'s most notable monuments in both size and significance. Upon the marble entablature that supports the four horses, three words are engraved: "immortalis," "libertas," and "justicia." Directly behind this portion of the structure stands a monopteros—a circular colonnade—featuring Nike at its peak and an eternal flame on

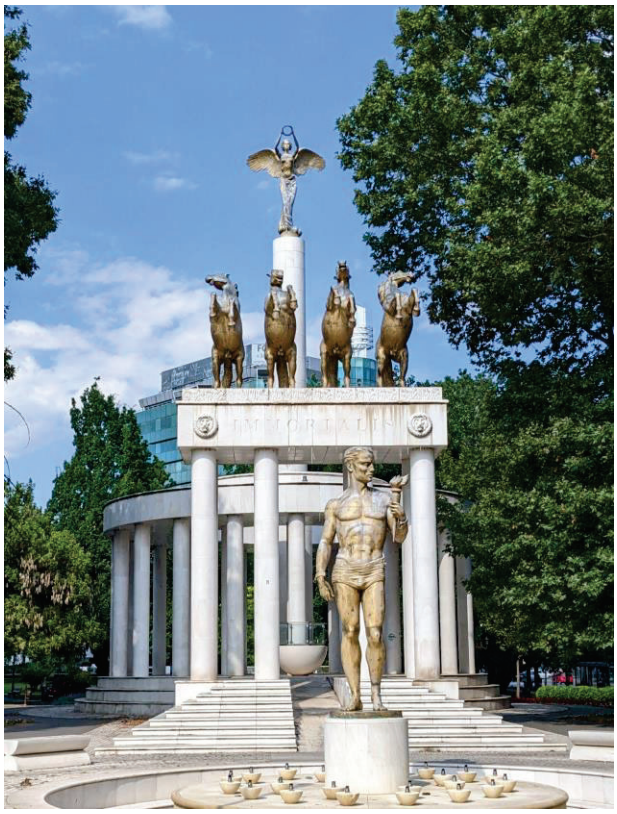

Figure 1. Quadriga driven by the goddess Nike at Zena Borec Park. A monument of Prometheus stands in front.

its base. While attempts to encapsulate the entirety of *Skopje 2014*'s target identity would be excessive, this quadriga outlines its key identity features: an immortalized Macedon which is independent and just. Not only are these identity features indicated directly by the engravings of their Latin equivalents but they are also supported by the presence of the eternal flame and the goddess of victory. These features are also reiterated throughout *Skopje 2014*'s identity performance as a whole.

The most literal evidence that this identity performance is a misfire is the fact that the eternal flame has been extinguished for nearly a decade—directly indicating that it was never as immortal as it purported to be. The extinguished flame symbolizes the project's evolution as a whole. The project's first act asserted an *immortalis* identity by suggesting that Ancient Macedon remains alive in North Macedonia; given that Macedon was established in the 4th century B.C.E., the "primordialist" implication that it still survives certainly suggests immortality (Pompeani 201). However, the cessation of this association according to Greek demands suggests the true *mortality* of this performance. Additionally, it reveals the nation's *dependence* on Greek approval, invalidating claims to *libertas* or independence. These negotiations even challenge the project's claim to *justicia*. If we define *justicia* as "moral uprightness," "just behavior," or "the quality of being . . . right," there is no way that *Skopje 2014* can maintain an identity of *justicia* while simultaneously conceding to allegations that it is a "falsification of history" ("Justice", "FYROM"). Austin calls this specific type of misfire a "misapplication," in which "the procedure does exist all right but can't be applied as purported" (Austin 16). The procedure of grounding a national identity in historical chronology does exist all right, but, apparently, North Macedonia was not in the position to apply the particular chronology of

Ancient Macedon as purported. If felicitous Chrono-work relies on repeating performances of national moments, then North Macedonia's cessation of its Ancient Macedon identity performance—and identity of immortality, independence, and justice—must be considered a misfire.

As *Skopje 2014* has been adapted in response to its initial characterization as a misfire, its subsequent identity performance has fallen under Austin's definition of *abuse*—a different subset of infelicity but infelicitous all the same. Once the first identity of immortality, independence, and justice gives out, what is left is an identity of compliance. This is a common identity for nations that have experienced subjugation to adopt. For subjugating nations, compliance is generally associated with "progress" (Zarakol 316). Thus, as Ayse Zarakol observes, subjugated nations can either "genuinely change their behaviors" because they are persuaded of the value of the norm to which they are complying or else they can "rationally go through the motions of norm-compliance *without* internalization because of material incentives" (Zarakol 315, italics added). While *Skopje 2014*'s compliant performance is being carried out appropriately and completely according to international negotiation, one would be hard-pressed to find an intra-national audience member who actually sees themselves or their nation as compliant. In personal correspondence, a Macedonian native claimed that the connection between Ancient Macedon and modern-day North Macedonia is "исто како мајка со своето дете . . . нераскинлива" ("the same as a mother with her child . . . unbreakable"). Another added that any source that says otherwise is purely "propaganda" by entities who aim to "erase our identity". While there may be debate regarding the aesthetics and quality of the project itself, my time spent living there has led me to believe that very few Macedonians feel that their identity complies with Greek demands. The nation has officially conceded that Ancient Macedon belongs

to “Hellenic history,” but it has done so insincerely; in Zarakol’s words, North Macedonia is going through the motions “without internalization” (Zarakol 315). Austin categorizes this type of breach of felicity conditions as an *abuse*. Thus, the nation is in a space of persistent infelicity: its attempts to claim an Ancient Macedon identity are *misfired* due to international rejection and cessation, and its attempts to revise that narrative according to international norms are *abused* due to insincerity.

This state of persistent infelicity in which North Macedonia is stuck suggests that felicitous identity performance is a privilege that can be revoked by leverage-holding nations. Because a precarious nation is, out of necessity, motivated by something other than self-expression, the prospect of a felicitous identity must be sacrificed and exchanged for whatever does motivate it: financial stability, international reputation, EU membership, etc. While it would be reductive to organize nations into categories of *agent* and *patient*, it is a fact that certain nations hold more leverage to accomplish action in those realms while others are primarily positioned to submit to those actions. Greece is the agent of the debate over Ancient Macedon, given that it functions as the initiating and leverage-holding entity determining North Macedonia’s fate as a member of the EU. North Macedonia can thus be categorized as the patient—the receiver of whatever actions Greece decides to take. If North Macedonia is not the agent of its own identity performance, then it will by definition be insincere (unless, miraculously, the vision of the leverage-holding nation just happens to align perfectly with that of the nation in need). In any case, the felicity of a precarious nation’s identity must be sacrificed upon the request of a leverage-holding nation, as it has been for North Macedonia in exchange for potential EU membership. In short, this is what persistent infelicity refers to throughout this analysis: the result of a leverage-holding nation rejecting another nation’s identity performance,

and then subsequently using their leverage to control it. Replacing the precarious nation's sincerity and self-expression with strategy and external control, persistent infelicity is characterized by a persistent tension between performed identity and desired identity.

Commodified History

Having illustrated that identity negotiation has consigned *Skopje 2014* to a state of persistent infelicity, I will further interrogate this state through a felicity condition that has proved prominent to the negotiation—that is, historicity. Conventionally, a nation's commitment to the condition of historicity (meaning, accuracy in Chrono-work) is characterized as an ethical issue. Public monuments like *Skopje 2014*, according to Banjeglav, serve as "reservoir[s] of narratives about the past," and are thus expressions of historicity that are susceptible to ethical judgment (Banjeglav 863). Purporting an appeal to ethics, Greece has demanded that ahistorical ties to the ancient kingdom Macedon be removed from *Skopje 2014*. This appeal to ethics can be seen in the Greek government's characterization of *Skopje 2014* as an "usurpation" of Greek history—a term that, by definition, refers to "wrongful" (i.e. unethical) seizure of a possession ("FYROM", "Usurp"). In addition to usurpation, *Skopje 2014*'s claims to historicity are accused of "counterfeiting," "contraven[ing] the fundamental principles of international law and order," and defying standards of "respect for good neighbourly relations"—all characterizations with implicit assumptions about right versus wrong through the lens of ethics ("FYROM"). This focus on ethics has been taken so seriously, in fact, that it has become a key factor in determining the fate of North Macedonia's EU ambitions. Based on the belief that *Skopje 2014*'s claims to Alexander the Great are "artificial," for example, Greece has demanded a greater commitment to historicity through the monument's revision: Greece would veto North Macedonia's accession into the EU until, among other things, the monument to Alexander the Great was renamed

"Warrior on a Horse" (Milanesi, Smith). In this way, the assumption that historicity is integral to an ethical national identity has put North Macedonia in a difficult position: it could either stick to the national narrative, which it purports to be true, and be deemed unethical to international audiences, or it could sacrifice this narrative according to Greek demands and qualify as ethical.

While this association between ethics and Chrono-work is often reasonable and even honorable, the complexity of this decision reveals a systemic belief in and reliance on objective historical truth—something *Skopje 2014* proves to be unstable. In some cases, this reliance is not an issue; the accuracy of our understanding of Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito, for example, is little debated. While the various monuments of Tito scattered across post-Yugoslav land could be called problematic by some, it would not be on the grounds of historical falsity. In contexts like *Skopje 2014*, however, historical truth is not so objective. Matthew Nimetz, the United Nations Special Representative for the Macedonia naming dispute, holds an "equal understanding" for both the Greek and North Macedonian perspective. The majority of Ancient Macedon's geography lands within modern Greek borders, yet North Macedonia argues that "you can trace its people back to the ancient kingdom of Macedon" (Marshall). Greece is concerned that North Macedonia's claim to Macedon symbolism reveals their "territorial ambitions" over the province in Greece, which is also called Macedonia; North Macedonians, however, consider themselves as "indigenous as anyone" and feel that their connection to Ancient Macedon is a critical aspect of their national identity (Marshall). The legitimacy of both sides suggests that the emphasis on ethics in relation to *Skopje 2014*'s historicity is misguided. In a simple application of Hermagoras's stasis theory, arguments of quality or policy cannot be effectively addressed until arguments of fact and definition are settled (Kennedy). In fact, as North Macedonia complies with Greek demands out of desperation for EU membership, its historical narrative becomes less

true—not more—since it fails to acknowledge the issue's complex subjectivity. Therefore, while ethics are certainly tied to historicity in cases of objective truth, *Skopje 2014* reveals that premature ethical judgments counterintuitively discourage, rather than encourage, the value of historicity.

Despite its typical framing as an ethical obligation to truth, an analysis of *Skopje 2014*'s monument "Warrior on a Horse" suggests that historicity is actually an issue of ownership. In contrast to the ethics-focused language of the Greek Ministry's statements regarding the project, the concrete evolution of the artifact reveals this hidden concept of ownership at work. The rhetorical performance of "Warrior on a Horse," like *Skopje 2014* overall, can be broken up into two distinct acts—an initial pre-negotiation act and then a revised post-negotiation act. During the first act, this 72-foot monument was introduced with the name "Alexander the Great" and placed at the very center of the city square (see fig. 2). Karolina Koziura notes that the historical figure of Alexander the Great is a "common hero" for several Balkan nations—including Greece—but the typical narrative surrounding him among North Macedonians is especially intimate and glorified (Koziura 115). An article published by the nation's largest public university characterizes Alexander the Great as a Christ-figure for the nation, which explains why many locals "wept for joy" when his monument was first erected (Stojanova, Durdanski). Further, as Koziura notes, even "the most important history books" in North Macedonia assert a unique bond with the figure by referring to him as "Александар Македонски" ("Alexander the Macedonian") (Koziura 114). When asked about the addition of this monument to the city center, a local remarked: "With this, Macedonia's identity is confirmed" (Duridanski). All this is to say, the monument to Alexander, with his sword raised and his horse rearing, functions as the *piéce de résistance* to North Macedonia's Chrono-work and a "symbol of the . . . project itself"

Figure 2. “Warrior on a Horse” in the center of Macedonia Square, Skopje’s city center.

(Koziura 112). When Greece claims that this depiction of Alexander is ahistorical and therefore unethical, the monument thus becomes the center of the “symbolic war” over Ancient Macedon (Koziura 105). Then, as it is altered according to Greek demands, it enters its second act as a record of the nations’ negotiations. This second act is characterized by two key revisions—a plaque that concedes Alexander the Great to Greek history and a name change from “Alexander the Great” to “Warrior on a Horse.” It is primarily within these revisions that the concept of ownership emerges.

While accuracy in North Macedonia’s Chrono-work has been framed as an ethical concern, the plaque introduced to the monument during the second act uses language that centers around ownership. In other words, while Greece speaks of the Alexander the Great monument as

a breach of objective truth, the implemented revisions approach it as a breach of property. The plaque erected during this second act states that the monument was built "in honor of Alexander the Great, a historic figure belonging to the ancient Hellenic history and civilization." While the English verb *to belong* could be interpreted through a broad range of definitions—to "fit in" or to "be a member," for example—the Macedonian equivalent *npunaŕa*, which is used on the plaque, is more narrow ("Belong"). The dictionary definition for the verb *npunaŕa* translates strictly as "to be the property of someone" ("Припаŕа"). In this plaque, Alexander the Great is not being framed as a participant in Hellenic history (i.e. Greek history, which is implicitly disconnected from North Macedonia) but rather the property of it. This plaque could just as easily be translated: "in honor of Alexander the Great, a historic figure who is the property of ancient Greek history [and implicitly disconnected from North Macedonian history]." While conversations of property ownership certainly bleed into conversations of ethics, the fact that both nations have reasonable claims to the historical figure leaves his rightful owner—and therefore ethical owner—undetermined. This clear emphasis on property, even in neglect of ethics, reveals that conversations of historicity are more of a guise than a legitimate concern: while public statements frame the situation as a *perpetrator* versus *victim* dichotomy, it is clearly more accurately described as a simple *mine* versus *yours* dichotomy.

When this language of ownership is applied to "Warrior on a Horse" as a whole, it becomes clear that historical figures such as Alexander the Great are perceived as commodities rather than essential national birthrights. This can be seen when the text on the aforementioned plaque is juxtaposed with the nation's choice to change the monument's official name to "Warrior on a Horse." The fact that the plaque clearly acknowledges that the monument is indeed Alexander the Great reveals Greece's apparent acceptance of the fact that it is not just an

ambiguous equestrian warrior but rather this specific historical figure; the changes made to the monument were, after all, accepted by Greece in regards to the EU negotiation. However, Greek representatives apparently still had qualms about the monument's official use of the historical figure's name, with Foreign Ministry spokesman Gregory Delavekouras calling it "provocative and condemnable" ("Foreign Ministry"). Even with the plaque's official disclaimer, Greece still required that the monument be called something other than "Alexander the Great." [6] It is as if the name itself—as opposed to the historical figure—is intellectual property trademarked by Greece. While North Macedonia would like to trademark this property just as much as Greece does, they simply do not hold the leverage that Greece holds as a member of the EU. This reframes the fight over these historical artifacts as a sort of capitalist transaction: the artifact is the commodity for which the nations are vying, and the decision is made based on which nation's expenditure is more valuable. While both nations tend to talk about Alexander the Great as if he is their essential birthright, the negotiations surrounding his monument reveal that the historical figure has in fact become a commodity, which can be bought with the appropriate leverage.

If real historical figures like Alexander the Great are transformed into commodities, then the historical narratives told via Chrono-work—the ritualized production of national moments—become simulacral rather than real. While I will use the term *history* to reference the literal events that have taken place in the past, the term *historical narratives* refers to present representations of it—for example, public monuments which perpetuate a specific framing of history. We tend to work under the assumption that historical narratives are direct consequences or products of history. We can compare this relationship with the one between clay and the pot which it forms: the clay may be shaped in countless different ways, and some of the clay may be thrown out entirely, but it is still the raw material from which the pot is formed. That is to say, a

historical narrative may be biased or incomplete in its presentation of history, but the conventional assumption is that history is indeed the raw material from which these narratives are formed. However, the case of "Warrior on a Horse" reveals the potential for a more complex relationship between the two: there has been a clear separation between Alexander the Great's literal being and his name. In other words, the signifier "Alexander the Great" no longer signifies the literal historical figure but rather something else entirely: the commodified property over which North Macedonia and Greece are fighting. The use of the Alexander the Great's name and likeness in "Warrior on a Horse" thus represents a new iteration of the original without what Walter Benjamin calls the "aura" of the original (Benjamin). If the original Alexander the Great is a figure of "real" history, Jean Baudrillard would characterize this phantasmatic copy as a "hyperreal" historical narrative untethered to that reality (Baudrillard 1). Rather than a clay-to-pot relationship, this instance suggests a relationship between history and narrative more akin to that between the Eiffel Tower and the Eiffel Tower simulacrum on the Las Vegas Strip.

While scholars of performativity like Butler have long since come to the conclusion that identity formation requires a type of negotiation with established felicity conditions, the simulacral relationship between Chrono-work and "real" history transforms this negotiation from iterative to instantaneous. "Real" performativity in identity relies on iteration: not only do the felicity conditions form and evolve through iterating performances but an individual's identity is "manufactured" through their iteration of acts which either conform to or subvert those conditions. Conformity and subversion, according to Amy Hollywood, occur within "the space and time interval demanded by repetition" (Hollywood 97). If Butler were to describe identity performance as a negotiation, then, they would be describing an ongoing and ever-evolving iteration of performances which respond to ever-evolving conditions in a way that suggests a

particular identity. When a necessary aspect of a felicity condition becomes commodified, however—as is the case with historical narrative for North Macedonia—a performing entity must essentially purchase access to that felicity condition or else lose access forever.[7] Thus, rather than an abstract and ever-evolving negotiation, *Skopje 2014*'s identity performance was in part determined by a literal and temporally-grounded negotiation. Since the felicity of *Skopje 2014*'s claim to an Ancient Macedon identity was determined in a single negotiation with Greece, its inability to felicitously perform that particular identity has become fixed. Not only does this solidify the persistent infelicity to which the nation was already consigned but also clarifies that persistent infelicity for North Macedonia is a state assigned based on a literal transaction of leverage rather than abstract iterations of societal power.

Camp and Subversive Bifurcation

Thus far, we have established two significant claims regarding *Skopje 2014*: first, that the project's identity performance has been left in a space of persistent infelicity due to international power dynamics; second, that historical narrative in the project functions as a commodified simulacrum of history, counterintuitively untethered to the literal history that it mimics. One might jump to the conclusion that there is a causal relationship between these two points: because the project failed to conform to the norms of historical narrative, the identity suggested by this narrative was doomed to infelicity from the very beginning. While this seems like a logical claim, it assumes that the treatment of historical narrative as commodified property was the initial catalyst for infelicity. In reality, however, this shift from real to hyperreal occurred in the second act of the project—an outcome of international negotiation. In other words, *Skopje 2014*'s identity performance was doomed to infelicity *before* its historical narrative was commodified. In reality, the inciting condition for this persistent infelicity is the competing

perspectives of North Macedonia and Greece, in conjunction with the fact that Greece holds leverage over North Macedonia as a member of NATO and the EU. Both the infelicitous identity performance and the simulacral Chrono-work are an outcome of this larger context. To use Butler's term, North Macedonia was living in a state of "precarity" long before *Skopje 2014*'s construction began—a state characterized by heightened risk for infelicity due to discriminatory systems of power (Butler, "Performativity" ii). It is unfortunately the case for many precarious entities that the story stops here: persistent infelicity for which they themselves are unjustly blamed. An alternative route, however, is for the precarious entity to be driven to subversion. This section will illustrate the ways in which *Skopje 2014* leverages the realm of aesthetics—specifically the aesthetic of camp—as a means of subverting the persistent infelicity which constrains it.

In the face of persistent infelicity, it makes sense that an entity would turn to "parodic proliferation and subversive play" (Butler, "Gender" 44). Especially in the case of national identity, it would be impossible to simply opt out of identity performance altogether—so, if current felicity conditions consign an identity performance to infelicity, it makes sense that the nation would attempt to subvert those conditions. Subversion can take several forms, including any "ironic appropriation" or "parodic inversion" of norms that "direct the critical gaze outward at society"—essentially, anything that challenges or destabilizes the established felicity conditions that are often "mistaken for 'truth'" (Atkinson 33, Nahm 93). These acts qualify as active subversion rather than simply non-conformity because their perpetuation can gradually reinscribe the felicity conditions which they oppose with new meaning. Of course, most acts of subversion are discouraged and subdued for precarious entities such as North Macedonia. It would have been a subversion, for example, for North Macedonia to refuse to concede on the

matter of Alexander the Great; however, the nation's precarity led to desperation for EU and NATO membership, making that particular act of subversion counterproductive. Precarious nations are thus held in a difficult space in which they must balance two conflicting motivations: first, the desire to subvert conditions that constrain them, and second, the need for the benefits that accompany compliance with those very conditions.

It is within this difficult space that the realm of aesthetics (in contrast to the realm of concrete content) enters the foreground as an optimal site for subversion—a realm that allows for subversive expression without as much risk. Greece requested that North Macedonia rescind its connections to Ancient Macedon from the content of *Skopje 2014*; it did not demand any specific attitude nor composition with which to do so and therefore cannot punish North Macedonia for whatever aesthetic the project may adopt. This is likely a result of the fact that aesthetic characteristics are generally not considered critical sites for analysis in conversations of performativity. To reference Austin's paragon of performativity, the marriage ceremony, it wouldn't matter if a bride or groom uses plain rather than flowery language in their wedding vows; as long as the central conditions are met (an ordained priest, a complete ceremony, and a consenting bride and groom), the performative will be felicitous without regard for whatever aesthetic choices were made along the way. Following the conceptualization of performatives as "speech *acts*," aesthetics would generally be categorized as the act's *mise en scéne* rather than an actor in and of itself. The assumption that aesthetic form is only an "accessory" while content is "essential" is a common one—and it is this assumption that makes aesthetics a less restricted space for subversion (Sontag, "Against" 14).

Camp has often been characterized as a particularly subversive aesthetic. Cultural historian Andy Medhurst claims that "trying to define camp is like attempting to sit in the corner

of a circular room," and it seems that nearly everyone else who has tried to define it would agree (Medhurst). It is elusive and often inconsistent—a "sensibility" rather than a concrete fact (Sontag, "Notes" 53). That being said, there is a general consensus that camp is an exercise in subversion of societal norms. It is characterized by a commitment to the marginal—"low" culture as opposed to "high"—through features that are theatrical or ironic in their artificiality and superfluity. For this reason, scholars like Mark Booth often associate camp with the queer movement, as it dismantles tradition by honoring and giving voice to underrepresented communities. As "a way of seeing things as good because they are bad," camp is an inherent subversion of what it means to be good in the first place (Booth 67).

In the case of *Skopje 2014*, features of camp are abundant enough to warrant an exploration of its subversive impact. If the sheer quantity and density of the statues is not enough, there are countless other features that qualify the project as camp: the multi-colored lights and speakers connected to the public radio, the 12-foot-tall bronze priestess on a rotating base, or the memorial house dedicated to Mother Teresa whose "opulent style" can "best be described as Miami meets the Flintstones," to name a few (Santora). In light of all of these pieces and more, there has been no debate about whether *Skopje 2014* qualifies as artificial, exaggerated, or theatrical in a way that diverges from typical nation-building strategies. Few have attempted to follow through with this observation, however, by delineating the ways in which this divergence contributes to the project's subversion of international norms. By exploring *Skopje 2014*'s camp aesthetic as a self-contained actor—as opposed to the *mise en scéne*—within the speech act, it becomes clear that it is much more than just an "accessory." In fact, just as the aesthetic itself is subversive to typical approaches to nation building, camp in *Skopje 2014* transforms the project's identity performance from compliant to subversive in a way

that challenges the international conditions that consigned it to persistent infelicity. In an analysis of this subversive impact, camp in *Skopje 2014* proves to accomplish two central purposes: *bifurcation* and *trivialization*.

The first rhetorical impact of camp evident in *Skopje 2014* is *bifurcation*. Susan Sontag, generally considered the first scholar to interrogate the concept of camp, uses the term "duplicity" to describe this phenomenon. According to Sontag, camp involves "gestures full of duplicity," with a "witty meaning for cognoscenti and another, more impersonal, for outsiders" (Sontag, "Notes" 57). The duplicity to which Sontag refers is achieved through a division of audience. Camp is meant to be perceived ironically—as if "in quotation marks"—rather than literally; those who perceive that irony are the *cognoscenti*, and those who perceive it as literal are the *outsiders* (Sontag, "Notes" 56-57). This division of audience parallels Charles Morris III's description of the "fourth persona," who is the "invisible audience" reached through "textual wink[s]" to which they are privy and others are not. In *Skopje 2014*, the camp aesthetic serves as the "textual wink" that interpellates the cognoscenti (Morris III 230). While Sontag uses the term *duplicity* to describe this rhetorical impact, I prefer the term *bifurcation* to emphasize that camp is the tool that creates this division in audience—as opposed to a reflection of an already-existing division.

Most national identities involve both an inter- and intra-national audience, but generally the identity performances are meant to be interpreted the same way by both. For example, when Croatia was emphasizing its identity as a democracy in order to appeal to the EU, it was not implying some alternate identity to the intra-national cognoscenti. The democratic values it was communicating to the EU may have been strategic, but they were not ironic or parodic. Camp in *Skopje 2014*, however, achieves a bifurcated meaning for a bifurcated audience. To the

"outsiders"—the international audience—*Skopje 2014* communicates an identity of compliance, as has been established. However, by communicating this identity of compliance through the irony-laden aesthetic of camp, it is as if it is acknowledging its own insincerity. This insincerity is not perceived by the outsiders, at least not to a degree significant enough to impede the nation's NATO and EU negotiations. However, the textual wink of theatricality in the "outsider" identity reveals this alternate meaning for the "cognoscenti"—the intra-national ethnic Macedonian audience.

Theatricality is one of the most prominent characteristics of the "public" layer of *Skopje 2014*'s bifurcated identity—the layer meant for "outsiders." While the "private" identity available to the cognoscenti might be more nuanced and sincere, the identity available to the public is artificial and superfluous. Many monuments in *Skopje 2014*, were they to exist *without* the camp aesthetic, might pass as rather straightforward instances of Chrono-work, which performatively reflect and perpetuate a chronological identity. However, camp as a sensibility disrupts this impact as it adopts the concept of "Being-as-Playing-a-Role," an approach that portrays "life as theater" (Sontag, "Notes" 56). *Skopje 2014* achieves a status of theatricality through the artificiality and superfluity characteristic of camp, a pattern of which the project's imitation galleons are representative (see fig. 3). Placed along the River Vardar, which runs through Skopje's city center, these three galleons may look like real ships from afar; however, a second glance will reveal their artificiality. Although they seem to be floating in the river, they are actually "ship-shaped buildings with foundations laid deep in the river bed" (Marusic, "North"). The permanent bridge, which conspicuously attaches the ship to land, further draws attention to the artificiality of these artifacts, making it impossible to miss even for the most gullible of outsiders. Adding to this theatricality is the ships' superfluity—three large galleons in

Figure 3. One of three imitation galleons along the River Vardar, which runs through Macedonia Square.

close range on a river whose maximum depth is only 13 feet. These ships are clearly distinct from—rather than woven into—the lived reality of the city, more similar to an on-stage production than a typical instance of Chrono-work.

The theatrical nature of camp, most visible in the three galleons but consistent throughout the project as a whole, is significant in its relationship to identity performance: Austin calls theater "parasitic" to the very concept of performativity, and even goes so far as to "exclud[e]" theatrical performance from "consideration [as a] performative" (Austin 22). Essentially, as Josette Féral articulates, theater is a realm "distinct from life and from reality," and therefore it cannot achieve performative felicity within the realm of reality (Féral 103). In this way, the

"public" identity of *Skopje 2014*, in accordance with Sontag's theories of camp, might be perceived as an identity performance that failed due to its theatricality.

As the bifurcated counterpart to its public identity, *Skopje 2014*'s "private" identity persists for the cognoscenti as a result of this same theatricality. First, I will use the theatricality of *Skopje 2014* to assert the existence of a private identity; only then will I be positioned to describe the nature of that identity. While there are many theories regarding the relationship between theatricality and reality, Féral observes that it is a "condition *sine qua non*" that theater is "distinct . . . from reality" (Féral 103). In other words, while theater may be representative of or responsive to reality, it is inherently something else—hence its characterization as parasitic in the context of performativity. Thus, assuming that it would be impossible for a nation to opt out of identity performance altogether, the existence of a theatrical identity implies the existence of a separate identity that is *other*. In concrete terms, the theatrical nature of *Skopje 2014*'s public identity performance communicates two things: first, that there exists a national identity—no matter how abstract or private its performance may be—that persists alongside the theatrical; second, that this implied identity is something distinct from the one being theatrically performed.

A specific "textual wink" that communicates the existence of this private identity to cognoscenti can be found in the four lion statues placed on Goce Delcev Bridge, one at each corner (Morris III). While the two lions closest to the city center (the heart of the project) were made to look as realistic as a bronze lion can look, the two furthest from the city center are more abstract and geometric (see fig. 4).[8] The realistic lions face the city center while the abstract lions face away from it. Notably, the abstract lions are placed in such a way that they would be the first statues a foreign traveler would encounter if they were driving from the airport into the city. Thus, while the unrealistic lions will greet the foreigner entering the city, the realistic lions watch

over the city itself. Artificiality is directed toward the international realm, while realism remains for the locals. Further, these four lions can be read as a gradual entrance into the arena of *Skopje 2014*, as if acknowledging that the project is a departure from reality. Just as a tourist is gradually submersed into the world of Disneyland—with the simulation becoming more immersive as they move from admission line to welcome gates to the depths of the park—Goce Delcev Bridge eases the foreign traveler from the artificial lion portrayed as artificial to the equally artificial lion portrayed as real. This is precisely the nature of the bifurcating impact of camp: a theatrical and artificial performance for the public that implies a separate performance accessible only to the perceptive.

Figure 4. Geometric lion, left. Realistic lion, right. Located on either end of Goce Delcev Bridge.

While the camp aesthetic itself may leave this private identity performance entirely to the nebulous realm of implication—hence the term cognoscenti to describe its audience—*Skopje 2014*'s utilization of both English and Macedonian language further clarifies the nature of each bifurcation. With each language inherently interpellating a distinct audience, each serves as a more concrete expression of the distinct public and private identities. While the English text seems exceptionally passive and vague, the Macedonian text is aggressive and nationalistic. The Bridge of Civilization, for example, includes a plaque representative of the project's English tone:

> The statues erected on the bridge represent distinguished individuals from Macedonian and world history. Numerous significant and invaluable archaeological finds dating from the time of their reign have been discovered on [this] territory. . . . Many of these artifacts which represent the depth of Macedonian history and the spirit of the time when these individuals reigned are displayed in the Archaeological Museum of Macedonia which can be reached via this bridge.

This paragraph is full of hedging language that would be difficult for a nation like Greece, for example, to dispute. Attributing these historical figures to "Macedonian and world history" is a fascinating move: it suggests a connection to North Macedonian history but immediately softens that implication by broadening the scope to the entire world. Scholars like Ofer Feldman call this rhetorical move *equivocation*: a form of "indirect communication" that is deliberately "ambiguous, contradictory, [or] obscure" so as to deflect responsibility or minimize conflict (Feldman 3). As Feldman notes, rhetors "tend to equivocate when they face a communicative conflict . . . in which all possible replies to a given question have potentially negative

consequences but a reply is nevertheless expected"—a situation which certainly describes North Macedonia's identity performance (Feldman 4). This plaque also uses equivocation when it connects these figures to the nearby Archeological Museum of Macedonia—a museum also constructed as a part of *Skopje 2014*—by describing "numerous . . . finds," "many" of which represent "the spirit of the time." By leaving the particulars of these "finds" unspecified, as well as the nature of "the spirit of the time," it is impossible to confirm the exact claim this plaque is making about North Macedonian history. While it is probably safe to assume that the authors of this plaque do believe that these historical figures and artifacts belong to North Macedonia, the linguistic obfuscation is a defense against those who may disagree—particularly among the international public, hence the use of English.

While this public identity of compliance has already been supported by other aspects of the project, its strong contrast to the project's use of Macedonian unveils the nature of the private identity whose existence is implied by the camp aesthetic. While the public-facing text includes vague and hedging English, the text in Macedonian is the complete opposite. For example, on the base of the monument to Macedonian revolutionary Hristo Tatarcev, the quote is engraved: "Македонија била и си останува култ на македонскиот народ, на неговата религија, род, јазик, на реликвиите на нејзините дедовци и прадедовци." ("Macedonia has been and is remaining a cult of the Macedonian people, of their religion, race, language, [and] of the relics of the nation's grandfathers and great-grandfathers.") This is a quote taken from Tatarcev, originally in the context of the Macedonian revolt against the Ottoman Empire in the 1930s, but its application to *Skopje 2014* is significant. Most notably, Tatarcev refers to the nation as "Macedonia" rather than "North Macedonia"—a move that, in the modern day, is in direct defiance of Greece. Further, Tatarcev uses the present-continuous tense for the verb *си остане*

("to remain"). This can best be translated to English as "is remaining"—a phrase implying that the action has yet to be completed and will thus persist until otherwise stated. While the context in which Tatarcev originally made this claim may have prompted a different interpretation, the fact that *Skopje 2014* cites it with no additional context is an implicit assertion that Macedonia—distinct from the compliant *North* Macedonia—is persisting in the present day. Even more explicitly to this point is the quote included on the monument to Gjorgjia Pulevski: "Нашето отечество се велит македонија и није се именуваме Македонци" ("Our homeland is called Macedonia and we are called Macedonians"). Not only are these Macedonian quotes more physically inconspicuous— subtle white-on-white carvings into the discreet corners of *Skopje 2014*, in contrast to the English quotes on large, foregrounded plaques—but the language itself makes these messages accessible only to the Macedonian cognoscenti (see fig. 5). Thus, *Skopje*

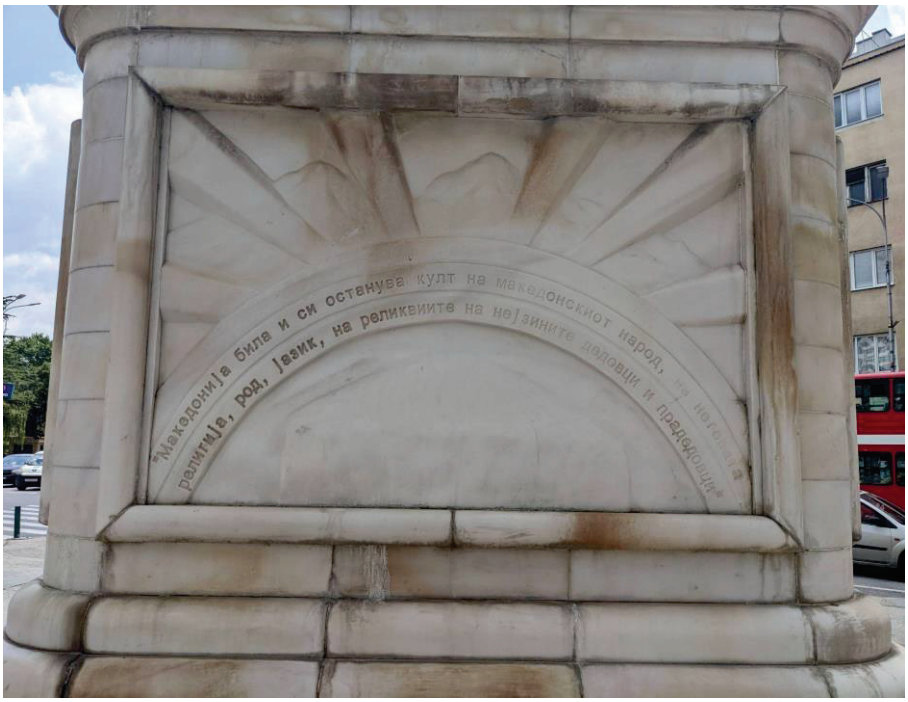

Figure 5. Quote by Hristo Tatarcev engraved into the base of his monument. Located in Pela Square.

2014 is enabled to theatrically foreground an identity of compliance that appeals to English-speaking "outsiders"—an audience that includes the nation's EU gatekeepers—while quietly asserting the strong-willed and nationalist identity as an immortalized Macedon for the Macedonian cognoscenti.

Exploring this bifurcated identity in conjunction with the trivializing aspects of camp, *Skopje 2014* proves subversive to the felicity condition of Chrono-work. If a national identity relies on the creation of a clear chronological continuum of national moments—as established by Lavi—one might assume that a bifurcated identity requires a bifurcated continuum. However, the camp aesthetic completely disrupts and "denaturaliz[es]" the temporal continuity of the "outsider" identity (van de Port 875, 878). At first glance, many of the monuments in *Skopje 2014* appear to be grounded in "national moments" from the nation's claimed origins; the project uses materials such as marble and bronze that mimic the architecture of Ancient Macedon, as well as symbols such as military friezes and rearing horses. If the description of these monuments could end here, it would seem that *Skopje 2014* mirrors countless other acts of Chrono-work in which monuments depict the national moments a nation wants to claim within its chronological continuum.

However, when these antiquating features are paired with camp, this supposed chronological continuum is uprooted. Multi-colored lights are not just installed around the city center; they are installed upon the antiquated monuments themselves. While "Warrior on a Horse" may pass as an artifact of antiquity while these lights are off, it could hardly look more modern when its base glows in strobing neon (see fig. 6). Speakers blasting songs from the public radio, also installed upon the monument itself, further cement this impact. These features draw comparisons to the Las Vegas Strip and Disneyland—environments that notably "eschew

Figure 6. “Warrior on a Horse” at night, with neon lights and fountains throughout Macedonia Square.

the usual reference points of time and space” through visual equivocation such that any chronological continuum is muddied (Koteska, Symes 11). Also like Vegas or Disneyland, *Skopje 2014* depicts a coexistence of classical, baroque, and contemporary architectural styles, rendering it disjointed from any particular era. These theatrical anachronisms are thus “inscribed in a time and space different from the quotidian,” displacing the ancient symbolism from concrete chronology (Féral 103). By displacing ancient symbolism from concrete time, *Skopje 2014* suggests that the very concept of Chrono-work through antiquization is trivial—something to be played with or even mocked rather than venerated as a vital felicity condition.

As camp bifurcates *Skopje 2014*'s identity performance and subsequently trivializes the public bifurcation, it can thus be read as an empowering subversion in the face of persistent infelicity. While the reception of *Skopje 2014* has been overwhelmingly critical—carrying accusations from unethical historicity to ugly aesthetics—this analysis grants several points in the project's favor. First and foremost, to speak reductively, the project's public identity performance has worked. Greece has rescinded its veto in regards to North Macedonia's accession into the EU and NATO; North Macedonia has since been fully accepted into NATO, and accession negotiations with the EU have been initiated. The project has even increased tourism, which has improved the nation's economic stability. Moreover, the nation has been able to achieve all of these desired benefits even while maintaining the very identity of *immortalis* Macedon it was expected to quell—albeit only for the private cognoscenti. In short, this analysis characterizes *Skopje 2014* as a performance of subversive compliance, in which it technically meets the necessary felicity conditions enough to gain its desired benefits from the international public while engaging in contradictory acts of subversion for the intra-national cognoscenti.

Conclusion: Precarity and Simulacra

Although *Skopje 2014* may seem to successfully subvert the international conditions that have so constrained the nation's identity performance, it has been compelled to do so within the realm of camp in order to deflect concrete international consequences. While parodic subversions like this can "leave a particular norm open to question," which is to North Macedonia's benefit, Kate Kenny notes that it remains "difficult to predict" the long-term ramifications of subversions as they proliferate and solidify over time (Kenny 225). In part, this is due to the fact that subversive parody is "dependent upon the original [norms] that it imitates"—similar to, for example, the relationship between theater and the reality to which it

responds (Kenny 226, Féral). To create its subversive bifurcation of audience, *Skopje 2014* must cite the very compliant or normative identity it resists; it may be performing this identity theatrically and parodically, but the fact is that this identity is still being performed. Baudrillard would call this a simulacrum of the third order: an artifact that mimics reality—that is, a reality of compliance as its international audience demands—in order to mask that reality's true absence. Just as the condition of Chrono-work became commodified and simulacral, so has the subversive identity performance that responded to it. The identity of compliance that *Skopje 2014* publicly performs may be convincing enough to appease Greece, but as a simulacrum it is in fact untethered to the "profound reality" with which the nation truly identifies within its private realm (Baudrillard 6). Simulacral identity certainly qualifies as an act of subversion in the face of persistent infelicity, considering its detachment from both sincerity and temporality, yet detachment from these conditions may prove to be something of a double-edged sword.

The fact that North Macedonia's identity performance has been propelled into the realm of simulacra leaves the nation's "real" identity performance—meaning, its private identification as an *immortalis* Macedon governed by *libertas* and *justicia*—in a precarious state. While *Skopje 2014*'s camp aesthetic may imply this private identity for cognoscenti, the question necessarily follows: how much of the nation would need to be attuned to the camp sensibility for this private identity to thrive on a national level? The literal space required to sustain the public performance of *Skopje 2014* requires a degree of erasure to the private performance; these theatrical and simulacral statues stand in spaces once absent of an international audience and thus dedicated solely to locals. This project, by its "objective material . . . existence" and "recalcitrant 'presentness,'" has permanently altered the Skopje landscape literally and symbolically (Balzotti 336, Blair 17). If identity is indeed "manufactured through a sustained set of acts," Butler would

say that a simulacral identity, "by its very existence," would overtake even the most sincere identity if sustained for a significant period of time (Butler, "Gender" xv; Balzotti 336). Thus, while it is fascinating to consider the possibility of a strategically bifurcated identity, it may be naively optimistic to assume that such a subversion is sustainable. Considering Baudrillard's theory of the precession of simulacra, it is perhaps inevitable that the private identity North Macedonia hopes to maintain will gradually but inevitably be overtaken and erased by the public identity that covers it. Not only does the reality of a "territory no longer preced[e] the map," according to Baudrillard, but the reality cannot even "survive it" (Baudrillard 1). In more concrete terms: not only does North Macedonia's "real" identity no longer dictate its identity performance, but perhaps this "real" identity will no longer be able to survive it.

This analysis thus leaves the identity performance of North Macedonia in a space of significant uncertainty and prompts questions about the identity performances of other precarious nations who may have been consigned to persistent infelicity. In the context of the North Macedonia's persistent infelicity, this reading of *Skopje 2014* as a subversive act of performativity has lead to a string of conclusions: first, that the commodification of the felicity condition of Chrono-work has limited the temporal space necessary for subversive play; second, that *Skopje 2014* has still managed to create a subversive performance by leveraging the temporally-detached realm of the camp aesthetic; and third, that *Skopje 2014* has thus utilized the camp aesthetic to bifurcate and trivialize its identity performance in a way that allowed it to appease both its inter- and intra-national audiences. Finally, while this is an empowering reading relative to typical characterizations of the project, we are still left in a state of uncertainty and precarity. If the only space available for precarious nations to practice subversion is the realm of

simulacra, this analysis of *Skopje 2014* perhaps foreshadows a gradual erasure of the "real," albeit private, identities of precarious nations at the hand of those nations who hold leverage.

Notes

1. The use of the term "North Macedonia" throughout this paper acknowledges the official name change agreed upon by this nation and Greece in the Prespa Agreement of 2018. I acknowledge the sensitivity surrounding this term and its potential to be offensive to some, given that many Macedonians still identify with the nation's former name. While I adhere to the internationally recognized name as per the Prespa Agreement, I understand the power of names and recognize that this concern runs parallel to many of the issues discussed throughout this paper.

2. Nikolina Stojanova performed a close reading of three monuments in particular within *Skopje 2014*—namely, the monuments of Alexander the Great, his father Phillip, and his mother Olympia—employing analysis of both form and content. Notably, Stojanova is a local Macedonian and this analysis was published by Skopje's local university.

3. Other precarious nations could include Serbia or Bosnia and Herzegovina, the other post-Yugoslav nations who have yet to join the EU. This term could potentially be used more broadly as well in reference to any nation whose fate lies in the hands of another, such as Ukraine or Palestine. More individualized analysis of these nations' identity formation strategies would be necessary to say any more.

4. Eric Hobsbawm calls this creation of chronology "invented tradition." He uses this term to refer to performances which "seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition" in a way that "automatically implies continuity . . . with a suitable historic past."

5. In an effort to join NATO and the EU, North Macedonia and Greece signed the Prespa Agreement. This agreement legally severs North Macedonia's ties to Ancient Macedon by

officially changing the nation's name from Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to North Macedonia.

6. North Macedonia was also required to change the name of "Skopje Alexander the Great Airport" and "Alexander the Great Highway." These were changed to "Skopje International Airport" and "Friendship Highway," respectively.

7. This explains Irene Sywenky's term "fiction of post-displacement," which theorizes that the literal or symbolic "eviction of populations and languages" is something "beyond rectification" (Pucherová 18). Once a performing entity is evicted from a given felicity condition, the ensuing precarity may become fixed.

8. According to Mirek Dymitrow, the incongruity between the two designs "instigated harsh public criticism." The abstract pair of lions in particular "drew comparison to transformer robots" (Dymitrow 140).

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