Foreword

Kaixuan Yao and Max Casey

Near the beginning of Ben Lerner's *10:04*, the protagonist Adam, a writer living in New York City in the early 2010s, is making last minute preparations for a hurricane that is about to hit the city. Planes have been grounded, highways closed, and Adam is purchasing storm supplies at a local supermarket, stripped bare from panic buying:

> Finally I found something on the list, something vital: instant coffee. I held the red plastic container, one of the last three on the shelf, held it like the marvel that it was: the seeds inside the purple fruits of coffee planets had been harvested on Andean slopes and roasted and ground and soaked and then dehydrated at a factory in Medellín and vacuum-sealed and flown to JFK and then driven upstate in bulk to Pearl River for repackaging and then transported back by truck to the store where I now stood reading the label. It was as if the social relations that produced the object in my hand began to glow within it as they were threatened, stirred inside their packaging, lending it a certain aura. (19)

Lerner's text points us to two certain truths of modern urban living. First, that our urban existence is the product of a deeply interconnected, globalized world; and second, that such connections very often seem invisible. That is, until they become threatened. Karl Marx famously called such an effect commodity fetishism. Marx saw commodities (such as Lerner's instant coffee) as elements of larger networks: networks of people, machinery and markets engendered by the forces of capitalism, and by extension, urbanization (Marx 539-40). Commodity fetishism, though, is a misrecognition of these connections, where we see the commodity only as something that exists separate from the system that made it; the social relations that created the object become invisible and we simply see the finished product on the store shelf, unaware or uninterested in how it got there. In Lerner's text, once this network becomes threatened, it becomes hyper-visible: the social underpinnings of our urban existence suddenly 'glow' and we are forced to consider the maddeningly complex systems and structures that allow urban life to continue day by day, week by week.

Such a conception of urban living has taken on new resonances in the current crisis caused by COVID-19, over the course of which this issue of *FRAME* has been developed. The streets have emptied, major business and industries forced to close, and residents advised to self-isolate in their houses and apartments (if they have them) for an indefinite period of time. Once again, it seems that the social relations that allow our increasing urbanizing existence to continue almost 'glow' as they verge on collapse. While the pandemic has forcibly challenged numerous aspects of urban living which are easy to be taken for granted, this issue of *FRAME* invites our readers to further engage with these processes of defamiliarization. Titled "Perspectives of Urban Studies," it features articles that share in making apparent what is lying below the surface of urban existence. Through analyzing the spatial-visual-material regime of the city (Vicherat Mattar; Roy and Diamanti; Burman), and the cultural representation and artistic remediation of urban living (Naeff; Paalman; Hartvelt; Burman), these articles each posit a distinct perspective in understanding lived or represented urban phenomena.

This issue opens with Simon Roy and Jeff Diamanti's "The Bifurcation of Amsterdam's Terminals and Tourists: Urgenda and Beyond," where they discuss the bifurcation of the city of Amsterdam and the terminal landscape of its Westpoort area. The city of Amsterdam is mainly known as a place that attracts tourists, given its rich culture and history. However, the large petroleum industry in the Westpoort area of the city makes apparent how this beauty is—both in terms of finances and energy—supported by oil. The authors provide a visual analysis of these two spaces in order to detail "the aesthetic, discursive, and material entanglements of global logistics to the cultural imaginary of Amsterdam." "By investigating these two spaces through the focal point of petro-mobile mass tourism," they argue that "the city and the harbour are logistically intertwined, but culturally and spatially bifurcated through different visual regimes." The authors finally take the recent Urgenda Climate Case, in which nine hundred signatories filed a class action lawsuit against the Dutch Government's inept and criminal climate policy, as evidence that the bifurcation of city and port is never permanent, and that ecological forms of polity are on the rise.

Next to Roy and Diamanti, who demonstrate the incongruity between spatial-visual regimes and material logistics, Daniela Vicherat Mattar reads the materiality of a public space that challenges existing spatial-visual regulations. In "Public Space as a Border Space: Social Contention and Street Art in Santiago Post 18/O," she specifically reads the public square, Plaza de la Dignidad, as well as its graffiti and addresses the political force and counter-hegemonic demands that manifest there. Massive changes have swept across Chile since October 2019, when civil protests began in response to a rise in the Santiago Metro's subway fare, escalating into larger protest movements against neoliberal state oppression and social inequality. Vicherat Mattar argues that the public space contains "material and symbolic borders, borders where the struggles over practices of ordering and othering take place." It is these spaces that hold the potential for thinking otherwise, not merely for imagining change, but for conceiving entirely new political orders. In this, Vicherat Mattar demonstrates the ways that "[n]ew connections between border studies and urban studies help to visualize

how the ordering of the city space, and its underpinning dynamics of othering, are contested through alternative forms of political imagination represented through street art and graffiti."

Following the discussions of urban space and urban art, Floris Paalman, in "An Ontology of City, Art, and Time: Plotting the Work of Fra Paalman," writes of his late father's artistic practice, and how his father's work impacted his own understanding of the relationship between art and the urban environment. Critical to Paalman's article is its moving away from the concept of urban art as capturing a fragment of a certain time and place in a city, given how such theoretical frameworks always imply a sort of 'ideal city,' or an imagined wholeness. Instead, his father's work is explored for how the city becomes spatially integrated into, and temporally traversed by, the artwork, and vice versa: "the artwork [...] is not epiphenomenal [to urban reality], but part of its ontology." The artwork, he argues, is engaged in the process of 'emplotment,' where temporal coordinates are situated in space. Such process may also be initiated in other urban activities and expressions, including Floris Paalman's own artistic research project. He argues in the end that "[t]he emplotment [...] grounds the composition of urban ontology and its artistic rendering." In this, Paalman's article reconceptualizes the relationship that art has with the urban environment, and works to illustrate their dynamic intertwining.

While Paalman explores the entangled ontology of the city, art and time, Judith Naeff's article, "Time, Space and Subaltern Phenomenology in the Documentary Film Essay *Taste of Cement*," offers us a different conception of urban space through 'subaltern phenomenology.' Following Gayatri Spivak's theorization of the 'subaltern' as one who has been robbed of their voice and ability to represent themselves, and drawing on Sara Ahmed's work on phenomenology, Naeff's analysis of *Taste of Cement* shows how the documentary works to represent the voiceless and exploited bodies of Syrian refugee labourers in Beirut without further participating in their silencing and exploitation. The urban experience emerging from the subaltern perspective challenges two conventional urban tropes: the cyclical narrative of the rise and fall of empires, and the progressive narrative of urban modernity.

Instead, Naeff argues, the film presents an "oscillating urbanism" in which the rhythm of war-time destruction and post-war reconstruction are "collapsed into a continuum of prolonged subjugation." For the refugee labourers presented in the film living under precarious conditions, "there is no continuity of time at all anymore. […] It is no more only a precarity of work time, but of time as a whole" (Puar qtd. in Naeff).

In our masterclass section, N.F. Hartvelt's article "The Urban Intersection: Resisting Control in the City of *Mirror's Edge Catalyst*" provides an analysis of the urban environment in the video game *Mirror's Edge Catalyst*. The article takes as its jumping-off point Gilles Deleuze's highly influential "Postscript on the Societies of Control" to present the game's setting as a city of control, characterized by mass surveillance and a reduction of human agents to flows of information. Examining the game's environmental storytelling, Hartvelt establishes links between the urban and the game's society of control and demonstrates how the parkour gameplay serves as a form of resistance against the urban control society. Fundamentally, the article opens up ways of understanding how resistance is represented and staged in the new context of the 'smart' city, showing that "[c]ontrol flourishes in the city, yet, ironically, it is also the specifically urban environment that allows [the main character] to resist control mechanisms through her parkour skills."

The last article of this issue comes from Nicholas Burman. His piece, "Fragmentary Impressions: Exploring the Spectral Narrator in Martin Vaughn-James' *The Cage,*" discusses Vaughn-James' 1975 comic *The Cage*, which presents us with a world bereft of human life, "a world dominated by ruins, detritus and debris," with architecture rendered as "*memento moris*, melancholic reminders that even the most grandiose biological projects come to an end." The abandoned cities of *The Cage* affect the narrator, who becomes a hollowed, spectral subjectivity, caged in by the comic's frames. Crucially, at one point, the framing device breaks, and the panel itself seems to fray and fall apart. The spectral subjectivity is then snapped into realizing that it is in itself "ruins, detritus and debris." This article went through many revisions over the editing process, as the COVID-19 pandemic brought Europe to a shattering halt, and suddenly those abandoned buildings

and unoccupied architectures portrayed in the comic turned from alien and distant to deeply material. With the shutting-down of social spaces and consumer services following the development of the disease, Burman recognizes how the changed quality of urban space surrounding him has resulted in the "emptying of [his] individuality." Burman's analysis of the comic underscores the political potential of our own moment of crisis that conditions a radical rethinking and othering of our urban subjectivity.

Another element that underscores the multi-perspectives that this issue offers is the range of different media it engages with. Through reading visual arts, comic, video game and the urban space itself, this issue's multi-medial analyses seek to expand the notion of what 'urban texts' are and can be analyzed as. While, on the one hand, Vicherat Mattar's and Roy and Diamanti's articles undertake discourse analysis of the urban space, the rest of the issue pays attention to how the body, either employed in construction (Naeff) or traversing space (Hartvelt); and the subject, either perceiving or being perceived (Paalman; Burman), 'read' the city: "it is a living memory of this experience aroused when [such] reading touches [...] the points where the scars of the unknown text have long been imprinted" (de Certeau 141). The articles in this issue of *FRAME* engage the 'urban texts' by tracing their imprints through various media.

On behalf of the editorial board, we would like to thank our authors for their contributions, especially in a time of crisis that is strange yet curious, inspiring yet desperate. We sincerely hope that our readers will enjoy this issue and (re-)discover these urban imprints, to let glow the unseen forces that engender our cities and our presents.

Works Cited

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