Foreword

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There are times when the connection between literature and activism might not seem self-evident. Activist demonstrations are often vigorous and direct, concerned with change, improvement and the fulfilment of demands. The social impact of literature, on the other hand, can be less apparent at first glance: frequently associated with the written language, it is inscribed on a surface, still and long-lasting. Yet to only consider these dominant perspectives of both phenomena would not be doing justice to either. Activism is not only concerned with the short-term. It looks to disrupt the status quo in the search for a better present, and with it, a better future. And literature is not static, but in constant movement. It moves the minds and bodies of its readers both as individuals and as masses.

Perhaps the most significant connection between literature and activism is their shared emphasis on the power of language, since it is language that can make a person aware of how she sees and interacts with the world and where change is needed or speculated. Poet Claudia Rankine, when describing an encounter with philosopher Judith Butler, put it beautifully into words:

> Our very being exposes us to the address of another, [Butler] answers. We suffer from the condition of being addressable. Our emotional openness, she adds, is carried by our addressability. Language navigates this. For so long you thought the ambition of racist language was to denigrate and erase you as a person. After considering Butler's remarks, you begin to understand yourself as rendered hypervisible in the face of such language acts. Language that feels hurtful is intended to exploit all the ways that you are present. Your alertness, your openness, and your desire to engage actually demand your presence, your looking up, your talking back, and, as insane as it is, saying please. (57)

Although concerned with the language of racism in particular, this observation extends to other contexts that demand engagement. Language acts, Rankine states, render us vulnerable to the sight and discourse of others, yet make us responsible for their vulnerability too. As Rankine points out throughout *Citizen: An American Lyric*, language can be used to exploit others, especially the most unprotected among us—from marginalized groups to the environment.

However, as language—and, with it, literature—might convey violence through speech acts and the reproduction of normative discourses, for example, it can also enforce its contestation. Audiences can confront the contestation, or enjoy the "addressing" produced by literature on an individual and collective level, since readers do not exist in a vacuum. Thus, literature can foment engagement across different readerships, it can encourage empathy and critical thinking, it can make injustice and trauma visible—or it can point towards the gaping holes in their representation. The literary arts have the power to support readers as they confront their feelings and assumptions and give a louder voice to those who often do not have the privilege of being heard, as well as present alternatives when one thought there were none. It is in these processes that literature intersects with activism since, as Val Plumwood states, "[w]riters are amongst the foremost of those who can help us to think differently" (125).

This potential has often been addressed throughout the history of our discipline. Among the many theorists who have touched upon the subject, Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet conceptualized literature's aim as giving the ability to flee or to create "a line of flight" (36). Important to note here is that the escapist nature of literature does not mean "making an exit from the world": "To flee is not to renounce action," so state Deleuze and Parnet; "nothing is more active than a flight. [...] It is also to put to flight—not necessarily others, but to put something to flight, to put a system to flight as one bursts a tube" (36). When reading literature, according to Deleuze and Parnet, one does not escape from the present, but faces it with newfound conceptions that can provide the tools needed to blow up a system.

To return once more to Rankine, the power behind addressing others is not just related to individuals, but to systems as well. Literature crystallizes the actions of those who face the present, those dedicated to reflecting upon the machinations of the status quo and those who have and still are taking action against oppression. It follows that literary and other artistic texts have the power to show to readers both involved and not involved in those processes what it is like to address others or be addressed *differently*—it provides a different position to think about the system through language. These positions and the disruptions of such positions are at the core of this edition of *FRAME*. In the pages that follow, we hope to provide a varied array of perspectives on the flight through literature as conducted through stories, actions or events. With this in mind, we present articles that engage with many forms of literature and the activist practices related to it—from young adult fiction and erasure poetry to the writing practice and literary balls.

Our first article is Rachel Gillett's "My Name Is Peaches." In the article, Gillett explores the way Black music dwells within the intersection between literature and activism, modeling how it can be analyzed in order to enrich our understanding of both poetic activity and disruptive force. She discusses Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit," Nina Simone's "Four Women," and the more recent "Glory" by John Legend and Common to reflect on the way Black music has a genealogy "that

stretches back and forward, through lines, roots and branches, ancestry and tradition, creation and evolution" (15).

Focusing on the potentially activist influence of contemporary literature, Odile Heynders' "Dissensus in Ali Smith's Seasonal Quartet" asks the question "if (and how) the literary novel can be effective in today's public spheres" (35). To answer this question, she uses the concept of "dissensus," as conceived by the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, as a hermeneutic lens to read Ali Smith's seasonal cycle. This focus on dissensus emphasizes the way Smith's works invoke conflicting worldviews, rather than reiterating normative ones. As Heynders notes, the effectiveness of literature lies in the confrontation of ideas on which the recipient is invited to reflect.

Sean P. Connors and Roberta Seelinger Trites also explore the confrontation of ideas, although in literature aimed at a different audience, in "'What's the Point of Having a Voice If You're Gonna Be Silent?': Youth Activism in Young Adult Literature." The authors discuss how young adult (YA) literature, a genre often underestimated and seen as superficial due to its young readership and mainstream success, can effectively offer its readers "a blueprint for engaging in activism" (68). The authors discuss how two North American novels—*The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas (2017) and *The Marrow Thieves* by Cherie Dimaline (2017)—navigate the neoliberal emphasis on individual success, often characteristic of the exceptional protagonists of YA literature. Novels that present young readers with alternatives to this discourse—such as those that highlight the power of collectivity and ancestral knowledge—can help young activists "understand themselves as agentic people who have the capacity to resist" systemic oppression (68).

Closing our main section, Thalia Ostendorf and American pacifist and peace activist Kathy Kelly discuss the experiences and literature that shaped Kelly's views as an activist in "Literary Courage as a Roadmap to Activism." They address her experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq and the books that inspired Kelly to move to action. For her, literary accounts informed the way she reflected on her role as activist: "would you act or not act? Would you go along, or would you resist?

And if you would resist, how far would you carry that resistance?" (78). Central to their conversation is the question of how narratives can help shape our conceptions of courage and fear and how we might question and overcome fear in favor of action.

For our Masterclass section, Andy Zuliani's "A Present Absence: Reading Redaction Poetry" explores the disruptive affordances of reading erasure poetry and, more specifically, its redaction poetry subgenre. The article's corpus is a multimedia selection that includes the headquarters of the National Security Agency of the United States (NSA), jayy dodd's tweet "Inaugural Poem for [REDACTED]," Niina Pollari's material poem "Form N-400 Erasures" and James Bridle's video "Every Redaction" (2015). By close reading these aesthetic objects, Zuliani discusses how the concealment and censorship enforced by redaction is subverted when artists adopt it in their artistic production in order to challenge imposed meanings and produce critically different ones. By openly confronting these acts of censorship, "these poetic practices model new kinds of attention, new modes of active engagement that challenge the status quo" (105).

Another take on the relationship between literature and political criticism can be found in "The Moon is Flicts: Political and Queer Uses of Negativity in a Brazilian Picturebook." In the article, Elisa M. F. Santos performs a queer reading of the first fully colored picture book printed in Brazil, Ziraldo's *Flicts* (1969). The book, published during the violent military dictatorship that ruled the country from 1964 to 1985, differs from most children's books in its rather unhappy and hopeless ending. Using Lee Edelman's concept of queer negativity, Santos attempts to unleash *Flicts'* activist potential by exploring how Ziraldo's employment of negative affects in a children's book works as a form of political dissent. The text argues that protagonist Flicts' "embracement of affects such as failure, isolation and withdrawal can be seen as a tool for political action" by exposing "the potential of altogether refusing any participation in oppressive systems" (121).

Deborah Schrijvers discusses another oppressive system in her article "Veganism against Patriarchy," which posits that Han Kang's novel *The Vegetarian* confronts the reader with a non-human gaze. This

gaze, which Schrijvers conceptualizes through Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida, deconstructs the current dominant "patriarchal framework" and the oppression inherent within it. Subsequently, Schrijvers uses an ecofeminist lens to show how the novel interlinks the suffering of its female protagonists with that of the animals. She concludes that, through these connections, the novel highlights the ways language can take on the role "of dominance and the ability to mute" marginalized others (133), as well as the actions that subvert these structures.

We close this issue with our very own Marit van de Warenburg and Thomas van Gaalen, who discuss a case of literary activism in the Netherlands by reflecting on the schism between the Boekenbal ("Book Ball"), a high profile Dutch literary festival, and its 2002 rival the Bal der Geweigerden ("Ball of the Refused"), which was organized in response to the perceived bourgeois and commercial nature of the Boekenbal. Working with a Bourdieuian approach, they argue that instances of clash and protest within a literary field can bring inconsistencies in literary values to the surface, thereby significantly weakening "the self-evidence of a field's fundamental assumptions" (147) in public discourse.

As always, the editing board would like to thank our authors for their contributions and, of course, our readers for their support. In a time when street protests against structural injustice have to navigate the mandate of lockdowns and isolation, *FRAME 34.2* hopes to offer articles that can act as flights; flights that may carry new ideas for protests yet to come and salute those that are—and have been—ongoing.

Works Cited

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