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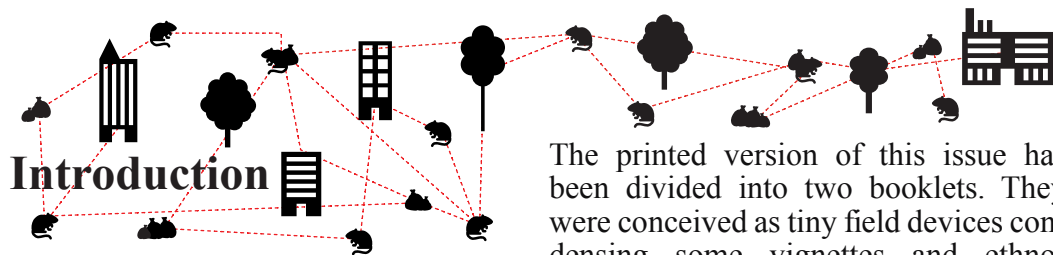
issue 04



Rats as urban infrastructure some tales from two cities Medellín

Tarde, a handbook of minimal and irrelevant urban entanglements

Mar-Apr/2024 - ISSN: 2941-4393
DOI: 10.17605/OSF.IO/Y762A



This issue on rats closes the first cycle of explorations on human-animal entanglements in public places. It is also the first edition conducted in two cities, Medellín, Colombia, and New York City, and the first exercise led collectively. Our goal with this number is to create an account of more-than-human attentiveness in our reader's conception of the city. We plan to achieve that by hoping to provoke a discussion on the urban as a complex mosaic of multi-species encounters, crashes, and infrastructures.

The printed version of this issue has been divided into two booklets. They were conceived as tiny field devices condensing some vignettes and ethnographic reflections on rats in the city. This first handout presents a speculative exercise that consisted of watching a sidewalk in Medellín and discussing the idea of rat infrastructures. The other booklet contains a first-hand descriptive activity in New York City that focuses on rats' behavior in public places. Additionally, the booklets introduce a set of infographics that will be expanded on our online version. The infographics condense two exercises of observation carried out in both cities regarding human-rats crashes and encounters.



rats-as-urban-infrastructure



unpredictability, is produced. Additionally, infrastructures "are things and also the relation between other things." In the case of rats, that duality highlights a sort of involvement [4] that implies the circulation of, most of the time, negative meanings through the enactment of those individuals in specific and temporal hybrid associations.

But where did those negative meanings come from? Why do people often use to hate or fear rats? Is it possible to co-produce more-than-human urban worlds based on multispecies conviviality? We invite you to explore those questions on our website by scanning this QR code.

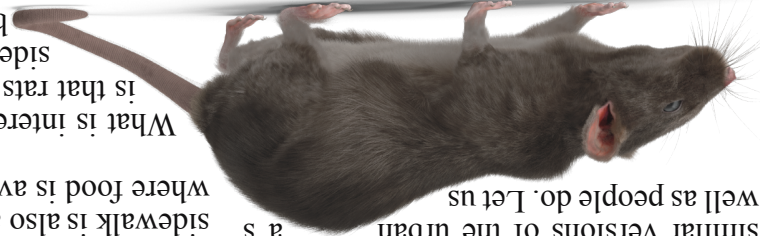
That type of infrastructure to get food. Palimpsestic composition ontologically plays with two properties of infrastructure: their multiplicity and invisibility. As Susan Leigh Star had noticed [3], infrastructures are often considered invisible because they function seamlessly in the background, becoming noticeable only when they fail. For the two women, it meant when they realized they were surrounded by rats. In the case of rats, it happened when their safety was at risk once the man started to chase them.

Infrastructures are multiple in terms of relationality. It is not only that humans and rats create their own imbricated separately, but when there are crashes—or failures—between both types of networks, a new type of limsy and momentary assemblage, framed by shock and

take the included vignette inside this booklet to expand our position.

In general terms, humans and rats produce different spatial configurations over the same physical place by enacting diverse elements and meanings. For instance, as humans, one of those configurations is called a sidewalk. A sidewalk is an infrastructure that comprises a material component, a rationality—to mobilize people safely from point A to point B—and a spatial logic that separates it from, let us say, the street. In the case of rats, what we understand as a sidewalk is also a temporal-spatial set-up where food is available.

What is interesting from that vignette is that rats were not only using the sidewalk to move around but creating their own

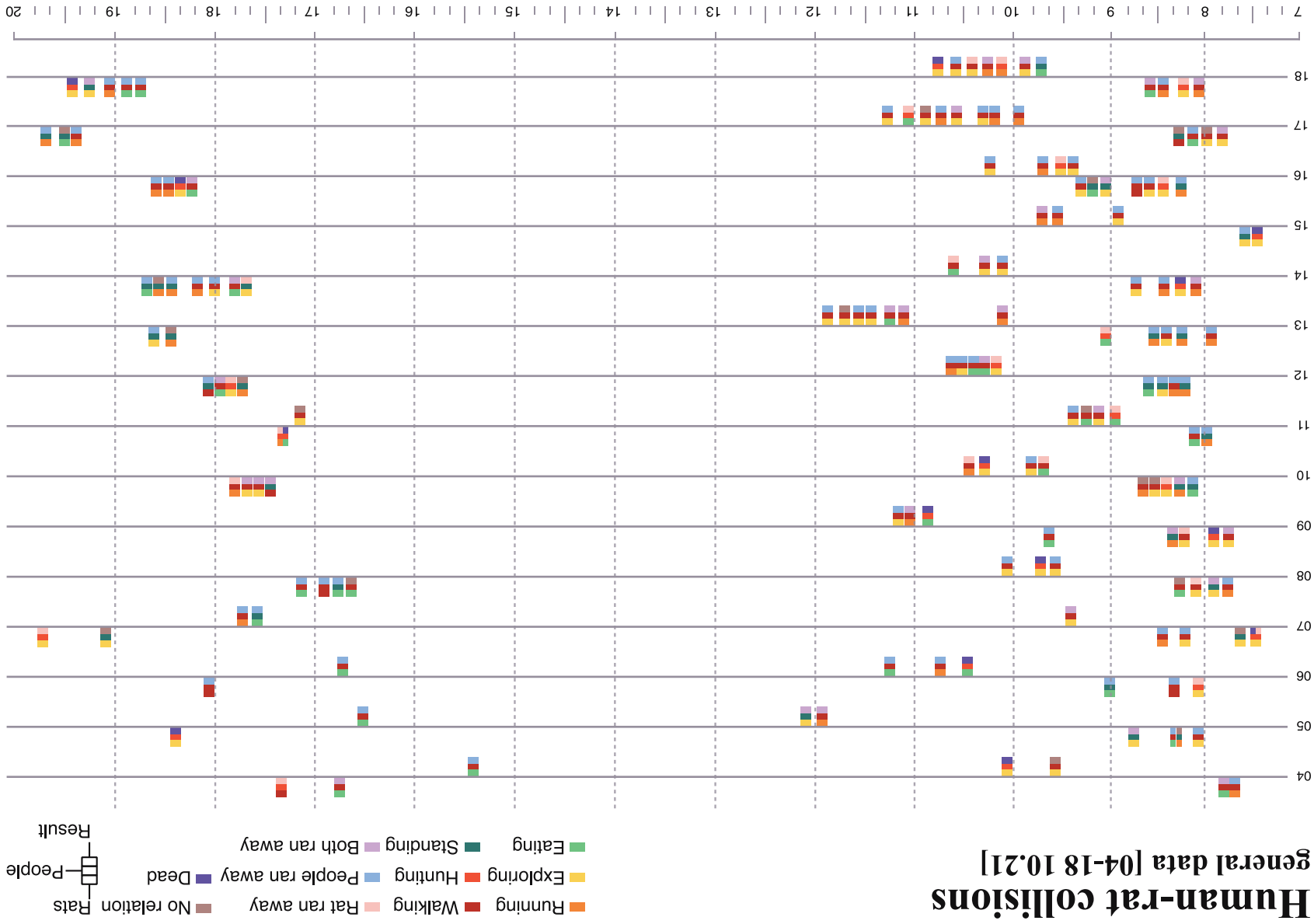


Unpacking rats' infrastructures

Like many other urban animals, rats "have the capacity to transgress the imagined and materially constructed spatial ordering of human societies [by transforming] certain environments they have adapted, and in which they have helped to mold in some way over time" [1]. In other words, it is not that rats are beings living [2] or surviving in the urban anthropocentric space; the point we want to make is that rats have the capacity to transform and produce dissimilar versions of the urban as well as people do. Let us

Human-rat collisions

General data [04-18 10.21]



This graphic condenses 15 days of direct observations of two groups of rats interacting with people in two locations in Calasanz, a neighborhood of Medellín, in October 2022. Although those rodents have been in the area for decades, the recent proliferation of commercial areas and residential developments, plus a lousy waste-management situation exponentiated during the COVID and right after the pandemic, have increased their encounters and collisions with humans in public zones.



Exploring human-rat crashes and encounters

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Rat behavior in urban settings can be described as an almost constant state of movement. They explore trash bins and bags, travel across curbs, tunnels, sewerage, and basements, and run away when facing pedestrians, cars, or other animals. It is uncommon to find them sitting or resting. However, when this happens, it could be interpreted as attempts at concealing themselves or avoiding detection instead of actual rest. Furthermore, the activity pattern of rats is pendular migration. For instance, when exploring trash bags of nearby establishments lying on the edge of the sidewalk, rats immediately run away when humans approach to dump more bags into the pile. However, they always return when danger has passed and continue to chew the trash.

Constant movements



Rat's tunnels in Upper Manhattan

of food, as well as sneak into them in response to potential threats posed by humans, automobiles, or other animals encroaching on their territory.



More pics
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Shared spaces

Urban animals are Others in urban space; therefore, they are constantly displaced and excluded, similar to marginalized humans, with whom they often share space [1, 2]. In New York, rats and the impoverished share the same spaces around areas of trash dump – on the edge of the sidewalks or near trash bins outside the build-

A rat exploring a trash bin in Upper Manhattan

ings. Digging through trash, rats look for provisions, while humans collect recyclable waste to get paid for it later. They both experience similar temporal regimes of being active towards the night when the trash is usually dumped on streets and the same social exclusion, as passers-by try to avoid contact with them or look at them with hostility.

Although rats rely heavily on urban infrastructure, they also create their own, transforming the public space of New York City's streets. They construct a network of tiny tunnels that enable mobility between crucial points of interest, such as trash dumping sites and sidewalk curbs. Tunnels are made in tree pit soil, lead to holes inside trash bins or building basements, and are connected to each other on the ground. This allows rats to navigate the area without interfering with pedestrians on the sidewalks. Thus, they can seamlessly

Tunnels

or sewers. Consequently, the lives of rats, parallel to other urban animals [4], are constantly connected to the urban infrastructure they occupy to facilitate their survival.

Rats are constantly using urban infrastructure, utilizing and altering it to suit their needs. As humans colonize urban space [3], rats tend to occupy spaces usually veiled from the human eye. For instance, rats reside along the streets' curbs, particularly with adjacent parking spots, where the space under vehicles is used to hide and rest. Curbs connected to drainage grates are especially populated, enabling rats' effortless mobility between cold streets and warm sewerage or subway, where they can retreat in case of danger. Similarly, rats favor the vicinity surrounding trash bins, which are usually attached to residential buildings in New York. Scavenging for sustenance, they tear up garbage bags and, as soon as they discover food, relocate to safer spaces, such as building basements, subway tunnels, as building basements, subway tunnels, especially populated, enabling rats' effortless mobility between cold streets and warm sewerage or subway, where they can retreat in case of danger. Similarly, rats favor the vicinity surrounding trash bins, which are usually attached to residential buildings in New York. Scavenging for sustenance, they tear up garbage bags and, as soon as they discover food, relocate to safer spaces, such as building basements, subway tunnels, as building basements, subway tunnels,

Using urban space



Counter-mapping rats

With few exceptions, rats are part of the daily life of cities. However, in most cases, they are perceived as symbols of urban decay commonly associated with filth, poverty, and disease. Despite being closer to us, the rodents remain distant, unexplored, neglected, and stigmatized.

We want to propose you an exercise of attentiveness towards other beings we use to neglect, fear, and hate. We want to propose you to go outside to watch rats. Although rats often live in sewers, in many cities, they are also around gardens, parks, and other green and bushy areas. Rats can also be spotted around railways, streams, drains, and, of course, human waste.

The goal is to create a counter-map/info-graph based on the idea that attentiveness is also a form of caring. To pay attention to rat's routines is to recognize their agency as urban actors co-producing our cities.

Find some examples and inspiration here

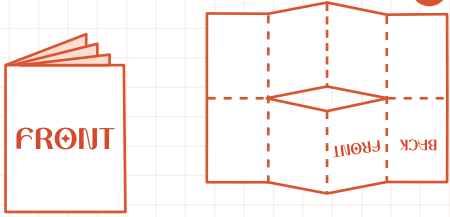


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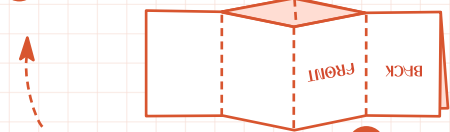
Human-rat actions and interactions		Location(s):	Date(s):
Running			
Exploring			
Eating			
Walking			
Hunting			
Standing			
Rat ran away			
People ran away			
Both ran away			
No relation			
Dead			

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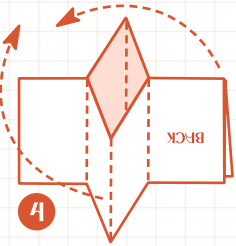
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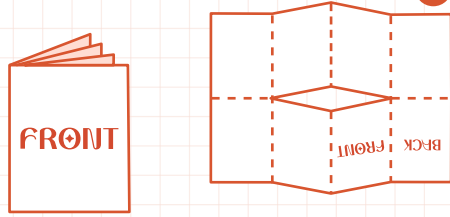
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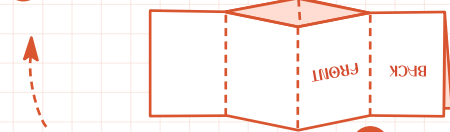
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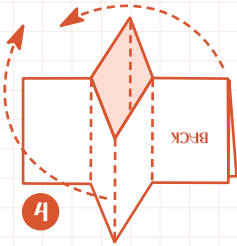
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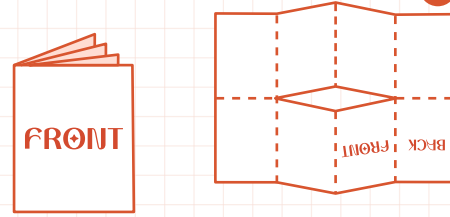
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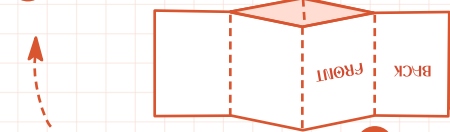
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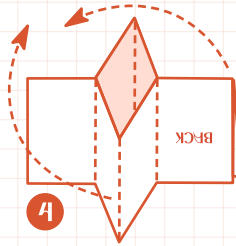
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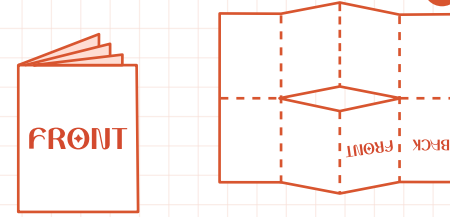
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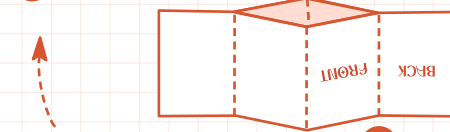
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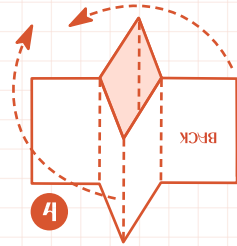
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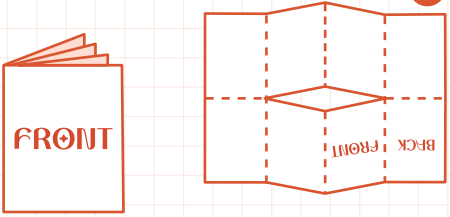
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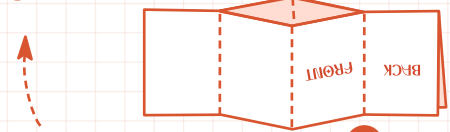
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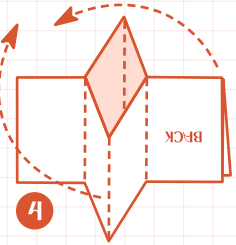
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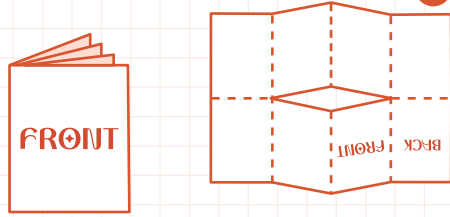
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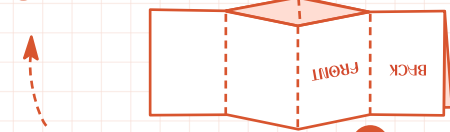
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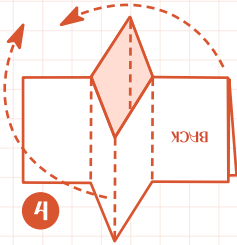
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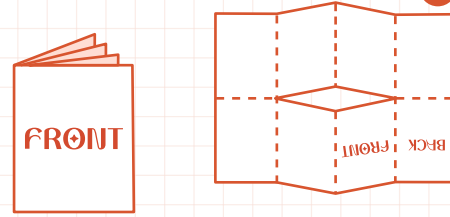
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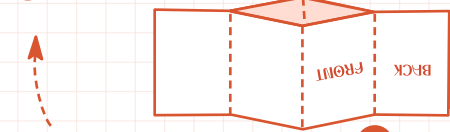
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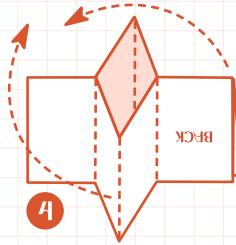
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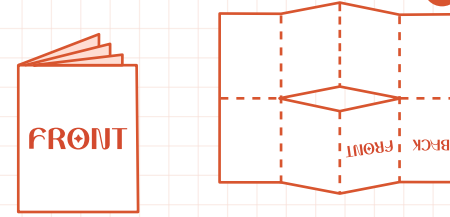
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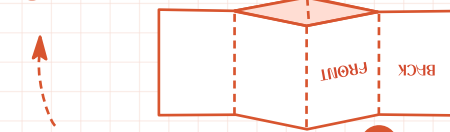
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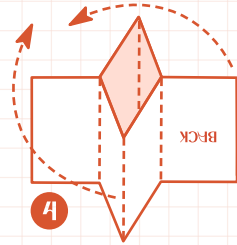
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