

*Stone* casts its gaze onto the ground as a site for extracting meaning. Digging, drilling, mining, and boring are all ways in which humans have interacted with the Earth, encountering and employing materials that have not only been understood as valuable, but also vital – we cannot live without them, or so it is thought. Our search for and dependence on fossil fuels, minerals, metals, and stones (from the banal to the precious) have generated entire cultural narratives, and frame the ways in which we imagine the past and question our progress towards the future. Specifically in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Global South, extraction has been one of the main engines for the rise of extreme wealth and power, as well as the fuel that maintains the resurgent catastrophes of war, conflict, and conquest. These resources are limited, that has long been clear. Yet, our world has reached a point where it is extremely difficult to imagine how anything would function, or how we would live, the day the wells run dry and the mines shut down. To speak of petrocultures and petrohistories means to seriously consider the future as both a utopian and dystopian set of possibilities. What scenarios can we put forth already, teetering between ideals of abundance and the reality of scarcity? How can history be re-imagined as a story of energy, its accumulation, and its expenditure?

Fadi Mansour's short story *Beirut 2050* posits an ambivalent future scenario. In the face of tomorrow's ever-worsening climate crisis, world governments decide on a "defensive" strategy – technology is to be used to fight against global warming and imminent environmental catastrophe. A techno-utopia emerges,

an artificial state of simulated, extremely fragile peace and prosperity. In the case of Beirut and many other cities, entire urban landscapes are rebuilt with "plastiglomerate," a new type of anthropogenic stone – a fusion of plastic and rock – which has been engineered to possess qualities of artificial intelligence. These plastic "smart" cities question what it means to inhabit our planet – when there are no more trees, only plastiglomerate walls that radiate animated, interactive images of plants and flowers, what will happen to the human sensory apparatus? Sophia Al Maria also imagines with and through plastic in her poem *Xanadu*, part of her ongoing artistic research on shopping malls in the Gulf States. The shopping mall, a plastic paradise frequented by plastic people is the 21st century's "heart of evil." Its inventor, Victor Gruen, notable for his design of the Gefinor Center in Beirut's Clemenceau district, disavowed the shopping mall as having been "bastardized" by real estate developers. Indeed, these spaces of mass consumerism, where "boredom is a natural state" have disseminated worldwide, fueled by war and built with the final, synthetic distillation of our civilization's addiction to fossil fuels. Trapped in and by plastic, a stroll around the shopping mall leads to a long meditation on human extinction – as T.S. Eliot would write a century ago, "this is the way the world ends / not with a bang but a whimper." The dystopian imaginary both of these fictional pieces offer is tempered by the difficult realities facing activists and organizers, a point that Hamza Hamouchene elaborates upon in his essay *What does it mean to fight for climate justice in the Maghreb?* Written from the perspective of his long, personal engagement on the ground

with ongoing struggles against systemic ecological violence taking place in North Africa, the piece addresses “extractivism” within global capitalism and its local variations. How has the neoliberalization of environmental governance in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia created a disastrous situation for a large segment of the population? How can one organize resistance? And an even more disconcerting dilemma: how has the concept of “justice” been mobilized in ways that manage to perpetuate greater injustice under the shadow of anthropogenic climate change? Indeed, the relationship between governance and infrastructure in perpetuating and accelerating the climate crisis is also a problem of representation, an issue that Rania Ghosn examines in her collaborative research practice Design Earth. Combining critical design with architectural theory, her contribution *The Image of the Oil Territory* examines the apparatus of offshore oil extraction – sites such as the rig and the platform – as a territorialized entity incorporated through representational forces into circuits that generate economic value and thus, legitimize the power of extra-statecraft. How is this territory “imagined” – literally, what ‘space of images’ does petroleum infrastructure occupy and how does its visualization contribute to a particular aesthetics? That is, aesthetics as a common sense: in this case, the sensibilities necessary for abstracting the environment and expropriating resources into the commodity form. The essay presents a number of projects initiated by Design Earth on offshore sites, namely in Brazil, through which it is argued that critical interventions by and through design practice are more urgent than ever. It is through such

practices that a re-imagining of the relationship between political ecology and collective, aesthetic experience can take place. Here, design becomes a means to intervene within power and its representations. Design in an expanded sense also plays a significant role in effectuating the transformations necessary to inhabit an increasingly complex world for the future, one of the arguments Namik Mačkić raises in his essay *Becoming-Amber*. A combination of personal reflection and theoretical rigor, the piece reflects primarily on the “city” as a testing ground for the co-evolution of humans with and through technological systems. Drawing on the philosopher Gilbert Simondon’s conceptual toolbox, largely unknown outside of a Francophone context, Mačkić attempts to re-conceive extraction as not only those operations that intervene into the Earth, but as the full-scale territorialization of space by technology. This involves an ontological shift that considers the complete range of world-making protocols, from the technical to the biological and geological, from Google algorithms to the mineralization of organic matter and the eruption of volcanoes, all as part of the Earth’s vital, slow-working “technicity.” Returning full circle back to the city, the “urban” expands beyond convention as a means to think through the evolution and expansion of a planetary exoskeleton whose immanent quality is to extract the machinic potential of the planet. The flows of the Earth accelerate towards a World-City, an environment suspended between the geo-physical ‘firmness’ of stone and the psycho-virtual shimmer of ethereal media. Humans, perhaps, are suspended somewhere in between, as if the species were to become a living artifact.

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