Weird Infrastructure

The Weird in the World-Literary System

Joshua D'Arcy

PhD

University of York

English and Related Literature

June 2025

Abstract

In this thesis I will compare "Weird" literary depictions of oil pipelines, railways, sanitation/sewage systems, and digital communications infrastructures from core and (semi-)peripheral sites within the world-system. Using the world-systemic framework outlined by the Warwick Research Collective (WReC), my comparisons will unpack Weird formal homologies in infrastructurally-bound literature from Korea, Russia, Iran, Nigeria, the US, and Europe, arguing for the world-literary scope of the Weird. Crucially, these comparisons are conducted in relation to signals of accumulation crisis produced by the ecological regime of neoliberal capital. In this mode I argue for the pervasive and underexplored presence the Weird in world-literature and culture. By examining how crisis is written into the Weird infrastructure of our world-literary system it becomes possible to see how the Weird anagnorisis of systemic crisis reverberates with the possibility of new futures. Throughout this analysis I maintain the efficacy of a materialist, world-literary approach in this exploration of Weird Infrastructural affect, effect and form.

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Acknowledgements

Ar scáth a cheile a mhaireann na daoine.

Without the support of the people around me this project would have come off the rails with the *Rattling Ark*.

I am endlessly grateful to Dr Claire Westall, who has had to tolerate my Weirdness for far too long, and who kept things on-track with a steady supply of sharp comments, insightful suggestions and an epochal surplus of patience. Thank you for the regular reassurance that I was onto something, even when I was struggling to articulate it. Dr Bryan Radley, thank you for your work as a TAP member, for shouldering the supervisory tag-in while I was at my lowest ebb, for being a constant source of good humour and for repeatedly filling out urgent paperwork while on the go.

My parents, Billy and Louise, this project would have been completely impossible without your constant aid. I am now and will always be grateful for all your help and support, and I remain amused by your attempts to kidnap me close to urgent deadlines. Thank you both for reading to me before I could do so. It's only words, but words are all I have. My siblings, Mark and Chloe, thank you for your critical wisdom and music recommendations. Chloe, you give great advice. I wish my brain was as smart as your muscles are strong. You're officially too cool and it's infuriating. Mark, your writing is inspiring. Thank you for giving me good reasons to hang around and get this together and done.

To Heather and Greg, thank you for tolerating the many times I've dragged the Weird to your home or on holiday, and thank you for welcoming me into your family despite my alien sleep schedule, heavy footfalls and general excess. Whatever "it" is, you two are doing it right.

Without the help of dozens of administrative, medical and mental health professionals I would not be here. Thank you to all the staff at Dalton terrace who have helped me navigate my health concerns over the course of this project, with a particular thank you to Dr Lloyd who encouraged me to pursue an ADHD diagnosis. Twice. I simply would not have made it without your good work. On that, Aleksandra and Dr Allen at the Phoenix clinic, you guys rock. Thank you for getting me my brain back. Thank you to my therapists, Daryl Verner, and Lorna Smeaton. Sincerely, Lorna, you were an outstanding help when it was most urgently necessary. I hope you've been well. I am extremely grateful to the crew at Open Door, as well as Denisse and Mickey in the Support to Study team and the folks at disability services—especially James, who got my SSP sorted so swiftly! The ensuing administrative load often spilled over into the capable hands of the staff in the English department. I am particularly grateful to Sarah Cox for getting me the

formerly known as Donnar, thanks for the hours on the South Seas, and for being a good influence on Verbil. It meant a lot.

Daisy, a good egg, a fellow traveller, and constant source of joy. Thank you for making me laugh every time we talk. Jess, thanks for the helping identify the wood that spits blue smoke. I couldn't fit it in the project, but I will forever be anxious around sawdust in low-light. Thanks to both Fred and Francis for your help on fonts. I'm sorry we landed on Aptos. Maybe I'll eventually print it in Century Gothic or ITC Johnston. Or Typefesse.

There are a great many teachers who put me on this path back when my brain was spongier and more absorbent, but there are two I should single out. Suzanne Birkett, thank you for the masterclasses, I always knew I was fortunate to benefit from your tuition but it wasn't until I started teaching undergraduates that I realised just how lucky I was. Thank you for teaching me how to close read, I use those tools every day. Elaine, thank you for everything. I wish I could give you a call.

Basil McBride, you fell wordsmith. Thank you for giving me the chance to write something that isn't this. I'm the one that put the calcium in the water, and I'll get you yet.

Chuala mé, "ní hiasc é go dtí go bhfhuil sé ar an mbanc". B'fhéidír—ach in a dhiaidh sin is iascaire ióntach é Muinteoir Mark. Mile, míle buíochas. Or something like that. Uncle P, for passing down Pratchett, King, Banks, and for showing me the face of fear in the Grand High Witch, thank you. Ye should both be aware that the concept of Moshuma was formative to my enduring sense that something insidious crawls (un)seen through our homes. I'll set out a bucket of fish heads in his honour. Nana, I'm grateful for the stories of the aliens in the ceramic gazebo—I'll let you know if I ever find the ignition on one of those things. Grandad, your sixth anniversary was two days after my viva, and I still can't make sense of it. Thank you for the Slime-Oozing Zorikin (again, sic), and for showing me the right way to make it Weird.

Sin í an obair nach easca. Saor sin ó olc.

Finally, and most fervently, Georgia: this project is the sum of much strain, most of which you've helped to bear. I would not have had the strength to see this through without the life we've built together. Thank you for making this, and me, possible. I know you know, but I hope you feel my love and gratitude in every moment of our future together. Can we please get married and go on holiday and have a cat now? Preferably in that order.

Author's declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

Introduction

The Literary Weird

In literary circles the Weird is a term commonly associated with the pulp horror of HP Lovecraft (1890 - 1937) and his correspondents, Clark Ashton Smith (1893 - 1961) and August Derleth (1909 - 1971), as well as contemporaries such as Arthur Machen (1863 - 1947), Robert W. Chambers (1865 - 1933) and William Hope Hodgson (1877 - 1918). The Weird has come to function as a categorising term for works that share the supernatural themes and imagery favoured by this collection of Weird authors. A non-exhaustive list of these shared characteristics would include prokaryotic, chimeric and tentacled monsters; ancient and god-like aliens; settings with abnormal geometry and temporal relations; purple prose filled with adjectival strings; radical intertextuality; insanity induced by supernatural anagnorisis; narratorial collapse and a load-bearing fear of the unknown. In many cases the Weird is a badge that relegates a text to genre or pulp fiction or distinguishes it from material with more traditional literary merit. Less commonly, but more productively, the Weird describes works that perform a process of expanded defamiliarisation above and beyond what is understood to be the usual defamiliarising capacities of literature. These sorts of approaches have produced interesting and generative critical discourse, but they often disregard the material processes and world-historical transformations that produce the texts they are attempting to identify. This inhibits critical analysis of Weird texts by masking important historical relationships, and overemphasises texts with a Weird surface aesthetic at the exclusion of those with more deeply embedded Weird formal characteristics. The world-historical process that produced Lovecraft and his contemporaries also produced the Great Depression of 1929-1940. This early phase of Weird literary production from 1880 to the end of the depression, lacked a surface engagement with the social and economic forces behind the downturn, but throughout such works there is an acute formal and thematic registration of developing crisis in the capitalist world-system. This thesis will move away from looser generic readings of the Weird and will instead think of the 'Weird' with a capital W, as a set of formal and affective dynamics bound to specific homologous patterns in the process of capitalist world-history; a

group of formal relations that are affiliated with, but not limited to, the set of texts typically understood to comprise the Weird.

The last three decades have seen a substantial uptick in Weird production, with important Weird authors like China Miéville (1972-), Thomas Ligotti (1953-) and Ann (1957-) and Jeff VanderMeer (1968) forming the literary arm of this enormous cultural resurgence. The production of popular television series such as *Stranger Things* (2016), *Dark* (2017), *Lovecraft Country* (2020), *Scavengers Reign* (2023) and films like *A Field in England* (2013), *Mandy* (2018), *Longlegs* (2024) and *The Lighthouse* (2019), has coincided with a decidedly Weird aesthetic propagating across board and video games such as *Pathologic* (2005), *Bioshock* (2007), *Dead Space* (2008), *Elder Sign* (2011), *Dishonoured* (2012), *Eldritch Horror* (2013), *Bloodborne* (2015), *Sunless Sea* (2015), *Disco Elysium* (2019) and *Dredge* (2023). The deluge of straightforwardly Weird texts has benefited from the "contested indeterminant status" of Lovecraft's intellectual copyright (Wallace 2023, 29). Unenforced copyright has facilitated the popularity of works that are derivative of Lovecraft, but these are only a portion of the wider Weird trend that registers analogous instances of material tension occurring across the long cycles of social reproduction in the process of the capitalist world-system. Immanuel Wallerstein is the most prominent proponent of world-systems analysis. The world-system conceptualises how discrete and heterogeneous regions of social reality are components of a singular—and now global—system of economic and social relations. In this system the labour-capital relationship acts as the glue that binds the diverse political structures of the global interstate system, unifying them into a singular, expanding economy predicated on the "*endless* accumulation of capital" (2004, 22-24, original italics). Importantly, the capitalist world-system is a spatiotemporal process. It organises production into core-peripheral relationships by directing flows of value from (semi-)peripheral regions into the economic core (28-9); and critically, its process involves long alternating cycles of economic expansion and contraction (30-1). In this context, then, this thesis will build on existing scholarship by mapping the literary Weird onto world-systemic relations, focusing on the formal correspondences between Weird texts and deformations in specific sets of social relations.

Some discourse glimpses the bind between the Weird and the world-historical by recognising points of significant upheaval in the process of the world-system through the increasingly visible signs of climate change. For example, in a book and *New York Times* opinion piece Thomas L Friedman has proposed "global weirding" as a rhetorical alternative to "global warming", hoping to better capture the uneven experiences of climate change across different parts of the planet (2008 133; 2010). A more scholarly effort to mobilise the word "weird" in an ecocritical context occurs in the definitional steps of *Dark Ecology* (2016), where Timothy Morton uses it to theorise the twisted forms of time and causality that come with ecological awareness. Morton loosely ties several definitions of the "weird", though he orients all of them around the Old Norse "*urth",* meaning a twisting, looping, or turning (5-6). For example, he entwines the contemporary adjectival form of "weird" as strange—as in "the weather was a strange turn-up for the book"—with the name of the *norn* "Urðr" to also mark "weird" as a noun meaning one's fate (5). As an example of this overlap, he narrates the unsettling experience of participating in "the Sixth Mass Extinction Event in the four-and-a-half billion-year history of life on this planet" through the simple act of turning the ignition of a car (8). Here, the Weird is an affect stemming from the experience of irreconcilable forms. The temporal logic of this scenario is consistent with Lauren Berlant's comment:

> the present is perceived, first, affectively: the present is what makes itself present to us before it becomes anything else, such as an orchestrated collective event or an epoch on which we can look back. (2011, 4)

In Morton's automotive metaphor, the driver is aware of their own distributed culpability, but this guilt is compounded when the present collapses under the weight of the incomprehensibly large time-space sensorium of climate change and mass extinction. Despite Morton's tendency to downplay or ignore the process of capital in his critical writing (Cassegård 2021, 184), his example is useful precisely because it inadvertently wrestles with the ongoing process of the world-system.

Morton's use of the Weird participates in some interesting misconceptions of Norse mythology, most of which are rooted in the idea of *nornir* weaving the web of fate (5, 135). Although this is an image that exists in the artistic, academic and popular

consciousness, "there are no clear-cut and unequivocal representations of the *nornir* engaged in spinning or weaving to be found anywhere in Old Norse literature" (Bek-Pedersen 2011, 123-47). This is particularly unfortunate, as *Dark Ecology* incorporates this metaphor into the three sections or "threads" of its structural logic without a full sense of the rhetorical and symbolic implications (Morton 3, 61, 111). Though in some ways reaching for something that feels solid and finding it unmoored to historical reality is an ideal illustration of the Weird and of neoliberal ecological awareness. At that, Morton's implementation of Old Norse implies that the contemporary relationship between fate, time and causality is in some way analogous to the configuration they would have shared in medieval Iceland. But as Anthony Winterborne observes, the dynamic relationship between these three categories "cannot be said to be in any way conceptually transparent" across any expanse of mythological narrative (2004, 17-8). Morton's attempt to smoothly move between these culturally specific forms masks the interesting contrast between the Old Norse and contemporary English meaning in a way that contradicts his own rhetorical purposes. When Morton discusses fate in Norse myth, he often conflates it with the Greek sense of the word and the associated concept of hubris (61-63). In Norse literature however, the loop has a contrary form grounded in finding fulfilment by making peace with fate. The hero will often "attempt to escape fate *by living up to it*—the near-opposite of hubris" (Winterborne 17). The messy element, with interesting formal implications, is lack of interest in subjectivity. In the automotive metaphor, the driver is not interested in rejecting or accepting the fate they discover by starting their engine. Instead of hubris, there is a Weird, dislocated anagnorisis. *Dark Ecology* is limited by an unfortunate preoccupation with object-oriented ontology. This introduction will periodically refer to the critical limitations of this perspective, and the subject will be explored more thoroughly in chapter 1, but here, *Dark Ecology* is concerned with the experience, but uninterested in the world-historical process by which the Weird transforms through space and time. Despite this, Morton's discussion of the imagined Old Norse understanding of the Weird identifies some important formal characteristics. In particular, the sinuous, twisting or looping structure; the recursive and repetitious temporal logic; the anagnorisis and the affect of irreconcilable time-space sensoria collapsing into one another. The Weird is more fluid than these

incomplete conceptions of fate and is far more concerned with possibility than certainty.

Scholarly engagement with literary Weirdness often lacks a world-systemic perspective, or a materialist logic that would facilitate a more expansive sense of Weird formal logic. In this, many efforts follow the example of Lovecraft's 1939 genre-making essay, "Supernatural Horror in Literature" by leaving the historical logic that underpins the criticism evident, but unspoken. Lovecraft's essay makes a clumsy attempt to locate its author and his circle of correspondents within a longstanding tradition of "cosmic horror" in the European and American literary canon, while subtextually signalling the nativist political undertone of these early works in the way it roots their appeal in a putatively transhistorical experience of "the fear of the unknown" (1939, 1041).[1] Critics are quick to highlight several fundamental inconsistencies within Lovecraft's thesis, not least of which is the amusing observation that Lovecraft's stories rarely evoke any sense of horror (Fisher 2016, 16). Nevertheless, most subsequent commentaries on the literary Weird sustain Lovecraft's flat view of history. For example, Noys and Murphy have made a strong case for a phenomenon they dub "The Lovecraft Event" – that his work and criticism formed a watershed that distinguished the Weird from the gothic, formalising the "weird" as a generic form that uses the conventions of fiction to expose its readership to the "shivering void" (2016, 117). They helpfully divide this work and the subsequent corpus of Weird fiction into the Old (1880 - 1940), the Transitional phase (1940 - 1980) and the New Weird (1980) according to developments they identify in content and form. However, this periodising effort confronts the Weird on its own merits and fails to locate their thesis in relation to the world-historical processes that produced these shifts.

Johnathan Newell holds an alternative periodising perspective that the Weird was fully distinct from the gothic as a recognisable literary form visible in the work of writers like Sheridan Le Fanu as early as 1832 (2020).[2] Newell expands on Lovecraft's

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[1] All in-text citations of Lovecraft will note the original date of publication, but all quotes are pulled from the 2008 Barnes & Noble *H.P. Lovecraft: The Complete Works,* edited by S.T. Joshi.
[2] Outside scholarly retrospectives of historical Weird form, it is worth noting that the Weird was a commercially recognised category well before the "Lovecraft Event". William Paterson's *Nuggets for Travellers Series* was a series of pocketbooks that was published in London in the 1880s. Alongside its

essay to argue that the Weird is an affective phenomenon that uses the experience of disgust to create "visceral aesthetic encounter allowing for queasy re-conceptions of reality" (3). Despite his insight that "philosophical investigations of weird fiction have often emphasised ideas at the expense of affect" (165), Newell's claim that Weird fiction "attempts to access a form of reality difficult to cognise, one radically distinct from the human mind and from an anthropocentric viewpoint" is limited by disinterest in the materialist approach that would restrict these ideas to their aesthetic function and help to contour the shifting form of Weird affect (5). For example, when Newell argues that Lovecraftian fiction bears out the author's interest in Schopenhauer, he writes:

> Schopenhauer provides a detailed account of the supposedly
> inaccessible world-in-itself, including means for nullifying the boundaries
> of selfhood in order to better apprehend the true essence of things. (172)

This ensuing discussion of Schopenhauer does little to acknowledge that any account of the world-in-itself can, of necessity, only ever be speculative without access to the supernatural forces in Lovecraft's fiction. Despite a stated reluctance to dismiss the ugly racialised narratives that populate Lovecraft's work, Newell is quick to move past political engagements with this writing and seems more interested in Lovecraft's untheorised "ontological speculations" (164-5). When he then attempts to interpret these speculations against the racial politics of a classically Lovecraftian ideology, he is unable to locate them in the material processes that underpin this dehumanising fear of the Other.

Many such incomplete critiques turn to the helpful concession that the Weird "remains an unstable construction" existing in the crevices between other forms (Noys and Murphy 117). Roger Luckhurst's introduction to *Textual Practice*'s 2017 issue on the Weird performs such a movement when he argues—accurately—that the Weird's "refusal to fit narrative or generic expectation" is a constitutive quality (1050). To the extent that this understands the Weird as a formal deformation occurring with variable

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volumes of "Jests and Anecdotes" it advertises collections of "Weird Tales". The front piece of *English Weird Tales* (1888) advertises collections of the Scottish, Irish, American and German Weird (Paterson).

degrees of intensity across an expanded range of material, Luckhurst's article concurs with this thesis. However, it falls short of understanding the Weird as a world-literary quality registering transformations in historical cycles of capitalist reproduction. This lack of a systemic perspective is particularly unfortunate in Luckhurst's concluding contribution to *The American Weird; Concept and Medium* (2021). Here, his afterword takes a puzzling step away from the world-systemic integration of the Weird, but then attempts to discuss the topic in relation to race, the apocalyptic theology of settler colonialism and the dehumanising political project of the Trump administration—but without the inconvenient systemic approach required to effectively identify and criticise the historical forces that produce these injustices (250-255). In an earlier chapter in the same volume, Stephen Shapiro describes how these periodising efforts tend to see history as "a sequence of uniquely differentiated units of social time", and suggests "Periodicity" as an alternative mode of literary historiography that "searches for the presence of capitalism's recurring features that reappear over multiple cycles of social reproduction" (57). Together, Shapiro and Sharae Deckard offer a more detailed outline of this approach in their 2016 introduction to *World Literature, Neoliberalism, and the Culture of Discontent.* My thesis follows and advocates for the methodology they describe by analysing the Weird in terms of its periodicity, in order "to ascertain the nature of recurring familiarities across historical cycles of capital's expanded reproduction" (26). This world-systemic perspective counters the traditionally unstable conceptions of the Weird by arguing that although it has varied in content and appearance since its conception, the Weird has been formally continuous across its cyclical recurrences. Michael Niblett (2014) and Deckard (2019) have both taken this approach to the gothic, by mapping gothic form in relation to expanded phases of world-ecological reproduction. This thesis takes up this project in terms of the Weird, by looking at areas of world-systemic correspondence across the last 45 years of neoliberal hegemony. It will demonstrate the world-systemic roots of the Weird by examining the homologous instances of Weird formal distortion in literary representations of infrastructure, thereby demonstrating how the Weird registers the embedded contradictions of capital that are spatialised by these material forms.

Before demonstrating the cyclical homologies of the Weird's formal signifiers it is crucial to explore how the affective dynamics of the Weird can function in a materialist context. In *Cruel Optimism* (2011) Lauren Berlant describes "the historical sensorium that has developed belatedly since the fantasmatic part of the optimism about structural transformation realized less and less traction in the world" (3). Writing in an American context, Berlant locates this complex and heterogeneous but recognisable affective dynamic in the "class bifurcation, downward mobility, and environmental, political, and social brittleness" that have emerged and intensified since the Reagan era (11). The Weird, too, has proliferated over this phase and space of world-systemic process, though it retains the formal contiguity with the Old Weird. The formal and affective mechanism that facilitates these correspondences can be gleaned from a comparison of Lovecraft's original figuration of the term, and more recent and scholarly commentaries on the subject, even where they lack an explicitly systemic approach. Lovecraft concludes the introduction to "Supernatural Horror in Literature" with the comment:

> The one test of the really weird is simply this—whether or not there be excited in the reader a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers; a subtle attitude of awed listening, as if for the beating of black wings or the scratching of outside shapes and entities on the known universe's utmost rim. And of course, the more completely and unifiedly a story conveys this atmosphere, the better it is as a work of art in the given medium. (1044)

Here Lovecraft presents a conclusion that runs contrary to much of his preceding argument: rather than generic qualities or stylistic markers he argues that the Weird text is fundamentally characterised by the response it elicits in its subject. Vivian Ralickas refines Lovecraft's florid description of this response, arguing the anti-humanist stance of Lovecraft's work approaches, but then negates, the Burkean and Kantian notions of the sublime. Because of this, she argues that the best description of Weird affect is the inverse of the Sublime. The abject: something that "diminishes us by forcing us to confront a materiality that cannot be signified" (Ralickas 2007, 389). Ralickas' flagging of the abject is a useful handle on the affective capacity of the Weird. However, it again

suggests the Weird is a transhistorical or universal phenomenon. While they are often described as monsters, aliens or mutants, the entities that inspire the abject in Lovecraft are rooted in historically specific anxieties. For example, Jordan S. Carroll and Alison Sperling argue that "Lovecraft's meditations on the foreordained extinction of humankind" were bound to a "racialised chronopolitics" developed from his anxieties of white replacement (2020, 9). But the affect of disgust and revulsion present in the politics of the Old Weird have proven unstable in more recent material, as the fear of miscegenation and racialised class conflict that underpin Lovecraft's writing are routinely reappropriated and subverted by artists working in the New Weird. Betsy Huang describes the white supremacist views of early Weird fiction, and the struggle of contemporary writers and scholars to perform critical and emancipatory work in a genre that "continues to fetishize the Lovecraftian mythos" (177-8), though while comparing Weird Fiction to Science Fiction she offers an interesting conceptual framework that is distinct from Ralickas and Newell's affective suggestions of the abject, or disgust. Here, Huang argues that the Weird is characterised by "an aesthetics of explanatory deferment", and that it resists "definitive verification of the interpretive and evaluative efforts" (2022, 180). Rather than a structuring aesthetic that defines the Weird, I would argue that Huang has discerningly observed a significant symptom of the underlying formal pattern that tends to produce Weird text.

Mark Fisher's commentary in *The Weird and the Eerie* (2016) is another useful contemporary counterpoint to Lovecraft's definition of the Weird, and though it lacks the materialist focus of Fisher's other work, it perceptively identifies and outlines the Weird's formal composition. Fisher asserts that the Weird has nothing to do with fear but instead is a "a fascination for the outside, for that which lies beyond standard perception, cognition, and experience" (8). In his previous work *Capitalist Realism* (2010), Fisher argues that neoliberal economic consensus is so entrenched and metastasised that it has spawned a widespread imaginative paralysis toward alternatives to the capitalist mode of production. He proposes that capitalism has become a kind of realism that he contrasts with the Lacanian 'Real', an "unrepresentable X, a traumatic void that can only be glimpsed in the fractures and inconsistencies in the field of apparent Reality" (18), citing environmental catastrophe

as an example of one such Real. Similarly, in *The Weird and the Eerie* Fisher builds out from Freud's theory of the *Unheimlich*, which he sees as a kind of critique that processes the 'outside' through the cracks in the logic of the 'inside,' Fisher suggests that the Weird is a way of perceiving the 'inside' from the 'outside'. A sense of wrongness accompanies this perception that reframes the inside as *"that which does not belong"* (10, original emphasis). Despite this critique of the limitations of the unheimlich, Fisher doesn't quite bring this reading to its fullest conclusion, which is strange considering his previous work and comment that "Although the experience is certainly triggered by particular cultural forms, it does *not originate in them*" (Fisher 2016, 61, emphasis added). Fisher comes closest to the full implications of his reading in the following passage on the strangeness of the Weird object:

> if the entity or object *is* here, then the categories which we have up until now used to make sense of the world cannot be valid. The weird thing is not wrong, after all: it is our conceptions that must be inadequate (15, original emphasis).

Though referring to the Weird in a broader cultural context than Lovecraft, this passage suggests that the Weird is an affective product of recognising the difference between our preconceptions and the object that contradicts them. Building on Fisher's definition of capitalist realism as "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only visible political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible to even imagine a coherent alternative to it" (2010, 2), it becomes clear that contemporary examples of the Weird commonly exist in relation to neoliberal hegemony, and that instances of breach in this imaginative paralysis will often register as Weird. Lovecraft and Fisher's extracts describe two spaces threatening to collapse into one another—the spaces of the inside and the outside; the everyday and the fantastic; and the known and the new. These categories are tangled in the Weird as the anxieties regarding border crossing are not a product of a specific hypothetical transgression, but of entire lifeworlds encroaching on one another and the ensuing affective crisis.

In Shapiro's contribution to *The American Weird; Concept and Medium* (2021) he notes a strange pattern in Fisher's binary encoding of the Weird and the Eerie. Shapiro

argues that this scheme echoes "older forms of criticism that invoked a cis-gendered division between the so-called female gothic of hysterical "entrapment" and the masculine gothic of paranoid "anonymous pursuit through empty spaces" (2022, 65). To remedy this, Shapiro suggests a materialist reimagining of Fisher's models and argues that the eerie might be seen as a form of capitalist apocalypse, where the objects that form the detritus of fixed capital are "abandoned before their value can be fully consumed" (65-6). While Shapiro then proceeds to pursue and identify the Weird's counter-hegemony in the "Camp", in earlier publications he argues that "Lovecraft's style is the formal gradient of a cultural confusion generated by an encounter with new flows of urban transhumance, which he feels will generate cultural and economic decline" (2016, 256). This, of course, refers to Lovecraft's demophobic revulsion toward "the proximity of different bodies and cultures in crowded urban spaces" (Shapiro and Barnard 2017, 140). Contemporary critics have noted the substantial intersection of the Weird and the queer in the Old Weird's trepidation of historical and cultural flux, particularly as these forms collide in modes of temporality and progress. For example, Caroll and Sperling discuss the complex, and often abrasive, intersection of queer and heteronormative timelines. Indeed, they write that Weird effect or affect "emerges from the resonance or interference pattern between two or more rival ways of organizing time when they overlap or cross paths with one another" (11). In this context, it is interesting that when describing the boom and bust cycles of capital's expanded reproduction, Shapiro prefers to describe the process of the world-system as a spiral, due to the expanded nature of its spatial and temporal reproduction (2014, 1251; 2017, 3). He explains how during the process of expanded reproduction the subcircuits of commodity, money, and productive capital strain apart; and while capital incorporates forms that allow these circuits to move freely, the disequilibrium created between them create crises named "transformation rips" (2017, 4-9). If the Weird is the affective consequence of ideological upheaval, it follows that the social experience of these transformation rips will often be wrung out in Weird cultural production.

China Miéville's commentary in Anne and Jeff VanderMeer's compendium *The Weird: a Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories* (2012), creatively reflects on over a century of Weird literature while demonstrating the political efficacy of the literary

Weird. Miéville queries the Weird that the compendium attempts to catalogue, and illustrates it through a deformation of the essay form. There are three creative motifs woven together to evoke and comment on the Weird: a text/ile metaphor; a defamiliarising stress on the materiality of language; and a radical recursivity. Beyond the straightforward example of an "Afterweird" examining the history of the Weird itself, the essay's first line, "how should we conduct investigations?" (1132), introduces this thread of recursivity. The Afterweird transforms this proposition into a pattern of reflexive practice, as it proceeds to recursively pursue the idea of heuristics as an object of discursive focus. The essay takes a superficially straightforward rhetorical structure that repeatedly falls back on itself. In doing this, Miéville performs a pattern of reflexive reasoning that is fundamental to Weird form, and its attachment to the process of world-systemic cyclicality. Beyond literature's usual capacity to estrange the object of focus, the excess of this activity has a metatextual reflexivity that facilitates new dynamics, orientations, and ways of grasping the subject at hand—here, the Weird itself.

Miéville's superlative estrangement of the Weird problematises attempts at establishing a Weird conceptual genealogy through a process of etymological analysis that recall's Morton's approach, though Miéville underscores the loose historical approach as he describes this manoeuvre as a pilfering "from the Anglo-Saxon wordhoard" (1114). This works to free the wordplay from expectations of academic rigor, while facilitating a similar temporal transposition to that of *Dark Ecology.* The cavalier appropriation of the Anglo-Saxon also emphasises a consequence of Weird form: that the process of ideological breach often places or intensifies pressure on linguistic signs and the object of signification. Most commonly this occurs through the pattern of emphasising the physicality of the language describing the subject at hand. As well as the paratextual references to works featured earlier in the compendium, the Afterweird defamiliarises language using metaphor, wordplay and formal distortion. For example, Miéville describes the process of investigation in terms of investigative surgery and the Weird as an object that has been left "open and bleeding" (1113). The image of a concept rendered into flesh is immediately followed by the first of eleven formal interpellations:

This is true of our heuristic terms and functions as much as of the objects

they are intended to illumine. It's as true of

our microscope-machines

(those were not here a moment ago, were they?) as of the microbes we

stare at through them. (Miéville 1113)

Here, the "heuristic terms and functions" are restated as a material object, their
transformation accentuated by the phrase having been plucked and placed floating in
the body of the text. Moreover, the sentence's continuity is immediately interrupted by a
parenthetical clause, commenting on the novelty of microscope-machines, reinforcing
this formal interruption and seeding the core discursive component of modernity. These
interpellations recur throughout Miéville's piece, often using their physical layout to
mirror the object they describe:

We shove a

fate-shaped key

At the Weird keyhole (or pry at the Weird

doorframe with a fate-shaped-jimmy

). (Miéville 1114).

In several instances, Miéville leaves hanging punctuation, as in the above example,
further defamiliarising the conventions of written speech and estranging the body of the

text itself. All these isolated words are material objects, but the physicality of the words themselves becomes heightened by their physical interpellation. The second instance provides an especially potent example that affects the sentence fragment that it leaves dangling behind:

> So: the Weird. Running
>
> a rough plough through
>
>
> the archaeology
>
>
>
> of language brings up 'Wyrd', that Anglo-Saxonism of knotting cause and effect as cats-cradle intricate and splendid as any Sutton Hoo buckle: Fate, Destiny (Miéville 1113-1114).

The highlighted etymological thread becomes palpable in the tongue-numbing tangle of "rough plough through" picked out by the irruption, and Wyrd's sense of place and history is made tangible in the whorls of the Sutton Hoo buckle forming a cat's cradle. This archaeological manoeuvre threatens to drag an alien social context into the present space. At the same time the interpellation forces an interruptive emphasis on the material form of the word itself, opening it to Weird forms of meaning. But as the text progresses and the reader starts to adapt, these interpellations become incrementally, and Weirdly familiar. This maps to the arc of a novel social form appearing and then becoming integrated into the wider social complex, or the manner in which uncommodified spaces are folded into successive phases of accumulation under capitalism.

The etymological interrogation of the Wyrd is also a central part of the text/textile metaphor. Miéville's reference to the whorls of fate recalls the Morton's figuration of the Weird. Crucially, however, he argues that Weird is not a continuation of Wyrd, but "a cleft, a repudiation, a revolution, a violence, a break" (1114) from tradition. The Wyrd is something that is utterly total: a "slub // in the life-weft, the snarl of interweaving, the

ineluctable." (1114) It is the sense that conditions are fundamental, permanent, and inescapable made physical in the holistic cloth of woven fate. In contrast, the Weird is "whole-y" (1114), characterised by its incompleteness. Here, Miéville alludes to Reza Negarestani's *Cyclonopedia* 2008 and the notion of "( )holey space," (*Cyclonopedia* 42-67), a metaphorical or eidetic space in which the earth is so vermiculated that there is no solid ground on which to stand. However, Miéville restores the evaporative "w", marking the Weird itself as something undergoing a process of erosion, both in the world and, metatextually, in his essay. Miéville lingers over the inherent permeability of the Weird:

> The fact of the Weird is the fact that the worldweave is ripped and
> unfinished. Moth-eaten, ill-made. And through the little tears, from
> behind the ragged
>
>
>   edges
>
>
> , things are looking at us. (Miéville 1115)

These things are clearly 'the Real' peering through the cracks of capitalist realism. In comparing capitalist realism with the material of the book—the tentative canon of Weird tales compiled by the VanderMeers—Miéville also binds the progression of the literary Weird to previous phases of capitalism. In the same way that the canonical Weird is in constant flux and constituted from its gaps as much as its content, the process of capitalist development over the long durée is presented as permeable and vulnerable. Fisher suggests that "one strategy against capitalist realism could involve invoking the Real(s) underlying the reality that capitalism presents to us" (*Capitalist Realism* 18), and mimics this in the body of the essay itself, with key points of reflexive tension worrying holes in the text. Miéville implies that the Weird comes from the patchiness of the fabric of our lifeworld, which under modernity is the now worlded system of contemporary capitalism, and so the Weirdness in literary texts likely stems from a recognition of potential gaps in this ostensibly total system.

The reflexive patterns that recur through Miéville's essay reflect the long cycles of boom and bust that are fundamental to the process of the world-system, with the formal interpellations corresponding to the formal tears that are increasingly visible in the ongoing process of climate change and ecological crisis. Where Wallerstein posits a singular world-economy founded on unequal relations between core and peripheral sectors, Jason Moore has built on this theory of a world-system by integrating it with the process of ecological reproduction. In *Capitalism in the Web of Life; Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (2015), Moore explains the alienation of nature and human production is a single contradiction. Just as society, (or the now worlded process of the capitalist world-system) is organised by nature, capitalism itself is, by definition, an ecological project that organises nature (84-5). A World-ecological perspective recognises how the process of capitalist expansion involves constant metabolic integration of nonhuman natures. At this, Moore uses the concept of "Cheap Nature" to describe the sources of free or low-cost labour and value that capital uses to generate ecological surplus (53). From this world-ecological perspective, successive phases of accumulation across the long durée of capitalist development are different sets of ecological relations, and these relations dramatically shift when they exhaust a supply of cheap nature and become unable to sustain the capitalisation process. This leads to a crisis of accumulation, which concludes when a new, expanded and (briefly) more stable mode of accumulation becomes dominant (2014; 2015, 158-151). Morton's commentary on cyclicality, fate and ecological awareness are a partial vision of how world-ecological cycles of accumulation proceed toward terminal crisis as cheap natures dwindle and it becomes increasingly difficult to sustain the ecological surplus that maintains world-ecological relations.

In papers drawing on their work with the Warwick Research Collective (WReC), Niblett and Shapiro have both attempted a world-ecological reading of the literary Weird. The collective explores the literary-cultural implications of the theory of combined and uneven development, and draws on Wallerstein's world-systemic thinking, in order to theorise a singular world-literary system that is structured on inequality between the core, peripheral and semi-peripheral regions of the world-economy (WReC 7-8). In this context, Niblett has previously built on Michael Löwy's

conception of "critical irrealism", a term describing works "that do not follow the rules governing the 'accurate representation of life as it really is' but that are nevertheless critical of social reality" (Löwy 2007 196). For Niblett, the irreal emerges when realism falters in response to periods of world-ecological revolution and the ensuing socioecological uncertainty that accompanies (Niblett 2012, 21). And Niblett has recently read the Weird in literary texts as "the presence of a social (or socioecological) contradiction that the text is trying to work through at the level of form" (2016 20), tying patterns of systemic and everyday dependency on oil to formal deformations. Consequently, Niblett suggests, the Weird emerges as a response to human history, often to the "intermixture of human and extra-human natures" (22) and usually unearths a haunting pattern of historical violence in response to contemporary social transformations. Working in a similar mode, Shapiro has located the Weird in the world-system with even greater specificity, arguing that:

> Weird tales tend to cluster, or achieve a density of appearance at moments of the first instantiation of an incipient downward phase of economic (and social) contraction. The weird registers initial perceptions of what ought not to be present—i.e. capitalism in crisis—in times otherwise dominated by wealth creation and continuing expansion, those moments when rising inequality begins to be sensed even though these social divisions have been dogmatically claimed to have been overcome (2016, 13).

Shapiro's position highlights the significant resonance between the first wave of Weird fiction and the Weird's cyclical resurgence under neoliberalism. Both Shapiro and Niblett, then, emphasise the underlying material tensions that give rise to Weird texts and the Weirding of cultural production, and in doing so they establish a method, critical for this project, for reading the Weird primarily in relation to the world-system via world-literature and world-ecology.

Such a systemic lens can be used to garner more from Miéville's Afterweird. For example, when Miéville describes the Weird as a "moth-eaten cloth" (1115) woven out of texts, it follows that this cloth and these texts are in turn bound to the material

spaces and ideological systems we inhabit. The Weird's homologous formal dynamics correspond to congruent dynamics of the wider social complex, and these are pressing in on Miéville's hole-y rendering of the Weird. These correspondences—between material spaces and ideological systems—can also be tracked spatially and temporally through the unfolding process of world-systemic relations. For example, on the subject of value's phasal changes through the circuits of capital, Shapiro writes:

> As capital is maintained *through* transformations girded by tensions, its metamorphoses *alter* the shape of the social complex, not as effects, but as the means through which it constitutes itself. (2017, 3; italics in original)

Capital's transformations proceed through and are perceived via tension and friction, but as capital proceeds, the specific nature of its deformation around a subject does not only make it more visible, in certain circumstances it allows for rips through which new social realities are possible, or even identifiable. Along a similar line, Miéville's comment on the instability of the VanderMeers' Weird canon illuminates how the Weird is transformed multifariously across the spatial and temporal expanse of the world-ecological process—"we don't fray the world quite the same, and different things watch each of us" (1115). An array of Weirds, then, will have the same point of formal origin despite variegated characteristics, and through this their specific encounters with the Real can gesture out toward larger systemic contradictions. This heterogeneity implies a constant reconfiguration and expansion of the Weird's aesthetic components, which explains the difficulty faced by critical approaches that eschew a materialist, world-systemic perspective. As the literary Weird is an affective response that comes from recognising the potentiality of new or unfamiliar social forms, it is made more evident when the social complex is defamiliarised by a worrying or fraying brought about by repetition or recursivity. Though this is often a product of the everyday friction of world-ecological process, equally it can be demonstrated or triggered by the formal deformations of literary-cultural texts.

Weirding Infrastructure

Why infrastructure? Further to Shapiro's assertion that the Weird registers the first signs of crisis in times otherwise typified by growth (2016 13), the Weird recognises the potential for new social forms within capital, and is, therefore, bound to infrastructure in ways stemming from the forms of political power that infrastructure embodies as well as the propensity of infrastructure to materialise and estrange ideological contradictions within capital. Infrastructure, and its literary depiction, are the material focus of this project. Put plainly, infrastructure here describes the vast networks of physical things that facilitate everyday life. This includes mines and rigs that supply raw materials and fuels. It means the coal, oil, nuclear, solar, geothermal, and hydro-electric power plants that produce our energy, and the power lines, transformers, and standardised circuit breakers that safely provide it. It also includes the roadways, rail networks, ports and airports that facilitate the movement of people and things. It references the sewerage pipes and sanitation programs that remove refuse, and the reservoirs and water-purification systems that provide clean water, as well as the undersea fibre-optic cables, warehoused server banks, the full spread of our satellite and cellular networks, and the physical components of the cloud. Given such enormity, this project will necessarily narrow its focus to three specific areas for the sake of precision and depth: petrol, rail and hydrological infrastructure.

There has been a good deal of productive scholarly work on infrastructure in recent years, with the field of anthropology seeing book-length extended analyses on the topics of rail, electricity and oil infrastructure by writers including Laura Bear (2007), Tanja Winther (2008) and Mandana E. Limbert (2010). Elsewhere, anxieties about peak oil have precipitated the rapid development of a robust body of work in the energy humanities, with texts like Timothy Mitchell's *Carbon Democracy* (2013), the petrocultural analysis of Macdonald (2013, 2014, 2017), work on energyscapes by Jeff M. Diamanti (2014), and *Oil Culture* (Barret, Ross, and Worden 2014) all serving as useful infrastructural field-markers. However, some of the clearest definitional work on infrastructure, in its broadest sense, has been conducted by Brian Larkin, especially in his now foundational article "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure" (2013). In this piece, Larkin describes how infrastructural analysis can "reveal forms of political

rationality that underlie technological projects and which give rise to an apparatus of governmentality" (328). He identifies infrastructure as the "material forms that allow for the possibility of exchange over space […,] the physical networks through which goods, ideas, waste, power, people, and finance are trafficked" (327). His article makes several crucial interventions in the field of infrastructural studies that highlight some of the difficulties of engaging with infrastructure on a theoretical level. Specifically, Larkin highlights the curious ontology of infrastructures in their nature as things and the relation between things, a state that often displaces their visibility in favour of the objects they transport. An outcome of this is that they must be understood as systems and distinguished from other technologies, because they form the structure underneath other technological functions. This is not a simple "linear" relation between an underlying network and its produced physical reality, however, as the relations are "recursive and dispersed" (329). One can consider an infrastructural system as being woven through the social complex—roads configure the living spaces of people, but they require people to build, use and maintain them, and they also need require oil, rubber, steel, finance, education, food, electricity, as well as all the necessary sub-infrastructures and supply chains. The extremely dense concatenation of networks that can be grasped as infrastructural is so prolific that

> The act of defining an infrastructure […] comprises a cultural analytic that highlights the epistemological and political commitments involved in selecting what one sees as infrastructural (and thus causal) and what one leaves out. (Larkin 2013, 330)

One of the most relevant parts of Larkin's paper is his argument that infrastructures also exist as aesthetic forms separate from their technical function, and this formal dimension performs equally vital tasks. These tasks can be the mediation and production of desire and fantasy, or they could have an administrative, regulatory or social function (329). The generative and conceptual possibility of this model comes partly from its rejection of the common notion that all infrastructures are invisible until they break. Rather, infrastructures are commonly semiotically deployed in order to achieve a set of effects. Infrastructure is often associated with the process of liberal economic development—a highway might be built to advertise the effective governance

of the state apparatus, or green energy systems might be placed strategically to alleviate public pressure for climate justice. Larkin proposes a critical line of infrastructural inquiry: to "examine how (in)visibility is mobilised and why" (336). This has a similar imperative to literary works often making visible concealed or suppressed hierarchies or patterns of exploitation. This thesis will demonstrate how the aesthetic articulation of such (in)visibility evokes precisely the affective dynamic that characterises the Weird by registering as a simultaneity of conflicting ideological realities. It will be considering how infrastructural visibility is implemented to keep certain infrastructural components and activities hidden, and how the presence of infrastructure can often make covertly implemented dynamics in the political and financial sphere more visible. More specifically, though, the chapters to follow will focus on the ways that conscious and unconscious exploration of such infrastructural (in)visibilities function in Weird literary texts.

To this end, Keller Easterling's *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructural Space* (2014) demonstrates some of the ways in which infrastructures can be mobilised as powerful political tools. Easterling coins the phrase 'infrastructure space' to describe the set of spaces derived from and determined by the "shared standards and ideas that control everything from technical objects to management styles" (11). She articulates an expanded view of what constitutes infrastructure, including the informational and logistical activities that "determine how objects and content are organized and circulated" (13), envisioning infrastructural proliferation as having a programmatic logic that configures the built environment as an operating system. Easterling argues that:

> Infrastructure space is a form, but not like a building is a form; it is an updating platform unfolding in time to handle new circumstances, encoding the relationships between buildings, or dictating logistics. There are object forms like buildings and active forms like bits of code in the software that organizes building (Easterling 14).

Active forms (which usually dictate a behaviour or perform a set of activities over time) combine with object forms to circulate and produce a complex set of relations that

organises and shapes our social conditions. Easterling's argument has a great deal of affinity with Larkin's engagement with the poetics of infrastructure:

> To conceive of this operation as a form of poetics in the Jackobsonian sense is to rearrange the hierarchy of functions so that the aesthetic dimension of infrastructure (rather than its technical one) is dominant (Larkin 335-6).

Returning to his description of infrastructural (in)visibility, the poetry of infrastructure describes the common instance where the aesthetic elements of infrastructure take primacy over its material function—where what the newly constructed highway communicates about the prosperity and stability of its environment is more important than the actual route it constitutes. This aesthetic dimension of an infrastructure operates within the circuit of active forms and is one aspect of the total set of relations that produces infrastructure space, but often the aesthetic components can be conflated with an infrastructure's fundamental nature and activity. Easterling argues that an understanding of 'infrastructural disposition' could prove useful here, for "Disposition uncovers accidental, covert, or stubborn forms of power—political chemistries and temperaments of aggression, submission, or violence—hiding in the folds of infrastructure space" (73). Disposition purports to describe the character produced by the total set of forms in a given network, but it more likely corresponds to the covert and often insidious material and formal capacities of an infrastructural network working to reproduce world-ecological relations, and occasionally those working to usher in a shift in the dominant mode of accumulation. The word disposition is especially significant, as it indicates that an affect borne of infrastructural estrangement is being projected onto an inert object. Often the gap between infrastructural disposition and aesthetic form is interesting in its indication of a covert activity, but equally it can reveal an emerging transformation in the configuration and conception of social reality, producing a Weirdness in apprehension and cultural representation.

In this critical context, there are a plurality of ways that infrastructure is aesthetically bound to the Weird under capital, and the political dynamics of neoliberal

hegemony elaborated in the first part of this introduction form a useful point of ingress. Both Larkin and Easterling have argued that infrastructure aesthetically registers as the embodiment of modernity and progress and often appears as an instrument of liberalism with its concomitant ideology (Easterling 137-69; Larkin 332-334). Infrastructure often embodies these ideological impulses and physically patterns them through the "web of life", as Moore terms it (2015 3, 6). The foundational practices of neoliberalism involve a number of contradictions that manifest through infrastructural spaces. For example, when Larkin describes infrastructure as having a logic of governmentality, he provides the example of infrastructure adopting responsibilities of the state in a laissez-faire economy, describing liberalism as a "form of government that disavows itself, seeking to organize populations and territories through technological domains that seem far removed from formal political institutions" (328). Here, the organisational capacities of infrastructure space regulate a supposedly free market, constraining possibilities and appearing as an alien force shaping the economy when glimpsed from within. Easterling goes beyond Larkin's examples, arguing that the leverage or even replacement of evaporative state power is a fundamental property of infrastructure space:

> As a site of multiple, overlapping, or nested forms of sovereignty, where domestic and transnational jurisdictions collide, infrastructure *space* becomes a medium of what might be called *extrastatecraft*—a portmanteau describing the often undisclosed activities outside of, in addition to, and sometimes even in partnership with statecraft (Easterling 15).

Easterling evidences the co-presence of private and public space in infrastructure. This is not so much an example of two encroaching spheres, but rather an illustration of a fundamental dialectic of neoliberalism—in the ostensible eschewing of formal governmentality aggressive forms of economic planning are programmed into the structure of the environment to maintain the current phase of world-ecological accumulation (Harvey 2005, 66, 72; Easterling 62-5). Preconceptions of an economy that is free to self-maintain are incompatible with the market manipulations performed by vast extra-state actors leveraging energy prices and undermining public transport

infrastructure. These are infrastructural practices that run contrary to prevailing narratives of how social relations are supposedly organised. The flagrant ways they breach neoliberal consensus evidence the impermanence of the current social order, and constantly gesture towards an ostensibly Weird outside.

A disruption of neoliberal hegemony is not really an encroaching outside, but the abutting of a perspective that assumes the strict delineation of the two spheres with their actual co-dependent behaviours. Beyond these obvious contradictions in prevailing metanarratives, the presence of authentically new and ill-defined social transformations looms half-seen as new phases of capital unfold through infrastructural space. Easterling describes how "dynamic systems of space, information, and power generate de facto forms of polity faster than even quasi-official forms of governance can legislate them" (15) and indeed, these transformations are often legible in infrastructure space before they are fully realised—the erosion of privacy was evident in online infrastructure long before it became a point of popular political contention. Obvious examples of this are new social realities that could be ushered in as a consequence of ongoing climate collapse, reconfigured labour conditions due to the widespread implementation of automation, and new forms of extractive practice under regimes of surveillance capitalism, where labour and leisure time are further mingled by the increasing ubiquity of social media platforms and "behavioural futures markets" (Zuboff 8-12).

The last half-century has already demonstrated a series of such transformations, with the development of the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET) into the modern internet creating new cultural institutions and labour forms modified by the social complex as they facilitate the smooth accumulation of capital. A vibrant culture of Weird Tales has sprung up out of the new realities these forces threaten, with online architecture allowing new collaborative forms of storytelling, such as the Secure, Contain, Protect (SCP) Foundation's vast database of anomalous objects and *Marble Hornets'* augmented reality horror allowing experimental forms of metafictionality. To revisit the threat of climate crisis, the recognition of crisis in process is an excellent stimulus for Weirdness. Our reliance on petrolic infrastructure borders on complete, with tendrils of influence extending into every facet of our lives, and as Graeme

Macdonald has argued, the global financial system being underpinned by $27 trillion of unextracted petroleum bodes extremely poorly for a smooth transition to a carbon-free economy (2013, 3). The very operation and configuration of infrastructure space cultivates the Weird. There is a certain crisis in representation in the dispersed and recursive networks of relations made present through interfacing with infrastructure space. The question is one of representation in terms of scale and complexity—as Jameson argues in his 1984 essay 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capital' these networks can signal the vastness of the world-system:

> I want to suggest that our faulty representations of some immense communicational and computer network are themselves but a distorted figuration of something even deeper, namely the whole world system of present-day multinational capitalism. The technology of contemporary society is therefore mesmerizing and fascinating, not so much in its own right, but because it seems to offer some privileged representational shorthand for grasping a network of power and control even more difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp—namely the whole new decentred global network of the third stage of capital itself. (1991, 79)

The relevance of Jameson's engagement with the burgeoning computer networks of the 1980s can be extended to the generalised operational system of contemporary infrastructure space, as the proliferation of digital systems brought with it a critical vocabulary facilitating the kind of analysis conducted by Easterling. In the same way that Ralickas sees parallels between the Weird and the Sublime, the enormity of the world-ecological system resists linear modes of expression and often registers as an unknowably vast and mysterious entity in contemporary cultural forms. As in works such as Jeff VanderMeer's *The Southern Reach Trilogy* (2017), the unknowable Weird entities that distinguish the text's lifeworld from our own confront the reader with a necessarily incomplete figuration of world-ecological relations.

Infrastructure and the Literary Weird

From its inception, Weird fiction has borne an infrastructural affinity. In "Supernatural Horror in Literature" Lovecraft identifies Robert W. Chambers as a notable part of the burgeoning canon of the American Weird, specifically citing his 1895 collection of short stories *The King in Yellow,* and the infrastructural underpinning of Weird fiction is expressly evident in this seminal text. The opening story, "The Repairer of Reputations", follows a straightforward narrative structure where a state of prosperity and stability is then subverted by an invasive Weird reality. The narrative anticipates the US of the 1920s, associating American plenitude with the rapid expansion of urban infrastructure:

> Everywhere good architecture was replacing bad, and even in New York, a sudden craving for decency had swept away a great portion of the existing horrors. Streets had been widened, properly paved and lighted, trees had been planted, squares laid out, elevated structures demolished and underground roads built to replace them. (Chambers 3-4)

This vision of an American future imagines an infrastructural smoothing and regulation of the urban environment, but it attributes this modernisation of the economic core to projected colonial expansion. The narrator reports the annexation of Hawaii, Cuba, and Samoa, and prodigious investment toward American military supremacy organised under the "Prussian system". For Chambers, the infrastructural development of the American core is contingent on material exploitation of peripheral economies and a nascent fascism that is already predicated on the elimination of marginalised groups. Alongside the renovation of electrical, leisure and transit infrastructure, the narrator describes how

> the exclusion of foreign-born Jews as a measure of self-preservation, the settlement of the new independent negro state of Suanee, the checking of immigration, the new laws concerning naturalization, and the gradual centralization of power in the executive all contributed to national calm and prosperity. (Chambers 4)

In his description of how the society of the future is predicated on authoritarian power, segregation and ethnonationalism, Castaigne, the story's narrator and protagonist, demonstrates a pre-discursive assumption that heterogeneity is tied to conflict. Zygmunt Bauman proposes that the production of "human waste" or excessive and redundant population of human surplus is "an inescapable side-effect of *order-building*" (Bauman 5), and the "Repairer of Reputations" works through an anxiety regarding the formation of a biopolitical human waste disposal infrastructure. Beyond the aforementioned developments in urban infrastructure, the story is set around the opening of the first "Government Lethal Chamber" in 1920 (4). With plans to open an identical chamber in each city, town, and village, the story outlines a parallel axis of modernisation, the institution of an infrastructure whereby the abject can remove themselves from a society unwilling to accommodate them. This tension becomes fully Weird in the protagonist's hallucinations, induced by the cocktail of a head injury and his reading of *The King in Yellow,* he begins to imagine an alien reality of Carcosa, imposed over New York. The protagonist's visions stem from an ideological awakening, and the recognition that nested in this period of capitalist modernisation and infrastructural expansion there are the markers of a system as brutal, unequal and arbitrary as Feudalism. Two spaces are folded into one another, the affective consequence of this characterising the Weird from its earliest origins.

As the Weird emerges from contradictions between subjective conceptions of reality and the systemic operation of the world-ecology, it can be mobilised to make these contradictions evident. in Weird fiction, the gaps between how we think an infrastructure space should behave and its covert political power are often depicted as a failure of reality. Larkin's description of the formal qualities of a highway network help illustrate this:

> A road's technical function is to transport vehicles from one place to
> another, promoting movement and realizing the enlightenment goal of
> society and economy as a space of unimpeded circulation. But it can also
> be an excessive fantastic object that generates desire and awe in
> autonomy of its technical function (Larkin 333).

In the same way the road's technical function can prove inadequate, its fantastical aesthetic can be equally unsuccessful and become a source of subversion and discontent. The ways in which personal transport impedes a driver's freedom are powerful even in their banality. The need to maintain the vehicle (in terms of road tax, M.O.T, gas mileage, mechanical repair) as well as negotiating the travails of traffic on a morning commute, or the perils of navigating the illogical ordinances of British industrial towns—these kinds of mundanities are often highlighted in Weird art and literature. As we have seen from Niblett, the forces of dependency have burst forth as Weird entities, and the petrol pump and motorway are charged with the untenability of our way of life. Cycles of frustrating repetition abound, and lengthy periods of travel and fraught navigation are present in the road-bound Weird fiction of Brian Hodge (1960-), Ben Wheatley (1972-), Ben Okri (1959-), Panos Cosmatos (1974-), and Stephen Graham Jones (1972). These mundanities are sufficiently estranging to infuse the experience of everyday life and with a Weird sense of disquiet, playing on the seeds of doubt that are planted when things are not as they ought or are said to be.

The tension between the Weird as an affect and infrastructure space being 'dispositional' is a significant feature in literary engagement with Weird infrastructure. In a similar manner to how Fisher's category of the Eerie misplaces agency, the affective product of registering a new or unfamiliar social form is projected into infrastructure space, hence the environment in Weird fiction often possessing an impossible disposition or agency as in Jeff VanderMeer's *Annihilation (2015),* the Duffer brothers' *Stranger Things* (2016), or Stephen King's *IT* (1986). It is important, then, to highlight how this thesis understands this 'disposition' as a projection of human affect, and not a rejection of a correlationist, humanist perspective. This project is instead positioned alongside the wider Materialist critique and repudiation of New Materialism: a term referring to a loose collection of critical approaches that includes the Speculative Realism of Graham Harman (2012), the object-oriented ontology of Timothy Morton (2016), and the Vibrant Materiality of Jane Bennet (2010). Although the ostensible goal of destabilising anthropocentric philosophy in order to advance new green axes of critical analysis is laudable, in practice, this body of work serves as a focused estrangement and abstraction of material relations. In the opening of *Vibrant Matter*

(2010), Bennett outlines a methodology for the text's examination of life and matter, namely, a process of "worrying them until they start to seem strange" (8). At best, this serves as a lukewarm subversion of commodity fetishism, though more often it acts as a concerted bourgeois effort to imagine the hypothetical actancy and interrelation of non-human objects instead of the inconvenient and uncomfortable reality of marginalised, exploited and dispossessed humans who continue to suffer under the process of historical capital.

Where infrastructure appears to possess a disposition, will, or actancy of its own it is inevitably the reflection or recurrence of human agency rippling through the enormously dispersed and entangled networks of our infrastructural reality. Weirdly animate infrastructure is a phenomenon that stretches back to the inception of Weird literature, with the most striking example being Lovecraft's genre-defining *At the Mountains of Madness* (1931). The novella describes the ruins of a civilization of extraterrestrial Elder Things that has stood abandoned in the remote Antarctic mountains for many millions of years. In the sub-glacial depths of this City the Antarctic explorers Danforth and Dyer encounter a still-living relic of the city's ancient infrastructure:

> It was the utter, objective embodiment of the fantastic novelist's 'thing that should not be'; and its nearest comprehensible analogue is a vast, onrushing subway train as one sees it from a station platform—the great black front looming colossally out of infinite subterranean distance, constellated with strangely coloured lights and filling the prodigious burrow as a piston fills a cylinder.
>
> But we were not on a station platform. We were on the track ahead as the nightmare plastic column of foetid black iridescence oozed tightly onward through its fifteen-foot sinus; gathering unholy speed and driving before it a spiral, re-thickening cloud of the pallid abyss-vapour. It was a terrible, indescribable thing vaster than any subway train—a shapeless congeries of protoplasmic bubbles, faintly self-luminous, and with myriads of temporary eyes forming and unforming as pustules of greenish

light all over the tunnel-filling front that bore down upon us, crushing the

frantic penguins and slithering over the glistening floor that it and its kind

had swept so evilly free of all litter. Still came that eldritch, mocking cry—

"Tekeli-li! Tekeli-li!" (Lovecraft 802)

Lovecraft's shoggoth is a shapeshifting mass of living infrastructure. At one point responsible for the manual labour of the fallen city, the shoggoths decapitated and usurped their erstwhile masters, and now slide through the tunnels, still incidentally clearing the passages of debris while their voices carry on the shrieking wind that surrounds the mountain-range. The Shoggoth's comparison to a train is significant not because it invests inert matter with a misplaced agency, but because it literalises world-ecological relations, drawing a parallel between labour-power and energy in the web of life. In *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy* (2012)*,* Harman fails to fully grasp the Weird materiality of Lovecraft, writing that "no other writer is so perplexed by the power of objects and the inability of language to describe them" (9). This position actively suppresses how labour-power is commonly refracted through Lovecraft's descriptions of space, creature and environment in favour of hollow abstraction.

New materialism struggles to fully account for the political capacity of the Weird precisely because its search for some unreachable outside reduces and smooths the Weird's accounting of physical things. This is particularly evident in the formal affinity between the Weird's production of space and the nested spaces of infrastructural networks. Spatial deformation is a fundamental element of Weird tales, one that is present across the canon not only in theme and content, but in higher spatial form. Mark Blacklock has elaborated on this in his essay, "Higher Spatial Form in Weird Fiction", where he identifies and explicates the subordination of the temporal components of Weird fiction on the formal level (2017). Of the spatialising techniques he describes, Weird fiction's intense regime of encadrement, its radical intertextuality and its narrative reflexivity are especially significant in terms of their relationship to the Weird deformations of infrastructure space. The intense concatenation of infrastructural networks corresponds to the nested narratives and structures typical of the Weird. Pseudobiblia, or the cross-contamination of fabricated texts in Weird tales, constructs an infrastructure of relations that mimics the circulation of active aesthetic

forms through infrastructure space, and resembles the tangled spatial networks of infrastructure in the way it co-locates authorial consciousness into a single text (Blacklock 1113-1114). The elongation of narrative time renders space out of the temporal in a manner similar to infrastructure's complex spatialisation of ideology. Often the intense dimensionality of Weird tales induces a crisis in representation. Language buckles and tears, and the gap between the thing and the form makes the space strange and provides the opportunity to glimpse an alternative Real.

At their most fundamental level, then, the ways in which infrastructures aesthetically operate on a subject correspond to this hyperdimensionality in Weird fiction:

> Were access to a theoretical four-dimensional space possible, it was reasoned, so would it be possible for a physical body to move in and out of three-dimensional space, re-emerging in distant locations; for a three-dimensional body to be inverted; for the co-location of more than one consciousness within the same three-dimensional body [...] (Blacklock 1104).

Poetically employed, infrastructure's loosened formal elements comprise an extra-dimensional network that act on the subject in ways that are strange, and while very visible, they are often not apprehended as infrastructural. With infrastructural edifice often expressing enormous physical presence, or even omnipresence in an urban setting, the operation of an infrastructure's formal and aesthetic apparatus registers as a confrontation with Weirded dimensionality in text. Although this complex layering of nested spaces in both the literary and infrastructural spheres could be seen to problematise attempts at mapping the Weird onto world-ecological relations, this is a fundamental quality of the transformative capitalist process that the Weird registers. By focussing closely on specific examples of Weird infrastructure in Weird literature and staying within the relatively narrow temporal frame of the neoliberal ecological revolution, this thesis will be able to gesture out to the larger and more complex dynamics at work in world-literary and world-infrastructural development. By interrogating literary depictions of "Weird" infrastructures and their eco-critical

revelations, and synthesising new methodological insights from the energy humanities, world-ecology and world-literary criticism, it will demonstrate that world-literature's infrastructurally Weird aesthetics register and expose emerging socio-political forms and futures.

Chapter Introductions

In the following chapters I will compare Weird literary depictions of petroleum infrastructure, railways and hydrological infrastructure systems, from core and (semi)peripheral sites within the world-system. Using the world-systemic framework outlined by the WReC, my comparisons will unpack Weird formal homologies in infrastructurally-bound literature from Korea, Russia, Iran, Nigeria, the United States, and Europe, arguing for the world-literary scope of the Weird. Crucially, these comparisons are conducted in relation to signals of crisis produced by the ecological regime of neoliberal capital.

Weird Oil: Petrol Pump, Crash and Cyclone

The first chapter begins by infrastructurally grounding itself in the energy humanities, examining literary Weirdness in neoliberal energy systems, and demonstrating the methodological validity of the thesis over a wide range of prose texts. I argue that friction between the cyclicality of the world-historical process and linear conceptions of historical development are a central tension in contemporary Weird literature, especially in petrofictive narratives where the foregrounding of carbon fuels makes the threat of climate crisis palpable. By examining the wave of scholarly responses to Abdelrahman Munif's *Cities of Salt* (1984) I identify a latent critical consciousness of the Weird as an affective and literary mode in the text's navigation of infrastructure space during energy transition. It will then continue to track the interrelation of Weird petro-infrastructural dynamics across core and (semi)peripheral regions by comparing the formal dynamics of *Cities of Salt* with congruent patterns in short fiction from different locations within the world-literary system. This section works out from Macdonald's analysis of Calvino's 1974 short story "The Petrol Pump", which I compare to three other

oil-bound road narratives: Ben Okri's "Worlds that Flourish" (1988); Denis Johnson's "Car Crash While Hitchhiking" (1992); and Brian Hodge's "It's all the same Road in the End" (2018). Finally, the chapter turns to Reza Negarestani's petrocultural odyssey, *Cyclonopedia* (2008). By analysing its obsessive interrogation of oil in the Middle East and demonstrating how this depiction of oil is entangled in world-ecological process I will demonstrate how Weird fiction can be approached from a materialist perspective, even where it appears inextricably tied to theories of speculative realism and object-oriented ontology.

Chapter 2: Weird Rail: Ideology, Dystopia, and Infrastructural Augury

Chapter two continues the transit theme by contrasting Weird rail in Korean and Russian post-apocalyptic science fiction, looking at Bong Joon-ho's *Snowpiercer* (2013), and Dimitry Glukhovsky's *Metro 2033* (2002). Having observed a Weird anxiety in contemporary infrastructural media stemming from the dynamic between linear and cyclical models of historical process, I turn my analysis to a category of infrastructural texts that project into a future beyond terminal systemic collapse. I read how such fantasies of systemic continuity mediate space and time through underlying Weird infrastructural networks, while clearly signalling impending world-ecological catastrophe. I unpack how infrastructure systems operate as systems of neoliberal ideological containment and how the Weird can negate and subvert the formal markers of said containment. I will be contrasting the variegated modes of falsified systemic continuity presented in these texts. In the case of *Snowpiercer* I track how this feature developed between the 1982 French graphic novel, the Korean film, and the 2020 Netflix adaptation. I will then apply this same mode of analysis to *Metro,* while staying conscious of the expanded Metro Universe, including Glukhovsky's sequels to the Metro novel and the video game series by 4A Games. Comparing the contours of these two properties via Mark Blacklock's writing on higher spatial form, I illustrate how these texts deploy narrative temporality and Weird looping form in a manner that projects up and outwards into the wider world-literary system and towards broad metanarratives of progress, systemic continuity, and frontier expansion. Through the comparison between these texts, I continue to illustrate how the Weird operates not as generic quality, but as a formal dynamic that exists across a range of infrastructurally bound texts.

Chapter 3: Weird Waste, Water, and Systemic (re-)Subjectification: the Neoliberal Anagnorisis of Irish Infrastructural Flows

From closing remarks on how *Snowpiercer* and *Metro* demonstrate waste's capacity to inspire neoliberal visions of systemic rupture, my third chapter examines how Weird literary form registers transformations in Irish hydrological infrastructure. I begin by unpacking Deckard's study of "cheap water" and her argument that neoliberal hydroculture has registered the ways that hydrological infrastructure is increasingly folded into the flows of neoliberal financialisation (Deckard 2019). I expand on my previous analysis of how failing infrastructure systems are represented in Weird literary form through a World-literary reflection on the Irish government's disastrous attempt to introduce domestic water charges after the fall of the Celtic Tiger in the early 2000s. To this end I discuss *Solar Bones*, Mike McCormack's 2016 novel detailing the ghostly internal monologue of Marcus Conway, a civil engineer on the west coast of Ireland. Here I work through the ideological intersection of public works and Roman Catholic practice in Marcus' vocation as a "Metaphysical Engineer" (Deckard 2016), and the Weird collapse he experiences due to a collision between the patriarchal logic of neoliberal accumulation and his family's experience of the Lough Corrib cryptosporidiosis epidemic. I then compare this to the Irish language poetry of Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, focusing on the cycle of poems about displaced *Murúcha* in *The Fifty Minute Mermaid* (2007). Through the collection's depiction of historical trauma and the precarity of Irish vernacular culture I draw attention to the previously unexplored Weirdness that runs in Irish poetic depictions of fish-human hybridity. I use these Weird formal developments to explore how the historical atrocities of the Roman Catholic church are infrastructurally embedded in Irish history and hydroculture, and how the poems' representation of these injustices register a short-term and neoliberal cultural logic that is willing to exploit vulnerable humans, non-human natures and a stable future to maintain an unequal social order. I conclude with an explanation of how these texts Weirdly literalise world-systemic relations by exploring the (re-)circulating logic of water, waste and human bodies through infrastructure space. In this I demonstrate how infrastructural flows of water and waste expose the world-ecological entanglement of subjects living in the spaces that they shape and connect. These entanglements are

particularly important in how they illuminate those vulnerable subjects that capital burns or processes as waste or surplus. In the process I argue that this Weird interconnected logic is inimical to neoliberal ideology, which feeds back into why the infrastructure is so ineffective and violent.

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1. Weird Oil: Petrol Pump, Crash and Cyclone

Introduction

The capacity of oil as an energy commodity is bounded by its finitude and ecological impact, and yet hydrocarbons form the economic and technological basis for our contemporary world-system—so much so that "oil's necessity to modern life appears less as a problem than an ontological given" (Barrett and Worden 2014, xviii - xix). The catastrophic irony of this set of energetic-relations is culturally embedded across the world-system, and the energy humanities have done a great deal to articulate the many ways that petroleum shapes and mediates our culture, politics and society. In the introduction to the 2017 collection, *Petrocultures: Oil, Politics, Culture,* Sheena Wilson, Adam Carlson and Imre Szeman argue that:

> At the heart of this newfound awareness of oil's importance to our
> sensibilities and social expectations – our belief, for example, that
> sociality is of necessity narrated by perpetual growth, ceaseless mobility,
> and the expanded personal capacities and possibilities associated with
> the past century's new flood of energy into our lives – is our recognition
> that over the course of our current century we will need to extract
> ourselves from our dependence on oil and make the transition to new
> energy sources and new ways of living. (Wilson et al. 2017, 3)

Here, members of the Petrocultures Research Group identify the critical and urgent need to move away from carbon dependency and its modes of sociality. They also go on to explain how managing this energy transition will require significant new ways of thinking about the future, including speculative and uncertain efforts to transform our contemporary social reality. In accordance with this proposal, this chapter posits a necessary bind between petrocultural research and the study of Weird infrastructures in contemporary literature. Oil and its associated infrastructures are calamitously entangled with ongoing transformations in the world-ecology, progressively Weirding

our social reality in ways that are registered across the world-literary system. A necessary incorporation of the Weird into existing petrocultural analysis will more fully anticipate complex impending mutations to the social complex and ideologically accommodate prospective solutions to the challenges that these alterations propose.

The energy humanities are especially relevant to this line of inquiry, as any critical discussion of infrastructure requires an emphasis on contemporary energetic relations. Timothy Mitchell has demonstrated how, as a concentrated source of energy, oil facilitates centralisation of affluence and power in a way that fundamentally undermines democratic institutions—not simply though the economic and ecological surplus oil generates, but through the processes of extraction, refinement and distribution, and the ways these processes configure the technical and material reality of the world-system (*Carbon Democracy* 2011, 2-11). That is, oil centralises value and increases inequality through its infrastructural logic. Carbon infrastructures therefore spatialise the ideological relations that gird and bind our social reality, by operating as the material representation of value and energy exchange in the capitalist world-system.

Frederick Buell has identified two specific modes to oil's reshaping of energetic and cultural history, the first being the rise of "the culture of extraction" (2012, 74). Buell tracks the start of the culture of extraction to 1859, when Edwin Drake successfully struck oil in Titusville, Pennsylvania. For Buell, this marks the beginning of a period of unprecedented exuberance in American markets and culture, where abundant access to free-flowing fuel promised and delivered an explosion of wealth and power at the level of the nation and (for some) the individual too. The ease and profitability of oil-drilling in comparison to coal-mining resonated with the liberal American ideals of democratic individualism and frontier-expansion, though over the course of the twentieth century the US would see the apparatus of extraction systematized into "a vertically integrated monopoly" that curtailed these ideals in favour of centralised wealth and power (Buell 2012, 76). The culture of extraction is the consequent and prevalent ideology that assumes future growth and abundance through sustained and easy appropriation of freely available natural resources, an ideology that operates in a co-productive relationship with oil infrastructure.

The second mode of oil's influence on energetic and cultural history, was oil's role in the new cultural system of "oil-electric-coal capitalism" (2012, 74). Oil-burning power plants and the continued abundance of coal allowed for the proliferation of electrical grids across the twentieth century, and a shift in lived environment across social classes. As "the spread of electric lighting began to limit the growth in demand for kerosene in industrialised countries, oil companies were forced to look for new uses for their product" (Mitchell 2013, 32), and so rapid developments in mechanical power ensued. Across the twentieth century the internal combustion engine transformed the social realities of workers, and private transport became fully integrated into the fabric of modern society, alongside concomitant efficiencies in industrial and manufacturing labour processes and their surrounding infrastructures. Again, this shift toward oil as the dominant energy-commodity came with a consolidation of political power away from those whose labour sustained the networks of energy infrastructure even as the significance of oil infrastructures grew. Unlike the "dendritic networks" (Mitchell 38) of coal, the grid-like structure of oil infrastructure lacks economic and industrial chokepoints for workers to leverage against owners of capital, and so infrastructural form is at the centre of Mitchell's contention that oil facilitates capitalism's anti-democratic tendencies (fig. 1). These two modes are simultaneous and complementary, and they dynamically reorganise the spatial relations of our material reality, as well as its developmental trajectory.
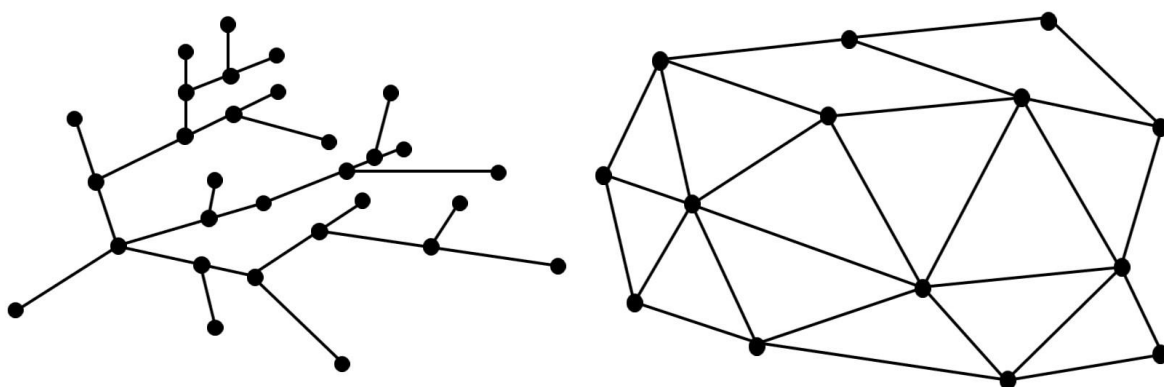
Figure. 1. *Illustration showing a dendritic network structure (left) and a grid-like n*etwork structure (right).

Contemporary oil infrastructure must therefore be understood in terms of its systemic permeation of the world-ecology, though it can be useful to consider the most visible elements of the extractive apparatus and contrast them to the ways we encounter the oil commodity at the point of consumption. Systems of extraction, refinement and distribution often seem distant for carbon consumers in core economies; offshore rigs, oil-wells, tar-sand strip-mines, refineries, power-plants, tankers, pipelines and storage facilities are typically less visible than the networks of everyday oil-electric infrastructure that they underpin. However, the roads and railways we use for transit; the pumps and stations we refuel at; the electrical power that runs our homes and workplaces; the plastics that permeate the biosphere and the trends of a global economy hinged on the trade of oil futures—through these phenomena we directly experience the distributed network of machinery and relations that comprises a sizable portion of the extractive frontier of neoliberal capital. And because carbon infrastructure is so fully enmeshed in the fabric of the everyday, these networks are ubiquitous in contemporary media, and the oily world-ecological patterns and social dynamics produced by these infrastructures are embedded in contemporary literature. This thread is central to the work of Graeme Macdonald, who has argued that fiction offers a "significant [...] repository for the energy aware scholar to demonstrate how, through successive epochs, particularly embedded kinds of energy create a predominant (and oftentimes alternative) culture of being and imagining in the world" (2013, 4). Macdonald demonstrates an energetic line of critical enquiry into fiction where he considers how literature illuminates the ways that oil generates and maintains a set of social relations intrinsic to contemporary capital. For Macdonald, as the dominant energy commodity, oil is fundamentally bound up with literary aesthetics – oil saturates everyday life, producing an energy unconscious that is tied to the booms and busts of the petrodollar. In his 2013 essay "The Resources of Culture," Macdonald traces such aesthetics in literary texts, beginning this analytical unpacking with Italo Calvino's "The Petrol Pump". Macdonald closely examines how the narrative navigates the petrol pump's function and structural significance, though he does not articulate the story's infrastructural encounter in terms of its Weirdness. The efficacy of the Weird as an analytical tool is particularly evident in this infrastructural context, however, as the narrative is expressly preoccupied with the petrol pump's position as the junction

where the energy commodity is transformed between the subcircuits of productive and financial capital. Here, tensions that constitute the crisis facing the world-ecology are brought into sharpest relief, and as such, alternative social realities are suggested by the looming collapse of the ideological relations spatialised by a petrol station. Put plainly, Calvino's story demonstrates how the Weirdness of literary oil infrastructure is often due to the affective registration of how neoliberal petroculture is incompatible with a sustainable future.

This chapter will track the development of a Weird petro-aesthetic over the phase of neoliberal capital in oil-bound fiction and demonstrate the broad applicability of the Weird as a vector of world-literary analysis. Particularly sharp examples of Weird form and affect arise at points of systemic and infrastructural rupture across the world-literary system, and as such this chapter will look at Weird oil encounters in world-literary texts that have conventionally been referred to as postmodern, postcolonial or traditionally Weird, focussing on their entanglements with oil infrastructure. The first part of this chapter will examine Abdelrahman Munif's *Cities of Salt* (1984), identifying a latent critical consciousness of the Weird as an affective and literary mode in the text's navigation of infrastructure space during energy transition. It will then continue to track the interrelation of Weird petro-infrastructural dynamics across core and (semi)peripheral regions by comparing the formal dynamics of *Cities of Salt* with congruent patterns in short fiction from different locations within the world-literary system. This section of the thesis works out from Macdonald's analysis of Calvino's 1974 short story "The Petrol Pump" and compares Calvino's short story to three other oil-bound road narratives. These include Ben Okri's "Worlds that Flourish" (1988), and Denis Johnson's "Car Crash While Hitchhiking" (1992); as well as Brian Hodge's "It's all the same Road in the End" (2018), which constitutes a more recent example of these formal patterns in an effusively Weird narrative. Finally, the chapter turns to Reza Negarestani's petrocultural odyssey, *Cyclonopedia* (2008), to argue that the text demonstrates how the Weird spatial and temporal relations of petro-capital that are embedded in contemporary neoliberal infrastructure space obfuscate themselves. I will unpick the formal and thematic tension between linear and cyclical schemas of travel and history in and across this run of texts and show how this tension reflects Weird

anxieties regarding social transformations bound to energetic regime change. Through this, I will evidence the world-literary binding of these texts by highlighting their homologous formal expression of (otherwise incongruous) Weird affective dynamics.

1.1. A Spectre is Haunting the Pipeline; The Weird Materiality of the Oil Frontier and Abdelrahman Munif's *Cities of Salt* (1984)

In 1992 Amitav Ghosh identified Abdelrahman Munif's *Cities of Salt* (1984) as the archetypal oil novel, establishing it as one of the definitional texts in the study of what would become "petrofictions" (Ghosh 1992, 31). Set in a fictitious parallel of Saudi Arabia, in the locale of Wadi Al-Uyoun, the narrative poses a confrontation between a nomadic Bedouin society and the invasive activities of American powers expanding their oil frontier. Munif outlines the violent reconfiguration of the seemingly Edenic Wadi and its associated social complex and focalises this transformation through the perspective of the Indigenous community. With the text operating as the fictionalised history of the oil industry's arrival in Saudi Arabia in the 1950s, Ghosh describes its depiction of oil discovery and extraction as being seen "through the wrong end of the telescope" (Ghosh 31). He argues that the novel addresses the charged absence of the oil encounter in fiction, which he argues is produced in part by the history of "physical and demographic separation of oil installations and their workers from the indigenous population" (Ghosh, 30). As an editor of the journal *Oil and Development,* an employee of the Syrian oil industry and the recipient of a Ph.D. in oil economics, Munif worked to fill this representative gap, distinguishing between the nomadic lives of the Bedouin and the rootlessness that followed industrialisation (Nixon 2011, 76). In the decades following Ghosh's initial comments on the novel, petrocritical analysis has developed to plumb and analyse the covert registration of carbon fuel across a broad range of literatures, but a key focus on critically significant literary oil encounters remains vital to the discipline. For example, in his essay "'Monstrous Transformer' Petrofiction and World Literature", Macdonald undertakes a comparative analysis of *Cities of Salt* and George Mackay Brown's *Greenvoe* (1972), arguing "that there *is* 'an aesthetics of oil' and

that this can be uncovered by comparing the recurring motifs, systemic connections and structures of feeling produced by oil modernity" (2017, 4, original emphasis). While Macdonald focuses on *Cities of Salt* primarily as a petrofictive text, it is important to acknowledge that the novel is also necessarily an infrastructural narrative due to its focus on the construction of the oil well, the pipeline, the surrounding infrastructure of ports, roads, workers' camps, sanitation systems, and eventually the two parallel cities of American and Arabian Harran. Indeed, the novel's central tension lies in how this new infrastructural reality is contrasted with the nomadic lifestyle of the Indigenous Bedouin. This thesis demonstrates the operation of a similar principle of infrastructural-aesthetics in the overlapping area of infrastructurally bound texts written during the neoliberal phase of capitalist expansion, and this chapter will examine the infrastructural in these petrol-texts, identifying the Weird as the consequent literary and affective mode, with *Cities of Salt* providing the first example case.

Although Macdonald's analysis of Mackay Brown and Munif's text makes no mention of the Weird, he identifies the underlying world-ecological upheaval that is Weirdly registered in the text's form and affect:

> Theirs was an era of incipient peak-oil geopolitics and environmental activism, but also of neoliberal shock tactics, deregulation, petro-fuelled finance-directives and world-economic "stagflation" (itself dire news for climate-conscious eco-activists), all of which is formally apparent in their respective novels. (12)

Published in 1972 during the earliest years of global neoliberal hegemony, the novel's preoccupation with the emergence of the oil economy over the previous two decades produces an affective topography of the associated existential anxiety. Oil infrastructure was (and remains) fundamental to the project of neoliberalism, and so the novel's Weird critique of invasive infrastructural forms – especially as offered through an ironic layering of revelation – is equally critical of the developing phase of neoliberal capital. Crucially, Macdonald articulates this petro-capitalist transition as an encroaching monstrosity, mundane in its position in world-ecological process, but supernatural in affect:

The petro-world appears as if by magic and as magic itself: estranged and unprecedented, if "indescribably" real. Monstrous technologies and diabolical machines herald and orient this extraordinary new world; a time and space powered by petroleum's scale, scope and force as the machines are by oil's intensified capacities. (20)

The notion that petrolia appears by magic and as magic resonates with Fisher's comments on capital and the eerie: "conjured out of nothing, capital nevertheless exerts more influence than any allegedly substantial being" (Fisher 2016, 29-30). Both arguments recognise that this disquieting affect stems from attributing sensorial transformation of the lived environment to a supernatural animating force, rather than tangible material processes.

Above and beyond the normal estranging capacity of literature, *Cities of Salt* portrays the behaviour and practices of the American oil prospectors and the ensuing transformation of material conditions as fundamentally Weird. More specifically, throughout the text Weirdness is usually a consequence of intense irony. Faced with Americans searching for Oil, Miteb al-Hathal can only interpret their actions as supernatural, warning the others that "They're looking for jinn, or devils—who knows?" (Munif 43). The process of Wadi's transformation from a comparatively unspoiled oasis into the modern industrial landscape is initially alien and unknowable to the Indigenous characters and so they can only articulate signifiers and symptoms of this violent transition in terms of the supernatural. In contrast, the developing oil economy and its associated industrial social complex is mundane to a contemporary reader, Weirdly inverting the expected relationship of the reader to what would typically be the narrative's external motivating forces. To date, the novel's Weird formal and thematic dynamics have gone unrecognised by literary scholars, but this pattern of Weirding-through-irony transforms the familiar rhythms and spaces of contemporary petrolia to a significant extent, emphasising the transformative capacity of oil infrastructure. For this reason, critics interested in critically analysing the novel's petrofictive qualities have commonly selected passages with language and phrasing that is directly evocative of the Weird while not unpacking the consequences of the Weirdness itself. For example, Ghosh's summary of the novel lingers over the confusion of the locals when faced with

the "unthinkable things" (32) practiced by the mysterious prospectors. He highlights the early section where Miteb becomes increasingly suspicious of the Americans as they conduct their surveys of the land around Wadi. To highlight the full passage:

> They were busy all day long. They went places no one dreamed of going. They collected unthinkable things. They had a piece of iron-no one knew what it was or what they did with it and when they returned in the evening they brought with them bags of sand and pieces of rock. Once they brought tamarisk and wormwood branches, and bunches of clover. They broke the branches in a strange way and attached pieces of paper on which they had written obscure things. That was not all: they placed wooden markers and iron poles everywhere they went, and wrote on them, and wrote things no one understood on the sheets of paper they carried with them everywhere." (Munif 30)

The local culture has no frame of reference for the investigative actions of the prospectors, and because the narration is focalised through the Indigenous population, the quotidian tasks carried out as part of the geological survey are explicitly Weirded. The foreign team's mundane behaviours are narrated in a manner that emphasises the unfamiliar and unknowable. Each successive sentence describes an action with no understanding of its motivation or purpose, and taken as a whole the passage poses an uneasy and unarticulated inquiry into the threat constituted by these unfamiliar agents. This is reminiscent of Fisher's proposal in *The Weird and the Eerie* (2016), that the Weird can be seen as an inversion of the Unheimlich, and that the Weird is a way of perceiving the "inside" from the "outside" (Fisher, 10). This interpretive mode is useful here, as the recognizable activities listed in this quotation are Weirded by the narrator's incomprehension. Indeed, the tight rhythm, repetitive syntax and thematic content of this list-like prose are commensurable with many similar passages in canonically Weird works such as Robert W. Chambers' "In the Court of the Dragon" (1985, 47-54), or *The House on the Borderland* (1908) by William Hope Hodgson.

A particularly relevant example occurs in H.P. Lovecraft's prose poem, *Nyarlathotep* (1920), where he details the emergence of a malicious entity that threatens to reshape society through occult means:

> Who he was, none could tell, but he was of the old native blood and looked like a Pharaoh. The fellahin knelt when they saw him, yet none could say why. [...] Into the lands of civilisation came Nyarlathotep, swarthy, slender, and sinister, always buying strange instruments of glass and metal and combining them into instruments yet stranger. He spoke much of the sciences—of electricity and psychology—and gave exhibitions of power which sent his spectators away speechless, [...]. And where Nyarlathotep went, rest vanished; for the small hours were rent with the screams of nightmare. (Lovecraft 2011, 121)

Here, as in the previous quotation from Munif's novel, the Weird encounter is described in terms of negatives; the witnesses are unable to understand, describe, or even imagine the transformations wrought on their social and material reality. The passages share a list-like enumeration of unknowable behaviours and occurrences, staging an apprehension toward the novel forms posed by their respective Weird agents. The sharpest contrast between these extracts lies in the assumed position of the reader in relation to the encroaching outside. In contrast to Munif's subversive positioning of a core economy exploiting the economic periphery, Lovecraft's Nyarlathotep is a characteristically shallow caricature reflecting a racist ideology. *Cities of Salt* does, however, share an anxiety regarding the transformative influence of foreign powers, as well as Lovecraft's fixation on an idealised imaginary past. Ghosh has noted that:

> Munif's satire is founded ultimately upon a kind of nostalgia, a romantic hearkening back to a pristine, unspoiled past. It is not merely Americans from the oil companies who are the intruders here: every "foreigner" is to some degree an interloper in Harran and Mooran. (Ghosh 1992, 34)

These formal similarities stem from the texts' homologous relations to points of tremendous ecological surplus and infrastructural development. Where the spaces of Lovecraft's narratives unconsciously deform due to the pressure of the suppressed

economic and social legacy of slavery, Munif's novel stages the collapse of an ecological regime and the associated annihilation and replacement of its corresponding social relations. The wadi is irreparably altered by the arrival of extractive infrastructure, and the infrastructural conversion of its ecology is narrated in terms of violence:

> The trees shook violently and groaned before falling, cried for help, wailed, panicked, called out in helpless pain and then fell entreatingly to the ground, as if trying to snuggle into the earth to grow and spring forth alive again.
>
> The butchery of Wadi al-Uyoun had begun, and it continued until everything was gone. (106)

The falling trees are Weirdly animated in this extract, humanised in an expression of agony and desperation. The trauma of ecological regime change disperses and distorts the affective landscape of the wadi, so that the mourning and terror of the human inhabitants is projected onto the environment as the oil company strip it of value. The conversion of the orchards into an oil-field is described as an act of butchery, Weirdly instilling the fallen trees with a fleshy vulnerability that pairs grotesquely with the preceding personification. The wadi is converted to the point of erasure, rendered so alien to the locals that it is functionally annihilated.

There are structural and thematic parallels between the construction of the American camp and the ritual practices seen in stories such as *The Call of Cthulhu* (1926) or *The Shadow over Innsmouth* (1931). For the inhabitants of Wadi Al-Uyoun the activies of the oil company are formally identical to that of Lovecraft's cultists—in each case a collective possessed of strange knowledge and populated by foreign or out-group agents seeks to commune with an unknowable outside force through mysterious rituals. Like Ghosh, Macdonald's analysis repeatedly highlights passages where the neoliberal, industrial lifeworld encroaches onto that of the Bedouin, and in these passages the first forays of oil infrastructure are felt as magical and ruinous. In one example he focuses on the Indigenous reaction to the construction of the prospector's camp:

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"It happened as quickly as in a dream. [...] As soon as the camp was erected, the men paced off the area, put up wire fencing and short white pickets [...]. Then they opened up their crates and unloaded large pieces of black iron, and before long, a sound like rolling thunder surged out of this machine, frightening men, animals and birds. [It was] as fast as a magic trick." (Munif 68)

Upheaval in the social complex poses challenges to prevailing ideologies that register in the affective topography of the political unconscious as Weird portents. The arrival of machines to the wadi disturbs the normal diurnal rhythms of the local people and animals, and this disruption is felt and witnessed as a supernatural power reshaping the land through sorcerous means. Subject for the first time to oil-electric capital, the land is altered by the act of enclosure, and this shift is portentously accompanied by the bellowing noise of thunder from the American machinery. Men, animals and birds are equally frightened by the construction of the camp, as the arrival of oil infrastructure and its associated culture of extraction reverberates through the ecosphere. Shortly after the passage quoted by Macdonald, the people of the wadi are terrified by the camp's electrical lights, experiencing them as "scores of small but brilliant suns" (Munif 69) that could burn them away to nothing. This misunderstanding Weirdly anticipates the destruction of the peripheral community, which will soon be metabolised by the oil frontier.

The representation of oil infrastructure in *Cities of Salt* is commonly interrogated in terms of these fantastical or supernatural elements, though there is a tendency for criticism to talk past the Weirdness of these sections in favour of other modes. For example, Imre Szeman reads the novel's presentation of petrolia via science-fiction:

Cities of Salt manages to transform oil modernity into the science-fictional time and space that it is; a world of steel and asphalt, animated by the liquid remains of plants millions of years old, and occupied by creatures who look human but whose imperatives and rationales are out of joint with the physical environment of the earth – so much so that they must be from elsewhere in the universe. (Szeman 283)

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As in Macdonald's writing, oil is recognised as an animating element, that Weirdly energises the mundane with a supernatural fervour, though Szeman's articulation of this is particularly esoteric. The natural formation of petroleum under millions of years of heat and pressure in the earth's crust is read as a vibrant necromantic force, and the American prospectors are recast as extra-terrestrial. It is in these comparisons that the "science fictional" descriptor falls flat. Rather than the speculative but plausible alterations to a familiar lifeworld that would be anticipated in science fiction, here, the supposed science fictional elements are magical, inscrutable and unknowable. The space described by Szeman has far more in common with the Weird essence of the Cthulhu Mythos, rather than that of science fiction—his description of the alien behaviour of the Americans parallels Lovecraft's allusions to "the scratching of outside shapes and entities on the universe's utmost rim" (1939, 1044). Like Macdonald and Szeman, Rob Nixon describes the impression of intangible elements at work in the narrative, though his analysis too falls slightly short of identifying the Weirdness of the novel's affect. Where Nixon's commentary is particularly helpful is how it negotiates the relationship between these intangibles and the materiality of oil infrastructure.

> In Munif's writings about the resource curse, spiritual powers are never immaterial: he is alive to the active energies of the spectral, whether expressed through the opaque enchantments of oil as fetishized commodity or through political resistance inspired by rumors of a shimmering, elusive desert fighter who launches sallies against the foreign dispossessors. (Nixon 2011, 75-76)

While *Cities of Salt* possesses a palpable Weirdness, there are no supernatural forces at work in the events of the novel, only the affective impressions and formal patterns that are typically associated with the Weird. The motivating forces in the text are not indescribable monstrosities, but systemic capitalist dynamics that are unknowable only in their unfamiliarity, relative complexity and world-historical scale. It is because of this that *Cities of Salt* is a particularly useful example of the fundamental binding of infrastructure space and the Weird—because the narrative follows a fictionalised history of familiar infrastructural transformation the reader's knowledge is aligned with the invasive industrialising forces. The eldritch forces that terrorise the novel's lifeworld

are not only recognisable, they are eminently material. Again, this process of Weirding-through-irony poses a simultaneous elucidation of the exploitative legacy of neoliberal oil infrastructure and a Weirding of contemporary world-ecological relations.

Nixon's comments on the construction of the pump are a particularly salient example of how this Weirding-through-irony works in the novel. Again, Nixon isolates a passage full of Weirdly supernatural inquiry:

> The diabolical Americans, who had come looking for water, why did they continually dig into the earth, never stopping but never taking anything out? The water from the wadi, from Sabha and from the many wells they dug was pumped back into a hole in the ground—why wasn't it given to people? Did the ground hold such ghastly hordes of thirsty jinn, whose screams day and night could be heard only by the foreigners, who had come to quench their thirst? Were the jinn burning in the depths of the earth, and were the Americans pumping the water down to extinguish the flames? Was there another world underground, with gardens, trees and men, all clamoring for water? (Munif 139)

Nixon writes that "This scene offers up, then, mistranslation as prescience" (94). The nomads are preoccupied with the wasting of water in ways they do not recognise as useful, and so the return of water from wells back into the earth can only be understood as some kind of service to an unknown non-human power. The flurry of questions operates as an intensification of the nomad's earlier confusion when faced with the prospectors' activities, though now unstated unease has developed into outspoken distrust. This conflict is a product of a discontinuity between two modes of energy consciousness: the American culture of extraction is incompatible with the water-conscious logic of the Bedouin. The actions of the Americans are so wasteful and nonsensical that only a supernatural solution could possibly explain their behaviour, the only reasonable explanation is trade with an imaginary world from below. The prescience arises in the Weird way that this world parallels the nature of neoliberal petroleum dependence, as the denizens of this subterranean space require immense sacrifice of cheap natures for their thirst to be sated. These "ghastly hordes of thirsty

jinn" share a further parallel with Szeman's description of oil as the liquid remains of plants and animals that animate the world above—and here again, oil is treated Weirdly at the point of infrastructural extraction, as though it possesses a latent agency or personality of its own.

Beyond the existing petrocultural and world-systemic criticism of the novel, there are crucial passages that can be judiciously illuminated by a Weirded analysis. These previous extracts selected by Ghosh, Macdonald and Szeman are the points where the pre-oil and post-oil social realities exist in near simultaneity, where the presence of ascendant neoliberal petro-capital takes shape to the Bedouin nomads and the vulnerability of Wadi Al-Uyoun is most apparent to the contemporary reader. This is Weirdly reflected in the oil industry's appropriation of the wadi's water. Suweyleh, one of the displaced locals who finds work in the oil company, is unnerved by "the devils draining the waters [...] through iron sheaths and pumping the waters into holes they had dug in the ground" (Munif 161). Although Suweyleh is not equipped to comprehend that the extracted groundwater is returned to the earth to displace oil to the surface, his reading of the situation expands on the straightforward material process of the pumps and strikes at its world-ecological operation. As he recollects his work on the pump, "That whirlpool of jinn and the depths of the earth began to whirl in his head" (Munif 161). Here, the spiralling outline of capitalist world-history appears, reflected as a resource-hungry vortex below the earth. Indeed, the oil displaced by the waters of the wadi is itself the material residue of a vanished time, dredged up and burned to fuel the process of neoliberal capital—a correspondence that literalises the folding of the inside and outside through one another.

For Suweyleh, the invasive process of capital and its assimilation of the wadi is registered as a dizzying embodied experience, an affect that is shared with the other displaced residents. Here, the transformative capacity of oil infrastructure has a Weirdly deleterious effect on the indigenous population of Wadi al-Uyoun. While the twin cities of Arab and American Harran are constructed, the original town is supplanted and destroyed and replaced with houses "so tall and huge that no one could imagine who would live in them" (207). With this, the population too are Weirdly transformed. For example, Miteb al-Hathal is transfigured over the course of the narrative, changing from

an ordinary person to a spectral mythological figure, appearing repeatedly as a vengeful warrior who is speculated on or "seen from afar" (616). Soon after the arrival of the Americans, Miteb begins to express an anxiety that will be shared by the reader. Although he struggles to fully understand the Americans' behaviours, "He sensed that something terrible was about to happen" (Munif 31), and his experience spying on the prospectors leaves him "a different man" (70). What begins as prescience develops into a Weirder phenomenon as Miteb witnesses the destruction of Wadi Al-Uyoun. He is overcome by a sense of premonition and leaves the wadi without explaining his departure.

> When they asked about Miteb al-Hathal, someone said he had gone. This seemed strange and unnatural and even eerie. "Mitch al-Hathal? How could he go and leave the wadi . . . Where could he possibly go?"
> Nothing seemed real anymore." (Munif 108)

Miteb and Wadi-Al-Uyoun are so integral to one another that his departure constitutes a Weird upheaval. His absence is so uncharacteristic that reality buckles under the weight of the incongruity, and, from this point of the novel, Miteb is physically absent from narrative—though he remains as a spectral entity haunting the construction of the pipeline. He is assumed responsible for every accident and setback that befalls the infrastructure project and becomes a near mythological figure who pushes back against the oil industry by reputation alone (Munif 511 -2). The character of Miteb is so tied to the wadi that when it is destroyed his body essentially vanishes. The man whose family "had been sown in this place like the palm trees" (10) disappears with their felling, and lingers as a Weird "phantom, appearing and disappearing for the whole period of the pipeline construction" (514). Both the man and the wadi remain only in memory, yet they continue to influence the social dynamics of Harran and the pipeline project through eerie immaterial means.

Beyond the physical spaces and characters of the novel, the narrative encoding of Weird temporal contraction and deformation is a significant feature of the text's interrogation of infrastructural development. As the pipeline is finished a road named "The Line" (Munif 470) is paved between Ujra and Harran to smooth transit between

these developing urban centres. The most notable affective consequence for the locals is a Weirding of the passage of time, a sense that is mimetically wound into the narrative structure. Imagined futures collapse and are supplanted by new modes of temporality. This is most visible in the section following Akoub, the Armenian truck-driver, as the reorganisation of his future is rendered spatially as his aspirations toward retirement are destroyed by the process of world-ecological development. Akoub's social and economic reality is fundamentally tied to the Line. He and his rival Raji replace the irregular and muscle-powered rhythm of desert caravans, and "become part of Harran" (Munif 468), operating a hybrid coach and freight service that quickly becomes indispensable. For the people of Harran, the experience of transit infrastructure is specific and personal, characterised and determined by Akoub and his idiosyncrasies. It is also casual, unreliable and slow:

> the trip between the two towns, which were no more than 145 miles
> apart, usually took about thirty hours, because the truck always got a flat
> tire or broke down on the road, and in either case it had to be emptied of
> cargo and men, all of whom had to help unload, push the truck, and load
> it up again. (Munif 462)

In these early days the Ujra-Harran service is prone to disruption, and routinely requires substantial physical labour from its passengers. The inefficient and laborious journey affords Akoub the opportunity to socialize with his passengers and he becomes well known to the population of both towns. As the road nears completion however, the slow and casual dynamic of Akoub's work changes to a rapid and professionalised service, undermining the typical rhythms of his social and economic life. The completed road substantially smooths the journey, so that "a truck set off from Ujra in the morning, and before the end of the afternoon it had been unloaded in Harran" (Munif 480). While this begins as a friendly competition between Akoub and Raji, this dynamic is soon replaced with an existential alarm. A fleet of six imported trucks arrives to outcompete the pair, and this alteration is felt and perceived in Weird and violent ways. Ibn Zamel remarks that "These new trucks are going to devour everyone's business, and first to be devoured are Akoub and his truck" (Munif 488). Akoub's truck is the congealed representation of his life savings, the proceeds and object of a lifetime of labour, and it is Weirdly

entangled with his physical wellbeing. The notion that he will be consumed by the trucks proves disquietingly accurate, for his efforts to keep pace wear his vehicle out. He and his vehicle become Weirdly afflicted with a mysterious disease, and his ambitions to sell the truck and retire to Aleppo are compromised. "Even if the truck was fine, Akoub is still sick. If the truck was shit but Akoub was fine, that's no use. Even if the truck was fine and Akoub was fine, there's no business. The market is shit" (493). His ensuing death is Weirdly affecting for the townsfolk, as is the end of his contribution to infrastructural dynamics of the city. The evaporation of Akoub's imagined future Weirdly ripples into the novel's form, and with significantly recursive temporal dynamics. Akoub and Raji enter the story over a year "before the paving of the road was completed" and here the narrative positions them in anticipation of the finished Line (461). Their existence is contextualised in the shadow of the looming transformation, and in this, the patterning of time in the novel Weirdly matches the affective reading experience. As a work of fictionalised history, the consequences of infrastructural development are evident to the reader, even as they are signalled in the structure of the narrative.

The infrastructural propagation in the area around the wadi results in immediate material consequences for its once nomadic inhabitants. Even as the wadi dissolves into the Weird recollection of a vanished reality, the emerging material infrastructures of the oil economy are inflected with an unshakable Weirdness, typically where an especially visible harbinger of this invasive infrastructure arises. At the nearby locale of Harran, the arrival of a ship weighs heavy on the locals, its silhouette forming an ominous omen of imminent suffering. The boat "frightened everyone," even the normally stoic Ibn Rasheed who refers to the vessel as a "calamity" drifting toward Harran (Munif 215):

> It would have seemed unthinkable for Harran ever to change as it now had, this quickly, for ships to bring such immense numbers of people, for its eastern quarter to be covered with buildings. This was unimaginable. The people had got used to the new buildings and even to the new faces, but nothing had prepared them for the arrival of this last ship. Ibn Rashed had called it the ship of King Solomon, because the women it brought resembled the Queen of Sheba, or were even more beautiful. No one in

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Harran had the powers to describe to others what he had seen. (Munif 221)

Again, the unknowable frontier of an invasive social complex is depicted as unimaginable, and ironically beyond description. The ship of King Solomon constitutes a material invasion of the ecological order, though for the observing labourers the origin of its Weird affect shifts from its physical mass to the social implications of its celebrating crew and passengers. The libidinal social dynamics between the American men and women are so alien to the men of Harran that those who bear witness are left with "throats parched and their limbs stiff, crushed by an extraordinary weariness" (226). This cultural exhaustion parallels the physical travails of the locals, as having destroyed the oasis to accommodate the pump, the American oil companies and local capitalist collaborators turn to the dispossessed indigenous population for the necessary labour. The muscle of the Bedouin population is exploited to complete the remainder of the necessary infrastructure for the extraction and sale of petroleum. The novel critiques the historical activities of companies like Aramco who exploited the local labourers while importing America's system of racial segregation to Saudi Arabia (Mitchell 106), reflecting this in the construction of the twin cities of Arab and American Harran. At the end of each workday the men working in the burgeoning oil industry

drifted home to the two sectors like streams coursing down a slope, one broad and one small, the Americans to their camp and the Arabs to theirs, the Americans to their swimming pool, where their racket could be heard in the nearby barracks behind the barbed wire. When silence fell, the workers guessed that the Americans had gone into their air-conditioned rooms whose thick curtains shut everything out: sunlight, dust, flies and Arabs. (391)

Ghosh reflects on this quotation, commenting that "Harran no longer quite belongs to its people" (32) now that fracture and segregation have been programmed directly into the city's infrastructure space. In *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* (2002) Zygmunt Bauman writes of waste management infrastructure arguing that "When it comes to designing the forms of human togetherness, the waste is human beings"

(Bauman 2004, 36). This dehumanising infrastructural logic can be seen in arrangement of the townships, where the Arab population are supplanted by the economic imperative and social logic of the oil companies, and Weirdly relegated to the status of non-human irritants prevalent to the local environment. Like insects, flies and unrelenting heat, the people of Harran are waste material to be shut out. Despite the materiality of *Cities of Salt,* the formal markers used by Weird fiction to express the immaterial recur throughout the text, and the material infrastructure is described as though it is Weirdly animate and hostile to the vulnerable workers. The expanding infrastructure network around Harran applies a constant pressure to the social realities of its inhabitants and fills its population with a sense of dread. In *Cities of Salt* construction and usage of the novel's infrastructural reality is articulated in terms of violence and exploitative consumption, the social transformation facilitating this stemming from the construction of the oil well, the pipeline, and the necessary surrounding infrastructure.

1.2. Weird Guilt and Peak Oil in Early Neoliberal Petrofiction with Italo Calvino's "The Petrol Pump" (1974)

In his "Research Note: The Resources of Fiction", Macdonald uses Calvino's "The Petrol Pump" to argue for the utility of energetic literature as a means of counteracting the powerful signifying-systems of petro-capital. In particular, he critiques the supposedly natural necessity of oil as the dominant energy commodity for the smooth functioning of the contemporary world-system. Macdonald specifically highlights a mirroring in the infrastructural logic of the petrol pump, as captured by Calvino, and the wider practice of carbon extraction, where the pressure to refuel before the filling station shuts is paralleled by the fact that global fuel reserves lie in a state of constant near-depletion. Written in the aftermath of the 1973 oil crisis, when six Arab oil-producing nations incrementally cut the supply of oil to prevent the United States interfering in the settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict (Mitchell 173), the protagonist's encounter with the petrol pump raises collective anxieties of deepening petroleum reliance, even as carbon-dependence wreaks havoc on the world-ecology—and Macdonald

demonstrates how these anxieties are formally embedded in the text. In his analysis, the similitude of the immediate and dispersed networks of oil infrastructure are registered in the contrasting time schemes "of short termism (the use of dramatic suspense) and long-termism (imagined, "off-page" inevitabilities)" (Macdonald 5). Such contrasts recur throughout the text and work to create points of tension for the Weird to seep into the narrative, though this is not Macdonald's point of focus. Instead, Macdonald argues that fiction has an affinity for energetic relations in how narrative has a fundamental reliance on propulsion devices and transference of potential energy (2013, 5). It follows, then, that incongruities in such narrative exchanges can be mapped onto the incongruities and contradictions inherent to wider petrol and energy culture. This is particularly visible in the way that Calvino uses an encounter with a petrol pump to merge lifeworlds and timescales. The story illustrates the representative significance of the infrastructural space of petrol consumption—a space where the energy consumer so transparently becomes an extension of the wider set of relations that comprise the world-system.

The story of "The Petrol Pump" hinges on the key contradiction of carbon fuel culture: the exuberance of peak oil as set against imagined energetic finitude. Indeed, the story's primary metaphor is the subject's specific experience of an energy crunch, and how this parallels the broader threat of systemic rupture. Driving their car and struggling to locate a serviceable petrol pump, the protagonist reflects that:

> The gauge has been warning me for quite a while that the tank is in reserve. They have been warning us for quite a while that underground global reserves can't last more than twenty years or so (Calvino 170).

Here we find a recurring device where sequential sentences, ideas and paragraphs are linked through the echoing of a particular word or phrase. In this example, the word "reserve" is employed in a specific, local sense – meaning the car's own physical tank – and then again in the sense of world-systemic relations, where extractive culture threatens to exhaust a portion of the biosphere so that the earth's "reserves" are irrecoverably depleted. Macdonald argues that this dynamic poses a critique of the "privatization of energy guilt", that the story demonstrates how energetic anxieties are

"privately compromising and publicly ineffectual, and therefore somehow excusable" (2013, 2). Significantly, however, the affective axis of these contrasting scales is not merely about anxiety but rather about an active Weirdness bound to energy anxiety. The narrator's oscillation between his immediate material reality and his impressionistic descriptions of deep time correspond to the looping form of the Weird, as the reader finds themselves moving repeatedly through contrasting spatiotemporal frames. There is an uneasiness to how these echoes mediate the spaces of "The Petrol Pump," as they mark points where the story's local and specific setting distends to accommodate the wider spatiotemporal expanses of petrol infrastructure.

Mark Blacklock's negotiation of narrative time and spatial form in Weird fiction provides a useful handle for such distension (2017, 1109). Drawing on Gerard Genette, Blacklock argues that description slows narrative time, spreading the narrative out across space in a fashion evocative of Weird fiction's multidimensional geometries. While Blacklock was illustrating this quality in the work of Hodgson, Calvino's "The Petrol Pump" is similarly and fundamentally occupied with this kind of Weirding of space and time. In fact, Calvino's protagonist consciously describes their sense of this Weirding:

> I am experiencing simultaneously the rise, apex and decline of the so–
> called opulent societies, the same way a rotating drill pushes in an instant
> from one millennium to the next as it cuts through the sedimentary rocks
> of the Pliocene, the Cretaceous, the Triassic. (171-2)

In this explanation the passage of time is spatially expressed, with the protagonist feeling akin to a corkscrewing drill that penetrates the layers of deep time required to convert biomass into crude oil. Crucially, this metaphor is mapping the trajectory of the contemporary world-system's "opulent societies" over the course of their growth and decline, with collapse seemingly imminent, and this situates the world-economic relations of petroleum within and against the longer history of world-ecological relations. In this figuration there are not two, but three scales of systemic reference: the personal-as-car, the world-systemic as carbon fuel age, and the geological. Critically, the representational cracks and conflations in the metaphorical unification of these

scales are best interpreted in terms of the Weird, as the contradictions posed demonstrate the unviability of the hegemonic neoliberal ideology fundamental to contemporary petro-capital.

These three scales (and the echoes carrying them) are laced together, and over the course of the narrative they interlock phonically, as well as thematically. One of the clearest examples of this thematic lacing occurs during one of Calvino's ventures in and out of the geological past. Sparked by the hands on the car's fuel gauge as it approaches zero, the following run-on sentence continues the text's preoccupation with deep time:

> In the meridian hours of the Cretaceous living creatures surged on the surface of the sea, swarms of minute algae and thin shells of plankton, soft sponges and sharp corals, simmering in the heat of a sun that will go on living through them in the long circumnavigation life begins after death, when reduced to a light rain of animal and vegetal detritus they sediment down in shallow waters, sink in the mud, and with the passing cataclysms are chewed up in the jaws of calcareous rocks, digested in the folds of syn–cline and anticline, liquefied in dense oils that push upward through dark subterranean porosities until they spurt out in the midst of the desert and burst into flames that once again warm the earth's surface in a blaze of primordial noon. (Calvino 172)

This passage opens one of the text's pairs of echoes, as the phrase "primordial noon" is picked up by the "noonday urban desert" (172) at the opening of the next paragraph, and this phrase, in turn, carries the narrative back into the narrator's immediate material frame of reference. Embedded within this passage are further homologies that gesture out of the Cretaceous and into the narrator's present. The "folds of syn–cline and anticline" rock within the earth's crust are analogous to the peaks and troughs of the economic cycles of boom and bust that have produced the oil crisis weighing on the narrator. Like the "animal and vegetal detritus" described by the narrator, disparate spaces and times are squashed into one another as the text establishes a set of concatenated relations that parallel the plaited converter chains of oil-infrastructure. In

this, the Weird systemic logic of oil infrastructure is plain, the engine light and the underground global reserves are coterminous.

From the cracks of these compressed scales and spaces wells the text's Weirdest elements: the protagonist's repeated mis-assignation of agency to non-human natures and the ensuing conflation of his own body with the materials of petrol infrastructure. In the above extract, "that ruthless devourer of living substances, the earth" (175) acts through him, as though it is a living organism or "a black Pluto [...] reaching up from the underworld" (175), with hungry jaws and a digestive system that works to process biomass and disgorge oil. The protagonist is unable to accommodate the enormous scope of the world-system without Weirdly projecting human infrastructural activity onto non-human nature. Indeed, his anxieties develop into a Weird conflation of self and body with wider infrastructure space, as he subordinates himself to the masculine imperial process of neoliberal capital during his accidental impersonation of a pump attendant. During the ejaculatory exchange with the young woman in the sports car, he imagines the petrol becoming "a liquid flow travelling between [himself] and the stranger at the wheel" (174). This expression constitutes a Weird conflation of capitalist and systemic reproduction with literal sexual reproduction, a grim irony arising in the fact that the object engendered at the petrol pump is the eventual collapse of contemporary social relations and the emergence of an unknown alternative future. As he narrates the woman's realisation that he is not a pump attendant he reflects: "I want to involve her in the last blast of heat the human race can make its own, an act of love that is an act of violence too, a rape, a mortal embrace of subterranean powers" (175). In this, the narrator's recognition of his position within world-ecological process collides with a violent and gendered neoliberal ideology that ties his self-conception to (re)productive capacity. This metaphorical recapitulation of his essentialist function in the maintenance of material relations amounts to a discomforted rejection of his own actancy in the reproduction of the world-ecology. Although the narrator recognises petrol infrastructure's role in the collapse of contemporary relations, he reassigns his agency to petroleum, finding it easier to attribute his behaviour to the will of an imagined, impersonal Lovecraftian mass than to confront material conditions that compromise his understanding of social

reality and his neoliberal sense of self. The narrator is not simply an individual actor in a competitive economic environment, but a conscious part of world-ecological reproduction, where said reproduction is at risk of significant collapse and reconfiguration into an alien set of systemic relations.

1.3. Weird Infrastructure and Carbon Crash in Petro-Magic-Realism with "Worlds that Flourish" (1988) by Ben Okri

"The Petrol Pump" is oriented in expectation of collapse and demonstrates a set of Weird formal contours that cluster in petrofictive texts written during (or in anticipation of) instances of acute crisis. These qualities are sharply evident in texts produced during the phase of neoliberal capital, as they strive to represent markers of systemic rupture that are suppressed and obfuscated by intense financialisation and a fortification of private capital across the world-system (Arrighi 2010, 371; Harvey, 2005, 33). Accordingly, the Weird arises independently in texts that are geographically separate but systemically contiguous, though critical efforts have often failed to recognise these homologies. A good example of this is Ben Okri's 1988 collection of short stories, *Stars of the New Curfew,* which has received a good deal of critical attention specifically as a work of postcolonial literature. For example, Kayode Omoniyi Ogunfolabi has reflected on the presence of the Nigerian civil war in *Stars of the New Curfew*, focusing on the roles of language, naming, and ethnicity in relation to Nigerian nation-building (2010, 181). Several of the collection's stories have even been noted for their preoccupation with petrol infrastructure; in particular, "What the Tapster Saw", which Jennifer Wenzel has described as "a quintessential example of petro-magic-realism", a literary mode created when magical realism transforms as it engages with the specific political ecology of petrol (2012, 217). Strangely, though, "Worlds that Flourish" has received almost no scholarly attention despite its suitability for such analysis. The story was written in London during the Nigerian dictatorship of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida who served as military president of Nigeria between 1985 and 1993. While clearly critical of military oppression in Nigeria, the text's primary thematic preoccupation is the Nigerian Oil crash of the 1980s. Nigeria's economic

dependence on oil extraction in the Niger Delta has resulted in a history of conflict and violence (Mitchell 2011, 201) as the Nigerian state has repeatedly worked to maintain control over petroleum resources and the distribution of mining leases (Obi 2011, 4-7). The 1980s crash was a signal crisis that followed a phase of explosive growth and wild economic fluctuation borne of the extractive practices of multinational corporations like Shell, Chevron Texaco and Exxonmobil over the preceding decades (Wenzel, 211), and the text's Weirding of infrastructure spatialises and explicates the ideological contradictions that facilitated the exploitation of the Delta and its rural communities. Despite the relative paucity of critical commentary on the narrative, and despite Okri's distance from the traditional Weird canon, this infrastructural binding creates a Weirdness so striking that the text appears in the VanderMeers' defining compendium, *The Weird, A Compendium of Strange and Dark Stories* (2012).

"Worlds that Flourish", therefore, is a useful case study to further understand how a text's Weirdness and its infrastructural characteristics work interdependently. Such an approach also follows from arguments made by Westall in her 2017 editorial for the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* (Westall 2017, 266), and by the WReC in *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Deckard et al, 2015), on how postcolonial literary debates surrounding texts like *Stars of the New Curfew* can benefit from a move into world-systemic terms. Wenzel's reading of *Stars of the New Curfew* situates the collection in terms of its political ecology and uses the text to illuminate the ways that oil has shaped narratives of modernization and development in Nigeria. She argues that:

> the sense of simultaneity and conviviality among strangers that Benedict Anderson sees the novel and the newspaper fostering in *Imagined Communities* are less salient in Nigeria than a sense of disjointed temporalities, contempt for all-too-familiar ethnic others, and disillusion with a shared national project: the unimagining of national community. (2012, 213)

In this passage, Wenzel articulates an affective complex produced by the logic of Nigerian petro-capital, a subcurrent that encapsulates the atmosphere and tone of

Okri's writing in this period. There is an unrecognised but significant affinity between this tonal discordance and the hyperbolic, alienating affect of later Weird fiction.

In Okri's "World's That Flourish", as in Calvino's "The Petrol Pump", formal registration of these world-ecological dynamics neatly map onto the formal profiles of neoliberal Weird fiction via an infrastructural encounter. The texts share many thematic similarities, the most obvious being the centrality of nameless male narrators who drive to and from a petrol pump while reckoning with impending systemic collapse. Equally significant, though, is the contrasting scope and stakes of the respective journeys. The majority of "Worlds that Flourish" is set in an environment resembling the Niger Delta, though the last section of the story drifts from material reality into a Weird afterlife. Driven from his compound home by deteriorating social and material conditions, the protagonist spends much of the narrative driving aimlessly in his car, pausing only to refuel, before crashing and retracing his steps on foot. This looping journey stages an infrastructural metaphor with Weird implications—the car and its trajectory map the progress of the local economy while the road functions as a stand-in for the underlying economic logic that limits where and in what direction the economy can travel.

Crucially, the story's infrastructural spaces are in poor condition from the outset with untarred roads full of military checkpoints connecting failing compounds that flood and collapse over the course of the story. In this environment of erosion and degradation, it is fundamentally hard to tell what is real. Early on the narrator describes how everything shimmers "like mirages in an omnipotent heat" (731), a signal of the twisting material relations at the onset of systemic crisis, and the infrastructural integrity of the text's lifeworld continues to deteriorate as the narrative progresses. The opening of the story describes a reality that has begun to fray at the edges, with a disquieting and ambiguous social encounter at the narrator's office being immediately followed by a description of strained transit infrastructure: "I got into my battered little car and drove home. When I arrived I parked my car three streets from where I lived, because the roads were bad" (731). The road is clearly unfit for its technical function of smooth transit from point to point, a failure that is notable considering Brian Larkin's argument that infrastructure serves not just a material, but also an aesthetic or poetic purpose. He writes that, "the materials of infrastructure—the hardness of the road, the

intensity of its blackness, its smooth finish—produces sensorial political experiences"
(Larkin 2013 337). Here in the story's opening, the integrity of the road surface registers
the world-ecological crisis that underpins the narrative. The crumbling roads reflect the
turmoil of the wider social complex, but the infrastructural metaphor is not completely
straightforward. More important than the infrastructural representation of a world failing
to flourish, is the protagonist's inability to digest and move forward with that
information.

Indeed, the affective connection between the narrator and their lived
environment is a point of significant contrast between the works by Calvino and Okri.
Throughout "Worlds that Flourish", the narrator is afflicted with a litany of disasters. He
is fired, burgled, arrested, beaten, humiliated, exiled and temporarily killed, but unlike
Calvino's anxious protagonist whose internal monologue forms the body of the story,
the narration of "Worlds that Flourish" is oddly external despite its first-person delivery.
The narrator delivers a flat report of events, enumerating his sufferings rather than
evaluating or commenting on them, providing little access to his understanding of the
scenario. Though he describes the degeneration of his environment, for most of the
story he is merely subject to the events of the narrative, and in a metafictional turn, this
lack of internality becomes evident to the other characters as well as the reader and
becomes the source of further misfortune. Early on, the narrator is confronted by his
neighbour:

> "How are you?"
> "Fine," I said.
> "Are you sure you are fine?'
> "Yes. Why do you ask?"
> "Well," said the neighbour, 'it's because you go around as if you don't have
> any eyes."
> "What do you mean?"
> "Since your wife died you've stopped using your eyes. Haven't you noticed
> that most of the compound people are gone?"
> "Gone where?"
> "Run away. To safety."

"Why?"

"Don't ask me."

"Why haven't you gone?"

"I'm happy here."

"So am I," I said, smiling. I went to my room. (731)

It is useful to consider the lack of descriptive commentary in the narration of this passage alongside the neighbour's speculation that the narrator is wilfully blind to his surroundings. The claim that this blindness started soon after the narrator's bereavement suggests that his "lack of eyes" is a means of managing pain. However, this ocular motif is soon echoed by the thieves that burgle the narrator's home as they threaten him with the line: "If you so much as cough after we've gone I will shoot out your eyes" (732). Here, the narrator's eyelessness is violently recontextualised, with the suggestion that an external force could have stolen his sight. The narrator's blindness explains why he is repeatedly assailed with danger and misfortune. Without eyes, the narrator is unable to recognise that his environment is crumbling around him, or that people are fleeing the dangers caused by the failing infrastructure. As with the protagonist of "The Petrol Pump", Okri's narrator is ineffectual when faced with looming crisis. While Calvino's character was paralysed by anxiety, the narrator of "Worlds that Flourish" severs himself from the negative affective dynamics of his infrastructural reality, and this invariably furthers his suffering.

The narrator's affective separation from his material conditions works as part of a profound alienation that afflicts all interpersonal and political activity in his social complex. Soon after his return from prison he sits on a bench near his home and observes that "Something had been creeping on us all along and now that the street was empty I couldn't see what it was" (733). This unidentifiable and creeping force is structurally tied to the surrounding infrastructural malaise, for immediately afterward a multi-day blackout strikes the city. Although the situation confounds the narrator, the causes of his misery and the surrounding social degradation are evident in his account. While hunting for a new job he notes: "Everywhere I went workers were being sacked in great numbers. There were no strikes. [...] the Head of State's broadcasts [...] spoke about austerity, about tightening the national belt, and about a great future" (733). The

state's ineffectual efforts to address the ruinous consequences of neoliberal economic policy through further cuts to the public sector are juxtaposed with the failure of the local labour forces to organise any kind of workers' opposition. In each case the response to material stimulus is counterintuitive and nonsensical, and this incongruity matches the pervading discordance of the narrator's personal encounters. The thieves, for example, are amicable and friendly and are described as always "smiling" (732), even as they burgle and threaten. In turn, the police and soldiers in turn do nothing to protect the narrator, arresting him alongside the thieves, before beating and extorting him. With these incongruities the narrator struggles to understand the people he encounters, a dynamic that is brought into focus when he begins to notice that "a lot of the people in the streets had handwriting on their faces" (733), as even in this, the words he sees are unintelligible. The inability to (literally) read these people is a product of the contradictory structures of his infrastructural environment–the evidence of an intensifying collapse simultaneously alienates him from the signifiers of his changing social environment, and the people and systems that continue as though nothing is changing. This struggle is paralleled by the reader's difficulty in accessing the narrator's thoughts and motivation. With no access to his interiority his actions appear unthinking, as though he is not simply eyeless, but hollow, like an automaton.

This automatic behaviour Weirdly compromises the narrator's agency. His position as the protagonist is routinely undermined, as throughout the story he is completely subject to his environment, following the path of least resistance and only moving when deprived of any other choice. When he eventually flees the deserted and flooding compound, he actively subordinates himself to the inanimate consequence of petrol infrastructure: "The car would suddenly, it seemed, start driving me. It picked up speed, and slowed down, of its own inscrutable volition" (734). Here, the car and its autonomous journey operate as a straightforward parallel of the oil economy—aimless, uncontrolled, and culminating in a ruinous crash. Interestingly, though, the narrator feels increasingly aware of his subordination and doesn't acknowledge that the road, for all its dips and damage, is the object that dictates the course of his aimless journey. Moreover, the way the narrator's desires are discarded in favour of the car's arbitrary movement complicates the story's narrative infrastructure. Wenzel has argued that in

Nigerian literature oil often has an anti-narrative function, as its petro-fantasy of "wealth without work, progress without the passage of time" hijacks the imagination and makes the impossible possible (2012, 212). In contrast, "Worlds that Flourish" puts forward a witheringly ironic perspective that sees the road and the car as apparatus of oil that have their imaginary agency privileged over that of the human protagonist.

As in "The Petrol Pump", there is a Weird conflation of oil infrastructure and the human body at the point of crisis. Shortly before the narrator's journey loops back on itself he stops at a petrol shack, where the opportunity arises for him to break from his trajectory. As he pauses to refuel and service his car, the old man who owns the petrol shack delivers a warning: "Don't go that way, I haven't seen any vehicles coming back. Stay where you can be happy" (735). The old man's warning echoes the earlier conversation with the neighbour, in which he and the protagonist claim to be living happily in the compound, and once again the narrator is confronted with people disappearing inexplicably. Despite the warning, and the opportunity to pause or reverse course, the narrator passively resumes his journey into danger and even greater loss of agency. At this point his narration includes the alarming note that the shack "didn't have any brake fluid" (734). Service brakes have used hydraulic operation for over 70 years (Owen 2011, 1-9). In most cars, depressing the brake lever forces fluid from a reservoir in the master brake cylinder out into the brake lines. This fluid then acts as a solid rod that transfers force to the wheel cylinders where, depending on the type of brake, it applies friction to a drum or rotor to stop the wheels. Though *Worlds that Flourish* gives no direct indication of the age of the narrator's vehicle, brake fluid is not a standard item of motor service, and a loss of brake pressure is a serious fault. Interestingly, until the 1970s most vehicles had a single hydraulic system serving all four wheels, which meant that "a leak anywhere in the system resulted in a complete braking failure" (6). This does recall Mitchell's account of the shift from dendritic infrastructural relations that oil has facilitated. A split-brake system and a grid-like oil economy can press through a single point of failure. Though crucially, in a coal economy, structural failure is only a grinding halt, not an uncontrollable acceleration followed by a catastrophic crash. In *Worlds that Flourish*, the ideological structure of the local oil infrastructure is too robust to slow the continued arc of world-ecological process. The car has already been accelerating

beyond his control, and the damage to the brakes is unclear. Despite this, he proceeds to take the dangerous road. In the metaphor of car-as-economy, at this point the narrator chooses an unknown and volatile future over current and known happiness.

Until this point in the story, the road has determined the outer limit of the car and the narrator's trajectory, but soon after his escape from a bandit ambush a heavy storm blows the vehicle off course and the car sustains catastrophic damage. The narrator even becomes "entangled in the car" (735), and in this, again, we find a recurring trope of Weird fiction, where an inanimate inorganic object exerts control over an individual or group, acting as though it possesses an agency of its own. The dynamic here is less that the vehicle has overwhelmed him, instead the narrator surrenders to his vehicle and his body becomes tangled with it as though he has been consumed as petroleum. He awakes from his crash and begins to walk off the path and into the forest where he arrives at a river "flowing in a direction opposite to how it seemed" (735). Upon crossing the river, he emerges from the water dry, indicating that the river is flowing backward through time rather than space. In a 2016 article Stephen Shapiro describes how

> the switchover from capitalism's systole to diastole [...] creates a time-space for capitalism's mixed nature of labour relations to become acknowledged, even if through strained narratives. These tales often deploy bizarre sensorium juxtapositions because no commonsensical (or dominant rational) language is readily available or allowed to express such inconvenient truth about the oncoming decline or overall heterogeneous composition of capital. (2016, 242)

Drawing on this and again taking the Weirdly autonomous car as a representation of the oil-economy, the narrator's Weird spatiotemporal reversal acts as his experience of the systemic transition from boom to bust after an instance of systemic crisis marked by his crash. The narrator's slumbrous surrender to the trajectory of the oil economy results in a crash, followed by a world that flows in reverse order.

In this world, the narrator finds a Weird village that contains a mixture of low huts and "a skyscraper that reflected the sunlight like blinding glass sheets" (736). The people of the village are just as Weird as its contradictory architecture:

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Some of the people of the village had their feet facing backwards. I was

amazed they could walk. Some people came out of tree-trunks. Some

had wings but they couldn't fly. After a while I got used to the strangeness

of the people. I ceased to really notice their three legs and elongated

necks. What I couldn't get used to were the huts and houses that were

walled round with mirrors on the outside. I didn't see myself reflected in

them as I went past. Some people walked into the mirrors and

disappeared. I couldn't walk into them. (736-7)

Wenzel notes the presence of a Yoruba narrative tradition that Okri employs repeatedly in *Stars of the New Curfew*, "where the forest is a liminal space peopled by transmogrifying creatures" (218). Outside the ideological containment of the infrastructural space that is the road, there is a village populated by such people. The villagers form a sharp contrast to the uncontrollable forward-momentum of the crashed car, their inverted feet and flightless wings constituting a Weird motility suited to their unfamiliar social reality. The village is strangely integrated into the world-ecology, with its residents emerging from tree-trunks as though the flora has been incorporated into the architecture. The dazzling skyscraper and mirrored huts are especially significant in their resemblance to the glossy and homogenous architectural style that characterises the special economic "free zone" (Easterling 2024, 25-7), a virally propagating urban infrastructural form that marks the site of economic and labour exploitation in (semi-) peripheral regions of the world-system. This reflective architecture is resistant and inaccessible for the narrator. He finds that his reflection does not appear in the mirrored surfaces, and, unlike the villagers, he is unable to pass into the reflected space. The blinding quality of the skyscraper ties back to the protagonist's eyelessness, illustrating the rationale behind this formal motif. The proximity and contrast between the huts and the skyscraper emphasise the exploitative logic at work in the setting's infrastructure. The free zone is the locus of surplus extraction, where core economies appropriate resources from the periphery most effectively, using the aesthetic signifiers of infrastructural development and false promises of plenitude to obfuscate the exploitation.

The narrator is unable to see and identify himself within his lived environment, which shifts and distorts around him in an intensification of the shimmering heatwave from the opening of the story. It takes the narrator an encounter with his dead wife and neighbour to understand that he too is dead or dying. When he meets his neighbour, he does not recognise him at first, again struggling to understand what he sees. He notes that the neighbour "had three eyes on his face" (737), but when the neighbour explains that he has been shot by a soldier it becomes clear to the reader that this description misidentifies a fatal bullet wound as a third eye. Suddenly aware that the dead are among the people in this village the narrator recognises that he is still unconscious in the ruin of his car, and he chooses to escape the village by mirroring the Weird villagers with their inverted feet. Running backwards moves him forwards until he can once again cross the river and return to his vehicle. This reversal finally allows the protagonist to break out of his trajectory, and he begins to consciously re-tread the loop of his journey backwards towards the petrol shack. On the way, he passes a younger man driving and attempts to repeat the warning he heard from the old man: "Don't go that way. Find where you can be happy" (738). In this we see the logical inverse to the uncontrolled and dangerous forward momentum of the car. We also see the narrator choose to move backwards towards where he can be "happy", though, ironically, there is no place or point in the narrative where the narrator is happy—the total range of experience and action available to the narrator is limited by his infrastructural reality. Indeed, the young man nods and continues to follow the same path as though he too is without eyes. This acknowledges a critical tension to the Weird infrastructural space and gestures out to the narrator's experience as a repeated, systemic pattern of blindness to the trajectory indicated by the configuration of infrastructure space. While in "The Petrol Pump" the ideological conditions spatialised by petrol infrastructure can reveal the approach of systemic rupture, here the text is preoccupied with the difficulty of producing meaningful change by breaking from that path before the transformation rip can occur.

1.4. Weird Carbon Intoxication and the Vanishing Future in Denis Johnson's "Car Crash While Hitchhiking" (1992)

Denis Johnson is best known for his 1992 book of short stories, *Jesus' Son*. The collection's opening story "Car Crash While Hitchhiking" is an infrastructurally bound narrative that shares similarities with the previous stories in this section. Set on the highways of the American South, the story follows a young man hitchhiking from Texas to Missouri, whose intoxicant-fuelled journey culminates in a car crash atop a two-lane bridge. There is little critical commentary on Johnson's wider oeuvre aside from Kevin McCarron's general comments on the affinity between religious experience and narcotics in the short stories. McCarron argues that "Johnson's characters are often preoccupied with the physicality of the body" and that they repeatedly turn to drugs and alcohol as a means of transcending the "reductivism" of mortality and bodily experience (2001 58). To take a more materialist perspective, however, in "Car Crash While Hitchhiking" the intoxication of the characters is not a transcendence of their material relations, but an expression of their collective subordination to their infrastructural reality. The story features a Weird recursive temporality, a nameless male protagonist on a dreamlike and directionless journey, and persistent conflation of human and non-living material. These homologies show themselves through deformations specific to the story's position in world-systemic process which work to recontextualise some of the Weird elements present in Okri and Calvino's narratives. As in "The Petrol Pump" and "Worlds that Flourish", Johnson's protagonist's journey is bounded by diegetic infrastructure space (Easterling 2016 11), though in this case the focus moves from the pump itself to the system of superhighways connecting the southern states of America. These interstate road networks depend on the same oil and oil-culture that they maintain and propagate. In Johnson's story, the roads enable the narrator's travel, but the movement they facilitate is unmotivated and chaotic. Published the same year as Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), "Car Crash While Hitchhiking" offers a repudiation of neoliberalism's pre-discursive cardinality. Fukuyama's text understood the end of the cold war as the ultimate triumph of liberal democracy and encapsulates the neoliberal confidence in the continued

ascendancy of capitalist development. However, just as the trajectory of the protagonist's journeys in the previous stories mirrored the trajectory of the oil economy, the opening of *Jesus' Son* shows a figure trapped in a state of compulsive movement. The ceaseless travel fuelled by intoxicants parallels the desire for ceaseless growth, and marks both notions as aimless, alienating and bound to disaster.

Although "Car Crash While Hitchhiking" avoids the explicit portrayal of petrol stations, the text parallels the previous stories in its preoccupation with the rhythm and necessity of refuelling. In this story, deceleration is always tied to malaise and discomfort, and intoxicating fuel sources that offer the body little or no energy. Despite an earlier dose of amphetamines, when the hitchhiker exits the car of "a college man" he is "too overcome to stand up" (4), and so he falls asleep in the grass off an exit ramp and becomes soaked overnight. Instead of petrol, the hitchhiker is refueled and reinvigorated by narcotics and forward motion, continuing despite his ongoing nutritional deficit. The hitchhiker presents this dynamic using language that reflects the combustion of petroleum as he describes his time with the salesman, claiming that "As soon as we slowed down, all the magic of travelling together burned away" (6). Moreover, each successive vehicle the hitchhiker travels in comes with a new supply of intoxicants and so movement itself becomes bound to intoxication. Johnson's substituting of oil with narcotics and alcohol satirises neoliberal carbon dependency and aligns the hitchhiker's unmotivated forward motion with the directionless progress of neoliberal capital—where Okri's protagonist is at least attempting to steer his Weirdly autonomous car, here the hitchhiker is always a passenger with no specified origin or destination. The substitution (of oil for narcotics) also highlights the contradiction of a carbon-based economy—progress only seems possible if the origin and consequences of addictive substances, and petroleum in particular, are ignored. The interstate road system is perhaps the most visible infrastructural consequence of American oil culture, but the oil that shapes this setting is made invisible, which suppresses the anticipation of crisis that comes with carbon fuels. "Car Crash While Hitchhiking" rehouses the world-ecological crisis in the body of the hitchhiker, expressing the distributed and systemic violence of the crisis in terms of its personal, embodied consequences. As with the previous stories, the narrative collapses contrasting scales into one another,

producing a Weirdness characteristic of infrastructurally-bound fiction that is carried forward with, and through, the endangerment of the human body.

The tension generated by the substitution of petrol with narcotics also Weirds the temporal logic of the text, and this Weirdness plays out formally and diegetically through the hitchhiker's precognitive ability. The hitchhiker's narration eschews chronology in favour of a more relational structure. For example, the story's opening reads as follows:

> A Salesman who shared his liquor and steered while sleeping ... A Cherokee filled with bourbon ... A VW no more than a bubble of hashish fumes, captained by a college student...
>
> And a family from Marshalltown who head-onned and killed forever a man driving west out of Bethany, Missouri. (3)

This summary of events outlines the entire story and creates a Weird irony because the narrator and reader are impotently conscious of the impending crash despite the fact that each successive vehicle is tied to a narcotic as though fuelled by it. The Weird simultaneity of the hitchhiker's predestination and the lack of a stated destination is exacerbated by the hazy, dreamlike quality of the narration. Each section of his journey is separated by an ellipsis, erasing the time spent outside of a vehicle and emphasising the phases of unmotivated travel. Going forward, much of the opening narration is delivered in staccato, list-like sentences with a repetitive structure: "My jaw ached. I knew every raindrop by its name. I sensed everything before it happened" (3). Rather than a consequential movement from moment to moment, the narrator sequences events almost arbitrarily, stating events from recollection while claiming to have foreseen them. This relational narration affords the experience of progress and futurity without consideration for process, again Weirding and emphasising the ideological contradictions underpinning neoliberal transit infrastructure. The interstate system ostensibly facilitates the smooth movement of individuals, but the narrator is forced to hitchhike due to the systematic disassembly of public transport infrastructure in the southern United States.

As in the two previous stories by Calvino and Okri, the protagonist's conversations and affective dynamics are incongruous next to the events of the narrative, though in the case of "Car Crash While Hitchhiking" the narrator is often callous or inappropriate rather than simply numb. The most obvious instance of this callousness is the narrator's refusal to warn the family of their upcoming crash, where he states: "I didn't care. They said they'd take me all the way" (4), though the most likely reason for this is the narrator's inability to recognise the chronology of events. The story is reported in the past tense as though recounted in recollection, so the hitchhiker's precognitive capacity is likely a result of hindsight; though in this retelling his past self is ironically aware of future events and does nothing to avoid oncoming disaster. In light of this, the family's offer to take him "all the way" forms an especially Weird critique of the neoliberal ideology spatialised by the interstate, as in the retelling, the promise of transport and progress towards an unknown and inconsequential destination is more important than the disastrous and obvious consequences of the journey. Indeed, the act of travel itself takes priority over any kind of destination for the hitchhiker, who describes his passage with the family driving the Oldsmobile as a kind of intoxication: "And yet I dreamed I was looking right through my eyelids, and my pulse marked off the seconds of time" (5). The embodied experience of travel itself lulls the hitchhiker into a Weird state of slumber that literalises his relationship to his infrastructural reality. With his eyes shut, he imagines the road ahead in a manner that poses a critique of neoliberal ideology and the culture of extraction's assumption of futurity. By visualising one's hopes for the processes of social reproduction rather than the actual material reality of capitalist development, the risk of crash and crisis is suppressed, facilitating the reproduction of infrastructural relations.

By drawing on Brian Larkin's explanation of the technical and poetic functions of infrastructure (Larkin 2013 337), we may say that the technical function of the interstate is to transport things and people, and its primary poetic function is to facilitate the smooth function of neoliberal social reproduction. In the story, though, the car-crash sees both functions subverted as they are Weirdly bound together. The collision occurs on a two-lane bridge, and the instance of the crash is flanked by two "semi-trucks" (3), that is, heavy goods vehicles used for moving commodities along vehicular

infrastructure networks. Of the two trucks, the first successfully passes the bridge and the hitchhiker in the family car, while the second is brought to a halt at the bridge entrance due to the infrastructural failure the collision constitutes. While this demonstrates the technical function of the interstate, it also highlights the systemic vulnerability that precipitates the crash as the hitchhiker and family are "lost in a blinding spray and a warfare of noises such as you get being towed through an automatic car wash" (3). The interstate system is unable to contain and organise the chaotic sensorium of the rainstorm that has been building over the course of the narrative. The storm acts as the encroaching outside that will supplant the extant social complex after collapse, and the pressure it puts on the infrastructure leaves it unfit for its technical and poetic functions. Following the crash, both traffic and social interaction are disrupted to the point of failure, and there are some illuminating inconsistencies in the description of how events unfurl. In the opening section, the hitchhiker claims that the family "head-onned" the man driving from Bethany, but when he climbs from the car and observes the accident on foot the hitchhiker says that "The car had been broadsided, smashed so flat that no room was left inside it even for this person's legs, to say nothing of a driver or any passengers" (4). Rather than a head-on collision, the other vehicle was struck in the side. Whether the other driver had swerved or deliberately steered his car, the titular crash occurred because of a change of direction at a point of infrastructural constraint. As in Okri's "Worlds that Flourish", Johnson's car crash marks the point of inertia on a journey where the movement of a car mirrors the trajectory of the oil economy from boom to bust. In the case of Johnson's narrative, the collision occurs at a point of infrastructural rigidity. Because the fatal error occurs on a bridge, the drivers are unable to swerve without leaving the infrastructural network and entering the Weird outside signalled by the plunge off the side of the road. Because of the efforts of both drivers to remain on the road, the technical function of the interstate collapses, which incurs a cost in human lives.

When the traffic halts, the interstate's poetic function is also disrupted, and the interpersonal behaviour of the characters becomes increasingly Weird, in part, due to shock and injury. In the immediate wreckage, the driver of the Oldsmobile becomes convinced his unconscious wife has died and is so focused on shaking her that he

either doesn't notice or react to the fact the hitchhiker leaves the car "with the baby, for some reason" (5). Rather than staying to aid the rest of the passengers, the hitchhiker wanders around the crash site with the child until the arrival of the second semi-truck. Again, the actions of the characters are determined by their infrastructural reality, and this is reinforced when the hitchhiker speaks with the truckdriver whose path is blocked by the wreckage. When asked to go for help, the driver replies, "I can't turn around here" (4), and instead of doing anything useful the pair sit in the truck and wait for rescue. Here, efforts to remedy the catastrophe are limited to and determined by constraints of the characters' infrastructural reality. Intoxicated, by shock, narcotics and the travel itself, the hitchhiker and the drivers lack the capacity to manage the consequences of an infrastructural rupture. The social complex is Weirded to such an extent that reality begins to fray. He realises this as he looks at the man who is fatally injured in the crash, lamenting that "He couldn't tell me what he was dreaming and I couldn't tell him what was real" (5). Having survived the collapse of one set of social relations, and like the narrator of "Worlds that Flourish", the hitchhiker is disoriented and confused in his new infrastructural reality.

The formal consequences of the collision are far-reaching, with gaps in the nonlinear narration becoming more pronounced and significant, and as consequential and dangerous as the collision itself. Between leaving the cab of the semi-truck and discovering his alienation from his fellow traveller, the baby vanishes from the narrative, lost in the lacuna between the descriptive passages, with any cohesive narration of the future fading along with it. From this point, the narration becomes increasingly confused and impressionistic, scenes melting into one another as the hitchhiker is alienated from his environment. This becomes such a problem for the hitchhiker that later in life the trauma of the collision is Weirdly transposed onto inanimate objects:

> "Are you hearing unusual sounds or voices?" the doctor asked.
>
> "Help us, oh God, it hurts" the boxes of cotton screamed.
>
> "Not exactly," I said. (7)

Again, then, we find the familiar pattern of agency being Weirdly assigned to non-living things in infrastructurally bound narrative, but in this instance the hitchhiker's reflection on this is especially notable. He states that "it's always been my tendency to lie to doctors, as if good health consisted only of the ability to fool them" (7). In this line, the hitchhiker reproduces the infrastructural logic that has run through the rest of the narrative. If Calvino's narrator was anxious about the future and Okri's narrator was blinded to his deteriorating reality, Johnson's narrator has wilfully lied to himself to preserve the rhythms of his life, an effort that proves increasingly unsuccessful as the narration fades into hallucinatory imagery and disorganisation. The dependence on intoxicants and the carbon fuel they represent results in a Weird termination of narrative chronology and a failure of representation. The hitchhiker's report of future events vanishes like the baby he pulls from the wreckage in an alarming anticipation of the consequences of hydrocarbon dependence.

1.5. Oil Infrastructure's Linear and Cyclical Conflict in Brian Hodge's "It's All the Same Road in the End" (2016)

Brian Hodge's short story, "It's All the Same Road in the End" (2016), is a Weird tale that focuses on the road networks that stretch across rural Kansas. As in the previous stories, the narrative's infrastructural binding produces formal deformations that express Weird anxieties regarding the world-ecological consequences of petroculture. These deformations highlight a pattern of tension running through the text, where linear and cyclical conceptions of temporality conflict, and where this conflict illustrates a fundamental contradiction in neoliberal ideology and the reality of world-ecological process. In contrast to the previous stories in this chapter, Hodge's "It's All the Same Road in the End" is written expressly within the tradition of Weird fiction. Hodge is a contemporary Coloradan novelist whose works have received little scholarly attention, though his operation within the contemporary Weird canon has been prolific and his work has been anthologised alongside definitional texts of the New Weird (Guran 41, 2016). The types of formal patterning of world-ecological anxieties found in the previous texts are once again evident in this story, but with Hodge's example text the qualities

that were notable due to infrastructural engagement are more obviously fundamental to Weird fiction.

As the title of his story suggests, the repetitious and recursive reality of the road subverts the linear trajectory followed by the characters, resulting in a narrative structure revolving around cyclicality and repetition. The journey and the underlying infrastructure that supports the narrative structure are deformed as they struggle to accommodate the history of long cycles of capitalist accumulation. The narrative takes place on the Great Plains, in the region of what was once the Dust Bowl, the site of fierce man-made dust-storms during the 1930s—an ecological disaster arising from mismanaged agricultural practices across the midwestern United States. Writing of tropical storms in the world-literary system, Sharae Deckard explains that in literature the cyclone typically

> incarnates a different sense of temporality–time as cyclical and "spiralique"–
> to that experienced by inhabitants of capitalist urban cores such as Los Angeles,
> where the modern obsession and desire to master nature through technological
> prediction leads to denial of the cyclical nature of cataclysms. (33).

Storms in Hodge's narrative follow a comparable logic, where the soil thrown up into dust clouds acts as a recrudescent haze of past ecological relations. The disorganisation and upheaval of the dust-storm follows the capitalist exploitation of non-human natures, and this is projected forward as the threat of a Weird Outside looms over the text in the shape of a spiralling storm front, a disruption to and obfuscation of infrastructure space that is registered on the level of form. Beyond the surface references to tornados, the climax in the storm-cellar and the misquotation of "I don't think we're in Kansas anymore" (Hodge 70), the story's looping narrative structure and its reflexive critique of the Weird present a significant example of how the tension between linear conceptions of temporality and the world-historical play out in infrastructurally-bound Weird fiction.

The story follows Clarence and Willard, the brothers Pine, at the end of a decades-long search for Willard Chambers, their grandfather who vanished in the 1960s while working as an ethnomusicologist. Clarence and Willard are "named for dead men,

grandfathers they'd never met" (46), and these two pairs are tied to specific modes of energetic production. Clarence senior was a miner "who'd succumbed in his thirties to the black lung he'd carried up out of a West Virginia coal mine. His end had come early, but at least it was hard and certain" (46). The events of his life were fixed to a single location and are referred to from start to end with a rock-solid certitude. Will Chambers, on the other hand, had a more fluid and energetic life. Petrol-driven like the brothers, he travelled the country in a car, and his work as a song-catcher required a tape recorder and a Leica camera, both of which house crucial components relying on petroleum by-products. Despite this comparative fluidity his life also came to an abrupt stop when he disappeared while travelling and searching for songs. Like his namesake, Will junior (or Willard) works in petrol-dependent production, and his job as a cloud architect finances the brothers' travels. The brothers spend all their vacation time combing the infrastructural space of the Great Plains, travelling along every road in a 400,000km^2 area, measuring their distance in units of gasoline and their progress against incomplete maps of the territory. Though the narrative arc of the text is ostensibly linear, the nature of their search compromises the linearity of the text from the outset, as the repetition of the road and dried-up towns, and the patterning of the family's intergenerational dynamics across contrasting energy commodities encodes and embeds a cyclicality across time and space. Every time the brothers go hunting for clues, they find that:

> The roads all looked the same again, along with the dried-up little towns they led to.

> They'd all looked the same for the last couple of years, the way they had at the beginning. (42)

> […]

> Five days into this trip, the latest of many, all the Brothers Pine had to show for it was another gallon of gas traded for another dusty roadside hamlet that, until this moment, was just a name along a blue line on the most detailed map they'd been able to buy. (43)

Although they constantly cover new ground, the spaces they traverse swiftly become repetitious. The towns and roads are almost identical due to the active formal logic of the infrastructural transport-network proliferating the same set of spatial and formal relations over and over (Easterling 73-81), and the story ensures the reader is aware of this from the outset, its title framing the brothers' journey as a process of repetition from the very beginning. Because of the systematic trajectory the brothers take across the plains, the content and narrative structure revolves around a cyclicality that complements this repetition. Typical of the Weird, the narrative's temporal elements are apprehended spatially, but rather than the narrative encadrement or syntactic elongation described by Blacklock in his 2017 essay for *Textual Practice* (1106-7), the characters' activities and behaviours are reiterated on individual and intergenerational levels, with the same occurrences and experiences repeated ad nauseum. The actions of the brothers Clarence and Willard are directed and mediated by long cycles of reiterative behaviour which they can only partially perceive, and they spend the narrative re-treading the behaviours and actions of their grandfathers. At the beginning of the story, Clarence has already begun to resent his brother's obsession with the past, suspecting that for Will, "The weight of his name had infected him with nostalgia for an era he'd never experienced and never could have tolerated" (51). Clarence believes that Willard's obsession is Weirdly reanimating his grandfather's legacy, and that this keeps the family lost and wandering the Dust Bowl–a space where the aerosolised debris of previous phases of ecological production prevents the characters from escaping the legacy of their inherited names. The brothers' dynamic mirrors the contemporary infrastructural dynamics of carbon fuel—coal having become a residual energy commodity while the dominance of petroleum persists and shapes infrastructure space long past its ideal terminus. The arc of the intergenerational dynamic is helical, mimicking the spiral form of overlapping cycles of capital accumulation (Shapiro 2016).

This mirroring of capitalism's long spiral is carried forward in how crucial narrative events occur at locations of infrastructural significance during significant moments of crisis in the systemic cycles of historical capitalism. The songs hunted by Will Chambers and Nana Ingram's childhood recollections of Old Daisy correspond to

the collapse of the metabolic equilibrium during the Dust Bowl, while Will's disappearance directly preceeds the oil crisis and economic downturn of the 1970s (Mitchell, 2013, 171-99), and the primary events of the narrative and the Mother's oncoming death of Myelofibrosis are situated just before the looming environmental collapse of our present moment. The coal-bunker storm cellar that provides the setting for the narrative's climax seems to have been constructed during the phase of agricultural expansion in the 1800s that predated the formation of the Dust Bowl. The brothers' accumulation of miles and villages is a small segment of an intergenerational cycle that reaches its apex at the narrative climax. The Weird affinity between the narrative's spatial and temporal cyclicality highlights how the conditions of collapse and conflict are formally and infrastructurally programmed through a network of behavioural relations; relations that have seen little formal differentiation through a long history of conflict, suffering and racial violence. The sedimentary layering of discrete threads of narrative significance across congruent instances of historical crisis demonstrates how these individual dynamics accumulate into cyclonic form, and spiral outward in the aggregate. Early on, Clarence ponders the endless stretches of highway and nowhere towns and reflects that the worst thing he "could think of was that he and his brother were now a part of it too. That the land was digesting them so slowly they didn't even realise it" (48). Clarence has the greater conception of the longue durée but is apprehensive of his own position within this wider frame. For Clarence, the very act of peering beyond the surface of this infrastructural landscape and his linear conception of time could be more dangerous than whatever the search may turn up. The two are conscious of the longer American history of discrimination and racial violence, and Clarence accompanies his brother partially for his safety: "No telling who he might run into, and his 4.0 grade average didn't mean he couldn't be stupid when smart mattered most. Elderly Klansmen and their ilk protected killings half a century old, and there was an uneasy sense they weren't dealing with anything so prosaic here" (49). The legacy of industrial slavery is perceptible in the infrastructural network underpinning transit of the great plains and this Weirds the brothers' relationship with the spaces they visit.

The Weird temporal leakage into the characters' spatial sensorium becomes especially palpable when they eventually rediscover the site of Will Chambers' disappearance. The brothers and their guide, Paulette, find "a decayed shard of post snarled in a rusty length of galvanised fencing that twisted through the grasses and weeds like a wire snakeskin. Will stared at it, seeming to ponder how he might straighten it out, make it all better" (63). In the twist of their destination's border-marker, Will can feel the general spatio-temporal tangle he is a part of, and as they move off the main roads the landscape begins to deform against their expectations. Despite the continued homogeneity of the infrastructural space the brothers have spent years exploring, and unremarkable experience of their approach, their destination feels spatially anomalous. The map they follow ceases to correspond to the contours of the land as they encounter "a curve in the road that shouldn't have been there, an expected crossroads that wasn't." (64). The linearity of the infrastructural surface carrying the narrative bends toward a circle, though it has yet to fully realise itself as a cycle as the brothers return to the point of congruence with the previous iteration. The Weird affect that saturates the space is a product of an historical cycle that the group have been only dimly aware of until reaching the location of its beginning and end. Clarence notes that, "It felt right. This was the place. It felt right because something about it felt so deeply wrong. This was a place poisoned by time" (65). The brothers begin to complete this circuit by physically recreating the events that drew them on their journey in the first place, and they reproduce the last photograph Will Senior took before disappearing. Aside from an audio recording of Old Daisy's voice, this photo was one of the last recordings taken by Will Senior before his disappearance. It depicts an individual of distressing countenance who Paulette eventually identifies as Old Daisy—an entity that the group stop considering human as they learn more of her nature. When the old seed man at the Gilead gas station was shown this photograph, his reaction was an appropriately Weird rejection of the image, where an unutterable and unsettling essence complicates the viewer's understanding of reality:

Perception demanded time. People noticed the wrongness of it in subtle ways they couldn't quite identify, as if something fifty years behind this

moment had left hidden hooks in the image, to hold their attention until

they truly saw, and then forced their hand to thrust the photos back. (45)

This slow recognition of Daisy's nature is mimicked in the overall flow of narrative exposition, where small details of her nature are suggested until the fuller picture becomes clear with the group's discovery of her lair—the same slow recognition of violence embedded in the history of the infrastructure the brothers have traversed. Before entering the hut, Willard has Paulette stand where Daisy did in the photograph that started their hunt, and he lines her up in the frame of the Leica camera that "has come full circle after half a century" (75). This recreation begins the completion of the narrative's current cycle and foreshadows Willard and Paulette's imminent transformation. But it also amounts to a literalised reproduction of material relations, the character's comprehensive recognition of the cyclicality of their temporal trajectory culminating in the Weird reapprehension of their social reality.

The original photograph of Old Daisy Weirded the course of the brothers' lives and twisted them into a loop with their grandfather, and the group's recreation of the image acts as the reader's in-text return to this instigating event. It directly preceeds the group's descent into Daisy's storm cellar, where they interface with an anomalous sculpture that provides the answer of what happened to Willard Chambers:

It was contradictory, various parts suggesting man and animal, mammal

and mollusk, demon and dragon, a creature fit to dominate anywhere, be

it ocean, land, or sky. It was a nightmare rising from a slag heap left over

from the formation of the galaxy. (70)

The subterranean statue is an artwork and effigy that cannot be reconciled with existing material conditions. The statue's appearance provides a metatextual critique of the Weird, as the description of the hybrid entity is an obvious cycling back to the idol from "The Call of Cthulhu" (1928, 362, 365), one of a flurry of allusions to Lovecraft's oeuvre. Paulette's joke about Willard's job involving "castles in the sky" points to "The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath" (1927), the prophesized colour of the sky refers to "The Color Out of Space" (1927), and even Daisy's "lantern jaw" (56) makes a less than subtle nod to a popular epithet for Lovecraft himself. Many of Lovecraft's more famous

stories such as The Dunwich Horror (1929) and The Shadow over Innsmouth (1931) end with the annihilation of their Weird persons so that the story world can return to a white pastoral fantasy. In the case of Innsmouth, the fish-persons were literally bombed and quietly eradicated in concentration camps. Daisy is a survivor of one such massacre and her survival constitutes a coming reckoning for the culture and infrastructural norms that precluded her people, the text swerving reflexively in an indictment against the racist history of the genre. It affords the chance to glimpse outside of the scope of the familiar historical cycles of accumulation. The creosote-stained rafters of the storm-cellar are carved over and over with the words "COME BACK" (70)—a desperate prayer for the recrudescence of an exterminated people and world, and a demand for a return to a reality outside of the existing cycle of material relations, though here it also serves as a nested invocation of the cyclical journey of Paulette and the Pine family. The storm cellar's resemblance to a coal bunker recalls the fate of the brothers' other grandfather, who died due "to the black lung he'd carried up out of a West Virginia coal mine" (46) and stresses the spatial overlay of successive energy regimes and their associated infrastructures.

Interacting with the idol allows Willard and Paulette to shift their past-oriented perspective "outside the boundaries of time" (74) so that they can see beyond the cycle they have inhabited until now and follow the trajectory of the new cycle their discovery has created so that they can witness the crisis of its culmination. This experience transfigures them in mind and body, granting them a newfound cyclonic asymmetry: "To see them now was like looking with one eye off-centre. The two halves of the image didn't quite match up" (75). Clarence is even shocked to hear Willard joke about their mother's short life expectancy when hours before he "could barely be coaxed into admitting his mother had two years at best, to live" (75). The pair follow in the path of Willard Chambers and stay in self-exile out on the Great Plains. But as Clarence returns home the infrastructural space of narrative focus shifts as the digital sphere supplants the previous sphere of primary production. Like the highways before it, the airwaves are haunted by the events of the previous cycle as the transfigured Willard begins to call Clarence regularly, imploring him to kill himself and murder his family rather than have them experience the terminus of the next cycle:

> "I shouldn't tell you this. When they come they'll look like meteors. But that won't be what they are at all. When the sky changes colour, it'll be too late. Nothing will make any difference then. They'll already have you. That's when you'll wish you'd listened to me. Don't ask what colour, I can't really describe it. But it's out here. I've seen the kind of green the sky turns before a tornado, that's a start." (78)

Again, the story evokes Lovecraft in an obvious reference to "The Colour Out of Space" (1927), though rather than the anti-immigration rhetoric of the older story, here the colour is an earthly and identifiable systemic phenomenon. Willard is describing terminal crisis, a complete transformation of the planetary biosphere and an unimaginable set of ecological relations ushered in because of "a choir of multitudes" (78) coming to join Daisy in her petition to the ultimate Outsider. As in *Cyclonopedia*, discussed below, a vortex threatens to disrupt contemporary material relations, but by the conclusion of "It's All the Same Road in the End" the storm is merely imminent, an unrepresentable break from the linear constraints of traditional narrative that Clarence can approach, but never fully articulate.

1.6. All That Is Solid Melts into Oil: The (Im)materiality of oil infrastructure in Negarestani's *Cyclonopedia* (2008)

Reza Negarestani's *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials* (2008) was published during the 2007-8 financial crisis, leaving the text well placed to articulate the infrastructural consequences of three decades of neoliberal hegemony. Having explored an array of literature bound to infrastructural points of carbon consumption, *Cyclonopedia's* inclusion in this chapter returns to the nexus of infrastructural extraction. The text is introduced by a frame narrative that describes the discovery of a bizarre academic manuscript beneath a hotel-room bed in Istanbul, which is then taken to the US and published as the remainder of the book. From this point, *Cyclonopedia's* content and arguments are posed by a cacophonous array of bickering interlocutors that includes a fictionalised Negarestani, though these voices are loosely structured

around the fabricated writing of a fictitious Iranian academic, archaeologist and scholar of ancient maths named Hamid Parsani. The book's exploration of oil and the Middle East draws from a vast array of contradictory materials, including genuine contemporary academic prose, popular culture, continental philosophy, speculative theology, the occult, and crucially, the writing of H.P. Lovecraft. The text's cyclonic extrapolation of these foundations positions the work as a useful formal corollary to the Weird tornado described by Willard at the climax of "It's All the Same Road in the End". As a pioneering text in the genre of theory-fiction (Fisher 1999, 5), *Cyclonopedia*'s unusual form and radical metafictionality lead to a disorientating and chaotic reading experience–one that resists linear interpretation. Eschewing the constraints of traditional narrative form, *Cyclonopedia*'s obsessive interrogation of oil deploys an involute set of aesthetic and discursive strategies that mirror the complex ways that oil infrastructure has become tangled in world-ecological process. In a 2014 essay, Melanie Doherty uses a petrocultural perspective to address the effective consequences of this sprawling form, though she makes only brief mention of the book's elevated status in the Weird canon:

> As a response to global petrocapitalism, the text has been categorised in the growing field of "weird fiction," which take [*sic*] cues from a mixture of pulp fiction and cultural and critical theory, such as China Miéville's *The City and the City*; however, its very opacity and Bakhtinian heteroglossia also encourages a variety of politically engaged readings. As a work of theory-fiction, *Cyclonopedia* uniquely problematizes its own references to other texts, including works by Deleuze and Guattari, Nick Land, Freud, and notably H.P. Lovecraft, in a way that echoes the text's articulations of radical openness as a critique of paranoid identity formation. (371)

Doherty puts forward the compelling argument that the text's many references to Lovecraft mobilise his racism and castration anxiety as a parallel to Western European and American othering of the Middle East (372). Doherty then moves on to conclude that *Cyclonopedia* is a form of textuality designed to act virally rather than representatively, transforming its readers' perspective on petropolitical dynamics more effectively than a traditional literary interrogation could accomplish (382). This

assumption that Weird fiction is politically detached by default is part of common critical practice, though it is unusual that she perpetuates this custom while using one of China Miéville's more overtly political texts to characterise the field, particularly given Miéville's long and well-known history of social and political activism (Kimblin 2017; Jacobson 2023). Unfortunately, *Cyclonopedia*'s Weirdness is incidental to Doherty's analysis, even though the Weird is the primary formal means by which *Cyclonopedia*'s virality propagates. The book's affective register is dominated by a reflexive and sustained Weirdness that derives from an intensification of the formal patterns discussed earlier in this chapter. Moreover, this fervid Weirdness is fundamental to the text's political efficacy, illustrating a more complete expression of the Weird's transformative capacity.

Although its Weirdness is a productive avenue for political dynamics, a world-literary analysis of the ways that *Cyclonopedia* Weirds oil infrastructure must reconcile a materialist, systemic logic with the text's arcane representation of oily subjectivity. In a recent chapter, Josephine Taylor uses a world-systemic approach to interrogate *Cyclonopedia*'s depiction of oil in terms of the extractive zone. Macarena Gómez-Barris has defined the 'extractive zone' as the peripheral regions of the earth that have been reduced to their ecological plenitude and resource density by (neo)colonial ideologies and forces in an effort "to reduce life to capitalist resource conversion" (2017 xvi). Taylor reads *Cyclonopedia* and Miéville's "Covehithe" (2011) as texts that are rooted in this extractive landscape, arguing that the literary imaginary can amplify activity in the global (semi-)periphery (2023, 76). She concludes:

> The creative reimaginings of crude oil and its infrastructure in both *Cyclonopedia* and *Covehithe* capture this move toward a new understanding of crude oil outside of capital and the market. The playful destruction of the subject/object domains allows for new possibilities to emerge: social, cultural, and structural transformations to our current energy regimes. (84)

While Taylor persuasively argues that the text advances a radical ideological reconfiguration of contemporary energetic relations, her identification of the book's

subject/object subversion as playful is critically charitable. Negarestani's writing draws heavily on the antihumanist work of Nick Land (1992), though his more recent work has moved away from this and adopted a more cogent, neorationalist perspective (Le 2019). *Cyclonopedia* stands as an interesting comparison to the "ontological 'turn' in social theory" (Cassegård 2021, 169), which describes a converging set of critical approaches that are problematically interested in the 'actancy' and agency of non-living material. Often grouped under the banner of new materialism, the most significant of these approaches includes the antihumanist work of Graham Harman (2012); Quentin Meillassoux (2008) and Ray Brassier's (2010) theory of speculative realism; and the related concepts of vital materialism and object-oriented ontology that are most associated with Jane Bennett (2010) and Timothy Morton (2018). While these critical efforts are often proposed as a kind of radical empathy, *Cyclonopedia*'s cognate relationship to Landian accelerationism helps to indicate the violence inherent to any critical subversion of subject/object relations. New materialism habitually privileges non-human things over the abject and the objectified, discovering "the undelivered rights of the formerly objectified *in objects, rather than people*" (Shapiro, 2016, 258, emphasis in original). With oil cast as determining object in *Cyclonopedia,* petrol becomes Weirdly animate in the text, and this portrayal of petrolic subjectivity often causes issues for materialist efforts that attempt to accommodate this dynamic. Taylor's otherwise excellent analysis encounters issues in this area. For example, while describing how the agential power of crude oil in the text is used to decentre man, Taylor writes that: "capital reduces oil to the status of an object, the same extractive process lends it a rebellious form of agency which takes up the pipeline as but one of its parts, always on the point of counteraction" (80). The primary issue with this perspective is that capitalism does not reduce oil to object, capitalism encounters oil as object and metabolises it as a commodity. This materialist grasp of crude oil and its derivatives is useful as the commodity form insists that any ostensible actancy or agency an object exhibits is fully contingent on human agency and control. This perspective leaves any critique of oil culture and its associated infrastructures better equipped to address the fundamental issues that plague carbon energy. One of Doherty's striking critical insights is to see *Cyclonopedia*'s forays into new materialism as a "step back from semiotics to readdress the material conditions of our world" (367). Although similarly generous to

new materialism and its common but erroneous conception of capital as a force exterior to human agency, Doherty's reading of *Cyclonopedia* correctly identifies how the text's theory-fictional contribution to new materialism and object-oriented ontology contributes to a destabilisation of dominant discourses and linear narratives of oil.

Considering this, the extractive zone is a productive framework for analysis of *Cyclonopedia*, though its utility is complicated by the text's aesthetic negation of extractive apparatus. Immaterial infrastructure is one of *Cyclonopedia's* central conceits. The text hollows out consensus readings of oil as part of its formal strategy of viral propagation and the aspirational erosion of typical oil-economic metanarratives. One example of this occurs in chapter one, where one of the text's interlocutors lists eleven "major hyperstitial entities of the Ancient Enemy" (26)—each one a divergent and contradictory conception of crude oil. Here, the modern understanding of oil formation is Weirdly paraphrased as "Hydrocarbon Corpse Juice" and contrasted with more esoteric delineations of petroleum such as "The Nether Blob" and "The Black Corpse of the Sun" (27). These conflicting conceptions of oil contribute to *Cyclonopedia*'s depiction of oil as a Weirdly subjective entity that permeates the world-ecology in a motivated and exanimate fashion. In this unlikely arrangement, oil moves independent of human activity, an imagined dynamic that works to conspicuously conceal material infrastructure in the lifeworld of the text. In a stylish analogy to the real and distributed system of contemporary carbon energy, the substance of oil infrastructure in *Cyclonopedia* is present but Weirdly suppressed throughout, surfacing only at crucial points of discursive similitude. When infrastructure does emerge in *Cyclonopedia* it is often mediated through metaphor or allegory, though this is invariably bound to the text's strategy of Weirding neoliberal narratives of oil.

This complex threading of infrastructural relations through the text is best elucidated by unpacking two entangled metafictional concepts that the in-text Negarestani names "blobjectivity" (16) and Hidden Writing (60). The text derives the first of these, blobjectivity, from *Hyperstition,* a fictionalised compatriot of the synonymous web forum that operated between 2004 and 2008 (Hyperstition 2004). "Blobjectivity" describes a totalising position that interprets global relations via petroleum, and Weirdly, from the perspective of petroleum. Negarestani explains that "According to the

blobjective point of view, petropolitical undercurrents function as narrative lubes: they interconnect inconsistencies, anomalies or what we might simply call the 'plot holes' in narratives of planetary formations and activities" (Negarestani 16). Although the efforts of *Hyperstition* draw from antihumanism, the blobjective effort to read world-systemic relations via petroleum can be productively re-interpreted from a materialist perspective. Discarding the insinuation of non-human subjectivity, blobjectivity accurately identifies petroleum as an entity that has permeated the entirety of the world-ecology, invisibly influencing the sub-circuits of capitalist reproduction. Despite oil's ubiquity, the technical and aesthetic operations of oil infrastructure cannot function without the widespread suppression of its catastrophic world-ecological consequences. Visible extractive infrastructure renders the ecological cost of carbon consumption evident, and so the pattern of offshoring oil production from core economies to extractive zones in the (semi-)periphery helps to maintain the culture of extraction. Similarly, there are many gaps and "plot holes" in the text of *Cyclonopedia*, the largest and most striking being its occlusion of oil infrastructure. The smattering of direct references to pipelines, wells, and pumps illuminates the suppressed sub-surface infrastructure that the text hides to accommodate its representation of oily subjectivity. One such example occurs in a lengthy quote from the text's primary (and fictional) source, Hamid Parsani, where he describes the Middle East as a Tiamaterialist entity:

> It is a surface near to collapse, full of inconsistencies and irrelevancies or, as I like to say, story holes, leading to an extensive undercurrent and subway system. A surface whose obsessive vocation consists in turning any political and religious movement into a burrowing machine whose every activity structurally degrades the whole field and ironically makes the problematics or holes more relevant to this space of sheer activity, and less relevant to the established ground. (65)

Because of his blobjective perspective, Parsani's dialogue is infected with the aesthetic of oil extraction, his language brimming with references to underground flows, digging and the integrity of the ground. Suppressed infrastructural material wells to the surface of this reported speech, as the web of conflicting ideological dynamics and political

interdependencies that constitute the idea of the Middle East are articulated as a subway system. Ideological trajectories and dynamics are described as tunnelling machines that expand this network to a point of instability, the significance of their process and motility eclipsing the form of the ideological object they constitute. Although Parsani's notion of Tiamaterialism is both reductive and obscure, his account has a productive twofold logic that simultaneously applies to structures of thought and material geography. This scheme of blobjective thought metafictionally maps to the overall structure of the text, as well as the (in)visibility of carbon infrastructure in the real world. In both cases, close attention to points of surface visibility allows for the wider system of sub-surface infrastructural relations to be inferred and ideologically re-materialised.

A preoccupation with plot holes ties the blobjective perspective to the practice of Hidden Writing. In the chapter "Machines are Digging" (41), the fictional Negarestani introduces an extract from Lovecraft's short story "The Festival" (1923), where a nested quote from the Necronomicon describes how the soul of a dead sorcerer can feed and "instruct" the worms that feed on their body (Lovecraft, 269).[3] This passage is Weirdly presented as Lovecraft's own critical commentary on the Deleuzian concept of holey space (Deleuze and Guatarri 1987, 413-4), a concept that is distorted into ( )hole complex. Negarestani defines ( )hole complex as a quality that instigates and accelerates transformation in a cohesive form:

> For a solid body, the vermiculation of holes undermines the coherency between the circumferential surfaces and its solidity. The process of degenerating a solid body by corrupting the coherency of its surfaces is called ungrounding. In other words, the process of ungrounding degenerates the whole into an endless hollow body—irreducible to nothingness—and damages the coherency between the surfaces and the solid body in itself. (Negarestani 43)

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[3] The Necronomicon is a fictitious book of esoteric knowledge that recurs through Lovecraft's fiction. It was eventually adopted into the wider canon of Weird fiction as an intertextual device that marks a text's association with the expanded Cthulhu mythos.

As in Parsani's comments on Tiamaterialism, the logic of this extract operates on a material and theoretical axis. As a visual metaphor, the parenthesis forms a hole that points to the negative, the evaporative "w" emphasising the presence of engineered absence. This mimetically demonstrates the fundamental ontological manoeuvre of the term: to signpost a significant hollow, while representatively reinforcing a significant transparency. On a theoretical axis, ( )hole complex is both an obsessive interrogatory strategy and the means by which a material object or space can be eroded via compulsive extraction. As with blobjectivity, the materialist connotations of ( )hole complex are notable, as they present a means of interpreting the relationship between instances of surface visibility. Negarestani writes that: "the emergence of two entities (political formation, military, economic, etc.) from two different locations on the ground is inconsistent, but according to the logic of ( )hole complex, they are terminally interconnected and consistent" (Negarestani 53). This description can be read as analogous to the process of world-literary analysis, where world-systemic relations are the means by which geographically inconsistent but systemically homologous relationships are explored. In the context of the extractive zone, the wormy description of the burrowing forces again subjectifies petroleum, positioning it as a malign necromantic force that Weirds surface appearances. During the explication of ( )hole complex, the chapter turns to carbon infrastructure in the Middle East, hyperbolically suggesting that the proliferation of pipelines threatens the integrity of the landmass but also illustrating a fundamental contradiction of neoliberal capital. Borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the "war machine" (1987. 351-423), Negarestani argues that the vermicular space of mines and oil-fields attract nomadic forces that become "treason-armies bound to the privatisation of military forces which in most cases belong not to the state but to foreign or multi-national mega-corporations involved in oil-fields" (58).[4] In this scenario, the neoliberal state cedes its monopoly on violence to private interests or "corporations and their privatized armies" (59), weakening itself in subjugation to the market-forces it seeks to empower. The aesthetic

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[4] In their "Treatise on Nomadology" Deleuze and Guattari propose the notion of the war machine, a specious historical phenomenon describing an assemblage of people and relations oriented toward war that are assimilated and co-opted by the state. The aesthetic corollary is the element of a given form that is oriented toward and facilitating of transformation.

function of peripheral oil-infrastructure is compromised, as rather than the narrative of modernisation and plenitude that oil extraction is supposed to signify, surplus ecological value is stripped and piped to private interests in the economic core. The physical cavity left by resource extraction is bound to a 'plot hole' in the narrative of oil as staple commodity—rather than enriching the peripheral state, petroleum lubricates the exploitation of vulnerable economies. Confronted with an extractive zone honeycombed by suppressed negatives and ideological contradictions, *Cyclonopedia* metafictionally proposes that a dedicated model of reading is required to navigate the labyrinth of sub-surface relations.

To this end, Negarestani proposes the idea of Hidden Writing as "a model of complicity with ( )hole complex [...] it suggests we read stories through their plot holes" (60). Rather than interpreting an object in terms of surface, or even content, the mode of Hidden Writing impels the reader to read via the material that is suppressed and excised. Where blobjectivity assumes the influence of oil is Weirdly ubiquitous, Hidden Writing "suggests a politics of contribution to, or participation with, perforated structures and degenerate formations" (60)—plainly, it endeavours to narrate oil culture via its conspicuous absences. This proposition emphasises the infrastructural dynamics that are covertly central to the text—just as narratives of neoliberal plenitude are undermined by the markers of the extractive zone, the subjectivity of oil in *Cyclonopedia* is undermined by its stubbornly material infrastructure. The synthesis of these ideas is that oil infrastructure has propagated so intensely through the world-ecology that its Weirding reverberates through the entire cycle of world-historical reproduction. While the Weirding of a smaller form invariably signals outward toward the whole, oil is so visibly entangled that the full system is obviously implicated, and the formal consequences of this can be identified in Weird depictions of oil infrastructure across the world-literary system. Across these threads there is a recurring parallelism between structures of analytical thought and the topography of material structures and relations in the real world. As seen in Parsani's carbon-laced language, the narrators of *Cyclonopedia* tend to rely on the systems and logics of oil to interpret oil. The trajectory of conflicting ideological relations in the Middle East is articulated like an underground infrastructural network, and private resource stripping of the extractive zone is likened

to the burrowing hunger of necromantic grave-worms. There is a recursive logic at work in these analogies, a failure of signification that points to the stubborn endurance of petrol as an energy commodity. Petroleum is so entangled in the reproduction of world-ecological relations that global efforts to transition to a greener energy commodity have yet to succeed. *Cyclonopedia* presents a discourse where the move beyond oil is not just difficult, it is unthinkable.

Oil is intoxicating in *Cyclonopedia,* so much so that its infrastructural propagation inexorably appropriates and regurgitates critical efforts. More than a reflection on an increasing capitalist dependence on carbon fuel, the way that oil-infrastructure assimilates the interrogative logic of the text is fundamental to *Cyclonopedia*'s strategy of Weirding petrolic ideology. The mechanism at work here can best be identified in the instances where the text explicitly turns to material infrastructure, such as the tail-end of Parsani's monologue on Tiamaterialism:

> Wahhabi hostility to idolatrous embodiments escalates to the degree where even mosques and holy tombs belonging to the prophet's family and disciples have to be destroyed because they illegitimately break the rules of the God's exclusive oneness. So they shift the location of their underground infrastructures to areas near mosques and holy shrines, changing the directions of underground construction projects including subways to these places, concentrating pipelines, water storages, and other transport tunnels under the holiest Islamic sites to gradually surrender them to the forces of nature, or to destabilize the sites' foundations. (65-6)

In this passage, the material function of subterranean infrastructure is disregarded in favour of its aesthetic dimension. The covert ideological objective is so dominant in Parsani's analysis that the purpose of the subways, pipelines, water storages and transit tunnels is shifted onto the by-product of their material activities. For Parsani, the corrosion of these holy sites is the purpose, rather than the side-effect of infrastructure's frictional propagation. The reformist rejection of idolatry Weirdly corresponds to the text's own attempts to Weird carbon infrastructure. An

infrastructural reformation of these holy sites is intended to suppress the material indicators of an idolatrous ideology—the disintegrating sites would in turn become holey, gradually transforming into plot-holes as the relations they spatialise are unmade. In a sense, *Cyclonopedia'*s discursive strategy matches this corrosive process, worrying at the stuff of oil infrastructure until it ideologically degenerates, though it would be more accurate to say that it operates in reverse—as *Cyclonopedia* cannot chip away at the material of infrastructure, instead it mobilises a radical metafictionality to detach and modify the signifying capacity of oil infrastructure. In this manner, the repeated references to narrative and plot holes are instrumental to the text's affective endeavours. *Cyclonopedia* works to unmoor the aesthetic function of oil infrastructure from its mechanical purpose by persistently articulating world-ecological relations in terms of narratology, a move that audaciously and aspirationally exaggerates the text's purported capacity to influence the material propagation of oil infrastructure.

As a consequence of this Weird strategy, the substance of infrastructure is often substituted for analogous literary models that mirror oil's relational structures. While this does obscure and suppress the mechanical operation of oil infrastructure, it also isolates and affectively heightens the negatives that offshoring suppresses. For example, the chapter "Five Billion Years of Hell-Engineering" (155–160) articulates the cost of carbon infrastructure through an account of the worship of Moloch in the Valley of Hinnom, located on the outskirts of Jerusalem (155-6). Although the material of oil infrastructure is absent from this chapter (there are no refineries, oil fields, pipes or pumps) the caustic essence of petroleum dependence lingers in an intensified form as the relations of material infrastructure are transposed onto the ritual practices described in the text. There are several key signifiers that mark the suppressed operation of carbon infrastructure in this chapter. For example, the text situates the worship of Moloch in Tophet, a region located beyond Jerusalem's Dung Gate "where the city disposed of its garbage" (155). Tophet functions as a peripheral zone of ancient Jerusalem and is accordingly described as "The Place of Abomination"—though this epithet refers to more than the filth of this peripheral space. Negarestani glosses the Hebrew name Hinnom as the origin of "the biblical and Koranic words for Hell" (155),

marking the region with a diabolical, agential pollution. This anticipates the flames and torture that characterise the worship of Moloch in *Cyclonopedia*. The idol of Moloch is described as a bull-headed bronze statue with a movable arm built to lift immobilised child sacrifices:

> At the pinnacle of the journey the child would slide down into Moloch's open mouth and plummet to the depths of the fire raging in the belly of the beast. All the while the hordes would be dancing round the statue singing, playing flutes and tambourines to drown out the screams of the dying child. (156)

The cultic imagery in this passage draws on a long literary tradition of depicting the biblical entity Moloch as a cruel power or deity, which appears in texts such as John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), Gustave Flaubert's *Salammbo* (1862), Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914) (fig. 4) and *Howl* by Alan Ginsberg (1956). *Cyclonopedia* deploys Moloch's common (and often Orientalist) function as literary shorthand for social degeneration and child sacrifice, folding these associations into its Weirding of the global oil economy. In the most obvious and evident comparison, the mechanical operation of the idol bears a particular resemblance to the scene depicting industrial disaster in Fritz Lang's 1927 film, *Metropolis*. The scene features a montage of the protagonist's experiences in the undercity, where the rhythmic movement of factory workers visually integrates them into the mechanisms of a vast industrial machine. The film's protagonist witnesses the contraption overheat catastrophically, and the engine undergoes a hallucinatory transformation into an effigy of Moloch that feasts on chained humans as they are marched into its burning mouth (Fig. 2). In both *Metropolis* and *Cyclonopedia*, then, the standard order of carbon relations is radically inverted as human bodies are burned as fuel in the belly of an inanimate object. In *Cyclonopedia* the consensus order of carbon relations is also mimetically reversed by the way the chapter sequences its information–in a similar pattern to the narrative surrounding the

Line in *Cities of Salt,* the reader learns about the sacrifices before it is revealed that the text understands the god as a direct oil analogy (157).
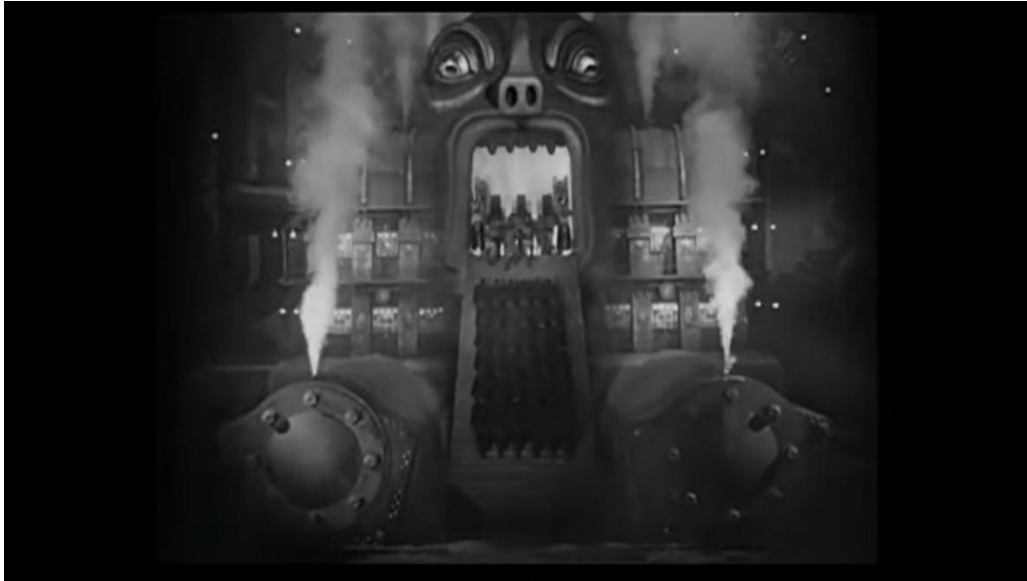
Figure. 2 . Moloch, from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*.

Recalling the definition of oil as the "Black Corpse of the Sun" in the text's introductory chapter, Negarestani ties the statue of Moloch to petroleum via its topographical position, explaining that as "the place of sacrifice to Moloch is a valley rather than the summit of a hill, Moloch must be an obscure, fallen Sun god." (157). Beyond the text's blobjective tendency to find petroleum in all things, these fiery and subterranean qualities identify this passage as a metaphorical expression of oil, though the text omits any direct explication for the motivation driving the sacrifices. Again, there is a failure of signification in the fictional Negarestani's choice of metaphor, the fictional relations are so close to the material reality of the culture of extraction that the signifier and the signified collapse into one another. The text's ideological paralysis results in an analogy so proximate that it literalises world-ecological infrastructural relations. The worshipper's motivations are legible in the process of capitalist reproduction. The statue's bronze construction and bull head refer in part to Arturo di Modica's 1987 sculpture "Charging Bull" (Fig. 3) which was placed on Wall Street shortly after the Black Monday crash (Huhne 2012). Sculpted as a testament to the resilience of the stock market, Negarestani's carnivorous companion illustrates the human cost of this ostensible stability in the global periphery. *Cyclonopedia* expresses the iniquity of this core-periphery dynamic through the singing of the celebrants, who generate a

cacophony to mask any evidence of suffering from inside the statue. The culture of extraction is likened to a kind of monstrous, sacrificial worship, where the maintenance of capital via extractive infrastructure is prioritised over the continued stability of world-ecological relations. By indicating that the sacrifices are "usually between the ages of five and eleven" (155) Negarestani emphasises that future generations will bear the most harmful consequences of carbon infrastructure. This act of worship destroys the future, and the celebrants ignore the screams of those suffering so that the process can continue. The "Hell Engineering" (155) in the chapter title simultaneously refers to the mechanical operation of engineering works in the extractive zone, but also the deliberate acts of engineering required to maintain this space of suffering. The continued process of oil-economic relations is not a consequence of simple apathy, but widespread and conscious complicity.

Figure. 3. Di Modica, Arturo. *Charging Bull*. 1989, Broadway, New York.

Figure. 4. Moloch from Pastrone's *Cabiria* (1914), National Museum of Cinema, Turin (Dalbéra 2003*)*

In the text's depiction of Moloch we see the convergence of several threads from the short stories earlier in the chapter. The oily subterranean sun god recalls Calvino's Pluto "reaching up from the underworld" (175), the immolated children are a return to the evaporative baby from Johnson's Car Crash (5), and the blindness of Okri's narrator arises in the diverting music of Moloch's worshipers. Through its dense, theory-fictional form, *Cyclonopedia* combines and manipulates these threads to a greater degree of specificity than the preceding texts, though this complicates the text's critical position accordingly. *Cyclonopedia*'s depiction of petrol infrastructure as a monstrous deity highlights the ways that oil as energy-commodity inextricably binds core and peripheral zones of the world-ecology, though the text's continued and habitual inversion of subject-object relations remains resistant to a materialist world-systemic reading. Matt Graham provides a useful means of resolving some of these tensions. In a 2022 paper, Graham offers a joint critique of the racist ideology that plagued the old Weird and the anti-Kantian turn in critical theory by reading the two in parallel. He applies George Sieg's understanding of horror as the affective product of an experience that violates

reason (7) and uses this to identify an affinity between the unrepresentable and inhuman Other in both categories. Despite the apparent disparity between new materialism's attempts at radical empathy and Lovecraft's racist revulsion, the consequence of both endeavours is a disregard for many of the most vulnerable voices in our world-system. Graham unpicks *Cyclonopedia*'s formal expression of this critique, as well as the consistent failure of scholarly efforts to address it, by noting the academic tendency to privilege *Cyclonopedia*'s discordant theoretical positions over its literary aesthetics (and vice versa). He untangles the book's oily non-human subjectivity by emphasising the text's hybrid form, viewing "*Cyclonopedia*'s theoretical elements as an integral aesthetic feature" (2023, 3) that exist in dialectical relationship with its stylistic deployment of Lovecraft. *Cyclonopedia* includes quotes from and allusions to Lovecraft as though they are scholarly material, while its academic prose is continuously compromised by its incorporation of Weird horror components and the occult. The synthesis of these actions is a mode that Graham identifies as "Lovecraftian inhumanism" (7), a strategy that facilitates the "realization of a Lovecraftian aesthetic decoupled from Lovecraft's problematic construction of subjectivity" (9). Crucially, Graham stresses that the complex and varied techniques the text employs to complicate normative understandings of subjectivity cannot function without the reader's subjectivity. The running meta-narrative of the text as found fiction underscore this position, as intermittent returns to Alvanson, Negarestani and the editorial process in the footnotes and the frame-narrative constantly confront the reader with instances of connected subjectivity to interpret and reconcile (10). For Graham, *Cyclonopedia* does not conjure or think the inhuman, it provides an opportunity to be affected by the inhuman (13). Though Graham's contribution helpfully criticises a common issue with the ways that scholars approach the recurring depiction of non-human subjectivity in the Weird (and *Cyclonopedia* in particular), his approach would benefit from world-literary development. As the earlier analysis of Moloch in *Cyclonopedia* demonstrates, the critical inversion or negation of subject/object relations is seldom emancipatory or revolutionary. Even a playful aesthetic suppression of human subjectivity is violent and

alienating in its subordination of vulnerable human and non-human natures.[5] In this context, the Weird is a politically productive axis of analysis, as the affective recognition of new social forms is often the product of the ways that these forms threaten or compromise an existing subjectivity. As demonstrated, a world-systems approach can address literary representations of object-oriented ontology by identifying the human subjectivities it suppresses.

Cyclonopedia and the broader category of the Weird can, therefore, be productively approached from a materialist perspective, though as demonstrated, this comes with its own set of complications. *Cyclonopedia's* ontology of oil, for example, is complex and plural. Its subversion of human subjectivity arises from its efforts to fundamentally reconfigure the position of oil in the political unconscious. A project of this scope requires a composite and layered reconstruction of oil-bound ideology and the distributed consequences of its global propagation. In this, the infrastructural elements of *Cyclonopedia* again come to the fore as the text consistently returns to the motif of pipelines when describing how the negatives of carbon infrastructure proliferate. Although the suffering required to maintain the process of capital is kept hidden in the extractive zone, *Cyclonopedia*'s scheme of oil demonstrates how the catastrophic consequences of oil are distributed globally via market forces. In the chapter titled "Pipeline Odyssey: The Z Monologue", the interlocutor outlines the metaphysical mechanism behind this distribution, contending that "War machines are dissolved in oil" (71). He explains that:

> The nervous system and the chemistry of war machines smuggled
> through oil infuse with the western machines feasting on oil unnoticed, as
> petroleum has already dissolved or refinedly emulsified them in itself, as
> its chemical elements or its essential derivatives (Islamic ideologies,

[5] The critical practice of imagining an animal or vegetal subjectivity usually seeks to subvert and destabilise colonial and capitalist readings of non-human nature while fostering empathy for the object or creature in question. However, the act of pretending to speak on behalf of non-human nature with any degree of authority is itself a form of discursive violence that further silences the object of focus. A conscientious materialist perspective is fully capable of accommodating empathy for and conservation of the non-human elements of the world-ecology without denying human subjectivity.

ambitions, implicit policies, socio-religious entities and formations, etc.) (71).

This assertion conflates the ideological and material capacities of petroleum by imagining oil's ability to house and transport social and political forms as commensurate with its efficacy as a material solvent.[6] The combustion of war machine-enriched petroleum releases these ideological solutes as an insidious pollutant. Again, oil is depicted as a subjective agent, but this passage outlines the purpose of these activities. *Cyclonopedia* constructs an image of oil as the "tellurian insider" (145), a Weird subterranean entity that haunts the text in the form of a degenerate unliving sun. In this form, the insider incorporates geopolitical and geological processes into its efforts to convert the planet into the Xerodrome: "the Earth of becoming-gas or cremation-to-dust" (17). With the eradication of the earth, oil, the object of critical focus, is ontologically centralised. Petroleum is presented as the purpose and orchestrating agent of world-ecological process. In this set of relations, the violence inherent to oil extraction and consumption is not simply incidental to carbon infrastructure. The cruelty is articulated as the objective, the means and the end.

Of the definitions of oil provided in the introduction, the ninth is particularly relevant in this context, as it illuminates the reflexive critique operating behind the textual construction of this god-like oily entity:

IX. The Pipeline-Crawler (Go-juice), a code name for an autonomous vehicle which smuggles Islamic war machines into Western Civilizations —but on the other side of the panorama, it is in fact the slow penetration of other narrative entities of petroleum into the rectal depths of all political orientations, whether formulated on religious platforms or not. Gas plays its role as an assistant culprit in making great distances accessible by applying pressure, pushing the flow to the furthest recesses of the globe. Petroleum is at the same time the desensitizer, the lubricant and the object of intrusion. (28)

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[6] Crude oil is a mixture of unrefined hydrocarbons (napthenic, paraffinic and aromatic) with other elements and compounds held in solution.

In this extract the spread of oil-bound political relations across the world-system is aided by natural gas. There is a flatulent and sexual humour in this passage, with the natural gas being introduced as a complicit agent in the queering "of all political orientations". In this, the text articulates its own subversive strategy of Weirding petrolic relations while mocking the structures that perpetuate the carbon economy. The pun of religious "platforms" conflates the site of carbon extraction with the role of religious ideology in the global oil economy, simultaneously Weirding the devotion to oil as a foundational energy commodity and implicating the role of religious ideology in the maintenance of extractive apparatus. The work of gas in aiding the movement of petroleum underscores the absurdity of any contemporary political defence or expansion of oil infrastructure. The culture of extraction can only ever assimilate political discourse through the pressure of hot air, as any promise of growth, plenitude or infrastructural development pinned to carbon fuel is inevitably compromised by irreconcilable ecological debt. This humour also works reflexively, satirising the text's own purple, Deleuzian prose, but also implicating the text in the dissemination of oil-inflected ideology. The declaration that oil is the vector for Islamic war machines seeking to infiltrate "Western Civilisation" is strategically dampened by this comic mode, as the text's bizarre presentation of Islam is a vital element of its destabilisation of carbon infrastructure. When Parsani discusses Islamic war machines or "Wahhabi hostility to idolatrous embodiments" (65), the object of reference is not Islam as practiced in the real world, but a Weird, parallel and constructed strain of occult theology that borrows its aesthetic signifiers from Islam. An iconoclastic apocalypticism or "fetishistic outrage against idols" (244) is often the focal characteristic of this system, though this is typically laden with further obvious humour.

For example, when describing the formation of the xerodrome, Negarestani writes that for "Wahhabi and Taliban Jihadis, for whom every erected thing, so to speak, every verticality, is a manifest idol, the desert, as militant horizontality, is the promised land of the Divine" (18). This rejection of phallic constructions is conspicuously ironic, as again, oil is simultaneously the motivator for this demolishing impetus while also acting as "the desensitizer, the lubricant and the object of intrusion" (28). Weirded Islamic theology is fundamental to the text's satire and a significant contributor to the

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text's sophisticated self-examination. This critique is most palpable in the chapter on "Hypercamouflage" (123), where Parsani draws a parallel between John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982) and Abdu-Salam Faraj's extremist pamphlet *Jihad: The Absent Obligation*. The chapter focuses on the section of Faraj's manifesto that discusses the permissibility of deceit in the exercise of jihad, twisting the practice of Taqiyya—a doctrine whereby a persecuted Muslim can conceal or deny their faith for the purpose of self-preservation (Virani 206)—into a duplicitous activity where a jihadi would infiltrate an enemy community by fully embodying membership of said community. For Parsani, the comparison to the *The Thing* "comes from the fact that it is not the Thing (the extremist under Taqiyya) which is targeted as the object of eradication and assault, but its potential hosts" (124). The crux of the comparison is not the threat that a jihadi poses to the state, but the threat the state poses to its citizens as it attempts to eliminate an insurgent threat. Here, the text mimetically adopts the mode of Hypercamouflague, as the interlocutor's depiction of Islam increasingly mirrors the conservative anxieties expressed by American and European actors in the wake of the World Trade Centre attacks on September the 11th, 2001. The absurd rhetorical position where any given Muslim constitutes an existential threat to state security is reconfigured to illustrate the self-destructive activities of the economic core, artfully employing the estranging capacity of the Weird while critiquing the legacy of orientalism and xenophobia in the genre's foundation.

It is important to recall that while the text poses the citizen as a hypothetical vector for negatives arising in the extractive zone, pipelines remain the primary means of transmission for these inimical affective forms. Here and throughout, *Cyclonopedia* oscillates between two scales of infrastructural and political subordination: the individual and the collective. The character and writings of Parsani are a useful way of examining the dynamic entanglement between these two registers. Not only does his prose work to centre and structure the text, his character is also constantly stretched between these contrasting ranges. Parsani's introduction notes his sudden obsession with archaeology and his ensuing acquisition of "The Cross of Akht," (11) a relic that Negarestani explains is numerologically coded to narrate the conflict between America and the Middle East on countervailing flows of petro-ideology. This recovered

archaeological material quickly becomes analogous to oil, as his obsessive behaviour, paranoia, and worsening skin condition closely match the prognosis outlined in the end note explaining inorganic demonic possession. The text describes an "inorganic demon", as an autonomous, sentient artefact from beyond the planetary biosphere that acts independent of human will (223-5). Parsani's subordination to the cross is total, as though the cross as an actant has eroded Parsani's agency and objectivity. This subordination tracks closely to the prognosis outlined in the note explaining inorganic demonic possession, which itself seems to be a thinly veiled metaphor for the general proliferation of hydrocarbons through the planetary biosphere. For example, the process of ridding oneself of such possession involves subordination to a new Inorganic Demon, and the associated cultural transformation:

> inorganic demons cannot be destroyed completely, other than by exerting the power of another inorganic demon on them. Such an action inevitably invokes in its turn the power of yet another inorganic demon. This is similar to the theme of the resurgence of evil or demonic return in horror stories. The discovery of an inorganic demon heralds a sequence of ruination for individuals or entire civilisations. Once the inorganic demon itself succumbs to the hibernation mode (known to humans as "foresaken status"), a civilization or another human host finds the opportunity to rise. (225)

The process of destroying an inorganic demon parallels the ways in which an energy regime or long cycle of accumulation is supplanted by a new frontier of appropriation. For example, capitalism's dependence on managed forests being supplanted by coal-capital, steam-power, and the concomitant explosion of ecological surplus that precipitated the industrial revolution and its associated carbon-culture (Moore, 2011, 25-6). Or again, the more recent transition to petrol as the dominant energy commodity due to oil production's relatively light labour dependency, oil's comparative ease of transportation, and its higher energy yielded per unit mass burned (Mitchell, 2013, 36). Here, the subjective experience of possession parallels a wider systemic possession and dependency on carbon fuel. As with the previous instances of analogy, the content of one scale communicates the outcome of the other; the deleterious consequences of

his encounter with the cross resonates with the systemic impact of oil infrastructure. As Parsani's subjectivity disappears into the cross, his language becomes progressively less comprehensible.
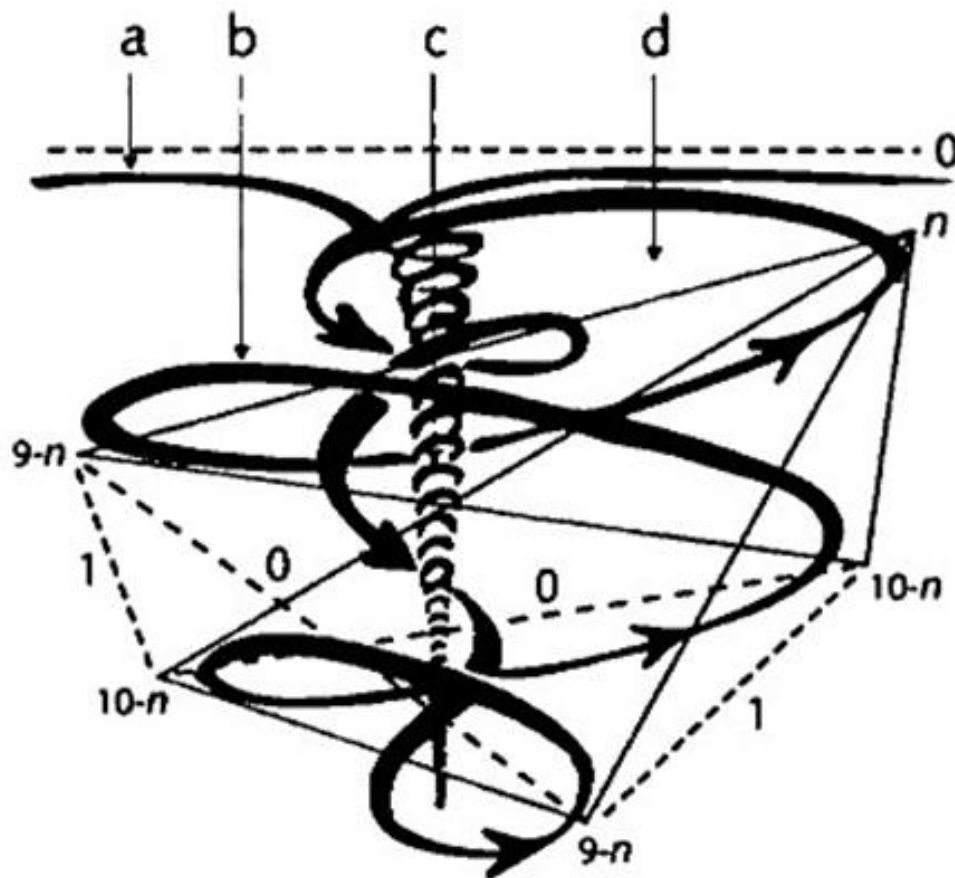
Fig. 10 A feedback Spiral mobilizes and prolongs the communications of Trisons, also known as the polytical units of the Middle East. Feedback spirals employ the Tnson in middle–eastern power formation. Feedback spirals are constituted of (a) Creep (b) Hysteric Force (c) Compelling Force (d) Dracage Zone. The dashed lines mark cross–numerization (10–n. 10–n and 9–n. 9–n) and parallel numerization (10–n. 9–n and 9–n. 10–n) in Feedback Spirals. While the difference of cross–numerization Is equal to 0. for parallel numerization the difference is 1

Figure. 5. Cyclonopedia. *The Feedback Spiral. (34).*

Beyond the parallels to Alhazred and his suggestive "H.P." initials that emphasise his fictionality, the text's radical heteroglossia and non-linear organisational structure overwhelm his voice and identity until he becomes as evaporative as the text's material infrastructure. This mirrors the fate of Abdul Alhazred, the fictitious author of the

Necronomicon who was devoured in broad daylight by an invisible monster, though here the disappearance is marked in Parsani's own writing, which "becomes illegible—as if he has intentionally scrambled the letters by turning each word into a strange and possibly self-invented rune or cipher" (221). Having been rendered incoherent through proximity to the wider system of petroleum extraction and its necessary infrastructures, his identity is disorganised in parallel by *Cyclonopedia*'s Weird textual infrastructure. Hodge's spiralling threats of narrative significance across congruent threads of historical crisis are neat and orderly in comparison to the whirling formal logic of *Cyclonopedia*. This formal strategy is encapsulated by the diagram of the feedback spiral (fig. 5) that describes the interactions between trisons, or "the political units of the Middle East" (34). Through the interaction of polar rotation discrete units are motivated upwards and outward in an expanding vortex, before being recirculated and focalised down through the centre of the spiral which grows itself by sweeping up material from its nadir as it progresses.

Cyclonopedia, then, uses its tremendous formal dynamism to bore at the epistemology of petrol and its infrastructures, hollowing it to the point of evaporation. As with the world-system, contradictory spiral action combines to reproduce an expanding set of dynamic relations that threatens to terminate itself due to a crisis of accumulation. The spiralling interaction of forces tightens into a drilling impetus that threatens to burrow and destroy the integrity of oil infrastructure and the planetary ecology, converting its object of focus to particles of dust and eventually desert. Negarestani fully subverts straightforward or linear imagining of infrastructural relations by incorporating dozens of contradictory and overlapping threads into this spiral structure, not in an effort to consign petroleum to illegibility through complexity, but to modify its audience's affective response to petroleum. Of all the texts covered in this chapter, *Cyclonopedia* expresses and estranges infrastructure with the Weirdest intensity, though crucially, this intensity is not a break from existing formal dynamics, but a radical escalation. Across these works, there is a pervasive tension between suggested linear forms and a subversive sinuosity that threatens to wind on itself in autophagic contradiction. While the mechanism behind these twisting forms can appear uncomplicated, this often belies an even more fundamental antimony that

challenges the representative capacity of more ordinary literary forms. The motif of inclement nature in the form of storm, tornado, cyclone, or dust bowl does operate as textual shorthand for looming crisis, but it also poses an uncertainty toward the fundamental categories bound to infrastructure. If the infrastructure organises space and thought, what is to be made of the set of relations outside of its material and ideological structure? Although the specific strategies used in their deformation of space and affect are recognisable from genre fiction, the texts in this chapter use these tools to signal the unknown and the new, probing the limits of textual representation to point toward troubling contradictions in the systems they depict. While this question of the exterior is especially pertinent in the context of the (now worlded) system of global capital, there are significant questions regarding the converse matter and thought that are bounded by infrastructure. The prevailing force these texts exert on the categories of subject and object registers the vulnerability of the human subject under neoliberalism, as, more than ever, the organising mechanical progress of world-ecological infrastructure space pressures the dialectic of individual and collective subjectivity. While the texts in this chapter have featured characters and narrators experiencing the affective force of a specific and personal Weirdness, it is important to emphasise that these works are not Weird because they represent these instances of abnormal anagnorisis. Their Weirdness stems from the formal navigation of contradictory and colliding structures, and the affective force this navigation exerts on their audience.

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2. Weird Infrastructure, Chapter 2: Weird Rail—Ideological Containment, Dystopia and Infrastructural Augury

Introduction

Having demonstrated the world-literary significance of the Weird in oil-bound infrastructural narratives in chapter one, my analysis now turns to the cognate systems of rail infrastructure, to contrast and analyse the contours of the Weird as an emergent literary registration of world-ecological crisis in rail-bound literature. In the previous chapter, the Weird anxiety uniting the primary texts stemmed from their shared anticipation of terminal crisis. The corresponding formal deformations in those narratives are a product of their exchange with the ongoing process of ecological collapse. This chapter turns to speculative works that manage systemic downturn by imagining a hypothetical social reality beyond terminal collapse and does so with a specific interest in Weird rail infrastructure. I will contrast two post-apocalyptic narratives in Bong Joon-ho's *Snowpiercer* (2013), and Dimitry Glukhovsky's *Metro 2033* (2002), reading both texts in the context of their expanded fictional universes and adaptational intertexts. The *Snowpiercer* series includes the original graphic novels written by Jacque Lob (1982), Jean-Marc Rochette (1999, 2001) and Olivier Bocquet (2015), as well as the 2020-2022 *TNT* televised adaptation. Glukhovsky's novel is the first of a series that developed into the multimedia *Metro* franchise. While there are dozens of officially sanctioned contributions to the series by other authors, *Metro* is most known for the video game adaptations developed by the Ukrainian studio 4A Games, which includes *Metro 2033* (2010), *Metro: Last Light* (2013) and *Metro: Exodus* (2019). These expansive intertexts grant *Metro* and *Snowpiercer* a relatively comprehensive sense of Weird rail-infrastructural developments over the neoliberal phase of capitalist expansion. This expanded scope will also help to track the development of the specific patterns of infrastructural Weirdness in time and space, but also across film, graphic and videogame form. While *Metro* and *Snowpiercer* work

within the generic framework of dystopian science fiction, a world-literary perspective emphasises the analytical limitations imposed by conclusive generic classification. Although it recognises the generic context of these texts, this analysis is far more interested in the Weird affective consequences of their infrastructural alterity and the ways this alterity impacts their respective forms. More importantly, it emphasises the politically significant and immanent Weirdness at work in the literary categories of science fiction and dystopia, while demonstrating the Weird formal congruities that are specific to rail infrastructure.

For instance, science fiction as a genre typically requires a functional lifeworld that operates similarly to our own material reality, save for the addition of what Darko Suvin describes as a "novum of cognitive innovation [..,] a totalising phenomenon or relationship deviating from the author's and implied reader's norm of reality" (1980, 64). As a formal device, the novum opens a work to emergent Weirdness by providing a point of ingress for the ideological outside through its aesthetic and discursive alteration of specific social totalities. The previous chapter's explanation of the propensity for Weirdness in petrocultural works is similarly relevant to discussions of science fiction, where new and alternative modes of energetic production are often at stake. In a 2016 paper, Macdonald discusses the discursive significance of energy systems in science fiction, writing that "oil and its refinements have been consonant with the historical movements and transitions of SF as a genre, and remain the key power source to reckon with in the present" (2016, 115). As demonstrated in chapter one, the Weird has followed a similar world-literary trajectory, developing in tandem with the process of global petro-capital. Indeed, when the alteration produced by a given novum constitutes a substantial transformation to the energetic budget of a text's lifeworld, the ensuing friction between material relations and the representational energy system creates a rich environment for the fermentation of Weird dynamics. In the *Snowpiercer* and *Metro* series, the respective novae are bound to rail infrastructure, which modifies the energetic relations in similar, but importantly distinct ways. In *Snowpiercer*, efforts to stymie climate change via geoengineering have backfired and plunged the earth into a new ice age. The few surviving humans are cast in a position of energetic and resource scarcity aboard a super-train powered by a fantastical perpetual motion engine. The

engine's ostensibly infinite capacity creates a bizarre and antimonious dynamic between energetic abundance and deprivation that operates as a crucial fulcrum for the story's discursive capacity. Like *Snowpiercer, Metro* is set after a catastrophic infrastructural transition represents a similarly drastic reduction to the world-systemic energy cap. A nuclear war has rendered the earth's surface uninhabitable, leaving several thousand survivors to subsist in a state of conflict and scarcity in the ruins of the Moscow metro system. Unlike *Snowpiercer,* the foregrounded rail infrastructure is diminished and derelict. Although the nuclear war constitutes an epochal release of energetic surplus that transfigures recognisable material relations, the result is a subterranean shadow of contemporary society, and the lingering transformative capacity of atomic power mutates familiar bodies and spaces into hostile and alien forms that recall the eldritch powers that populate Lovecraftian fiction. Szeman notes the tendency of contemporary literature to participate in fictions of energy surplus, and for speculative fiction to present fantastic solutions to finitude, in which "the promise of the future underwrites and legitimises the bad faith of the present" (2012, 324-5). Szeman also argues that postapocalyptic narratives are more likely to present a future of energetic deficit (325), but *Snowpiercer* and *Metro* pressure this expectation through their respective apparatus of ruinous surplus: the Eternal Engine and nuclear weapons. Both texts pose a critique of the excesses and shortcomings of contemporary energetic relations, and they each harbour a catastrophic trepidation for energy transition. Crucially, they express these energetic anxieties through a Weirding of rail infrastructure, and while the ensuing formal tension produces Weird deviations from science fiction and post-apocalyptic narrative form, these deviations are shaped by the rail infrastructure and are significantly distinct from the road and oil-bound Weirdness identified in the previous chapter.

Just as a novum can pose a vast range of possible deviations from literary realism, complex energetic infrastructures are only a portion of the material relations that shape the Weird's characteristic formal contours. While petrofictions register the material of petroleum infrastructure through a specific set of formal dynamics, contingent infrastructural systems lend themselves to contrasting, if correspondent Weird consequences in literary expression. For example, because of their rail-bound

infrastructural focus, *Snowpiercer* and *Metro* share a preoccupation with infrastructural continuity in the wake of world-ecological crisis, and this shared representation of incongruent futurity produces a set of specific formal homologies that are distinct from, but related to, their registration of contemporary energetic relations. *Snowpiercer*'s publication timeline, from 1982 to the present day, tracks the evolution of these formal dynamics across the more recent phase of neoliberal capital, while *Metro* reflects the world-ecological upheavals and growing neoliberal anxiety that has developed since the September 11 attacks of 2001. Indeed, the third novel reveals that the coordinating hegemony in the apocalyptic underground sustains itself through an orchestrated conflict that diverts the Metro's population from organising an alternative way of living outside of the metro-system (Glukhovsky 2016, ch. 20); a conclusion that has proven increasingly relevant following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine and the ensuing military tensions currently spreading across Europe. The *Snowpiercer* series provides a useful world-literary comparison on this front, with its European origins and later adaptations from East Asia and the US that offer contrasting perspectives on rail infrastructure. In particular, Bong's Korean adaptation goes to great lengths to reflect contemporary world-systemic relations in its critique of neocolonial ideology (Lee and Manicastri 2018, 215).

Before the formal consistencies between these two rail narratives can be unpacked, it is necessary to account for the ways that aesthetic infrastructural forms operate within the confines of specific social realities. When Larkin argues that material infrastructure performs a signifying function beyond its technical purpose (for example, smooth-running infrastructure being used to evidence social development and political stability), he acknowledges that this critical perspective is entangled with the formation of liberalism and the market economy. He explains:

> it is difficult to separate an analysis of infrastructures from this
> sedimented history and our belief that, by promoting circulation,
> infrastructures bring about change, and through change they enact
> progress, and through progress we gain freedom. (Larkin 2013, 332)

Here, Larkin touches on a critical tension in systemic infrastructural analysis, namely the determining role of ideology in the aesthetic and signifying capacity of infrastructure. In the context of nineteenth century England, the advancement of rail infrastructure came with a specific set of liberal ideological associations. Giovanni Arrighi describes how the integration of the steam engine into British industry in the 1800s accelerated the conversion rate of money capital into commodities so effectively that the capital goods industry became a key arm of British imperial power. For the first time the capitalist world-economy became globalised, with British industry being situated at the economic core (2010, 164-5). Accordingly, rail infrastructure became the conduit and signifier of modern capitalist expansion. In his contribution to *Oil Culture* (2012), Buell describes the promethean exuberance surrounding this unprecedented ecological surplus, writing that "Coal-fuelled mechanical power [...] promised open ended progress. Steam engines, engines of motion and change, replaced clocks as the paradigm of machinery" (73). While coal capitalist exuberance was opposed by the attendant development of a "sinister cultural geography of depths and instructive descents" (74), the transformative capacity of the steam engine was associated with an aesthetic of triumphant modernity and an ascendant class of wealthy industrialists—an enduring mode that became bound to expanding rail infrastructure. With the accelerated transition of commodities and the ensuing advancement of capital, railways came to symbolically carry the idea of capitalism as a straight line of progress and development into an increasingly prosperous future. Over the second half of the nineteenth century, rail infrastructure became fully integrated into the world-ecology, as "Capital's steel tentacles penetrated far-flung peasant formations from South Asia to Eastern Europe, setting free vast rivers of Cheap labour-power" (Moore 153). In contrast to petrol infrastructure, with its offshore rigs and hidden flows, rail infrastructure constituted the material evidence of the uneven relationship between the economic core and the zones of peripheral extraction.

While Larkin flags the relationship between infrastructure and liberal conceptions of modernity, rail infrastructure's specific ideological associations have been tied to local social realities. In the USSR for example, the Mosco metro was designed from the outset to evoke a utopian impulse. Keith A, Livers argues:

The Stalinist body and body politic were forged through a complex

process that envisioned the ideological formation of both individual and

collective within a vast landscape of interconnected, mythologically

charged locales, each of which had a central role to play in realizing the

culture's grand narrative of social transformation. [...] Without a doubt

one of the boldest technological undertakings of the Stalinist '30s, the

Moscow metro provides a perfect model of the culture's attempts to

envision the communist society of the future (2004, 228)

Although transit infrastructure was ostensibly positioned to hold a contrasting set of political values, it shared a series of significant associations with liberal technocracy, particularly the celebratory attitude toward industrial progress and imperial development, as well as technological mastery over an externalised nature and the supposed enrichment of the working population. Mark Griffiths identifies the Moscow metro as an official ideological challenge to the West, where the smooth integration of a palatial transit system into the urban environment would exceed the aesthetic and functional capacity of existing transport systems such as the London underground. The metro was positioned as the infrastructural herald "of a bright new future, conceptualized as a completed whole and soon to be realized everywhere" (Griffiths 2016, 495), a utopian vision that stands in sharp contrast to the deprivation and misery of the dystopian futures described by *Snowpiercer* and *Metro*.

To recognise the Weird dynamics in the formal operation of the dystopian projections of these texts, it is necessary to reckon with the temporally specific and spatially particular characteristics of the utopian imagination. To this end, it will be useful to consider Fredric Jameson's explication of Marx's theory of ideology. Jameson understands Ideology via an elucidation of the Althusserian mode, namely, "a representational structure which allows the individual subject to conceive or imagine his or her lived relationship to transpersonal realities such as the social structure or the collective logic of history" (1981, 14-15). But Jameson's argument that "such an approach posits ideology in terms of strategies of containment, whether intellectual or (in the case of narratives) formal" (1983, 37) is even more helpful. When reading these world-literary texts, their specific confrontations with local ideological limits are the

most significant points of ingress for the Weird, as well as the obstacles posed to their representation of systemic crisis by the imaginative limits immanent to world-ecological reproduction. In his later work, Jameson addresses this axis of critical purchase with his claim that the deepest vocation of Science Fiction is "over and over again to demonstrate and to dramatise our incapacity to imagine the future" (2005, 288-9). Indeed, for both *Metro* and *Snowpiercer* the shape of their imagined apocalypses is less important than the social consequences of their respective novae. Specifically, the antimonious stagnation of social reality in their imagined futures, and the ways that this antimony parallels our contemporary political reality.

The term "critical dystopia" has been used to describe narratives that demonstrate a dystopian social system that sustains the potential for utopian externality. The introduction to the 2003 volume *Dark Horizons: Science fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* explains that "critical dystopias allow both readers and protagonists to hope by resisting closure: the ambiguous, open endings of these novels maintain the utopian impulse within the work" (Baccolini and Moylan 2003, 7). While the *Snowpiercer* and *Metro* series both correspond to this formal descriptor, their maintenance of the utopian impulse is less significant to this thesis than the Weird infrastructural means through which they accomplish this task. For Jameson, texts that preoccupy themselves formally and thematically with progress and the future can serve to illuminate the structural and ideological barriers to the utopian imagination, because critical pressure can then be applied to recognise the obstacles to utopian space that such works deploy and repress. It follows that a literary navigation of progress and futurity via rail infrastructure will bring the infrastructural suppression of alternative ideological forms to the fore. To this end, when Jameson describes utopian space, he identifies it as an enclave, which is "itself a result of spatial and social differentiation" and whose formation is "a kind of eddy or self-contained backwater within the general differentiation process and its seemingly irreversible forward momentum" (Jameson 2005, 15). Notably, these enclaves are bound to infrastructural systems from the outset, with Jameson describing the utopian dreamscape, in part, as a location where "even garbage disposal is as attentively organized as administrative hierarchy" (2005, 10). Because these enclaves constitute a "confrontation with the ideal of totality which they

at once imply and repress", they can therefore be understood in terms of ideological containment (Jameson 1981, 37-8). This methodology facilitates critical purchase on the formal origin of the Weird affect that pervades speculative fiction. In *Metro* and *Snowpiercer,* if utopia is taken as the spatialisation of ideology itself, dystopia can be grasped as an enclave by pursuing the dynamics of the negative, so that now the repressed element is brought to the fore. The dystopian works of Bong Joon-ho and Dimitry Glukhovsky displace contemporary infrastructure into its imagined consequence, spatialising neoliberal ideological contradictions and Weirding the utopian promise of transit infrastructure through Weird rail. In other words, the Weirdness of these texts derives not just from their aesthetics or content, but from their demonstration of these ideological containment strategies, and the ensuing subversion of their imaginative limitations—and this is directly visible in the Weirding of trains and rail networks.

2.1. "It is Eternity Itself"—The Weird Engine, and the Reproduction of Ideological Containment in Bong Joon-Ho's *Snowpiercer* (2013)

Across its various adaptations, the *Snowpiercer* narrative maintains several fundamental consistencies. The icy world-ecological crisis, a repurposed super-train turned apocalyptic shelter, and the infrastructural expression of class struggle are fundamental to the concept developed in Jacque Lob and Jean-Marc Rochette's *Le Transperceneige* (1982). Bong Joon-Ho's 2013 film adaptation of the graphic novel was produced three decades into the neoliberal phase of capitalist expansion, leaving it well placed to revisit and develop on the world-ecological anxieties registered by its source material. The film eschews the narrative and conceptual digressions present in the 2020 TNT series and the comic's sequels, and this thematic and formal focus leaves *Snowpiercer* (2013) particularly suitable as a point of analytical ingress to the series. Bong's film follows the character of Curtis (played by Chris Evans) as he leads a Tail

Section rebellion from the rear to the front of the train.[7] As in every version of the story, the train is powered by a perpetual motion engine, though the opening of the film departs from the graphic novel by definitively explaining the source of the ice age as a geoengineering disaster caused by the climate-cooling chemical called cw-7. Like Noah's Ark in the book of Genesis, the *Rattling Ark* operates as an apocalyptic refuge. It works as an infrastructural enclave with an architectural logic that follows an ostensibly straightforward class hierarchy: the rich white holders of capital luxuriate in the front, while a melting pot of the poor are forced to suffer in the back. The obviousness of this political allegory has produced some contrasting critical perspectives on the cogency of the text's conceptual structure. For example, in his praise of *Snowpiercer*'s political critique, Gerry Canavan argues that the "irrational retention of a class system" is crucial to the film's critique of political economy, as the incongruity of the situation facilitates a kind of "vulgar Marxism" that drives the revolution and the plot forward (2014, 15-6). In contrast, Fred Lee and Steven Manicastri propose that the film performs a detailed political critique of neoliberal capitalist relations, writing that:

> The train's Sections represent a set of structural relations in a globalized production process: Global North/West post-industrial economies (represented by service workers in the head Section of the train) find their conditions of possibility in Global South underdeveloped economies (represented by child slaves from the Tail Section) and Global East industrial economies (represented by high-tech workers from somewhere between tail and head Sections). (216)

While these arguments align in their reading of (and praise for) the text's rhetorical trajectory, they disagree on the fidelity with which the text reflects the political reality of world-systemic relations. Ultimately, however, the film's allegorical apparatus is more sophisticated than either of these perspectives allow, a fact that helpfully demonstrates the critical significance of the Weird in infrastructural representation.

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[7] Bong Joon Ho and Kelly Masterson's 2011 script capitalises Front Section and Tail Section throughout. The terms are used to refer to the structure of the train and the passengers simultaneously and interchangeably.

Like all the *Snowpiercer* narratives, the 2013 film is usually read in terms of post-apocalyptic science fiction, though this perspective neglects the immanent Weirdness the franchise has demonstrated from the outset. Although the primary nova in each adaptation is the fantastical engine powering the locomotive, the series features many Weird ruptures in its diegetic congruity. For example, the second graphic novel, *The Explorers* (1999) features a second larger train named the *Icebreaker*. When the characters push their way to the engine room, they discover that it contains the complete front-carriage of the smaller *Snowpiercer* from the previous volume, itself housing Proloff, the protagonist of the first book, who is still alive and working to maintain the locomotive. Here, the spatiotemporal structure of the first two volumes collapses back on itself by transposing the site of the first novel's climax into that of the second. This looping and self-referential structure is a defining characteristic of the *Snowpiercer* series, one that is reflected not only in its science-fictional deviations from material reality, but also in its routine exploration of mystical phenomena. Characters experience dream-visions and perform acts of clairvoyance in the graphic novels, the film, and the later arks of the TV series, and this thematic preoccupation with supernatural foresight blurs the formal boundaries of the texts in a manner that is receptive to a critical sensitivity to world-literary Weirdness. As with the texts in chapter one, *Snowpiercer* exhibits the Weird tendency to probe the conflict between linear and cyclical modes of time, space, and narrative progress, though with critical differences due to the text's specific infrastructural and world-historical bindings.

To this end, it is useful to analyse *Snowpiercer* within the larger context of the world-literary Weird by briefly examining its similarities to two instances of Weird fiction discussed earlier in this thesis: Lovecraft's genre-defining *At the Mountains of Madness* (1931) and Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982). Beyond the thematic consequences of their shared Antarctic environment, these texts are notably comparable in their inclusion of an amorphous fleshy entity that threatens the ideological integrity of their respective characters. Lovecraft's shoggoth operates as the faceless incarnation of working-class revolution. It is an instance of rebellious, living infrastructure that threatens the conservative white habitus of Lovecraft's academic explorers, while registering the supressed legacy of industrial slavery in New England. In contrast, Carpenter's Thing

registers its contemporary neoliberal anxieties and locates its horror in how fully the Weird entity can emulate the characters. The film follows a group of American academic researchers stationed in the Antarctic. As they are unable to differentiate each other from the monster that hunts them, the men are forced to act in radical self-interest. This destroys the social bonds of their professional environment, and they become as likely to kill one another as they are to kill or be killed by the Thing. *Le Transperceniege* features a similar mass of amorphous tissue named the Mother. A soldier describes her role in the train's metabolic system to Proloff, explaining that she is "an inexhaustible source of meat. The more you cut off the more she grows back! That's how she reproduces" (Lob 1982, 50). Harvesting the Mother's tissue sustains the train's food supply, but only through the repetition of infrastructurally organised violence and the torture of the Mother, who is seen to "flinch whenever the blades touch her" (55). Unlike Lovecraft's shoggoth, the Mother neither expresses nor possesses the capacity for rebellion, and she does not threaten to consume the passengers like Carpenter's Thing. Rather than a significant disruption to the ideological reality of the characters, the Mother's anomalous body has been fully incorporated into the infrastructural dynamics of the *Icebreaker*. She is witnessed in passing and disregarded as the plot presses onward. Though brief, this encounter is a generative illustration of *Snowpiercer*'s fundamental preoccupation with ideological containment, one that also exemplifies how this formal thread is bound to consonant patterns in literary Weird.

A close examination of the text's infrastructural reality makes these strategies of ideological containment more visible and identifiable. Like the texts in chapter one, *Snowpiercer* is formally tied to neoliberal energy infrastructure, though it differs in its surface depiction of an alternative, if radically diminished, fuel economy. Nevertheless, the premise of repurposing contemporary infrastructure space to survive carbon-inflected ecological disaster still works to satirise what Macdonald would describe as "the systemic conditions of modern petrolia"; a set of conditions that is "consistently haunted by its eventual depletion" (2013, 1, 13). Of all these *Snowpiercer* texts, the film's commentary on contemporary material reality is the most critically compelling, due to the Weird antinomy of the film-world's energetic and social relations. Lee and Manicastri identify the *Ark* as "a biopolitical order, that is, a system of power geared

toward the orderly production and reproduction of life itself" (2018, 215), though the specific form of that order is Weirdly asynchronous with the mode of production that sustains it. The other adaptations recognise the unsustainable nature of constant linear progress as their trains all struggle to maintain their forward momentum, but the film subverts this pattern. In a press interview with Charlie Jane Andrews, Bong claimed that the train's constant deceleration was one of the first ideas cut from the graphic novel, as it interfered with his plan to represent the *Rattling Ark* as an enormous clock (2014). This decision significantly alters the film's allegorical trajectory, as the film-world's underlying energy infrastructure, and all its contingent economic and social relations, are Weirded by the now-functional novum.[8] As a form of perpetual motion, the "Eternal Engine" (Bong, 1:45:58) constitutes a technological revolution that would transcend the oil-based energy infrastructure of the current world-system. Despite this ostensible break from carbon energy, *Snowpiercer* (2012) is possessed of a Weird irony rooted in the fear of energetic finitude. It challenges an indulgent fiction sustaining carbon infrastructure, "that energy surplus, an unrepeatable historical event, will define daily life on into the future, without major change or crisis" (Szeman, 324). The film depicts a reality that accomplishes this dream of unlimited energetic surplus, and yet social conflict and ecological collapse persist. This tension tinges the narrative's science fictional elements with the Weird, as the social relations and mode of production are so incongruous that they suggest some fundamental contortion of the fictional reality. A novum as radically impactful as the *Ark*'s engine would be an "epoch-making innovation" that would drastically diminish "the share of world nature directly dependent on the circuit of capital" (Moore 2010, 393). The ensuing spike in ecological surplus would allow for the rapid reconfiguration of the world-ecology, but in a manner that should preclude the climate collapse instigating the events of *Snowpiercer*.

Despite this Weird failure of world-ecological and energetic process, the film pushes heavily on the notion that the energy infrastructure and architecture of the *Ark* determine and limit the lived conditions of its passengers, and through this, their cognitive and ideological bounds. Canavan describes how the looping path of the *Ark*

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[8] This decision also complicates the logic of the graphic novels, as Bocquet's *Terminus* (2015) incorporates several characters from the film to unify the world of the film and the earlier volumes.

grants "the illusion of forward movement while actually being limited to prebuilt rails, the illusion of progress while actually simply circling the same dead loop forever" (2014, 23). Much of the film's conflict, narrative tension and tonal Weirdness stem from the characters' probing of these ideological limits, as well as the audience's increasing grasp of the contradictions in the *Ark*'s material and social complex. At first, small behavioural cues suggest the scale of ideological containment like the word "train" replacing "world" in idiomatic expressions like "The whole wide train" (Bong, 00:08:22). A monologue from Minister Mason (Tilda Swinton) offers a top-down description of the train's social relations, making the form and extent of this containment more explicit:

> In the beginning, order was prescribed by your ticket. First class, economy, and freeloaders like you. Eternal order is prescribed by the Sacred Engine. All things flow from the Sacred Engine. All things in their place, all Passengers in their Section, all water flowing, all heat rising, pays homage to the Sacred Engine in its own par-tic-u-lar, pre-ordained position. So it is. (Bong, 00:18:11-00:18:45)[9]

Mason's scheme of the *Ark* centralises the train's fantastical engine, subordinating the passengers and their social reality to the material conditions that it generates. Moreover, Mason articulates the train's organising principles as though they are a determination of the Engine's will. This Weird narrative of the wilful Engine parallels the unfortunate tendency of object-oriented ontology to deflect attention and responsibility from the human perpetrators of systemic injustice. In this case, the Tail Section's suffering is presented as a pre-discursive fact of reality, rather than a decision made by the *Ark*'s billionaire driver and architect, Mr Wilford (Ed Harris). As noted by Canavan, the social hierarchy aboard the *Ark* is deeply incongruous, as "class distinctions from before the disaster have no force or logic in the world afterwards" (2014, 16). However, the ensuing claim "there is nothing particularly capitalistic about the political economy of the train" (16) is discarded before its significance can be fully explored. Much of the film's rhetorical weight pulls from the specific ways that the *Ark* emulates and subverts familiar structures of capital. The visible seams between the fictional world-system and

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[9] Quotes from the film have been transcribed from the actors' performance, with cues for punctuation and capitalisation taken from Bong and Masterson's 2011 script.

everyday material reality are the formal origin of *Snowpiercer*'s rarely acknowledged Weirdness, and as such, these points of formal tension productively illustrate contradictions in contemporary social reality.

For example, the *Ark's* irrational social hierarchy works in tandem with Mason's quasi-religious veneration of the inanimate engine to satirise and critique the organising principles of neoliberal political economy. In volume one of *Capital*, Marx discusses the co-productive role of religion in the development of a society of commodity-producers, with a particular focus on Christianity's "religious cult of man in the abstract" (1976, 172). For Marx, the abstract and numinous elements of religious practice are entangled with the ways that the process of material production obscures the essence of social-reality; that "religious reflections of the real world" could only dissipate if the substantive relations of everyday life were presented "in a transparent and rational form" (173). In the above monologue, Mason furthers the *Ark*'s religious naming conventions with reference to the "Sacred Engine", which she describes as though the weight of its presence and process distorts and defines the substance of reality. While the Engine's provision of infinite ecological surplus should fundamentally transfigure the social complex, the visible material relations are incongruous with its prospective capacity. In lieu of a rational account of the *Ark*'s order, Mason's rendition is forced to lean on biblical terminology, cadence and repetition. The ensuing Section of Marx's argument is particularly helpful for identifying the mechanism behind the occlusion of the *Ark*'s social reality. Building on his discussion of religion, Marx directs his attention to the bourgeois political economy, and its historical failure to distinguish between labour in the value of a product, and labour in its use-value:

> The value form of the product of labour is the most abstract, but also the most universal form of the bourgeois mode of production; by that fact it stamps the bourgeois mode of production as a particular kind of social production of a historical and transitory character.
>
> [...]
>
> The vulgar economists confine themselves to systematizing in a pedantic way, and proclaiming for everlasting truths, the banal and complacent

notions held by the bourgeois agents about their own world, which is to them the best possible one. (1976, 174-5)

Because classical political economy is unable to manage and recognise the historical specificity of the bourgeois mode of production, it relies on a set of speculative abstractions that attempt to understand value only in its social form. The practice of contemporary neoliberal economics encounters the same issue, appealing to the aesthetic allure of an a-historical system of mathematical speculation and ontological assumption that bears little relation to the process of world-ecological development. Similarly, the train's Front Section are unable to manage the historical reality of the technology that structures their material conditions and are more interested in aesthetic dynamics of the value produced by the Engine, rather than the transformative capacity of its substantive form. Mason's language strains to achieve authority through biblical aesthetics and classist slurs, while the empty self-sufficiency of prepositional phrases like "So it is" highlight the deliberate construction and enforcement of the social conditions through the insistence on their pre-discursive self-evidence.

In keeping with neoliberal economics, the Front Section subordinates the wellbeing of the most vulnerable members of the *Ark* to an almost numerological fixation on tally and measurement. From Claude's (Emma Levie) obsessive and dehumanising use of the tape measure to measure the confiscated bodies and contraband of Tail Section passengers (00:13:48-00:14:50, 01:36:30-01:36:35), to the repeated and unusually specific promise that "precisely 74% of you shall die" (00:49:05); the train's leadership routinely reduce the population of the *Ark*—and the Tail Section in particular—to components of arbitrary mathematical expression. This dehumanisation is not simply a consequence of the artificially sustained class-hierarchy: it is its primary motivation. Bauman proposes that the production of "human waste" or excessive and redundant population is "an inescapable side-effect of order-building" (2004, 5), and this is precisely the status of the un-ticketed Tail Section who, in the infrastructural logic of the *Ark,* are a stateless surplus living in a perpetual state of exception. The Tail Section are isolated from the ticketed population and forced to live in a state of abject precarity in every iteration of the *Snowpiercer* story. The threat that the Tail Section will be uncoupled and abandoned is a recurring source of tension in the

graphic novels and TV series. While this threat is not expressed in the film, it remains that a defining characteristic of the Tail Section is the false claim that they are not of the *Ark,* and therefore belong in the Outside. This uneven hierarchy allows the Front Section to indiscriminately appropriate labour from the pool of captive "Freeloaders" (00:18:17). The film establishes this dynamic from the outset, with the soldiers brutally acquiring an experienced violinist from the ranks of the Tail Section. Gerald (Robert Russel) and Doris (Magda Weigertová), two violinists who volunteer as husband and wife, are violently separated by a soldier (Peter Hallin). After one soldier asks to see their hands, Gerald (with the larger pair of hands) is instructed to follow. When he puts an arm around Doris and asks "Not both?", the soldier turns to him, confused, replying, "Yes, both hands" (Bong, 00:05:47—00:05:50). The soldier's confusion is a result of the ideological apparatus that sustains the stratified social classes. His snap decision to break Doris' hand in the ensuing melee speaks to the Front Section's cruelty, but it also communicates the extent of the Tail section's purported redundancy, as despite the ongoing rationing he is free to injure and destroy any resource in excess of his current quota. His dehumanising exchange with the couple is not simply cruel, but indicative of a Weird inability to conceive of them as any more than their labour-power and mechanical function. To those in the front of the train—and despite their critical role in the continuity of the vessel's progress and ecosystem—the Tail Section are analogous to Lovecraft's shoggoth, a reviled and abused mass of living infrastructure.

The casual violence inflicted on Gerald and Doris is so vital to the train's system of ideological containment that it has been factored into the material infrastructure of the *Rattling Ark*. Mason orchestrates the punitive dismemberment of Andrew (Ewen Bremner) as a public spectacle to demonstrate "the dissymmetry between the subject who has dared to violate the law and the all-powerful sovereign" (Foucault 1975, 49). Andrew is stripped to the waist by his captors, who lock his arm into a purpose-built aperture in the carriage wall (Fig 6). The exposed limb is held in the frozen exterior until it is completely solid, at which point it is brought back into the train and smashed with an enormous hammer. Andrew's ordeal demonstrates the coeval vulnerability of his body to the authority of the Front Section and the *Ark's* inimical exterior. However, the scene is suffused with an underlying Weirdness that undercuts the certainty of these material

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conditions. The brief shots of his lone arm protruding from the windowless carriage present a body that has been Weirdly divided into its component parts, and fundamentally altered by its exposure to the literal Outside. The now alien reality of the external world is emphasised by the contrast between the icy-blue colour grading of the exterior shots and the warmer, if steely-cold, palette of the Tail Section interior (Fig 7). But the camera perspective shifts freely between these incompatible realities, and the expositional function of Mason's dialogue in this scene is predicated on the viewer's externality—while the scene establishes justification for the Tail Section rebellion, the audience recognise the familiar from the Outside. This Weirdness is compounded by the dilation of narrative time, as officer Fuyu (Steve Park) instructs the guards that it will take seven minutes for Andrew to fully freeze. A stopwatch in the shape of carriage clock is slung around Andrew's neck to illustrate the fast action of the freezing climate, but this prop calls attention to a significant discrepancy in the flow of diegetic time (Fig 8). Despite the contiguity and ostensible naturalism of the scene's performance, the seven minutes dialled into the clock elapse in only four (00:00:16—00:00:20), undermining the reliability of the Front Section's tallying imperative.

Mason's efforts to present the class hierarchy as a naturalistic outcome of some immutable physical law are transparently foolish, but the scene's ties to the Weird further subvert the trajectory of her argument. In an earlier part of her speech to the Tail Section, Mason brandishes the shoe that Andrew used to strike Claude, eventually balancing it on his head:

> Passengers, this is not a shoe. This is disorder. This is size-ten chaos. This—see this—this is death. In this locomotive that we call home there is one thing that's between our warm hearts and the bitter cold. Clothing? Shields? No. Order. [...] Would you wear a shoe on your head? Of course you wouldn't wear a shoe on your head! A shoe doesn't belong on your head! A shoe, belongs on your foot. A hat belongs on your head. I am a hat, you are a shoe. I belong on the head, you belong on the foot. Yes? So it is. (Bong, 00:16:59—00:18:10)

Figure. 6. Bracket to the outside (00:16:04).

Figure. 6. Train exterior, and Andrew's arm, freezing (00:16:22; brightened)

Figure. 8. Screenshot of Andrew, interior (00:16:20; brightened).

Using Andrew's body as a grotesque prop, Mason tries to rhetorically bind the *Ark*'s social order to its material function. She proposes the *Ark*'s social order as the only barrier between survival and bodily annihilation, but as previously discussed, there is a disconnect between the *Ark*'s energy infrastructure and mode of production. Mason argues that Andrew's violation of the social hierarchy is unacceptable not because it challenges the authority of the Front Section, but because a disruption to this order threatens the lives of everyone aboard the train. Mason nestles the shoe into Andrew's hair to semiotically place the crime on the head of the perpetrator. As the knife in Foucault's description of the execution of Robert-Francois Damien, the weapon is tied to the body of the criminal to establish a chain of cause and effect, and to visually reinforce front section sovereignty over the body of the accused (Foucault 1975, 44-5). Yet the shoe is such an incongruous weapon, that it instead highlights the disproportionate scale of the Front Section's response. However, the Weirdest and most illuminating contradiction in Andrew's dismemberment, is his literal integration into the body of the train. Mason's effort to present him sliding partially outside of the Engine's prescribed order, accidentally literalises the Tail Section's enmeshment with the *Ark*'s material infrastructure. Whenever Mason says the words "preordained, par-tic-u-lar position", she performs an unusual gesture, extending the shoe, rotating it, and returning it to her body (fig 9). After balancing the shoe on Andrew's head, she repeats the gesture with her bare hand. In a sense this mechanical gesture tries to emphasise the smooth operation of the *Ark*'s social order. But it also unintentionally signals a vital contradiction in the train's current reality: unlike Andrew, Mason has the capacity to use her arm freely. Despite her authority and Andrew's abject position, he is literally a part of the train. Despite their comparative comfort and freedom, Mason and the Front Section are just as bound by the *Ark*'s scheme of ideological containment, and while this comes

with an enormous material cost, Andrew's particular position is far more essential to the *Ark* than Mason's.

The scene in the classroom carriage illustrates how the irrational social conditions are ideologically reproduced in the Front Section. Here, Curtis, the revolutionaries and Mason—now their hostage—encounter Teacher (Alison Pill), a pregnant woman who watches over a group of train babies (Bong, 00:40:27)[10], her lesson alternating between brief lectures and unnerving call-and-response exercises that comment on the history of the *Ark* and its creator. When Teacher leads the children in a song praising the Engine, a rare and dizzying downward-angled shot tracks her face as she sings and plays organ from atop a revolving platform. This shot is interspersed with glimpses of singing children and reaction shots of Curtis, who looks on in bewilderment and growing disgust. In these reaction shots, the out-of-focus face of Minister Mason slowly encroaches from the right of screen, her face finally obscuring Curtis as she sings along enthusiastically. At the song's conclusion she turns to cheer, saying "I love that one, such a tonic" (01:10:12-01:10:39). Mason's behaviour makes it increasingly clear that the Front Section's veneration of the Engine is more than a political expedience, it is an earnestly held foundation of their ideology. Both Teacher and Mason exude an effusive passion for the *Ark* and the logic of its continued process; Mason's celebration is so eager that, in a visual parallel of the suppressed dissent and suffering of the Tail Section, she physically obscures the observing revolutionaries.

The circular tracking movement of the camera in this classroom scene emulates

Figure. 7. Mason gesturing with Andrew's shoe (00:17:43—00:17:46; brightened).

the circular path of the train, while emphasising the exuberant and circular logic of its ruling class. This motion also sets up a contrast and rhetorical counterpoint with the

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[10] "Train baby" is the diegetic term used to describe people who were born aboard the *Rattling Ark*.

ensuing shots, that laterally pan over the bodies of seven frozen escapees from an earlier, failed revolution (01:11:32). The teacher quickly incorporates the passing corpses into the lesson, and leads the children in call and response task, where the group participate in a collective hand motion that simultaneously evokes the impression of a Roman salute, and Mason's earlier manipulation of the shoe (fig 10):

TEACHER

(excited)

So, everyone! If we ever go outside the train?

CHILDREN

We'd freeze and die!

TEACHER

If the engine stops running?

CHILDREN

We'd all die! (Bong 2011, 70)

TEACHER

Who takes care of the Sacred Engine?

CHILDREN

Mr. Wilford! (Bong 2011, 70).

Figure. 8. Teacher and schoolchildren. (01:12:01-01:12:02).

The children's practiced response shows that the curriculum routinely works to embed the existential necessity of their social conditions as an axiomatic truth. With the repeating hand gesture pulling their gaze from the inside to the outside of the train, the children, like the Tail section, are made to associate the outside of the train with ice and death. Where modes of linear thought enter the lesson plan, they are ideologically

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incompatible with the passage of the *Ark*. For the children, song and celebration are tied to moving in circles, while movement outside the walls of the train is impossible. This ideological elimination of political alternatives is a similar scheme to the Thatcherite case for neoliberalism (Harvey 2007, 40; Fisher 2010). Indeed, the assumption of perpetual and self-sustaining progress is a foundational principle of the train's construction, and through this the *Ark* spatialises the imperialist logic of neoliberal capital. The train, like neoliberalism, offers no alternative. It simply circles endlessly, the lack of real progress appearing Weird due to the illusion of forward motion.

This dialectic of the linear and cyclical is an inversion of the pattern that characterised the oil texts discussed in chapter one, where formal circularity was typically the result of world-ecological reality buckling the neoliberal narrative of ceaseless progress and growth. This contradiction is Weirdly unpicked however, by the contents of the Teacher's infographic biography of the *Ark*'s billionaire engineer and operator, Mr. Wilford. The video briefly displays a world-map (Fig. 11) and circular calendar (Fig. 12) that show the A*rk*'s annual route. The map in figure 11 shows that the *Ark*'s railroad spans much of the contemporary world map, though the infographic replaces familiar placenames with flags sporting a range of dates significant to the American calendar. Japan is marked with Thanksgiving, US presidential birthdays are in the Middle East and Scandinavia, and Independence and Labour Day are in the US and Canada respectively. The infographic then transposes these dates to the face of the calendar clock in figure 12, confirming with the narration that the train travels on "a circular railway that extends 438,000 kilometres, and completes one circle every year" (Bong, 1:09:10-1:09:18). This expository presentation boasts the technical function and capacity of the engine, but it also allows a great deal to be inferred about the ideological apparatus behind the vessel's construction and operation. The conceit of the train operating as a vast clock gestures to the historical reality of the industrial revolution and the ebullient cultural aesthetic that came with steam and coal power.

Buell describes the early phase of coal-capital as a period of technocratic exuberance, motivated by the surge of ecological surplus generated by carbon fuel. As noted in this chapter's introduction, Locomotives seemed to promise "open-ended progress", quickly replacing "clocks as the paradigm of machinery" (279). Incidentally,

Figure. 11. Bong. Infographic Map the *Rattling Ark's* annual cycle. (01:09:14)

Figure. 12. Bong. Calendar of the *Rattling Ark's* annual cycle. (01:09:19).

rail became the primary driver behind the standardisation of local mean time. While accurate timetabling proved essential to safe and efficient operation of the expanding rail networks (Science Museum, 2018), the driving force behind this universal scheme of timekeeping was rail's offer of a significant leap in the smooth operation of capital over an expanded geographical scale. As Moore says, "Capitalism as a planetary system became possible through the production of a globe-encircling railroad and steamship network" (Moore 2015, 137), and this infrastructural network facilitated unprecedented

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smoothness in the phasal transformation of value between commodity, labour and money form. In the *Snowpiercer* infographic, a youthful Wilford (Tyler John Williams) encapsulates the fantasy this systemic upheaval embedded in the capitalist imagination, stating: "When I grow up, I'm going to live on a train—forever" (Bong, 1:08:50 -54). The *Rattling Ark*'s quixotic mimicry of an enormous timepiece stems from this desire to seize and perpetuate the progress promised by rail infrastructure. The train is engineering for engineering's sake, a monument to the "techno-sublime" (Macdonald 2014, N. Pag.) and the imagined primacy of man over an imaginary externalised "Nature" (Moore 2018, 84). The formal folding of time and space is a characterising trope of the Weird, though the spatiotemporal satire of *Snowpiercer*'s *Rattling Ark* poses an interesting subversion of the typical Lovecraftian schema. The film inverts the dynamic where an encroaching outside threatens the imaginary idealised past. Instead, the film's antagonist works to infrastructurally reproduce the imagined social conditions that stemmed from an instance of historically specific ecological surplus, so the aesthetic and affect of this period can be perpetuated into an ideologically narrow future. As a result, cyclicality is Weirdly distorted in Snowpiercer, the expanding loop of world-ecological process is tightened and closed into a circle, where the aesthetic of linearity can be held at great human and ecological cost.

For all its Weirdness, the film here registers a congruent pattern in capitalist world-history. To quote Manu Karuka: "Imperialists across the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Australia built railroads as infrastructures of reaction, as attempts to control the future" (Kanuka 2019, 172). While the impact of coal-capital was world-systemic in scope, the cultural context of the dates listed in figures 11 and 12 point to America, where the construction of the transcontinental railway resulted in a distinctly explosive infrastructural expansion. Starting from a rail network that exceeded the scale of Britain's by a factor of two, "American railroads grew nearly eightfold between 1845 and 1860" (Moore 2015, 135). The transposition of the American calendar onto the Asian World map ties Wilford's project to these systemic, world-historical stakes, and marks the *Ark* as an extension of colonial history rather than the product of a singularly evil

individual.[11] The *Rattling Ark* becomes thematically bound to the imperial logic that facilitated the violent capture of Indigenous territory in the US, streamlining the movement of soldiers and settlers into the extractive frontier. Karuka's description of this process helps to untangle the formal consequences of this binding:

> The capture and transformation of putatively free land into a space of liberal imperialist freedoms occurs through infrastructure. [...] Ostensibly created in order to serve and protect colonizers from Indigenous people, the infrastructure of war and occupation actually establishes preconditions for settlement. [...] The transcontinental railroad constituted a core infrastructure of continental imperialism. (2019, 173)

The *Ark's* spread across the frozen world-map is the imperialist impetus of the transcontinental railroad taken to its logical end—the Frontier presses endlessly on until space is completely colonised, leaving time as the only possible dimension for further expansion. For Karuka, there is an obvious gap between the ostensible motivation and the actual function of infrastructural development, a world-historical dynamic that *Snowpiercer* registers in the disconnect between the Front Section's presentation, and execution, of the *Ark's* technical function. The infographic proposes a foundational allegory of the *Rattling Ark,* but its efforts to celebrate the train are contradictory in their simultaneous expression and suppression of the colonial underpinnings of the rail boom. In both world-history and the counterfactual history of *Snowpiercer,* rail infrastructure is constructed in pursuit of surplus, progress and growth, while its contingent role as infrastructural apparatus of injustice, exploitation and violent hierarchy is suppressed. The train circulates these exploitative conditions round and round the same space. As it pushes through the otherwise exhausted world-ecology its forward motion remains constant despite the inevitable degradation of its components. One of the Weirdest characteristics of *Snowpiercer* is the affective dissonance created by this situation. While the scenario appears hyperbolically, even laughably cruel on

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[11] As Bong stresses in a press interview with Charlie Jane Anders, it is "not humans per se, but capitalism that's destroying the environment" (2014).

film, it poses a concerningly accurate reflection of the structures of the world-ecology under neoliberal hegemony.

One of the film's Weirdest, and rhetorically effective manoeuvres is to demonstrate how these infrastructural relations subvert revolutionary efforts by determining imaginative limits and folding the insurgent energy back into the cycle of ideological reproduction. In this sense, the Engine processes and recirculates revolutionary and kinetic energy in an identical fashion, Weirdly subverting the plot of the Tail Section rebellion. For example, the members of the Tail Section are motivated to rebel by Andrew's dismemberment. However, after seventeen years of life on the *Ark*, the conceptual apparatus of the passengers has been so determined by infrastructural conditions that they construct a train-like ram from waste barrels, which they drive up the *Ark* to wedge open the doors of the first few militarised carriages. Here, the rebellion reproduces the conditions of their own exploitation. The train-within-the-train draws its energy from the Tail Section's straining bodies (fig. 13). The rapid forward movement accomplished by repurposing mechanical infrastructure in the form of the stolen food trolley (fig. 14), and in a parallel of Wilford, Curtis sits at the head of the train and is propelled forward by the death and sweat of the Tail Section (fig. 15). Despite the apparent success of this initial foray, the Tail Section have unconsciously internalised and recreated the logic of technocratic salvation through locomotion, a locomotive imperative permeates the entire film, colonising the shot-to-shot and scene-to-scene editing. As the film's protagonist, Curtis is routinely framed according to this logic, with the right of frame being symbolically tied to the forward progress, the future and the front of the train, while the left of frame is associated with narrative regression, the past, and his ties to the tail section. For example, the moments before the revolution, when he is framed front-on between his two advisors, the older, more conservative Gilliam (John Hurt) behind him and to the left, while Edgar (Jamie Bell) the young and fervid revolutionary is foregrounded to the right of frame (fig 16). This locomotive syntax is developed over repeated instances of narrative tension and climactic decision-making, which Weirdly compromises the agency of the film's revolutionary subjects.

Figure. 93. The Tail Section struggling to lift the ram. (00:27:56; brightened)
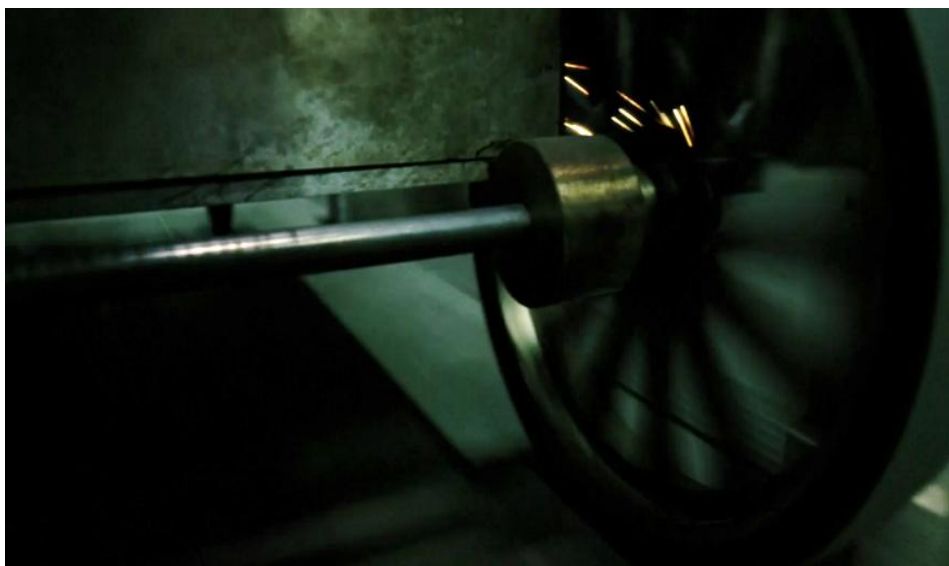

Figure. 14. The train-like wheels of the stolen food-cart. (00:28:09; brightened).

Figure. 15. Curtis on the prow of the ram. (00:28:08; brightened)

Figure. 106. Gilliam, Curtis and Edgar. (00:26:58; brightened)

This pattern is especially conspicuous in the many lateral-panning shots that capture Curtis in profile while he deliberates the next course of action: his decision to bet his own life in the revolution's opening gambit (00:27:33-00:27:34); his decision to sacrifice Edgar to capture Mason and end the battle in Yekatarina tunnel (00:53:20—00:53:25); and the decision to execute Mason, and fully take the mantle of leadership from Gilliam (01:14:30—01:15:35). The culmination of this motif, however, occurs in the room housing the Engine, as Wilford offers him stewardship of the Eternal Engine. Here, he discovers that his mentor, Gilliam, has been orchestrating the revolution in collaboration with Wilford:

> We don't have time for true natural selection, we would all be hideously overcrowded and starved waiting for that. The next best solution is to have individual units kill off other individual units. From time to time we've had to "stir the pot" so to speak (Bong, 01:39:16—01:39:38)

Wilford pot-stirring parallels the contradictory neoliberal practice of intervening to salvage failing financial institutions, despite the supposed naturalistic basis of the laissez-faire economy. It further evidences the disparity between the *Ark*'s engineered social system, and the ecological reality of the train's energetic infrastructure. The emotional upheaval of this scene is matched by a nauseating subversion of the shot-reverse-shot rhythm of his dialogue with Wilford. The camera, which had been framing Wilford and the Engine behind him, swings outward, revealing the panel that conceals the dial-phone that Wilford used to collaborate with Gilliam (01:41:08). Like the

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protagonists of the short stories in the previous chapter, Curtis discovers that his forward motion has paradoxically returned him to his point of origin, the panel hiding the phone even resembling the socket that was used to dismember Andrew. At this point, the train is an ouroboros in structure, plot, and image and its internal rhythm maintained through its containment of the revolutionary imagination.

When analysing the *Ark*'s energetic infrastructure, it is crucial to recall that the film's definitional nova does not simply resemble a Weird object or "inorganic demon" (Negarestani 2008, 223). It is one. When the Engine is eventually revealed, it fulfils its supernatural reputation. Aside from its elevated status in the frame, the technocratic sublimity of its cascading turbines bears no resemblance to the wheels and corroded steel seen elsewhere in the film. Instead, its movements emulate the formal logic that structures the film's narrative and infrastructural reality. Each component of the Engine Core slides in a smooth, forward-oriented cylinder. Each turbine revolves smoothly in its silo, guided by the rails that prevent it escaping its housing; the potential energy of each vast screw is caught and redirected by its neighbour, compelling successive revolutions of the Eternal Engine (01:45:15—01:45:45). Wilford's discussion of the engine is littered with personifying phrases that describe the engine as a living, gendered being. While touring the engine, he says "She's waking up now", informs Curtis that "You are now in her heart" and anticipates that he will need an heir to "keep her humming" (01:45:50, 01:45:51, 01:48:03). While vehicles are commonly affectionately personified, the Engine exhibits a Weird, non-human form of consciousness. Like the Mother in *Le Transperceneige,* the Engine responds to stimulus, surging the power in fright when Claude discharges a gun in the engine room (01:51:58-01:52:04), whirring to life as Wilford approaches with Curtis (01:45:17), and beginning an automated reactor check when Curtis interferes with the mechanism concealed beneath the floor (01:52:30). Beyond her Weird ability to perceive and respond, the Engine is also able to exert a Weird pressure on the minds of its passengers.[12] When Curtis stares into the Engine Core after learning of Gilliam's

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[12] Bong and Masterson's screenplay often specifies the appearance of characters' eyes. Yona's are "strange and dreamy" (18), Frano the Elder's are "Cold and Vacant" (54), while Curtis' are typically "ablaze" (20) or "focused with determination and rage" (104). When Curtis stares into the Engine Core, which itself resembles an enormous silver eye, his customary fury fades, until the stage directions state

betrayal he falls to his knees, overwhelmed by the Weird shearing of his understanding of the *Ark*'s social and material reality, but also the tremendous psychic pressure of the Sacred Engine. In this respect, the engine again expresses a Weird subjectivity that subordinates the subjectivities of its human passengers.

Against this pattern of subjugating human subjectivity to Weird infrastructural agency the film has an ethical preoccupation with how the characters and factions treat the train babies. In the classroom carriage for example, the children's paper masks offer an uneasy indictment of the Front Section leaders, as they bear a distressing similarity to the eyeless masks worn by the soldiers in a previous carriage. The obvious inference is that the Front Section are raising their children to reproduce the violent fascism of the previous scene. Egg-head's (Tómas Lemarquis) delivery of the New Year eggs compounds this subtext, as the eggs—celebrating fertility and the start of a new cycle of life—are used to conceal firearms that cause the film to explode into another burst of sudden violence. The phallic silhouette of the egg cart and basket, combines with the jarring image of the children scattering behind the pregnant Teacher as she unloads a submachine gun into the revolutionaries, to illustrate that violence is an intrinsic part of the *Ark*'s process of social reproduction. Two of the revolutionaries, Andrew and Tanya (Octavia Spencer), invert this dynamic, fighting their way up the train to rescue their children from their Front Section captors. Similarly, Namgoong Minsu (Song Kang-Ho) works tirelessly to prevent his daughter Yona (Ko Ah-Sung) from experiencing or participating in the ubiquitous violence, even risking his life to wrestle a knife from her while he grapples with Franco the Elder (01:22:23). While the effort to save their children from the cycle of violence is sympathetic and laudable, it highlights some of the film's limitations in the areas of gender and women's labour specifically. Of Tanya, Lee and Manicastri note that her

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that: "His eyes, as he looks down on the *humans*, have turned into exact replicas of Wilford's. Curtis' bleak and cold eyes blink." (104; original emphasis). While the final film capitalises on Chris Evans' and Ed Harris' famously blue eyes, the hypnotic capacity of the Engine is left largely subtextual. The script's italicisation of *"humans"* is interesting however, as it Weirdly suggests that Curtis' time looking into the engine alters him, making him feel as though he falls Outside of the human category.

characterisation veers toward the stereotype of a "strong black woman" (as if Tanya's black female body were inherently more combat-ready than, say, Yona's Asian female body). Given the feminization of social reproduction, the film could have done more to highlight that women of color such as Tanya have performed and perform childbirth and childcare on behalf of racially and class privileged populations. (2018, 219)

In contrast, Minsu does not permit Yona any agency in their escape from the *Ark*. He does not allow her to defend herself nor aid the Tail section in combat, though she does manage to subvert his efforts by ambushing Claude, killing Franco the Younger (Adnan Haskovic), and shooting Franco the Elder (Vlad Ivanovic) while her father repels a horde of murderous Front Section ticketholders. In this manner, Yona resists the cycle of ideological reproduction and proves anomalously resistant to the *Ark's* ideological containment. As the revolution progresses up the *Ark,* Yona is consistently able to predict the contents of each carriage before the bulkhead is opened by her father. Young enough to be born on the train, Yona is so attuned to the rhythms of the *Ark* that she can perform a kind of infrastructural augury that grants her insight into the future, breaching the Weirdly stagnant time of the looping train and identifying the actual nature of the train's occluded material structure.

Yona's Weird sensitivity to the train allows her to rescue Curtis from the ego-breaking influence of the Engine Core. Having been offered the opportunity to take over as caretaker of the Engine, Curtis's decision-making process is staged in profile for a final time, though here, at the nose of the train, the montage ends with Curtis standing "to look at the back of the train for the very first time" (Bong 2012, 014545—015040; Bong 2012, 102). When Yona interrupts, Curtis initially pushes her away, but is snapped out of his stupor by her sudden expression of horror, followed by her scrabbling at the carriage floor. In the film's ultimate Weird turn, it emerges that the Front Section abducted Timmy (Marcanthonee Reis) and Andy (Karel Vesely) so that they could replace extinct machine parts as sections of the engine room begin to wear out. Together, Yona and Curtis find Timmy beneath the floor of the engine-room, acting as a part of the engine, repeating the hand motion that Mason used to mark the particular position of the tail-section. In a Weird literalisation, bodies and the *Ark*'s energy-

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infrastructural components are collapsed together. And in a stunningly transparent metaphor, the engineer walks over the bodies of suffering children which allow for the train to continue its forward progress. The *Ark* was built from Wilford's fortune and as such is bound to the previous state of capitalist relations. It is an enclave comprised of the congealed dead human labour, and increasingly, the bodies of the people who it should shelter. In the Weird upheaval of this revelation Curtis abandons the engine and finds his place in infrastructural relations by emulating Andrew, jamming the mechanism with his own arm so Timmy can be extracted from the machine. Canavan describes Curtis' narrative arc as:

> a familiar liberal drama about coming to terms with and moving past your own guilty complicity in the system—a process which, as if by baptismal magic, thereby makes you worthy to run the whole thing as if you had never been guilty or complicit in the first place, and, as a bonus, does not require you or the system to actually change. (18)

While the film often waxes on Curtis' worthiness as a leader, Canavan's reading does not account for the ways that this narrative interacts with the process of ideological reproduction. It does, however, helpfully identify that this guilt is bound up in his participation in the narrowed world-ecological system of the train. Protein block rations are the basis of the Tail Section's currency, they are first exchanged for Chronole (a potent hallucinogenic and industrial waste-product), and the Chronole is later exchanged for Minsu's aid, which in turn allows the Tail Section army to progress up the train. The nutritional content of the blocks is an obvious reflection on the relationship between labour and capital and is one of the earliest examples of conflation between bodies and infrastructure and the human cost of capital. Indeed, they parallel the initial cannibalistic chaos in the Tail Section, that was only alleviated through the trade of limbs for lives. Before meeting Wilford, Curtis tells Minsu that in the early days of the Tail Section he and other able-bodied men resorted to cannibalising the weak. Curtis murdered Edgar's mother and would have killed and eaten Edgar if Gilliam had not sacrificed his own arm to feed the hungry. Curtis claims he tried to contribute to the exchange of limbs but could not bring himself to sever his own arm. His guilt at his perceived failure is compounded by the hostage exchange in the Yekaterina tunnel,

where he again participated in the exchange of human lives. When Park is taken hostage, Mason decides that his life is not worth ending the violence, and so she permits his execution. When Edgar is taken hostage by Franco the Younger, Curtis is clearly pained by his dilemma, but he weighs Edgar's life against Mason's, and chooses to sacrifice him so she can be captured. Throughout the film, Curtis repeatedly emulates the Front Section's willingness to exchange the younger generation for material and political gains. In this context, Curtis' dismemberment is not a mark of the right to lead, but a break from this pattern of exploitation, and a rejection of Wilford's statement that without leadership, people "devour one another" (Bong, 01:48:59). It marks his participation in the collective suffering, his missing arm and the mantle of privileged leadership being the cost of rescuing the younger generation.

It is fitting, therefore, that the breach in the *Ark*'s ideological containment is a result of a breach in its physical integrity caused by the hallucinogenic Chronole. When Minsu is first encountered, Edgar assumes his addiction has destroyed his reason, exclaiming: "look at him man, he's gone: his eyes—he's fried his brain with that fucking shite" (00:30:58); and when Minsu describes his plan to disembark the train, Curtis echoes this sentiment. Minsu and Yona, are the only two passengers who consistently turn their heads towards the windows long enough to envision life outside of the arc. When handled properly, Chronole is the material incarnation of the labour power of the Tail Section, as well as the ability to imagine a space outside of the enclave, and its flammability is used to breach the ideological containment of the Rattling Ark— physically, and imaginatively. This breach proves too violent and too late an intervention. Even though Timmy and Yona can survive outside the ruined train without freezing, it is unlikely their lives will be long or happy considering the polar bear that greets them off the train; the once-endangered poster-animal for climate-change triumphing over humanity. Yona and Timmy's exodus poses an intervention in the artificial hierarchy, and an end to the reproduction of ideological containment, though the frontier that opens before them is now barren, devoid of infrastructure and stripped of resources due to the collapse of the ecological debt crisis.

2.2. Weird Rail: Ideological Containment, Dystopia and Infrastructural Augury in Dmitry Glukhovsky's *Metro 2033*

Like *Snowpiercer,* the *Metro Universe* is a collaborative multimedia project with numerous contributors developing a shared apocalyptic lifeworld around Dimitry Glukovsky's novel trilogy. The *Metro* series provides a significant and rail-bound World-literary counterpoint to *Snowpiercer's* depiction of infrastructural exodus and terminal crisis. Originally circulated online in 2002, *Metro 2033* (2005) became the first entry in the postapocalyptic series. Along with its two sequels, *Metro 2034* (2009) and *Metro 2035* (2015), *2033* has inspired thousands of print and web publications set in the same universe. Of these, the most well-known is 4A Games' *Metro* trilogy. The Ukrainian studio timed the debut of its videogame adaptation of *Metro 2033* to coincide with the international release of the first novel's English language edition in 2010, and expanded the franchise over the following decade with *Metro Last Light* (2013) and *Metro Exodus* (2019) (Radosz 2021, 157; Banerjee 2016, 71-2). Because of this combined international release, the peak of the franchise's cultural popularity aligned with the production and release of Bong's *Snowpiercer.* While *Metro* lacks a contemporary companion to Rochette and Lob's graphic novel of 1982, the structurally significant antecedent to *Metro* can be found in the works of Boris and Arkady Strugatsky. Glukhovsky's *Metro* borrows the concept of "Stalkers" from the Strugatsky brothers' 1971 novel, *Roadside Picnic,* and critics often note their shared ecocritical slant and subversive political rhetoric (Radosz 2021, 160-1), as well as their comparable anti-utopian sentiment (Schwartz 594-5). Anindita Banerjee highlights the novel's ties to Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker,* his 1978 adaptation of the *Roadside Picnic.*[13] Noting that Tarkovsky's film was retroactively cast as the "prophetic preconfiguration" (71) of the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, Banerjee reads these texts as "contaminated fiction," a category she uses to describe:

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[13]4A Games were founded by Andrew Prokhorov, Oles Shyshkovtsov, and Alexander Maximchuk, following the trio's departure from GSC Gameworld. There they had worked on *"S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl"* (2007), a first-person shooter that takes heavy inspiration from *Roadside Picnic* and *Stalker* alike.

the particular capacity of nuclear narratives and events to penetrate each other, enfold the future in the past, and thereby inform each other's interpretations and representations across the boundaries of genres, discourses and media. (71)

The patten described here recalls the formal collapse of temporal contiguity seen in *Snowpiercer.* While Banerjee's analysis of nuclear fiction persuasively identifies the formal traces of pollution and irradiation working across text and culture, this focus suppresses the transformative ways these texts process anxieties of energy transition. The very presence of the world-literary homology between *Snowpiercer* and *Metro* suggests a similar preoccupation with the sheer scale of nuclear energetic capacity, a dynamic that Weirds the carbon-logic running through both narratives. Indeed, the epochal crisis that structures the social reality of *Metro 2033* is global nuclear war—an energetic eruption analogous to the kind of technological revolution and surplus represented by the Eternal Engine of the *Rattling Ark*. In *Metro,* however, the ensuing set of social dynamics bypasses the techno-sublime exuberance of *Snowpiercer* in favour of a more pessimistic affect and aesthetic.

The world of *Metro 2033* is awash with mutants, eerie intelligences, cults, amorphous monsters, and many other trappings of mainstream Weird fiction. Despite this, when discussing the supernatural elements of the metro, scholars often take a limited view of its function, reading it exclusively in terms of national allegory, or as a device that affords subterranean symbolism (Kozak 2013; Banerjee 2016; Schwartz, 2016). This occludes the complex interaction between the infrastructural underpinning of the text and the formal deformations that characterise the text as Weird fiction. The Weirdness of *Metro 2033*'s infrastructural reality has crucial practical implications for critical readings that understand "the fictionalized metro as an architectural allegory of the dissolution of Soviet state power" (Banerjee 72). A Weirded reading simultaneously locates the work within a wider system of texts bound to the incipient collapse of world-ecological relations and identifies formal resistance in a text that has typically been read as a straightforward parody or reflection. For example, Matthias Schwarz has cited the novel as an example of the wave of anti-utopian fiction that coincided with Vladimir Putin's establishment of a more potent authoritarian state in the 2000's, a

"pseudopoliticization of prose" that preceded the annexation of Crimea in 2014 (59-2). He argues that the novel strives to combat the collective subordination of Russian citizens to a simulated reality or "matrix" (591) of authoritarian political dynamics and sees the novel's movement underground as an archaeological exploration of Russia's traumatic national past, which is then compromised by its anti-utopian character. While Schwartz argues that the text adheres to a regressive military fantasy that tends to "downplay and legitimate the actual political situation" (603), he goes on to concede that the narrative instead contributes "to a new way of imagining precarious subjectivity and individual behaviour beyond disciplinary power, state control, and governmental politics" (591-592). Schwarz's analysis is nuanced, and highlights much of the text's problematic reactionary subtext, but it fails to account for the formal mechanism behind this imaginative capacity—which is surprising, given his invocation of Lana and Lilly Wachowskis' *Matrix* (1999). Instead, Schwarz characterises the narrative as a process of Artyom, the protagonist, realising that he is "not on the good side, but rather the bad" (602). By framing the narrative in this fashion, Schwarz presents the story's outcome as a substitute for the process of narrative relation and development, which ironically occludes the text with an incomplete summary of itself. Like *Snowpiercer, Metro* is interested in the social construction and dissolution of ideological containment, but as with *Snowpiercer*, *Metro* pushes on the idea that infrastructures "generate the ambient environment of everyday life" (Larkin 328), and presents a social complex shaped by residual transit infrastructure. The protagonist's realisation of their political position within the broader relations of the novel's lifeworld is, crucially, brought about by a prolonged and abrasive exposure to this Weird infrastructure and its incongruities with the new state of social relations brought about by terminal world-systemic crisis.

Metro 2033's infrastructural focus is tied to a longer tradition of subway narratives in Russian literature. Krystyna Radosz describes how the construction of the Moscow metro in the 1930s precipitated a wave of urban legends over the following decades, but it was not until the final days of the Soviet Union that the exuberant state-narratives were fully supplanted by the most politically incriminating folktales (164). Radosz describes how in the 1980s, amateur urban explorers like Vladimir Gonik would

covertly critique the collapsing soviet government by detailing the once-classified human cost of the metro's construction in fictional narratives (Radosz 164-5). On the legacy of Gonik's 1992 novel *The Hell*, Radosz writes that: "the Moscow Metro has become an object not only of admiration but also of fear. It symbolised the threat posed to society by interfering with the underworld" (166). Here, the underworld is an ideological substrate expressed in spatial, chthonian terms. *Metro 2033* repeatedly pressures and develops this literary convention by drawing much of its narrative tension from the process of transition between the underground and the surface—a transition that is not only spatial, but ontological. Those who survived the nuclear war have been forced to seek refuge in the *Metro*'s covered stations and have separated into conflicting ideological factions that are divided in accordance with the architecture of the overall structure. The Hanseatic League of merchant stations forms a ring that is bisected and power-checked by the Stalinist Red Line, which itself is broken by the capital Polis, while independent and criminal stations like the fascist Fourth Reich fill the remaining terminals (fig 17). The unifying ideology of each station in the new Moscow is their foundational goal to endure and survive in defiance of one another, resource scarcity, and the Weird entities that haunt the tunnels and the surface. While the apocalyptic metro constitutes a vast simplification of world-systemic dynamics, it retains specific structural analogues to the neoliberal hegemony of the early 21st century, as Darwinist and oppositional social relations, engineered and widespread precarity, and propagandistic narratives of external threat sustain a small and privileged ruling class (Glukhovsky 2016, ch. 20). A new semi-stable social complex has developed below ground, displacing and integrating into the historic "underworld" (Radosz 166), though despite this new equilibrium, *Metro's* underworld remains haunted by state and systemic violence, as well as newer, supernatural threats. The abandoned surface is the new and expanded space of existential threat and ideological breach, and the few spaces with social relations that resemble the pre-apocalypse are in a state of precarity. The human colonisation of the underground is fundamental to the text's Weirdness, as it recalls Fisher's notion that "The Weird grants vision of the inside from the perspective of the outside" (Fisher 10). The interpenetrative logic of nuclear fiction sees the spaces folded into one another, so that the familiar is only ever accessible through the radically Weird.

Figure. 11. Map and Key of the Metro 2033 underground, edited to show the trajectory of Artyom's journey. The pink line indicates Artyom's movements. Entrance and exit points are marked in yellow. The teal line marks the speculative trajectory of a section of Metro 2. (u/InfamousScribbler 2023).

As seen with *Cyclonopedia,* however, this Weirdness has proven critically challenging. For example, Radosz's otherwise persuasive analysis struggles to account for *Metro 2033's* preference for circular time over the linear, and borrows from Mariya Galina to argue that together, the novel's chthonic descent and circularity indicate a desire to retreat from the "uncertainty of real life" into "the vicious circle of repetitive history", thereby sacrificing freedom and solitude in favour of a known but "expectable existence" (171). Galina's line of argument is limited by its neoliberal historicity, and makes a number of assumptions that Radosz leaves untouched: that "real life" is separate or has somehow transcended the process of history; that the form of "real life" is more linear than the "circle of repetitive history"; that freedom and solitude are universal consequences of the triumphant "real" and that the process of circular history could plausibly be understood as known and "expectable" from the inside. Radosz's thorough explication of *Metro's* indebtedness to Russian literary tradition is complicated by this inadvertent separation of literature from systemic process—which is particularly unfortunate considering the material's proximity to the collapse of the USSR and the ensuing neoliberal ideological hegemony.

The difficulty here stems, in part, from the project of navigating *Metro's* apocalypse through the frame of the Anthropocene, as Radosz's advocates for a "different perspective on Earth than the anthropocentric one" (158). Radosz's desire for a non-anthropocentric perspective on ecological relations is potentially productive, though the absence of a materialist foundation leads to a repeat of the problems encountered under object-oriented ontology. Faced with the existential threat that capital poses to humanity and the stable biosphere, it seeks refuge in an imagined Outside, avoiding the necessary and urgent critique of human activity and systemic relations. Moreover, this overlooks the generative critical potential of a world-ecological perspective on apocalyptic literature. For example, while drawing on Moore's explanation of world-ecology, Westall's editorial on energetic materialism flags the rhetorical inadequacy of the Anthropocene hypothesis, noting its susceptibility to an unrefined and oppositional grasp of Society and Nature, and the term's limitations in the face of systemic crisis. Westall notes the Anthropocene's obfuscation of the uneven nature of world-systemic relations, and its tendency to offer "an undifferentiated mass

of *Anthropos* as eco-culprits, despite the minimal carbon footprint of the world's (semi-)peripheral populations" (2017, 266). She proposes that an energetic materialist perspective should consider the more nuanced proposition of the Capitalocene (266), a term that Moore defines as "the historical era shaped by relations privileging the endless accumulation of capital" (2015, 173). This offers a more robust framework for the political relations at stake in the *Metro Universe*, and it quantitively addresses the return to cyclicality posed by its narrative and aesthetic form.

Metro 2033 establishes the setting for the series, and with that, the franchise's interest in formal and historical cyclicality. For example, the narrative represents its inciting event in recollection, marking the text's formal preoccupation with reproduction and repetition from the outset. Here, Artyom recalls how he and his friends accidentally left the Metro exposed to the surface by failing to secure a hermetic gate during an above-ground excursion. Indeed, this diegetic recollection is itself concatenated with a metafictional recollection of *Metro*'s literary antecedents. The text emphasises this by modulating narrative temporality. Note that in the following quote, the ellipsis contains the description of a daydream that lasts for over a page:

> The path to the surface wasn't long, but their initial determination was evaporating after that first collapsed step; and in order to raise their spirits, they imagined themselves to be stalkers.
>
> Stalkers...
>
> The word, strange and foreign to the Russian language had caught on very well nonetheless.
>
> […]
>
> They imagined themselves in protective suits, with radiation damage monitors, with hulking machineguns at the ready, just as one would expect of real stalkers. But they had neither radiation monitors, nor protection, and instead of imposing army-issue machine-guns, they had only the ancient double-barrelled rifle, which, perhaps, didn't even shoot at all...

Before long their ascent was complete, and they found themselves almost on the surface. (Glukhovsky 2009, 30-31)

During the interpellation the boys imagine themselves as stalkers. Their aspiration to become elite agents of state-power helps to establish the ideological bounds of the Metro's cultural imagination. By doing so through an allusion to the Strugatsky brothers, the imaginative space of the text is expanded as *Roadside Picnic*'s "Zones" (2-5) are pulled into the fictional Moscow of *Metro 2033.* The passage of time is similarly distorted; as with Andrew's dismemberment in *Snowpiercer,* unsealing an infrastructural aperture to the hostile outside distorts the narrative temporality of the scene. The narrative duration of the journey along the escalator is significantly extended by the lengthy excursus on the reputation and equipment of the Metro's stalkers. The immobile escalator carries the characters' imagination beyond the ideological containment of their infrastructural reality, and this becomes the inciting incident for a cycle of formal echoes that reverberate through the text.

Through this pattern of formal repetition *Metro 2033* shares *Snowpiercer*'s topical and narrative interrogation of how temporal schema entwine with their underlying infrastructural systems. The narrative follows Artyom as he tries to carry an urgent message from *VDNKh* to *Polis*, carrying him from the furthermost inhabitable station of the *Kaluzhko-Rizhskaia* line to a network of stations below the Moscow State Library that form the Metro's largest city state. Like his first excursion to the surface, Artyom's journey is narratively elongated by the Weirded infrastructural space. Late in his journey, he finds the tunnel occluded by a mysterious slab of cold rusted metal. After careful manual inspection Artyom is surprised to discover that "the mysterious obstacle was a train" (246). The energetic capacity of the Metro is so drastically reduced that muscle is now the primary mode of locomotion, and accordingly, the apparatus of rapid transit has become strange and unrecognisable. The normal flows of time and distance associated with rail travel are so distorted that the mundane train and rail transform into Weird infrastructure. Its presence as an obstacle to Artyom's journey makes the spacetime of the Metro even Weirder. While traversing the line between *VDNKh* and *Rizhskaya* with a group of soldiers*,* Artyom's commander explains:

That's the main problem with the metro: there aren't any reliable communication lines. It isn't possible to get from one end to the other quickly. [...] Do you think the Metro system is all that big? Well, you can get from one end to the other in an hour by train. And it takes people weeks to do that now, and that's if they make it. (68)

The energetic limitations that stymie travel impose and exacerbate an equivalent set of limitations on the movement of information through the tunnels. With the intense declaration of information exchange, all knowledge of the contours of social and material conditions throughout the Metro destabilised. Artyom's odyssey through the Metro system demonstrates this reality, but it also reproduces the formal quirk seen in his first excursion to the surface. The threshold between the surface and the hidden underworld is strained by the transformation of the Metro's technical function, and the narrative elongation of Artyom's journey mirrors and emphasises this Weirding. The commander's explanation metafictionally establishes the novel's primary formal mechanism, as knowledge and narrative development come with the slow experience of new sights that gradually produce a fuller sense of the wider Metro. While the novel does conform to many of the formal characteristics of a typical bildungsroman, the ways that Artyom's infrastructural reality extensively and perspicuously deform distance and narrative time distinguish it from this more familiar literary convention.

Metro 2033's narrative trajectory complies with the established tendency of Weird infrastructural journeys to loop and turn back on themselves, as Artyom's arrival at Polis eventually returns him to VDNKh, and then to the surface beyond the unsealed hermetic door. This broad and meandering cycle is punctuated by smaller loops, as Artyom crosses his own path at Kitay-Gorod, and again during his excursion through the folkloric Metro-2, where he passes back beneath Kievskaya, Polis, the Kremlin and Pushkinskaya (fig 17). These loops layer the novel's imaginative spaces over one another, while the compression and elongation of narrative space exaggerates the Weird infrastructural twisting of the text's spacetime. For example, Artyom's second journey to the surface with the stalkers Daniel and Melnik also takes a looping trajectory; but while unfettered by the deteriorating Metro infrastructure it takes Artyom just a single night to travel a distance that took three weeks below ground (311-26) (fig

17). While on the surface Artyom has the second of three significant encounters with the Kremlin, each of which pose several further complications to the novel's narrative trajectory and its attendant temporality. In the first of these, Artyom hears that the Kremlin exerts a compulsive lure over anyone who beholds it. To learn more, he reads a history of the Soviet Union, which describes a counterfactual reality wherein the communist leadership had negotiated an accord with demon lords, who "took up residence in the giant ruby pentagrams on the Kremlin towers" (272). Immediately afterward, Artyom dreams of seeing these stars atop the Kremlin, and describes how they glitter with strange red light (274-5). Later, when he passes the Kremlin on the surface, he risks a brief glimpse that results in the following narratorial collapse:

> His mouth became dry and the blood began to pound in his temples.
> The star on the tower really did glitter.
> "Hey, Artyom! Artyom!" Someone shook his shoulder.
> A numb awareness came alive with difficulty. [...] He was sitting on the ground with his back against the granite base of the monument. (290)

In this instance, a section of Artyom's journey is excised, as the distance and time spent charging toward the Kremlin and being rescued by Daniel and Melnik vanish in the space between the full stop and the speech marks opening the next line. More than an acceleration, this lacuna suggests a formal eradication or displacement of space and time. The third person narration is so closely tied to Artyom's perspective that this unprecedented cessation of representation constitutes an annihilation of subjectivity. Ordinarily, when Artyom falls unconscious, the missing time is structured by dreams that the narration recounts in recollection. Here, the conventional pattern is completely subverted as it vanishes into the paragraph break that follows a full stop.

The Kremlin's hypnotic capacity has a diegetic source that is structurally significant for the formal composition of the narrative. Carrying forward the theme of hidden infrastructure space, Artyom and the forces from *Polis* later access the palace's sub-basement through the legendary and fictional Metro-2. Here, they encounter an

amorphous monster as it ascends yet another broken elevator to trap and consume them:

> He saw something dirty, brown, oily, overflowing and unambiguously alive oozing through the slits between the steps. The arch was like a monstrous jaw to Artyom, the domes of the escalator tunnel a throat, and the steps themselves, the greedy tongue of a terrible ancient god awakened by strangers. And then it was as if a hand touched his consciousness, stroking it. And his head emptied, as in the tunnel. (409-10)

In the mode of the shoggoth, the Thing or the Mother, the entity beneath the Kremlin is a shapeless biological mass that threatens the ideological integrity of the characters' reality. The product of a bioweapon dropped on the Kremlin, the "doodlebug" (407) is an intelligent organic slurry comprised of the bodies of those it consumes and incorporates. Like Lovecraft's Shoggoth, the doodlebug is aesthetically entwined with infrastructure space through simile. But unlike Lovecraft's explorers, Artyom and the stalkers find the creature on an actual station platform, the arch and steps of the escalator appearing as the corporeal extension of the slime's consuming surface. While the Thing destroys the social bonds between its victims, and the Mother is smoothly incorporated into the ideological containment scheme of its infrastructural reality, the doodlebug annihilates the fundamental ideological premise of the post-apocalyptic Metro system by psychically replacing the Muscovite's will to survive with an insidious death drive. Ulman, the stalker, explains its name and supernatural mode of hunting through a spatial metaphor, comparing the creature to antlion larvae that snare prey from the bottom of a sand funnel that they dig and collapse (407). Through this description the doodlebug unifies the text's spatial, infrastructural and ideological dynamics: its representational significance bends *Metro*'s narrative reality as mass bends space time, and its victims are pulled into the ensuing vortex. Its lair is below the epicentre of the civilisation-ending attack. Infrastructure space, human bodies and thought collapse in its presence, presenting a ruinous terminus to the ideological containment of the crumbling Metro system.

Yet the doodlebug's presence constitutes more than the diegetic threat of an ontological orifice, as details of its form and the pressure it exerts on the narrative-reality present a blunt political invective toward the Russian administration. The creature's explosive genesis is tied to its other namesake, namely the buzzing V-1 rockets used by Germany in WWII (Zaloga 2005, 3). Spawned by a violent and epoch-ending explosion, in the then-future of 2013 (Glukhovsky 2005, 5), the monster's form mirrors the petroleum that defined this previous era of energetic production. Its Weird infrastructural antlion-pit recalls the swirling pool of Jinn that Suweyleh imagined beneath the Wadi in *Cities of Salt* (Munif 1984, 161), and, like the oil well, the doodlebug's event-horizon reflects the spiral form of world-ecological process. Accordingly, the creature bears an obvious similarity to crude oil, though in a dazzlingly indelicate metaphor, its zombie body is not made of zooplankton, but a slurry of the liquefied Russian administration. If the shoggoth is the labour of the Old Ones' fallen city, the doodlebug is the faceless and hungry oligarchy beneath the Kremlin. Its appellative allusion to Nazi weaponry is particularly significant considering the defensive strategy stalkers resort to. They fight the creature by reasserting the ideological containment structures that it destroys, sheltering atop an immobile train carriage and singing the Soviet martial anthem *The Sacred War* (Alexandrov 1941) to focus their thoughts against its intellect-devouring powers. This scene poses a significant Weird counterpoint to Jameson's comments on "the culture of the western realist and modernist novel" with its "radical split between the private and the public, between the poetic and the political, between what we have come to think of as the domain of sexuality and the unconscious and that of the public world of classes" (1986, 70). Here, this decidedly Weird novel muddles the libidinal and the political; the Eros is pressured by an infrastructurally-bound expression of a zombie accumulating class, and the operational solution is the imagination and performance of a specific and mythological form of quasi-historical and archetypal masculinity. The result is a fragmentary and overlapping temporality that foregrounds and satirises the relationship between its constituent narratives. When Stalkers invoke the aesthetic of the historical Red Army against the encroaching monster, it symbolically collapses Nazi Germany and the contemporary Russian ruling class into a single entity, uniting both as adversaries of the Russian nation. The doodlebug's funnel operates as a temporal vortex to the

previous phase of petro-capital, that displaces and blends sections of historical and narrative time to critique Putin's administration, though its critique of the Russian administration is complicated and hollowed by the blob's retreat before the "blazing fuel" of an exploded flamethrower (Glukhovsky 2005, 414). Through the reproduction of a defensive nationalist ideology, the preapocalyptic leadership are posed as an external threat to the Russian people, rather than a systemic consequence of a combined and uneven world-historical process of development. Considering the explosive origin of the Metro's post-apocalypse, such a catastrophically exuberant expense of carbon fuel is an ironically accelerationist solution to the vortex it produces; but like the Tail Section of the *Rattling Ark,* the Stalkers inhabit a space of ideological containment that stymies and shapes their revolutionary capacity. When presented with a Weird and dangerous ideological frontier, both sets of characters immediately resort to familiar and counterproductive forms of resistance that are rooted in the infrastructural logic of their respective lifeworlds.

In keeping with the subway narrative tradition, Glukhovsky's *Metro* series stages and encodes its political commentary from the relative safety of a literary allegory, though the novel's critique of the Putin administration is complicated and inhibited by its mixed relationship with Russian imperial and nationalist rhetoric. For example, Artyom's encounter with the Khan insinuates a thematic investment with a more mystical and counter-cultural national allegory, which reaches back to the Mongol empire in the 13th century and the Golden Horde that ruled Russia until the 1480s. The historical legacy of Chinggis Khan in Russia is complicated by racial and religious politics.[14] Over time, the narrative of Chinggis' invasion and conquest has been cast as an infidel invasion against Orthodox Christianity (Biran 2007, 153), an enduring obstacle against Russian Westernisation, and a historical disaster to be leveraged as a political narrative during the Sino-Soviet conflicts of the 20th century (154). Mainstream political discourse in post-Soviet Russia maintains a racialised disdain for the Mongolian contribution to Russian history and identity and though Chinggis is viewed favourably

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[14] Like many English language sources that refer to the founder of the Mongol empire, the English edition of *Metro 2033* romanises the honorific as 'Genghis' and so quotes and textual references to Glukhovsky's character will reflect this translation accordingly. All references to the historical figure will instead use 'Chinggis', which is a more accurate romanisation of the Mongolian word.

among Mongolian, Turkic and Buddhist Minorities, many extreme-right Eurasianists view themselves as the Khan's "Spiritual Children" and "see Russia as a legitimate successor to Chinggis's empire that should continue his mission of uniting the Eurasian geopolitical space through further expansion under an autocratic leadership" (Biran 154-5). *Metro*'s Khan deviates from and interrogates these narratives. Claiming to be "the latest incarnation of Ghengis Khan" (Glukhovsky, 106), the character is ambiguously supernatural. In the time he spends with Artyom he displays an extraordinary comfort with navigating the Metro's hostile labyrinth; demonstrates an unrivalled capacity for rhetoric and persuasion; and beyond his self-reported reincarnation, he provides a variety of plausible (if extraordinary) explanations for the Weird phenomena that Artyom encounters. Claiming to have no memory of his life as Chinggis Khan, the only further qualification he provides is brief trepidation at being associated with the author Genghis Aitmatov (106). As such, the character's relation to popular narratives of the historical figure is significantly obscure, though his fleeting role as a mentor to Artyom proposes a sympathy for an equivocally Russian, pre-modern wisdom. Nevertheless, his temporal ambiguity and early comments on the subjectivity of time are a productive handle for the novel's sedimentary Weirding of world-history.

Khan argues for the notion of free, personal time which he distinguishes from the "tamed" infrastructural time that comes when people have "shackled it into pocket-watches and stop-watches" (108). With the darkness of the underground severing people from the diurnal cycles of the surface, the passage of time is arbitrary, with clocks and watches functioning mainly as a comforting tie to the previous phase of energetic production. Again, Artyom processes this temporal dynamic through spatial reasoning, and comes to understand personal time through residual linguistic conventions from familiar, but defunct infrastructure space. He notes that his subjective sense of left and right are different from the people who used to ride the subway trains, though he uses incongruously reverent language to explain himself to Khan, asking if it was true that the passengers would adopt the train drivers' perspective of "absolute right" and "absolute left" (109) even if they were sat in a chair perpendicular to the direction of travel. Khan's energetic explanation is significant here: "Explode your hours and you'll see how time will transform—it's very interesting. It

changes—you wont even recognise it" (108). The narrative carries Artyom through a series of vignettes that evoke spaces of historical significance, and where these spaces are notable for their Weird inconsistencies between world-history and the fictional reality of the text, many of these critical inconsistencies derive from the incongruity of their simultaneity. The existence of Khan is one such example, but Khan's Weirdness is heightened by his proximity to the contemporary Russian government, even in their amorphous, zombified state. The ongoing conflict between the Red Line and the 4th Reich restages the historical conflict between USSR and Nazi Germany, but also the enduring conflict between recrudescent Fascism and the political left, complete with their uneasy equilibrium with the neoliberal hegemony of the Hanseatic League who control the surrounding *Koltsevaya* line. Like the space on the surface, time was exploded by the war, Weirdly scattered and spatially redistributed as a new phase of world-ecological history unfolds.

Despite its diminished energetic capacity, *Metro*'s thematic and formal preoccupation with explosions and their consequences applies significant pressure to Banerjee's categorising proposal of "contaminated fiction" (71). As well as the interpenetrative form of nuclear radiation, the explosive scattering and reconfiguration of space and time is fundamental to the logic and structure of the text. The hypertextual relations of the series, such as its sanctioned sequels and interactive adaptations emphasise this quality. For example, the *Metro 2033* videogame sees Artyom's path split from the novel at *Turgenevskaya,* or more drastically, at the game's conclusion, which presents an alternative history of the character's journey to and from *Polis*. Crucially, the infrastructural forms of *Metro* are influenced by these explosive dynamics, but the fragments of narrative space and time still demonstrate Banerjee's contaminative logic through their mingling and consequent mutation. The Weird elements that stem from these colliding spaces mark the text's most significant systemic anxieties. The doodlebug inhabits the site of the first bomb which was dropped on Moscow, the failing blast doors were the infrastructural consequence of nuclear proliferation, and the wailing pipes that Artyom repeatedly encounters at the start of his journey are torn and wrecked by the reverberation of the nuclear explosions through the supernatural space of the underworld (Glukhovsky 2005, 79, 90, and 101).

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Khan explains that the sounds Artyom hears are the voices of the restless dead, asking "How many megatons and bevatons does it take to disperse the noosphere?" (110). Here, the numinous extradimensional spacetime of the afterlife has been shattered and blended into the ruins of the underground. The fear that no soul will ever find refuge from the new social reality registers many of the same systemic anxieties as *Snowpiercer*: that crisis is imminent, that it is terminal and existential, and that any ensuing social complex will be worse, inescapable, and permanent. Moreover, the destruction of the afterlife also Weirds the past, as everyone who has ever died is dragged back into the apocalyptic present. For Khan, the "Metro combines material life with the hypostases of the other world" (110), a similitude that corresponds to Blacklock's theory of higher spatial form in Weird fiction (2017). The metafictional elements of the series are a vital part of this hyperdimensional form, and they extend a further narratological frontier toward the reader. Artyom's periodic and partial recognition that he is a character in a fictional "plot" (256) draws attention to the artifice of the text, producing a Weird metafictional inference: the crisis that created the *Metro* lifeworld has killed billions, and every survivor will be miserable until death. When they die, their misery will continue, as will the renewed misery of everyone who has ever lived. Alternative and hypothetical versions of the survivors suffer the same fate, and through the third person narration, the focal observer of this higher and cross-dimensional crisis has acknowledged the existence of the text, and the assumed presence of the reader.

In contrast to the radical freedom and opportunity that ecological surplus ostensibly proposes, this explosive hyperdimensional form tightens the ideological containment apparatus of the Metro system by exploding even hypothetical alternatives. Yet, as with *Snowpiercer*, in *Metro 2033* escape from infrastructural containment is possible through strategic manipulation of waste material—not an industrial by-product like Chronole, but the funguses that form because of industrial and urban decay. Despite vivid dreams, Artyom boasts a Weird resilience to the mind-affecting dangers that plague the tunnels. On the first night of his journey, he dreams of a psychoactive drug manufactured from a system of mushrooms that permeates the totality of the metro. These dream mushrooms are "a new type of rational life on earth,

which may with time, replace humans", not independent beings, but "elements connected by neurons to the whole unit, spread across a whole metro of a gigantic fungus" (61). In this vision, Artyom subconsciously perceives the metro as a singular organism and recognises a fundamental homology between two ostensibly contrasting societies. The dream demonstrates Artyom's nascent and intuitive understanding of the egregore projected by the alien humanoids who are ostensibly invading *VDNKh*. Richard Boyechko has explained the racial context of the word "чёрные," which is translated as "dark ones" in the English edition of the novel (Randall 2009, 256). Boyechko clarifies that, when applied to people, the nominalised form of the adjective black is a slur that has historically been directed to the "Muslim population of humans from the Northern Caucasus", though it is also applied to people from central Asia, Indigenous and minority ethnic groups from other areas of Russia, and carries classist connotations tied to the increasing number of migrant workers immigrating to the Russian core (2023, 115-116). For Boyechko, the novel introduces a "double valence" by using "чёрные" to describe the alien creatures from the surface, while enforcers of the fascist Fourth Reich use the same word to describe humans that fall outside the narrow category of "white, male, and Russian-speaking" (116). He argues that the novel takes a critical stand against the racialised politics of anti-immigration rhetoric in "*fin-de-siècle* Russian culture as well as the post-9/11 world" (116), and reads this criticism as one of the novel's primary organising concerns:

> the fundamental logic of the novel emerges as that of the giant organism
> of the Moscow Metro as a body or organism protecting itself, via the work
> of its immune system composed of "сталкеры" like Hunter, from the
> threat of infection that "чёрные" and other "нелюди" represent. (111-2)

Boyechko deploys this logic of the Metro-as-organism as part of an immunological development on Hobbes' Leviathan, focusing on the stringent maintenance of borders as they appear between both the station-states and the underground and surface worlds. But there is an unplumbed Weirdness to this model, as the novel expresses this logic as an intensely biological simile. Beyond the function of "сталкеры" as macrophages, Artyom's fungal dreams, the howling souls of the restless dead, the squamous doodlebug and the pulsing, fleshy architecture of the dark ones' lair are

Weird markers of an unease at the cognitive incorporation of individual bodies into infrastructure space. Like the blobjectivity of Negarestani's *Cyclonopedia,* the reading of the metro as body registers the pervasive liberal anxiety that stems from the ideological separation of the individual subject and relational, systemic logic of the collective political sphere. This, and elements of the novel's later portrayal of the dark ones, inhibit *Metro*'s anti-racist and ecocritical intentions. For example, the ultimate presentation of the dark ones is as a naively benevolent and homogeneous collective who are easily eradicated by *Polis'* scavenged nuclear arsenal. Still, the dark ones' Weird fungal biology and hive-community combines with Boyacheko's reading of the *Metro* as organism to illustrate one of the narrative's critical dialectics. And *Metro 2033* expresses these foundational neoliberal anxieties around the social role of the individual and the collective, by slowly unfolding Artyom's subconscious understanding of how humans are materially entangled in the process of the Metro system, while juxtaposing this entanglement with the fleshy social relations of the dark ones.

This integration of human lives into the infrastructure of the Metro system is fundamental, and recognisable in the overall spatial and economic relations. At that, the labour and activities of Artyom's fellow Muscovites form just as much of the infrastructural reality as the non-functional rails and perilous tunnels. This equilibrium is facilitated by the universal commodity within the Metro, Kalshnikov cartridges. At the market at *Prospekt Mir,* Artyom reflects on this economic reality:

> One cartridge—one death. Someone's life removed. A hundred grammes of tea cost five human lives. A length of sausage? Very cheap if you please: just fifteen lives. A quality leather jacket, on sale today, is just twenty-five so you're saving five lives. The daily exchange at this market was equal in lives to the entire population of the metro. (*Glukhovsky* 98)

As with the flesh-trade in *Snowpiercer, Metro 2033* illustrates the intrinsic Weirdness of commodity fetishism by literalising the human cost that underpins the exchange. With cartridges underwriting every economic exchange in the Metro system, the evidence of the violent origins and maintenance of the social complex are ubiquitous. The use of cartridges as a universal commodity does complicate a comprehensive conception of

the social relations bound to commodity production and exchange. For example, Artyom's quip that a leather jacket saves five lives relies on the misconception that the spent cartridges are not recirculated, when the endless conflict between the various station-enclaves is precisely what sustains the Metro economy as the constant war parodies the competitive environment intrinsic to capitalist production. But the bullet currency does introduce an interruption in the action of violence by bifurcating the purpose of ammunition. As Marx writes, it is "only through exchange that products of labour acquire socially uniform objectivity as values distinct from sensuous objectivity as articles of utility" (1976, 176). Bullets could hypothetically be used exclusively for their exchange value, as they require the purchase or ownership of a gun to effectively fulfil their familiar utility. Furthermore, when loaded into a firearm, the economic cost of firing the weapon is even more obvious and apparent when bullets are the primary form of economic liquidity, rather than an expensive commodity. The videogame adaptations demonstrate this economic relationship in an interactive fashion, for example, in *Metro 2033* (2010) "Military Grade" bullets are the currency used to purchase and upgrade your weapons and equipment. Individual weapons use different kinds of ammunition, but your stock of Military Grade rounds can be expended as a last resort or as a critical extension to an urgently relevant weapon. While this system provides a limited demonstration of the cost-benefit analysis, the universal utility of Military Grade cartridges, the relative abundance of ammunition (especially on easier difficulty settings), and the low-stakes of a single-player videogame inhibit the analogy. But the cartridge-currency does emphasise the uneven relations of the Metro's social order, with an obvious inequality in access to violence between the rich and poor individuals and factions. It also presents a sharp counterpoint to *Snowpiercer*, where the exchange of nourishing protein blocks and explosive and hallucinogenic Chronole present an alternative mode of biopolitical exchange, with the film's exchange of limbs offering a closer corollary.

Even with the bullet currency's limited capacity to delay violence, it remains that violence is the default mode of social interaction in *Metro 2033*. Tension and conflict mediate all Artyom's encounters, even where the other party is peaceful, as with the dark ones, the fear of violent confrontation remains and acts as the primary motivator

for his journey. For most of the novel the dark ones are understood as an existential threat to humanity, as their attempts to communicate exert a psychic pressure that turns humans to despair—an ironic anxiety produced by their effort to break the ideological containment of the metro system. Artyom's journey eventually cycles back to the surface, where he assists in the launch of an unexploded nuclear warhead against the hive the dark ones have constructed the Moscow Botanical Gardens. From atop the Ostankino tower, Artyom can see that the Gardens have become host to "a large city like a gigantic life-giving organ, pulsing and quivering, [...] a living membrane entangled with veins" (Glukovsky 454) and, like Artyom's dream mushrooms, the inhabitants, share a single mind "inquisitive, living, but completely unlike the human mind" (456). Moments after the weapon's launch, a critical breakthrough allows Artyom to understand the benevolent dark ones. His return to the surface reverberates back through the novel, as he discovers that almost every Weird dream and vision was a result of their attempts to communicate and ally with humanity, so that the two cultures could unite and thrive on the surface together. This realisation, and the imminent explosion, produces yet another evaporative space and future, as at this moment of Weird anagnorisis the explosive possibility of novel social forms has already become impossible due to the missile that is already airborne.

In *Metro 2033,* it is the communal and collaborative will that renders the dark ones so fundamentally alien to the humans left clinging to the derelict infrastructure of their fallen society. The dark ones are a Weird reflection of the population of the Metro. As Artyom recognises, they too are physically integrated into a fleshy infrastructure network, literalising the balance of economic and martial relations that keeps the Metro in order. However, unlike the social complex of their "deaf and blind elder brothers" (457), the dark ones' social reality is based in collaboration and a subordination of the individual to the collective infrastructure of their wider society. This wilful integration into infrastructural space is anathematic to the denizens of the Metro, who exhibit a condescending and pre-discursive rejection of co-operation that the novel struggles to overcome. This mirrors the prevailing ideology of the *Rattling Ark* in *Snowpiercer* where the incorporation of bodies into infrastructure space is encoded as authoritarian and systemically enforced through violence and planned inequality. Yet the decision Curtis

makes in the engine room of the *Ark*—to wilfully insert himself into the grinding mechanism of the train—is what allows a break from the ideological containment structures of the train and its entrenched hierarchy (Bong, 01:52:00). In *Metro 2033,* Artyom accomplishes a homologous escape from his ideological constraints during the time he spends indentured to the Hanseatic League. With the collapse of the sewerage system at *Paveletskaya,* the Hansa have their labourers take the roll of a flush for the wealthier citizens, using a wheelbarrow and shovel to cart faeces from the toilets to a nearby shaft. The work is so intense and disgusting that Artyom's perspective on the infrastructural order of the Metro shifts entirely:

> He now viewed man as a clever machine for the decomposition of food and the production of shit, functioning almost without a hitch throughout a life without meaning, if by the word 'meaning' one has in mind some kind of ultimate goal. The meaning was in the process: to break down the most food possible convert it even faster, and eliminate it to dregs— everything that was left of smoking pork chops, juicy braised mushrooms, fluffy cakes—now rotten and contaminated. (Glukhovsky 227)

Here, Artyom begins to see individuals as single components in a wider metabolic process that subordinates "meaning" to the more fundamental process of converting fuel into waste. Like the children in the engine of *the Rattling Ark,* Artyom integrates into the waste-disposal system at *Paveletskaya*. The process begins to outweigh the individual goals of its constituent components, including the "ultimate goal" of his quest to *Polis*, the goal around which he has constructed most of his identity. Despite his disgust, Artyom's integration into the station's infrastructure space is what affords him the ability to escape. He coats himself head-to-toe in waste, until "He himself could feel that he was now so loathsome, so repulsive, that his aura would have to drive anyone away"; he then uses this ability to escape his servitude, walking away from his post and past his captors, whose "gazes passed over him without lingering" (228). For the citizens of the Hansa—the section of the Metro that most stridently clings to the capitalist system—integrating into infrastructure is dehumanising to the point of annihilation. This poses one of the fundamental contradictions of the Metro's social order. Even a limited Ideological containment breach requires refuge in refuse, or

communion and sublimation with an unknowable, repulsive and narratively doomed alien species—and yet infrastructural continuity is demonstrably untenable.

In both *Metro* and *Snowpiercer,* then, the body's integration with infrastructure space is a climactic instance of Weird anagnorisis. These points where the unity of infrastructure and body are foregrounded merely express the everyday reality of world-ecological relations, but nevertheless, they are loadbearing points of structural significance that Weird the texts' formal contours. Moreover, these points of neoliberal ideological breach typically either express a terminus or suggest a novel state of containment and restraint. With the corporeal integration of the body into infrastructure Curtis' arm is severed and the train derails. Artyom's narration vanishes with his internality, and the stalkers are devoured by the oily doodlebug. This failure of signification and the ensuing paralysis exists in earlier, more conservative examples of the Weird, the shoggoth, for example, roams mindlessly in the ruins of the Old One's city, and the Mother is utterly subordinated, lacking any expression but that of visible pain. In a sense, where *Metro* and *Snowpiercer* approach an escape from the containment they propose, they pull back in fear that a break from the known would constitute a collapse into an earlier form of infrastructural paralysis. The decaying infrastructure of the Moscow metro and *Rattling Ark* operate as a parallel to the increasingly inadequate infrastructural logic of neoliberal hegemony, and the Weirdness at their seams stems from the limitations of a neoliberal aesthetic expression, and its struggle to accommodate the aesthetics of a more energetic materialist perspective.

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3.Weird Waste, Water, and Systemic (re-)Subjectification: the Neoliberal Anagnorisis of Irish Infrastructural Flows

Introduction

From its outset, the Weird has favoured water and wetness as a site of inspiration. Weird texts habitually incorporate slimes, sludges and slurries, as well as liquid emissions and transfers between amorphous entities and unravelling narrators. Of course, the most persistent recurring watery motif is the vast and unknowable ocean. In part, this is a product of emulation and homage to Lovecraft's most popular works, which tend to use water to mark the limit of familiar civilisation. Written in 1917 and published in 1923, *Dagon* imagines the seafloor rising to breach the ocean's surface—an image that Lovecraft developed in his most famous work *The Call of Cthulhu* (1928). Both narratives follow an investigative trail that becomes increasingly waterlogged as the Weirdness intensifies. This trajectory is particularly evident in *The Call*, which travels through "swamp and lagoon country" (364) before developing into a transatlantic sailing expedition. The story achieves narrative climax on the exposed sea floor, when the expedition makes land on the flagstones of the once sunken city of R'lyeh. *The Call* exemplifies a common Weird metaphor, where the water's surface acts as an increasingly permeable membrane that separates the familiar from the Outside, a world-edge membrane through which alternative lifeworlds can peer and encroach. This symbolic framework endures as a focal motif in neoliberal Weird media, where it is adapted to function across geography, form, and ideological trajectory. For example, Japanese game developer FromSoftware reproduces this motif in *Bloodborne* (2015), a game that enacts a reflexive critique of its own creative debt to Lovecraft's work by repeatedly concealing large areas of gameplay beneath illusory lakes and oceans. In the game's DLC, *The Old Hunters* (2015), this motif culminates in an environment that emulates the Weird fishing village in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (1936). A parallel Lovecraftian adaptation and world-literary homology that emphasizes the infrastructural dynamics of Weird water is Richard Stanley's 2019 film version of *The

Colour Out of Space (1927). Both versions of the story are framed by the narration of a hydrologist who describes his experience surveying the site of a proposed reservoir. He learns of an old well corrupted by an anomalous colour emitted by an eldritch meteorite, and of a family who are mutated by their exposure to the contaminated water. While both narratives end with the hydrologist worrying that the reservoir has been contaminated by the submerged meteor, the film exemplifies the representative flexibility of water through its attempts to subvert the xenophobic subtext of the short story, displacing the Lovecraftian fear from the racial other to the intense strain placed on American social life under the Trump administration, and its dire implications for future ecological stability.

Across the world-literary system and outside of direct Lovecraftian homage, water remains a focal motif in neoliberal Weird media because of how effortlessly it facilitates the formal slippages characteristic of Weird form. Because water is so urgently essential to human metabolic function its pollution or endangerment is invariably destabilising. Many of the primary texts in this thesis have conformed to this pattern plainly. In chapter one, water is the object that Weirds the narrative integrity of the short stories, appearing in the varied form of the storms, floods, and streaming rivers. *The Thing, The Mountains of Madness* and *Snowpiercer* function in parallel, as their water-made-solid icescapes underscore the ideological paralysis and Weird alterity of their respective lifeworlds. Despite their ostensible dryness, water underpins *Cyclonopedia* and *The Petrol Pump* through its conspicuous absence, and the oily contrast of the gushing petroleum that saturates their every sentence. Similarly, the Weird emerges in *Cities of Salt* when the Bedouin nomads witness Wadi al-Uyoun poured into the earth to quench hordes of thirsty jinn. The unifying factor across these texts is their shared recognition that the web of co-productive relations tying individual subjects to world-ecological process is a point of ideological vulnerability for the neoliberal imagination. The Weird integration of the body into infrastructure space registers this ideological tension, especially where it probes or recontextualises the function of a given infrastructure.

Neoliberal efforts to exploit and financialise water and wastewater infrastructure intensify this cultural logic, with flows of Weird affect circulating through the world-

literary system as the recirculation of water through human bodies and the water cycle comes under threat from private capital. In a 2019 contribution to *Atlantic Studies,* Deckard recognises water as an underdeveloped component of Moore's crisis of cheap nature and argues that the decline of "*cheap water*" (italics in original, 108) is an inextricable consequence of capital's inability to manage the exhaustion of water frontiers and the increasing costs of water appropriation. She argues that financialistion exacerbates Hydrological crisis by "integrating the flows of finance capital with the flows of the liquid resources necessary for social reproduction", and terms the cultural product of this systemic transformation "hydroculture" (108-11). Underscoring the role of water within the larger categories of cheap food and nature usefully foregrounds neoliberal efforts to enclose and appropriate the most urgent resources that fulfil human metabolic need. While Deckard's 2019 paper focuses on areas of water scarcity, regions of plenitude have not escaped these privatisation efforts, which produce alternative forms of precarity. Despite the nation's ample precipitation, Irish hydrofictions at the tail of the Celtic Tiger have been awash with Weird affect, as the country's deteriorating water infrastructure has been an issue of intense political debate. Deckard references this in a 2016 issue of the *Journal of World-Systems Research,* writing that "Ireland's uncommodified groundwater resources—a source of "cheap water" that could be appropriated without cost to transnational corporations— have been key in attracting industries dependent on the exploitation of clean groundwater" (160). As a vulnerable semi-peripheral economy, policymakers have staged the marketisation of water infrastructure as a method of efficiently managing an increasingly complex set of socio-ecological needs, though in practice, any such effort would bind an increasingly unstable ecological system to the volatile fluctuations of speculative capital, introducing new and complex points of vulnerability to both.

In the context of the proximate financial crisis, a critical observer should recognise the intense irony of the ongoing neoliberal efforts to exploit Ireland's hydrological frontiers. The 2007 real estate crash and the collapse of Lehman Brothers produced a consonant collapse in the Irish Banking sector, which—after decades of financial deregulation—was vastly over-leveraged, reliant on loans from international markets and supported by property-backed assets which only existed due to aggressive

internal lending to the now insolvent property sector. A €6.5 billion bailout from the European Union and the International Monetary Fund shunted the cost of the crash onto the general population, transforming the banking crisis into one of sovereign debt (Mercille and Murphy 2015, 49-50). During the ensuing years of austerity, the cost of a deteriorating system of water and wastewater infrastructure became a topic of national controversy. The Water Services act of 2014 attempted to offload this necessary expense through the foundation of Irish Water, a water utility that would replace the existing funding policy of central taxation with direct billing. The public met these proposed measures with considerable outcry, and grassroots protest rapidly grew into organised opposition groups such as Right2Water. Amidst marches and demonstrations encouraging mass non-compliance (Hickey and Kelleher 2014, Melia 2014, Rubenstein 310), Irish Water was beset by a series of scandals relating to data insecurity (Andrews 2014, Edwards & MacMahon 2014), misapplication of public funds (McConnell 2014), controversial bonus payments (Walsh & Melia 2014), and repeated concessions of inadequacy from government ministers (Phelan, 2014) all before its embarrassing failure of the EU's Market Corporation Test in 2015 (Independent.ie Newsdesk). Patrick Bresnihan draws attention to comments from the contemporary Minister for the Environment, Alan Kelly, that betrayed the motivation behind the government's floundering efforts:

> He admitted that the new water utility was established not only to charge for water use but also to take the financing of water services off the general exchequer balance sheet: as an independent, semi-state company, Irish Water would be able to borrow directly from international credit markets. (Bresnihan 1, 2015)

For Bresnihan, the functional logic of Irish Water was the neoliberal competitive imperative—the ecological and financial outcomes of Irish water infrastructure would be tallied and used as a basis of comparison, leveraging its future value as a speculative asset, rather than its current use value and cost as an essential service. Of course, this exemplifies a fundamental contradiction of neoliberal policy. The ostensible retreat of state power leaves the public goods vulnerable to the influence of private interests. Rather than a diminishment of government intervention, the state functions as the

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primary means of converting a public utility into a financial asset for future investors (Bresnihan 2015, 8-9). By 2017, the government repealed and refunded domestic water charges (Republic of Ireland, 5), but the faltering efforts to financialise Irish water infrastructure posed an ideological and temporal uncoupling of the most essential resource for everyday social reproduction. Moreover, it constituted a brazen repetition of the poisonous economic logic that triggered the 2007 collapse, staking the country's ecological security against its economic recovery.

Unsurprisingly, Irish hydrofiction written at this point registered the publicly precarious state of the national water infrastructure, especially as municipal water supply was familiar ground to the existing literary tradition. Michael Rubenstein describes the already prominent position of public waterworks in Irish literary fiction. He compares sections of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman* (1967) to demonstrate a dialogue between the texts that explores how municipal water infrastructure shapes the material and ideological bounds of public space (2018, 313-5). For Rubenstein, Irish literary culture demands that water remain a public good, standing in opposition to water privatisation with the Right2Water. Existing works were recontextualised by the infrastructural upheaval, with particularly drastic consequences for those texts with existing Weird charge. For example, in *The Fifty Minute Mermaid* (2007)*,* Nuala Ní Dhomnaill re-published poems from *Cead Aighnis* (1998), printed side-by-side for the first time with English translations by Paul Muldoon. Their re-release in this collection proved timely, as the Tiger's ensuing collapse shed new light on the poems' themes of national allegory, colonial history and linguistic identity. Ní Dhomnaill's cycle on the *murúcha* (merfolk) now appears Weirdly prophetic, as poems like "Cuimhne an Uisce" and "Mhurúch san Ospidéal" were already in dialogue with the (re-)circulation of water through the body and culture. Other poems like "Bás agus Aiséirí na Murúiche" and "Murúch Linbh gan Baisteadh" magnify and interpret this infrastructural logic through the enduring infrastructural impact of the Roman Catholic church.

While the nation was battling over the future of public water, it was simultaneously contending with public revelations of systematic abuse carried out on an infrastructural scale in church-run laundries and maternity homes. *The Fifty Minute*

Mermaid (2007) was published under the ordinances of the Water services act of 2007, but Mike McCormack's *Solar Bones* (2017) provides an ideal starting point and foundation for this analysis of Weird water infrastructure. Set on November 2, 2008, the next eight years of civil protest against water charges are a core part of its material reflection on recent Irish history. Its specific infrastructural focus is the failure of municipal planning that led to the pollution of the Lough Corrib reservoir and the ensuing cryptosporidiosis outbreak. Where water operates as a vehicle for the Weird it often functions as the means of concealing an ideological anathema, and increasingly a repressed negative or history. In an immediate and contemporary analysis on the crisis Liam Leonard notes:

> While levels of personal wealth have increased dramatically, the
> accompanying growth in consumption and waste has created a series of
> crisis and subsequent protests about sewage treatment plants, landfills
> or planned incinerators, gas pipelines, roads, electricity pylons and
> mobile phone masts (Leonard 2007)

Solar Bones' aesthetic reflection on this same crisis provides the socio-political and world-historical context for the hydrocultural upheaval in the aftermath of the Tiger, and thoroughly explores the overlapping civic, social and infrastructural forces that sustain the expansion of neoliberal capital. The novel transmits these forces through the collapsing subjectivity and re-subjectification of its narrator, which serves an ideal foreground for the hydro-poetic analysis that follows.

In this chapter I explore the Weird ideological snarl between Irish civil engineering and Roman Catholicism in *Solar Bones*. I then explain how the narration of the public health crisis at Lough Corrib induces a form of ideological rupture in the narrator, pressuring the neoliberal logic that structures his patriarchal sense of self. By contrasting this with the *Fifty Minute Mermaid,* I demonstrate a corresponding Weird intersection between hydrological infrastructure and the uneasy aesthetic representation of Irish Catholic practice. I unpack the spatial logic of Irish vernacular precarity and synthesise this with the Weird depiction of historical trauma in the collection's fish-human hybrids. In this, I demonstrate the cultural intersection of Irish hydrological infrastructure, and the historical abuses carried out in the Magdalene

Laundries and the Church-operated Mother and Baby Homes. I conclude my analysis of Ní Dhomhnaill's poems by outlining the tendency of neoliberal ideology to favour short-term profit over a secure and stable future. I also narrate the (re-)circulation of wastewater and human bodies through the hydro-infrastructural circuits of the world-ecology, and the ways that these flows can point to the vulnerable human subjects that capital hides and processes as material surplus.

3.1. "this shite swirling through my head": Crisis, Catholicism and Cryptosporidium in Mike McCormack and *Solar Bones* (2017)

The ghost of Marcus Conway, a recently deceased civil engineer, narrates McCormack's *Solar Bones.* Over the course of a single, run-on, 265 page sentence fragment, Marcus reflects on his life, the life of his wife Mairead and those of his children Agnes and Darragh. The text is fundamentally concerned with the individual and their integration into complex world-systemic relations. A keen sense of the underlying and incipient crisis characterises and structures the narrative, which the text registers in its continuous depictions of bodily and infrastructural failure; and grounds those in the 2008 cryptosporidiosis outbreak at the Corrib reservoir. The flowing form of Marcus' narration facilitates the complex representation of world-ecological crisis, by braiding seemingly disparate streams of thought and memory using techniques of association and thematic consonance. Crisis is represented in the visible collapse of material infrastructures, in the physical friction and emotional pressure applied to individual and collective bodies, but also as the consequence and expression of Weird, supernatural, and spiritual influence. The novel's innovative form allows the narration to evoke a synaesthetic blend of contrasting sensory impressions that mirror the novel's fascination with the spillage and mingling of liquid matter—literally, in the sense of water contamination, but also in terms of the contrasting cultural, rhetorical and aesthetic flows that encroach on one another due to the lived experience of material crisis. In a 2016 review for the Irish Times, Deckard describes the novel's sensorial modulation as shifting states of water expressed through sound, writing that: "The reader is pulled effortlessly along by the rhythmic cadences of Marcus's posthuman

consciousness, first condensing, then evaporating in ghostly vapours of memory"
(Deckard *Irish Times*, 2016). The opening lines demonstrate the simultaneity of these
effects, as they emulate the clangour of the Angelus bells and the source of the swirling
cascade that forms the rest of the text:

> the bell
>
> the bell as
>
>> hearing the bell as
>>
>>> hearing the bell as standing here
>>>
>>> the bell being heard standing here
>>>
>>> hearing it ring out through the grey light of this
>>>
>>> morning, noon or night
>>>
>>> god knows
>>>
>>> this grey day standing here and
>>>
>>> listening to this bell in the middle of the day, the middle of
>>
>> the day bell, the Angelus bell in the middle of the day, ringing out to the
>>
>> grey light to
>>
>>> here
>>>
>>> standing in the kitchen
>>>
>>> hearing this bell
>>>
>>> snag at my heart and
>>>
>>> draw the whole world into
>>>
>>> being here (McCormack 2016, 1-2)

Throughout the book, the lack of end-stops lends the effect of flowing water or shifting
vapour to the narration. Through these staggered sentence fragments, the uneven but
rhythmic distribution of the plosive "bell" simulates the sensorial pattern of its object of
signification. The continuous enjambment provides phonic structure to the imitative
cascade, but it also groups the flood of sound into chunks of discrete meaning. For
example, "hearing the bell as standing here" describes the Weird ontological movement
established in this opening passage. Even as it takes form, the homophones "here," and
"hear" surround and displace the pealing bell of the Angelus in a fused statement of
perception, presence and position that formally emulates the patterns of sonic

interference characteristic of church bells. For Marcus, the space, sound and time are inextricably tangled, producing synaesthetic muddle that highlights Marcus' Weirded experience of time and space. Just as water takes the form of the vessel it fills, when Marcus is summoned into being by the bells his ghostly narration begins to reflect the object it describes.

In a Weird intensification of the typical capacity of formal mimesis, this liquid form opens the text to the infrastructural collapse and pollution it articulates. While unaware of his own death, Marcus narrates a growing dread of "some imminent catastrophe" (174). He speculates his thoughts are like the ringing produced by the Angelus bells: that they are the arbitrary mechanical product of material stimulus, and that their ongoing cacophony is his mind's way of resisting entropic oblivion. He imagines:

> the mind in repose, unspooling to infinity, slackening to these ridiculous musings which are too easily passed off as thought, these glib associations, mental echoes which reverb with our anxiety to stay wake and wise to the world or at least attentive to as much of its circumstances as we can grasp (175)

This passage outlines the text's dominant structural logic. Through Marcus' narration, it is steered by a relational, associative logic rather than a temporal scheme. Notably, Marcus concedes that the content of "these glib associations" is only as important as its structural relation to the affective experience of existential anxiety. His thoughts and narration are a product of Eros, an expression and performance of his existence. Yet even in its description, there is a barely hidden death-drive that undermines this scheme of fluid, streaming association, leaving it just as vulnerable to contamination as the Corrib reservoir. Marcus' ghost achieves form through his flowing narration, but in the process of free association, his suppressed recollection of death often stains his memories, manifesting through his sense of dread and the recurring embodied experience of an unbearable pressure that sets "every nerve and sinew" on edge (174). Of course, the ghost of Marcus does not have a body. He retains only the impression of embodied experience, which the novel simulates by oscillating its formal mimesis between streaming water and the pulse and gush of pumping blood, granting the text a

Weird, fleshy quality. Critics have not yet read Marcus' spectral embodiment in terms of its Weirdness, though several have worked on the contradiction between the pulmonary motif and his (dis)embodied existence. For example, Mianowski notes the macabre significance of the word "snag" as it applies to Marcus' heart. She writes that Marcus' memories "follow a chain of emotions, weaving a pattern of affects and experiences. And yet, despite its evanescent quality, the enunciating voice is deeply anchored and embodied" (Mianowski 2019, 2). Again, Marcus lacks a coherent physicality, but the bells' emotional tug suggests as a physical strain on Marcus' circulatory system. Here, the embodied portion of the affect produced by sound and memory is constructed from recollection, and accentuated and pressured in anticipation of the novel's climax. The novel structures its streaming narration around this back-facing anticipatory mode, pushing the text's spatiotemporal progression into the hyperdimensional register characteristic of Weird fiction.

The process of Marcus' narration, as well as the immediate events and actions that frame it, appear to take place over the course of a single hour. However, this span is stretched by the ebb and flow of Marcus' recollections. His unknowingly postmortem narration complicates matters further, as it becomes difficult to distinguish between his immediate and current reported experiences and events that appear only in his recollections. The reveal that the signals of an approaching heart attack were analepsis rather than prolepsis causes the illusory temporal logic that gives shape to Marcus and the narrative to unspool as the text flips over on itself. Altuna views this as a complete inversion of narrative time against historical temporality, arguing that, "Marcus's ghost manages the temporal and spatial variations in the novel and, in so doing, overcomes the tension between fragmentation/collapse and coherence/organisation" (Altuna 2016, 88). Even though Marcus' narration is constantly haunted by the threat of entropy, dispersal and oblivion, the associative structure of his thoughts and memory eschews chronology, producing a temporal scheme that is simply more complicated than a reversal. Thomas Gurke's efforts to disentangle the novel's temporal structure identify the recursive pattern, making note of the "repetitive", "swirling", "circular" and "spiralling" structures that McCormack borrows from the structure of Heidegger's essays (2023, 615). While Altuna and Gurke differ in their reading of the novel's temporal

structure, their analysis converges when it comes to the intricate interplay between the novel's narration and its production of time and space. Gurke argues that the narration's constant return to "here" is a necessary means of temporally locating the narrative through the rhythmic return to a spatial marker (622). Altuna also reads the temporal dislocations as the formal expression of Marcus' ghost binding itself to material reality, describing the pulsing motif of the bell as "the rhythmic heartbeat Marcus's ghost needs to make his streams of post-consciousness real" (Altuna, 87). Because a break in Marcus' consciousness would risk a collapse in spatiotemporal order, the narration must constantly locate and restructure itself against its material environment. Like the slurry seeping through the soil and into Lough Corrib, Marcus' ghostly body bleeds into the novel's form, setting and environment, so that the failure of his body's pulmonary infrastructure and the failures of Irish water infrastructure unify in the points of narrative and formal rupture.

Neither Altuna nor Gurke mention the novel's formal Weirdness, though the hyperdimensional structure, and the narrative tendency toward a spiralling trajectory and the tactile suffusion of the human body into infrastructure space are, again, exemplary instances of Weird form. In *Solar Bones* this Weirdness is rooted in the snarl between identity, subjectivity, ideological collapse and the narrative production of infrastructure space. Marcus is a subject who is coming to terms with the instability of his imagined relationship to the process of world-ecological reproduction. While his ghost is constituted by his streaming narration, this same process threatens to sweep him to a point of inevitable crisis and dissolution. Marcus' tendency to locate himself in his immediate environment demonstrates a pattern of avoidant behaviour. At points of heightened tension, he often states a variation on "this is how you get carried away" (McCormack, 12). This puns on his own stream of consciousness narration, but also recognises its dangerous kinetic pull, which spirals constantly toward the topic of his own dissolution. For example, when he remembers the end of a video-call with his son Darragh, he imagines lingering eyestrain from the monitor as an apocalyptic, eye-melting fire:

> leaving you standing hollow-eyed in the middle of some desolation with
> the wind whistling through your skull, just before the world collapses

mountains, rivers and lakes

acres, roods and perches

into oblivion, drawn down into that fissure in creation where

everything is consumed in the raging tides and swells of non-being, the

physical world gone down in flames

mountains, rivers and lakes

and pulling with it also all those human rhythms that bind us

together and draw the world into a community, those daily

rites, rhythms and rituals

upholding the world like solar bones, that rarefied amalgam of

time and light whose extension through every minute of the day is visible

from the moment I get up in the morning and stand at the kitchen window

with a mug of tea in my hand, watching the first cars of the day passing on

the road, every one of them known to me

name, number plate and destinations (85)

Marcus' farewell to Darragh pulls his mind to his death, to the destruction of his sensory organs, and an apocalyptic vision of oblivion. His narration becomes centred through the rhythmic organisation of material objects into groups of three, an exercise that draws the world (and his narration) back to the space of the kitchen he now haunts. 'Drawing,' is an extended motif in Marcus' narration that first appears in the opening lines where the bells "draw" the world into being. In the above extract, the verb "draw" sets the substance of Marcus' reality into motion. In the first instance, it describes how the world drains into a tear in the substance of reality and then is used again to describe how things can be pulled into a state of community and order. Here, the narration describes the space it depicts as a liquid that can be drawn like well-water or blood, but 'draw' also suggests a process of sketching or drafting. The act of "drawing up the world" (3) is tied to the ideological self-image Marcus claims from his job as a civil engineer, and the rhythmic and structural association between the words he separates into ternary phrases emphasises the gravity he lends this task. Objects of civic registration and units of measurement for land and scale are as foundational to

existence as the habits and patterns of daily life, and as tangible to his reality as the earth below him.

Indeed, Marcus often laments the truism that "the world is built by politicians and not engineers" (116), but this idiom masks a characteristic authoritarian streak. He considers politics a messy human disruption to the ideal process of engineering, but this diminishes the political function of his job as a civil engineer. Within his rational distaste for the inefficiency and corruption of local politics, there is a conviction that the world should conform to his own, uniquely insightful sense of a greater will. Deckard discusses this conviction, writing that "Infrastructure is holy for Marcus, the stuff around which human relations coalesce". She describes him as a "Metaphysical Engineer", a man that sees and directs engineering as a creative contribution to the collective public good, rather than a means toward the accumulative logic of the property bubble (Deckard *Irish Times*, 2016). However, the nature and form of this holiness is complex and integral to the text's Weird infrastructure space. Marcus describes his work with Christian overtones: following the "gradual leaking away of conviction" he experienced while in Maynooth seminary (McCormack, 94) it was the drive that took over his life. Though the substance of his religious conviction has faded, he retains many quirks and structures of thought from Roman Catholicism. Darragh acknowledges this in teasing accusation, joking that Marcus has "turned [his] back on the cross to take up the theodolite", a statement validated by Marcus' reflection on his life's work. He considers engineering "a religious vocation with its own rituals and articles of faith, not to mention a reckoning in some vaulted and girdered hereafter where engineer's souls are weighed and evaluated" (205-6). Marcus' reanimation falls on the shared date of All Souls Day and the day of the Samhain, "when the souls of the dead are bailed from purgatory" (92), placing the novel at the junction of Roman Catholic and Celtic pagan tradition. Organising itself around the Angelus bell that sounds "a systolic thump from the other side of the parish" (2), *Solar Bones* depcits the municipal organising influence that the Catholic church exerts on Ireland's ecology and population. The bell is presented as a biological, mechanical and metaphysical pump that drives the Church's infrastructural influence through the narration, and despite Marcus' lapsed faith, the text is steeped in the culture and aesthetic of Roman

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Catholicism. For example, the combination of Marcus' name and the first-person narration puns on The Gospel according to Mark, and his narratological reanimation plays on Christ's resurrection and the Word made flesh. His lexicon defaults to the ecclesiastical, particularly his exclamations which are more often blasphemous than obscene (McCormack, 4, 11, 47, 124, 1178, 206, 258). The textual structure also exhibits this Catholic influence, as Marcus' thoughts adopt the structure and rhythm of prayer. This is visible in the visual pattern of the previous block quotation, where longer paragraphs of reported memory are interspersed with brief refrains, mirroring the visual structure of the Angelus prayer. Marcus' many triads are also part of this logic. Passages like:

> mountains, rivers and lakes
> acres, roods and perches
> animal, mineral, vegetable
> covenant, cross and crown (3)

mimic the structure of the Holy Trinity as recited during the sign of the cross: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These aesthetic markers shape and colour the narrative, but they also signal an underlying stream of Catholic theological influence that fuels Marcus' gushing narration and eventual dissolution, namely a fixation on sin, culpability, blame and attendant suffering.

There is a harmonious interplay between Marcus' vocation as a civil engineer and the way his narration structures the novel's form and space, and his ideological emphasis on sin and penance is integral to both sides of this dynamic. First visible when Marcus notices a newspaper article on the financial crash, Marcus sees a distinction between news stories where he can feel "the flesh and blood element twitching in them", and those on "the over-realm of international finance", which he imagines as an independent conceptual space where ratios, interests, and margins fluctuate "so that everything continues to move ever forward" (8). The Weird dimensional distinction between the material and mathematical is central to Marcus' later description of his quasi-religious work: to make sure "that there are not too many differences between what is on paper and what is coming into being as timber, concrete and stone" (206). He imagines an idealised world of forms and mathematical relations that proceeds

separate to, but somehow in influence of, material reality. This imagined system inverts the standard order of world-systemic operations, by imagining that economic forces are an agential and independently determining instrument rather than a co-productive expression of material relations, demonstrating the neoliberal inflection of Marcus' ideology. It also poses a parallel to the Catholic church's supposed theological function and infrastructural logic, as Marcus envisions a higher numinous realm in urgent need of interpretation by a distributed class of educated experts who have failed to prevent a moral and systemic crisis. He imagines Ireland's financial experts as seers who have been "struck dumb and blind", and, coherent with the ensuing infrastructural rupture, as deranged prophets who are "wild-eyed and smeared with shit". In a stream of association his thoughts flow to a local environmental campaigner on hunger strike "against the energy consortium planning to run a pressurised gas pipeline" through northern Mayo, and to the photograph of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protester opposing a line of tanks. He then returns these images to the names "McNeela, Gaughan, Stagg", Mayo-born republican hunger strikers who died during their respective protests (9-11). Through the novel's relational formal logic, this stream of association poses an imagined relationship between hermitage, martyrdom, acts of political resistance and the wellbeing and stability of the nation. Moreover, it poses this relationship as infrastructurally embedded in the process of social reproduction.

Ritual, mortification and martyrdom remain essential to this metaphysical ideology, as for Marcus, they hold a position of infrastructural and social necessity. In his contribution to *The Body and Pain in Irish Literature And Culture* (2016) Iain Miller describes a national narrative dating back to the War of Independence, wherein a sense of ongoing national persecution meets with a Roman Catholic ethos that identifies with martyr traditions and the suffering of Christ (124-6). K. M. Fierke traces this narrative back to the ancient Brehon Laws that codified restorative justice through the practice of self-sacrificial fasting, and on to the medieval *Senchus Mór,* where the act of achieving justice through starvation was called *cealachan.* She also discusses the overlapping Christian tradition of Irish fasting, citing St. Patrick's hunger and thirst strike described in the *Book of Armagh* (2012 108-9). Through the lens of his residual Catholic sensibilities, Marcus tangles this historical narrative with his belief in the divine purpose

of civil engineering. He states that Mayo has "a unique history of people starving and mortifying themselves for higher causes and principles, a political reflex that has twitched steadily down the years and seems rooted in some aggregated sense of sinfulness" (McCormack, 11). The twitching of flesh, blood and reflex that runs through newspaper stories and bloodlines is a recurring motif that is tied to Marcus' failing heart and the embodied, interconnected experience of social reality. Just as systemic relations are felt as stresses on a subject's body, bodies and blood flow through, and as, infrastructural systems. But suffering and pain are unevenly distributed through the social environment. Marcus imagines that certain people fulfil an infrastructural imperative to suffer in excess. Critically, this infrastructurally-bound suffering does not stem from sin itself, but from his affective perception of some collective sinfulness and the belief that this suffering is somehow necessary or redeeming. Mairead's account of a Mongolian holy woman "living her life backwards" follows a similar logic. Marcus recalls her explanation that "if everyone is walking and talking and doing things in the same direction then there is a real danger that the whole world will tip over, so one person is needed to work the opposite way to keep the world balanced" and that the practice is "a vocation that had come down to her through the family, the line of apostolic succession" (81). Marcus immediately steamrolls Mairead's anecdote to insistently incorporate this peripheral cultural practice into his core-proximate engineering ideology. For Marcus, this unnamed woman provides a necessary insulation against any destabilising behavioural excess, such as the mono-directional motion mandated by "the over-realm of international finance" (8); the inevitable consequence of a holy system of organisation that grants him responsibility to enact and reproduce the holy logic in public works. But in effect, she signals Marcus' increasing sense of guilt and shame, functioning as a further emotional buffer against the twitching signals of the crisis—his increasing awareness that suffering is integral to the system and existence that he maintains.

Marcus has an inflated sense of his life's significance to the wider system of world-ecological relations, but in death his powers as a Metaphysical engineer are Weirdly magnified. The fictionalised Ireland of *Solar Bones* is accessed and engineered exclusively via Marcus' recollection. While the narration of a recognisable time and

space enhances its rhetorical capacity, its relationship to literary tradition has been a source of some critical difficulty, as academic responses to the text have had some trouble with the novel's unacknowledged Weird form. For example, Mianowski writes that the novel's intense concern with "memory, introspection and synaesthesia" have produced comparisons to Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (1913) and O'Brien's *The Third Policeman* but then proceeds to argue that: "McCormack's writing is not self-reflexive in any metafictional mode. Indeed, its methodology is more one of diffraction than self-reflection" (2019, 1). Diffraction is a useful handle for the narration's threat to scatter outward into disarray, but this comparison of creative methodology avoids a more consequential textual comparison: regardless of whether McCormack's methodology is autobiographically self-reflexive, *Solar Bones* is self-reflexive in its recursive, metafictional rumination on itself as an object of narrative expression. There is some critical consensus that Agnes' artwork, "The O Negative Diaries", is the element that most clearly foregrounds the novel's insistent metafiction (45). Here, Agnes uses several pints of her own blood to completely cover the gallery walls with handwritten extracts from provincial newspapers, choosing passages that themselves quote from criminal cases under the purview of the district and circle courts. Both Deckard and Orlaith Darling note the formal and thematic parallels between the exhibition and the novel itself, though neither linger on the Weird correspondence in artistic medium, that both texts are expressed using the vital substance of their author's body. Marcus finds Agnes's installation so intensely affecting that he experiences a panic attack and steps outside. As he consumes her exhibit, he is struck by a sense of himself, as a father, but also as a ghostly narrator:

> I saw it
>
> me
>
> nothing and no one else but
>
> me (45)

Here, Marcus is consuming and incorporating the words and work of a woman into his own sense of reality, but the formal correspondences between Agnes' work and his own pulmonary narration forces a confrontation with his postmortem reality. In the next pages his attempts to calm down pose a break from his usual lack of self-reflection as

he struggles to articulate a sense of persecution, guilt, and culpability (50). Drawing on Deckard, Darling writes that Agnes lives up to the nickname she receives from Darragh, by functioning "as an anagnorisis for Marcus, providing the moments in which his understanding of the world is radically shaken or even reversed" (343). This description of Anagnorisis is, of course, precisely the narrative turn that characterises the Weird, and is the process that Marcus desperately resists over the course of the novel.

The *O Negative Diaries* stimulate Marcus' Weird Anagnorisis by breaching the imagined ideological infrastructure he uses to interpret the world along several converging axes. It echoes and literalises Marcus own ideological grasp of the wider social relations that he sees partially represented in the news-cycle, but the Conway blood highlights the "flesh and blood element" with a discomforting immediacy that precludes detachment. The Diaries undermine Marcus' assumed patriarchal authority by upsetting his preferred understanding of Agnes, thereby destabilising the entangled "rites, rhythms and rituals" (85) that anchor his identity. This upset contains a nested conflict: Agnes' choice of subject is a potential betrayal of their shared rural roots, but her choice of medium fills Marcus with misplaced concern for her physical and mental wellbeing. It also poses a visual reminder of Marcus past and future cardiac arrest, decomposition and bodily incoherence. Marcus' improvised prayer picks up on this Weird temporality: "*Jesus Christ/ let it be some vision ahead of her / and not torment behind / responsible for this*" (47, italics in original). The prayer signals the suppressed memory of his own future and past demise, but its unusual form reveals a further layer of reflexive self-absorption. The function of the prayer is to absolve him of culpability, but the means to absolution is a dereliction of responsibility; it is not a confession, but a profession of aspirational innocence. Contrary to his concern for the public good, Marcus is unable to think of or narrate Agnes without subordinating and filtering her through his reflexive self-interest—and his nascent understanding of this pattern infuses these concerns with a sense of shame. As Darling succinctly says, Agnes violates his expectations of "sanitised bodily neatness" (2021, 342). In the display of human corporeal emissions in an incongruous state and location, the Diaries function as a portent of the looming water sanitation crisis, but it also resonates with the 1980 No Wash protest, where a group of republican inmates protested the conditions at

Armagh women's prison by coating the walls with excrement and menstrual blood. For international observers, and even supposed republican allies, the display of menstrual blood at Armagh distinguished the protest from the parallel demonstration at Long Kesh men's prison, marking the female protesters as distinctly repulsive and dangerous (Weinstein 2006, 12; Wahidin 2019, 113-5). Later, during the cryptosporidiosis epidemic, Marcus demonstrates a similar disgust when he comments on her narration of the crisis: "I'd never seen her lose the run of herself [...] words and ideas spilling from her in a liquid rush" (McCormack, 126). Again, Agnes's speech resembles her father's, but for Marcus, the similarities between their creative and political expression are a problem. Agnes' disruptive art and non-conformity are a messy indiscretion that threaten to destabilise or contaminate Marcus' patriarchal ideology and sense of self.

Accordingly, the exhibition catalyses much of the rest of the novel, as the celebratory dinner held afterward is where Mairead drinks the cryptosporidium-infected tap water. Rubenstein describes how "Marcus marvels at how his wife's body has become a bellwether for the political, social, and economic crisis that grips the nation (2018, 319), but he makes little note of the reflexive shame that muddles his recollection. Though Marcus narrates her experience of cryptosporidiosis, it is Mairead's body that experiences the brunt of the infrastructural crisis. He often processes her suffering as a function of the wider systemic collapse rather than the immediate corporeal experience, saying, for example, that "history and politics were now a severe intestinal disorder spliced into the figure of my wife" (139). As he squares the municipal, systemic failure of Irish water infrastructure with its embodied consequences he narrates her body as the battleground between exterior systemic forces. He is stricken by the simultaneous experience of the epidemic as a "political phenomenon" and its immediate presence "down the hall in the far bedroom, engineering and politics converging in the slight figure of my wife living in bed, her body and soul now giving her an extension into the political arena" (135). Here, Marcus wrestles with an imagined boundary between the personal and political, thereby suppressing Mairead's political capacity before or beyond the physical strain of cryptosporidiosis. He ideologically embeds her in his metaphysical vision of the wider system of civil infrastructure, so that when he describes her body it is as though the

mechanical workings of municipal water provision are visible in her movement, imagining "a rinse of bitter filth sluicing up out of her as if it were being pumped from deep within with such a twisting force she was now almost out of bed" (116). He becomes fixated and disgusted by the "the filthiness of the whole process," lingering on the sweat, stream, bile and diarrhoea that pours out of her body (121). The spillage of liquid excretions from the body into the visible environment indicates intense social and infrastructural disorder, and he observes that the leakage allows something essential to drain from her, "as if her very soul was being drawn from her body" (121-2). Through her illness, Marcus is wracked by the shame of being unable to aid her, but also by a suspicion that he is somehow responsible. When Darragh learns of his mother's illness, his anger is described in similar liquid terms. As the "frustration spilled from him" he heaps a "scalding tirade" and a "venomous cascade" on the heads of politicians and engineers responsible for the disaster (227). For Marcus, Darragh's rage is a similar crisis in the expected infrastructural order. In anticipation of their call, Marcus is stricken by an "anxious itch" (225) and finds himself cleaning the house compulsively. By his own definition of his secular vocation, he is implicated in the political and material cause of the crisis through his role in engineering, and now narrating, the national infrastructure. Again, through his distress and concern for Mairead there remains a reflexive concern for himself, for what her illness and the collapse of clean water infrastructure says about him, and his potential failures.

Darling's 2021 contribution to the *Irish Studies Review* foregrounds the Weird patriarchal subtext that flows through Marcus' narration, discussing it against the Celtic Tiger's impact on Irish gender dynamics. She describes a form of emergent hyper-masculinity that railed against "centuries of colonial emasculation" and attributed Ireland's newfound prosperity to the virility and "ballsiness" of property developers, politicians, and the financial class (335). In his assumed and imagined patriarchal dominion over the municipal and social reality of the Irish state, Marcus defines himself as engineer of the lived environment. Under this system, the female body is the medium that "social power is mediated through and exercised on." Darling identifies a stream of logic within the text where women specifically are leveraged as "counterweights to social chaos" (2021, 337). She identifies the Mongolian holy woman as a specific

example, and describes how her incorporation into Marcus' engineering narrative mirrors the fate of Mairead and Agnes as he repeatedly pins their biological existence to the systems of Irish civil infrastructure. For instance, Marcus struggles to think of his newborn daughter as a complete human individual until he is in possession of her authorised birth certificate, thereby privileging systems of civic infrastructure over the embodied process of procreation (337-8). For Darling, this mirrors the ways that the Irish state routinely constructs itself through the legislative subordination of the maternal body. She flags the 2004 Constitutional amendment referendum which revoked citizenship rights for children of non-citizens born on Irish soil—effectively staking state borders along the maternal body. For Darling, the landslide vote for "yes" was rooted in the fear of "foreign contamination" and an effort to legislate maternal bodies into the means of sustaining "a certain (white, Irish) vision of nation" (340). Darling ties this to the long battle for abortion rights in Ireland, arguing that between the 1983 ban on abortion and the passing of the eighth amendment in 2018, women's bodies were not just subject to law, but to an ongoing public enquiry. She pays particular attention to the public outcry following the death of Savita Halappanaver, who became "a martyr for the pro-choice cause in Ireland" in 2012 after being admitted to Galway University Hospital with heavy bleeding and repeatedly denied a termination due to the presence of a foetal heartbeat (343). Throughout, Darling argues that even when the women of *Solar Bones* "attempt to challenge and subvert patriarchally engineered infrastructures and systems [...] they are doomed to symbolic and representational roles in a male-centric society" (Darling 2021,335-7). Darling's piercing commentary recognises and critiques the text's essential formal nexus. The text poses Marcus as a singular node of experience in a sprawling system of social and historical relations, and as such, the web of relations that he narrates are the substance of his subjectivity. Because of his Weird, spectral narration, the novel's lifeworld and Marcus' character are fundamentally co-productive. Marcus' gender identity and expression are foundational to his subjectivity and constituted in his increasingly conscious performance and reproduction of patriarchy.

There are several important areas where Darling's commentary can be reinforced with the text's Weird and world-systemic elements, particularly where his deflection

and eventual narratorial collapse imply the shape of a world beyond Marcus. One such area is the absence of queer and trans bodies in Marcus' narration. Where queer and gender nonconforming bodies may exist, they are masked by his narration, with the brief exception of a "stilted Bo Peep—ten feet tall and with six days' growth of beard under a platinum fright wig" (McCormack, 243). Bo Peep appears alongside zombies, mermaids and a bearded dragon at Agnes' apocalyptic pageant protesting the Cryptosporidium outbreak. For Marcus, a rigid and essentialist conception of gender underpins his sense of the social reproduction, and through this, his own identity and narratorial integrity. Non-binary gender presentation is of the Outside, appearing when his sense of self and reality is at its most vulnerable. In the preceding pages he describes the results of the civic authority's consensus on the origin of the health crisis:

> it found it could not be pinpointed to one specific cause, human or environmental, but that its primary source was the convergence of adverse circumstances—decrepit technology and torrential rains, overdevelopment and agricultural slurry—which smudged and spread responsibility for the crisis in such a way as to make the whole idea of accountability a murky realm (233)

Throughout, the novel establishes a dichotomy between the "clarity" (8) of Marcus' vision and narration, and "murky realm" of systemic accountability. Here, the murkiness poses an existential threat to Marcus, as it shakes his conviction in engineering's capacity to disassemble, diagnose and mend the world. Learned from watching his father disassemble and repair a tractor, this belief is also his first memory of "anxious worry about the world" (22), as the image of the complex machine so easily disassembled caused his mind to spiral out to the wider world-systemic relations and their possible fragility. But the alternative, that the civic authorities are deflecting blame from the policy and profit motive that incentivised overdevelopment and poor environmental management, is even more damaging, as it feeds his increasing sense of participation in and culpability for the financial crash.

The crushing effect of this guilt is an area where Darling's commentary can be further extended, as Marcus' affective experience of guilt and shame oscillates between the libidinal and systemic. While Marcus sustains and reaffirms his sense of self

through a rhythm of narrative deflection and reorientation via material stimulus, his righteous conviction as an engineer is undercut by his real and perceived failures as a husband and father. For example, his narration formally binds his conviction in the nobility of engineering to his shame and infidelity. In the first year of his marriage, while attending a bridge construction conference in Prague, Marcus met his affair partner while wandering the Museum of Torture. Whenever his narration recalls the affair, it is accompanied by a quote from Mairead: "bridge building, fucking bridge building" (158). His memories of the museum and the conference overlap and infrastructural works built for the public good are juxtaposed with "the maiden, the rack and the wheel", mechanical instruments of torture that he considers "the highest technical expression of their age" (18). The Catherine wheel lingers in his mind, and he struggles to forget

> that awful alignment by which the body weight of the accused slowly but inevitably overcame the strength needed to uphold it and the gradual downward pressure collapsed it eventually (19).

This process is precisely how his ghost disintegrates. Marcus, the accused subject, who becomes unable to sustain coherent narration, as his spectral body slowly collapses and disperses under the weight of his guilt. Darling stresses that throughout the text, local and global crises are played out primarily on the female body (335). While Marcus' death superficially appears to buck this trend, systemic collapse is not impressed on Marcus, it is represented through—and as—his failing body and subjectivity. Marcus is not merely subject to world-systemic process, his ghost *is* the totality of the world he narrates. His death, and the consequent end of narrative representation, reflect a terminal rupture in world-systemic process and an irreconcilable crisis in identity, but his second spectral death is a consequence of his own self-annihilating shame.

Marcus states that the most damning evidence of his infidelity was "the clear absence of any clear motive [...] other than a soft opportunity from which I had neither the wit not the courage to back away from" (159), and here the word "opportunity" resonates with another memory of bridge building. He recalls his involvement with the disrupted repair of Keeva bridge which had collapsed "under its own weight" after two months of hard rain washed its piers away (65). Under pressure from a local politician named Halloran, he visits the bridge and cuts a deal with Keville, the site engineer. By

dumping the cut granite from the old bridge on Keville's land they can shave time off the clean-up, and Keville can pocket the stone for himself. The process infuriates Marcus, though he struggles to articulate his grievance with the exchange, saying that: "something about his naked opportunism had riled me, [...] this was one of the things that sickened me about this job–every cunt wanting something" (78). He senses "something mean in it also, that small mentality that enabled small minds to thrive on such opportunities" (79). Keville's attempt to profit from the infrastructural off-cuts follows what Darling describes as the ballsy logic of the Tiger economy, the individualistic entrepreneurial imperative to exploit and accumulate to get ahead. But converting failing public infrastructure into a private revenue stream is incompatible with Marcus' belief in engineering as a sacred institution for the public good. The collapse of the Tiger did follow a culture of reckless financial opportunism as a policy of unchecked accumulation, but Marcus' pseudo-Catholic principles process this as "wanting"—an emasculating and diminishing sin or moral failure. When Marcus genders this entrepreneurial logic of competitive accumulation, he reproduces a pattern of Irish recessionary culture, which often identifies "the feminine as a site of blame for the excesses of the Tiger period" (Bracken and Harney Mahajan 2017, 2). There is a clear contradiction here, rooted in the multi-scalar instability of his ideology. Marcus' anger is reflexive, he sees Keville's self-interest and opportunism are a failure of masculinity homologous to his own infidelity. Moreover, what Keville offers is a quid pro quo that makes Marcus complicit, pulling him from the ideal realm of schematics and drafts to the earthly plane of convenience and political expedience. Marcus does not meet his own invented standards of patriarchy, which leaves him increasingly open to Weird anagnorisis.

When he narrates the fallibility of his labours and ideology, their shaky foundations leave Marcus at risk of being swept away like Keeva bridge, and carried to memories of the fact, place and time of his death. For example, when he finishes recounting the story of Keeva bridge he recalls trying to calm himself on the drive home by listening the to the radio as he passes Clew Bay, which is ironically a re-enactment of the lead-up to his final moments. He thinks of the memories that threaten his self-image "this shite swilling through my head, as if there wasn't enough there already"

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(McCormack, 79). This image of a liquid, faecal contaminant sloshing through his body recalls the effects of cryptosporidiosis, though buffered as he is from the consequences of infrastructural failure, his experience of the pathogen is symbolic. Darling comments on the metaphorical structure of cryptosporidium in the novel by highlighting the following quote from Agnes:

> it was now the case that citizens were consuming their own shit, the
> source of their own illness and there was something fatally concentric
> and self-generating about this, as if the virus had circled back to source to
> find its proper home where it settled in for its evolutionary span (125)

Darling argues that when Agnes describes the workings of cryptosporidium her words imply an underlying fear of miscegenation (340). While such an analogy would resonate with a widespread and racist discourse that remains prevalent in Ireland, Agnes' articulation of the situation is far closer to a Weird analogy of inbreeding rather than race-mixing. In a continuation of the Weird reflexivity that runs through the novel, the virus does not appear from the outside; it is self-generated, and circles back to its own source. If anything, the novel stages the crisis as a consequence of stagnancy, repetition and reproduction of injurious ideology. This is the organising principle that guides Marcus to the narration of his own death, and the climactic instance of Weird anagnorisis that pulls the novel to a close. He recalls forgetting himself in a protracted period of absent-mindedness while driving home past Clew Bay. As he comes again to conscious thought he is gradually overcome by chest-pain, until he is forced to pull-in and rest. As he turns on the radio for the one o'clock news, he realises that he remembers this pain. He explains:

> I died in that lay-by
>
> [...]
> my body had already picked up the rhythms of decay which had
> begun to work immediately in my soft flesh, that momentary heat spike
> which gave way to the falling temperature of rot with my blood passing
> from oxygenated red to black as the universal cellular explosions which
> bring on that spillage of filth within my organs which will eventually purge

from every orifice of my body even as I

    found my way home

    home again

    to sit at this table

    and drift through these rooms (263-4)

Marcus' first death comes as the pips announcing the news synchronise with his heart. He integrates with the flesh and blood twitching through the news stories, and his death becomes the realisation of ongoing decay, collapse and the spillage of waste and filth, which then recirculates back through the text polluting his second, spectral self. Like the excrement that pollutes the Corrib reservoir, it is the recirculation of these putrid fluids that leads to the collapse of his narration and his spectral life. Fulfilling the crisis of bodily borders seen in Agnes and Mairead's waste and Agnes' Blood, Marcus' terminal bodily crisis is expressed as a spray of liquid emissions. His own necrotic liquids are the black ink of his narration. His postmortem narration is a second run at subjectivity that refuses to confront its original collapse for fear of failure and repetition.

At the point of irreconcilable collapse Marcus's death is reflected in his car, and he recalls how his spine went rigid to slam his "shoe down into the foot-well," hitting the accelerator until "the car was screaming over a hundred thousand revs" (261). For Marcus, it is the recollection and the consequent reproduction of his life that bring about his second death, and the fatal neoliberal drive to overcome by pushing forward is instinctually embedded: in the pain of collapse his first reflex is to escape by pressing forward, but at this point he is simply burning oil.

3.2. "Níl an fhaisnéis fhadtéarmach róghléineach": Trauma, Scalding Water and the Revenant Future in *The Fifty Minute Mermaid* (2007)[15]

Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's *The Fifty Minute Mermaid* (2007) contains a series of republished Irish-language poems presented for the first time alongside Paul Muldoon's English translations. Taken from the 1998 *Cead Aighnis,* their newfound proximity to the 2007 global financial crisis and the ensuing attempts to privatise Irish water infrastructure infused the poems with renewed significance and infrastructural irony. The collection has two sections: part one, consisting of three introductory poems, while the longer second part is a cycle of 37 poems that form a fragmentary narrative following a group of displaced, land-dwelling *murúcha* (merfolk). Ní Dhomhnaill's longstanding reputation as an advocate for Irish language poetry and preservation (Theinová 2021, 30-31), as well as her critical writing on the significance and precarity of the oral tradition (Ní Dhomhnaill 2005, 165) suggest that the challenges facing the *murúcha* are a clear analogy to the precarity of Irish vernacular culture. Where recent criticism has interrogated the subtextual and symbolic significance of these fantastical fish-human hybrids, the way that the collection navigates the cultural precarity of the Irish language is the foundational textual logic that these texts work outwards from. For example, in Manuela Palacios-González and María Xesús Nogueira-Pereira's 2022 article, they agree that the poems explore the deliberate "repression of the vernacular culture by the colonized and their harrowing assimilation to the colonizing ideology" (2022, 230), before they continue on to emphasise how the *murúcha* press on the specific intersection of violence committed against women and animals in contemporary Galician and Irish poetry. Similarly, Ríona Ní Fhrighil reads the poems in terms of human rights testimony by focusing on the perceptible disparity between the narrator's words and the modes of narration favoured by the *murúcha,* arguing that the poems demonstrate "the power differential between oral and literate cultures and the greater

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[15] 'The long-term forecast isn't looking too bright' Translated from "Na Murúcha I mBun Oibreacha Innealtóireachta"/"Public Works" (Ní Dhomnaill, 68). All English translations in double quotation marks are from secondary sources. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Ní Dhomhnaill come from Paul Muldoon's parallel transcriptions printed in *The Fifty Minute Mermaid*. All translations in single quotation marks are my own.

validity or authenticity associated with written testimonies" (2017, 117). Again, this insightful and persuasive commentary requires an underlying reading of the *murúcha* as subjects of violent colonisation and cultural erasure. Through this, these papers provide perceptive and compelling commentary that world-literary systems analysis can develop further—particularly as critics have yet to account for the plentiful formal correspondences between the collection and contemporary Weird fiction. The linguistic alienation articulated by the poems is an ineluctable undercurrent that heightens the affective sense of ideological rupture. The *murúcha* sit as a rich seam of Weird literary consequence especially where their otherwise mythological or folk-inflected form collides with representations of contemporary infrastructure space. Poems like, "Cuimhne an Uisce"/"A Recovered Memory of Water", "Na Murúcha I mBun Oibreacha Innealtóireachta"/"Public Works" and "Bás agus Aiséirí na Murúiche"/"The Death and Rebirth of the Mermaid" weave the fantastical into the everyday experience of water infrastructure. Against the backdrop of Irish Water and neoliberal financiers recklessly attempting to integrate water resources into the mechanisms of speculative capital, the Weird infrastructural dynamics of these poems is pushed to the fore.

The formal consequences of the *murúcha* are complicated and non-linear, particularly as they are subject to a secondary dissociation through the intermediary perspective of the human narrator. In a 2014 volume, Cary A Shay argues that Ní Dhomhnaill deploys the *murúcha* as a dissociative device, and that this technique facilitates a distance between the poet and their subject that enables "an objective work of art" with a metaphorical structure that permits "the expression of traumatic and inexpressible conflicts" (188). Paradoxically, the interpretive process of separating the poet's specific autobiographical creative influence from the symbolic product of their creative labour only tightens the critical focus onto the authorial perspective and intent that the technique has supposedly excised. While it would be unhelpful to reduce the poetry to putative authorial intent, it would not necessarily be helpful to disregard the poetry's confessional context or Ní Dhomhnaill's written comments on creative process or theme. The more urgent critical imperative is to situate the work within the world-literary system to illustrate the infrastructural and systemic integration of the material and cultural processes that produce the "linguistic alienation, psychological trauma,

and exile from the symbolic order" (188) that Shay sees mediated in the *murúcha*. Indeed, Shay's reflections on Ní Dhomnaill's biography and authorial intent are a useful handle on the convoluted interplay of form and space in *The Fifty Minute Mermaid*. For example, her analysis of "Admháil Shuaithinseach/A Remarkable Admission" unpicks the poem's self-reflexive representation of an "insurmountable disjunction" between the rational and fantastical and argues that the supernatural elements of the poem facilitate "a metaphorical examination of what Ní Dhomhnaill sees as modern life in Ireland being lived in denial of the Irish language and the world that she believes it encompasses" (Shay 2014, 226). This alludes to Ní Dhomnaill's comments from a passage in the 1995 article, "Why I Choose to Write in Irish, the Corpse that Sits Up and Talks Back". Here, Ní Dhomnaill argues that "*an saol eile*," is straightforwardly immanent to the Irish language (19, 2005/1995). She translates *an saol eile* as "the otherworld" before describing the concept as an analogue for the imaginary or the subconscious; something "beyond the ego-envelope" that provides "a great source of linguistic and imaginative playfulness" (20, 2005). The passage contends that the everyday use of the Irish language involves a particularly pronounced tension between reality and *an saol eile,* and that this trait has become culturally and linguistically embedded as a consequence of historical circumstances. *The Fifty Minute Mermaid* is constructed around the separation of the fantastical *murúcha* from *an saol eile,* metaphorically tying their marginalisation to the peripheral status of the Irish language. This poses a critical antinomy that is central to the collection's heretofore unrecognised Weirdness. The *murúcha* derive from an abstract or ideological space that is independent of, but bound to, the material process of history; a contradiction that plays out along the legacy of Irish colonial subordination and mediated through the collection's expression of space and perspective.

Ní Dhomnaill conceptualises the creative and ideological horizons of the Irish language in terms of physical space, and crucially, this spatial register is accomplished and emphasised through the translation of the language into English. Though she glosses "an saol eile" as "the otherworld", a more literal translation of the phrase is 'the other life.' This wordplay rhetorically underscores the distinction in how both languages express this congruent concept: Irish processes the notion in terms of lived experience,

while English, the colonising language of occupation, does so spatially. Every time *an saol eile* appears in spatial terms it is interacting with an invasive outside force. For example:

> "The way so-called depth-psychologists go on about the subconscious nowadays you'd swear they had invented it, or at the very least stumbled on a ghostly and ghastly continent where mankind had never previously set foot" (19).

Despite its playful tone, this criticism accuses psychoanalysis of arrogant complicity with the colonial project. In Ní Dhomhnaill's framing of the situation, psychology not only encounters *an saol eile* with a presumptive confidence that misappropriates the unfamiliar concept, it reimagines it as an empty landmass that is ripe for colonisation. The title of *The Fifty Minute Mermaid* sharpens this criticism, as its reference to the standardised length of a therapy appointment underscores how the ongoing mechanisms of capital have incorporated the discipline of psychology. Capital exploits the generational trauma of colonisation and trades it back to the neoliberal subject in billable units of labour time. This constitutes a phase-change from embodied suffering to exploitable surplus that resonates with the phase-change that occurs when Ní Dhomnaill translates *an saol eile* into English. It is not simply that the division between two ideological spaces is evident in the process of translation, the ideology becomes spatial when shifted from Irish to English, and the spatial change occurs to facilitate occupation and exploitation. The description of the continent as ghostly and ghastly is particularly useful, as it draws together the capitalist desire for an extensive frontier with the contingent Lovecraftian terror of the colonised body. The Weird emerges from the oppositional nature of these ideological spaces, and the poetry of *The Fifty Minute Mermaid* mediates their collision through the process and struggle of translation, particularly where understanding and signification break down and become untenable. Considering this formal preoccupation with spatialised ideology it is little surprise that significant points of Weird visibility occur at instances of water infrastructural encounter, particularly in the representation of domestic appliances where the shifting economic relations of wider water infrastructure extrude into the everyday. The colonial dynamic in the collection operates on the familiar spatial logic described in Lovecraft's

"Supernatural Horror in Literature" where an invasive outside collides with and transforms a familiar ideological space. This produces thematic parallels to contemporary Weird texts. For example, this notion of *an saol eile* has a certain affinity for the destroyed noosphere in *Metro 2033*, as both concepts constitute an extra-material space threatened by systemic crisis and infrastructural alterity. The most obvious but critically neglected connection between *The Fifty Minute Mermaid* and the self-consciously Weird is the *murúcha* themselves. Fish-folk in Weird fiction have a long history of interplay with dominion over public water resources and wastewater management which makes critical discussion of their formal similarities all the more urgent.

In a 2023 chapter, Elizabeth Wessling explores the radically mutable form of the mermaid in anglophone culture by identifying the "rogue circulation" of the mermaid within contemporary mermaid-narratives and fan communities (22-3). Wessling identifies Disney's 1989 and 2000 adaptations of Hans Christian Anderson's *The Little Mermaid* (1837) as the most influential merfolk-narrative in popular culture, noting the story's conservative inversion of the classical and mythological forms of the siren or *ningyo*. While a siren is characterised by her powerful hybrid body and beguiling voice, Ariel moves the mermaid "from the seducer to the seduced" (22) as she surrenders these animal and supernatural parts of herself, foregoing her expression and mobility to pursue heterosexual romance with a human man. Wessling argues that recent popular mermaid narratives re-subvert this relationship, breaking from the confines of the heteronormative love-plot to express gender fluidities and queer sexualities in works including *How to be a Mermaid* (2012), *The Lure* (2015) and *Julian is a Mermaid* (2018). Across these works, the mermaid's non-human characteristics function as markers of nonconforming subjectivity or identity. Like Ariel, Ní Dhomnaill's *Murúcha* have been stripped of their speech and fantastical capacity, but as a metaphorical corollary for Irish vernacular culture their deprivation comes as part of the coercive process of colonial assimilation.

The townsfolk from Lovecraft's "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" (1936) are the most prominent sea-people in the classical Weird. Here, an isolated fishing village has secured regular and plentiful yields of fish through ritual communion, human sacrifice,

and interbreeding with a culture of ocean-dwelling creatures named "Deep Ones" (858). Innsmouth's fishy regime solidified in the wake of sectarian conflict between Christian townsfolk and the church of Dagon. The opening of the story details the outcome of the scenario: when the unnamed protagonist-narrator discovers the arrangement and flees the town, "a vast series of raids and arrests occurred, followed by the deliberate burning and dynamiting" of the waterfront. "No trials, or even definitive charges were reported" and yet the fish-folk of Innsmouth vanish into military prisons and concentration camps (807). Though the fish-folk of Innsmouth are unambiguously monstrous and violent, the narrative essentially describes a community with a non-conforming social relationship with water resources, and how the state restores the status quo through violent intervention in the community. The moment of climactic Weird anagnorisis comes at the end of the story when the narrator, discovers his blood-relation to the church of Dagon and the Deep Ones. His sanity gradually deteriorates as he begins to visibly manifest physical characteristics of the fish-folk, starting with the physical inability to shut his eyes and culminating in the biological apparatus to fulfil his compulsion to dive into the deep ocean and live forever in the columned city of Y'ha-nthlei (857-8). Again, the fish-parts of the merfolk's hybrid body mark the ideological outside, though in contrast to Ariel and most of the *murúcha*, the narrator succumbs to his non-human aspects. Lovecraft's predictable turn to anti-miscegenation panic illustrates the Weird's tendency to exaggerate the transgressive non-human elements of the hybrid body, and to situate the audience perspective within or alongside this ideological outside. Contemporary Weird narratives typically present a more interesting and favourable perspective of non-conforming, queer and rebellious characteristics represented in the hybrid body, though they often sustain a heightened sense of non-human corporeality and explore this along even more expressly infrastructural terms.

In twenty-first century mermaid adaptations the mermaid remains the embodied junction between two contrasting worlds. For Wessling the subversive invitation of the mermaid is to "reimagine the relations between humans and (in)animate beings sharing habitats" (25). This enormous contrast between the mundane and the otherworldly in self-consciously Weird texts intensifies this dynamic and renders the Merfolk's infrastructural ties even more visible. In the old Weird the fish-hybrid's nonconformity is

a source of horror, in the New Weird it is more complicated, but often tied to patterns reminiscent of *Solar Bones,* where toxic material is recirculated through the water supply due to an infrastructural failure. A hallucinatory mermaid (played by Valeriia Karaman) acts as the metaphorical lynchpin of Robert Eggers' 2019 film *The Lighthouse,* appearing as the setting's primitive hydrological infrastructure and the characters' ideological stability undergo a co-productive collapse. Set in 1890, the narrative follows Young (Robert Pattinson) and Old (Willem Dafoe), two lighthouse keepers who become stranded at their post on an Island off the coast of New England. Old enforces a restrictive and unfamiliar set of seafarers' superstitions and when Young violates one of Old's social mandates by killing a seabird in a fit of rage, a storm descends on the island, causing its fresh water and sanitation infrastructure to collapse. Here, The film emphasises the co-productivity of the island's material and social infrastructure through their supernatural entanglement. The lighthouse's water cistern becomes contaminated by drowned seagulls, and it becomes impossible to empty the brimming chamber-pots into the ocean—the squall defeats Young's attempts to do so by splashing their contents back into his face. Anupriya Dasgupta argues that this and the many other scenes showing "graphic acts of flatulence, excretion and masturbation" produce a heightened sense of mortality salience that comes to fruition through the hybrid body of the mermaid (2023, 83). Citing the scene where Young masturbates while he imagines having sex with the mermaid, the non-human appearance of the mermaid's genitalia and his apparent failure to climax, Dasgupta contends that the mermaid's non-normative body poses a disruption to the symbolic immortality offered by sexual reproduction (87). Indeed, Hayward notes that the framing and editing often juxtapose the mermaid with phallic imagery like tentacles and sharp objects, and at several points she is match-cut with the face and head of a blonde man that Young had clashed with in Canada, and eventually the face of Old wearing piscine adornments and characteristics of Triton (Hayward 2022, 206-7). Both critics read the mermaid as an expression of Young's inability to reconcile his queer desire with the social expectations of nineteenth-century New England and his performance of heteronormative masculinity.

However, critics have said comparatively little of the film's thematic interrelation of the carnal and the carnivorous. Much of the broiling sexual tension between the

lighthouse keepers occurs in discussions over food and food preparation; both in the toxic jockeying for hierarchy in the distribution of traditionally gendered roles in the domestic and work environment (Hayward 198, Newell 2020), and in the sensuous experience of drinking and eating—especially meat. During one such argument Young disparages Old's cooking "If I had a steak, I could, oh boy, I could fuck it." (Eggers 2021, 51). As food supplies on the island dwindle and starvation sets in, this overlap of libido and appetite becomes a thematic conflation of human bodies with animals and food. Young dredges up the decaying body of a previous lighthouse keeper in the island's lobster pot. The conflict between the lighthouse keepers devolves into Young burying Old alive, but not before leashing him and parading him around as a barking dog. The film concludes with the image of Young, immobilised and eaten alive by seagulls experiencing a doom prophesied by Old (Eggers, 52-3, 85). The cannibalistic implications of Young's carnivorous libido draw attention to a critically underdiscussed element of the contemporary Weird mermaid: just as animal traits mark social non-conformity, they are also a marker of which bodies are fit to be consumed, excreted and processed into waste and effluvia. In this, the *Lighthouse* reflects *Solar Bones,* as in both texts the collapsing sanitation system forces the characters to endure the recirculation of their own toxic excretions until the text undergoes a narrative collapse.

The Fifty Minute Mermaid specifically addresses the entanglement between infrastructure and the *murúcha* in "Na Murúcha I mBun Oibreacha Innealtóireachta"/"Public Works". Here, the narrator discusses—and thereby establishes—a known quality of the *Murúcha*: "go bhfuilid an-thugtha d'oibreacha innealtóireactha"/'that they are very given to large works of engineering' (68-71). The poem attributes this infrastructural predilection to the unutterable crisis that displaced them from their ocean home. The collection never gives concrete form to this calamity, instead it traces its outline through tone, implication and the narrator's speculation. The narrator of "Oibreacha Innealtóireachta" refers to their exodus as "an mhéid gur ghaibheadar tríd"/'the amount that they went through' (68), but the following poems suggest further details, particularly where they echo and modify the structure of this sentence. One such example appears in "Admháil Shuaithinseach*"* when the narrator realises "go raibh saghas éigin cineghlanadh gafa tríd acu"/"that they had gone through

some sort of ethnic cleansing" (Ní Dhomnaill, trans. Muldoon, 86-87), though even here the structure of the language shifts slightly to maintain the ambiguity. Muldoon preserves the sense of motion in the phrase "gafa tríd" by writing that the *murúcha* had "gone through" this trauma, though this suppresses some subtleties of the verb *gabh*. An alternative translation could be that the *murúcha* were 'caught up,' in this ethnic cleansing. The past participle "gafa" precludes the notion that they perpetrated this violence, but the action of being caught or fished up from the ocean is an inextricable part of their unspoken trauma. This also feeds into an idea established earlier in the collection, the Merfolk have been left "A Thríomaigh"/'out to dry'(26). Their trauma is not the product of a single cataclysm; it also comes from the ongoing strain of their exodus and becomes physically spatialised by the infrastructure they turn to in the circumstances.

Shay writes: "The Fifty Minute Mermaid contains a primary sense of dislocation from a would-be home, and an inability to access or possess a collective mythology" (220). Indeed it is this profound sense of loss that makes the *murúcha*'s fondness for infrastructure applicable to the water privatisation efforts in post-Tiger Ireland. The *murúcha* fear a return to the ocean, the site of their historic trauma, as a return to that environment could involve a re-subjectification to that state of exception, vulnerability and humiliation. This reflects the perceived "centuries of colonial emasculation" that Darling contrasts with the "hypermasculine" neoliberal ideology that drove Ireland's aggressive development and financialisation during the Tiger (335, 2021). The Irish government's attempt to apply this logic to the country's aging water infrastructure shortly after the crash was ill-conceived and unsuccessful, but the preceding decades of neoliberal hegemony inhibited organised political opposition to the foundation of Irish Water by pushing alternative strategies of infrastructural reform out of mainstream political discourse. *The Fifty Minute Mermaid* registers this imaginative paralysis in the *murúcha*'s culture of silence toward their ocean home, but also in many material barriers to their ocean home that their new social complex produces. In their long exodus to dry land, the *murúcha* have experienced social upheaval that is matched and exacerbated by physiological transformation. "Easpa Comhbríon"/'Lack of Sympathy' notes that "na sceoilbhaigh a bheith ag obair níos mó"/"their gills had ceased to

function" (Ní Dhomnaill, Muldoon, 58-59), and "Na Murúcha a Thriomaigh" catalogues the many physical symptoms of living on dry land: "galar cnis mar oighear is gríosach"/"skin complaints [such] as windgall or blotching" (26-7) are accompanied by superstitions and cultural practices that have been adopted to manage these illnesses, many of which require a rejection of their former oceanic culture. Though their Catholic culture is a sharp contrast to classical sea people or the Lovecraftian Deep Ones, the poem's interest in medical grotesquery recalls the slow mutation seen in "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" and the corporeal revulsion of *The Lighthouse*. The "muincí troma"/'heavy necklaces' and "ceirtacha dearga"/'red neckerchiefs' the *murúcha* use to obscure their gills smooth their social life on land, but they also indicate a desire to obscure the shame of their historical subordination.

In "Oibreacha Innealtóireachta" the narrator slightly qualifies the shape of this ongoing trauma by noting that the *murúcha'*s knowledge of the English word "*danger*" (italics original) is rooted in their familiarity with Murrough of the Burnings: the Baron of Inchiquin who commanded the Parliamentarian army at the Sack of Cashel in 1647. This aligns and conflates the *murúcha* with the Irish Catholic resistance during the Eleven Years' War, adding colonial sectarian conflict to the growing "mhéid gur ghaibheadar tríd"; and yet the chronology and location of their cultural history is Weirded by its parallel origin in the oceans of *an saol eile* and the dry land of seventeenth-century Ireland. This Weirding is reflected in the infrastructural policy that the *Murúcha* deploy to prevent a repeat of this crisis:

> tá stáisiún draenála
> agus é lán suas de chaidéil agus de phumpanna
> le húsáid I gcoinne na hanachaine. (Ní Dhomnaill 68)

> they have a drainage station
> full of water pumps and all sorts of hydraulic systems
> in case of emergency. (Muldoon, 69)

In their efforts to avoid a repeat of their historical experience, the *murúcha* counter-intuitively rely on a drainage system intended to manage water levels and prevent flooding. At the point of republication, such a preposterous hydro-infrastructural

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solution to epochal crisis was intensely relevant to the Irish government's then-imminent introduction of domestic water charges. The translation of "anachaine" to emergency playfully obscures the scale of the scenario the *murúcha* hope to avert with the drainage station, as "anachain" is a word that can refer to anything ranging from a mishap to a calamitous disaster or loss. The linguistic dissonance highlights the gap between the station's technical and aesthetic function, in that the small drainage station is of little use in a serious crisis. Its function is to preserve the existing social conditions by suppressing the *murúcha*'s anxiety that they will re-experience their historical trauma.

The Weird forecast of epochal crisis presents the *murúcha* with an alternative form of pressing danger that threatens the traumatic return of suppressed history but translated through their new cultural practices.

Pléascfaidh toibreacha uile an duibheagáin mhóir
agus osclóidh comhlaí uisce uile neimhe.
//
All the wells of the deep will burst
and the floodgates of Heaven will open.

(Ní Dhomnaill, trans. Muldoon 68-9)

In a direct parallel of the Gensis flood narrative, the *murúcha* expect the downpour to last "daichead lá is daichead oíche/forty days and forty nights" though in this case the supposed cause will be converging infrastructural failures within *an saol eile*. 'Duibheagáin,' which Muldoon here renders as the "deep", resembling the English word 'abyss' in its indication of darkness, size, inscrutability, and its association with hell or the underworld. Earlier in the collection, however, the narrator uses it to describe the *murúcha*'s place of origin. In "Na Murúcha a Thriomaigh" the narrator writes that the *murúcha* have forgotten

ar shuathadh mearathail na gcaisí doimhne
is ar chlaisceadal na míol mór sa duibheagán.
[...}
Cuireann siad fíor na croise idir iad agus é. (Muldoon, 29)

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//

      the dizzying turning of the deep currents

and, from the abyss, the whale's antiphonal singing.

[…]

They make a sign of the cross between themselves and it.

                                  (Ní Dhomnaill, 26),

The Irish communicates the motion of the currents with greater intensity as though the language is more capable of communicating the affect of the deep-ocean. The nested homophones 'caisí' (turnings, warp) and 'cais' (spite) embed the word 'caise' (current) with torsional fury. A series of plaited internal rhymes and corresponding rhythms also accentuate this sense of swirling: "shuathadh" with "míol mór sa", "doimhne" and "duibhea[gan]", "chlaisceadal" to "mearathail" and the "chlais-" to "gcais-". As these sounds echo through the description of the *duibheagan*, the whale's "chlaisceadal" describes a collection of simultaneous voices arranged into harmonious, choral rows, which reflects the interlocking structure of these two lines. The phonic techniques that emphasise the chaotic spiralling of the deep ocean are, simultaneously, the patterns that pull the language into poetic structure. In a discussion of "Bunmhiotas na Murúch/Founding Myth," (Ní Dhomnaill, Muldoon, 44-45), Fanni Fekete Nagy draws on Van der Kolk to argue that the *murúcha*'s accounts of their origins are "ambiguous appropriations of stories from the Christian tradition" and that these borrowed cultural traditions function as a means of supressing the trauma of their historical reality (Fekete-Nagy 2021). This strategy of avoidance compromises any reflection on their traumatic cultural experience, inhibiting their infrastructural efforts at crisis mitigation. Their signing of the cross performs the same function as the drainage station, by aesthetically insulating the *murúcha* from the call of the ocean. Their defensive signing of the cross between themselves and *an saol eile* not only obscures its form, when memory does pierce their appropriated biblical narrative this new cultural lens distorts the *duibheagán*. With the swirling form of the deep current and echoing whale song the *murúcha* reinterpret its echoes in the choral tradition, a dissonance that Muldoon highlights from the Irish with the singular possessive apostrophe on "whale's": while the

dense echoes of the Irish version could constitute the plurality of voices necessary for antiphonal singing, in the English the whale is calling for a reciprocal voice.

This resonates with the other infrastructural solutions described in "Oibreacha Innealtóireachta". Daniela Theinová describes Ní Dhomnaill as a poet who views the "concept of the language issue as coexisting alongside a deteriorating ecological environment" (2021, 242), and "Oibreacha Innealtóireacha" effectively demonstrates this through the formal and thematic convergence of linguistic precarity, and environmental crisis. Moreover, the imaginative stasis evident in the *murúcha*'s infrastructural response twines these threads into the singular crisis of capital. Although the prophesised flood would originate from infrastructural failure within *an saol eile,* the narrator stresses that "róthruaillithe agus na gásanna úd tigh gloine"/"pollution and greenhouse gases" are now posing a material rise in sea levels (Ní Dhomnaill, Muldoon, 70-1). Yet the *murúcha* continue to favour solutions inspired by their appropriated historical narratives:

> Tá cuid acu ag cuimhneamh ar áirc a dhéanamh
> agus brat pice uirthi lasmuigh agus laistigh,
> a rá is go saorfaidh sé sin iad
>
> /
>
> some of them are even considering building an ark
> and proofing it with bitumen and pitch, inside and out,
> in the hope that this will somehow save them. (70-1)

Their reliance on carbon byproducts as a solution for mounting ecological debt is ironic, but deeply reflective of the neoliberal impetus for a stopgap solution, and the ecologically inimical preference for the financial liquidity afforded by carbon-capital. The poem's final lines address the insufficiency of these infrastructural solutions in the face of epochal crisis with the disconcerting question: "n'fheadar ag an bpointe sin cad a dhéanfaidh siad?" Muldoon emphasises the ominous implication of the Irish by avoiding the most straightforward translations of 'I wonder at that point, what will they do' or 'what will they be made of.' Instead, his version reads "I wonder, at that point, what stuff they'll be made of", a less naturalistic translation that Weirdly emphasises

their biological composition (70-1). Combined with the earlier mention of fishing boats that have been repurposed to carry tourists, the narrator's question carries the carnivorous subtext of *The Lighthouse*—should their current social reality collapse, would their crisis-management infrastructure help the *murúcha* to survive, or will they persist only as fishing stock, or sedimentary biomass that slowly decays into crude oil.

Just as the *murúcha*'s inability to articulate their historical trauma has undermined their infrastructural efforts to protect from a recurring disaster, the culture of silence inadvertently reproduces and magnifies the trauma it is supposed to obscure. "Cuimhne an Uisce"/"A Recovered Memory of Water" (30-33) is a poem about a woman who suffers with recurring hallucinations, and her struggle to articulate this experience in conversations with her therapist. Fekete-Nagy applies Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory to the poem, which she interprets as a text detailing the intergenerational transmission of historical trauma. She explains that "postmemory describes the experiences of children of survivors of historical trauma" which arises because "children can be traumatised themselves by the fragments of memories they have heard from their parents; they can be afraid of things their parents fear without knowing why" (2021 N. Pag). This theme appears in the invisibility of traumatic stimulus: the poem excludes certain focal elements from textual representation, ensuring that they haunt the poem through inference alone. The first absence is evident in the way the narrator provides the woman's identity. While the English text specifies that she is "the mermaid's daughter" the Irish limits her introduction to "a hiníon" (her daughter) and makes no mention of the *murúcha*. Her *murúch* ancestry is evident only through the inherited trauma that suffuses everyday experience of water infrastructure with Weird hallucinations. The narrator introduces and defines the narrator by her relationship to her mother before omitting her mother from the poem, thereby obscuring details of the daughter's identity while marking their relationship as one of distance or absence. Her ability to understand and reflect on herself is further destabilised through the conspicuous absence of a bathroom mirror. Instead, the act of teeth-brushing, the poem's side-by-side English and Irish presentation, and the daughter's struggle to meaningfully recall useful language in the therapist's office imply a process of reflection

and a surface in which to perform it. The narrator highlights the axis of presence and absence through the struggle over the word 'uisce'/'water':

> Níl aon térmaíocht aici, [...]
> ná focal ar bith a tabharfadh aon tuairim is lú
> do cad é 'uisce'. (Ní Dhomnaill 32).
>
> //
>
> She doesn't have the terminology [...]
> or any word at all that would give the slightest opinion
> to what is 'water'.

Despite this struggle to articulate the concept, water makes a central symbolic appearance in the poem through the narrator's description of the daughter's hallucinatory experience. The daughter's attempts to describe the phenomenon parallel the reader's attempts to recognise the concepts that the poem suppresses and omits. However, it also masks the most likely material origin of the water she hallucinates: a flowing tap that spills over the edge of the sink, or the connective apparatus between domestic sphere and the wider system of hydrological infrastructure. In these hallucinations the washroom appears to fill with water as she brushes her teeth. The narrator describes how the water moves up her body. It starts at her "cosa is a rúitíní, is bíonn sé ag slibearáil suas is suas arís thar a masaí is a cromáin is a básta /feet and ankles and slides further and further up over her thighs and hips and waist" (30-1). The two languages then deviate as in the English the water rises "up to her oxters", in the original it rises "go dtí na hioscaidí uirthí", where 'ioscaid' is the word for the hollow at the back of the knee. She then bends to gather the wet objects from the floor of the bathroom, producing a Weird inversion: with her head falling, and the rising water passing her knees twice, she appears to tip upside down as though she is reflected by or floating in the water. The word 'iasc' (fish) is muddled into the word 'ioscaid' and the description of the water's recession: "téann an t-uisce I *ndísc"/*"the water goes dry" (Ní Dhomnaill, Muldoon, 30-1, my italics). This heightens the impression of the daughter's buoyancy and foregrounds her Weird, non-human characteristics.

The water rapidly vanishes, leaving the room "iomlán tirim/fully dry" (30 translation mine) and the *murúch*'s daughter to struggle with "strus uafásach/a terrible stress" (30 translation mine). Again, material apparatus that connect the bathroom with the wider system of hydro-infrastructure are conspicuously absent. The ambiguous implications of the Weird domestic flood compound the trauma of the experience. As always, water itself is a reminder of the historical exodus, but its sudden absence is just as alarming. The phrase "iomlán tirim" plays on this compound stress. The vanishing water reproduces the "ná tráma a dtroimaithe"/'the trauma of being left high and dry' (Ní Dhomnaill, trans. Muldoon, 106-7), but its sudden disappearance coupled with the textual absence of a drain or shower for it to empty into insinuates that the water may still be present: by fully filling the space the surface has vanished, making the water an omnipresent but invisible pressure. The crux of the stress here is that the daughter cannot meaningfully distinguish between the presence and absence of water—like the protagonist from "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" the ambiguity deprives her of an urgent part of her familial history, leaving her in a state of great uncertainty. As the hallucination is one of tremendous liquid excess there is an obvious correspondence to the crash of the Tiger economy: an abundance of water floods the space and causes a sudden inversion of relations before vanishing into an inarticulable nothingness. Increasingly, the motif of *murúcha* being left out to dry reflects the condition of Irish taxpayers in 2007, when the housing crisis revealed that the endless stream of liquid capital flooding the nation was unstable, impermanent, and largely fictitious— particularly as the government and economic apparatus appeared to lack the language or ideological apparatus to manage the crisis in a measured and sustainable fashion.

This failure of neoliberal economic policy ties into the collection's theme of intergenerational friction, which works in tandem with the ongoing implication of sexual conflict and reproductive trauma. In "Cuimhne an Uisce" the "ceirteacha" or rags discarded around the bathroom recall the decaying sanitary products described in "Na Murúcha a Thriomaigh": "ceirteacha na gcneácha, an fhuil mhíosúil is náireach leo"/'the menstrual rags, the menstrual blood they shy away from' (29). Like their recollections of the whale song, the *murúcha* discard these rags in shame, but in "Cuimhne and Uisce" they become mysterious symbols of the *murúcha,* as the

daughter sees the rags as strands of "ceilpe/kelp" named 'mermaid-hair' or 'foxtail' (30-1). Her confusion at the sodden rags foregrounds the daughter's alienation from her oceanic heritage, and a simultaneous—and possibly defensive—alienation from her own body. Whenever the daughter lacks the language to describe something, her missing vocabulary shunts the object from text to the subtext. Despite their formal displacement she remains subject to the presence of these objects:

> 'Lacht trédhearcach,' a deir sí, ag déanamh a cruinndíchill.
>
> 'Sea,' a deireann an teiripí, coinnibh ort!' […]
>
> Deineann sí iarracht eile.
>
> 'Slaod tanaí,' a thugann sí air, […]
>
> 'Brat gléineach, ábhar silteach, rud fliuch.' (Ní Dhomnaill 32).
>
> //
>
> 'Diaphonous milk' she said, doing her utmost.
>
> 'Right,' says the therapist, 'keep going!' […]
>
> She makes another attempt.
>
> 'A thin flow' she names it,
>
> 'A shining film, a flowing material, something wet.'

In her attempts to articulate the concept of water, her paraphrasis often suggest repressed sexual or reproductive trauma, as phrases like "lacht trédhearcach" and "Brat gléineach" are closer to insinuated translucent bodily fluids like semen, breast-milk and vaginal fluid than water. Moreover, the poem opens with the *murúch* brushing her teeth with baking soda and a "slaod tiubh". Though Muldoon renders the phrase as a "thick brush" (31), the phrase also translates to 'heavy flow', and so the poem's eventual arrival at "slaod tanaí" maps the passage of narrative time along the arrival and cessation of her menstrual period. And yet, the sudden tide of dispersing fluid also suggests the experience of breaking water, or even a miscarriage. The closest indicator of suppressed violence appears in the way the Irish narrator describes the water's movement: "ag slibearáil suas"/'slobbering up' her legs and thighs as though possessed of a Weird and sexually aggressive agency. Indeed, the word 'ioscaid' shares a further distressing similarity with the word 'oscail' or 'open', as though the water is rising to her 'hollows' or 'openings'. The implication of sexual exploitation anticipates later poems

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such as "An Mhurúch agus an Sagart Paróiste" / "Mermaid with Parish Priest", in which a parish priest molests an eleven year-old *murúch*, leading to her alienation from the Irish language, Catholicism, adults and her Mother who failed to protect or empathise with her (108-113). Whether she is suppressing trauma stemming from sexual violence, reproductive trauma or routine but unresolved stress arising from the discomfort of adolescence, the daughter's shaky attempts to put language to the concept of water combine with her mother's evaporative presence to communicate an intense anxiety attached to reproduction and sexuality. There is a fundamental communicative failure here, between the daughter and her mother, but also with the therapist. When she first attempts to describe the substance in her hallucination, the therapist's reply, "sea" is an informal affirmative constructed by abbreviating 'is ea' or 'it is.' Of course, in this context, the solution to her problem is "sea", as in the English word for ocean. The bathroom sink connects the domestic space to the wider ecological frame of the water cycle and through this, the sea and the *duibheagán* of *an saol eile*. The hallucination occurs when the daughter encounters the *murúcha*'s ancestral home, but only after hydrological infrastructure has converted it into a barely recognisable social context. In the context of the financial crisis and the establishment of Irish Water, the poem registers the Weird affective discontinuity that occurs when the infrastructural development transforms the social relations surrounding a resource as fundamental and ubiquitous as water.

Further to the foundational historical trauma of the *Murúcha's* exodus, "Cuimhne an Uisce" exhibits a persistent thread of single-generational trauma transmission that runs throughout the collection. This kind of conflict and the question of culpability are particularly evident in the collection's depiction of mother-daughter relationships, especially in the poems that discuss the ties between the *murúcha* and Catholic religious practice. The dynamic in "Cuimhne an Uisce" is narrated with a degree of ambiguity: the daughter's limited vocabulary obscures the subtextual presence of sexual trauma, but her relationship with her mother is similarly hazy. The daughter's inability to articulate this suffering could stem from parental neglect, or the unfortunate postmemory of her mother's unspeakable trauma. Poems like "Sagart Paróiste" and Bás agus Aiséirí na Murúiche"/"The Death and Rebirth of the Mermaid" (114-7) help to

untangle this question of culpability, as they describe scenarios where intergenerational trauma is not transferred passively, but deliberately inflicted through representations of interpersonal violence and systemic exploitation. Ríóna Ní Fhrighil's 2017 article, "Of Mermaids and Changelings: Human Rights, Folklore and Contemporary Irish Language Poetry", is useful here, as its discussion of Louis De Paor's 1996 poem, "Iarlais"/"Changeling" provides a strong counterpoint to Ní Dhomnaill's work on hereditary trauma. In De Peor's poem, the narrator describes how his infant daughter once scalded herself with bathwater during a lapse in his supervision, and how the sight of her pain caused an involuntary recollection of Phan Thị Kim Phúc in Nick Ut's 1973 Pulitzer Prize winning photograph "The Terror of War"—also known as "the Napalm girl" (109). The narrator of "Iarlais" imagines his eye forming a singular entity with the "dhall/blind" lens of Ut's camera as the bathwater brands Phúc's injuries onto his daughter's skin. He Weirdly conflates and entangles his unnamed child and the space of his domestic bathroom with Phúc and the roads outside the devastated Trảng Bàng, and in the process he assumes a sense of culpability for both children's injuries. Ní Fhrighil weighs the narrator's guilt against De Paor's reference to the "shúil mhillteach" / "evil eye"—a folkloric motif where a person's gaze can afflict its object with ill fortune (109). Beyond his straightforward culpability for his daughter's burns, the narrator wrestles with the guilt of his voyeuristic consumption of Phúc's suffering. He also struggles with the realisation that his empathy for Phúc must be mediated through his daughter's suffering, and that his narration of the poem itself perpetuates the exploitation of both girls. The poem concludes with a description of how his daughter's skin is: "loiscthe ag an uisce fiuchta ag allas scólta mo shul" "burned by boiling water that sweats from my scalded eyes" (De Paor in Ní Fhrighil, 109). Here, the narrator expresses the ultimate concern that his exposure to and consumption of horror has left him with traumatic damage that he will inevitably pass on to his child.

Despite its similar exploration of inherited trauma through the hydro-infrastructural referent of a domestic bath, Ní Fhrighil makes only passing reference to "Bás agus Aiséirí na Murúiche" (114-7). Like "Cuimhne an Uisce", "Bás agus Aiséirí" follows the relationship of a mother-daughter pair, but it inverts the nomenclative hierarchy of this earlier poem. Throughout its gruesome account of filicide, the narration

identifies the daughter as the "mhurúch" and exclusively refers to the "Máthair an-mhallaithe" / 'very wicked mother' by her position in the mother-daughter relationship. Alongside the mother's open hostility "Bás agus Aiséirí" foregrounds several of the subtextual threads from "Cuimhne an Uisce". Reflections, for example, are a recurring point of structural and thematic significance. The mother is jealous of the *mhurúch*'s "cúl fada gruaige ar dhath na feamnaí" / "long head of hair the colour of seaweed" and so she keeps sharp watch to ensure that "ní ligfeadh sí in aon ghaobhar í do scáthán"/ 'she did not let her in any proximity to mirrors' (Ní Dhomhnaill114-5). Water, therefore, becomes the reflective surface that grants the mhurúch knowledge of "a háilleacht féin"/'her own beauty'. She starts to seek her reflection, first, in the "sruthán"/'rivulet' by their home, and later in a communal "trach uisce"/'drinking trough' (114) before she eventually discovers the full sense of her beauty in the company of "aoire ar an mbaile darb ainm Mícheál"/'a shepherd in the village by the name of Mícheál' (114). By gazing into the surrounding groundwater resources and public water-infrastructure she gains knowledge of her Weird heritage, and through this, her supernatural power, sexuality, alternative social relations and the possibility of a life outside her mother's home. She becomes one of the only *mhurúcha* in the collection to actively seek out water. When the mother learns of Mícheál she tries to halt the relationship by beating her daughter savagely, but instead the mhurúch sneaks out that night to meet Mícheál at a currach at the cliffside, where they have sex surrounded by "rabhán" or "sea pink" (Ní Dhomhnaill, Muldoon, 114-5). When the mother notices that the *mhurúch* is carrying a sea pink on her return, "théigh sí dabhach mhór copair is d'iarr sí cabhair na Maighdine Muire ar an rud a chuir sí roimpi"/'she heated a vast copper bath and requested the aid of the Virgin Mary in the thing that she put before her' (Ní Dhomhnaill 116). When the *mhurúch* peers into the tub to see her reflection she instead finds the same sea pink submerged and "dubh doite"/'burnt black', before her mother thrusts her into the boiling water where she is left "gan áilleacht is fiú gan Beatha"/'without beauty or even her life' (116). The mother uses water, the source of her daughter's joy, cultural identity and growing independence to boil away her life and beauty.

The boiling of the *murúch* ties into the running motif of parents cooking and eating children, and of non-normative traits consigning vulnerable subjects to the

category of food and therefore waste. But the mother's appeal to the "Mhaighdine Muire", coupled with the attempt to cleanse evidence of the *mhurúch*'s sexual activity in a vat of water, signals a further hydro-infrastructural parallel to the historical abuses carried out in the Magdalene Laundries. Initially established in the 18th century to "undertake rescue work with prostitutes" and women in need of "moral and spiritual recovery", the Laundries were a penal institution that the Irish state eventually contracted to process human surplus that were considered "extraneous to the modes of production" (Bragan 2024, 396). Between 1922-1996, ten of these institutions were operated by four orders of Roman Catholic nuns. During this period they imprisoned and abused over 10,000 women with the tacit permission of the state. These prisoners performed arduous, unpaid, forced labour in tortuous psychological conditions to sustain the Laundries' for-profit commercial business. Often, they were assigned new names on arrival. Many were sentenced to the laundries by the judicial services, and many more were trafficked by hospitals, church authorities and their families to suppress scandals related to supposed promiscuity, unmarried motherhood, sexual abuse, disability, and mental illness (JFM 2013). The Magdalene Laundries constituted a unification of the state's penal and sanitation infrastructure, that processed and sanitised the laundry of public hospitals, schools, prisons, the military, and state entities including Córas Iompair Éireann, the Office of Public Works, the Land Commission and Áras an Uachtaráin (JFM). As evidenced by her petition to the Virgin Mary, the wicked mother grounds her actions in a distorted sense of Catholic morality and shame, and her filicide conforms to this sanitising, penal logic. The *murúch*'s mother kills her in response to a supposed sexual transgression, but the poem poses her decision to sleep with Mícheál as a metamorphosis rather than a loss of purity: "Dhein bean den mhurúch nach raibh go dtí san ach ina cailín óg" / 'A woman was made of the mermaid, who until then was nothing but a young girl' (114). This line seems to imply that as the *mhurúch* comes to maturity she also becomes a human. Indeed, by the end of the poem the narrator does abandon the word *mhurúch* and refers to her with exclusively prepositional pronouns. However, her maturity and independence come from her deepening grasp of her Weird non-human characteristics like her seaweed-hair and siren-capacity to attract Mícheál. The chronology of her transformation is further complicated by the fact that the narrator names her *mhurúch* twice more: once when

she boils, and for a final time when Mícheál exhumes and reanimates her corpse (116). The thing that stops her being a *mhurúch,* is the scalding baptism imposed by her mother. Like the *murúcha* from "Oibreacha Innealtóireachta" the mother has appropriated Catholic traditions to insulate herself from inherited trauma, and through these traditions she has shed her nonhuman characteristics. She attacks her daughter for the Weird traits that would allow her independence from these strict appropriated morals, posing an inversion of the parental dynamic seen in Iarlais.

However, this dynamic does correspond to the folkloric motif of the changeling that Ní Fhrighil discusses in "Iarlais". She identifies the changeling as a Weird and sickly child that people from the otherworld exchange for a good and healthy child. Like the *mhurúcha*, stories of changelings betray a pattern of negligent parenting, and the social exclusion of vulnerable bodies that exhibit non-conforming physical and behavioural characteristics, especially signs of illness, disability or neurodivergence (110). Ní Fhrighil explains that to resolve this alienation and recover their child the parents in changeling narratives typically rely on violence:

> To recover the human child, the changeling must be made cry, be beaten or burned, thrown on the fire or on a dunghill, or left to drown, although in most accounts to no avail since the original child is not returned. (2017, 110)

The Fifty Minute Mermaid often ties these kinds of filial cruelty to Catholic social tradition. As discussed in the context of *Solar Bones,* Roman Catholicism provided a stable social framework for republican national identity and resistance against British colonialism. In her discussion of the Roman Catholic Church in Irish women's poetry, Catriona Clutterbuck describes the Church's other contributions to the social reproduction of the Irish state, such as its institutional provision of "solace, stimulation, reconciliation, and hope" as well as "a sense of belonging, collective bonding, and transnational connection" that impelled many toward "spiritual, educational, and artistic growth" (2021, 304). She also describes the rapid decline of the Church's moral authority over the past half-century: partially because of the nation's "increasing openness to the forces of global modernity" but also the increasing evidence of the Church's role in "reprehensible sexual, physical, and psychological abuse of the most

vulnerable in society, perpetrated and/or facilitated by members of the clergy." (304, 307-8). In "Bás agus Aiséirí", Mícheál exhumes and resurrects the *murúch,* and the two flee and make a new life in Galway. Though she starts her new life as a "*zombie balbh*"/'mute zombie', her speech slowly returns, though like the daughter in "Cuimhne an Uisce" she retains "luaithbhéalaíocht éigin"/'some speech impediment'. Often, she moves with a stiffness "gur I gcónra a bhí sí"/'as if she was in a coffin" (Ní Dhomhnaill, 116). The poem registers the ongoing physical and psychological scars left by this infrastructural logic, but also the impossibility of fully accounting for this trauma.

It is worth returning to the subtitle of Ní Dhomhnaill's 1995 essay: "the Corpse that Sits Up and Talks Back" to highlight how she characterises the Irish language as a revenant. Of course, the irony at work in this Weird analogy is that the language is very much alive, but in the context of the Celtic Tiger's neoliberal primacy Irish was, and continues to be, treated as a cultural atavism or archaeological curiosity. But in "Bás agus Aiséirí" the zombie refuses to speak, which draws further infrastructural correspondence to the Laundries and the wider system of infrastructural violence perpetrated by the Catholic church. In 1993, a mass grave of prisoners from the Magdalene Laundry at High Park, Drumcondra was discovered. The Department of the Environment granted an initial exhumation license to exhume 133 women, but were forced to issue a further license to account for the discovery of even more unmarked human remains. There were 155 women buried at the site, many of whom lacked death certificates and conclusive identification beyond the religious names given by the Laundry (McGettrick et al 2015, 49-44; Brangan 395). Interestingly, it was a liquidity crisis that caused the public discovery of the grave at High Park—one that followed reckless financial speculation on the future of a doomed private transit infrastructure project. The legal representatives of Sisters of Our Lady of Charity have insisted that this debt arose from the cost of their sheltering services, though Claire McGettrick and her fellow researchers at Justice for Magdalene have demonstrated the chronological inconsistencies of this claim, and present the likelier scenario that the Sisters were forced to sell the land to cover losses incurred from a catastrophic investment in the failed Guinness Peat Aviation company (McGettrick et al. 40-1).

None of this is to resolve the poems with a narrow critique of Catholic ideology, or to argue that the systemic consequences of Catholic cultural practice in Ireland have dictated the post-crash infrastructural reforms. Rather, that the Roman Catholic Church is increasingly recognised as an organisation that is willing and able to sponsor the exploitation and abuse of children and vulnerable adults to preserve social order, and this reputation is instrumental to the collection's infrastructural logic. The poems recognise a pervasive ideological willingness to preserve neoliberal social order through the deliberate sacrifice of the future—here registered in the suffering of the youngest generation of *murúcha*—and this ideology corresponds to the rigid and short-term logic that backed the neoliberal attempts at hydrological reform in the years after the Celtic Tiger. There is a homologous exploration of this cruelty in "Murúch Linbh gan Baisteadh"/ "An Unbaptised Merchild", where children who deviate from Catholic cultural practice are culturally processed as waste using the language of sanitation infrastructure:

caitheann tú seile ar an leanbh sin.

Is ceart duit an méid sin a dhéanamh
is a rá lena linn,
'Cac is mún is aoileach ort'. (84)
//
you absolutely must spit on that child.

You have to do that
and to say while you're doing it,
'May shit and piss and the dunghill be with you.' (Muldoon, 85)

Muldoon translates "ort" to "with you", but the literal translation of 'upon you' more clearly communicates that the relative placement of an unbaptised mer-child should be at the infrastructural terminus of discarded excretion and waste fluid. Again, children outside the circle of normative Catholic practice are subject to scorn, exclusion and abuse in the guise of moral necessity. In these poems, 'illegitimate' and non-conforming youth are involuntarily hauled into social acceptability and a state of infrastructural

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abjection with a baptism of scalding water and thrown spit. Interestingly, the verb "caitheann", used here in the future conditional, communicates the necessity of the action, but the root verb "caith" also means 'consume,' 'spend,' 'wear' and most commonly 'throw.' This definitional convergence has interesting ideological intimations that Muldoon attempts to express in "you absolutely must". The motion of this wastewater originates in cultural necessity, and the performance of this Weird baptism involves a consumption, but also an expenditure bodily fluid. The line break before "caitheann" slices the "Má"/'If' from the poem's opening sentence, suffuses the text with a suppressed sense of guilt, as the conditional Weirdly transforms into an imperative and an accusation.

"Linbh gan Baisteadh" proved uncomfortably infrastructurally prophetic, as the collective culpability for the historical conditions in church-operated maternity homes became an issue of national scandal. In 2012 Catherine Corless published an essay in the *Journal of the Old Tuam Society*, where she combined witness testimony and historical statistics to allege that a disused septic tank on the former grounds of the Bon Secours Mother and Baby Home was likely the site of a concealed mass grave (Corless 15-19). In response to the ensuing outrage, the government launched a commission of investigation that discovered significant quantities of juvenile human remains at the site, which presented a substantial contrast in scale and complexity to the exhumation carried out at High Park (McCullagh et al 2017, i, 13). The remains of 796 children were disinterred from sewerage infrastructure at the Tuam site (Barry, 2017), though the commission flagged this as just one instance of a larger pattern of systemic failure: between 1922 and 1998 approximately 9000 children died at the 18 institutions covered by the report. To borrow the language of the commission of investigation:

> In the years before 1960 mother and baby homes did not save the lives of 'illegitimate' children; in fact, they appear to have significantly reduced their prospects of survival. (2020, 4)

Infuriatingly, these figures were known and uncritically recorded by local and national authorities (2020, 4). Of the many contributing factors the Commission describes, one of the most interesting is that Ireland was one of the last countries in Europe to legislate

adoption. The Commission argues that concerns "that state-regulated adoption would result in Catholic children being adopted by parents of a different religion" was a significant factor in this catastrophic legislative failure. Again, the historical reputation of the Church is entwined with a cultural trauma rooted in the nation's colonial history, and this corresponds with the neoliberal policy economic policy that continues to interfere with the nation's water infrastructure.

In *Solar Bones* and *The Fifty Minute Mermaid,* infrastructural flows of water and waste expose the world-ecological entanglement of the neoliberal subjects that consume and expel them. In *Solar Bones* Marcus' belief in the fundamental public good of infrastructure is Weirdly polluted by his inability to curb the patriarchal logic of the Celtic Tiger and his lapsed Catholicism. This produces a Weird temporal and narrative incoherence that leads to an ultimate ontological crisis. To recall Morton's automotive metaphor from the Thesis introduction, Marcus, the driver, finds his present invaded by his complicity in ecological crisis, which brings his thoughts, narration and action to a stop. In *The Fifty Minute Mermaid* the historical trauma of colonialism produces a cultural logic of silence, and coercive assimilative violence. In this silence however, there are constant Weird glimpses of an alternative way of being. In "*Teoranna*"/ "Boundaries" (130-1), a *murúch* struggles to shed a sense of interconnectivity immanent to life in the *duibheagán*: "Ritheamair go léir isteach ina chéile, ba dhóigh leat uaithi,"/'We all ran into each other, if you'd believe her" (130). The narrator rejects her Weird sensitivity to watery infrastructural entanglement, but such a sensitivity illuminates the subjectivities and forms that are hidden by a more individualist, neoliberal ideology. The fact that such logic is inimical to neoliberal thought, simultaneously produces and disguises the iniquities of its consequent infrastructure space. Increasingly, the investigation of historical Irish infrastructure space has uncovered human subjects that the world-system has metabolised as waste or surplus. It would follow that a world-literary perspective should take a similarly investigative approach toward the Weird infrastructural forms that permeate cultural products of the world-ecological system.

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Conclusion

Fresh from a discussion grounded in Irish water infrastructure, it is important to reflect on the widespread public opposition to the government's attempted reforms. Through co-ordinated demonstration, mass non-compliance and the incompetence of the Irish Water executives, the planned measures to shift the cost of Irish water infrastructure into a system of direct billing was halted in 2017. In times of intensifying economic inequality it's important to recall that there is, surprisingly, a line in neoliberal ecological policy-making that significant numbers of the public will push back against—though obviously this comes with some load-bearing caveats. The water protests came on the heels of the 2008 recession, which had intensified the ambient level of public scrutiny. The policy would have directly intruded on every household of an already furious public and in one of the wettest nations in Europe, water charges were always going to be a hard sell. Nevertheless, if an ideology spatialised by infrastructural policy is sufficiently Weird, it appears that it can spark widespread organised resistance. This is not to argue that Weird fiction needs to be distributed as a matter public concern, but rather that the ongoing crises visible in contemporary infrastructure will already be distorting the form of world-literary media in new and important ways.

Today, one of the more visible and interesting instances of water infrastructural controversy in Ireland is the government's plan to reroute millions of litres of water from the nation's economic periphery in order to cool the datacentres of multinational corporations based in Dublin. Bresnihan has commented of the controversial plans to build a €1.2 billion water pipeline between the river Shannon and the Greater Dublin Region in the hope that this will facilitate foreign direct investment from large corporations that hope to exploit Ireland's plentiful supply of groundwater. He emphasises that the purported benefits of such a project often dismiss the dubious gains, comparing the plan to the Intel microchip Plant in Lexlip. Here, he argues that a planned expansion to the Kildare site is projected to account for 7-9% of the country's total energy consumption, while offering little of substance to regional development (2023, 97-109). Opposition groups like the River Shannon Protection Alliance have queried the necessity of the Pipeline, when engineering works could instead be directed

to fix the 40% leakage rate in the Dublin municipal area that would better cover the capital's hydrological needs if properly addressed. (Siggins 2023). In Northern Ireland, an adjacent crisis has emerged in the form of the Lough Neagh Algae bloom. In the Summer of 2022, the largest lake on the island blossomed into shades of rancid green, as decades of agricultural mismanagement rooted in neoliberal economic policy poisoned the drinking water of 40% of the population of Northern Ireland. Depressingly, this is once again an issue of faecal contamination, as the biomass killing the lake has been fertilised by agricultural runoff and human waste (Taylor and Barry 2024).

Between these two hydrological crises is the outline of Weird infrastructural developments in urgent need of critical focus. The visibly poisonous slime infesting Lough Neagh is a local expression of Weird ecological crisis, reflecting a historically inadequate provision of national hydro-infrastructural security through sensorially repulsive means. The Shannon pipeline fulfils the same logic of negligence and poor judgement, but in a mode that suppresses the structural violence that this infrastructure affords. An enormous and urgent area of Weird infrastructural inquiry is the realm of digital infrastructure that has become almost ubiquitous and integrated into cycles of world-ecological as water. A crucial task for such an endeavour is to (re-)materialise the ephemeral infrastructures that enables cellular networks and internet architecture. These subterranean cables, satellite systems and datacentres bind infrastructural circuits of energy and water to the cheap forms of finance and productive capital in way that diminishes their visible ecological impact. Thethe visible crises of energy and water infrastructure can be used to gesture toward the private interstate networks of digital infrastructure, and that through this the interconnected systems of capital that hide their most horrific expressions of exploitation and violence in the peripheral regions of the world-system.

Digital infrastructure facilitates new and elaborate forms of simultaneity that compress and Weird the experience of distributive, world-systemic time. Throughout the earlier sections of this thesis a recurring thread has been neoliberalism's tendency to sacrifice a stable future for the maintenance of the present, and Weird texts often register this in the form of vulnerable and vanishing children. In *Cyclonopedia*, "Murúch Linbh gan Baisteadh" and "Car Crash While Hitch Hiking", children are consigned to fire,

the Dunghill, or disappearance into narrative lacunae. In these texts, the evaporative children do not simply function as a denial of the future, they are a conceptual death of any alternative social reality. This gesture is particularly visible in the post-apocalyptic texts of the second chapter. Here, *Metro 2033* positions the doomed dark ones as a younger cousin to a violent, subterranean humanity. Similarly, in *Snowpiercer* the Tail Section children are processed into undifferentiated components of the *Rattling Ark*. Tyler Bradway touches on this pattern of a vanishing future in his 2020 discussion of "Dreadful Kinship". Bradway uses this term to describe a set of horror narratives that "explore the fragility, trauma, and irreducible violence of normative kinship structures" or a "becoming-weird" of heteronormativity. He argues that in the face of "austerity, debt, underemployment, environmental catastrophe, and widespread precarity, heteronormative plots of the good life look less and less tenable" (123-4). These types of temporal Weirding occur across the expanding system of world-ecological reproduction and are worth considering against the Weird temporal form of Okri's "Worlds That Flourish", particularly the recursive imperative to stay or find "where you can be happy" (734, 738).

A recurring looping pattern across the journey-bound narratives in this thesis, is the heightened formal extent to which time is expressed in spatial terms. Where temporality is encoded in the unfolding of narrative time, the thematic preoccupation with time produces recursive formal structures that capture the ideological paralysis of contemporary social reality. The risk here, of course, is a negation of subjectivity and an ensuing death of political efficacy. The Weird registers, and often participates in, an aesthetic abrasion of subject-object relations. This formal manoeuvre is generative and interesting but causes a collapse into speculative abstraction if it is not handled with the necessary materialist rigor. Yet, the florid lexical field of *Cyclonopedia* is potentially extremely helpful when managing the ontologically corrosive critical practices of new materialism. For example, applying the logic of Hidden Writing to "Cuimhne and Uisce" offers a productive interpretive lens. The subsurface hydrological infrastructure of domestic space becomes visible in the paranoid hunt for plot ( )holes, and the photonegative illumination of this hidden space affords a novel perspective on

(in)visible social forms. The challenge here, of course, is to apply a process of Weird interrogation without completely collapsing the object of inquiry.

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