WILD TIDES

MEDIA INFRASTRUCTURE AND FINANCIAL CRISIS IN IRELAND

Patrick Brodie


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Introduction

A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats

The combination of an increased reliance on short-term foreign liquidity sources and an increased reliance on property as an outlet for lending, in the short term, inflated asset bubbles further and, in the medium term, created the perfect storm for one of the most spectacular property and financial crashes in the history of capitalism.

Sinéad Kelly, "Light Touch Regulation: The Rise and Fall of the Irish Banking Sector"

A rising tide lifts all boats.

Seán Lemass, common usage

The economic fortunes of contemporary Ireland are intricately tethered to the fluctuations of global capital.[1] Since the late 1950s, and then especially since the early 1990s, Ireland's increasingly active participation in the world economic system has facilitated, on the surface, an emergent and remarkably prosperous capitalist society characterized by a global consumer culture, significant social progress, and the swelling presence of multinational business. The 2007–8 financial crisis left Ireland in a state of disrepair

after tearing across the markets of much of the world, revealing the uneven but interdependent distribution of risk and prosperity after financial globalization. The high-water marks of finance capital could be seen dotted across all corners of the country, with unfinished housing projects, suburban developments, and other abandoned built environments materializing the generalized feelings of shock and hopelessness cutting across the population. Prosperity at the apparently invisible hands of global finance capital and its productive forces, as it turned out, was part of a materially interconnected, spatially expansive, and deeply extractive system of erosion, through which the world's largest owners of capital and a select few native offspring generated enormous floods of spectacular wealth, only to withdraw it, revealing the empty veneers of growth and success that mask its corrosive liquidity.

Wild Tides performs a study of some of these hidden mechanisms of value creation and extraction that undergird the social and economic development logics of the Irish state during and after this radically altering financial crisis, and especially its cultural and spatial dimensions through media infrastructure.[2] In the aftermath of the crisis, capital reanimated space in Ireland, the creeping fingers of capital's returning tide appearing to nourish its shores once again. But this "Celtic Phoenix" rising from the ashes, as some referred to it—or to carry the oceanic metaphor, a resurgent Celtic swell[3]—was chimeric for most people. Many had already figured out new ways to make a living, fled for more plentiful places, or simply never experienced the first "rising tide" everyone was talking about in the 1990s and 2000s. It seemed, for many, that this tide had only lifted *some* boats that remained afloat after the recession, while others had either sunk or run aground—or never been seaworthy to begin with—amid the turbulent and unpredictable tides of global capital.

Wild Tides looks at wreckage and rebuilding in the transformed cultural and political landscape of post–financial crisis Ireland until 2020. What systemic factors had differentially kept individuals, communities, and businesses afloat, sunk, or run aground? What processes and remnants could be attributed to the relatively novel Celtic Tiger, and which were continuous developments of Irish capitalism? And how did the state, communities, and individuals reconstruct lives, systems, and institutions in this environment? Central to this book's argument is that the Celtic Tiger and the subsequent financial crash were *spatial* phenomena, driven by irresponsible state intervention and (lack of) financial regulation in property and development, and that these strategies were reoriented toward private (media)

infrastructure during the crisis and its aftermath. The question asked by so many is: How and why did the state double down on this strategy? It was not due only to external pressures, as this book will detail. Amid the turmoil of the crash, the state navigated the cultural and emotional tensions of a society still adjusting to its advanced position in the global economy. By using these cultural dynamics as a channel for multinational investment, however much at the behest of supranational debtors and enormously powerful corporations, the state and its partners in industry facilitated a remarkable reintroduction of financial and logistical flows through Irish territory in the post–financial crisis era—an era that we may now retroactively refer to as "the recovery."

But again, we must ask: By and through what mechanisms? This book analyzes these dynamics by focusing specifically on media and technology industries and their infrastructures of production and circulation in post–financial crisis Ireland. To do so, it looks closely at the public imaginations and popular discourses around media and culture coursing through this environment. *Wild Tides* thus locates the place of media within the spatial and circulatory logics of capitalism as its material operations cut across the landscape of contemporary Ireland. In this milieu, the state continued to gamble the country's, and by extension its media and creative industries', futures on the foreign direct investment (FDI)–driven dreams of finance, global media, and big tech,[4] through the imbrication of business policy, planning, and spatial development. At the time of the crisis, media industries in Ireland were transitioning to a model of financial and logistical facilitation for foreign corporate and transnational productions and, at the same time, the tech industry was increasingly setting its sights on the state as the site for low tax headquarters in Europe. The coalescing industries of media and tech, as they "converged" (Jenkins 2006) in the early 2010s with the rapid emergence of smart technologies, streaming, digital platforms, and data-driven marketing, were targeted by the state as a method to draw capital investment back into the country's ailing business environment, reproducing FDI-driven strategies that characterized the Celtic Tiger and its precipitous crash.

Wild Tides confronts these growth-driven logics, arguments, and strategies through media infrastructures, which at the large scale serve to materialize and naturalize turbulent but methodical extraction of value from space and culture by global capital. By focusing on the effects of media infrastructural development and experience among workers, communities, and the natural environment, I uncover both the false promises and

potentially alternative futures offered by more textured engagements with where capital, in the words of political economists Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, "hits the ground" through media infrastructure. In doing so, we can see how media capital "shapes conditions of everyday life, always working in consonance or conflict with the active role of space and multifarious resistances in guiding and molding capital's operations" (Mezzadra and Neilson 2019, 22), whether at sites of media infrastructural development or struggles against it.

In media studies, through which this book attunes its analytical compass, attention has shifted over the past two decades to the material infrastructures of supposedly immaterial media of distanced communication and, more recently, on the digital platforms, data, and streaming services through which contemporary media economies function (Larkin 2008; Parks 2005, 2015a; Parks and Starosielski 2015; Plantin and Punathambekar 2019; Starosielski 2015). These studies have focused primarily on the distributive arrangements of media as their industries and economies are organized across space *via* infrastructures. But media infrastructures are also productive, not only distributive. As the sites within which powers—economic, political, social, cultural—become encoded, and imaginaries of certain kinds of existence are embedded, global media infrastructures, whether film studios, internet data centers, or the networks and supply chains that connect sites to one another, are increasingly important not only in our everyday lives and consumption of media and participation in culture. But they are also central in how states govern, collect data, and manage change and economic turbulence. The subfield of media infrastructure studies has focused on these entanglements in order to complicate fixed understandings of how media circulates through given environments, emphasizing the specificity of formal and informal infrastructures as they are experienced across diverse spaces on the ground—from surfacing the affective texture of everyday media in urban spaces, to understanding how people work in and around media industries in rural places, to answering why media infrastructures are developed where they are. *Wild Tides* builds on these understandings of infrastructure's multifaceted, sedimented, and entangled spatial existence to articulate the ways in which finance and logistics play a role in their construction of everyday life, focusing on the nexus of financialization, media, and technological infrastructure. Stubbornly emplacing these processes within their built environments of production *and* circulation, and the state and corporate finance, policy, and planning that conjure them, *Wild Tides* materializes and politicizes understandings

of media's infrastructures and supply chains through their financial and logistical operations.[5]

"A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats"

Ireland, as a formerly "developing" postcolonial nation-state existing within the political boundaries of Europe, has a peculiar relationship to global economic history and modernity, especially in terms of its perceived place within the capitalist world system (Deckard 2016; O'Hearn 2001). As England's first colony and the laboratory in which many of its most violent and innovative mechanisms of territorial control were tested—from resource mapping to counterinsurgency[6]—the country has a fraught and textured history within discourses of European modernity. After protracted and complex revolutionary struggles for much of its modern history, the southern "Free State" seized independence in 1921. In the torrid aftermath, competing factions of pro- and anti-Treaty Republican forces fought a bloody and bitter civil war from 1921 to 1923. After a traumatic victory for the pro-Treaty forces, which accepted the partition between the twenty-six-county southern Free State and the six counties of "Northern Ireland," the south operated in the following years as a "dominion" of Great Britain, and finally moved to form a profoundly compromised Republic in 1937 (see McVeigh and Rolston 2021). The scars and violence of colonization were in large part inherited by the postcolonial southern state, which built a partitioned nation governed around a Catholic theocratic, socially conservative cultural nationalism, one that downplayed the "colonial question" in part due to the enduring and inconvenient reality of the occupied six counties in the north. The early days of the postcolonial state were thus characterized by strategic nation-building predicated on moving on from the colonial past and neglecting social division within and across its borders.[7]

But the transition away from colonial rule is always also an infrastructural one, and the fledgling Irish Free State was tasked with modernizing its industry and infrastructure in the absence of overtly extractive land management and paternalistic policies from Britain. While the result of a long and contested nation-building process, the mainstream history follows something like this: Under the rule of former revolutionary Eamon de Valera's Fianna Fáil party, the newly established Republic of Ireland remained neutral during World War II, focusing instead on industrializing while adapting to internal and external changes in the global economy. As the story goes, de Valera's Ireland was deeply protectionist, in part a result

of the culturally Catholic insularity that constituted the "imagined" Ireland he was trying to build.[8] However, one of the primary figures in his governments through the 1950s was fellow former revolutionary Seán Lemass. Serving as the minister for industry and commerce for several tenures, most influentially prior to his election as Taoiseach from 1959 to 1966, Lemass's economic philosophy, alongside that of civil servant, economist, and governor of the Central Bank of Ireland T. K. Whitaker, espoused a cautious and experimental economic liberalism, predicated on mostly US investment. Lemass supported the establishment of the "world's first free trade zone" in Shannon, a small town in the west of Ireland, which capitalized on an existing transatlantic airport experiment and duty free zone pioneered by local entrepreneur Brendan O'Regan (see O'Connell and O'Carroll 2018). He also, significantly for the arguments of this book, presided over the establishment of Ardmore Studios in County Wicklow in 1958, a film studio partially funded by US interests to facilitate "Hollywood-style" production in the Dublin region. As Taoiseach, Lemass advocated strongly for Ireland's admission to the free market European Economic Community (EEC) (not achieved until he left office in 1971).[9]

These strategies formed the template for visions of how Ireland would be opened up to the world for business over the next decades. They were also profoundly influential for liberalization measures as implemented by postcolonial and developmental nation-states worldwide, including for much more spectacular experiments with export-processing zones implemented in China and elsewhere in the Global South (see Easterling 2014). This early liberalization period, from Lemass and Whitaker to the Celtic Tiger "boom" in the 1990s, would firmly tether Ireland's fortunes to the rolling waves of the global economy. These ties would only tighten as the tides rocked and the state solidified the attraction of FDI as the structural condition of Ireland's economic and industrialization strategies. Lemass's favorite dictum, "a rising tide lifts all boats," often attributed to John F. Kennedy, can be considered an ur-logic for economic common sense in Ireland. Throughout my research during the economic recovery of the 2010s, this phrase remained present in everyday life and public discourse as a metaphor for how the country's prosperity must be measured—still—along with the naturalized tides of global economic ebbs and flows.

These elemental metaphors of economic common sense help us to understand how pervasive these logics are in Irish governance. In their materialization through policy and infrastructure, cultural ideas and metaphors

are *actually* connected to Irish state strategies and how they play out as tension and politics on the ground. Thus, what is important about tracing the popular history of Irish liberalization through this period is not what Lemass said, nor even the specific mechanisms that he encouraged and enacted while in power—nor even confronting the veracity of this "origin story" of Irish economic progress, which is obviously much more complicated and conflicted than the CliffsNotes traced above.[10] Rather, the origins of these economic logics pertain to a few specific and enduring resonances in the media infrastructural stories detailed throughout this book: (1) the metaphorical significance of Lemass's economic philosophy across Irish history and culture, to the degree that you would hear "a rising tide lifts all boats" from either a film studio CEO or a freelance worker, with varying degrees of assurance, hope, sarcasm, or exhaustion; (2) the establishment of Ardmore during his tenure as minister for industry and commerce, setting the stage for future offshored media productions in Ireland; and (3) the emplacement and facilitation of a system of political and economic liberalism, setting in motion a pervasive and prevailing economic common sense around the necessity of FDI for industrial development and economic survival. This "naturalized" mode of thinking manifests in everyday life and through a variety of governing institutions, rendered "sacrosanct" and untouchably important to Irish economic life (McCabe 2022).

With the forces behind the "rising tide" thus naturalized, its waves crested in the "economic miracle" of the Celtic Tiger and crashed spectacularly with the global crisis of neoliberalism in 2007–8. Thus, these commonsense naturalizations refer not only to the presence and role of FDI in shaping the political and economic landscape of the country. They serve as a visual heuristic for processes that subjugate culture, space, and labor to the turbulence of the global market and the epistemologies of value extraction that characterize what geographer David Harvey once referred to as the "financialization of everything" (2005). And it is in critical reference to this set of naturalizing logics that the basis of this book's approach to Ireland's media infrastructural politics is formed, addressing across its chapters the specific integrations of Ireland and its media infrastructures into the capitalist world system (chapter 1), the financialized logics of the "creative city" in recovery-era Dublin (chapter 2), the uneven and precarious spatial distribution of media industries across Ireland in relation to creative policy and tourism (chapter 3), and finally the climatic politics and circulations of big tech infrastructure in the form of data centers (chapter 4).

Media, Finance, and Irish Globalization

The key factors in the 2007–8 financial crisis in Ireland were speculative finance and property development, buttressed by the state's FDI policies with the help of favorable development zoning and tax incentives. When the property bubble burst, as will be detailed in chapter 1, the Irish state doubled down on neoliberal measures amid the turmoil to generate a recovery economy centered again on FDI—and deepening privatization—across most sectors. Largely due to "recommendations" imposed by the bailout conditions of the "troika"—the International Monetary Fund (IMF), European Commission, and European Central Bank, which implemented a loan and austerity program based on so-called fiscal discipline designed to pull Ireland out of debt—the country was compelled to slash public jobs and subsidies, privatize assets, and enter what was essentially a structural adjustment program by another name (Coulter 2015).

But how exactly do we get to a point that state-led neoliberal reforms across a diverse range of public-sector bodies—common across much of the so-called post-developmental world—become so inextricable from direct interventions by private-sector, export-driven industries like financial services and big tech? After the financial crisis, it became clear that any sector that could draw in additional investment and "jobs" to the starved economy would soon be reflected in policies, and this included the traditionally "public" media policy of the Irish Film Board/Screen Ireland, which extolled the agency's ability to facilitate foreign productions and enable partnerships with other sectors. While this might appear to be a textbook example of neoliberal privatization enacted through cultural policies, it is worth unpacking the core logics and material operations of this neoliberal common sense—and where exactly "culture" lives in this set of political economic strategies.

Neoliberalism, as a catchall term for these measures both in Ireland and imposed from abroad, before and after the crisis, became in the 2010s a straw person for arguments from the left, critiquing the values of highly marketized economies reliant on widespread privatization and multinational investment (among more aggressive measures). Ireland is no different, and "neoliberalism" as a term was thrown about in the aftermath of the financial crisis, referring to Ireland's "neoliberal crisis," the "invisible ideology" of neoliberalism, and other ascriptions of power to this economic and political system that had operated in Ireland for some time, but was only just entering the popular lexicon from the left and academia. While

none of these analyses are incorrect, and I share and draw from them quite extensively, this book unravels the specific industrial threads that characterize contemporary Irish neoliberalism, focusing first on the financialization of the economy and its effects on spatial development and everyday life, before examining more closely its implications and deployment within media and technology industries.

Financialization, then, forms a backdrop for much of this book's analysis by *naming* and *identifying* exactly how certain strategies and orthodoxies traditionally ascribed to neoliberalism emerge in fields far beyond typical corporate actors and state spheres of regulation. This is in part due to the powerful presence of finance capital across the landscape of Ireland both pre– and post–financial crisis, and the naturalization of financial rationalities within the country's planning, society, and culture during austerity. At a basic level, financialization is, as literary scholar Max Haiven summarizes, "a term which refers to the increased power of the financial sector in the economy, in politics, in social life and in culture writ large. More expansively, the idea of financialization speaks to the way financial measurements, ideas, processes, techniques, metaphors, narratives, values and tropes migrate beyond the financial sector and transform other areas of society" (Haiven 2014, 1). Pertinent to the wider argument of this book, financialization is particularly urgent in the ways in which finance comes to organize spheres of life somehow thought to be far removed from financial considerations—not only property development, considered a typical and particularly heinous sphere of financial speculation in the aftermath of the financial crisis and the embroilment of subprime mortgages and other bad lending practices, but also media, technology, and fundamentally how people live, work, and consume and participate in culture.

But beyond more familiar industries like property, energy, utilities, or services, all of which have come under duress by privatization and speculation for several decades, less studied has been the financialization of media industries. Financialization can be read through most contemporary geographies of media, and this is not to mention the power of finance capital in Hollywood cinema (see DeWaard 2020). Even in more public systems like Ireland, government tax incentives attract foreign capital in the form of investment in media production, and mechanisms like special purpose vehicles (SPVs), short-term companies established for tax residency, were formed to make use of these exceptional financial mechanisms and funnel profits offshore. This then shaped spatial and industry practices in each territory, as infrastructure and facilities had to be built to accommodate these

operations. In turn, property markets and deregulated planning dictated where global media capital would land in the form of these infrastructures. Financialization is not "immaterial," but rather describes a profoundly material process by which space and culture are transformed under the influence of finance capital.

As the story goes, "ripple" and "spillover" effects of these financialized practices create the infrastructures required to sustain the industry—local film companies, training and expertise, production and postproduction studios—and will give rise to a more stable environment within which a local industry will thrive. But these private infrastructures are supported and inflated by big capital, boxing out most upstart individual or company competition by absorbing and accumulating these transnational circulations. Within these logics, then, workers and many creatives are, ultimately, dependent on the precarious flows of media capital, left to compete for scraps from limited and unstable institutions, as the eventful waves of private finance promoted by public state policy are barely felt as a trickle for many across the country. As sociologist Verónica Gago argues through what she calls "neoliberalism from below," conditions of financialized *lack* of state investment and care, like the environment of post–financial crisis austerity that will be described presently, profoundly shapes how people relate not only to the state and the economy, but to one another. This means that politics must necessarily be theorized and practiced through an understanding of this multiscalar relationship between state power, global capital, and workers and communities on the ground (Gago 2017). Media infrastructures, as both strategic development priorities and crucial instruments of everyday services and experiences, offer a unique vantage point for analyzing how and where these relations materialize and operate within crisscrossing fields of power and tension.

The book uses this prevalence—or better, entanglement—of finance capital and its logics within these infrastructures of everyday life and work to tease out the specificities of Irish neoliberal development in relation to the postcrisis austerity economy. In a lineage from Ireland's early deregulated zoning mechanisms like the Shannon Free Zone (SFZ) and the International Financial Services Center (IFSC), Ireland's progressive "free zoning" from its establishment as a site for financial, media, and tech industry offshoring have contributed to the material conditions of Ireland at present and its geopolitical (and geo-economic) positioning within global trade flows. As I argue in various ways across the coming chapters, "logistical" governance, a logic that operates across state and corporate partner-

ships that optimizes the production of value across global supply chains (Cowen 2014), has become a transformative presence and actor across the Irish media landscape, creeping into state media and cultural policy as much as it operates openly through the facilitation of multinational, big tech circulatory infrastructures like Amazon Web Services (AWS).

When discussing the regulatory measures that states take in response to turbulent global conditions like financial crises, political economists like Mezzadra and Neilson articulate the ways in which the role of the state is pervasive, if altered and apparently withering, under shifting regimes of capital. In adjacent terms, the "national question" in Ireland has historically been primarily confronted by Irish cultural theorists in relation to the shifting and emergent social, cultural, economic, and political realities of globalized Ireland, especially in film and media studies (Barton 2004; Crosson 2003; McLoone 2000, 2008; Pettitt 2000; Rockett, Gibbons, and Hill 1987). While formative to how this book approaches the development of the Irish media industries, often secondary in these analyses is the constituent role of and interaction between the state and capital in the production of culture, much as critiques of national film and literary approaches have focused on the fixation with the "national" and its bias toward cultural identity and even sovereignty (see Kearney 1996). In this sense, it is not the focus on the "national" that seems a shortcoming of culturalist approaches, but rather the limited and limiting heuristic of national identity and sovereignty instead of *how a state thinks through territory* and *conjures certain conditions into being* (democratically or not). This involves seeing global capital as a political actor in dynamic relation to the state, as its role and power in governing populations, encapsulating "culture," and regulating capital has changed. This book understands the Irish state as not only an active but a *fundamental* historical participant in capitalist processes through operational modes and moments of (non)intervention. Only through such an approach does "the inability of the state to fully control or regulate the nexus of capital and politics" come into focus (Mezzadra and Neilson 2019, 52).

However, to understand the political power exerted by *capital* under emerging conditions, we have to remain attentive to how capital "crosses existing political forms" (Mezzadra and Neilson 2019, 52) like states and geopolitical relations in its multifaceted enactments across time and space. As Mezzadra and Neilson explain in more detail, "Recognizing the role of the state in the production of such conditions, as well as in the management of the challenges that become manifest when these conditions are destabilized, does not mean ignoring the wider array of government entities and

actors involved in this process. However, the testing of government capacities within the crisis of the past decade has at once made states prominent again and revealed the limits of state actions and interventions as a means of restarting growth in a global situation characterized by the intermeshing and interdependence of economic systems" (49). These interdependencies affect spheres beyond typical areas of economic activity, such as heavy industry and finance, but intersect and affect the organization of sectors and ways of life thought to be shielded from certain kinds of intervention, traditionally conceived as the realm of "national culture" in relation to much longer and emplaced histories of practice and relation.

The long decade of 2007–20, which makes up the upper bounds of this book's temporal range of inquiry, provides a useful framework for understanding how the laboratory of crisis produces novel forms and arrangements of capitalist activity. While the preceding pages introduce how these processes in Ireland would not have been possible without the foundational experimental conditions created by almost a century of postcolonial (under)development (Bresnihan and Brodie 2025), "crisis" delineates a temporal period by which new and inventive ways of generating and extracting value through and from these geographical dynamics. Popular commentator Naomi Klein has described the ways in which capitalists cynically manufacture and exploit catastrophe as "disaster capitalism" (2007), a cyclical process by which the "free market" entrenches power and wealth into the pockets of an increasingly shielded few. This book extends this and similar hypotheses historically by suggesting both that Ireland has long been a kind of "laboratory" for particular forms of governance (see Deckard 2016) *and* that crisis, and financial crisis especially, drives terrible innovation in *fixing* flows of capital through evolving cycles of spatial practice. From a "spatial fix," as geographer David Harvey has famously theorized (2001), to a "creative fix," as chapter 2 refers to neoliberal creative policies, these market corrections are retroactively ascribed to economic recovery, though later revealed as empty veneers for capitalist exploitation. The decline of the "creative sector" as an exciting and viable career path in the aftermath of the long 2010s is a case in point (see Whiting, Barnett, and O'Connor 2022)—retrospectively, it becomes even clearer how the mechanisms of "recovery" analyzed especially from 2017 to 2019 were powered by the corrosion of public services and support across multiple sectors, largely in and through the cynical capture of cultural and media activity by and for capital.

But while globalization has often been seen as a problem to be dealt with in terms of culture, the largely turbulent shifts associated with globalization and neoliberalism have brought mixed blessings to Ireland. The Celtic Tiger intensified social and economic inequality within what was revealed in 2007–8 to be largely chimeric capital growth. Since the 1990s, more active participation in the world economic system has led to undeniably advanced levels of prosperity, during which Ireland has catapulted to one of the wealthiest nation-states by GDP per capita in the world, even despite years of downturn and stagnation following the financial crisis. It has also seen major progress on social and specifically gender-based repression, as the long shadow of the Catholic Church has begun to wane in Irish life, encapsulated by the passing of the Thirty-Fourth Amendment allowing same-sex marriage (2015) and the repeal of the Eighth Amendment prohibiting abortion (2018), both by popular referendum.

However, at the underside of these changes has remained structural inequality, housing shortages, the privatization of services, the racialized and carceral immigration and direct provision system, reckoning with the historical abuses of the Catholic Church, and ongoing and often conservative cultural negotiations about what it means to be "Irish" after globalization. Until recently, progressive values have not been represented through the electoral process, with the center-right parties Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil still dominating government through the crisis and recovery. Protest movements tended to be local and reactive in character, even as the countrywide "recovery" metrics looked more like "leprechaun economics" by the day (Regan and Brazys 2018). Regressive politics could still be found in both the margins and the mainstream, and many citizens who felt left out or abandoned by the state's Dublin-centric, FDI-driven, recovery-era prosperity engaged in the kind of affective and racist politics seen in the era of right-wing populisms in the rest of the EU, the United States, India, and elsewhere.[11] In the 2010s—and still now—the place of the occupied six counties in the north within the Irish state narrative remains unresolved. Republican party Sinn Féin's electoral successes in the north and the Republic in the early 2020s, and periodic talks of a border poll, demonstrate the degree to which the *national* question itself, like the uneven "European" modernity that has characterized the postcolonial Irish state, has never been fully contended with.

It is within the unfinished and constantly evolving cultural politics of Ireland that this book analyzes the role of media and its infrastructures in

the post–financial crisis era. Political change (if not progression) has not prevented the Irish state from capitalizing on the essentialisms and commodified versions of "Ireland" as a product that has been the bugbear of many cultural critics, especially in film and media studies (Barton 2004; Pettitt 2000), demonstrating the ways in which the cultural bias of the "national" has often acted as a funnel for commodification. Ireland has long been "branded" for international audiences, and romanticized Irish imagery and flippant "paddywhackery" remain persistent and powerful within consumer culture in Ireland and many parts of the world (James 2014; McGovern 2002; Mulhall 2013).[12] Beyond tourism, however, the Irish state also extends this cultural "soft power" (Nye 1990) into how it operates and attracts foreign investment in general, branding the culture, state, citizens, and space of Ireland as ideal resources for the extraction of value via industry-adjacent groups and semi-state organizations like the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA), the Industrial Development Authority (IDA), Screen Ireland, Culture Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, Host in Ireland, among many others. I argue that these organizations, whatever their remit, employ and instrumentalize these cultural values toward a regime of FDI-driven profit.

This book thus contends that, by experimenting with and intensifying these earlier forms of commodification and development, the post–financial crisis Irish state posed these facets of Irish life and its labor force as "resources," employing regressive and essentializing cultural logics across long-standing political fault lines. Joining with the private sector, then, the state peddled an ongoing series of naturalizations with regard to so-called "uneven development" across Irish space, culture, and labor (chapter 1), whether by unquestioning commitment to financial logics in urban spatial development (chapter 2), its treatment of Irish labor as a "resource" for international media production (chapter 3), or the artificial generation of a "business climate" suitable to the extractive environmental infrastructures of the tech industry (chapter 4). Throughout the language, policy, and planning materials deployed to support such projects, these conditions are posed as *natural* elements of everyday existence in post–financial crisis Ireland. In a way that is instructive to other contexts, this book critically assesses the persistent and ongoing naturalization of FDI-driven logics and cultures of neoliberalism across the country's public social, political, and environmental discourses.

Naturalization, after all, is not *only* something that can be revealed through critical analysis, lifting the veil of ideology to reveal the truth underneath. The representation of anything as a natural set of conditions, especially within *state* strategies, has very real material effects and social histories. Especially when the problems of an economic system are revealed—for example, during the aftermath of the 2007–8 financial crisis—"extractive rationalities need to be naturalized or normalized" (Couldry and Mejias 2019) to resume function without delays, objections, and oversight. In Ireland and elsewhere, especially during austerity and privatization, it is a tried-and-true strategy by state and corporate organizations to rhetorically associate their actions with benign or affectively appealing natural processes.

Take, for example, a 2016 Deloitte pamphlet entitled "Waves of Disruption: The Future of Ireland's Financial Services Sector" (Dalton and Marmion 2016). Throughout this report, the authors determine that it is "environmental" aspects of Ireland's business world—its regulatory "climate"—that must be controlled and managed to respond to the "disruption" that occurs in global tech and finance markets. These disruptions are created by a series of factors, according to the report, including the regulatory changes brought on by the 2007–8 financial crisis and the resulting market changes, like digitization and "consumer empowerment." The *climate* of a place can be controlled through savvy business (and regulatory manipulation), whereas consumer activity cannot, betraying how companies conceive of market control as a method to rein in and predict the activity of unruly citizen-consumers. This pamphlet, like other such pieces of "gray media" and otherwise "boring" corporate communication studied for this book (Ballestero 2019; Bowker and Star 1999; Opaque Media 2017; Star 1999), provides insight into the cultures that sustain and produce the above-mentioned naturalization, providing routes for ongoing capital circulation and accumulation.

Wild Tides, in transparent conversation with gray media like "Waves of Disruption," analyzes where and how media centers within naturalized "cultures of circulation" characterizing contemporary capitalism (Lee and LiPuma 2002). Circulation functions through the operational and infrastructural conduits built (physically or legally) to facilitate it, the "ambient environment of everyday life" (Larkin 2013, 328), which appears natural but is manufactured by policy, planning, construction, and capital. The

book locates several ways in which this functions in post–financial crisis Ireland—whether in chapter 1, which demonstrates the historical and spatial development of Ireland's FDI-driven media economy; in chapter 2, which uncovers how financial circulation operates through the built environment of the "creative city"; in chapter 3, which discusses how global media supply chains capitalize on regional competition and the FDI-hungry logics of film and media policy; or in chapter 4, on how server racks and cable networks of digital economies act as conduits and grounding points for technological, logistical, and financial supply chains.

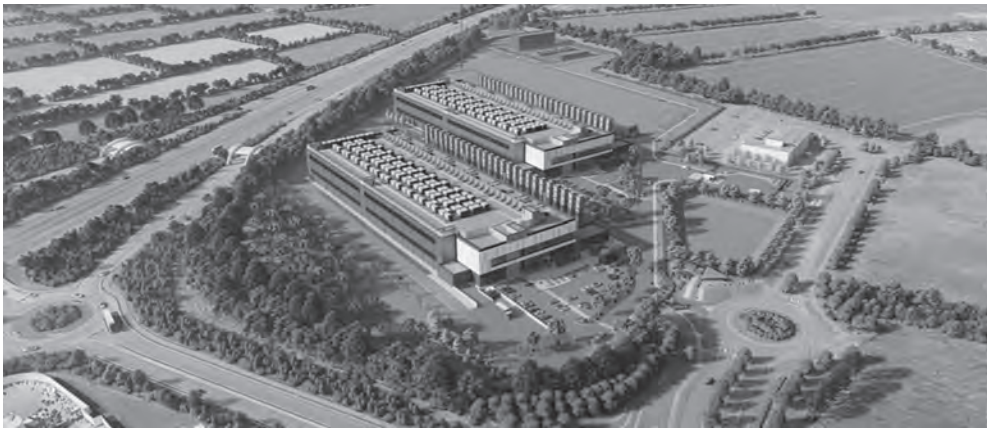
Turbulence, the choppy waves and shifting tides of the world and its economies suggested even by the Deloitte industrial literature, must always be managed for capital to operate and extract value through instability. Finance, infrastructure, and logistics are ways in which to exert some manner of control over a dispersed and often unmanageable assemblage of global factors across spaces and contexts, and their logics have proved robust for states and corporations attempting to govern these flows to the best of their abilities. However, in the process, their entanglements have become naturalized across both top-down discourses and in many other social and cultural contexts. Media industries and their infrastructures are increasingly at the forefront of how the future of global economies will function, especially through the tech industries and their reorganization of economies across the world via digital software and hardware. The horizontal integration of media and technology, across diverse supply chains and contexts of circulation, demonstrate the degree to which media conglomeration and technological development will organize and disorganize across a diversity of global sites, institutional and infrastructural formations aggregating and disaggregating along with the turbulence of global systems. These private operations become a strategy for *managing* turbulence, coming to visualize and spatialize the experience of turbulence itself.

This tumult and its governance begin the process of materialization in gray media. In the "boring" plans and images for these infrastructures, exchanged across desks and emails and discussed in boardrooms and offices until eventually becoming plastered on the construction hoardings and billboards for new projects, visual media of planning and development demonstrate *financialized* and *logistical* ways of seeing and visualizing the future, which imaginatively and physically foreclose alternative and existing lives and visions for environments. They perform several different kinds of erasure, all at once: the erasure of existing communities and ways of being in these spaces; the augmentation of spatial histories and ruins

with capitalized futures; and finally, the removal of the labor that goes into these sorts of plans, whether in real or virtual space. If finance and logistics, as dominant forms of circulation across the global landscape, are shaping the networks within which nation-states and regional units exist, control the trade of goods, and build economic power, we need to use all tools at our disposal to understand how these forms of circulation are visualized, come into being, operate, and collide with and through the state and diverse communities on the ground.

Researching infrastructure, as anthropologist Susan Leigh Star has influentially theorized (1999), thus means devoting ample time to these "boring" chores of analyzing not just technical materials. It also means chewing through arcane, jargony, and niche government documents, policy briefs, community consultations, reports, corporate strategies, court cases, promotional materials, and the gray media that characterize the everyday work of politics and business, paying close attention to the power hierarchies expressed within, visualized, and reproduced by their future-driven language, plans, and images (figure I.1). Media scholar Rafico Ruiz demonstrates that such documents, in his case archival materials of a Canadian settler colony, are themselves a kind of "media infrastructure" in the ways that they organize and act to institutionalize practices, physical spaces, and ways of life (2021). While much of this book draws insights from sited fieldwork, these visits were supported and enriched by months spent combing industry reports, plans and designs, policy documents, newspaper articles, and state and corporate organizations' websites to grasp how promotional and strategy logics were being operationalized through on-the-ground media infrastructural conditions. Contained within these documents, then, are the futures that the state and capital attempt to implement. They imagine worlds that appear beneficial to public goods and needs. However, as visual representations of financialized life and culture, they are rife with unseen and inconvenient spatial inequalities and violence. They show us the logics that they naturalize, if we know how to look at them.

Financialization and the logistical organization of the global economy mean that such plans are used to "grease the wheels" for future operations, mobilized by the state and capital.[13] However, as "plans," they are inevitably disrupted by the messiness of life and experience. Top-down planning is experienced very differently on the ground, and such conditions enrich or disrupt capital's operations. In the process of writing this book, I performed site-specific fieldwork and interviews between 2017 and 2019. I visited job sites, community organizations, individual workers, government offices,



I.1 Digitally rendered plan for AWS data center in Drogheda. Data Centre Dynamics. https://www.datacenterdynamics.com/en/news/environmental-group-blocks-amazons-second-400m-data-center-in-drogheda-ireland/.

and corporate infrastructures. The book in its current iteration thus balances the speculative and operational gaze of transnational capital with sited engagements at points where these materially are felt and enacted. But the translation from field to manuscript is never a smooth process, and thus this book reflects throughout the methodological messiness of on-the-ground research and the often-cumbersome task of fitting real-life encounters into the conceptual molds required by an academic monograph.

Fieldwork, as I reflect upon throughout this book, is a useful method for muckraking and mapping out stakeholders across localized and transnational environments. It cannot alone answer for all the nuances of subjectivity, the messiness of politics, nor the precise ways in which value is extracted from emplaced environments. Echoing media scholars Lisa Parks, Lindsay Palmer, and Daniel Grinberg's reflections on sited media studies research, fieldwork "coincides with an interest in understanding how material conditions, location, *difference*, and *power hierarchies* function as part of media cultures" (2017). Difference as a mobilizing structure for supply chains and the power they materially operate through—financial, infrastructural, logistical—are primary issues for this book. But the pictures that scholars paint are necessarily filtered through theoretical and methodological tools at our disposal, documents we have time to study and sites we can feasibly visit, and our very positions as researchers legitimized (and limited) by often extractive institutions, risking the reproduction of such hierarchies in our endeavors. This leaves the task of weaving together theories, documents, discourses, and lived experiences as delicately and ethically as we can. There is always a politics to how these things are brought together, what is represented, and what is left dangling outside of our study.

In this way, what this book does is tactically work across scales by leaving space for unexpected and recalcitrant infrastructural politics arising from unique experiences of their development, operation, and failure. The spectacular presence and future dreams of media infrastructure, what Larkin acknowledges is a kind of infrastructural "sublime" when dealing with large-scale projects (2008), necessitate a sustained and measured engagement with diverse and unexpected experiences of media infrastructure. Despite the mundaneness of their plans and visualizations, the spectacle of development—whether through the extended and often antagonistic planning process, news reporting, or large-scale construction—directs "eventful" attention away from the everyday precarity and abandonment of people conceived as or left outside of them (see Povinelli 2011).

Rather than seeing the large- and the small-scale as separate objects of study, however, throughout this book I identify multiscalar tensions and entanglements occurring across sites, communities, and institutions, which are often not as antagonistic as you would expect. Individuals and communities, wittingly or unwittingly, are frequently powerful tools and advocates for capitalist systems. Anthropologist Aihwa Ong addresses the often-ambivalent forces affecting the cultural politics of economic systems, choosing "to examine the everyday effects of transnationality in terms of the tensions between capital and state power because *there is no other field of force for understanding the logics of cultural change*" (2000, 23, my emphasis). The bluntness of her advocacy for this approach remains inspiring: When it comes down to it, the state and capital—and their logics of value and governance—have power over our lives in more ways than we care to admit, even as we live through different vectors of precarity or stability, whether in terms of jobs, racialization, abandonment, or environmental collapse. We relate to their infrastructures every day, and our behaviors and politics are influenced by these relations. When these structures are transnational in scope, and increasingly formally discrete from public institutions and forms of care, how exactly do we then form a politics around them, whether in acquiescence or struggle?

But just as state and corporate power are black-boxed and inaccessible, local politics are equally recalcitrant and hard to grasp, making it especially difficult to follow strands between these levels of operation. In Ireland as elsewhere, local culture and politics are crucial to understanding how media and tech companies generate consent or dissent for their territorial projects. Communities do not think the same thing collectively; they consent or dissent in varying and antagonistic ways, compelled or choosing to relate to the state and capital in whatever way seems to serve the interests of their needs and beliefs at any given time. Thus, both *scale* and *place* are central to research into media infrastructure projects. As environmental humanist Rob Nixon argues, local environmentalism and advocacy tend to have a hard time "scaling up" from local politics to more global or planetary concerns (2011). For example, local anti–wind farm groups in Ireland have trouble translating their localized concerns—biodiversity destruction, lack of consultation, noise pollution, unequal distribution of impacts and benefits—to a planetary or even national scale, which tends to privilege the urgency and immensity of global climate change over these small-scale concerns.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, powerful corporations are enormously scalable (see Vonderau 2019), crunching place into their global

metrics, incorporating these local frictions into their very way of generating and extracting value. However, as anthropologist Anna Tsing argues, studies of global capital have often failed to explain the necessary and structural diversity of transnational economic systems, and we must better account for the "bigness" of this operation across different scales, an "imaginative project" for both those who study and those who enact the power of global capitalism (2009, 153). Much of this book focuses on the machinations and places where this big capital "hits the ground" (Mezzadra and Neilson 2019) in Ireland—for example, in Athenry, County Galway, where a proposed €850 million Apple data center was supported by a popular movement of thousands called "Athenry for Apple," but was stopped by a small minority of objectors on environmental grounds; or in west Kerry, where Disney filmed portions of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (J. J. Abrams, 2015) and *The Last Jedi* (Rian Johnson, 2017), shooting on UNESCO World Heritage Site Skellig Michael before international pressure forced the IFB to revoke permission, while still allowing them to film in other rural locations across west Kerry. Local infrastructural conditions are overhauled by such moments of collision, whether in terms of the social fabric behind infrastructure (like civil society, in the case of Athenry) or physical infrastructures themselves (the film crew for *Star Wars* had to build modular, temporary access roads across muddy fields to get to inaccessible coastal sites in west Kerry [figure I.2]).

But as Mezzadra and Neilson articulate, it is not enough to understand these places as simply where capital "hits the ground," even if this is a useful heuristic. Rather, we must see them as sites through which to "move from the subterranean to the surface level and back again to show how the systemic edge is always caught in a dense fabric of frictions, conflicts, and resistances" (2019, 138). In doing so, we can understand the entanglements on the ground that drive such projects and then also disrupt, challenge, or support them. If, as media scholar Ravi Sundaram argues, "infrastructures are at the center of media circulation by way of entangling people, objects, knowledges, and technologies" (2015, S299), then these are not just incursions but immediate *entanglements* with social, political, economic, cultural, and environmental conditions.

Workers and communities operating within these entanglements, while actors within infrastructural assemblages, are often thrust together by these very same impersonal arrangements. In one day I spent doing interviews in Limerick city, I was shepherded around to various arts spaces, coffee shops, bars, and organizations, as I followed the tangled threads of local actors within the media and arts scene, all tenuously interconnected

1.2 Infrastructure for *Star Wars* film set on Ceann Sibeál, Ballyferriter, County Kerry. Irish Examiner. https://www.irishexaminer.com/sport/golf/arid-20464660.html.

by the infrastructural investments (or lack thereof) in Limerick's "creative industries" that I was trying to unravel. In a day spent in Athenry, I was similarly directed from storefront to storefront, and even to someone's front door in the town center, pointed to new and various people and organizations involved in the town's civil society with each additional meeting. Years later, I still occasionally received Facebook messages from Athenry for Apple members I met or was put in touch with that day, who asked me to advocate for future data center projects in Athenry via my social networks. When meeting with a data center developer in Newtownmountkennedy in County Wicklow, our conversation was interrupted by a phone call from a former state official with whom he was working. The developer handed me the phone, and the former official conspiratorially avowed to me that the country was run by a cabal of powerful, wealthy people who also controlled RTÉ (the national broadcaster) and were insulated from democratic accountability by controlling public opinion through the national media. Throughout my research, word of mouth, community networks, and general presence have been inordinately more valuable and generative for thinking than expertise—even just for odd stories like the one above. Dozens of similar encounters never made it into these pages, but nonetheless inform a robust background of my approach and understanding. There are always kernels of truth and insight to be gleaned from such accidents and entangled experiences of place, capital, and community.

Theorizing the "Wild"

Film and media studies' methodological and conceptual training has more often favored historical, discourse, and textual analysis than these sorts of on-the-ground engagements with sites, communities, and technologies. In Ireland, when studying cultural forms, this has frequently involved the use of media texts as an insight into cultural change and social organization, especially since the growth of a publicly supported film industry from the 1970s and 1980s and the national transformations of the Celtic Tiger (see Barton 2015; O'Connell 2010). Building on this, however, this book is inspired by Star's theorization of the diverse practices required to perform ethnographies of "the imbrication of infrastructure and human organization" (1999, 379). I read this imbrication through projects of spatial development, culture, industrial activity, and state strategy around media as a social and technological formation rather than traditional media texts themselves.

That said, trained as a film and media scholar, I am no ethnographer.[14] Parks, Palmer, and Grinberg's insights on media studies fieldwork are useful to my methodological application: "Our fieldwork does not aspire to or adhere to all of the central tenets of a classically defined ethnography: immersion in spaces, mastery of languages, establishment of cultural competency, longitudinal study, participant observation, and 'thick description.' As media scholars we are primarily interested in understanding how diverse communities in the world think about, organize, and use media technologies to support their interests" (2017). When it comes to media politics, there is always more to the picture. Panoramic views can sometimes foreclose the real and productive messiness of life and labor under financial and supply chain capitalism. Unfortunately, I could not speak Irish to people in the Gaeltachts (Irish-speaking regions) in west Kerry and Galway, nor would I ever purport to understand the granularities of context in a way that only someone who has lived within that community for years or decades possibly could. Neither do I know in the same way as lifelong or permanent residents the rhythms, the relations, the everyday feeling of a life lived in Dublin, Limerick, or Athenry.[15] This must necessarily be addressed as a shortcoming for the sorts of work this book does.

Media infrastructures, however, offer sites through which to begin an analysis of media's material politics—a data center, for example, or a film set, or an "undeveloped" plot of land under the planning gaze for the creative city. This targeted approach thus gives space to the unexpected, and what my own perspective can bring to the study of Ireland's post–financial crisis media landscape. Where are some of the places that financialization has not been as widely theorized, for example, the rural media industries in which I spend much of the book? What does it look like, and who does it affect? What are the weird formations of financialized media in Ireland that only reveal themselves to an outsider's perspective? And how are the logistical forms of governance identified throughout this book enrolling these differential media landscapes into processes of capital accumulation? These are questions that apply and look different whether you are looking at a graffitied wall in central Dublin, or a forest for sale in rural Galway.

In this way, the book also responds to what Jack Halberstam calls the "metronormativity" of humanities research (2005), which reflects an urban bias of media studies associated with core issues characterizing globalization and connectivity: for example, speed, modernization, and emergence. But as Parks, Palmer, and Grinberg also note, media infrastructures are often *rural* spatial technologies designed to *support* processes of devel-

opment and urbanization *elsewhere*—for example, energy infrastructures supporting urban technologies like data centers and smart sensors. These forms of infrastructural mediation of spatial and political relationships provide powerful insight into the durable structural imbalances, exclusions, and extractions of contemporary capitalist (and colonial) formations (see Brodie and Barney 2026; Ruiz 2021). If cultural studies teaches, in the words of Stuart Hall, the basic point that "conditions of existence [are] cultural, political and economic" (2007, 156), and geography, according to Ruth Wilson Gilmore, examines "why things happen where they do" (2020), combining these approaches helps us understand interconnected histories and industrial formations of media and economic development *through* Ireland and its emplaced iterations.

Where infrastructure "hits the ground," unruly and conceptually disruptive worlds reveal themselves. This is where we must center the unexpected, both challenging the promised systematicity of capital while recognizing the multiple, messy avenues and directionalities that arise out of infrastructural encounters. Strange and uncanny entanglements occur in meetings with local communities and their embedded political lives and affects. The following accounts of these instances are sketchy, of course, but necessarily so, because that is how experience is, and throughout the process of writing this book I have tried to preserve the character of these interactions.

In her study of energy politics in the Orkney Islands in northern Scotland, Laura Watts deals with similar assemblages of people and things in looking at the speculative financial gazes that are focused on Orkney due to its environmental resources (a test bed for tidal power), with tech investors, European and UK politicians, and local communities operating across the various scales of Orkney's social, political, and environmental life. While sharing an office waiting room with a Silicon Valley entrepreneur looking to invest in Orkney-generated energy, she describes events with the following qualification:

> this is not precisely how it happened, not precisely how it was said, because all empirical research can only record so much. Stuff happens off camera, the pen can only move so fast, you can only sit in one chair, not all the chairs in all the rooms. This is good, honest objectivity because it has good, honest limits. . . . What you read has a *partial perspective*, as theorist of science and technology Donna Haraway long ago named it. Its knowledge is situated, embodied, in relation to others,

> because the knowing that I am after, what I want to tell you about and work with, has no laboratory walls nor well-defined variables. It is a communal endeavor, and the social world is always a right *mess*, to paraphrase sociologist John Law. . . . This story honors that rich tangle by looking at it with both eyes, with a *split vision*, and finding different strands to follow. (2018, 5–6)

To lock these encounters into place, to gift them to the systematicity of capital would be to reproduce the governing impulse to *control* and *manage*. Everyday life is wiggly, and infrastructures and governance struggle to keep up, to make everyday worlds knowable, legible, and manageable. Global turbulence may be the norm and appear natural in and of itself, but the "nature" of everyday life is uncontainable and unmanageable. Infrastructures, by their definition, *circulate* things through environments; governance *manages* how this happens. But people do not live and move according to fixed structures. Rather, in Ireland, as with many other places with their own complex and layered infrastructural and political histories, strange encounters and unexpected connections abound, and this should excite rather than limit our approaches.

Even if this "wild" world at the edges of the frame remains constitutively offscreen of written research,[16] we should remain skeptical of attempts to manage it, especially within our own practices—and I am being self-reflective here, not least due to the title of this book. "Wildness" exists within a colonial lineage of frontier designations, territorializing and applying the "unruliness" of bodies and environments for violent incursion by capital (see Cram 2021; Yusoff 2018). Halberstam and Tavia Nyong'o recognize that the "wild" refers to "a colonial division of the world into the modernizing and the extractive zones" (2018, 455), reflecting the dynamics of spatial development that subjugate people and places to the whims of global capital. Ireland, as a postcolony,[17] is still often seen through colonial imaginations and frontier logics of its rural, "wild" backwardness, a place of precolonial heritage and colonial extraction, and this is oftentimes peddled by the Irish state itself as a development strategy. *Wild Tides* as a conceptual gesture associates the turbulence of global markets with the cultural and environmental politics of Ireland and climate change, doing so to comment on the persistence of colonial optics in contemporary Irish infrastructural development politics.

The "wild" is prevalent, for example, in the popular "Wild Atlantic Way" tourist campaign, which has branded the west of Ireland as a differ-

entially tamed, authentic landscape and culture to *experience* by driving up and down its coastal road network, supporting local businesses and consuming culture along the way. It has been successful in drawing international tourists and business to the Atlantic coast in the post–financial crisis era, and was a relatively popular initiative during the period of my research. But it also, in clearly nonreflexive ways, by treating the Atlantic coastline and its cultures as "resources" (Government of Ireland 2018b, 103), commodifies the people and landscape via regressive—and colonial—visions of rurality and authenticity. Theorists like Doreen Massey (2005) have argued that "uneven development" conceptualized by scholars of globalization like David Harvey (2005) and Neil Smith (2008) does not only mean that underdeveloped regions are disempowered. Across Ireland and elsewhere, there are differential experiences of economic and spatial development and responses to it, filtered through and coproduced by complex and emplaced social, cultural, and environmental histories. To these scholars, the so-called "waiting rooms of history" (Chakrabarty 2000) imagined by theories of uneven development discount the already-global forms circulating through such environments (see Woods 2007), the turbulence and crises that are felt in differential ways across urban and rural spaces, and the ingenuity of people living so-called underdevelopment and abandonment. The same state forces that have traditionally left rural places behind in development, promising a prosperity that never arrives, now expect them to fend for themselves under the cruel care of a turbulent global market (see Berlant 2011; Gago 2017; Povinelli 2011). Austerity breeds unexpected relations and endurances in the face of global capital, whether through popular politics and economies, or acts of everyday care and getting by (see chapter 3).

However, there remains a seductiveness in the "wild," especially its aesthetics and anarchic suggestion of difference truly outside of colonial and capitalist regimes, unable to be "captured" by the rationalities and normativities of modernity. Halberstam has written powerfully on this subject (2020), especially in its suggestion of queer lines of flight and ways of life. His treatise with Nyong'o on wildness as a generative political force, articulated through a series of articles in their 2018 special issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly*, proves that under the right circumstances, the "wild" remains something to be sought, at least under (and outside of) the punishing regimes of colonialism and capitalism.

But rather than building on Halberstam and Nyong'o's aesthetic critique, which expands the potentiality of the "wild" and challenges its relationship with modernity, *Wild Tides* sits with the term's ambivalence, and

how processes of representation through the media of policy, planning, and infrastructure interact with histories and presents of territorial boundary-making and breaking by powerful forces of global capital and its partners in the nation-state. Ireland's "wilds," like those elsewhere, have always been sites of strategic territorialization, whether for resource extraction, conservation, agriculture, tourism, or other forms of development. The difference in Ireland is that this powerful legacy of the "wild" permeates even its urbanizing and industrializing development paradigms, a kind of neoliberal "wild west" where deregulation and culture collide to create coalescing circumstances for turbulent growth. Experimental relations emerge and take form through Ireland's spaces and infrastructures—in the timeline of this book, especially during the global financial crisis and subsequent "recovery." *Wild Tides* thus tells the story of systems by which the public and private institutions worked together to use culture, media, and technology to capture, control, and instrumentalize both the turbulence of global capital and the unruliness of culture and environment, foreclosing the spatial cultures, livelihoods, and work that could not be made profitable. In doing so, this book shows that Ireland's "wildness," far from a site of mere colonial territorialization or a vibrant and unruly subjectivity, is constitutive of the neoliberal character of spatial and economic development itself. The maintenance, management, and harnessing of "wild" circulations, via various governmental, cultural, and business-driven means of naturalization and instrumentalization, is crucial to the creation and extraction of value from Irish space.

In this sense, it is not only global "turbulence" being managed—this turbulence generates conditions of possibility. Geographers Charmaine Chua, Martin Danyluk, Deborah Cowen, and Laleh Khalili draw a generative dialectic of "turbulence" and "liveliness" under global logistical systems (2018), where economic and political turbulence is met with the productive vibrancy of local communities and histories. As anthropologist Cymene Howe also argues in her study of wind energy ecologies in Oaxaca, Mexico, focusing on how elemental circulations like wind, which breathes life into renewable economies, "assembles" entangled threads differently and helps "to look for a new, turbulent prototype" (2019, 3) of politics. In this case, "turbulence," while disruptive to human economic endeavor, is also a generative, elemental force through which to understand alternative circulations of culture, power, and capital.

Turbulence, like wildness, must be *harnessed*, *managed*, *controlled* for it to be useful for capital, whether through the state, financial, or logistical networks. By conceptually enfolding turbulence and wildness, then, the

latter is perhaps alone a twofold framework through which to understand both the system, state, financial, and logistical means of control and management, as well as what Mezzadra and Neilson call the "systemic edge" (Mezzadra and Neilson 2019)—somewhere at the margins of the supposed frame where we can acknowledge the non-totality of the system itself, while appreciating that these same systems leak and seep into everyday life (see Anand 2019; Liang 2005). Whether a highly specific land dispute in Kerry between two rival landowners about where Luke Skywalker's cliff-edge death scene was shot and who was allowed to charge for access to it; or the drunken nights at cultural events that fostered follow-ups with new field contacts in Dublin and Galway; or the Coillte official who asked me, an early PhD student in Québec, if I knew anyone who would be interested in a data center development opportunity; many experiences opened apertures to new and strange understandings and insights, while also presenting persistent dilemmas as to what to keep out of the final picture. This book takes us through a number of these worlds at the so-called "systemic edge" in Ireland, where one is compelled to realize that apparently stable media geographies are constantly formed and reformed by interactions among the state, capital, people, communities, and environments, whether disrupting or entrenching existing hegemonies.

When relating to the "worlds" you enter as a researcher, amid the crisis-laden and turbulent environments of global capitalism, we also must keep in mind that there are many different "arts of living on a damaged planet" (Tsing 2015). As Tsing notices, many across the world, in the Global North and Global South, are living "life without the promise of stability" (2). In Athenry, I encountered residents who craved the stability of a bygone era (industrial capitalism, which may have never fully arrived in most of rural Ireland) through a tech services–focused future. In opposition to the turbulent "wildness" represented by the financialized global economy and the livelihoods that it offers, the promise of jobs and infrastructure through these systems was seductive and all-encompassing, even if empty at the center. If modernity and modernization were designed to "fill the world . . . with jobs," "such jobs are now quite rare; most people depend on much more irregular livelihoods. The irony of our times, then, is that everyone depends on capitalism but almost no one has what we used to call a 'regular job'" (Tsing 2015, 3). Fieldwork among media professionals revealed a widespread acceptance of such unstable forms of work, which characterize the sector. However, although many felt browbeaten, others embraced the competition, passion, and flexibility that drive value production in the

media industries (see Caldwell 2023). But while such arts of living through precarity sometimes move toward emancipation, and critical theorists tend to disproportionately focus on these more hopeful moments and practices, my fieldwork revealed that the politics are far more ambivalent. They short-circuit easy left–right distinctions and solutions, especially when it comes to labor, communities, and land relations. There is only so much a leftist research practice, defined by Mezzadra as "an attempt to localize, within a specific situation, the points around which practices of organizing and struggle can match" (2013, 310), can do in the face of the flooding of influence of commonsense logics of global capital enacted and managed through the state. Such promises of better lives through capitalist development are seductive. Sometimes you just have to work through what you see.

But this disparity is generative—unpredictability and contingency should be central to our methodologies, even if *stability* remains a chimeric fascination and goal of the institutions and communities we study. Research into these formations requires a simultaneous understanding of the ongoing allure of more stable and prosperous ways of life, which often take on unexpected and contradictory political formations, and the impossibility of achieving more just ones under the turbulent conditions of global capitalism.

Unweaving the Tethers

The threads holding this book together—to weather its own turbulence—come from structured fieldwork as much as the unexpected and even forgotten encounters that pervaded it. They are woven with structured and unstructured discourses and conversations with interlocutors and collaborators about media infrastructure, the state, capital, and the environment.

Infrastructures are hard to pin down, because they are as much about relations as they are about physical spaces. As Marxist sociologist Henri Lefebvre famously argued, "spaces" consist of social and political relations that *produce* our experiences of them (1991). Coursing through the environments and politics of contemporary Ireland are much longer histories, as well as the forms of subterranean power that continue to feed infrastructures built and sustained on extraction. *Wild Tides* may often give more space to power structures than other books that profess a similar political—and methodological—agenda. But looking at financialization across Ireland's media infrastructural formations, the built, imagined, and lived architectures of these spaces become clearer, as the structures

of dependency and power within the world system emerge more clearly in and through Ireland's industrial landscapes. As each chapter analyzes, these tidal and climatic forces—both global economic and planetary—enact power and agency *over* given environments, continuing extractive colonial relationships in ways that appear natural and even beneficial to people that both do and do not directly benefit from them.

Chapter 1, "Turbulent Waters: Media Infrastructure and the World Economy," picks up where we left off with Seán Lemass and the early liberalizing state, expanding our gaze to understand the place of Ireland in the modern world system and the development of its media industrial formations through geopolitics and territory. Tracing the histories, infrastructures, and theoretical threads that remain essential for understanding contemporary Irish media policies, economies, and spaces, the chapter picks out a series of interconnected conditions and phenomena shaping the country before and after the financial crisis—neoliberal financialization, the media and creative industries, technological infrastructure, and logistics and extraction. The chapter thus lays the groundwork for understanding the Irish media environment's entanglements with global financial and logistical systems. Beginning by connecting early experiments with liberalization in the country to the deregulated zoning mechanisms like the SFZ and IFSC that carried through the recovery period, the chapter reveals the political implications of financialization through the 1980s and 1990s for the post–financial crisis shifts identified throughout the book. I then unravel the logics of the so-called "creative industries" in relation to post–financial crisis contestations around media and culture, and how they extend physically into the built environment through "media infrastructure" like film studios, broadband networks, and data centers. At this point, I contend that the naturalized, "ambient" circulations facilitated by infrastructure represent a point at which to identify changes in governance where the public and the private collapse within infrastructure and its management, demonstrating the prevalence of "logistical" forms of rule in new technological systems, particularly within data centers and other technological infrastructures.

Chapter 2, "Ghostly Currents and Creative Erosion," identifies the financialized logics at work within the built environment of recovery-era Dublin through direct encounters with the creative and media industries and the projects designed to support them. The Irish financial crisis was deeply tied to property markets, and it left swaths of half-built and unfinished housing and mixed-use developments across the country. These ruins

of finance capital became a major cultural touchstone and public point of negotiation around feelings of guilt and hopelessness post-crisis. Within this aftermath, the Irish state established a for-profit semi-state organization called the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) to absorb millions of euros in toxic real-estate assets across the country to make them profitable once more, whether by selling them, developing them themselves, or some combination of the two, usually in partnership with private and multinational corporations and investors. A major element of this strategy was the continued development of the Dublin Docklands, a former port area that houses the IFSC, an offshore financial services hub with a formerly exceptional 10 percent corporate tax rate, marked by several Strategic Development Zones (SDZs), or areas demarcated for private development with deregulated planning rules. The Docklands through the crisis and recovery transformed into a "creative city" and was home to the offices of many of the major tech multinationals located in Ireland, including Facebook, Google, and Airbnb. The technocratic asset management strategy represented by NAMA, informed by recommendations from the "troika" and neoliberal commonsense solutions to crisis, foreclosed alternative uses of space in the capital and imaginations of different futures to be built out of the crisis. Navigating the ways in which creative industries–led growth permeates the city, particularly through the visual media of planning and development and the capture of creative labor through spatial planning and policy, I unpack the place of media within the logics of neoliberal recovery and deep imbrications with space and culture by emphasizing the invisible circulations of finance and the spectacular experience of the "creative city." In discussing the ways in which affect, labor, and contingencies are captured and contained within Dublin's post-crisis built environment, the chapter shows how the spatial violence of finance capital circulates through living and ruined infrastructures across and through the creative city.

Building on the intersection of space and policy in chapter 2, the third chapter, "Waves of Austerity: Film Policy and the Infrastructural Geographies of Media Labor," articulates the ways in which media policy is *infrastructural* to the circulation of global capital through the country and its modes of extracting value from space and labor. Looking at how the policy of the Irish Film Board (IFB)/Screen Ireland (SI) post–financial crisis has become increasingly profit-oriented as the public remit of "cultural goods" has been sidelined, this chapter unravels the role of the state in managing national industries in the face of media globalization and austerity, articulating the relationship between state media industrial policy, infrastructure, and labor.

While many approaches to global media have focused on deterritorialization and the declining role of nation-states within transnational formations, I argue that the state is crucial to how private capital comes to colonize the logics of public good in given places, in this case through culture. However, while this complicates ideas of media sovereignty, my primary focus turns from policy to labor—that is, to how workers across the country feel and relate to top-down media policies—utilizing insights gathered from interviews and informal conversations with a range of media workers and professionals between 2017 and 2019. On a global level, the Section 481 tax incentive has brought in large-scale media productions from all over the world, and the state puts in place infrastructural conditions for them to operate smoothly. But most workers do not directly benefit, despite arguments about ripple and spillover effects. The landscape of media work in Ireland is characterized by precarity and contract-to-contract work, within which most media workers spend most of their time gig to gig rather than in the stable employment promised by FDI-driven media policy. The Irish state, within these policies, treats workers as a resource for value extraction, much as they tend to treat space as agnostic to whichever company is currently paying to use it. This positioning of workers as resources through ideas of "talent" and "skills" contributes to a naturalization of precarity at the whims of transnational investment and the supply chain organization of contemporary media economies.

Bringing together the creative industries, media circulation, and finally the place of big tech corporations within these ecologies, chapter 4, "Storm Clouds: Technology Industries and the Climate of Crisis," builds on debates forwarded in the first three chapters and identifies the convergence of a variety of state and corporate logics within a single, private infrastructure that has been at the forefront of planning and economic development since the financial crisis: data centers. The tidal forces of the global economy have come together to manage the "climate" through the "cloud." The recessionary financial and business climate—like the cold, windy, rainy weather that was posited as a benefit for data-center cooling—was perfect for the "logistical media" (Rossiter 2016) of data centers, nourished by proprietary subterranean flows of capital from abroad, which generated these large, power-hungry, and labor-averse infrastructures. Entangled with the cultural and environmental politics of the country through data centers, the state and capital frequently employed cultural rhetorics to naturalize the role of big tech companies in the infrastructural provision not only of capital and connectivity but of future care through industrial employment. Representing a fulcrum of public and private partnership, where the state has bent over backward

to ensure the proper infrastructure, planning provisions, technical labor, and business environment to facilitate these massive and power-hungry facilities, data centers represent the coalescing of various logics at the heart of Irish spatial development in the post-crisis and recovery era. Through this array of conditions these companies and their partners in the state engage in what I call "climate extraction": a coalescing logic of extraction that can only be achieved in partnership with the Irish state's persistent association of the country's space and labor with "greenness" and the naturalization of the infrastructural conditions of an FDI-driven economy tethered to global markets. Looking at both the strategies of the state in attracting data center investment and the politics surrounding how people relate to them as potential and existing infrastructures that represent an imagined future "stability," in this chapter I try to understand how cultural, political, and environmental histories and presents are not necessarily existing in easy antagonisms between communities/workers and the state/capital, but rather in a far messier set of relations, requiring a reorientation of our conceptual tool kits for doing politics in the era of big tech's media infrastructural dominance.

Conclusion

As this book takes the reader in and out of a variety of interconnected but differentially globalized worlds across Ireland, I hope that the dynamic and lively environments encountered throughout are generative for understanding how the cultural and mediating relations of capital have reorganized in an era of rampant and naturalized austerity. The machinations of global finance, tech, and media capital spare few territories their omnivorous and extractive operations, and Ireland, as throughout history, has been an experimental case where particular kinds of media infrastructural activity were tested through the conditions of austerity pervading through the financial crisis—a neoliberal "wild west" where these turbulent circulations have formed monstrous new infrastructures amid the disordered foundations of the old. However, this book makes clear that different political futures arising out of the networks of financial globalization and the dense entanglements with life and culture in Ireland are in fact possible. But to disrupt the commonsense logics that are driving the processes of media infrastructure in Ireland and elsewhere, we must first learn how they operate and become intimately acquainted with how they are reproduced.

NOTES

Introduction. A Rising Tide Lifts All Boats

1 Although "Ireland" constitutes all thirty-two counties on the island of Ireland, I am in this book using Ireland as shorthand for the Republic of Ireland, the twenty-six counties south of the border with the UK and Northern Ireland, which separates the historical "Free State" and the occupied six counties of the north.

2 The time period on which this book focuses is roughly 2007–19. However, this is not a strict timeline, and I make no pretense of doing "historical" work. Rather, methodologically and conceptually, I gather material based on moments, cases, and phenomena, gathered through fieldwork, policy research, discourse analysis, and other materials, that appear significant *within* this time frame in terms of media infrastructure and the built environment.

3 The "Celtic Phoenix" as an economic period has itself been characterized by critics as the more pejorative "leprechaun economics" (Allen 2019; Regan and Brazys 2018).

4 A terminological note: Throughout this book, I often use "FDI" as a broad term describing private inward investment at a large scale (e.g., multinationals), which is how the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) and other state and semi-state bodies use it (e.g., "FDI companies"). Such imprecise usage demonstrates the ubiquity and unquestioning commitment to the strategy, obviously painting over different power relations and

geographical distinctions between its various sources, while also suggesting still that they are primarily US-based. Where possible and relevant, I attend to the nuances of power and distinguish between this reductive definition of FDI and other forms of foreign investment, involvement, and intervention.

5 A glaring absence that many attuned readers will notice is the absence of an analysis of "legacy media" in Ireland, especially Ireland's robust public television and radio apparatuses as well as its complex landscape of print and related online news media. This is not by accident—ultimately, there are already many, much better and comprehensive, analyses of these systems, their infrastructures, and their effects than I could muster in these pages (see Barton and O'Brien 2004; McCarthy 2021; Mercille 2014; Morash 2010; Pettitt 2000; Phelan 2014). My analysis is specifically focused on the physical environments of media production and circulation as enablers of trans- and multinational capital—in short, the infrastructures supporting this media and the policy that most directly affects these environments. It probably, in this way, may also betray my background in film studies, as Ireland's "screen policy" today arises largely from its former Film Board and its emphasis on foreign productions. While the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) and Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ) have played a significant role in film production and transnational partnerships of the "screen industries" in Ireland, that influence will be for future studies, within which I hope the frameworks of this book provide a useful tool in the arsenal of critique, especially in light of 2023's payment scandals at RTÉ.

6 The laboratory concept has been explored at length in both conservative "revisionist" histories as well as postcolonial theory—specifically, as a way to understand Ireland's unique role within Britain's colonial empire among its other holdings. Ireland's experimental character comes largely from the "political arithmetic" of William Petty's landscape improvement ideologies, which also in many ways formed the basis of the export of Irish engineers and administrators elsewhere in the colonies. (See Bhandar 2020; Bresnihan and Brodie 2025; Carroll 2007; Ohlmeyer 2023.)

7 Of course, as with most truncated histories such as this, there is much more texture to this story than I have the space to give here, as the focus of this book is contemporary. For a more complex infrastructural history of this period, with all of the dense navigations around postcoloniality and the challenges of delinking amid a changing world economic system, see Bresnihan and Brodie (2025).

8 I am referring here, of course, to Anderson's concept of nations as "imagined communities" (2006). The dominance of the "national question" in postcolonial Irish society has of course been discussed and com-

mented on at length by conservative and radical thinkers. In particular, Joe Cleary's idea of the revisionist construction of "de Valera's Ireland" as a place of exclusively regressive insularity is instructive—he makes the point that in spite of conservative social values instilled through governance, it was also a time of attempted, if imperfect and incomplete, national modernization. See Cleary (2002).

9 It should be noted that the above paragraph is a simplified version of a longer history of tension and experiment within the nation-building project, as a way to illustrate the mainstream cultural relevance of Lemass's economic policies more than any specifically textured historiography. This "origin story," with Lemass and his contemporary T. K. Whitaker as the heroes of Ireland's early economic liberalization, has an ongoing popular appeal among a liberal-conservative elite whose economic reality is dubious in the historiography. I reproduce it here for its cultural and metaphorical significance within the material enactment of the state's development programs across history and its pertinence to the centrality of FDI (see Bresnihan and Brodie 2025; McCabe 2020; O'Hearn 1990).

10 In Irish historical discourse, this is contested terrain, especially considering the ways in which "modernization" theory has been employed by revisionists to whitewash the crimes of the British Empire in Ireland and, by extension, to celebrate the innovative ethos of the Irish developmental state in developing its "industrialization by invitation" strategy in response to a chronically "underdeveloped" society. See Bresnihan and Brodie (2025).

11 More recently, the genocide in Gaza has in 2023–24 awakened both the most powerful progressive and anti-colonial solidarity organizing the island has seen since the northern civil rights movements in the 1960s–70s and the Dunnes workers anti-apartheid strikes in the 1980s, but it has also empowered reactionary, racist cross-border anti-immigrant and specifically anti-Muslim organizing with the English Defense League and Loyalists. These right-wing groups have capitalized on the ongoing austerity-era housing shortage to sow hatred among working-class and migrant communities across the island.

12 In the early 2020s alone, we saw both traditional examples like the "Irish" Twitter-maligned *Wild Mountain Thyme* (John Patrick Shanley, 2021) and *Irish Wish* (Janeen Damian, 2024), as well as a commercially successful unraveling of these dynamics in the Oscar-winning *The Banshees of Inisherin* (Martin McDonagh, 2022). The popular discourse that raged around each of these films points to the unresolved positioning of Ireland and Irish cultural identity within global media forms.

13 For this incredible logistical phrase, I owe gratitude to Kay Dickinson (see her recent book, 2024).

14 An adopted human geographer, at best.

15 Of the three, I have only lived in Dublin, where I lived for several months over the course of my research, and where I now work. Still—I would not propose that this gives me any particularly unique or privileged insight.

16 This suggestion of drawing what's "offscreen" into the kind of research we do in film and media studies is generative in its reference to the dynamics between the researcher and the media technologies used to do research. In media production, for a sound technician or editor, this would involve considering both "wild" sound—unedited, environmental sonic "atmosphere"—as well as the cleaner, edited, narrative sound of the day. These were sites and encounters that will remain, shall we say, "wild"—at the edges of the frame, "where the environment speaks back, where communication bows to intensity, where worlds collide, cultures clash, and things fall apart" (Halberstam and Nyong'o 2018, 454). Conceptions of politics are scrambled, frayed even, but are constituent and vibrantly of the place, the history, its relations, and its livelihoods.

17 Again, "post-," in spite of ongoing occupation in the six counties, and in spite of a more privileged position today within the imperial and extractive world order than other postcolonies in the Global South.

Chapter 1. Turbulent Waters

1 This US collapse may still be imminent, but empire remains unfortunately durable. As I will suggest throughout this book, what we saw in Ireland in the 2010s may be symptomatic of a death knell of a particular kind of "stable" neoliberal orthodoxy.

2 Ireland's classification is consistently under debate. During the Celtic Tiger, its destiny seemed one of a pure core country, allied with the dominant economic powers of the Global North. However, for much of its history, theorists have termed it "semi-peripheral," and since the financial crisis this seems to be a consensus. Its status as a tax haven also seems to suggest some enduring, or at least imaginative, peripherality—such "havens" are rarely considered a true feature of the core. See Nitzsche (2013); O'Boyle and Allen (2021); O'Hearn (2016).

3 As of the end of 2020, the limit point of this study, the "recovery" appeared to have peaked and was leading to another recession. However, recessionary austerity and the ongoing creep of privatization that has become the norm means that another crash will likely look different than the last.

4 The twentieth century in Ireland has been debated and written about in great detail, especially according to the ways in which the country's postcolonial condition—a European semi-periphery with a relatively successful economy that nonetheless emerged as a post-developmental