

## ISSUE NO. 14

# Between A Rock And A Hard Place: Performative Politics And Queer Migrant Activisms

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In June 2017, the refugee rights group LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece abducted a participatory artwork from the global contemporary art exhibit Documenta 14, held in Athens to highlight the city's centrality to European imaginaries of crisis. They then released a ransom note and accompanying video in social media, in which they addressed the artist, Roger Bernat, condemning the fetishization of refugees by Documenta, and highlighting the precarious conditions queer migrants face on a daily basis. This paper takes up this action to examine the performative potential of such cultural interventions, their use of embodied actions which draw from the aesthetic languages of feminist and queer artistic practice, the forms of alliance their gesture enacted, and their careful negotiation of the tricky boundary of visibility/invisibility. It concludes that the strategic appropriation of urban space and digital platforms—a strategy it names “displacement”—served to interrupt Documenta's more narrowly defined public sphere, forging a new space in which to appear publicly.

*What holds them together there, and what are their conditions of persistence and power in relation to their precarity and exposure?*

—Judith Butler, *Bodies in Alliance and the Politics of the Street*

In April 2017, the global contemporary art exhibition Documenta, typically held in Kassel, Germany, opened in Athens, Greece under the title “Learning from Athens.” [1] The exhibition was located in Athens to call attention to Europe's economic, political and migration “crises,” which have become synonymous with Greece in Western and Northern Europe's persistent differentiation from its Southern and Eastern Eurozone partners. In “Learning from Athens,” Documenta 14 sought to engage directly with questions of identity, culture and resistance under the constraints of the European

neoliberal economic order. It included, for example, participatory public art projects such as British-Pakistani artist Rasheed Araeen's *Shamiyaana—Food for Thought: Thought for Change* (2017), a tent in an Athens square serving food to Athenians and Syrian refugees, and political works such as Anishinaabekwe artist Rebecca Belmore's *Biinjiya'iing Onji (From Inside)* (2017), a refugee tent carved out of marble, located on Filopappou Hill overlooking the Parthenon. Seeking to blur the boundaries of the art historical and the ethnographic, the exhibit took up the city of Athens not only as the site but also the object of its curatorial gesture and performative practice.

In doing so, however, the exhibit organizers and participants also risked instrumentalizing Greek resistance movements by demanding participation on narrowly circumscribed terms, treating activists and artists as instantiations of the "Greek crisis" that fed the curatorial imaginary of the exhibit. The extensive public program, entitled "The Parliament of Bodies," took up Athens as a potent site for understanding the history of dictatorship, the ravages of neoliberalism, questions of representation and colonization, North-South European tensions, and the potential excavation of (sometimes classical) Greek democratic politics. In making Greece emblematic of Europe's economic, political, social and cultural crises, it failed to see its non-emblematic (and thus non-metaphorical) sites of social struggle. <sup>[2]</sup> As an emblem of such crises, Athens became a site where participants and visitors might engage in a form of "crisis tourism," rather than take notice of and engage existing sites of creative political protest in the city in a spirit of solidarity.

This paper takes up the shape and terms of the creative protests against Documenta's "Learning from Athens" in an effort to think through the tactics employed to performatively disrupt and displace the circuits of public engagement in an international art exhibition insufficiently rooted in its local social and political climate, and to think more broadly about the exchanges between participatory action and the public sphere revealed by this event. I take as my central example the performative interventions of the queer migrant activist group LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece. Their intervention is potent, in my view, first, because they exemplify strategies of disruption and displacement that have the potential to open a cultural dialogue around politically-engaged public art practice; second, because their action speaks to the potential of performative displacement as a strategy for the aesthetics of dissent.

Migrant activism has carefully negotiated the boundaries of visibility/invisibility to make demands without bringing the brute force of the state to bear on those made

vulnerable by citizenship and border security regimes. This is all the more true for queer migrants, who face the discriminations of non-citizenship alongside sex/gender discriminations. Queer migration politics must thus address simultaneous ‘normative, inclusionary perspectives’ in both LGBT rights activism and immigration rights and justice (Chavez 5, 8). LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece thus provides a fruitful source for thinking such creative activism both in its capacity to expose sites of exclusion and make concrete demands on cultural institutions. Their actions give shape to the potential strategies for visualizing protest and intervening in cultural institutions and media circuits from which they are frequently foreclosed.

In an effort to highlight local protest actions, I dwell not on Documenta’s public program (which certainly had fruitful and generative propositions about the politics of assembly in times of crisis) but rather on the creative and political force of these local dissenting actions, which pried open the distance between the publics imagined by Documenta and the active social movements in the city. In approaching the cultural struggles around Documenta 14 in this manner, I aim to give protest actions their due weight, rather than to simply re-center international biennials, even as an object of critique. It acknowledges that sites of critical inquiry are also spaces where the visibility/invisibility boundary is negotiated for allies of migrant activists.

### *“Crapumenta!”: The Scene of Local Protests*

As Documenta 14 opened in Athens in April 2017, graffiti appeared throughout the city voicing opposition to its cultural capital and extensive operating budget (Fig.1). [3]



(<https://adanewmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/lynes-Figure-1-1.jpg>)

*Figure 1: © Eirini Vourloumis, The New York Times (2017)*

Stenciled on the walls of institutes and buildings, simple declarative statements appeared in the form of letters or telegrams to Documenta 14, exposing the gap between their radical political intentions and the markets that supported them:

DEAR DOCUMENTA: I REFUSE TO EXOTICIZE MYSELF TO INCREASE YOUR CULTURAL CAPITAL

DEAR DOCUMENTA: IT MUST BE NICE TO CRITIQUE CAPITALISM ETC. WITH A 38 (70?) MILLION EURO BUDGET.

Alongside this epistolary graffiti, erupting on the surface of the city, a group called Artists Against Evictions penned an “Open Letter to the Viewers, Participants, and Cultural Workers of Documenta 14.” Artists Against Evictions is a collective of artists who work to open houses and communities beyond the authority of the state, seeking to offer a haven for displaced persons across Europe through culture and self-expression (Rafferty). They are self-organized, and are located primarily around Exarcheia in Athens (a key site for autonomous living, and a hospitable space for refugees). Their letter drew attention to the mayor of Athens’ eviction of migrants, artists and activists from squatted houses in preparation for Documenta 14, and condemned Documenta’s silence on Mayor Kaminis’s evictions from squats and social spaces such as Villa Zografou and the Alkiviadou refugee squat. They note that evictions are ‘dividing the legitimate bodies from the illegitimate ones,’ targeting the very bodies Szymczyk lauded in the “Parliament of Bodies” as ‘a space for cultural activism, inventing new affects and creating synthetic alliances between different world struggles for sovereignty, recognition and survival’ (*The Parliament of Bodies*). The open letter, posted on *e-flux conversations* two days after Documenta’s opening in Athens, went viral over the opening days of Documenta’s Athens event (it has 28.2k views to date) and the blog *Berlin Art Link* notes that the letter in fact had more views than the exhibition itself had visitors in its opening hours (Rafferty). [4]

Documenta’s public programs, the “Parliament of Bodies,” aimed to counter the failures of representative democratic institutions with a parliament “on the street,” constituted by unrepresented and undocumented bodies. To this end, organizers launched a series of events seven months prior to Documenta’s opening, engaging the Municipality Arts

Center at Parko Eleftherias and the Athens Museum of Queer Arts, and coordinating with local and international artists, scholars, and curators. Iliana Fokianaki argues, however, that Documenta 14 also ‘landed in an artistic scene exhausted by the continuous effort to sustain itself through alternative economies, volunteer work and DIY exhibitions.’ Fokianaki notes that, despite the title “Learning from Athens,” the curatorial team never met with cultural workers in Athens, or shared their curatorial interests or direction. Lectures and workshops in the events leading up to the opening were frequently by invitation only, and weren’t publicly announced, since the spaces where events were held were too small to accommodate a large crowd. Fokianaki further notes that the precursor events were mainly organized for the staff of Documenta 14 and Greek art students, many of whom couldn’t attend because the location, the Polytechnic School, was too far from the art school. The Polytechnic School was chosen specifically for its location in Exarxheia—a neighborhood for socialist, anarchist and anti-fascist groups—which lent symbolic capital to Documenta’s political aims; it also contained, next to the entrance to the School, a section of the crumbled fence of the university, taken down by tanks during the military dictatorship in 1973 and killing dozens of students.

Documenta described its own organization and social formation as follows: ‘Nomadic and performative, working as a stateless heterotopia by means of multiplication and displacement, the Parliament of Bodies acts within the spaces of the exhibition as well as within spaces of both cities (theaters, associations, studios, squares...) that are experimenting with new forms of sovereignty beyond the norm.’ By contrast, Artists Against Evictions’ letter called for a different embodied action, a different engagement with Athenian public space: ‘Your jostling bodies crowd the streets of Athens, your mouths are speaking of our hardship, your feet are pounding the pavements. But this is not enough [...] We ask you to redirect your limbs into the shadows and the black outs, away from the feast the Mayor of Athens has staged for you’. They called for visitors to ‘open your eyes to the city,’ and to ‘recalibrate your devices, hack your automation, rewire your cultural viewpoint.’ The call elicited a bodily engagement with the city, one that engaged in allied action through devising new trajectories through urban space and attuning oneself to the other frequencies of political and performative action.

Artists against Evictions’ action is situated squarely within contemporary critical debates regarding democratic aesthetic practices and art in public places. <sup>[5]</sup> Central to such debates have been the grounds and terms of “participation” in and through a politically-engaged artistic practice. Judith Butler, in theorizing the politics of the street,

notes that these grounds (the street, the square, but also the blog or the tweet) are not only the material supports for action, but ‘they themselves are part of any account of bodily public action’ (118). The material conditions of struggle over public space are also, then, struggles over ‘how bodies will be supported in the world’ (118). These supports include not only the city’s shifting apertures, but also the concrete material supports for daily survival (Butler names, among others, employment, education, equitable food distribution, livable shelter, freedom of movement and expression). She argues that people can persist and act ‘only when they are supported, by environments, by nutrition, by work, by modes of sociality and belonging’ (124). The call by Artists Against Evictions thus allied the critique of the material conditions of Documenta’s staging in Athens (the wages it payed local staff, its support for conservative cultural institutions) with its critique of the exhibit’s spectacularization of marginal populations. Documenta’s ‘map’ of Athens rested on its material solicitation of exhibition spaces, the transport infrastructures that enabled visitors to travel between Kassel and Athens, the host city’s tourism, etc. <sup>[6]</sup> Such insights expose the paradoxes of participatory public art projects which seek to mobilize precarious populations in Athens in the interests of a politically-engaged artistic practice. The letter raised the question of the nature of public art and performative intervention, particularly in the context of economic and political crisis, as well as the resurgent of right-wing nationalisms following the so-called ‘migrant crisis’ of 2015-16. <sup>[7]</sup>

### *Taking up Place / Displacement*

Artistic actions do not, then, simply take place in public; they rather *take up* place—relying on the architectures and topographies of the city, its rites (and rights) of passage, forces of gentrification, and apparatuses of policing and surveillance. The notion of “taking up place” echoes (even as it torques) the calls within feminist activist organizing to “take up space”—to have a voice, to be heard, to call out instances of social oppression and institutional constraint. <sup>[8]</sup> Places—as Doreen Massey sees them—are a ‘spatio-temporal events,’ (2005, 394), but located within particular material arenas that include the shifting natural and build environment. She argues that what is special about place is its ‘throwntogetherness, the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now [...]; a negotiation which must take place within and between both human and nonhuman’ (2005, 418). She stresses that the forces of movement under contemporary globalization do not erode so much as reveal place-making’s processual and contested nature (1991, 24).

To “take up place,” then, is to engage in an action that creates a momentary destination, an anchor or ground, for the social dynamics and incessant movements that—for thinkers like Henri Lefebvre and others—make up space. Actions in the public sphere entail a tangle of things brought in relation to one another and mediated through new forms of encounter and arrangement. The role of creativity and creative excess in such actions draws from histories of symbolic exchange, bodily excess, transgressive behavior, *dérive*, and inscription. Darby English argues that, in artistic processes, ‘[y]ou take something and set it next to something else in order to pose, but not necessarily to answer, a question about their relationship. You do this not because on its own it’s a particularly interesting thing to do but because, *as a context*, art gives things-in-relation a capacity to inform that no other framework can’ (in Moten 202). English’s attention to ‘things in relation’ is a key feminist, queer, and anti-racist question for thinking struggles over public space, and for thinking the potential of artistic practice in relation to them in the present conjuncture. Such placing-in-relation may involve an irreconcilable intimacy, just as it may involve a sudden and precipitative displacement. Each of these have a performative and experiential potential to intervene in temporary and mobile sites.

A potent visual strategy for putting things in relation in the past decade has been articulated under the banner of the term “occupation.” Occupations intimate the taking up of place, the performative irruption of protest in and through public sites from which they are frequently foreclosed. They are associated with strategies of performative rupture—the setting up of tent cities, open air kitchens and libraries, etc. which displace everyday activities in the public sphere. What I’d like to suggest in reading the performative protests against Documenta 14, however, is less the rupture or break that “occupation” implies than a strategy of “displacement.” For Fred Moten, “displacement” points to other origins or traditions of radical resistance, not fully outside but not fully within the historical trajectories of social change (Marx, Hegel) (9). It points to sites of social change that emerge outside the categories of revolutionary agency (‘class’ for instance, or—more aptly for migrant actions—‘citizen’). In Jose Muñoz’s work, which Moten cites, displacement points to sites that are ‘both temporary and shifting, in underground, virtual neighborhoods, ephemeral, disappearing clubs, and ordinary everyday venues broken and reconstructed by extraordinary everynight presences’ (in Moten, 192).

Displacement is a taking up of place, a movement-in-place, a *dis-place*-ment.

Displacement is, of course, the very force being contested—the eviction from squats,

migrant deportations, and stark foreclosures from the fortunes of neoliberal wealth accumulation. Resistance to such processes of displacement and abandonment might very well involve re-centering displaced populations in the city through strategies of occupation. Displacement, however, might also involve both less and more than occupation. In physics, displacement measures how out of place an object or substance is, its appearance other than where it was presumed to be located, its movement into unforeseen locations. It measures how, in taking up place in an otherwise full vessel, it moves *something else* out of the way, for better or for worse. Again, Butler notes, ‘... in revolutionary or insurrectionary moments, we are no longer sure what is the space of politics, just as we are often unsure about exactly in what time we are living, since the established regimes of both space and time are upended in ways that expose their violence and their contingent limits’ (122). Displacement is necessarily metonymic rather than metaphorical, which positions creative practice elsewhere, well beyond its capacity to symbolize and represent social life. <sup>[9]</sup>

Displacement becomes a strategy for marking how place becomes continually disarticulated and rearticulated through movement and action, and how in that movement new subjective positions produce, in Moten’s terms, ‘theoretical insight and political possibility’ (109). In other words, displacement is a potent political tool because it can put to the side the very terms on which political demands are made (‘property, propriety, possession and self-possession, and the modes of subjectivity these engender’) in the interests of refusing to be accountable on those terms, already laid out by urban policies, neoliberal constraint, participation in international artistic events, and the national(ist) politics of citizenship (192). It involves, in Moten’s terms, ‘refusing being bought and sold,’ a potent positioning in the multiple and conflicting appeals to participation proffered by state and non-state actors (160).

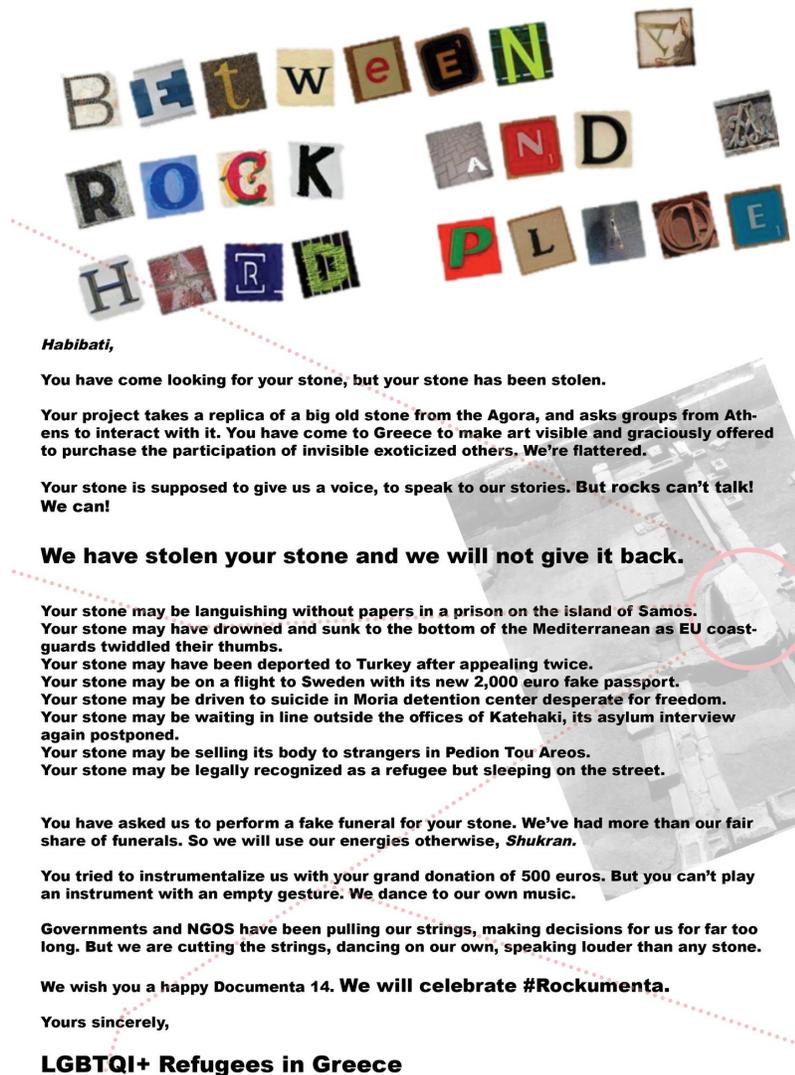
Artists Against Evictions’ call for artists and visitors to ‘recalibrate their devices’ displaces the space of the city not only from the Documenta 14 maps to other itineraries, but also from physical space to overlapping virtual ones. It engages (frictionally) the various occupations and performative practices in the city, the infrastructures supporting various activities, the technologies propelling bodies through space, the communicative networks within which works accrue value and gain an affective charge. The letter, posted in e-flux conversations and circulated through social media, thus constituted an expanded and replicable scene of contestation (through the streets, and through its reverberating visual and audible dimensions) (Butler 129). Artists Against Evictions were attuned to the transnational traversals of

Documenta 14 from the outset, a set of traversals established by the art world. The 'Open Letter' format, thus opened a space of performative contestation in this broader sphere of artistic and performative activity – addressing both the material occupations of the city, and the virtual and networked operations of Documenta 14 as an institution, an idea, a set of social relations, and a potent field of mediations.

*Performative Displacements: LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece*

The performative engagement of the activist group LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece in the context of Documenta 14 reveals the potent potential of “displacement” and “taking up place” as feminist and queer strategies for interrupting the presumed publics engaged by the art exhibit. LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece is a self-organized and grassroots initiative of queer migrants and allies which seeks to raise funds for accommodations serving LGBTQI migrants in Athens. <sup>[10]</sup> Their focus on queer migrant rights is attuned to the high levels of discrimination, violence and abuse that queer migrants face around the world. The collective signed up to participate in a participatory art project for Documenta 14 by the artist Roger Bernat, entitled *The Place of the Thing* (2017). Bernat's project consisted of a replica of the 'oath stone' in front of which the trial of Socrates was held. The stone was to be 'walked' by various collectives in Athens and the Balkans through multiple spaces of various cities *en route* from Athens to Kassel (including Salonika, Skopje, Belgrade, Budapest, Bratislava, and Brno). Prior to LGBTQI+ Refugees taking up the oath stone's walking tour, the stone was toured by different collectives through public schools, museums, bars, embassies, parks, private houses, squares and state institutions for one week.

When it was LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece's turn to carry the stone, they instead carried it off midway through an event at Athens' Polytechnic University and released a statement in the form of a ransom note, entitled “Between a Rock and a Hard Place” (Fig.2).



(<https://adanewmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/lynes-Figure-2-2.jpeg>)

*Figure 2: LGBTQI+ Refugees, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place".  
 Courtesy of LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece*

Addressed to 'Habibati' (the feminine form of 'my beloved' in Arabic), the letter critiques the artist for offering to 'purchase the participation of invisible exoticized others.' It then speculates on the whereabouts of the stone, which provides its authors with a playful form in which to relay the critical material conditions of migrant precarity: imprisoned, drowned, deported, committing suicide, waiting for asylum interviews, engaging in sex work, homeless or surreptitiously travelling in Europe with fake identification. Affirming that they can't be bought with 500 euros, LGBTQI+ Refugees noted in defiance 'we are cutting the strings, dancing on our own, speaking louder than any stone'. Alongside the letter, the group released a photograph (Fig.3) and a video in which the letter is read aloud over footage of the group, in various disguises,

dancing jubilantly around the stolen oath stone before they carry it off down the road (LGBTQI+ Refugees, *Rockumenta*).



(<https://adanewmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/lynes-Figure-3-2.jpg>)

*Fig.3: #rockumenta, courtesy of LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece*

Rather than abiding by the terms of participation set out by the artist and the exhibit more broadly, the group took up the place assigned to them to displace its ‘participatory’ circuit elsewhere. In doing so, they also quite literally seized the artistic object (whose symbolic and material significance was in any case inadequate to the stakes of thinking the enchantments of collectivity and new forms of proto-fascism laid out in Bernat’s “handbook,”) replacing it with the substantive form of a ransom note and queer family portrait.

LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece’s action was not anti-art in its critique of Documenta 14 (in other words, it didn’t critique the value of artistic practice in favor of more concrete political demands). It instead highlighted the shortcomings of certain public art practices for addressing the queer migrant populations whose experiences the art sought to activate. The performance was powerful because it took up the narrowly circumscribed place opened up to the group by Documenta 14 and displaced it. The physical image of displacement (an object causing a full vessel to overflow) is an apt image for thinking the political dynamics of displacement as a strategy of visual protest because it focuses our attention not only on the shape of the object (the form of visual protest), but also the container in which it is placed, and (perhaps more importantly) the fluid overflow that the aesthetics of dissent produce in dominant cultural dynamics.

LGBTQI+ Refugees' actions take up an assigned place in the sphere of public art, but in doing so from a different angle, taking perhaps more space, or a different shape, producing different movements or actions, cause the fluid dynamics of participatory art practice (with their strictures of exoticization, spectacularization, or tokenism) to overflow.

We might locate feminist and queer aesthetic precedents for their performative displacement in Lynda Benglis' controversial *Art Forum* ad of 1974 (R. Smith), in the queer LA collective Toxic Titties' surreptitious insertion into a Vanessa Beecroft performance (Steinmetz et al), Nao Bustamante's appearance on *The Joan Rivers Show* in the 1990s (Gutiérrez), and Adrian Piper's performance of the Mythic Being in the art pages of *The Village Voice* and in the streets of New York City (Bowles), among many others. In each of these examples, the places given to marginalized groups were shaped by repressive ideologies of gender, sexuality, and race that delimited the possibilities of appearing and acting in public. Strategies of displacement point to the possibilities of taking up that place from elsewhere, from another location, another mode of being and moving and living that pushes to the side (even momentarily) the contours of the place carved out by the forces of the dominant for participation in public culture.

LGBTQI+ Refugees' action must also be located in the risky visibility that migrant actions, occupations, and protests perform in the public sphere of state and para-state formations which do not recognize them. <sup>[11]</sup> Historical precedents exist in the movement of the *sans-papiers* in France (whose visibility both put undocumented subjects at risk and made demands that challenged the very terms of recognition and the conferral of rights), in the strategies of migrant communities in the United States (Judith Butler and Gayatri Spivak discuss the protest action where undocumented workers in the US took to the streets to sing the US national anthem in Spanish), in O-Platz activists in Berlin who located the refugee tent not in the marginal spaces delimited for asylum seekers but in the center of Berlin (Ataç et al), and other actions. These moving performances are both precarious—given the threats both migrants and queers face in public space—and poignant, constituting claims to the city and performing forms of belonging outside the bounds of the nation, citizenship, or sovereignty.

The textual interventions in all these cases (magazine and newspaper ads, videos and interviews, tweets, Facebook posts, academic journal articles) also form an acknowledgement that the very terms of participation circulate not only in the space of

the city, but also in broader media ecologies which are rigid and exclusive but also porous, able to germinate other circulatory dynamics. Textual supplements (such as the ransom note and accompanying video for LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece), are essential not only to the manifestation of the performance, but to its intervention and circulation in broader transnational mediated contexts. Local performative actions are thus buttressed by networked activism, parallel communities and infrastructures of visibility that may take up place in different but connected ways. These media texts draw from DIY and post-punk aesthetics, through cut-out letters and a hand-held camera, for instance. The video's attempt to anonymize the activist-artists (to protect them against persecution or deportation) is accomplished through veils, masks, scarves and sunglasses, even as the participants also draw attention to their embodied queerness through fishnet stockings, dresses and (more enigmatically) a dangling car license plate.

The performance actions are therefore accompanied by announcements and accounts that flesh out and disperse the actions across multiple public contexts. Displacement, within the heavily mediated contexts within which local protests such as LGBTQI+ Refugees operated, involves taking up the place of publicity, news and social media with alternate stories, voices and images which come to be seen alongside (and sometimes in the place of) the officially sanctioned visual repertoire of cultural events. <sup>[12]</sup> Thus, while one might be tempted to read these performative actions as local interventions in the transnational networks of contemporary art practice, such a reading would miss the important transnational community which supports, enlivens, and connects with LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece. They are conscious as they distribute these documents on social media to name both their intervention ("Between a Rock and a Hard Place") and to provide an alternate hashtag to the Documenta events (#rockumenta rather than #documenta). The action was tweeted and posted on the group's Facebook page, but the story was quickly picked up by blogs such as Hyperallergic (Voon), Art Review, Berlin Art Link (Rafferty), the London Review of Books (Trilling), and Art Forum, among others, as well as by LGBTQ publications such as Gay Star Loves (Gerdes), and Queer.de (Kowalski).

Further, a cursory glance through the group's Facebook page, twitter feed, and fundraising site further opens onto a world of queer connection and solidarity, which highlight the different transnational circuits of connection enlivened by LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece vs. Documenta 14's artistic networks. These sites of solidarity include the Banbha Theatre Company in Ireland, which staged a networked production

in which performances by queer migrants in Athens were livestreamed to Dublin; VFD in London, an incubator of queer arts and entertainment who, in association with the Alliance of Queers Against Borders (AQAB), hosted a fundraiser for the Notara 26 Squat; Punkhurst fundraising concerts in Athens; dinner and party events; a drag performance at the Athens Museum of Queer Art; and donation boxes located in the 'Beaver' women's co-op in Athens. Unlike Documenta's trajectory between Kassel and Athens, then, LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece gather together a number of disparate but committed trajectories of activism against borders, queer rights groups, feminist movements and anti-eviction mobilizers. The circulation of their intervention through mainstream art circuits and queer blogs constitutes a performative rupture, a node in circuits which more frequently run parallel to one another rather than in frictional relation.

LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece's actions thus constitute networked theatrical events, club performances, music events, and alternative sites where minoritarian and migrant queer communities and their allies hold meetings, conferences, how-to workshops and interventions and, importantly, fundraise for the work of LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece. In this respect, strategies of displacement do not lose sight of the fact that 'the material supports for action are not only part of action, but they are also what is being fought about, especially in those cases when the political struggle is about food, employment, mobility, and access to institutions' (Butler 119). This insight comes closest to exposing the gulf between Documenta's public actions and the interventions of Artists against Evictions and LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece. LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece were not foreclosed from Documenta; they were invited to participate through the structure of Roger Bernat's public art work. Instead of accepting these terms, however, LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece appeared in a place other than where they were imagined to be.

The plurality of networked connections are extensions of the plurality of bodies and orientations in the street also, signaled by the very name LGBTQI+ Refugees. The group signifies a mode of alliance from the outset, a *between* of bodies whose alliance forms the interstitial support for appearing in public at all. The action's networked dimensions (its tweets and posts across social media) constitute a media circuit that exceeds the local at every instant. The dimensions of these actions contain also specifically feminist, queer and anti-racist imaginaries of a world without borders. Many queer groups in Greece were formed within the squatting and anti-authoritarian scenes of local activist politics, and thus have sought to redefine both the materialist analyses of anti-austerity activism *and* the identity-politics of LGBT movements at once. Eleftheriadis argues that queer groups in Greece worked specifically to construct a

more expansive, economic and socio-cultural response to austerity (1034). The affective bonds groups call upon and initiate work to create bonds that move with the sometimes stalled, differential and risky movement of queer migrant trajectories. At the same time, it is important to note the localized force of their performative action, as well as of Artists Against Evictions concrete demand that Documenta participants and visitors work to halt evictions and understand the sites in the city located in the shadows of the art event. Part of these actions displace but do not travel, and it is those aspects that expose the risks run by queer, minoritarian and migrant bodies on the street. The performance ultimately exposes the differential movement by which some objects and bodies move while others are trapped in the waiting rooms of asylum processes, the border territories of state lines, or the confines of urban planning initiatives.

Roger Bernat responded to LGBTQI+ Refugees' action by thanking them for finally activating the work, circumscribing their intervention by claiming it as part of his own authorial intention, and thus part of the creative genius of the piece itself. His tone-deaf but revelatory statement that, having suspected something was afoot, he made two separate replicas of the stone (and thus could afford to dispense with the one LGBTQI+ Refugees carried off) wildly misses the point of LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece's critique. It is precisely Documenta's excess, its readiness with back-up plans, extra objects, its capacity to move and circulate and disappear soon after that was at issue for activist groups in Athens. The form of politics it proposed were problematically divorced from the material conditions and social relations on the ground in Athens. Rather than engaging practices of critical and creative displacement (as Artists Against Evictions and LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece did), his work was more firmly embedded in structures of mobility and flexibility within the global art market.

For Documenta 14 to engender a spirit of solidarity, it would have had (at a minimum) to address the real material conditions that subtend the possibility of public participation from the outset: living wages, safe housing, freedom from police or state harassment. As Butler argues, these material supports must be part of any account of bodily public action. Beyond this, though, Documenta 14 (like all large peripatetic art exhibitions) must understand the relation between the public space that reveals itself to organizers and the counter-places in which the very subjects of the "Greek crisis" negotiate their (in)visibility, their actions and inactions, and their movement and stasis as they make performative demands in public without the guarantees of citizenship or belonging. It could begin to approach this by taking its Greek site not as "emblematic" of crisis more broadly but as a particular configuration of the forces of globalization,

neoliberal deregulation, border securitization, and emergent fierce ethnocentrism. This might generate a starting point for thinking sites of radical critique that displace the peripatetic, partially site-specific tenor of many international exhibitions.

The performative work of Artists Against Evictions and LGBTQI+ Refugees—in their circulatory force, their intervention, and their playful appearance across various publics—pointed to the differential and displaced movement of bodies, objects, institutions and capital, and to very concrete questions, such as wage rates, the exclusion of local artist, and the exploitation of minority groups as spectacles for Documenta’s work. The actions claimed the right to move, appear, and make demands for populations ensnared within the cruel bureaucracies of European immigration and security policy, even as it robbed one work of its privilege of movement at the expense of others. In doing so it displaced the object’s right to circulate, mobilizing in its stead queer migrants’ own right to persist, to survive, and to flourish.

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### Footnotes ( returns to text)

1. While Documenta had traditionally been held in Kassel, Germany since it was founded in the post-WWII period, in 2002 Documenta 11 was organized instead as a series of “Platforms”, including debates, conferences, and seminars held in Berlin, Vienna, New Delhi, St. Lucia and Lagos on the themes of globalization, postcolonialism, creolization and marginality. Okwui Enwezor, Documenta’s first non-European artistic director, had sought to redress past exclusions in Documenta’s European and Westernist focus. Since Documenta 11, the biennial exhibit has sought to engage other sites in Kassel, Germany, as well as locations further afield, such as Kabul (Afghanistan) and Banff (Canada) in 2012. Adam Szymczyk, Documenta 14’s artistic director, argued that Athens offered a “‘fertile land’ to explore the global complexities of possession and dispossession, displacement and debt’ (H. Smith). The effort to engage with questions of geopolitical significance through the siting of Documenta has thus become a key element of its curatorial vision.
2. In this regard, Adam Szymczyk said the following in an interview on German Cultural Radio: ‘We were, however, not that interested in the artistic scene of Athens, but rather in the city as a living organism. And this goes beyond contemporary art. Athens is not alone; it stands for other places in the world. Lagos. Guatemala City’ (Fokianaki).
3. Documenta is run by the German company Documenta GmbH, and typically financed by the state of Hesse, the city of Kassel and the German federal government. The budget for Documenta 14 was agreed

at 37 million euros, half financed by institutional partners, and half raised through ticket and merchandise sales and sponsors. The cost of operating a second venue contributed to a budget deficit of more than 7 million euros. The city of Kassel and the state of Hesse stepped in to cover the deficit with loan guarantees (Hickley).

4. E-flux conversations was launched in the fall of 2014 as a platform for ‘in-depth open discussions pertaining to art and society’. In their inaugural statement on art-agenda.com, they highlighted that social media networks could enable and support artistic practice’s social relations, relations which were in their view ‘more important than artworks and exhibitions themselves’ in the current moment (e-flux conversations).
5. Among these, works by Rosalyn Deutsche, Claire Bishop, Chantal Mouffe, and Miwon Kwon, among others.
6. The letter specifically noted the direct flights established between Kassel and Athens during the time of the exhibit, as well as the reliance on Airbnb and other institutions of the new ‘sharing economy’ which received visitors in Athens.
7. While this question opens onto a vast literature and set of debates surrounding art in the public sphere, I have chosen to focus more fully on the performative interventions of local artists and activists to explore how their challenges forge new forms of public space. I have then foreshortened an adequate account of Documenta 14’s own public actions, and what this might mean for debates surrounding new genre public art, relational aesthetics, the ‘ethical turn’ in public art practice, and site-specific public works.
8. See for example, British poet Vanessa Kisuule’s “Take up Space,” included in the BBC series Women Who Spit. Or Aimée Grant Cumberbath’s recent article in Bustle.
9. I thank Carol Stabile particularly for her observation regarding the metonymic tenor of displacement processes. These are vital to thinking the potential of artistic practice in feminist activist politics.
10. In fact, the term “migrant” is not a term the group uses. In their assemblies and other fora, they distinguish “locals” from “internationals,” specifically to break down the iconic figuration of the “migrant” in public discourse (LGBTQI+ Refugees in Greece).

11. For queer and trans migrants, moreover, the very fact of appearing in public space is frequently punishable by both legal and illegal forms of violence.
12. A Google Image Search on “Documenta 14 Athens” includes, among multiple images of the artworks, press materials and curatorial team, multiple images of the protest graffiti in response to the exhibit. It is notable that LGBTQI+ Refugee’s documented action appears only three-quarters of the way down the first page, a signal of the differential power in which Documenta and LGBTQI+ Refugees operate within social and traditional media.

◀ ATHENS ◀ DISPLACEMENT ◀ DOCUMENTA 14 ◀ MIGRATION ◀ PEER REVIEWED  
 ◀ PERFORMATIVITY ◀ PUBLIC ART ◀ QUEER KINSHIP ◀ SOCIAL MEDIA

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