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Roadkill: the extended urbanization of cannibal capitalism in the Peruvian Amazon

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ABSTRACT
This paper presents a surrealist urban political ecology of cannibal capitalism beyond the city, through the case of the Iquitos-Nauta highway in the Peruvian Amazon. Inaugurated in 2005 after decades of corrupt construction, the highway has catalyzed a chaotic fusion of unplanned urban processes and paralegal extractive industries erupting from and surging back into the city of Iquitos. Armed mafias seize tracts of land and sell off lots to landless migrants; deforestation opens access to white sand mined for the concrete of the city; battery chicken farms abut nature reserves and exclusive resorts; spiritual tourists drink hallucinogenic plant medicines down the road from the municipal dump. All bisected by the howling speed and mangled flesh of the road itself. Drawing on extensive field research, I interpret the highway as a paradigmatic example of extended urbanization in response to the conceptual conundrum of how to grasp the structuring logic of this process without abstracting from the complexities of its disjunctive fragmentation. Cannibal capitalism is identified as the violent dynamic animating extended urbanization, which undermines the conditions of its own expanded reproduction, while surrealist modalities of montage, ethnography and psychogeography are deployed to convey the apocalyptic morphology of the expanding urban fabric.

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Introduction

Iquitos is the principal city of the Peruvian Amazon and the largest city in the world that cannot be reached by road. Surrounded on three sides by a maze of rivers, the only road out runs due south for 97 kilometers to the town of Nauta on the River Marañón, from which it is a three-day journey by cargo ship to the edge of the national road network in Yurimaguas. Finally completed in 2005, after decades of corrupt construction that have led to claims that it is the most expensive road in the world per kilometer (Harvey & Knox, 2012), the Iquitos-Nauta highway has catalyzed a chaotic fusion of unplanned urban processes and paralegal extractive industries erupting from and surging back into Iquitos. Armed mafias seize tracts of land and sell off lots to landless migrants;

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deforestation opens access to white sand mined for the concrete of the city; battery chicken farms sit next to nature reserves and exclusive resorts; spiritual tourists drink hallucinogenic plant medicines down the road from the municipal dump. All bisected by the howling speed and mangled flesh of the highway. In the words of a local economist describing the road: "Today we live in a world that is difficult to comprehend, in which reality assumes unimaginable forms" (Grandez, 2022, p. 1).

This paper seeks to comprehend the Iquitos-Nauta highway as a paradigmatic example of the bewildering tangle of forms and processes that characterize extended urbanization. In recent years, the field of urban political ecology has increasingly focused on spaces beyond the city, asserting that the dynamics of contemporary urbanization exceed the limits of the city in both concrete and conceptual terms. Contributors to this literature have drawn attention to a multiplicity of urbanizing phenomena reminiscent of those along the Iquitos-Nauta highway, including "informal settlements, gated communities … brutalscapes, deforestation … as well as extended recreational and infrastructural spaces" (Tzaninis et al, 2023, p. 7). Inspired by Henri Lefebvre's concept of the expanding "urban fabric" (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 3), urban political ecologists have variously theorized this explosion of spaces in terms of "extended urbanization" (Castriota & Tonucci, 2018; Monte-Mór, 2023), "planetary urbanization" (Arboleda, 2016; Brenner, 2014); "suburbanization" (Keil, 2018; Tzaninis et al., 2021) and "extensive urbanization" (Simone, 2022; Simone et al., 2025). While significant differences exist between these approaches, they all confront the "conceptual conundrum" of grasping "how such processes entail a coherent series of manoeuvres and logics without reifying the intensely malleable, shape-shifting ways in which urbanization articulates divergent trajectories of spatial production" (Simone, quoted in Tzaninis et al, 2023, p. 10).

This paper addresses this conundrum. Rather than arguing for one or other of the various conceptual framings of extended urbanization, or introducing my own term into an already crowded field, I aim to make two precise contributions that I hope will be of use across these competing approaches, by addressing the twin elements of the conundrum: deciphering the (de)structuring logic of extended urbanization on one hand, while seeking to capture and convey its surreal morphology on the other. There is a tension in the literature regarding the first of these factors. While some scholars identify capital accumulation as the driving force of extended urbanization (Arboleda, 2023; Brenner & Katsikis, 2023; Jamieson, 2024), others indicate that its complexity cannot be accounted for by any such generic causal factor (Keil, 2018; Roy, 2016; Simone, 2022). The case of the Iquitos-Nauta highway, however, suggests an alternative path between these two positions, according to which capitalism is indeed at the heart of the process, but a specific iteration of capitalism that has yet to be conceptualized within this literature. In an early formulation of his planetary urbanization thesis, Neil Brenner drew on the work of Marxist philosopher Nancy Fraser in arguing that "precisely because the process of capitalist urbanization continues its forward movement of creative destruction on a world scale, the meanings and modalities of critique can never be held constant" (Brenner, 2009, p. 204). This axiom can be applied to the urban political ecologies of our apocalyptic present (Pohl, 2021; Swyngedouw, 2023; Wilson, 2023), by turning to Fraser's recent theorization of the decadence and destructiveness of the dominant contemporary regime of accumulation in terms of "cannibal capitalism", which "persistently devours the very supports on which it relies" including the social, political and ecological bases of its expanded

reproduction (Fraser, 2022, p. 24). As such, cannibal capitalism not only involves the metaphorical cannibalization of one class by another, but also threatens the terminal self-consumption of the system's own underlying conditions of possibility.

Fraser does not address the urban dimensions of this process, and her theorization of cannibal capitalism abstracts from geographical specificities – a limitation also identified in critiques of the literatures on planetary and extended urbanization, which have called for more grounded and situated approaches (Gururani, 2023; Tzaninis et al., 2021; Wilson & Jonas, 2018). With this in mind, I bring Fraser's approach into dialogue with decolonial theorist Sayak Valencia's work on "gore capitalism" as the emergent logic of urbanization in places like her home city of Tijuana. Drawing attention to the systemic corruption, organized criminality, and spectacular violence that characterize "the reinterpretation of the hegemonic global economy in (geographic) border spaces", Valencia conceptualizes gore capitalism as a peripheral "process of capitalism's deformed duplication … in places, spaces and subjects" (Valencia, 2018, p. 1, 7). A fusion of Fraser and Valencia's approaches thus provides a starting point for deciphering the violent and chaotic animating forces of extended urbanization in such peripheral spaces, which remains firmly grounded in the global dynamics of capital accumulation while being attentive to the geographical specificities of this process.

The second contribution of this paper is methodological, and pertains to the second clause of the conceptual conundrum identified above, regarding the challenge of adequately conveying the morphological incongruity of extended urbanization. As Roger Keil has noted, Lefebvre's original conceptualization of the expanding urban fabric framed it in terms of "the projection of numerous disjunct fragments … into space" (Lefebvre, quoted in Keil, 2018, p. 500). AbdouMaliq Simone has similarly described extensive urbanization as "a tremulous, provisional interstice among disparate forms of spatial development that often concretely sit right next to each other" (Simone, 2022, pp. 6–7); and Neil Brenner has depicted planetary urbanization as "a kaleidoscopic churning of sociospatial arrangements" (Brenner, 2014, p. 17). As Simone observes, such vivid evocations of the miasmic incoherence of extended urban space point toward "something unintelligible, or ungraspable, with the available interpretive tools" (Simone, 2022, p. 16). Yet they also recall the language of surrealism, which developed a set of interpretive tools that served to capture the "concrete irrationality" of urban modernity as a "cacophony of vectors, multi-scaled material parts and spatial striations" (Dalí, quoted in Polizzotti, 2024, p. 63; Spiller, 2019, p. 90). Indeed, Lefebvre himself was involved in the surrealist movement in the 1920s and remained committed to "the [surrealist] hypothesis that only the excessive image can come to grips with the profundity of the real world" (Lefebvre, 2008, p. 261).[1] Among the surrealist techniques for generating such images is the method of montage, which seeks to disrupt the rationalizing tendencies of bourgeois aesthetics and academic sense-making through the generation of disorienting juxtapositions reminiscent of the disjunctive fragmentation of extended urban landscapes (Creed, 2007; Wilson, 2025a).

While montage can be drawn upon as a literary technique for conveying the spaces of extended urbanization, their material terrain can be explored through surrealist iterations of ethnography and psychogeography, both of which have been proposed for the study of extended urbanization. Psychogeography is a walking method for exploring the relationship between material and psychological space through close attention to our subjective experience of urban environments (Mason et al., 2023; Wilson, 2025b).

Though developed by the Situationist International in the 1950s, its roots lie in earlier surrealist explorations of Parisian ruination and mutation (Coverley, 2010). Surrealist psychography seeks to "bring forth the hidden, strange and subversive", and approaches urban space as "a site of entropy, where weirdness is breaking through the surface of normal life" (Bonnett, 2017, pp. 477, 480). As such, it can be usefully deployed in capturing the "strange geographies" of extended urbanization (Simone, 2023, p. 393). Indeed, psychogeographical practice is characterized by an increasing interest in urban spaces beyond the city, leading James Sidaway to suggest that the method possesses potential "synergies with work examining the expansive boundaries of the urban" (Sidaway, 2022, p. 564). Such synergies are evident in the surrealist psychogeography of JG Ballard, whose fragmented narratives revealed the underlying weirdness of the abstract space of flyovers, malls and multistorey carparks that proliferated in late-twentieth-century suburbia (Coverley, 2010). Consistent with Lefebvre's perspective on the expanding urban fabric, Ballard insisted that his method of disjunctive fragmentation "isn't a reordering of narrative at all. Reality is already reordered … The world *is* discontinuous" (Ballard, 2012, p. 451). His work inspired Bolivian writer Maximiliano Barrientos, whose recent novel *Miles do Ojos* (*Thousands of Eyes*) explores the contemporary intersection of cannibal capitalism and extended urbanization in a psychogeographical road trip through the vast operational landscapes of the Bolivian lowlands, experienced as "a decomposition of all form, a chaos in which speed … annihilated matter, reducing it to a roar" (Barrientos, 2022, p. 152).

Echoing the extension of psychogeography to spaces beyond the city, Monika Streule has recently outlined a "mobile ethnography," as "a novel approach to qualitatively study large and heterogeneous metropolitan territories" (Streule, 2020, p. 424). Focusing on multiple sites, and deploying mixed qualitative methods triangulated with secondary data, mobile ethnography combines the embodied experience of extended urban landscapes afforded by psychogeography with an ethnographic attentiveness to multiple perspectives. The outcome is "a series of juxtapositions, in which urbanization processes are collapsed into and made an integral part of parallel, related local situations" (Streule, 2020, p. 427). This method can be drawn upon in responding to calls for greater ethnographic detail in the study of extended urbanization (Bathla, 2024; Gururani, 2023), along with the anthropology of infrastructure (Dalakoglou & Harvey, 2012; Larkin, 2013), which foregrounds the phantasmatic power with which seemingly mundane infrastructures are often invested by the inhabitants of isolated regions, including the Amazon (Campbell, 2012; Harvey & Knox, 2012). This approach provides a counterpoint to much of the critical literature on Amazonian megaprojects, which tends to represent such infrastructures as totalizing schemes imposed on resistant Indigenous communities (Barrantes et al., 2014; Bebbington et al., 2018; Hope, 2022).[2]

In its emphasis on "the enchantments of infrastructure" (Harvey & Knox, 2012), the anthropology of infrastructure echoes the early surrealist fascination with the "marvellous" and "enchanted" dimensions of everyday life (Bonnett, 2017; Polizzotti, 2024). But the fusion of cannibal capitalism and extended urbanization in the dysfunctional landscapes of our apocalyptic present is better captured by the later surrealist concern with the absurd (Wilson, 2024), which Salvador Dalí regarded as "a kind of fount of truths" (Dalí, 1998, p. 33), and Ballard called "the phenomenology of the universe" (Ballard, 2014, p. 134). The absurdist aspect of extended urbanization, and the

heterogeneity and juxtaposition captured by Streule's mobile ethnography, both resonate with "ethnographic surrealism" (Lusty, 2017; Wilson, 2025c), which similarly emphasizes "fragmentation and juxtaposition" in the construction of "a collage … containing voices other than the ethnographer's, as well as data … not fully integrated within the work's governing interpretation" (Clifford, 1981, pp. 539, 563-564).

This paper draws on these methods in the development of a surrealist urban political ecology of cannibal capitalism beyond the city. Over the course of five days in 2022, I walked the first 58 kilometers of the Iquitos-Nauta highway, taking psychogeographical notes throughout, and concluding where the extended urbanization of Iquitos seemed to have run its course. I then drew on mobile ethnographic methods in deepening my research on multiple sites along the highway. These included twenty-eight semi-structured interviews with people living on or near the roadside, and with politicians, bureaucrats, journalists and academics in Iquitos with specialist knowledge of various aspects of the road and its associated urban processes, as part of a broader twelve-month ethnographic study of the city. The resulting information was triangulated with reviews of the secondary literature; the archives of local newspapers; and those of the Iquitos-based journal *Kanatari*, which provided a unique forum for local academics and investigative journalists for over three decades prior to its closure in 2017.

These diverse elements were spliced together with sets of photographs taken during my field research to create a montage that seeks to reproduce the disjunct fragments of extended urbanization, based on material that "cannot be woven into a coherent narrative [but] can only be contingently assembled out of a jumble of disconnected things, occurrences and sensations" (DeSilvey & Edensor, 2012, p. 10).[3] This fusion of surrealist writing and photography could be accused of fetishizing my object of inquiry in problematic ways. But as Dalí has noted, "by brutally reducing the field of our preferences, we gain in intensity what we lose in vast and insipid panoramas" (Dalí, 1998, p. 65). In other words, there is something to be gained from "getting with the fetish" (Pohl, 2022, p. 153), as long as this is held in dialectical tension with an equally rigorous attentiveness to the material dynamics generating such surrealist objects, consistent with what Walter Benjamin called the cojoining of "a heightened graphicness to the realization of Marxist method" (Benjamin, 1999, p. 461). Through this approach, a composite image of the violence and absurdity of cannibal capitalism emerges, in which "the cuts and sutures of the research process are left visible; there is no smoothing over or blending of the work's raw 'data' into a homogenous representation" (Clifford, 1981, p. 563).

"Red meat for the mafias"

KM1: The road is a striated mulch of waste and destruction. Smashed prams satellite dishes blue-haired dolls burned-out microwaves crushed metal sheeting flung into collided piles on the roadside. Trucks stripped of their parts rot like scavenged skeletons. Chunks of immense vehicles come to rest in random places like the aftermath of an explosion. The mechanics and scrap dealers that line the first stretch of road give way to gray concrete walls and barbed wire fencing, embellished only by signs on which the landholders anxiously demarcate their properties, list the numbers of their supposed titles, and warn that their security guards are under orders to shoot on sight. These signs mark the entrance to the current frontline of the so-called invasions. "Iquitos Has

Become a No-Man's Land!" screamed a headline in the local press in October 2022 (La Región, 2022c) reporting on the latest wave of violent incursions along this section of the highway, in which armed gangs seize large tracts of land from the propertied elite. The frontpage featured a photograph of the site of a recent invasion – an enormous stretch of land belonging to the owner of Denisam, one of the largest construction companies in Iquitos. The concrete block wall that divides the long face of the property from the road-side is adorned with the company slogan: "Iquitos also constructs (*Iquitos también construye*)". In an apparently satirical gesture, the invaders used sledgehammers to smash holes through the wall that undermined these words (Figure 1(a)).

The General Manager of Denisam is a veteran of such situations, who has organized the evictions of fourteen invasions in various properties he had managed over the years. "The invasions used to be romantic!" he says. "The invaders were poor people with limited resources, building their houses, planting their flags, and defending themselves with sticks; stones, and Molotov cocktails."[4] That was back in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Iquitos was flooded with the families of 15,000 unemployed oil workers who had lost their jobs after abandoning their homes along the riverbanks of the local region of Loreto to join a brief oil boom. In the absence of urban planning or social housing programs, the workers formed Maoist organizations and occupied land on the outskirts of the city, taking advantage of land reform legislation that facilitated such ad hoc processes of redistribution (Santos Granero & Barclay, 2015). Since then, the city has expanded through multiple invasions of this kind, and several of its outlying barrios bear the names of courageous leaders who died resisting police evictions (Nájar, 1999). But the politics of the invasions changed in the late 1990s, as they reached the city limits and began extending along the freshly paved stretches of the road to Nauta (IIAP, 2002). Criminal gangs took control of the process and commodified it, seizing land not in the name of social justice, but in order to sell it on to a burgeoning urban population fed by a constant influx of Indigenous and mestizo peasants abandoning the increasingly inviable rural economy of the region (Nájar, 2005). Over time, these mafia-led invasions have evolved into a cannibal capitalist structure that simultaneously advances and undermines the logic of capital, by organizing a flourishing urban land market through a relentless series of frontal attacks on private property:

> They enter private properties. They don't respect the proprietors. They contract thugs who destroy everything, loot everything, and take control of the properties by force. And the landless people follow them … And then they start selling lots. The objective is to sell lots. Everyone is involved. Police, lawyers, it's a system. An invasion benefits everyone – although it damages the proprietor … When the police act [to evict the invaders], they don't act for free. You have to pay them under the table … And the invaders are well protected. There are lawyers who offer their services to defend them. And unfortunately, there are certain legal loopholes.[5]

Chief among these "loopholes" is a law stipulating that once a property has been occupied for fifteen days without eviction, the occupiers can only be removed by judicial order.[6] This process typically takes several years, during which an initially precarious invasion can develop into a fully integrated component of the expanding urban landscape with its own competing legal claims to the land, making its eviction increasingly problematic. The first fortnight is therefore crucial, as landholders scramble to organize an eviction before the fifteen-day window closes. The General Manager of Denisam has just been through this

process for the fourteenth time, in response to the recent invasion of the company's land. The mafia attacked at 4am from the back of the property, opening fire with shotguns, before knocking through the walls on the roadside to symbolize their control of the space. They systematically looted the site over the following days, emptying the company warehouse and stripping the owner's home of its kitchen, bathroom fittings, wiring, roofing panels … When the police arrived to evict them, they immediately abandoned the site. This suggests they were more concerned with extorting the wealthy landholder for protection money than with usurping the land in this case, and such arrangements are said to explain why certain large tracts along this stretch of highway are left untouched by the invaders.

KM3: Mashed up bananas, nappies, corn cobs, eggshells, tin cans, shoes, sinks, television screens, foam mattresses, chicken bones, a sky-blue umbrella decorated with radiant palm trees. Mud-encrusted images of gold necklaces, sapphire broaches and pearl earrings ricochet across multiple dumped copies of a free inflight magazine. The Hacienda gas station stands amidst the uncollected trash of two invasions that recently occupied lands held by its owner on both sides of the road. Unlike the case of Denisam, here the invaders have permanently usurped the properties. The plot opposite the Hacienda was first invaded in January 2022. Repelled by private security, the mafia returned to the road and attacked the gas station, murdering the guard who they accused of informing on their activities (Ampuero, 2022). They had seized the land behind the station in a similarly violent invasion back in October 2021, resisting the subsequent eviction in a shootout in which four police officers were injured, including one who lost an eye (Ampuero, 2021; Pro y Contra, 2022). The land has since been sold off in lots to landless migrants and poor inhabitants of the city's central slums, who have resisted three further evictions, in which several of them suffered buckshot wounds.[7] Their new community is named Second of October, to commemorate the date of the initial invasion. Brightly colored banners flutter above the makeshift entrance behind the gas station to celebrate the first anniversary of the community's foundation.

From the perspective of the previously landless inhabitants of Second of October and other such settlements, the mafias play a vital social role, regardless of their brutal methods and purely pecuniary motives. Although the local media frames the invasions as the theft of private property, most of the land along this initial stretch of the Iquitos-Nauta highway is actually state property, which was fraudulently acquired by the proprietors, with the collusion of corrupt functionaries of the Ministry of Agriculture. Back in the 1980s, when the road was just a muddy track, elites took advantage of agrarian reform laws, posing as peasant farmers to gain usufruct rights over large extensions of land, which were conditional on the land being put to agricultural use (Alvarez, 1997). In the majority of cases, they instead stripped the land of precious timber and deployed it as a speculative asset, while bribing officials to overlook the use to which it was being put.[8] But the mafias have countered with a corrupt system of their own, by bribing bureaucrats in the Loreto Directorate of Legal Agrarian Property Formalization (DISAFILPA), who inform them of the legal status of the properties they are targeting for invasion and initiate the process of reverting these properties to the state once the invasions have taken place, after which the state can reassign them to the invaders.[9] The costs are included in the installments paid by the inhabitants of the invasions for their lots. They also pay the mafias to bribe municipal authorities to grant them "Human Settlement" status, which gives them rights to services including water and electricity.[10]

While the inhabitants of Second of October were resisting evictions and claiming services, the mafia that had led their invasion reinvaded the property opposite the Hacienda gas station, seizing it successfully in June 2022. The hill above the road is filled with the fragile tents of previously landless migrants fashioned from wooden stakes and blue tarpaulins, amidst freshly felled trees and the remains of buildings once belonging to the Hacienda's owner. In the words of an indignant member of the local bourgeoisie: "People are looting our properties with shotguns, and we are not being defended by any authority! We feel totally unprotected as landlords of our own terrains … We have no one to protect us … We are desperate!" (quoted in La Región, 2022a).

KM6: A sudden gust of wind blasts loose trash against the broken radiator grille of a derelict bus. The mouth of a shattered dog rots into the bare snarl inscribed by the aggression of the impact. An elegant black sign marks the entrance to Chic Paradise – an exclusive restaurant and hotel concealed behind white security fences (Figure 1(b)). A poster on the roadside offers glimpses of gourmet dishes and turquoise swimming pools. A campaign billboard with the neck of the politician torn out. Concrete pylon collapses into drooping cables above the remains of a barricade fleetingly flung across the highway: the repetitive spirals of multiple burned-out mattresses are scattered across the wire circles of incinerated tyres (Figure 1(c)).

This is one of several such residues of struggle that I have passed along the road, remnants of the general strike called across Loreto in August 2022 (La Región, 2022b). But like the invasions, these once-powerful regional strikes are now integrated into the logic of cannibal capitalism. According to a man selling lengths of hardwood on the roadside, the barricades were mainly an opportunity to extort passing traffic, and the strike was soon called off after the leadership received its anticipated payoff from the governor. From his stall on a rise in the road, we can see the blue tarpaulin rooves of The Miracle of San Juan – an invasion being hastily reconstructed amidst the stumps of a decimated stretch of the Quistacocha Forest Reserve, alongside the charred remains of similar tents destroyed during a recent police eviction (Figure 1(d)). He had seen the invasion taking place and had rushed down the hill to stake his claim to a piece of land. The mafia offered him a 6 × 20 meter lot at a good price, where he hoped to build a home. He believed they were "serious, transparent leaders who wanted to help people." But over the following days they started demanding further payments from him and his new neighbors, claiming that these were required to hire lawyers and bribe bureaucrats in order to gain titles for the land. When he asked for evidence of these purported operations, his request was aggressively rejected:

> The whole thing was a con job. The leaders were surrounded by delinquents who threatened anyone who didn't pay. When people had fallen behind by a couple of payments, they went to their huts with guns and told them to pay or leave. And if they didn't pay, they burned their huts down.[11]

Similarly aggressive extortions were described by the inhabitants of Second of October, who claimed that the leaders of their invasion had been enjoying debauched lives in Iquitos with the proceeds.[12] And along the intervening stretch of road, there are multiple reports of poor homesteads being looted by the same groups, with the same ferocity as the invasions of the large landholdings. In the words of the General Manager of Denisam: "It's all red meat for the mafias."[13]

Figure 1. (a) Sledgehammer holes; (b) Chic Paradise; (c) incinerated tyres; (d) Miracle of San Juan. (All photographs by Japhy Wilson).

"The inexhaustible resources of its guts"

KM11: The white sand that once sustained the annihilated jungle glitters in black holes gouged from the thin asphalt of the road. Diesel rainbows spiral in stagnant water trapped in decayed steel piping. Teeth gnash from a dental advertisement ground into the dirt. Obliterated anaconda unfurls across the highway (Figure 2(a)). Plastic horse galloping through roadside trash. Faded campaign posters promise "you are a priority" alongside "for sale" signs on abandoned land. Empty sun loungers recline beside a drained swimming pool filled with the cracked blue plaster fragments of its own disintegrating walls (Figure 2(b)). Sections of collapsed corrugated fencing expose the concrete ribcage of a half-constructed building. Bulldozers ram through secondary jungle beside a dismantled asphalt factory.

The opening of the asphalt factory in 1996 marked the long-awaited start of the paving of the road (Kanatari, 1996). An exploratory track had been cut back in the 1930s, but had come to nothing (Knox, 2017). Construction was finally initiated by the military in 1971 but proved to be only the first step in a "a pilgrimage plagued with accidents, obstacles, penalties, shocks and frustrations, travelling through indecipherable bureaucratic labyrinths. To begin again, to eternally begin again … A true myth of Sisyphus" (Kanatari, 1994, p. 3). This appearance of a Sisyphean struggle, however, disguised the repeated embezzlement of the budgets allocated for the highway's construction, which "would have been sufficient to pave the road with ivory" (Kanatari, 1995, p. 1). From the early 1980s, these budgets had been derived from the *canon petrolero*, a percentage

of oil revenues granted to the regional administration in exchange for the hydrocarbons being extracted from the jungles of Loreto (Santos Granero & Barclay, 2015). This coincided with a boom in narcotrafficking in the region, with Iquitos becoming a key node in cocaine transport routes and money laundering operations. The local state, which had long been dominated by extractive elites operating on the boundaries of legality, was now infiltrated by criminal networks utilizing corrupted public works like the Iquitos-Nauta highway to access the increasingly lavish budgets of the *canon petrolero*. This ad hoc arrangement was consolidated under the authoritarian regime of Alberto Fujimori, who was president of Peru from 1990 to 2000, during which time he set about constructing a paradigmatic cannibal capitalist state. In addition to aggressively opening the Amazonian frontier to extractive capital through a series of deregulatory legislations, Fujimori built a comprehensive structure of institutionalized corruption, which combined protection money paid to the Peruvian military by international narcotraffickers with the systematic theft of public funds (Brisco et al., 2014; Crabtree & Durand, 2017; Schulte-Bockholt, 2013).

The asphalt factory was a small component of this scheme. At the time of its inauguration, the regional administration was headed by Tomás González – a close ally of Fujimori who went on to serve in his cabinet. González was subsequently accused of paving the highway as a front for the transfer of the resources of the *canon petrolero* into the financing of Fujimori's political operations and personal enrichment (Nájar, 2004). This was just one example of the operations of a self-consuming state in which "black holes related to corruption, injustice, disorder and impunity … fill the path ahead with frustrations and Kafkaesque twists" (Tello, 2014, p. 7). In 1985, an agrarian credit scheme had been introduced by Fujimori's presidential predecessor Alan García. Its launch coincided with one of countless political pledges to complete the road to Nauta, along with a network of feeder roads. Families of unemployed oil workers and migrants from the Andes formed associations along the still unsurfaced track, and invested loans provided by the Agrarian Bank in what they hoped would be the opening of a flourishing agricultural frontier (Alvarez, 1989). But the road remained unsurfaced, becoming unpassable in poor weather, and the promised feeder roads were not constructed, leaving many of the colonizers stranded in the jungle, unable to transport their initial harvests to the markets of Iquitos (Pinedo, 1987). Subsequent harvests failed as the nutrient-poor soils were rapidly exhausted. In the words of a woman living in the roadside community of Ex-Petroleros (Ex-Oil Workers): "We used to plant yucca, potatoes, maize and plantain. But now the land has nothing left to give. There are no more fish in the streams. All the animals – deer and other game – have been killed."[14] Deforestation accelerated as new land was repeatedly opened and abandoned (Jara, 2023), while destitute families unable to repay their loans became "the latest victims of the dream … of the Amazon as a land of riches … awaiting hard-working hands to tear out the inexhaustible resources of its guts" (Kanatari, 1987, p. 8).

The agrarian credit project was connected to the land redistribution scheme through which the local bourgeoise had masqueraded as peasant farmers to acquire the tracts of lands nearer Iquitos that are now being targeted by the invasions. Members of the same class had been allocated parcels of up to 1,000 hectares further along the road (Gutiérrez, 2001b), most of which were subjected to "speculative deforestation with no intention of agricultural production" (Maki et al., 2001, p. 204). The precious hardwoods on these

lands were clandestinely logged despite their protected status. Among the companies allegedly involved was TRENSA, which was said to be extracting timber from land that had been allocated to a minor member of the local elite for agrarian purposes, despite being located on fragile white sands inappropriate for agriculture (Alvarez, 1999). TRENSA was owned by Luis Valdez, one of the wealthiest capitalists of the Peruvian Amazon, who controlled twenty-five percent of timber exports from the region at the time (Santos Granero & Barclay, 2015). These exports served as a front for cocaine smuggling from Iquitos to Colombia, Europe and the USA, and Valdez has since been identified as a member of an international narcotrafficking organization with connections to the Fujimori regime (Brisco et al., 2014).

The delicate white sands from which TRENSA's timber was allegedly extracted are known as *varillales*. Formed from past meanders of the constantly shifting rivers of the region, the *varillales* line the first 33 kilometers of the highway (Maki et al., 2001). They constitute the basis of a unique and fragile ecosystem formed over millennia that is home to multiple endemic species, which cannot recover after deforestation (IIAP, 2002). But their sharp quartz structure is ideal for concrete and asphalt manufacture, and the sands exposed by logging have been extensively mined for construction projects in Iquitos, and for the paving of the road itself. These sands are thin, and the shallow mines are rapidly replaced by others opened further down the road, despite the absence of mining licences and environmental impact assessments (Gutiérrez, 2001a). This stretch of highway is lined with the blinding white escarpments of exhausted sand mines (Figure 2(c)), and battery chicken farms for which the sands provide a free filtration system.[15] The entrails of the slaughtered chickens are sold as feed to nearby fish farms, which have proven to be the only viable industry for the campesinos of the region.[16] The huge tilapia ponds that now line the roadside have undermined the structure of the highway, causing sinkholes that sporadically block the transportation of the garbage of Iquitos to the municipal dump, which is illegally located within the buffer zone of the highly biodiverse Allpahuayo-Mishana National Reserve (Ching Ruiz, 2015) (Figure 2(d)). The dump was moved here in 2007 from the outskirts of Iquitos, after one of the thousands of vultures feeding on the refuse was sucked into the turbine of a passenger jet departing from the nearby airport (Nájar, 2007). The company that owns it holds a monopoly over garbage disposal in Iquitos, and the seemingly irrational decision to relocate the dump so far from the city – and on the opposite side of the road from a nature reserve – was allegedly taken to inflate disposal costs, in collusion with local politicians.[17]

The relocation of the dump disregarded the recommendations of a territorial development plan for the Iquitos-Nauta highway, which was belatedly produced in 2002 by a government-funded research institute. The plan noted that the construction of the highway was catalyzing "a rapid and disorganized process of the occupation of geographical space, which is generating grave environmental problems due to the erroneous location of diverse productive and urban activities" (IIAP, 2002, p. 9). It accordingly proposed a comprehensive strategy for "the orderly and sustainable use of natural resources, with the aim of achieving a harmonious relationship between society and nature" (IIAP, 2002, p. 10). But the paving of the road continued without implementing any of its recommendations, and since its completion in 2005, the Allpahuayo-Mishana Reserve, which is the main protected area on the highway, has become yet another frontier for illegal logging and sand mining. As an author of the plan subsequently acknowledged:

Figure 2. (a) Obliterated anaconda; (b) drained swimming pool; (c) sand mine; (d) municipal dump (All photographs by Japhy Wilson).

"The origin of the road is political. It does not have an origin in development [policy] … It would have been better not to build the road at all."[18]

"Time to get your demons out"

KM25: The edges of the city fragment and fall away like shards of shrapnel at the limits of a detonating bomb. Tenuous utopias flicker along the fringes of this shattering periphery. Beyond the flock of dump trucks circling the last sand mine stands the campesino community of El Dorado, named after the fantasy that first drove Spanish conquistadors to ransack the Amazon in search of a kingdom of gold. I buy a bottle of water through the metal grille of a shop set up in a roadside front room. The mestizo shopkeeper tells me lots of foreigners used to visit a lodge down a track on the far side of town. They would drink a psychedelic plant medicine called ayahuasca with an Indigenous shaman. "It was a beautiful spot", she says. Then she lowers her voice and draws closer to the window's steel bars. "It was abandoned due to a murder. Not many gringos came here after that." Workers from the lodge had come to her shop one morning in 2015 to tell her that a Canadian man had stabbed an English man to death during an ayahuasca ceremony the night before. "What must that drink be like?" the shopkeeper wondered, "I've never tried it, and I don't want to try it either!"[19]

Ayahuasca is a potent hallucinogen known locally as the vine of death, which has the capacity to generate profound visions, violent purges, and life-changing experiences. In recent decades it has been appropriated by the global wellness industry, and since the

early 2000s Iquitos has become a mecca for spiritual tourists who pay thousands of dollars to attend retreats in the jungles surrounding the city, where they participate in ayahuasca ceremonies presided over by Indigenous shamans. But in contrast to the framing of ayahuasca by the wellness industry as a traditional medicine used by Indigenous Amazonians since time immemorial, its use only became widespread in the context of the violent fusion of multiple Indigenous cultures generated by the rubber boom of the early twentieth century, when the Amazon became the principal source of the rubber demanded by Western industry (Fotiou, 2020; Gearin, 2022). Iquitos was the Peruvian center of the trade, attracting capital from across Europe. The rubber was extracted from the forests of Loreto by enslaved Indigenous workers, many of whom were captured in slave raids, and torture and murder were common tools of labor control. The region between Iquitos and Nauta was worked by enslaved members of the Omagua, Kukama, and Ikitu peoples, after whom the city of Iquitos was named (Chirif, 2014; San Roman, 1975). Indeed, plans for a road from Nauta to Iquitos were first discussed at this time, as a means of facilitating rubber extraction (IIAP, 2002).

The paving of the road almost a century later opened a new frontier for the ayahuasca industry, allowing retreats located at the end of dirt tracks like the one that runs through El Dorado to be quickly accessed by tourists arriving from the airport on the outskirts of Iquitos. Dozens of ayahuasca lodges were rapidly constructed along the road (Figure 3(a)), based on the generic spatial form of private wooden chalets and a communal dining room set around a large "*maloca*" – a circular thatched-roofed building in which the ceremonies take place. The majority of these lodges are owned by North American and European entrepreneurs, who market the retreats as primitivist escapes from the planetary urban world. The staging of the Amazon rainforest as an Edenic paradise untouched by Western modernity is central to the framing of the retreats, and the Indigenous shamans hired to preside over the ceremonies play a crucial role in authenticating the experience (Fotiou, 2020; Freedman, 2014; Gearin, 2022).

The ill-fated lodge near El Dorado was marketed under the name of Phoenix Ayahuasca and operated by two Australian spiritualists who purchased a patch of exhausted land from local campesinos and constructed a standard spatial arrangement of huts, kitchen and *maloca*. The lodge was promoted as being "nestled in the beautiful Amazon rainforest" and offered "solitary jungle isolation" in which to "explore the true nature of the self", charging US$1,200 for a 10-day retreat (Aya Advisors, n.d.). Unsurprisingly, no mention was made of the catastrophic extended urban landscape of invasions and extractions stretching between the airport and El Dorado, nor of the impoverished town, abandoned fields and charred jungle surrounding the dirt track running from the highway to the lodge. But this repressed reality returned to disrupt the bucolic staging of Phoenix Ayahuasca, when the Indigenous shaman due to lead an ayahuasca ceremony in 2015 was prevented from reaching the lodge by a strike that had barricaded the Iquitos-Nauta highway. The ceremony went ahead with a less experienced shaman, who was unable to intervene when the British tourist Unais Gomes apparently suffered a psychotic breakdown. Gomes left the *maloca* at this point, and went in search of Joshua Stevens, a Canadian man conducting a personal ceremony in his private chalet. Stevens claims he suddenly heard Gomes shouting "It's time to get your demons out brother. We're going to get them out together" (quoted in Houghton, 2016). When he went outside, Gomes wrestled him to the ground, forcing

his finger up his anus and his tongue into his throat. Stevens fought himself free and ran into the kitchen. Gomes followed him and attacked Stevens with a carving knife, which Stevens wrestled from his grip before desperately stabbing him to death (Grierson & Siddique, 2016; Houghton, 2016).

KM47: Decaying roadside settlements peel away from the screaming highway. Dismantled panels of a prefabricated building; the last surviving beams of a wooden bridge. Faded dreams of fincas with names like "Paradise" and "City of God" scrawled on scraps of rotten hardboard beside signs trying to sell unwanted land (Figure 3(b)). Flooded tracks hacked into tired jungle; gutted huts sliding into roadside gorges (Figure 3(c)). These exhausted scenes are bisected by the psychedelic violence of the road itself. Mangled paws and splintered teeth of an unidentifiable animal crushed into a new mutant lifeform; fine lines embossed with brick dust and pink blossom engraved by pure speed into the surface of the highway; abstractions of blasted paint spilled from accelerating trucks (Figure 3(d)). The yellow line that marked the center of the road has eroded into a dancing filament of light. Dead snake curled into rut gouged from the speed-exploded asphalt. Reality unravels in the riptide of the blast.

But the billboard at KM58 promises a change of scene. It celebrates the new road that runs from here to San Joaquin de Omaguas on the banks of the Amazon eight kilometers away, which was inaugurated in 2019 by the Governor of Loreto, Elisban Ochoa (Pro y Contra, 2019). In the image, Ochoa stands on the road in radiant sunshine, pointing triumphantly at an arc of asphalt unfurling into the distance. The message reads: "The San Joaquin de Omaguas highway: A reality!" The image rears into the sky above its miraculous materialization, along which the speed is pure and the disintegration of the road to Nauta has not yet occurred. Light clean wood of new huts on freshly cleared land. Dense foliage and dazzling flowers of primary jungle. Sinuous curves of smooth unblemished asphalt.

On the outskirts of San Joaquin de Omaguas I meet a local mayoral candidate who is busily preparing campaign materials for the upcoming elections. He relocated here from Lima a few years ago, and credits himself with successfully lobbying the regional government for the construction of the road, which forms a central pillar of his electoral campaign. As he explains, the arrival of the road has transformed this previously remote village, catalyzing a rapid process of urban development as Indigenous families from the riversides relocate here to take advantage of the access to Iquitos that the highway now provides. But talk soon turns to a remarkable event that he claims to have experienced soon after his arrival in the town:

> "I sat down beneath a tree to admire the panorama … And looking around me, I looked up and saw something strange. Something like a big flying hat … hovering above the highway. And when it moved, the sun hit it – it had a kind of mirror that shone a blinding light into the jungle. In the middle of the day. It was there for perhaps five minutes, as if it were watching me, and then it disappeared. It had multicoloured windows. It was incredible!"[20]

Further into town I speak to a woman selling chicken and rice at a roadside stall. She says she has seen similar flying objects, which are covered in lights and look like a cross between an airplane and a drone. In her opinion, they are *pelacaras* – face peelers. The *pelacaras* are one of several supernatural beings whose presence in the Amazon has been reported by Indigenous communities since colonial times, and whose actions

Figure 3. (a) Ayahuasca lodge; (b) Paradise Finca; (c) gutted hut; (d) blasted abstractions. (All photographs by Japhy Wilson).

seem to symbolize the operations of cannibal capitalism in the region (Santos Granero & Barclay, 2011; Taussig, 1987). Beings called *pishtacos* are said to have extracted fat from Indigenous people for the payment of foreign debts on behalf of the García and Fujimori regimes, while the *pelacaras* are described as gringos in flying saucers, who use laser beams to remove people's faces and internal organs (Berjón & Cadenas, 2009; Gutiérrez, 2005). According to the woman selling chicken and rice, *pelacaras* were responsible for the recent murders of two Indigenous inhabitants of the town, both of which remain unexplained (Pro y Contra, 2021). The first "was found in the river with his face peeled off." The second "died on his land. They had drained him of his blood."[21] The first case was confirmed by a bus driver, who likewise said that "they skinned his face. They say it was done by the *pelacaras*."[22] And the mayoral candidate noted that in the second case the murdered man's "mouth had been opened like a cross … And there was only a little blood. You would think there would have been blood everywhere."[23]

Monstrous beings like the *pelacaras* proliferate in places like San Joaquin de Omaguas, "where fable and fantasy enter into the everydayness of race and class oppression – mundaneness made hyperreal where society abuts wilderness at the frontier" (Taussig, 1987, p. 211). There is no police station in the town, which only has electricity for two or three hours each evening and is unlit for the rest of the night. People describe hearing vehicles traveling to and from the port at high speed along the new road, and speedboats arriving and departing under cover of darkness. Ten years previously, there were reports of similar nocturnal movements coinciding with the equally unexplained murder of another Indigenous man, which at the time was attributed to "people who dedicate

themselves to narcotrafficking … and travel from here to the city of Iquitos" (Ampuero, 2012). The new highway may have facilitated such journeys, although no-one wants to discuss whether these forces might be at work today. The most powerful narcotrafficker in Iquitos allegedly funded the election campaign of Elisban Ochoa, the governor who inaugurated the road (Aguirre, 2019), and thirteen members of Ochoa's team are now under investigation for the theft of *canon petrolero* funds deployed in its construction (Herrera, 2022b). The extended urbanization of cannibal capitalism advances through such murky processes, shimmering with stories of UFOs and *pelacaras*, beneath which "organized crime becomes entangled with the state, taking over (or financing) many of its operations. This process gives rise to an inscrutable web that is difficult to challenge in any effective way, since the needs of the population are met by the creation of infrastructure [connected to] drug trafficking" (Valencia, 2018, p. 19).

Conclusion

This paper has presented a surrealist urban political ecology of cannibal capitalism beyond the city, in an attempt to grasp the structuring logic of extended urbanization without abstracting from the complexities of its disjunctive fragmentation. Drawing on montage, psychogeography, and ethnographic surrealism, I have constructed a composite image of the Iquitos-Nauta highway from fragments of my walk along the road, through which an uncanny sense of the underlying dynamics of cannibal capitalism has emerged. Here I will conclude by sifting a handful of salient themes from the spatial wreckage of the preceding sections, pertaining to the morphological complexity of extended urbanization; the socioecological peculiarities of cannibal capitalism; and the critical contributions of surrealist method.

The Iquitos-Nauta highway vividly illustrates the process of "implosion-explosion" that Lefebvre identified as central to the expansion of the urban fabric (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 14). The city of Iquitos explodes outwards along the road, an initial concentration of mechanics and scrapyards giving way to the latest wave of land invasions through which the city has expanded in the absence of urban planning. The force of the eruption dissipates as it moves along the road, breaking up into the increasingly dispersed splinters of exclusive resorts catering to urban elites; ayahuasca lodges for international tourists arriving from the airport; and the municipal garbage dump to which the refuse of the city is hauled in a barrage of howling dump trucks. This explosive process is interpenetrated by an equally inchoate dynamic of implosion surging in the opposite direction. Timber and sand are extracted in vast quantities from the surrounding forests to sustain the metabolic upheavals of the city; the urban population is fed by the battery chicken farms and exhausted peasant fields that line the central stretches of the highway; and the people and produce of remote rivers reach the markets of Iquitos along new feeder roads such as the one from San Joaquin de Omaguas.

This amorphous dialectic of accelerating collapse is expressive of the perverse logic of cannibal capitalism, which paradoxically thrives by undermining the foundations of its own expanded reproduction. In the invasions on the outskirts of Iquitos, a burgeoning urban land market is sustained by mafias infiltrating the state in order to strip the bourgeoisie of their landholdings, subverting the cardinal principle of private property on which capitalist social relations depend, and which the capitalist

state is duty-bound to uphold. In the building of the highway, criminal networks encompassing the upper echelons of the Peruvian government replaced the technocratic rationale of road infrastructure as a state spatial strategy for sustainable economic development with the utilization of the Iquitos-Nauta highway as a mechanism for the embezzlement of the funds of the *canon petrolero*. The opening of the road in turn created opportunities for extractive capital to illegally access resources located in protected areas, eroding the ecological basis of capitalism's own survival. And the same process subsequently reproduced itself on a smaller scale, through the corrupt construction of the highway to San Joaquin Omaguas, overseen by a regional governor allegedly financed by narcotraffickers, which opened a new extractive frontier and cocaine transport route.

Many elements of extended urbanization discussed in this paper are shared by other urbanizing peripheries around the world, where the dynamics of cannibal capitalism can also be observed. These include informal suburbs (Gururani, 2023; Simone, 2022), extractive frontiers (Arboleda, 2016; Castriota, 2024), agrarian hinterlands (Cowan, 2024; Roy, 2016), and sand mines, which have been discussed in the cannibalistic terminology of "metabolic voracity" and "self-consuming growth" (Jamieson, 2024, p. 4; Livingston, 2019, p. 103). Other aspects of this self-consuming metabolism include the transformation of discarded chicken guts into feed for unregulated fish farms along the highway, and the mutation of oil rents into the embezzled budget of the road itself, both of which are illustrative of more general urban metabolic processes (Huber, 2015; Landecker, 2019). And the involvement of mafias in the production of these urbanizing spaces is not limited to Iquitos but extends throughout the Amazon Basin, where "drug trafficking constitutes just one of multiple criminal activities in which organized criminal groups are involved, together with land-grabbing, timber trafficking [and] illegal mining" (UNODC, 2023, p. 63).

This cannibal capitalist configuration is permeated by the violence and racketeering that characterize gore capitalism, which I interpret as the form adopted by cannibal capitalism on urbanizing frontiers such as the Iquitos-Nauta highway. The case suggests that corruption should not be understood as a deviation from the logic of capital, or as a cancerous growth to be removed in order to restore the system to health (Doshi & Ranganathan, 2019). Instead, corruption is indispensable to the geographies of cannibal capitalism, "as a system of normalized rules, transformed from legal authority, patterned around existing inequalities, and cemented through cooperation and trust" (Robbins, 2000, p. 424). And violence is equally necessary for its spatial operations, in which the structural violence of capitalist social relations is increasingly dependent on direct violence (Valencia, 2018). Landholders pay police to defend their properties from mafias who seize land through spectacular acts of violence and use force of arms to extort the landless families who inhabit the invasions. The reproduction of the fragile ecosystems of the region is cannibalized in cases such as the deforestation and sand mining of the *varillales*. Brutal murders mark the opening of new extractive frontiers and the establishment of new relations of domination in places like San Joaquin de Omaguas. The desire of spiritual tourists to escape the alienation of capitalist modernity becomes entangled with the unregulated commodification of ayahuasca, the genocidal violence of the rubber boom through which this hallucinogen came to be widely used in the region, and moments of

psychotic breakdown and murder such as those at Phoenix Ayahuasca. And the abstract violence of capital's annihilation of space by time is inscribed into the highway itself, in the form of blasted asphalt and mangled roadkill.

This vision of the extended urbanization of cannibal capitalism has not been projected onto the highway from the vantage point of conceptual abstraction. Instead, it has risen to the surface through multiple fragmented images of the highway assembled in accordance with the surrealist method of montage, which seeks to allow new meanings to emerge through the juxtaposition of apparently unrelated elements. Rather than forcing disparate objects together, I have simply documented the spatial derangement of the road itself, relying on the spontaneous surrealism of the extended urban landscape to give rise to its own significations. Far from the escape from reality with which surrealism is often erroneously associated, this ethnographic and psychogeographical modality of surrealist practice constitutes a radical form of realism that seeks to "disrupt the imagery of natural order through which, in the name of the real, power exercises its dominion" (Taussig, 1987, p. xiv). Stripped of such imagery, the extended urbanization of cannibal capitalism is exposed in its true absurdity (Phelps, 2018; Wilson, 2024): the state colluding with the invasion mafias to undermine the principle of private property in the name of private profit; the agrarian credits issued for unfarmable land; the "Sisyphean" and "Kafkaesque" irrationalities of the road's construction; the bucolic fantasies of the ayahuasca retreats staged amidst the apocalyptic breakdown of the highway.

In many of the stories I have related of the road, the relationship between fact and fiction has been left deliberately unclear. This again is consistent with surrealist method, which seeks "to shake what is called reality by means of non-adapted hallucinations" (Clifford, 1981, p. 549). The Iquitos-Nauta highway is permeated by multiple layers of mythology and subterfuge, which are intrinsic to the urban political ecologies of corruption and violence through which cannibal capitalism unfolds. This disorienting panorama is no mere illusion to be removed to reveal the reality of the road, but is central to its lived experience. Stories of gringos in UFOs peeling people's faces off with laser beams, for example, appear in a different light when not debunked out of hand but instead placed without judgement alongside the brutal and unexplained murders in San Joaquin de Omaguas; the gringos killing each other in the ayahuasca lodges; the shootouts, lootings, and assassinations related to the invasions; and the history of extractive enslavement and murder in the region. The extended urbanization of cannibal capitalism *is* incoherent and absurd and hallucinatory, and none of these elements should be erased from our attempts to convey its catastrophic reality. Hence the absence of a conventional historical narrative, as a final application of surrealist method (Lusty, 2017). By unfolding spatially instead of temporally, with fragments of the highway's history appearing in a dissociated sequence determined by the road's own deranged trajectory, the paper has sought to replace linear time and its illusion of progress with the spatiotemporal disintegration of our apocalyptic present, in which "what was once a line, a direction, a way out and forward, now becomes the formless field of antagonism. It isn't that the singular road of development comes to an end and reaches its catastrophic destination. It's the end of the road itself". (Calder Williams, 2011, p. 218).

Notes

1. Lefebvre collaborated with the pioneering surrealists Andre Breton and Louis Aragon in the early years of the movement, but subsequently distanced himself from surrealism due to what he perceived as its failure to formulate a materialist politics (Gardiner, 1995). His *Critique of Everyday Life Volume 1*, published in 1947, includes a lengthy anti-surrealist diatribe along these lines. But this was partially retracted in a later foreword to the book written in 1958, from which this quote was taken, and in which Lefebvre acknowledged the significance of surrealism's "scorn for the prosaic bourgeois world, its radical rebellion" (Lefebvre, 2008, p. 261). Given its consistency with surrealist language and concerns, his subsequent identification of the 'disjunctive fragmentation' of the expanded urban fabric in *The Urban Revolution* may well have been influenced by surrealism, and it is notable that he opens the 1989 essay in which he coined the concept of planetary urbanization with a quote from the proto-surrealist Appollinaire (Lefebvre, 2014). Surrealism could thus be said to have had a hitherto unacknowledged influence on the conceptual foundations of the literature on extended and planetary urbanization.
2. I encountered no evidence of any such resistance to the Iquitos-Nauta highway, which could hardly be considered a totalizing project given its corrupt and incoherent implementation. In this sense my findings support those of Harvey and Knox (2012), whose exploration of the enchantments of infrastructure is partly focused on the same road. Their research, however, was conducted around the time of the road's completion in 2005, when the inhabitants of the region were apparently caught up in the highway's promise of progress, profit, and freedom, and before the avalanche of extended urban processes that have since engulfed the road. There was little sense of such enchantment in the testimonies of these inhabitants when I conducted my research in 2022–2023, suggesting the need for a different approach attuned less to enchantment than to violence and absurdity.
3. Photography is itself a surrealist medium, which Dalí regarded as "the most agile process for perceiving the most delicate osmoses that are established between reality and surreality … Nothing has come to prove surrealism more correct than photography" (Dalí, 1998, p. 71; see also Baxter 2008).
4. General Manager of Denisam. Author interview, 26 October 2022, Iquitos.
5. General Manager of Denisam. Author interview, 26 October 2022.
6. Assistant Manager of Land Registry, Municipal District of San Juan. Author interview, 26 October 2022, Iquitos.
7. Inhabitants of Second of October. Author interview, 11 October 2022, Second of October.
8. Lawyer 1, DISAFILPA. Author interview, 5 May 2023, Iquitos.
9. Lawyer 2, DISAFILPA. Author interview, 5 May 2023, Iquitos.
10. Assistant Manager of Land Registry. Author interview, 26 October 2022.
11. Wood-seller. Author interview, 1 September 2022, Iquitos-Nauta highway.
12. Inhabitants of Second of October. Author interview, 11 October 2022.
13. General Manager of Denisam. Author interview, 26 October 2022.
14. Inhabitant of Ex-Petroleros. Author interview, 6 September 2022, Ex-Petroleros.
15. Researcher at the Research Institute of the Peruvian Amazon (IIAP) 1. Author interview, 24 January 2023, Iquitos.
16. Researcher at IIAP 2. Author interview, 23 January 2023, Iquitos.
17. Journalist at the Iquitos newspaper La Región. Author interview, 29 March 2023, Iquitos.
18. Researcher at IIAP 1. Author interview, 24 January 2023.
19. Shopkeeper. Author interview, 18 November 2022, El Dorado.
20. Mayoral candidate. Author interview, 9 September 2022, San Joaquin de Omaguas.
21. Stallholder. Author interview, 9 September 2022, San Joaquin de Omaguas.
22. Bus driver. Author interview, 9 September 2022, San Joaquin de Omaguas.
23. Mayoral candidate. Author interview, 9 September 2022.

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All research participants provided verbal informed consent, which was audio recorded, or noted down when interview recordings were not made. Consent covered participation in the research and the use of quotations in published results.

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