Introduction

Infrastructures of Feeling

Cast your mind back to August 2022: Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss stand on the stage of Victoria Hall in Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent. They are midway through the first head-to-head debate of the Conservative Party leadership contest. It has been a campaign of extremes, with views diverging on austerity or unfunded tax cuts and converging on the deportation of migrants. The legacy of Margaret Thatcher is repeatedly invoked, satiating Tory members with a 'sugar-rush politics.'[1] But until now, both contestants have remained conspicuously quiet on the flagship policy of Boris Johnson's previous government: the promise of 'levelling up.'

A stone's throw from Victoria Hall, a building site is concealed by hoardings that read: 'we are levelling up Stoke-on-Trent.' The enclosed plot belongs to the new Etruscan Square development, a project backed by £20 million from the levelling up fund. It is barely eight months old and has been well documented in local papers, partly because of the site's notoriety. At the heart of Stoke's struggling Cultural Quarter, it is one of the city's 'longest running regeneration sagas.'[2] Decades of failure to invest in public infrastructure, along with deep cuts to arts funding and council budgets, have stymied previous attempts to rejuvenate Hanley's town centre. But according to this Tory council, Etruscan Square is different, providing the 'once in a generation opportunity' that will 'turbo-charge' Stoke's post-Covid recovery and reignite an era of prosperity not seen since the industrial revolution. As one councillor explains, invoking Stoke's historic reputation for global ceramics production: 'When Wedgwood built his new factory he named it after the Etruscan civilisation who were known for their pottery. They built a great civilisation and he believed he was doing the same. So we decided on the name Etruscan Square to connect back to Wedgwood, and the original Etruscans. It's also good that there isn't another place called Etruscan Square in the country, so it will be unique.'[3]

Figure 1. The hoardings of the Etruscan Square development promise to level up Stoke-on-Trent. Photograph by the author.

These comments exemplify the broken promise of infrastructure that is referred to in the title this book. They stir nostalgia for industry and empire together with myths of entrepreneurial nationalism, and then attach them to infrastructures that will do little to restore prosperity to Stoke.

Occupying seven acres of real estate in the heart of the city, the plans for Etruscan Square feature a 3,750 capacity indoor arena, a 701-space multi-storey car park, and a ten-storey block of private rental flats. There is nothing visionary about another giant car park in the centre of the city. Stoke's roads are already plagued by congestion because local bus services have been so drastically reduced. Prioritising car travel will further increase pollution and diminish air quality for residents, while also locking out those who would most benefit from the new development. Of the 300 private rental flats that have been promised, none are reserved as social housing, despite the fact that a recent report estimated Stoke's housing deficit to be in the region of 80,000 units.[4] The inclusion of a mid-capacity arena at the centre of Etruscan Square parodies the development's primary function as a spectacle that distracts from deeper failures of government. In the absence of sustained funding from central government, it is unlikely the project will ever be completed. If it is, it will be quickly turned over to a private conglomerate that will hike ticket prices and suck profits out of the city, leaving Stoke's existing cultural venues still gasping for investment, and local government with a burden of debt.

Engaged in their own performance on the stage of the Victoria Hall, the Tory leadership contenders do not seem concerned by any of this. It's only because they're in Stoke that 'levelling up' has even been mentioned. Etruscan Square is a tokenistic project. It mobilises what I will call in this book 'infrastructures of feeling,' aiming with nationalist histories and divisive cultural narratives to deflect attention away from the infrastructure investment that is so desperately needed in Britain.

In the chapters that follow, I will use the phrase 'infrastructures of feeling' to show how certain stories, affects, and experiences – what Raymond Williams referred to as structures of feeling – are connected to the hard materials that we encounter and rely on in our everyday lives, from railways and roads to sewers and housing.[5] In Williams's definition, structures of feeling are 'as firm and definite as "structure" suggests, yet [they shape] the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity.'[6] They refer not to a definitive ideology or policy platform, but to a set of loosely interconnected and overlapping stories that are used by cultures and societies to make sense of the world. They act on people and shape how they see themselves and one another, though never in deterministic or uncontested ways. With the phrase 'infrastructures of feeling' I hope to extend Williams's phrase to show how seemingly mundane infrastructures are always thick with cultural meaning, shaped by and shaping what it is possible for us to feel, think, and imagine.

It is the contention of this book that these infrastructures of feeling have in recent years been weaponised by politicians in Britain to distract from their repeated broken promises on infrastructure. My aim is to map these cultural narratives, to ask how they inform and sometimes limit our social experience, and to search for potential alternatives. To this end, each of the five chapters focuses on a different theme: promise, origins, spectacle, autonomy, and belonging. These different

infrastructures of feeling are neither discrete entities nor coherent worldviews. They overlap and blend into one another, occasionally merging into organised ideologies, at other times containing deep contradictions. Yet by drawing connections between our embodied engagement with infrastructure and more abstract ideas of what we accept as 'common sense,' they exert a powerful influence on political narratives and place serious constraints on what it is possible to argue for and against. In deconstructing them here, I hope not only to subject them to scrutiny, but to create space to think about alternative ways of making and feeling infrastructure – not as a hypothetical or utopian experiment, but through examples that are already alive and active in the material world.

If this makes *The Broken Promise of Infrastructure* a book about the present and future, it must also partly be a book about the past. Infrastructure is a form of what Marxist geographers call 'fixed capital.' Rather than moving money and goods around to make a quick buck, investors sink excess profits into construction projects that might take decades to yield worthwhile returns. Infrastructure therefore operates on much longer timescales than most of the other stuff that makes up our world. This slower temporality also holds for the various affects – pride, superiority, resentment, decline – that infrastructures produce and come to represent in culture and society. As infrastructures crumble, the feelings they once inspired do not remain constant: these associations too have a half-life, decaying and warping like concrete and steel, but almost always enduring beyond their original use.

The book therefore returns to histories of Britain and its Empire to interrogate these infrastructures of feeling, demonstrating how building works from streets to sewers have always been cloaked in stories of nationalist exceptionalism, imperial grandeur, and racial supremacy. Professionally, I am an academic and lecturer who has been researching and writing about the way we imagine infrastructure for over a decade. Alongside archival and social scientific research, I have always used literature, the visual arts, and other cultural texts to decipher the narratives that are built into bridges, railways, and roads. I continue this practice here, drawing on literary and historical writings that illuminate the stories that have been told about infrastructure over the past two and half centuries, all the while emphasising that many of these narratives are still alive in the ways we experience and make sense of infrastructure in our own time.

This book loops back into history, then, but it does so to illuminate the failures and possibilities of infrastructure in the twenty-first century. Writing in *The Long Revolution*, Williams argued that while we may get a feel for important historical moments through our readings, any particular structure of feeling can only be wholly known to those who live through it. 'The most difficult thing to get hold of, in studying any past period,' he observed, 'is this felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time.'[7] This is why I begin and end the book in Stoke-on-Trent, a so-called 'left behind' city in the West Midlands where I grew up and from which I will take several examples in the chapters that follow. Williams's emphasis on structures of feeling as social relations that are lived,

rather than experienced secondhand, is also why I have written this book *now*. The broken promise of infrastructure may have been apparent in places like Stoke for more than a generation, but it has more recently intensified to become part of a widespread experience across Britain that is now almost daily in the headlines.

Cast your mind back to August 2022 for a second time. Rising energy costs are everywhere in the news; while oil and gas companies report record profits, people are negotiate a tripling of their bills. Calls to insulate ageing housing stock are ignored and there is a steadily rising deficit of affordable homes. Refuting the most basic economic and scientific evidence, the government is refusing to tax the profits on fossil fuels, pledging to prevent the construction of onshore wind farms, and doubling down on fracking commitments. While a scorching summer has dried up reservoirs across Britain, sudden bouts of rain falling on hardened ground have produced flash floods that are displacing people from their homes. Privatised water companies, which have for decades diverted profits away from infrastructure investment and into bonuses for CEOs, are leaking raw sewage into rivers and oceans. Britain's railways are running interrupted and overpriced services in a sector that has been mismanaged for decades.

People are not settling for this state of things. As the cost of living rises, workers are striking for a portion of the billions in assets that have been stripped from the sector by privatised train companies. Facing mass layoffs and a woeful pay increase, the Communications Workers Union are shutting down call centres, delaying broadband installations, and refusing network repairs. Postal workers, too, are blocking Royal Mail's logistical infrastructures in an ongoing series of pay disputes, refusing to deliver letters and parcels. These providers of hard infrastructure are joined on pickets by nurses, civil servants, and teachers, drawing attention to the human labour that is usually concealed within large networks and systems. Groups such as Insulate Britain and Just Stop Oil are objecting to new oil and gas licenses by climbing the Dartford Crossing and blocking the M25. Infrastructure has become 'the "theatre" of ideological struggle,' to borrow Stuart Hall's phrase, providing new social movements with public platforms and targeted policy demands.[8]

In 1999, the anthropologist Susan Leigh Star pointed out that infrastructure 'is by definition invisible, part of the background for other kinds of work.'[9] Infrastructure therefore only 'becomes visible when it breaks,' she continued, when 'the server is down, the bridge washes out, there is a power blackout.'[10] For Star, we experience broken infrastructure as a crisis, an interruption in the smooth flows of progress that enable everyday life under capitalism. A quarter of a century on from Star's definition, ours is an era in which crisis is no longer an exception but a permanent condition. Everywhere you look, infrastructure seems to be in states of failure and disrepair. It is drastically under-funded and unable to cope with huge social pressures, from aging and displaced populations,

to foreign wars and slowing economic growth, to the breakdown of the earth's climate systems. In 2022, the Collins Dictionary announced 'permacrisis' as its word of the year, while the term 'polycrisis' is now popular among economists.[11] In May 2023, a poll that asked more than 2,000 adults to describe Britain revealed 'broken' as the most frequently used word.[12] If Star was right that infrastructure only becomes visible when it fails, this book asks: what happens when infrastructure failure becomes the norm?

The answer to that question is feeling, intense swells and bursts of it. Think of the impatience you feel when the streamed video buffers, or the sadness at lost time with loved ones because of a cancelled train; of the heated anger of drivers stuck on blocked motorways, or the desperation of those unable to keep their homes warm. What fails with malfunctioning infrastructure is not only a physical system but a belief system, as the vast network of stories that have held modern Britain together short-circuit and begin to come apart. The infrastructures of feeling mapped here are wielded in a last attempt to distract from the evidence that is everywhere stacking up in favour of political alternatives to capitalism. This is why it is more vital than ever that we learn to see through these deep cultural narratives, to historicise them and understand how they shape social experience, and to shine a light on the many broken promises they work to conceal. As this book will contend, there is an alternative to the sugar-rush politics of car parks and vanity stadiums: a socialised, sustainable, and ambitious public infrastructure programme that redistributes wealth to communities and empowers them to take control of their lives.

The Freedom of Place

Discussions of broken infrastructure are an abiding memory from my childhood: energy bills, bus services, internet access, and most of all, roadworks. I grew up in and around Stoke, a network of six post-industrial towns in the West Midlands that were federated into an administrative whole in 1910 and later connected with a web of single-lane roads and dual carriageways. The area is still known locally as 'The Potteries' for its historic ceramics industry, of which the eighteenth-century entrepreneur Josiah Wedgewood was a notable pioneer. But despite this strong local identity, Stoke often gets lost in England's semi-urban heartland, known if at all for the football club's occasional foray into the premiership or more recently as a brick in the so-called 'Red Wall.'

Stoke is connected to the rest of the country by the M6 motorway. The A500 dual carriage way, also known as the 'D-Road,' loops out east from Junction 15, runs through the towns of Stoke-upon-Trent, Etruria, Burslem, and Tunstall, and then heads back west to rejoin the motorway further north. The road's letter-based name was first floated in the 1970s in a promotional pamphlet produced by the council to win over the dense urban communities that would be displaced by the road. The council

hoped that naming it after the Roman numeral for '500' would mitigate the destruction of businesses and homes by communicating its promise of improved connectivity. But while it was officially opened with much fanfare in 1977, the D-Road would take another three decades to complete, its final sections only finished in 2006. Rather than a throwback to the grandeur of the Romans, the name stuck for a simpler reason: the route resembles the shape of the letter 'D' on a map.

Figure 2. The A500 curves away from the M6, through Stoke-on-Trent, and then back to the motorway to make the shape of a letter 'D' on a map. Drawn by the author.

I developed a peculiar fascination with the D-Road, and not only because of the countless hours I have spent queuing along it. The A500 shaped the world of my childhood and still defines how I feel about Stoke. On maps of the UK, larger cities are legible by their centripetal infrastructure, cordoned off from the surrounding area by circular ring roads. But unless you know where to look, Stoke's semi-urban sprawl appeared without boundaries: there are no iconic tube maps or tram systems showing how it all links up. Only the distinctive shape of the D-Road marks its post-industrial landscape apart from the many other turn-offs along the M6.

Stoke therefore took shape as a place in my imagination through the D-Road, an arterial infrastructure that seemed to inhibit as much as it enabled movement between the city's six towns. Through my teenage years, the A500's grip on my psyche was frustratingly material. Without driving licenses or cars, my friends and I relied on a complex schedule of lifts, irregular bus services, and long walks. Daily life was shaped by the problem of moving about. We inhabited a micro-economy of waiting at bus stops, on street corners, in shops and supermarkets, and outside school gates. We filled these gaps in the day by browsing in music stores and hanging out in parks, conjuring what subcultural lives we could for ourselves. But as we moved through the city, the D-Road always remained a perilous border to be crossed by irregular footbridges or death-defying dashes between traffic islands. I remember an overriding feeling of mild desperation, perhaps even panic, as I searched for more efficient ways to get around. No doubt such emotions are common to many young adults in the Midlands, but the D-Road seemed to create a world of extremes for everyone regardless of age: intoxicated by the road's promise of free movement, people were either busy getting away from the place, or feeling frustrated that they weren't.

When I was eighteen I moved away to Liverpool, where buses were more reliable and cabs cheap; then I moved again to Oxford, where everyone cycled and walked; and finally, several years later, Britain's tilted economy sucked me finally to London, with its publicly owned transport network. In that same decade Stoke was struck by a series of political events: what infrastructure it had was further weakened by austerity; voters turned out overwhelmingly in favour of Brexit; and by

2019, all three of its parliamentary constituencies had swung for the first time in their seventy-year history from Labour to Conservative. Several years on again and it is clear that while the pledges of levelling up have built a few more roads and car parks, they have done little to improve life in Stoke. As with the D-Road in the 1970s, successive infrastructures of feeling have been wielded to cloud more expansive and enduring understandings of what infrastructure might do for a community. Beyond its critique of these broken promises, this book will therefore also search for alternatives, questioning narrow feelings of freedom as mobility and following abolitionist geographers who think of 'freedom as a place' instead.[13]

In an influential 1991 essay, the feminist geographer Doreeen Massey beautifully captures the way that lived experiences of local infrastructure are formed through relations that are global in reach. To evoke this 'global sense of place,' as she calls it, she asks us to pause and consider a thought experiment:

> Imagine for a moment that you are on a satellite, further out and beyond all actual satellites; you can see 'planet earth' from a distance and, unusually for someone with only peaceful intentions, you are equipped with the kind of technology which allows you to see the colours of people's eyes and the numbers on their numberplates. You can see all the movement and tune in to all the communication that is going on. Furthest out are the satellites, then aeroplanes, the long haul between London and Tokyo and the hop from San Salvador to Guatemala City. Some of this is people moving, some of it is physical trade, some is media broadcasting. There are faxes, e-mail, film-distribution networks, financial flows and transactions. Look in closer and there are ships and trains, steam trains slogging laboriously up hills somewhere in Asia. Look in closer still and there are lorries and cars and buses, and on down further, somewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, there's a woman – amongst many women – on foot, who still spends hours a day collecting water.[14]

Here Massey asks us to recognise that the power of infrastructure is unevenly distributed across different populations: 'some people are more in charge of it than others,' she writes; 'some initiate flows and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving-end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it.'[15] There are the lightning fast connections of emails, financial transactions, and passenger planes circling the planet. There are the shipping lines and railway tracks transporting goods between continents. There are roads funnelling automobiles of all shapes and sizes between cities and towns. And there are the bodies of people – often women, often racialised – who, lacking access to basic infrastructure, spend much of their lives hauling water to their homes.

There is another lesson in this thought experiment, one that teaches us a deeper truth about the infrastructures we rely on in our day-to-day lives. By pointing to the unequal distribution of infrastructure, Massey encourages us to see that we are all living at *relative* speeds. When we climb into our car and speed off down the road, she observes, we reduce 'the social rationale and the financial viability of the public transport system – and thereby also potentially reduce the mobility of those who rely on that system.'[16] These relationships, mediated by infrastructure, work at much larger scales too. The speed enjoyed by those passing over the Atlantic on a passenger plane, for instance, derives from the lessened mobility of those on island nations whose infrastructure is decimated by the impacts of climate change. Mobility must come from *somewhere* or *someone* else, even if those places or people aren't immediately in front of us. Infrastructure is the stuff that extends these interdependencies far beyond the perceptual and imaginative limits of our individual lives.

The infrastructures of feeling discussed in this book have long worked to justify the vast network of infrastructures that redistribute mobility upwards to an ever-smaller portion of the world's population. There is nothing new in this: since the beginning of capitalist modernity infrastructures have determined access to movement and, in so doing, enabled the accumulation of wealth and power. Infrastructures might allow us to travel for work in economically prosperous centres, for instance, or to secure improved education and healthcare; or they might equally prevent us from moving across borders, trap us in exploitative rental markets, or coerce us into poorly renumerated pools of labour. They might move things around for us, transporting food to our supermarket shelves, channelling water and energy into our homes, or siphoning away unwanted waste through toilets and bin collections; or they might turn our bodies themselves into infrastructures that courier goods from one place to another. In a capitalist world, infrastructure is the means by which freedom is experienced as movement: the more mobility we acquire, the more we are freed from day-to-day toil. Infrastructures put the 'motion' into the emotional politics that govern our everyday lives.[17]

While we tend to think of infrastructures as moving people and things through space, what they are actually providing is time. How long does it take you to get around, whether to your place of education or work? How much time must you spend trying to keep yourself warm, picking up food, or accessing water to wash and drink? By enabling the movement of people and things, infrastructures provide us with the resource of time; by inhibiting movement or transferring it elsewhere, infrastructures can confiscate that resource as well. Time is 'the resource of life,' as the abolitionist geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore describes.[18] If infrastructures provide us with more time, they give us more life; if they steal it, they are – sometimes slowly, sometimes very quickly – taking life away.

The infrastructures of feeling explored in the chapters that follow each defend the capitalist idea of freedom as mobility. Because of this, I will throughout pose the question: what would happen if we tried to think and feel freedom differently? What infrastructures would we need to conceive

freedom not in terms of our ability to move, but on the contrary, our ability to stay put? To enable a freedom of this kind, a city like Stoke would need not more car parks and roads, but a mass house-building programme, investment in education and healthcare, and a green public transport system that connected the area to itself. These infrastructures could not be just anywhere; they would have to be *there*, in Stoke, in that particular place. Of course, this idea of freedom as a place still involves movement: mobility infrastructures connect places to themselves and to one another, boosting communities and economies alike. What we are talking about is instead a different kind of premise for infrastructure, one that begins not with the exacerbation of inequalities in time and mobility, but the abolition of those inequalities altogether.

'Abolition geography starts from the homely premise that freedom is a place,' writes Gilmore in her summary of a lifetime of activism and scholarship.[19] It opposes the 'carceral geographies' that govern our lives, and which, as that term implies, unevenly distribute time and freedom – the fundamental resources of life – between different populations. Britain is not California, the state that informs much of Gilmore's research, with its extremes of mass incarceration and reliance on private automobiles. But as we will see in this book, it does have its own carceral geographies, repeatedly building infrastructure to prioritise feelings of movement and escape over more enduring place-making projects.

In the same essay, Gilmore invokes Raymond Williams to describe the critical tradition in which she situates her work. Alternative ways of living and organising society operate as infrastructures of feeling, Gilmore explains. They accumulate as they are kept alive and handed down through time; their possibilities circulate through culture and society, often passing unnoticed; and yet, every now and again, at particular junctures, they thicken into social movements that might just become powerful enough to shift history on its axis. As Gilmore writes:

> In the material world, infrastructure underlies productivity – it speeds some processes and slows down others, setting agendas, producing isolation, enabling cooperation. The infrastructure of feeling is material too, in the sense that ideology becomes material as do the actions that feelings enable or constrain. The infrastructure of feeling is then consciousness-foundation, sturdy but not static, that underlies our capacity to recognise viscerally (no less than prudently) immanent possibility as we select and re-select liberatory line-ages.[20]

The different infrastructures of feeling discussed in the chapters of this book have long worked in this way, as consciousness-foundations that shape our embodied perceptions and experiences. They are as alive today as they were in the nineteenth century, and as we will see, they have mostly evolved through colonial and capitalist histories of violence and dispossession, not Gilmore's lineages of

liberation. Yet as I hope to show, it is by tracking them down and taking them apart that we will also gain glimpses of movements that have conceived of infrastructure differently: as a means of creating and sustaining life where we are, rather than the far narrower means of escaping elsewhere. This book does not prescribe detailed policy ideas or lengthy plans for new infrastructure initiatives; there are no detailed debates about house-building targets or recommended designs for a new bridge. Instead, it digs into cultural history and contemporary politics to show up the broken promise of infrastructure and ask how it might be remade when we think of freedom as the making of place.

Route Map

I have spent too much of my life on the M6 motorway. Yet while this infrastructural geography has rooted my personal experience mostly to England, this book uses 'Britain' throughout. Practically, Scotland has yet to be granted a second referendum on its independence and Northern Ireland has not so far been united with the Republic to the South. But the decision to speak specifically of *Britain's* broken infrastructure is motivated less by concerns about the political integrity of the Union and more by the post-imperial feelings it draws together. The United Kingdom was from its very beginning an imperial state: in 1707, both England and Scotland were already imperial powers with colonies in Ireland and the so-called 'New World.'[21] Fuelled by the wealth from these colonial possessions, Britain emerged in the eighteenth century as the world's first 'infrastructure state,' a nation bound together by a network of turnpike roads and with different regions competing for funding from a centralised government.[22] Then as now, infrastructure in Britain has always been lived and imagined in relation to its peripheries, from the slum dwellings at the edges of its colonial cities to the refugee camps and detention centres that have recently accrued at its borders. While the infrastructures of feeling I discuss have particular resonance in ideas of Englishness, I use 'Britain' to ensure this global picture is always in view.

This is also why the book follows a geographic arc that enacts infrastructure's folding of the global into the local, as Massey described. The first two chapters begin in Stoke and move outwards from local questions of failing mobility and heritage infrastructures to larger questions of 'race' and national identity. In the centre of the book, the middle chapter departs from Britain entirely to attend more closely to the building of infrastructure across its Empire in southern Africa. The fourth and fifth chapters then look back to Stoke and to other parts Britain, bringing the lessons of colonial infrastructure and its aftermath with them. Finally, a short epilogue returns the book to where it started, looking to the future of place-based politics and drawing up a speculative infrastructure programme for Stoke.

The first chapter explores the narratives of nationalist promise and exponential growth that have been built into infrastructure since the Second World War. It begins by returning to the D-Road to show how its promise of mobility has been broken by decades of privatisation into a contemporary carceral geography. Through an etymology of the word 'infrastructure,' the chapter situates this cultural politics of promise in a global context, tracking how economic growth, rising nationalism, and racialised identities were folded together through infrastructure and an associated language of 'developing' and 'developed' countries. Set against these postwar imaginaries, the chapter then turns its attention to austerity and the nationalist and racialised attachments to broken infrastructure that are coded into the now notorious phrase, 'the left behind,' used in the years after Brexit to refer to Britain's regional populations. As we will see, the Brexit campaign and the 2019 general election were each built on promise as an infrastructure of feeling, one that wielded an enticing prospect of unfettered mobility while deflecting away from any meaningful redistribution of material wealth. At the same time, while these promises were always already broken, the infrastructure pledges made by Corbyn's Labour felt abstracted from the common sense of that moment. In conclusion, the chapter calls for a promise of infrastructure development that holds in tension the embodied experience of people's day-to-day lives and the horizon of future alternatives.

The second chapter considers the cultural narratives that credit 'genius' individuals with infrastructure's origins, rather than the working-class and enslaved populations that have enabled its construction. In Britain, this centres on the persistent celebration of the industrial revolution as the historical origin of our modern infrastructure, a narrative that is consecrated in the many monuments to inventors and entrepreneurs erected in towns and cities across the country. The chapter begins with the statue of Stoke's most famous potter and industrialist, Josiah Wedgwood, which stands outside of the city's central train station. It maps the global histories that are erased by such nationalist monuments and considers the toppling of statues as a place-making activity that might help us to recognise infrastructure's real origins in collective human labour. By tracing this infrastructure of feeling as it has evolved from John Locke's philosophies of property through to Wedgewood and then later to the Victorian writer Samuel Smiles, the chapter draws out a sustained attempt to erase the labour of racialised and working-class populations from the stories we tell about infrastructure's origins, while also pointing to the riot and the strike as ways in which people have sought to challenge these narratives. In conclusion, the chapter shows how this same infrastructure of feeling lives on in the logistics giant Amazon, which decimates the freedom of place through the deliberate concealment of the origins of its wealth and infrastructure, but which is also contested through forms of place-based organising.

The third chapter reaches beyond Britain to its Empire in southern Africa to show how infrastructure not only evokes powerful feelings when it fails, but also when it operates as a spectacle

of power. It begins with the familiar claim that the legacy of the railways provide evidence of the British Empire's benevolence, an infrastructure of feeling that is entangled in cultures of imperial nostalgia, liberal humanitarianism, and what the poet and infrastructure enthusiast Rudyard Kipling infamously called 'the white man's burden.' Decolonial theorists Frantz Fanon and Walter Rodney were some of the earliest writers to note the affective as well as economic power of infrastructure in a colonial context. Drawing on their work, the chapter argues that when financiers speculated on the millions of miles of railways that Britain built across its colonies, they were investing not only economically in profitable enterprises but also imaginatively in ideas of white supremacy. The activities of notorious railway imperialist Cecil Rhodes exemplify this culture of racialised spectacle and speculation. The chapter tracks his railways across southern Africa before exploring how his memory has been challenged by groups such as Rhodes Must Fall. As we will see, if imperial infrastructure was built on spectacle, so too were acts of decolonisation. Moving from anti-apartheid poets who reclaimed the railway as a place-making infrastructure, to women's activist groups who confronted racial segregation by building their own infrastructure on the outskirts of Cape Town, the chapter insists that any progressive infrastructure programme must recognise and challenge these enduring racialised imaginaries.

The fourth chapter returns to the proliferation of roads and car parks in cities such as Stoke to show how privatised mobility infrastructures have been used to roll out deeply individualised and limited understandings of autonomy as an infrastructure of feeling. It argues that the image of roads running through open countryside is central to narratives of both English nationalism and neoliberal ideology, worldviews that have their roots in imperial history and racialised notions of civilisational supremacy. It then tracks this infrastructure of feeling from motorways and Free Enterprise Zones through to the illusory promises of Silicon Valley, where settler politics combine with eugenicist worldviews and an obsession with individual mobility. Against the lies spun by Elon Musk and others, it shows how app-based infrastructures such as Uber have inadvertently created new precedents for collective autonomy. As the material realities of climate breakdown render privatised autonomy increasingly untenable, the chapter argues that in everyday examples of collective organising we might glimpse a future where infrastructure is not something done to us, but something we make collectively for ourselves.

The fifth and final chapter explores how sanitation and housing infrastructures have underpinned imaginaries of cleanliness and dirt, and how these in turn have defined categories of belonging. It begins by pointing to the many infrastructural metaphors that have long suffused anti-migrant rhetoric in Britain to draw out an infrastructure of feeling that juxtaposes the 'clean,' property-owning, and implicitly white citizen with racialised non-citizens such as refugees and the homeless. This imaginary runs right back to the earliest disciplinary institutions, from the nineteenth-

century workhouse to the establishment of the police, when sanitation infrastructure was built not only to improve the health of the workforce, but to establish a social order that protected capitalist interests. The chapter digs into this infrastructure of feeling through discussion of Victorian figures such as Edwin Chadwick, before then showing how it was resurrected in the 1970s and 1980s, when it was mapped onto increasingly racialised spaces such as council estates. This long history of racialised stigmatisation and failing infrastructure culminates in the fire at Grenfell Tower in 2017, one of the most shameful acts of infrastructural violence to have taken place in twenty-first-century Britain. While tracing the enduring legacies of Empire that shaped this disaster, the chapter also argues – without romanticisation – that alternative anti-racist modes of infrastructure provision were visible in the aftermath of the fire. By tracking similar examples of community activism that arise in response to infrastructure failure and violence, it suggests that is in these place-making practices that different forms of belonging can be articulated.

This book does not claim to provide a comprehensive history of infrastructure in Stoke or Britain or anywhere else for that matter. Nor does it claim to document the myriad ways in which infrastructure is lived, experienced, fought for, and imagined in the UK today. Infrastructure reaches into so many aspects of our lives that any such project would be impossible. Instead, by identifying and interrogating five infrastructures of feeling that continue to prevent meaningful political alternatives from emerging, the book pushes back against deep-seated cultural imaginaries to create space for different ideas of infrastructures as place-making and life-giving materials. To this end, the book finishes with a brief epilogue that points to possible and potential futures of infrastructure in Britain. Taken together, I hope this book will encourage you to think both practically and speculatively about how promises on infrastructure might be made and kept rather than broken.

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[1] Bill Schwarz, 'Editorial: Sugar-rush politics,' *Soundings* 81 (2022), p.4.

[2] Phil Corrigan, 'City Sentral, Unity Walk, and Etruscan Square – the long-running saga of Hanley's East-West site,' *The Stoke Sentinel*, 22 January 2022, https://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/news/stoke-on-trent-news/city-sentral-unity-walk-etruscan-6529353.

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[5] This phrase has been used by other scholars, most notably the abolitionist and feminist scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore, as I will discuss in the next section of this introduction. It has also been used to explain specific infrastructures (such as blue-light emergency phones that create feelings of safety), enable more theoretical approaches (how infrastructure justified white possession in settler colonies), and describe the material circuits and landscapes that underpin Williams's original structures of feeling. See Elizabeth Ellcessor, 'Blue-light emergence phones on campus: Media infrastructures of feeling,' *International Journal of Cultural* Studies 22.4 (2019), p.499-518; Andrew Brooks and Astrid Lorange, 'Torrens Title: property, race, and (infra)structures of feeling in the settler colony,' *Race & Class* 64.1 (2022), p.63-83; Clayton Rosati, 'Infrastructures of Feeling and the Right to the City,' *Asia Pacific Media Educator* 29.2 (2020), pp.251-258.

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[18] Gilmore, 'Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence,' p.227.
[19] Gilmore, 'Abolition Geography and the Problem of Innocence,' p.227.
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