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‘Le feu est de retour dans la vallée’: The Noir Landscapes of Deindustrialization in Lorraine

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Abstract:

The region of Lorraine is often seen as paradigmatic of the social problems arising from deindustrialization in France. Noir novels set in the region offer rich reimaginings of the landscapes of deindustrialization, both geographical and social. This article examines what noir aesthetics do to these landscapes, studying a corpus of novels from four writers. In a first section, the article looks at how the novels engage with deindustrialization through ruins and natural environments. In a second section, the article examines how Dominique Manotti’s *Lorraine Connection* critiques the policies of reindustrialization implemented in the region since the late 1980s. The article concludes with an analysis of how noir genre conventions allow the novels to critique the cruel optimism of reindustrialization.

Keywords:

Noir, deindustrialization, Lorraine, unemployment, neoliberalism, post-industrial landscapes, Didier Daeninckx, Dominique Manotti, Nicolas Mathieu, Roger Martin.

‘It seems after all fire has returned to his valley’ muses Maurice Quignard, the manipulative local politician responsible for reconversions and reindustrialization in Dominique Manotti’s noir novel *Lorraine Connection*.¹ In the region of Lorraine, a former industrial heartland in the North-East of France, where the mono-industry of steelmaking dominated the twentieth century, fire in the valley immediately evokes the blast furnaces that illuminated the sky, day and night. Except that in *Lorraine Connection*, the fire is that of a Daewoo factory set ablaze during a strike. Typical of both the ironic tone characteristic of the noir genre, and of its pessimism, this moment in the novel closes its opening third which is almost entirely set within the walls of the factory.

Quignard’s statement exemplifies the way noir novels set in deindustrialized Lorraine attempt to find ways to articulate a conflicted relationship between a lamented deindustrialized present and a hallowed industrial past. The use of words such as deindustrialized, post-industrial, or industrial era reifies a clear distinction between before and after, and constitutes deindustrialization as an event, whereas it is a complex and heterogeneous process made of conflicting policies of reconversion.² The temporality of deindustrialization is complex; it is neither an event (for example the great strikes of metal workers in 1979 and subsequent closure of factories in Longwy), nor is it simply a slow death (from the closure of the mines in the 1960s to that of the remaining forges in the early 2010s). Rather, it is both a drastic reduction of the prominence of industry in the economic makeup of the region over time, and a series of contradictory policies of reconversion and reindustrialization. These policies, however, do not recreate the same conditions of work and existence in the region, and signal a profound mutation in the relationship between people and their work(place).

In this article I will examine a corpus of four novels: Didier Daeninckx’s *Play-Back* (1986), Roger Martin’s *Un Chien de sa chienne* (2000), Dominique Manotti’s *Lorraine*

Connection (2006) and Nicolas Mathieu's *Aux Animaux la guerre* (2014). Whilst acknowledging the complexity of the temporality of deindustrialization, for ease of reference, this article will refer to 'deindustrialization' in relation to the novels that tackle the aftermath of the closure of long-standing factories (Daeninckx, Martin and Mathieu) and to 'reindustrialization' for the novel that concentrates on the working conditions in the factories attracted to the region by French and European public subsidies from the late 1980s onwards in a bid to replace the jobs lost in the first waves of deindustrialization (Manotti). I will examine the way space is inhabited in different ways through deindustrialized time in these noir novels. I propose that noir genre conventions act as a toolbox for writers to produce a powerful social critique of both deindustrialization and reindustrialization. In the first half of this article I will concentrate on deindustrialization and analyse how Daeninckx, Martin and Mathieu engage with the landscapes of Lorraine, in particular ruins and natural environments, in order to critique the varying forms of exploitation both of the land and the people in industrial and post-industrial times. In the second half, I will turn to reindustrialization, and study how Manotti presents a new Daewoo factory as a crime scene, and supplements noir pessimism with critical forms of optimism for a post-industrial future.

The landscapes of deindustrialization

An important aspect of deindustrialization in Lorraine is the way it has, in a relatively short time, transformed spaces and landscapes. Large numbers of cultural projects produced in and about deindustrialized Lorraine thus attempt to make sense of this new spatial configuration: whether it be the ruin photography of Gilbert Fastenaekens, the writings of François Bon, or the artist films of Jonathan Rescigno exploring the destruction of buildings. A recurrent trope in this cultural production is the empty plot, best illustrated by the works of the state-

sponsored *Observatoire national du paysage* (national landscape observatory) Lorraine brownfield sites.³ In this series, photographers return to the same sites every few years, and take black and white photographs from the same perspective, documenting processes of erosion, destruction and abandonment. These new landscapes lead to the emergence of new affective states, where subjectivities and topographies are intertwined.

Such states can be found in the psychogeographic writings of Gilles Ortlieb, who questions his fascination for these landscapes: ‘What is it that we seek there? The confirmation of which personal fallow, which dilapidated definition of beauty, which belated compassion in the face of the end of an ordeal announced.’⁴ The image of an intimate fallow conjures up the idea that after industrial exploitation, not only the landscape, but the psyche itself needs a period of rest to become fertile again. Fallow lands are also temporarily untended spaces: the metaphor draws a link between the kind of post-industrial ruins photographed by Fastenaekens,⁵ the rurality of pre-industrial Lorraine, and the psychic states of those who live in these landscapes. Another example of such affinity between post-industrial landscape and affective states can be seen in Marcel Donati, a steel worker, unionist and poet, who claims: ‘I am a brownfield.’⁶ In this case, the metaphor is less rural, and the former worker undergoes what might be called a becoming-brownfield: a state of indeterminate latency, where the abandonment of production has not yet given rise (and may never) to new subjective assemblages, new ways of producing, expressing and experiencing the self.⁷ Such spaces (ruins, brownfield sites) all feature in post-industrial noir novels, which begs the question: how does a noir aesthetic illuminate the way these places are inhabited?

Ruins in *Play-Back* and *Aux Animaux la guerre*

Ruins feature prominently in *Play-Back* and *Aux Animaux la guerre*. The latter is set in the early 2010s in the Vosges mountains, in the south of Lorraine, a region that provided much of the wood used to prop up the mines of the region, and which was also an important area of textile industry. *Aux Animaux la guerre* is partly set in a dilapidated farmhouse in which an ex-OAS militiaman lives with his two grandchildren.⁸ This miserable setting induces feelings of shame in both: the younger daughter, Lydie, finds ways to forget about her alcoholic mother through self-absorption and a keen interest in pop culture. She conjures away the farmhouse by covering the walls of her bedroom with a miscellany of trinkets, described as ‘a heap of trinkets under which the farm disappears.’⁹ She also works hard to make her appearance an asset; practically the only girl in a vocational school, she finds self-worth and social prestige in her sex-appeal. The older son, Bruce, is desperate to leave the farm, which he describes as a ‘scrapyard mess’,¹⁰ and sells drugs in all the mountain towns around. His sense of self-worth is continually endangered by his surroundings, and he deploys coping strategies, including bodybuilding and criminality, to reinvent himself. With his muscular body and drug selling, ‘he mingled with the small world of night owls, daddy’s boys and two-bit thugs [...] kissing hello blond beauties destined to become lawyers or cardiologists.’¹¹ Using what Adam Isaiah Green calls the social organization of desire, an application of Bourdieu’s field model to sexuality,¹² it appears that in this passage, Bruce believes he possesses an erotic capital (he fancies himself a local Tony Montana)¹³ that allows him to cross class boundaries in a way that would otherwise be difficult with his economic, social and cultural capitals. Whether or not his assessment is accurate is another matter, as other characters in the novel repeatedly ridicule both his looks and his delusions of grandeur. With the closure of factories these younger inhabitants cannot place pride in their bodies as productive sites any longer. Yet, their sole asset remains their own bodies, leading to an obsession with their looks. This reliance on erotic capital reads in the novel as a

reterritorialization of the body as source of legitimacy: as the body is no longer a prized tool of industrial work (gendered as the strength of the forge worker, or the dexterity of the seamstress), Bruce and Lydie invest in their erotic capital as a way of relegitimising their bodies.

For the main character Martel, who belongs to the older generation, the closure of the factory where he works is simultaneously a source of worry and somewhat appealing as he imagines the ruins-to-be of the buildings: ‘Martel could already picture the kids from around the town having fun throwing stones at the windows of the empty factory. Give it two winters and there would be nothing left but ruins.’¹⁴ This affective and imaginative state is common in the cultures of deindustrialization and could be called the becoming-ruin of factories.¹⁵ Martel’s affective state, a form of conflicted longing for a deindustrialized future, can be described as projective nostalgia. I follow here Ortlieb’s use of the expression to describe his relationship to the landscapes of deindustrialized Lorraine:

[...] Projecting yourself into a future that was as implacable as it was ill defined, you could almost bring yourself to believe that the wreaths and eddies of smoke from the factory that you can hear throbbing on the other side have already lost a good part of their reality.¹⁶

I propose that such projective nostalgia is a dominant aesthetic and affective state in the culture of deindustrialization in Lorraine.¹⁷ In projective nostalgia, ruins play a symbolic role, putting the subject in a future state of nostalgia for their present. In *Aux Animaux la guerre*, ruins therefore have an appeal for the struggling worker that they do not possess for the younger generation: they suggest escape or a perspective beyond the hopelessness of the process of deindustrialization. That is to say, they allow consideration of a form of futurism,

or perhaps even optimism, that is predicated neither on an industrial conflict they cannot win (indeed all the noir novels studied in this corpus are pessimistic about the power of industrial action) nor on a form of optimism that sees reindustrialization and reconversion as solutions to the problem of deindustrialization. Indeed, as this article will discuss later with *Lorraine Connection*, this optimism about reindustrialization could be seen as a ‘cruel optimism’, following Lauren Berlant’s coinage.¹⁸ Instead, projective nostalgia denotes a longing for the disappearance of industry, for a ruined future.

This longing suggests that if there are criminal acts in these noir novels, they are perhaps the crimes of industrialization. Didier Daeninckx plays the most clearly with this idea. *Play-Back* was first published in 1986, only a few years after the great demonstrations of 1979 in Longwy, during the closure of important steelworks. The novel is clearly set in this aftermath, and the fictional town where it is set, Longrupt, is a portmanteau word of two towns at the Luxemburgish border, Longwy and Villerupt. Ruins feature prominently in Daeninckx’s *Play-Back*; indeed, they constitute the dominant atmosphere of the novel, from the descriptions of Longrupt at the beginning of the novel and throughout the central character’s travels across the region. In *Play-Back*, ruined landscapes do not bring a sense of new futures or heterotopic possibilities: the novel’s pessimistic sensibility sees ruins as meaningless and unproductively tethered to the industrial past. At the end of *Play-Back*, the protagonist is on the motorway to Paris and sees a housing block near Metz being dynamited:

A thick cloud of plaster, concrete dust, powder and earth immediately covered the ruins, like an aerial shroud that the wind slowly blew away.

Police cars cleared the roads. I pushed up the wipers’ lever, and I observed the blades mixing the dust settled on the windscreen with the drizzle brought by the wind.¹⁹

Representations of industrial ruins tend to aestheticize them and emphasize the way the thick layer of dust under which buildings and machines lay dormant ‘shroud’ industrial times, to reuse Daeninckx’s word. However, the narrator here is keen to move on and insist on the ruin not as a persistence, but as a complete and rapid disappearance, easily washed away by the car’s wipers. Comparing this passage to work by artists such as Belgian photographer Gilbert Fastenaekens and his night shots of abandoned Lorraine factories that have the picturesque and classical qualities evocative of *Ruinenlust*, Daeninckx’s ruins seem wilfully devoid of reverie, aesthetic pleasures and imagination.²⁰ The novel never indulges in the poetics of ruination, nor does it attempt to think of ruins as a *topos* open for any appropriation by inhabitants: it is as if the semiotics of ruins are reduced to their simplest meaning of disappearance and erasure. I argue that this rare take on industrial ruins produces a distancing effect on the reader, preventing aesthetic investment in the spaces, in order to cast more efficiently ruins as evidence, not so much of the industrial past (of which we might be nostalgic) but evidence of a crime.

For Daeninckx,

We live in a society that relentlessly erases everything, and which exists in a sort of continual present. But what noir novels say is precisely that traces from the past are capital, which is why they are hidden from us.²¹

Such erasure has been so thorough in Lorraine, that it is as if the ‘industrial crime never took place.’²² In this perspective, the distancing effect in *Play-Back*’s ruins has a political dimension: for Daeninckx, ruins are not so much the traces of lost industry as evidence of the political and cultural obfuscation of the social suffering produced by

deindustrialization. Just as the narrator leaves the region for good, it seems that all is being erased and Lorraine is destined to be levelled. Back in Paris, he decides against doing the job he is paid for (ghost writing a pop star's biography) and writes instead the story of the singer's murdered childhood friend, following the promise he made to the victim's great aunt earlier in the novel that he would tell the world about what is happening to the region. The novel he ends up writing (*Play-Back* itself) thus works against the erasure of the process of deindustrialization.

A return to nature in *Un Chien de sa chienne*

Compared to ruins, natural spaces seem at first to offer the possibility of happier post-industrial futures, yet in *Un Chien de sa chienne*, the use of certain *noir* tropes foreclose this possibility. *Un Chien de sa chienne* follows the investigations of a female private detective into the murder of a former steel worker in the forest. The novel's prologue depicts Lorraine as a rural place: the soon-to-be victim drives through rapeseed fields and walks in the forest, listening to the chorus of birds. The region returns to preindustrial idyllic days – a rural landscape that was the region's core identity for a long time, as writers like Jacques Réda in *Aller aux mirabelles* (1991) and Philippe Claudel in *Nos si proches orientes* (2002) remind us.²³ *Un Chien de sa chienne* thus starts with the happy ending of deindustrialization, where landscape returns to nature and a former steelworker is surprised by his own happiness in this landscape. Thinking about the past, in the factory, the character realizes things are not so bad:

That was the past. He had done quite well in the end because, as far as he remembered, he had always loved nature, fishing, picking mushrooms and doing long walks in the forests near the Meuse river and Belgium.²⁴

The post-industrial aesthetics of nature are related to ruins, insofar as ruins are the result of a losing battle of culture over the forces of time and nature, but rely on a nostalgic fantasy whereby a happy, balanced relationship between humans and the land can be found again.

This longing is different from Ortlieb's fallow land. The inhabitants' subjectivity is not so much in a state of rest and expectation for an unseen future, as it is a clear return to the ideal of a happier preindustrial era. Nostalgia is thus displaced from industrial times (when towns were bustling) to preindustrial ones. It is a fantasy about the land that is also divorced from labour: when labour has become intertwined with industry, it is unsurprising that the character able to return to the simple pleasures of nature is retired. In other words, the fantasy is not only about the landscape and our relationship to it, but also about a population free from work. This radical nostalgia, one that forgets altogether about (re)industrialization, is also behind the policy of reconversion based on the marketization of the natural world, part of the efforts to shift the region to a tourism economy. Alongside trails about industrial heritage (such as the European Route of Industrial Heritage), wildlife is protected, and green tourism developed.

The Noir element in Martin's novel is a critique of this return to nature if it means inscribing it into economic production. Indeed, the murder happening in the first pages of the novel acts as a very quick rebuttal of the possibility of a return to nature as a credible future for Lorraine. Following the murder, the novel's investigation painstakingly delves into successive layers of mystery shrouding the extensive exploitation of the natural world. The investigators make a series of discoveries: the trafficking of a protected species of birds of prey, rat-baiting and illegal dog fights in a former Maginot line fort, and finally the dumping of dioxin from a German factory in other fortifications. The novel is part of a series whose

detective, H el ena R enal, specializes in miscarriages of justice. At first, the moral issue at stake is indeed one such miscarriage, with a young Romany man being accused of a murder he did not commit. However, H el ena quickly turns into what Jo Lindsay Walton and Samantha Walton call an ‘ecological detective’ called to ‘bear witness’ and take action against a series of ecological crimes.²⁵

Within noir novels set in Lorraine, *Un Chien de sa chienne* is unique in its treatment of ecological crimes, rather than economic and social ones. Here, the victims are animals, both wild and domestic, as well as the environment, and the crimes are investigated as a local problem. The novel has clear affinities with what Deborah Bird Rose calls ‘Anthropocene noir’: in her conception of the genre, ‘human beings are all criminals, all detectives and all victims’ of ecological crimes.²⁶ Although there is a clear culprit in *Un Chien de sa chienne*, a man who organizes dog fights, traffics protected species and dumps dioxin, the novel’s investigation uncovers larger environmental damage. A first form of damage occurs because of the way promises of economic reconversion of the region into ‘green’ tourism have commodified wildlife. As the novel explains, the international traffic of birds of prey is far from the only cause of their extinction, and leisure activities like rock climbing are also damaging: as a local bird watcher explains in the novel, ‘the cliffs where the raptors live and nest are as busy as the Champs-Ellys ees!’²⁷ The investigation questions the solution of protecting nature for economic purposes: the novel seems to propose that using potential economic gains to incentivize ecological action, especially nature conservation, only leads to further exploitation. The novel thereby implicitly traces back a genealogy of Lorraine as a privileged site for the exploitation of its land, first for its iron-poor ore, and now for its protected species.

The second way in which we are all implicated in the crimes in *Un Chien de sa chienne*, has to do with the way animals are treated in the novel. Compassion for other

animals is shown to be elicited through the narrative structure of the detective investigation: a series of clues leading to red herrings, each an exemplar of crime against animals and the environment. A wildlife advocate explains about the rat-baiting the detective uncovers: ‘do you really think it is easy to elicit compassion for rats?’²⁸ and adds that for local politicians it is not a crime to kill rats.²⁹ It is only when H el ena sees the scene of rat-baiting that she admits to changing her mind about these animals, whereas her associate, not privy to the spectacle is unmoved by the story: ‘he had seen nothing of the spectacle and rats still looked repulsive to him.’³⁰ In Martin’s novel, noir is eco-critical insofar as the narrative structure of the investigation acts as an education for the protagonists who are forced to rethink their (lack of) fellow-feeling with animals, including animals that are culturally cast into the abject.

However, looking in more detail at the issue of place reveals a deeper engagement with the relationship between human and non-human animals in the novel. The Lorraine region is described as a prime locus of animal exploitation; for the detectives:

Before driving up to Lorraine, they had known nothing of pet trafficking. They had subsequently learnt about rat-baiting, and heard rumours about dog fights [...] How long before you saw elephants, crocodiles or trained fleas?³¹

Another character proceeds to explain that the traffic of animals is a booming global business. The novel’s ecological discourse establishes a relationship between a defence of the local and the regional, and the recognition of global wildlife exploitation. This is clearest in a passage where a diplomat from the United Arab Emirates attempts to cross the border to Germany with a few peregrine falcon juveniles; the birds are then found by a custom officer who describes the crime as a theft, a kidnapping.³² The word theft indicates that the

protection of the environment is based on the notion of wildlife as a treasure, as an asset. Biodiversity is thus reifiable and birds are an economic asset for green tourism. But the word kidnapping emphasizes a form of kinship, literally because the birds are juveniles stolen from their mother, and by extension kidnapped from Lorraine. The protagonists, spending the night in the forest to protect the birds, are not simply seeing them as valuable commodities in touristic Lorraine, but also as lives in need of protection. The novel weaves together the human and the environmental sides of deindustrialization through a continual back and forth in the novel's structure between the human consequences of deindustrialization, with passages describing the idleness and disenfranchisement of former workers, and the uncovering of new forms of exploitation and pollution of the environment: all are victims, in varying ways, of the process of deindustrialization.³³ The structure of the novel's investigation shows deindustrialized Lorraine as a space of 'shared vulnerability' for human and non-human animals, where there is what David Farrier calls after Rose and Ulrich Beck a 'multispecies community of risk.'³⁴

The crimes of reindustrialization in *Lorraine Connection*

In *Lorraine Connection*, Dominique Manotti depicts in detail a factory in Lorraine, a fictional version of one of the three Daewoo factories opened in the region in the late 1980s with the help of subsidies designed to bring industrial jobs into the region as part of a wider policy of reindustrialization after the mass closures of the region's steel mills that had gradually happened since the 1960s.³⁵ By the 2000s the Daewoo factories were closed and delocalized. Manotti's noir novels are often inspired by a real *fait divers* mixing fact and fiction, and *Lorraine Connection* conflates two events: the failed attempt by Matra-Daewoo to buy

weapons manufacturer Thomson during its 1996 privatization, and the burning of Daewoo's Mont-Saint-Martin factory in 2003.³⁶

Although it may seem contradictory to speak of a post-industrial factory, I would argue that the Daewoo factory burnt down in *Lorraine Connection* exemplifies a post-industrial condition in Lorraine, chiefly because it is the result of a policy to tackle deindustrialization. This factory is unlike the behemoths of the steelmaking days, having been attracted to the region with subsidies to create jobs and characterized by its transience and mobility. Its architecture itself testifies to this difference: described in the novel as underwhelming ('a rather unimpressive glorified hangar'),³⁷ the factory is a far cry from the monuments of the steel industry, from the steel barons' grand offices, to the cathedral-like structures of the blast furnaces documented by Bernd and Hilla Becher.³⁸ Former industrial architecture matched the sense of permanence of the industrial age in the 20th century, whereas in the novel, the new factory buildings are a reminder of the constant threat of delocalization of the production to low-cost countries: built to be easily dismantled and shipped elsewhere when subsidies dry up. Indeed, as the workers note, 'there's no shortage of removal firms in Lorraine.'³⁹

In *Lorraine Connection*, the factory is not a mere background for the 'hermeneutic square' of detective novels described by Jacques Dubois, that is the respective oppositions of victims, suspects, criminals and detectives.⁴⁰ In fact, in the novel, the factory is the paradigmatic space of economic and social violence: as Andrew Pepper argues, elements of the detective narrative (uncovering working conditions on the shop floor and the manipulations of hidden decision makers) produce a critique of the neoliberalising agenda of reindustrialization.⁴¹ Noting the family resemblance between social realism and detective novels, Luc Boltanski proposes that they both rely on sociological insight from the readers, who are able to expect certain behaviours from certain types of people. Social realism sees in

crime a moral question about social determinism and responsibility, whereas the detective novel, by obfuscating the identity of the criminal, produces a crisis in the intelligibility of the social world.⁴² The narrative form of the detective novel, based on the restoration of that intelligibility through a work of revelation, is particularly apt to produce a critique of reindustrialization in neoliberal times. Indeed, *Lorraine Connection* presents a social world where actors (the state, trade unions, workers and managers) fail to act according to clear expectations: Rolande, one of the workers, retrospectively describes Daewoo as a ‘strange outfit. [...] Not easy to put into words. [...] it’s as though the whole factory was a stage set, and we were acting in a play without understanding what it was about.’⁴³ In this context, the crisis of intelligibility at the core of *Lorraine Connection* is not simply that of an unsolved murder, but that of a new organization of labour and production in neoliberal reindustrialization.

The way the novel treats death at work illuminates how the factory itself becomes criminal. The novel starts with a long description of repetitive work on the assembly line, using broken syntax to evoke a sense of the mind numbing and daydreaming induced by that type of work. This disjointed state is interrupted by a work accident: Émilienne, a pregnant worker, is electrocuted on the line, losing her baby in the process. This accident, alongside the revelation that promised bonuses have been rescinded, lead to the occupation of the factory by the workers. The first third of the novel then autopsies a failed occupation by examining manipulations by managers and local politicians outside of the factory, and the dynamics and tensions within the factory. By the end of the novel’s long first part, the factory is set on fire and the striking workers have nothing left to fight for.

The work accident is the entry point for the reader into the layered mysteries of the Daewoo factory and the financial manipulations described in the novel. As a murder is the starting point of a whodunit, the work accident is the catalyst of *Lorraine Connection*: the

novel explores both its explanation (how the safety of workers was disregarded) and its consequences (the occupation of the factory has important implications for the politico-financial scandal that unfolds in the novel). The work accident is mostly narrativized around the character of Aïcha. She witnesses Émilienne's electrocution, after which she is sent to recover in the infirmary. There, she reminisces about a previous experience witnessing a deadly accident, when a Korean engineer was beheaded by a machine accidentally turned on while he was inspecting it. This traumatising experience leads to inarticulacy, coming not only from a need to repress it, as she repeats the mantra 'Forget. Forget. Think about something else',⁴⁴ but also from a desire to keep it to herself, and not mention it to her father: 'My father at home with all his questions. Why aren't you at the factory? I shan't tell him anything. Not a word. Nothing happened. I can't talk any more.'⁴⁵ Aïcha's silence is a counterpart to her vivid memory of Émilienne's cry, so powerful she can still feel its vibrations shaking the metal: 'between these sheet-metal walls, white from the flash of electricity, resonating with the scream, Emilienne's body.'⁴⁶ Aïcha's ineloquence seems due to a lack of receptive ears – her father is more likely to reproach her, and the foreman only comes in the infirmary to ask her to return to her station so the production line can resume.

This repression of her traumatic experience comes to an end when she eventually finds a willing audience for her story in the occupying workers who congregate in the canteen. Her testimony repeats the same sensory description as in the previous recollection in the infirmary:

I saw the headless body straighten up. People tell me it's impossible, but I tell you I saw it, and the blood spurting out. I felt the blood on my face, my hands, and then the body crumpled at my feet.⁴⁷

The horrifying experience haunts her at night and wakes her up: ‘and when I wake up in the dark, I feel the warmth of the blood on my face.’⁴⁸ The experience of death in the factory is both an embodied experience and a collective one. Unlike in the translation, in the original French, Aïcha’s testimony moves seamlessly from indirect speech (‘elle l’a vécu’, ‘Aïcha se tenait debout’) to direct speech (‘J’ai vu le corps sans tête se redresser’, ‘on me dit que c’est impossible, mais moi je l’ai vu’)⁴⁹ without quote marks. The switch between the two voices has the effect of articulating her irreducible experience as a collective condition of working for Daewoo: she becomes ‘the embodiment of the tragedy in their day-to-day lives.’⁵⁰ This tension between testimonial authenticity, grammatically guaranteed by the enunciator’s ‘I’, and the interchangeability of experience between workers, mobilizes a counterpublic in the canteen of the occupied factory and orchestrates the exchange of trauma.

It is in this way that the overlap of factory operations and criminality becomes apparent.⁵¹ The criminal quality of the Lorraine factory is not simply linked to accidental death; the factory is criminal precisely because of the way these deaths are rationalized in a calculation of risk against cost. The failure of the state to uphold its regulatory role is also depicted: from local politicians during the occupation to a labour inspector who turns a blind eye, the quantity of jobs created by the factory is more important than their quality. The factory managers, depersonalized with the use of pronouns lacking antecedent (in the original French ‘Ils’, ‘on’, and in the translation ‘They’) are only interested in resuming production swiftly, the order is clear: ‘clear up the mess, clean up, carry on’ (‘on ramasse, on essuie, on continue’).⁵² The verb *essuyer* (to wipe) magnifies the denial of Aïcha’s traumatic experience; not only does it refer to the gruesome idea of picking up body parts and going back to work, but also to her description of feeling blood on the skin. ‘They’ manage death in the way biopower manages life by integrating it into the production process in a seamless manner. Wiping it all up, like wiping up the blood from Aïcha’s skin, casts the bodies of workers into

a death-world. The injunction to carry on working (and to be silent about it) also emphasizes the way workers are ungrievable, following Judith Butler's formulation.⁵³ In the novel, it is impossible to take time to think about how accidents happen because of the precarity of the company's finance. Pressure is put on the workers to carry on as if nothing had happened in a blackmail for jobs.

The factory comes fully into focus as crime scene at the end of the section, as it is engulfed by fire. The people behind the Matra-Thomson takeover order arson on the factory to put an end to the occupation; the fire becomes unmanageable and leads to total destruction. Even though no one in the town seems to care about the strike, leading to unfavourable comparisons with the steel industry strikes of the late 1970s, the only point at which the town assembles is to watch the factory burn. As the fire roars, Étienne, a worker who witnessed the arson, goes from group to group and repeats 'I saw the guys who started the fire, I saw the guys who started the fire.'⁵⁴ Far from having trouble finding witnesses of the arson, *Lorraine Connection* here reverses expectations about investigation narratives and instead depicts a town that has no interest in knowing who set the factory ablaze. While there is a counterpublic for Aïcha's self-narrative about the criminal conditions of work in the factory, Étienne's testimony falls on deaf ears: the onlookers do not deem the destruction of the Daewoo factory worthy of investigation, not because it is unbelievable, but because Daewoo is not worth the trouble. A worker explains why people do not care about their factory and their strike:

You know as well as I do that no one – no one, do you hear? – in Pondange will lift a finger to defend us. Because we're Arabs, because this factory is seen as a mere annex of the unemployment office. There's no real work here, we're being kept off the streets and we're paid out of taxes.⁵⁵

Collective action fails because in a deindustrialized economy and after 30 years of neoliberal policies, what workers are striking for is a fiction: a mere pastime, the factory does not deserve to be saved and was never worth fighting for. This nihilism is intrinsic to the unkept promises of reindustrialization and calls for an examination of the novel's relationship with pessimism.

A dissident optimism

Pessimism is often a dominant mood in Noir and it has the power to provide a solid critique of the forms of cruel optimism found in the discourses of deindustrialization/reindustrialization. Lorraine noir novels profess a form of reorientation: one that displaces our gaze away from the happy, yet unreachable, objects of work, reindustrialization and reconversions, to keep it firmly focused on the changing living conditions of inhabitants and workers. Noir pessimism presents a moral relationship to the social landscape of deindustrialization: it displaces criticism from the promises themselves to their unquestioned premises. To conclude this article, I wish to show how *Lorraine Connection*, beyond critical pessimism, also proposes a form of counter-optimism: one that is not directed towards the happy object of reindustrialization and reconversions, but rather takes the void, the absence of perspective as its happy object.

When the occupation of the factory begins in *Lorraine Connection*, Aïcha turns it into a space where she can do things she cannot elsewhere. She smokes pot with another worker, Étienne, and then has sex with him in a secluded corner of the shop floor. While the factory in normal times triggered a series of traumatic memories for her, her experiences this time turn

the place into a heterotopia. As she smokes, she remembers the voice of her colleague Émilienne describing her first sexual experience with a man she did not know:

‘I didn’t even see his face,’ repeated Émilienne, between two outbursts of laughter. Followed by her father’s voice, grating and halting, cursing when she refused to go back to the village even for holidays. *I know what can happen there.*⁵⁶

The juxtaposition of the amusing, perhaps enticing experience of Émilienne evokes the possibility of another life, one that contrasts with paternal control over Aïcha’s sexuality suggested by the reference to a possible arranged marriage. The factory, once occupied, becomes a space of freedom: Aïcha takes control of her body outside of the logics of production (Daewoo) and reproduction (her father). Sex is a tool in the techniques of the self that Aïcha has at her disposal to reinvent herself: after having sex with Étienne she thinks she will be free (‘Fear, no going back now: *After him I’m not returning to my father’s house*’).⁵⁷ In the occupied factory, the rationalization of space and the microphysics of power it enables are open for new, unintended uses. This is particularly clear in a later scene when workers end up in the administrative offices and play with the equipment or make long-distance calls: ‘They’re at home, or rather, they’re acting as though they’re at home.’⁵⁸ Aïcha’s optimism emerges out of the factory as reinvented heterotopia, and centres on her desire to escape various determinisms in her life.

The character of Karim is also illuminating: his optimism is based not so much on a reinvention of himself, but on the reinvention of Lorraine. During the occupation, he sets up a small barbecue selling merguez:

On the waste ground behind the factory, Karim has set up his little business. He likes the place. Before him the valley's verdant slopes stretch down to Pondange. When he was little, it was a street filled with blast furnaces – fire, noise, smoke and dust, day and night. His father wore himself out working at one blast furnace after another, and Karim's destiny, as the eldest son, was all mapped out. At sixteen, a steelworker, alongside his father. Today, his father is slowly dying on a good pension, while he's thriving on small time wheeling and dealing. The air is pure and the valley is green, life's good, seen from the Daewoo waste ground.⁵⁹

Karim's optimism is, like Aïcha's, about evading determinism: his working-class destiny is not seen as a positive link between generations and the possibility of a 'good life' of job security, but as an alienating form of social reproduction. In the original French, the word used for 'waste ground' is '*terrain vague*': Karim is looking at life from the perspective of the *terrain vague*, a term that is useful to clarify. Following the multiple etymologies of *vague*, Ignasi de Solà-Morales conceives of the *terrain vague* as a space that is both empty (from the Latin *vacuus*) and indeterminate (from *vagus*).⁶⁰ Karim takes emptiness as a starting point: the emptiness of the landscape reflects the emptiness of the promises of reindustrialization. The *terrain vague* is also a marginal space, and especially one that is economically unproductive.⁶¹ It is perhaps because it is not of use for capital that someone like Karim can invest it as his space, a space whose indeterminacy he embraces. If Karim has happily relinquished the possibility of becoming a craftsman like his father, he finds his happiness in being a bricoleur, following Levi-Strauss's distinction between the two figures, where the bricoleur uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman.⁶² Here, this bricolage has two dimensions: firstly, Karim has a make-do attitude and makes a living out of salvaged, leftover

bits of industrial culture. Selling sausages during a strike or cannabis when the factory is open, he finds ways to make himself a niche between the cracks of the crumbling welfare state and post-industrial economy. His father, dying from his hard work at the factory with the protection of a generous pension plan, is a leftover from an era with a different social contract.

Secondly, his means of survival are ‘devious’ (*détourné* in Levi-Strauss’s original). Thinking of happiness as orientation towards desirable objects,⁶³ the optimism resulting from Karim’s bricolage takes circuitous, untrodden routes. It has nothing to do with either what we might call the cruel optimism of reconversions (the unkept promises of jobs in the region made by successive governments), or trade unionist optimism (the idea that collective action and occupation will lead to a positive outcome). Karim’s dissident optimism is not of a happy-go-lucky sort and does not try to forget difficult futures. Nor is it exclusively based on a neoliberal form of self-responsible optimism, one that would fail to see his conditions for happiness as contingent on the economic structures subjugating him. As a matter of fact, the novel later destroys this fledgling optimism (Aïcha is murdered, and Karim exploited), showing this optimism as the main victim of the long-term social destruction of deindustrialization. Instead, Aïcha and Karim’s dissident optimism is a glimpse of the possible futures offered by the brownfield site: a way of understanding deindustrialization not as a loss to be compensated, but as a gain, a new lease of life. This fleeting optimism, outside of the general affective economy of de- and re-industrialization, may be the first casualty for the reader of *Lorraine Connection*, but by reorienting our desires, it is also a welcome antidote to the broken teleology of deindustrialization.

Focusing on sites and locations, this article has emphasized the way noir tackles the crisis in intelligibility of a deindustrialized world. The work of revelation of the investigation acts as a relentless accusation of the continued capitalistic exploitation of both the land and

the people: whether they are left behind in a field of ruins or reconverted in new forms of capitalistic exploitation via what Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre calls the enrichment economy.⁶⁴ However this crisis of intelligibility is not restricted to the process of deindustrialization, but also applies to the promises of reindustrialization that politicians have made since the 1980s in the region. A common reaction to such promises is disappointment or disillusion, as illustrated by the tombstones dedicated to the unkept promises of then presidents Nicolas Sarkozy and François Hollande, which local trade unions erected in closing metal works in 2009 and 2013. A noir novel such as *Lorraine Connection* displays another attitude: using genre conventions with crimes, investigations and revelations, it refuses entirely the optimism of reindustrialization and questions its very desirability. If reconversions and reindustrialization are ‘what we cannot not want’,⁶⁵ to use Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s coinage, then the political power of these noir novels is to simultaneously show the violence and exploitation inherent in the politics of deindustrialization and look at how a post-industrial landscape may generate margins and heterotopias that could be invested by new forms of subjectivation.

NOTES

¹ Dominique Manotti, *Lorraine Connection*, trans. by Ros Schwartz and Amanda Hopkinson (London: Arcadia Books, 2009), p. 43.

² Jefferson Cowie, Joseph Heathcott, and Barry Bluestone, *Beyond the Ruins: The Meaning of Deindustrialization* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 2–7.

³ Ministère de l’écologie, du développement durable et de l’énergie, ‘Observatoire Photographique National Du Paysage’ <<https://terra.developpement-durable.gouv.fr/observatoire-photo-paysage/home/>> [accessed 4 December 2018].

⁴ The translations for this quotation and subsequent ones by Ortlieb are mine. I wish to thank Andy Leak and Cécile Renaud for their comments. ‘Que va-t-on chercher là, la confirmation de quelle jachère intime, quelle définition déglinguée de la beauté, quelle compassion retardataire devant la fin d’une épreuve annoncée?’ Gilles Ortlieb, *Liquidation totale* (Cognac: Le Temps qu’il fait, 2011), p. 10.

⁵ Gilbert Fastenaekens and Alain Buttard, *Essai pour une archéologie imaginaire* (Brussels: Arp, 1994).

⁶ The translation for this quotation is mine. ‘Je suis une friche’ Guy-Joseph Feller, *Colère Rouge : Hommage à Marcel Donati, Militant et Poète Ouvrier* (Longwy: Éditions paroles de lorrains, 2005), p. 29.

⁷ By subjectivation, I mean here the processes of constitution of subjectivity, which are open-ended, continuous, and involving forces of subjection and resistance. I also use the term following Félix Guattari’s remark that the most essential action of capitalism is the mass production of subjectivities. Michel Foucault, *Le Gouvernement de Soi et Des Autres: Cours Au Collège de France 1982-1983*, ed. by François Ewald, Alessandro Fontana, and

Frédéric Gros (Paris: Seuil, 2008); Félix Guattari and Suely Rolnik, *Micropolitiques* (Paris: Empêcheurs de Penser en Rond, 2007), pp. 46–49.

⁸ The OAS (Organisation armée secrète) was a right-wing paramilitary organisation dedicated to keeping Algeria under French colonial rule during the Algerian war. Their actions included assassinations and bombings. Ex-OAS characters are a staple of noir novels, especially since the néo-polar in the late 1960s and are often prominent in narratives including right-wing politicians and violence.

⁹ The translations for this quotation and subsequent ones by Mathieu are mine. ‘un amoncellement d’objets derrière lequel la ferme disparaît.’ Nicolas Mathieu, *Aux Animaux la guerre* (Actes Sud, 2016), p. 118.

¹⁰ ‘bordel de ferrailleur’ Mathieu, p. 115.

¹¹ ‘Il frayait avec le petit monde des noctambules, fils à papa et voyous de pacotille [...]. Des beautés blondes qui finiraient avocates ou cardiologues lui faisaient la bise.’ Mathieu, p. 187.

¹² Adam Isaiah Green, ‘The Social Organization of Desire: The Sexual Fields Approach’, *Sociological Theory*, 26.1 (2008), 25–50 (p. 29).

¹³ Mathieu, p. 187.

¹⁴ ‘Martel imaginait déjà les gamins du coin s’amusant à descendre les vitres de l’usine désertée à coup de caillou. Deux hivers et il ne resterait que des ruines.’ Mathieu, p. 176.

¹⁵ This phenomenon has been explored by artists like Bernd and Hilla Becher or Robert Smithson in his photographic travelogue of Passaic in New Jersey. See: *Ruins*, ed. by Brian Dillon (Cambridge, Mass: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2011), p. 100; Robert Smithson, ‘The Monuments of Passaic’, *ArtForum*, 1967.

¹⁶ ‘[...] se projetant dans un avenir aussi certain qu’il est indéfini, on en venait à se persuader que les volutes et tourbillons de fumée de l’usine que l’on entend trépider de l’autre côté, ont déjà perdu une bonne part de leur réalité.’ Gilles Ortlieb, *Tombeau des anges* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2011), p. 55.

¹⁷ Thibaut Raboin, ‘Réimaginer La Lorraine Désindustrialisée. Les Psycho-Géographies de La Lorraine Chez François Bon, Gilles Ortlieb et Denis Robert.’, *Questions de Communication*, Série actes, 2018, 139–56.

¹⁸ Berlant sees cruel optimism as a central relation of neoliberalism: it describes the cases when longing for certain objects actually prevents the subject from attaining them. See: Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011).

¹⁹ The translations for this quotation and subsequent ones by Daeninckx are mine. ‘Un nuage épais de plâtre, de poussière de béton, de poudre, de terre, recouvrit immédiatement les ruines, à la manière d’un linceul aérien que le vent, peu à peu, dispersa. Les voitures de police dégagèrent les voies. J’appuyais sur la commande des essuie-glaces et les balais mélangèrent sous mes yeux la poussière déposée sur le pare-brise et la pluie fine amenée par le vent’ Didier Daeninckx, *Play-Back*, Folio Policier (Gallimard, 2001), p. 204.

²⁰ Fastenaekens and Buttard.

²¹ ‘On vit dans une société qui n’arrête pas de tout effacer et qui est dans une sorte de présent permanent. Or, justement le roman noir dit que les traces sont d’une importance capitale et que c’est pour cela qu’on nous les cache’ Annie Collovald, ‘Entretien avec Didier Daeninckx : une modernité contre la modernité de pacotilles’, *Mouvements*, no15-16.3 (2001), 9–15 (p. 15) <<https://doi.org/10.3917/mouv.015.0009>>.

²² Donald Reid, ‘Didier Daeninckx: Raconteur of History’, *South /Central Review*, 27.1 & 2 (2010), 39–60 (p. 41).

²³ Philippe Claudel, *Nos si proches orientes* (Paris: National Geographic, 2002); Jacques Réda, *Aller aux mirabelles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991).

²⁴ The translations for this quotation and subsequent ones by Martin are mine. ‘C’était le passé. Il ne s’en était pas trop mal tiré parce que, du loin qu’il se souvint, il avait toujours aimé la nature, les parties de pêche, la cueillette des champignons et les longues balades en forêt toutes proches de Meuse et de Belgique.’ Roger Martin, *Un chien de sa chienne* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), p. 14.

²⁵ Jo Lindsay Walton and Samantha Walton, ‘Introduction to Green Letters: Crime Fiction and Ecology’, *Green Letters*, 22.1 (2018), 2–6 (p. 3) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14688417.2018.1484628>>.

²⁶ Deborah Bird Rose, ‘Anthropocene Noir’, *Arena Journal; Carlton North*, 2014 2013, pp. 206–19 (p. 215).

²⁷ ‘Les falaises où nichent et vivent les rapaces sont aussi fréquentées que les Champs-Élysées!’ Martin, p. 138.

²⁸ ‘vous croyez vraiment qu’il est aisé de soulever la compassion pour des rats?’ Martin, p. 124.

²⁹ Martin, p. 125.

³⁰ ‘Lui n’avait rien vu du spectacle et les rats continuaient à lui paraître répugnants.’ Martin, p. 125.

³¹ ‘Avant de monter en Lorraine ils ignoraient jusqu’à l’existence de trafics d’animaux domestiques. Ils avaient ensuite découvert les concours de ratiers, cru comprendre qu’on organisait aussi des combats de chien. [...] À quand les éléphants, les crocodiles et les puces savantes?’ Martin, p. 132.

³² ‘volés, kidnappés dans la forêt’ Martin, p. 157.

³³ Martin, pp. 39, 95, 63–66.

³⁴ David Farrier, ‘Animal Detectives and “Anthropocene Noir” in Chloe Hooper’s A Child’s Book of True Crime’, *Textual Practice*, 32.5 (2018), 875–93 (p. 889) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2016.1275756>>.

- ³⁵ The three factories made cathode ray tubes and microwaves, and were opened in Villers-la-Montagne, Mont-Saint-Martin and Fameck. *Lorraine Connection* is set in the fictional town of Pondange, which is evocative of the region's industrial 'vallée des anges' (valley of angels), named after the common suffix -ange in the names of towns.
- ³⁶ Véronique Desnain, 'Le polar, du fait divers au fait d'histoire', *Itinéraires. Littérature, textes, cultures*, 2014–3, 2015, p. 8 <<https://doi.org/10.4000/itineraires.2557>>; Véronique Desnain, 'Style et idéologie dans le roman noir', *Itinéraires. Littérature, textes, cultures*, 2015–1, 2015, p. 7 <<https://doi.org/10.4000/itineraires.2685>>.
- ³⁷ Manotti, *Lorraine Connection*, p. 30.
- ³⁸ Bernd Becher and Hilla Becher, *Bernd & Hilla Becher: Industrielandschaften* (München: Schirmer, Mosel Verlag, 2008); Bernd Becher and Hilla Becher, *Bernd Und Hilla Becher: Basic Forms* (München: Schirmer, Mosel Verlag, 2014).
- ³⁹ Manotti, *Lorraine Connection*, p. 21.
- ⁴⁰ Jacques Dubois, *Le Roman policier ou la modernité*, Le texte à l'oeuvre (Paris: Nathan, 1992), pp. 91–97.
- ⁴¹ Andrew Pepper, *Unwilling Executioner: Crime Fiction and the State* (Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 225.
- ⁴² Luc Boltanski, *Énigmes et complots: une enquête à propos d'enquêtes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012), pp. 34–35.
- ⁴³ Manotti, *Lorraine Connection*, pp. 134–35.
- ⁴⁴ Manotti, *Lorraine Connection*, p. 7.
- ⁴⁵ Manotti, *Lorraine Connection*, p. 8.
- ⁴⁶ Manotti, *Lorraine Connection*, p. 7.
- ⁴⁷ Manotti, *Lorraine Connection*, p. 13.
- ⁴⁸ Manotti, *Lorraine Connection*, p. 13.
- ⁴⁹ Dominique Manotti, *Lorraine Connection*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Rivages, 2008), p. 25.
- ⁵⁰ Manotti, *Lorraine Connection*, p. 13.
- ⁵¹ The notion of work as crime, and crime as work in factory noir is developed by Pepper in his analysis of Natsuo Kirino's *Out*. Pepper, p. 221.
- ⁵² In the original : Manotti, *Lorraine Connection*, p. 25. In the translation: Manotti, *Lorraine Connection*, p. 13.
- ⁵³ Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2010).
- ⁵⁴ Manotti, *Lorraine Connection*, p. 42.
- ⁵⁵ Manotti, *Lorraine Connection*, p. 40.
- ⁵⁶ Manotti, *Lorraine Connection*, p. 18.
- ⁵⁷ Manotti, *Lorraine Connection*, p. 18.
- ⁵⁸ Manotti, *Lorraine Connection*, p. 33.
- ⁵⁹ Manotti, *Lorraine Connection*, pp. 26–27.
- ⁶⁰ Ignasi de Solà-Morales, 'Terrain Vague', in *Terrain Vague: Interstices at the Edge of the Pale*, ed. by Manuela Mariani and Patrick Barron, First edition (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 24–30 (p. 26).
- ⁶¹ Karen A. Franck, 'Isn't All Public Space Terrain Vague?', in *Terrain Vague: Interstices at the Edge of the Pale*, ed. by Manuela Mariani and Patrick Barron, First edition (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 153–70 (pp. 158–62).
- ⁶² Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée Sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962), p. 26.
- ⁶³ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 2006); Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 2010).
- ⁶⁴ Luc Boltanski and Arnaud Esquerre, *Enrichissement: Une critique de la marchandise* (Paris: Gallimard, 2017).
- ⁶⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, ed. by Donna Landry and Gerald M. MacLean (New York; London: Routledge, 1996), p. 21.