

Reading the Global City: Crisis, Cognitive Mapping and the “Urban Sensorium” in Tom McCarthy’s *Satin Island* and Ben Lerner’s *10:04*

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"Reading the Global City: Crisis, Cognitive Mapping and the "Urban Sensorium" in Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island* and Ben Lerner's *10:04*"

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Ed. Treasa De Loughry and Brittany Murray

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Abstract: "What is the role played by the aesthetics and politics of space," asks Kanishk Goonewardena, "in producing and reproducing the durable disjunction between the consciousness of our urban everyday life [...] and the now global structure of social relations that is itself ultimately responsible for producing the spaces of our lived-experience?" (55). Goonewardena's account of the "urban sensorium" describes the mediatory, ideological role played by space in this "gap," informing his adaptation of Jameson's "cognitive mapping" as a hermeneutics of urban experience *vis-à-vis* totality. This article considers the mediation of these insights as critical aesthetic strategies in two global city novels written in the post-2008/11 recessionary period, Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island* (2015) and Ben Lerner's *10:04* (2014). The former thematizes the obfuscating ideological function of "depthless" space in the late neoliberal era, while the latter pursues an immanent cognitive mapping project predicated on the interpretation of everyday urban life.

Marty GILROY

"Reading the Global City: Crisis, Cognitive Mapping and the "Urban Sensorium" in Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island* and Ben Lerner's *10:04*"

In *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson's diagnosis of the social and spatial disorientation attendant to the experience of "late capitalism" is famously illustrated with reference to the work of urban planner Kevin Lynch. Lynch's account of the alienated city whose form mitigates against urban orientation is compared by Jameson to the epistemological and political problematic of postmodernity, marked by the subject's incapacity to map their position within the increasingly complex and mystifying totality of the capitalist world-system. Jameson also identifies the outlines of a renewed political project in Lynch's work, adapting its description of city-dwellers' mental itineraries of urban space in his call for a pedagogical aesthetic of "cognitive mapping" which would "enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole" (44-51). While Jameson extrapolates from Lynch's urban analysis to the level of the global social order, Kanishka Goonewardena notes that he falls short of theorizing the relationship *between* these levels, prompting Goonewardena to ask: "What is the role played by the aesthetics and politics of space [...] in *producing* and *reproducing* the durable disjunction between the consciousness of our urban 'everyday life' [...] and the now global structure of social relations that is itself ultimately responsible for producing the spaces of our lived-experience?" ("The Urban Sensorium" 55).

Goonewardena proposes the concept of the "urban sensorium" to describe the mediatory, ideological role played by space in the "gap" between subject and totality, describing it "as one of the key elements of material reality which represents to us, by way of urban experience, the relationship between us and our real conditions of existence" ("Urban Space and Political Consciousness" 168). While this synthesis implicates the urban realm in the (re-)production of "false consciousness," it also leads to a reformulation of cognitive mapping which sidesteps Jameson's focus on radical aesthetic forms and foregrounds instead a hermeneutical practice whose task is to "*produce* [...] moments [of truth] out of everyday life, by means of phenomenological experience combined with critical interpretation [...] with a specific commitment to grasping the totality of capitalism from actually existing locations within it" (173-74). Goonewardena adapts Jameson's aesthetic concept for the purposes of critical urban theory, but his insights can be applied to a world-literary analysis distinct from those that identify responses to cognitive mapping in "cartographic" fictions that "navigate the imaginary and material geographies of the advanced capitalist world [...] [through] multi-scalar structures that can navigate multiple temporalities and localities and escape the boundedness of character-led form" (Deckard 5). This alternative approach follows Goonewardena in foregrounding texts whose responses to cognitive mapping proceed not through such maximalist representational forms, but through a situated engagement with the hermeneutics of urban experience *vis-à-vis* totality. This task is taken up below in relation to Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island* (2015) and Ben Lerner's *10:04* (2014), works which aesthetically register different aspects of Goonewardena's synthesis of Lynch and Jameson. Whereas McCarthy's novel thematizes the epistemological inaccessibility of constitutive socio-ecological relations in post-Fordist cores with an emphasis on the obfuscating ideological function of urban space, Lerner's more clearly aligns with Goonewardena in its critical interrogation of everyday life in New York in relation to the broader context of the capitalist totality, highlighting at the same time an immanent redemptive potentiality aligned with the utopian urbanism of Henri Lefebvre.

I follow the Warwick Research Collective in contextualizing Jameson's account of postmodernism within the framework of cultural registrations of the capitalist world-system under the sign of combined and uneven development, the product of a core-hegemonic perspective which is "epistemologically crippling" (Jameson, "Third-World Literature" 69) and whose correlative can be found in the cultural forms of the (semi-) periphery where "the systemic violence and unevenness produced by capital is frequently more visible" (Deckard 5). Jameson's account should be historicized, however, as pertaining to a no-longer dominant "cultural logic of incipient or insurgent neoliberalism," one that has ceded to new historical conditions and attendant cultural forms (Deckard and Shapiro 3). Mathias Nilges writes of this shift in outlining his typology of the "neoliberal novel," which describes postmodernism's stabilizing role in the sphere of cultural regulation and attributes its decline to "the structural implementation of postmodernism's constitutive wishes in neoliberalism," a perspective which "provides us with one way of understanding the novel's ability to make legible the epistemological horizons of that

which neoliberalism establishes as our new reality" (108). The texts considered here are emblematic of this development, critically interrogating the spatially mediated relationship between subject and totality rather than symptomatically reproducing its effects. Compounding this broad historical shift is the more immediate context of the 2008/11 financial crash, in whose wake Toscano and Kinkle identify a "noticeable increase ... in tales and artefacts that, consciously or otherwise, seem to answer the call for an aesthetic of cognitive mapping" (20). *10:04* is explicitly set in the post-crash interregnum between crisis and reconstitution, manifesting its political opportunities and risks in its oscillation between "capitalist realist" despair and utopian hope. McCarthy's novel, meanwhile, thematizes the ascent of "algorithmic governmentality" which helped enable systemic reconstitution in this period of "late or renewed neoliberalism" (Deckard and Shapiro 42). Beyond these direct contextual markers, I argue that the post-crash context gives impetus to the return of totality as a horizon of critique in these texts, dealing a blow to both neoliberalism's ideological hegemony and the segmentation of global social realities described by Jameson in accordance with Lukács' conception of crises as times in which "the unity of the economic process ... moves within reach" (Lukács 75).

I argue that Goonewardena's critique of spatial mediation and hermeneutical conception of cognitive mapping describe aesthetic strategies utilized by critical literary texts in the aftermath of the 2008/11 financial crash to address this horizon of totality. Moreover, I claim that this practice is uniquely suited to the setting of the global city, a paradigmatic space of reification, spectacle, and ideological mystification, but one in which key features, processes, and dynamics of the world-ecology converge and are, in multiple senses, made concrete. John Friedmann's 1986 "World City Hypothesis" described the role of cities in the articulation of the world-economy, highlighting the extent to which they "bring into focus the major contradictions of industrial capitalism" while also bearing the impress of their particular position in the "world city system" manifest immanently in their production sectors, employment, populations, internal dynamics of combined and uneven development, and forms of socio-spatial separation (76). Saskia Sassen describes the cities at the apex of this system as "global cities," citing New York, London, and Tokyo. Coupled with more general accounts of the role of urban space in capital accumulation and its ecological status as a "metabolic socio-environmental process that stretches from the immediate environment to the remotest corners of the globe," these perspectives illuminate some of the ways in which global cities can act as prisms through which broader socio-ecological relations can be apprehended (Heynen et al 5). Among these are their abundant opportunities for elementary critiques of commodity fetishism and the reification of urban space; their immanent internal recreation of capitalist relations of combined and uneven development; and their immanent refraction of global core-periphery relations whose different poles might be apprehended in the financial district and the migrant enclave. These avenues of critique co-exist with characteristics that also make the global city a "postmodern" *topos* for its dominant class fractions, however, and it is this tension between obscurity and legibility, between hallucinogenic spectacle and concretized capitalist relations that makes it a generative setting for literary cognitive-mapping projects that seek not merely to transcend the epistemological problematic that Jameson describes, but also to identify and critique the material, spatial means through which it is (re-)produced.

Satin Island

Such a critique of urban space in its obfuscating ideological capacity is carried out in Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island*, an anti-realist novel that renders in estranged form the late neoliberal ascendance of "datafication" and digital mediation alongside attendant forms of depthless, non-relational space. As part of his role at the mysterious consultancy firm known only as the Company, the corporate anthropologist protagonist of the novel, U., is charged with writing a totalizing tract that will "speak (the) secret name" of the contemporary era, the Great Report (70). This document is never completed, and the novel is presented as "the offshoot of the real, unwritten manuscript," a text in the form of a company report describing U.'s disorientating and affectless experience of contemporary life, his work, and his musings on disconnected phenomena in which he seeks to discern an ever-elusive master-meaning (144). While the novel enacts the collapse of this project, it describes a world shaped according to the principles of Manuel Castells' theory of the "network society," in which he claims that "networks constitute the new social morphology of our societies" and that power has shifted from social relations to such networks themselves (469). The network form defines all levels of the novel's world, from the subjective level of the Deleuzian "dividual" constituted by their enmeshment in the productive networks of informational capitalism and surveillance technologies of the "society of control" to the level of its metonymic representative of totality, the vast and abstract work of "network architecture" to which U. contributes, the Koob-Sassen Project. U. describes this project to the reader early in the novel:

It will have direct effects on you; in fact, there's probably not a single area of your life that it hasn't, in some way or other, touched on, penetrated, changed; although you probably don't know this [...] even if I could, and if you wanted me to shine a (no more than anecdotal) spotlight on specific moments of Koob-Sassen's early phases, letting the beam linger on the passages and segments where the Company's operations, or my own small, insignificant activities, intersected them, would this, in any way, illuminate the Whole? I doubt it. (14–15)

The Great Report and Koob-Sassen act as variations on the theme of cognitive mapping, the former's totalizing epistemological efforts consigned to obsolescence in the fully postmodernized "network society" represented by the inscrutable and autonomous power of the latter, whose penetration into all areas of life represents a broader system of subsumption that has reached its post-historical *telos* in a globalized world devoid of dialectical struggle and characterized by standardized, depthless space—or so it appears. In its gradual accretion of self-deconstructive gestures, the novel reveals its thematization of the ontological, epistemological, and political condition of its narrator, a poststructuralist subject and thinker whose failed efforts to interpret and act politically reveal the extent to which the postmodernist paradigm, the model of post-Fordist subjectivity and culture, serves a regulatory function in this Regime of Accumulation (Nilges 2008). The novel thus recasts what appears to be an authoritative representation of the nature of contemporary society and space as one which reveals the material conditions through which U.'s "false consciousness" is (re-)produced, most notably his sequestration in an urban *milieu* that ideologically mediates and conceals the socio-ecological contexts that find form only in a rupture of the "geopolitical unconscious" in its central scene.

For the most part, *Satin Island* portrays urban and global space purely in terms of the territorialization of the abstract technological networks that stealthily penetrate and shape all areas of experience. An indication of this model emerges in one of U.'s efforts to imagine Koob-Sassen, in which he describes it as "a black box[...] above a city maybe, like the Parthenon, or maybe situated (for strategic reasons) far from any settlement, but nonetheless connected to a city, or a set of cities, over which it exerted influence" (94), mediating Castells' account of the territorialization of the "network society" in the "world city network" in which urban spaces act as basing points in its deterritorialized "space of flows" (25). It also indicates, however, the extent to which U.'s vision of the world at large is restricted to urban spaces delinked from their broader socio-ecological contexts, subject only to the 'influence' of these reified networks and acting, the novel suggests, as the medium through which they interface with the subject; thus, in U.'s brief period of rebellion against Koob-Sassen, he fantasizes about "[making] urban space itself, its very fabric, rise up in revolt" (McCarthy 157). In his travels from London to Frankfurt, Paris, and New York, U. finds these cities virtually undifferentiated, subject to near-complete standardization, devoid of manifestations of uneven development and populated almost entirely by other bourgeois immaterial laborers. His experience is largely limited to airports, hotels, conference rooms, and corporate offices, nodes in the network that Marc Augé characterizes as "non-places" which "cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity" (77–78). As if to dispense with the notion that space might be anything but a cypher for networked power, U.'s shadowy boss Peyman describes the "stealth" outlets developed by Starbucks named for fictional "local" figures, which simulate "authenticity, locality[...] [and] origin" (McCarthy 59).

In its erasure of (semi-) peripheral formations, capitalist inequalities, and laboring subjects beyond the bourgeois immaterial laborer, this distorted representation of global and urban space could be seen as the extension of a broader symptomatic logic, extrapolating a faulty cognitive map from surface conditions of the post-Fordist core. However, it is best considered a thematization of the material *role* of space in (re-)producing U.'s distorted understanding of the structures of the capitalist totality. If U. is ontologically, epistemologically, and ideologically shaped by his position as a subject of the post-Fordist core, in other words, this is (re-)produced by his sequestration in a non-contiguous "urban sensorium" of core zones across the archipelago of the world cities of the Global North, in which the inaccessibility of broader uneven socio-ecological relations and the proliferation of mute, non-relational space maintains his incapacity to comprehend his position *vis-à-vis* the world-system. The novel's thematization of this condition is intimated throughout by U.'s pointed incapacity to interpret phenomena which speak to wider socio-ecological contexts, most clearly represented by the oil spill with which he is preoccupied. A figuration of the energy regime that underpins the digitally saturated urban world he inhabits, U. watches footage of the spill in the hope of gleaning insight into its meaning, but through the dead-end lens of poststructuralist theory rather than a materialist framework of petromodernity (Grew-Volpp 145).

U.'s evasion of this materialist perspective becomes particularly clear in a passage in which he watches aerial footage of a Lagos traffic jam. He doesn't recognize the city at first, his assertion that "it didn't look like a British or a European one, or North American either" reinforcing the suggestion that his comprehension of constitutive relations is shaped by his sequestration in the restricted sensorium of the post-Fordist urban core (30). The passage describes congestion problems that U.'s colleague explains as the result of the government purchasing designs for transport infrastructure "on the cheap" without adjusting for the fact that it was "designed for a city where they drive on the left, not the right" (31). This infrastructure has its roots in public works projects initiated during Nigeria's oil boom in the 1970s, which collapsed after a Federal Reserve interest rates hike in 1979, the onset of a global recession and a collapse in oil prices (Gandy 2005). Nigeria entered an IMF Structural Adjustment Programme in 1986, after which Lagos underwent rapid population growth rooted in the imbrication of agricultural producers within volatile global markets (Davis 15–17). Behind the explanation provided in McCarthy's text lies a history in which this scene might reveal Nigeria's boom-to-bust past, the effect of neoliberalizing policies in Lagos, inequalities within the world city system, and the manifestation of capitalist contradictions in urban space which take particularly pronounced form in semi-peripheral regions of the Global South, a history intimately connected to the oil that preoccupies U. throughout the novel. For him it serves, however, only as one among many moments in which the flattening experience of proliferating screens is registered in aestheticized terms, remaining on the level of the depthless, two-dimensional surface: "the whole city's like a painting, painting itself as you watch" (31).

These gradually accreting gestures towards U.'s inability to interpret his socio-ecological contexts come to a head in the novel's central passage, which describes a dream in which he travels in a helicopter over a city described as an amalgam of Carthage, London, Alexandria, Vienna, Byzantium, and New York (161). The "Satin Island" that gives the novel its title appears on the horizon:

These buildings—huge, derelict factories whose outer walls and rafters, barely intact, recalled the shells of bombed-out cathedrals—ran one into the next to form a single giant, half-ruined complex that covered the island's entire surface area. Inside the complex, rubbish was being burnt: it was a trash-incinerating plant[...] If the city was the capital, the seat of empire, then this island was the exact opposite, the inverse—the *other* place, the feeder, filter, overflow-manager, the dirty, secreted-away appendix without which the body proper couldn't function[...] (162–63)

This rupture of the "geopolitical unconscious" figures the repressed socio-ecological relations underpinning U.'s experience, a figuration of the wider totality that undercuts his distorted cognitive map of a reified, totalizing "network society" (Ivakhiv 2008). Its source is an earlier paraphrased passage from Lévi-Strauss that describes the "order and harmony of the West" in terms of its "emission of noxious by-products" elsewhere, alluding to the unequal interdependent relationship between post-Fordist cores and (semi-) peripheral regions that is generally absent from U.'s consciousness (McCarthy 161). On a smaller scale, the dream is an uncanny figuration of the mess and dirt "banned from everyday consciousness," which are "reminders of the materiality of the networked city" (Kaika and Swyngedouw 136). Though the passage's preoccupation is waste, this one-directional flow is complicated by the mention of "derelict factories," pointing to the outsourcing of productive processes that facilitated the ascent of post-Fordist economies. Alongside the reference to this place as a "feeder" and the emphasis placed on the capacious term "*other*," the scene hints at a deeper level of repression figuring the productive and extractive processes that shape and sustain U.'s experience.

U. wakes from this dream to describe an urban scene whose features "seemed, in that moment, both consistent[...] and, at the same time, porous, like some kind of wrapper that was starting to leak whatever content it was meant to keep wrapped up," a momentary recognition of urban space's mediation and concealment of these constitutive contexts (164). U. misrecognizes this dream's significance, however, as he comes to recognize the island as a distorted version of New York's Staten Island, the "fifth, forgotten borough, the great dump" (165). At the end of the novel, he travels to Battery Park with the intention of taking the ferry to visit the island before deciding against it and turning "back into the city" (217). This abortive journey indicates that the pertinent implications of the dream remain untranslated; rather than seeking to comprehend his economic and ecological context, U. now seeks to interact with a vaguely conceived materiality that eludes him in daily life. In seeking this in the now-closed Staten Island dump, meanwhile, he takes its psychoanalytical symbolism literally, apparently extrapolating from the dump's closure the conclusion that such materiality is now entirely inaccessible to the subject of the urban core. Unlike the protagonist, the reader recognizes that the closure of a dump in New York is not the dramatic development it appears to be, the ending signaling

rather U.'s inability to look beyond the global and urban core for evidence of the constitutive combined and uneven socio-ecological relations represented by the island in his dream.

The thematization of U.'s symptomatic subjectivity that becomes clear in these sequences casts particularly interesting light on an earlier passage, in which he visits his colleague while he observes a Parisian rollerblading event. His colleague explains that it is a "Demonstration With No Complaint" before describing the city's smooth surfaces:

Paris, Daniel explained when I commented on the pavement's texture, has the smoothest street surface of any major European city. It's because of '68, he said, the general uprisings, when revolutionaries pulled up all the cobblestones to throw them at the cops[...] After that, he explained, the authorities replaced the paving stones with tarmac—which had the unforeseen effect of turning the city into a paradise for rollerbladers (67).

This scene appears to reinforce the pervasive thread of "post-historical" thinking in the novel, parodying the events of 1968 in the form of a depoliticized demonstration replacing radical action with bourgeois leisure that figuratively represents the new state of social relations. The individuality of the activity sees the rollerbladers represent isolated monads that merely co-exist in space, and the replacement of cobblestones with tarmac symbolizes the Deleuzian distinction between the "striated," three-dimensional space of modernity and the "smooth" space that Hardt describes as characteristic of the decentered, networked "empire" (143). While the most straightforward interpretation suggests that this scene merely *describes* the "end" of political resistance, however, it can also be read as an allusion to the embedded history of the retreat from Marxist to poststructuralist paradigms in the aftermath of 1968, now legible in terms of their role in the cultural regulation of post-Fordism and critiqued in the novel's thematization of U.'s "detachment from his material (and social) environment [which] exposes [...] limitations which must be read as McCarthy's critical response to the extreme positions of a postmodern mind" (Grew-Volpp 149). If the scene is recast as one that thematizes the ascent of a philosophical and cultural paradigm that serves this regulatory function, it also points to an attendant *spatial* shift; the ascent of opaque, depthless space represented by tarmac, which acts as a cypher for the illegible spatial forms that reinforce and maintain U.'s epistemological condition.

10:04

While *Satin Island* critically thematizes the obfuscating ideological function of this depthless form of urban space, *10:04*'s cognitive mapping project is predicated on the immanent legibility of urban experience. In the opening scene of the novel, the protagonist Ben celebrates the receipt of a six-figure advance for his yet-to-be-written novel by dining with his literary agent on "octopuses that had literally been massaged to death" (Lerner 3). After a brief account of his diagnosis with Marfan syndrome, Ben describes characteristic features of the octopus shared by sufferers of his condition:

It can taste what it touches, but has poor proprioception, the brain unable to determine the position of its body in the current, particularly my arms, and the privileging of flexibility over proprioceptive input means it lacks stereognosis, the mental capacity to form a mental image of the overall shape of what I touch: it can detect local texture variations, but cannot integrate that information into a larger picture, cannot read the realistic fiction the world appears to be. (6-7)

This passage is a thinly veiled allusion to the problematic to which cognitive mapping responds, hinging on cultural associations between octopi and capitalism, alluding to the deleterious epistemological effects of neoliberalism's regime of flexible accumulation, and highlighting the difficulty of reconciling "local" experience with the "larger picture" of the capitalist totality. Rather than merely thematizing this condition, *10:04*'s narrator consistently contextualizes his experience within this broader system repeatedly described as one of "majesty and murderous stupidity" (19) through the critical interpretation of everyday urban life, tempered by a muted utopianism in which Ben identifies the immanent redemptive potential of "bad forms of collectivity" which he considers "conditions of its possibility".

Set in New York over 2011-12, *10:04* metafictionally describes the process of becoming "the book you're reading now" (194), exposing the conditions of its own production as an art-commodity and reckoning with the contradiction between this status and its radical political and aesthetic intentions. Meanwhile, it follows the everyday life of its Brooklyn-based "author" characterized by the penetration of market logic to the most intimate levels of experience, most evident in his effort to conceive with his platonic friend Alex through an IUI process paid for with the novel's advance in a gesture that signals "money's centrality in both artistic and human reproduction" (O'Dell 452).

The novel's preoccupation with market relations is not limited to such tangible examples, but consistently expands into representation of those that lie beyond Ben's immediate experience. One such exercise occurs as he visits a supermarket while a hurricane closes in on New York, finding that the sight of its near-empty shelves precipitates a vertiginous experience whereby the remaining products appear "a little changed, a little charged" (18). "The approaching storm," he writes, "was estranging the routine of shopping just enough to make me viscerally aware of both the miracle and the insanity of the mundane economy" (19). This experience culminates in an epiphanic encounter with the fetishized commodity in the form of a container of instant coffee:

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—the majesty and murderous stupidity of that organization of time and space and fuel and labor becoming visible in the commodity itself now that planes were grounded and the highways were starting to close. (19)

This passage can be described in terms of the implicit source of Goonewardena's reformulation of cognitive mapping as a situated practice—that is, Henri Lefebvre's concept of the "moment". Rob Shields describes "moments" as "those times when one recognizes or has a sudden insight into a situation or experience beyond the merely empirical routine of some activity [...] a flash of the wider significance of some 'thing' or event—its relation to the whole, and by extension, our relation to totality" (Shields 1998: 58). Prompted by weather-induced scarcity, Ben considers the spatially dispersed relations embedded in the fetishized commodity, describing its convoluted route from Andean slopes to Medellín, JFK airport, upstate to Pearl River for repackaging and back to New York and highlighting the relations that are inaccessible to individual experience while being its constitutive context (Lerner 19). Moreover, it is precipitated by the manifestation of disrupted circulation and patterns of consumption in the "large empty spaces" of the supermarket shelves; it is only in the estrangement of this mundane *space* that the commodity becomes legible (18). As such, the passage points more broadly to the reification of the spaces of urban everyday life, wherein the supermarket as a nexus of complex global socio-ecological processes is uncritically experienced as a space of boredom and routine.

While the urban spaces of *Satin Island* are virtually absent of characters outside its protagonist's class, *10:04*'s narrator is particularly preoccupied with the low-paid, often informal migrant labor that facilitates bourgeois experience in New York. In one scene, Ben notes the "nannies, all of whom were black or brown, [pushing] around white kids in expensive strollers," extending the novel's preoccupation with reproduction to its entanglement within a global labor market concretized in the form of racialized socio-economic inequality (91). This becomes a more overt act of spatial contextualization in a scene in which Ben dines with peers after a literary event, noting that "even here, where a meal for seven would cost at least a thousand dollars, much of the work was done by a swift underclass of Spanish-speaking laborers" (118). Ben's perspective expands further to consider this situation's global coordinates, picturing "towns in Mexico in which almost all of the able-bodied men were gone, employed now in the New York service industry" (118). The city's internal inequalities here become legible in terms of the combined and uneven relations of the world-system, pointing to the extraction of cheap surplus labor from Mexico on the part of the US that entrenches the former's underdevelopment.

This preoccupation returns in the reprise of the opening scene halfway through the novel. This later version begins with a long description of the financial motivations contributing to Ben's substantial advance offer, describing "the remarkable commonalities between the logics of publishing [...] and the core dynamics of the financial markets" (Crosthwaite 200). The scene transitions into a comparative list:

I would clear something like two hundred and seventy thousand dollars. Or Fifty-four IUIs. Or around four Hummer H2 SUVs. Or the first two editions on the market of *Leaves of Grass*. Or about twenty-five years of a Mexican migrant's labor, seven of Alex's in her current job. Or my rent, if I had rent control, for eleven years. Or thirty-six hundred flights of bluefin, assuming the species held. (155-56)

This constellational matrix of relative exchange-values portrays the disparate commodities and activities capitalism makes commensurable, encouraging multiple lines of comparison that speak to its different levels of inequity merely by reproducing its own logic. The disparity of income between the labor of Alex and a Mexican migrant, for example, highlights the inequalities of the global migration system and the exploitation of racialized peripheral labor within the urban core, while comparing either to Ben's advance speaks to the distinction between remunerated, value-producing labor and the financialized logic of futures trading. This list is drawn almost entirely from Ben's own life or preoccupations expressed in

previous parts of the novel. As such, the novel here draws everyday experience into a systemic critique based on immanent features of a space that concentrates excess and exploitation in particularly pronounced form. The scene subsequently moves into a microcosmic representation of the coordinated, synchronous global totality, whose dispersed processes converge in Ben's immediate surroundings:

I swallowed and the majesty and murderous stupidity of it was all about me, coursing through me: the rhythm of artisanal Portuguese octopus fisheries coordinated with the rhythm of laborers' migration and the rise and fall of commodities and tradable futures in the dark galleries outside the restaurant and the mercury and radiation levels of the sashimi and the chests of the beautiful people in the restaurant—coordinated, or so it appeared, by money. (156)

This system is not only "all about" the protagonist, but "coursing through" him, highlighting the constitutive force of the market which shapes the subject but also reasserting the capacity to immanently interrogate it *through* the experience of the individual subject. While the octopus in the first version of the scene acts as a metaphor for the problem of cognitive mapping, here it takes its place as a commodity within the global networks of capitalist exchange to contribute to the novel's cognitive-mapping practice.

Towards its end, the passage above subtly points to this unsustainable system's uncertain future, quoting the financiers at the next table who discuss a market that is "completely underwater. Probably forever" (158). This climate anxiety is one of the novel's central preoccupations, often manifested in visions of a future Ben "increasingly imagined as underwater" (40). At other points, however, this is tempered with a utopianism indebted to Walter Benjamin's "weak Messianism," the basis of the novel's efforts to reclaim the future from neoliberal foreclosure by "awakening us to the immanent potentiality of change in the present" (Clare 11). I argue that the novel also possesses a more specifically spatial politics that aligns it with Lefebvre's virtual, utopian concept of the "urban society," a possible post-capitalist future manifest in the existing city in moments of encounter, collectivity, and cooperation, which represent 'flashes' of this world to come (Purcell 151). The novel's clearest representative of utopian urbanism is the Occupy Movement, the impetus that at one point stirs Ben's expression of a desire to "coconstruct a world in which moments can be something other than the elements of profit" (Lerner 47). This occurs not in the encampment, however, from which he remains aloof, but in his home, where he has invited a protestor to use his shower. This apparent contradiction points in part to the balance struck in the novel between irony and sincerity, with Ben's avowed political commitments always at risk of collapsing into ironic commentary on a character who "believes what the radical believes and acts how the liberal acts" (Brown n.p.). The novel maintains this balance by situating Ben's identification of the political in the realm of his (privileged) everyday life, establishing an unresolved tension between a satirical portrait of the bourgeois Marxist intellectual and a genuine Lefebvrian utopianism, one which recognizes in everyday urban life the momentary flashes of an alternative social world.

This tension is clearest in the passages describing Ben's membership of the Park Slope Food Co-op, which encourages comparison to the localized democratic self-management Lefebvre calls *autogestion* (Purcell 147). Ben recognizes the co-op's inefficacy as a form of resistance to the market, revealing its supposed radicalism as a cover for bourgeois liberalism which he excoriates; complaining about it, Ben writes, "indicated you weren't foolish enough to believe that belonging to the co-op made you meaningfully less of a node in a capitalist network" (Lerner 95-96). Ben doesn't write the co-op off as morally trivial, however, asserting that he "liked having the money [he] spent on food and household goods go to an institution that made labor shared and visible" (96). Brown cites these passages as evidence that Ben's critique is merely "an alibi for an essential sameness," a point well taken (n.p.). But on the other end of the novel's irony/sincerity dialectic is the ambivalent suggestion that even this co-opted form of *autogestion* manifests a flash of Lefebvrian utopianism. This becomes clearer in the following scene as Ben works alongside a colleague with whom he has an unexpectedly intimate encounter, in which she discusses the details of her complex personal history. This transpersonal, affective experience prompts Ben's subsequent moment of utopian projection on the journey home:

Only an urban experience of the sublime was available to me because only then was the greatness beyond calculation the intuition of community. Bundled debt, trace amounts of antidepressants in the municipal water, the vast arterial network of traffic, changing weather patterns of increasing severity—whenever I looked at lower Manhattan from Whitman's side of the river I resolved to become one of the artists who momentarily made bad forms of collectivity figures of its possibility, a proprioceptive flicker in advance of the communal body. (108)

The experience of collective labor within the bourgeois co-op leads directly to this re-inscription of the meaning of urban space itself, not as a symbol of domination but the signature of a post-capitalist future. Without denying its openness to ironic interpretation as the projection of a character whose politics are carried out almost exclusively in the imagination, the passage suggests that even spaces of market domination in its most extreme form, from the co-opted co-op to the capital of capital, create the conditions of collectivity that might one day lead to capitalism's supersession.

Conclusion

This article has sought to demonstrate that Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island* and Ben Lerner's *10:04* interrogate in distinct ways the relationship between urban experience and political consciousness of its broader world-systemic contexts. Though these novels are limited in their representation of the complex interdependencies of the world-system, their spatial limitation possesses its own unique critical capacities, among them the ability to highlight the ongoing relevance of Jameson's account of postmodernity's epistemological and political problematic even as they respond to it. McCarthy's novel is effectively a self-reflexive account of this problem as it persists in mutated form in the late neoliberal era. Lerner's *10:04* extends beyond the thematization of epistemological limits found in McCarthy's novel in seeking to make totality legible and imagine a post-capitalist future, but to overstate its radicalism would be to misrecognize its simultaneous thematization of the limits of this political consciousness; Ben sees the world through a Marxist lens, but outside the realm of critical thought and imagination, he is virtually indistinguishable from a bourgeois liberal. While Jameson considers cognitive mapping an "integral part of any socialist project," the ironic edge of Lerner's novel highlights that it is not this political project in and of itself (*Postmodernism* 416).

The post-crash interregnum in which these texts were published has ceded not only to neoliberalism's reconstitution but also its next major crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic. Articles speculating about neoliberalism's death have again resurfaced, likely to be as premature as those written under similar titles in the aftermath of 2008/11. Alongside expanding climate breakdown, however, COVID-19 provides a perspective from which to recognize the late neoliberal period spanning from 2008 to the present as one marked by the decline of neoliberal ideological hegemony and increasing critical consciousness in the face of mounting crises evidencing the singularity, inequality, and vulnerability of the capitalist economic and ecological totality. The texts considered here are early examples of a definitive strand in the critical culture of this period, the resurgent interest in cognitive mapping, which will likely see another inflection point in the aftermath of our current crisis.

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