Introduction: (Re)Building the City

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When the topic for this issue was announced, in the Spring of 2021, the world was contending with change. In the midst of the 'Zoom era', stringent regulations, and calls for the reevaluation and restructuring of public health institutions, the question of (re)building city space and place was urgent. A year later, the mask mandate has been lifted throughout the Netherlands, universities are urging employees to come back to work on location, and yet the notion of 'the city' remains unstable and amorphous. Institutionally-perpetuated narratives that frame the pandemic as a thing of the past highlight the power these institutions have in deciding which bodies and beings are permitted to exist in public. The lifting of the mask mandate, for instance, carries with it the implication that safety means safety for the able-bodied; the steady decrease in the availability of hybrid work conditions implies that their necessity for immunocompromised and otherwise disabled individuals is irrelevant. The question of access, too, has taken on new and multifaceted forms beyond the spatial inaccessibility of architecture, monuments, and buildings: existing patterns of exclusion and denial of access have evolved and adapted into the virtual space. Amid an urging to 'return to normal', the call to question what 'normal' is, who it protects, and who it fails to protect, is slowly gaining more traction. What we are witnessing is a site of potential change: an opportunity, perhaps, to really begin the process of rebuilding.

Discussions of safety and the city have always been pertinent. Safety, depending on which group it pertains to, takes on different meanings when we think of public space. In the last year, there were multiple high-profile cases of women murdered on their way home, sparking questions about how to facilitate safe commutes for women and igniting initiatives such as the *Strut Safe* hotline for women who have to walk home alone and feel unsafe.[1] Another consideration discussed in our initial call was that of hostile architecture, installed to 'clear' cities of unhoused populations. Rather than enacting solutions that address gentrification and the housing crisis, architectural changes are made that render homelessness no longer physically visible in public spaces, thereby pushing the narrative that the issue is 'solved'. Many of these projects additionally inadvertently remove seating and rest areas for disabled individuals in spaces such as bus stops and subway stations in the name of safety and security—but whose safety, whose security?

Indeed, the city is far from a 'neutral', inanimate, objective space. This is highlighted in Françoise Vergès exploration of the Capitalocene in 2019, where she investigated questions of race, gender, and waste in relation to public infrastructure.[2] Vergès asked these questions pre-COVID-19, but they hold relevance here and now: why are waste and sanitation workers denied the categorization of 'essential workers', despite being required to continue performing labor—labor that was crucial for maintaining public health and safety standards—throughout the pandemic? Who is the city (made) liveable for? By whom?

This relates in large part to the question of remembrance, both in relation to death and its reduction to body counts and statistics, and in relation to whose illness, whose recovery, whose existence is and was deemed worthy of remembering, of broadcasting and calling attention to. Not only is the city remembered—the city *remembers*. Public awareness of governmental 'pandemic responses' and who was left behind in their wake will continue to have repercussions and consequences for whether notions of health and safety will be left in the hands of 'the city', or instead entrusted to more localized practices of mutual aid and community care; indeed, whether the meaning of 'the city' itself will come to mean those communities and safe spaces borne out of weathering the last few years and being determined not to repeat them.

This issue of *Junctions* seeks to explore these questions, both material and symbolic, about the relation between space and power. We hope that engaging with four theoretical conceptions of the city–the physical, the imagined, the radical, and the remembered–allows us to contemplate current and future understandings of city space and place, and the actors, networks, and dynamics of power therein. This holds special relevance in light of what is being presented as the 'aftermath' of the pandemic, and the importance of considering the ways in which we are able, if not obligated, to rethink, reframe, and, of course, rebuild.

CONTRIBUTIONS

In 'Ineffable Poetics', Sophie Fernier reflects on Wittgenstein's metaphor of language as an imagined city, where meaning and understanding rest on houses and neighborhoods of familiarity and shared experience, and Maurice Blanchot's notion of 'disaster', where chaos coincides with reality to produce societal horrors deemed ineffable, beyond words. Reading Dunya Mikhail's 'The Iraqi Nights' through this framework, Fernier presents poetic modes of expression as a way to negotiate the chasm between the holes left by these cultural traumas and the need to convey these experiences through language; between city and disaster.

In 'Reimagining Public Safety', Adrianna Elizabeth Rosario envisions the city through the public institutions it upholds, examining the role of punitivism and carceral discourses in shaping societal responses to gender-based violence in Spain and the United States. Using traveling concepts to connect anti-carceral scholarship from various geopolitical sites, Rosario pushes against perpetuating the dominant, globalized and neoliberal-oriented rhetoric of punishment as accountability. Instead, Rosario highlights the value of transnational anti-carceral solutions in protecting survivors of gender-based violence.

In 'The Sardar Sarovar Dam Project', Elaine O'Donnell discusses the building of the Sardar Sarovar Dam in India and reflects on its neocolonial implications for both the indigenous peoples and their infrastructure. By focusing on this case study, O'Donnell explores the more damaging aspects of (re)building—the potential for conflict, loss, and further marginalization—and the colonial power structures that enable their enforcement.

In addition to these articles, we also present a book review of Olivier Vallerand's *Unplanned Visitors: Queering the Ethics and Aesthetics of Domestic Space* by Martin van Wijk. In their view, the book presents a long-overdue consideration of architecture through the lens of contemporary feminist and queer scholarship. In applying queer theory as a form of critical enquiry into built environment, van Wijk argues, Vallerand positions queerness in relation to domestic space as both relational and performative, highlighting the fluidity inherent to such a consideration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

[1] McDermott, Sarah. "Hi, thanks for calling. Are you OK? How far away are you?". *BBC* 22/01/2022 https://www.bbc.com/news/stories-60055916

[2] Verges, Françoise. 'Capitalocene, Waste, Race, and Gender.' *e-flux* 100 (May 2019). https://www.e-flux.com/journal/100/269165/capitalocene-waste-race-and-gender/