**Introduction**

Nina Davies

You're listening to Future Artefacts FM , a bi-monthly podcast/broadcast featuring speculative fiction audio works by artists and writers produced and presented by Nina Davies,

Rebecca Edwards

Rebecca Edwards

Niamh Schmidtke

and Niamh Schmidtke, on RTM

ND

and also available on podcast channels.

NS

The programme focuses on fictional works intended for broadcast to carve out a better understanding of the now by exploring various interpretations of the future.

RE

Together with guests we discuss the mechanics of different types of storytelling to reveal the complexities of contemporary culture. Let’s get started.

All

Let’s get started.

**Episode Introduction**

A note before listening to the show: This conversation includes discussions about transgender identities and was recorded before the UK Supreme Court ruling on April 16th. All trans women are women and all trans men are men, love and solidarity to everyone in the trans community.

ND

Welcome back to future artifacts. FM. I am Nina Davies.

RE

I'm Rebecca Edwards

NS

and this is Niamh Schmidtke. Welcome to Episode 27. We're doing something quite new in this episode. We're going to be doing a recap of our new weird mini series, which is very exciting. So this episode, we're not going to have any guests, but it's going to be myself, Nina and Rebecca, speaking to some of the themes that we explored in those four episodes, and also reflecting a bit within our own research and interests, what we think the weird is now, and kind of how we're processing the work that we've been doing over the last few months. Yeah,

RE

yeah, I think so.

NS

So to recap, before we start off, we wanted to read you a little bit of our initial statement that we put together about what the new weird was for us. So for this mini series, we were exploring what weird means, inspired by the new weird, we want to build, consider what kinds of technologies, structures and disciplines can be explored through this sentiment. We're interested in locating the slippage between where something becomes weird or familiar, for example, the inclusion of generated images in news articles. We're interested in works that challenge the flatness of science fiction and expand notions of storytelling. Some examples of how this flatness can be challenged are ways the uncanny can be used as a tool for repositioning deteriorating notions of good and evil into amorphic forces, or interrogating different dimensions as multi-planar realities.

RE

Yeah, and I think it's important for us to also situate some places where this work has been done a little bit before we came to this, because there have been definitions of the new weird as early as.. probably even earlier.

ND

Well even weird, there's like weird and then there's new weird.

RE

That's true. Yeah, yeah. Do you want to speak about weird?

ND

I don't really know whether I know, like, enough about it, just, like, just gonna admit that, but I do know that, like, oh, what's his name? Edgar Allan Poe is like, one of, like, I would imagine is like, sort of one of the classical, sort of, like, weird writers.

NS

It's funny because I was reading Mary Shelley when we recorded Phil's episode, Frankenstein, which is also of that same genre, of this kind of moment of weirdness, and I was thinking a bit on this in relation to the new weird. And then we jump into some of the research that Rebecca's done about that moment of this kind of 1800s weird genre, in relation to things like the Industrial Revolution and this moment of kind of industrialised technologies becoming much more prevalent and widespread, also like enlightenment theory and just the world becoming a more rational place. So maybe needing the weird to also like work against that rationalisation somehow. And the Mary Shelley Frankenstein is kind of playing on those ideas of science, of like, how do you make a creature? But then the morals of what happens when you don't treat that creature with care, you know, because then Frankenstein goes around and kind of keeps murdering people that are important to its creator.

So yeah, that feels a bit where weird is coming from for me.

ND

yeah, and I think, and I don't know whether this is what you're going to kind of go into Rebecca when you're kind of recapping what sort of new weird is. But also, I remember when we were beginning to talk about doing this mini series, we kind of went away and did little bits of research. And I think one of the things that, correct me if I'm wrong, but one of the things that really stuck in my head was that that the idea with weird, weird fiction on, I think, also new weird as well, or maybe this is just new weird, is that there's kind of no sense of like good or evil with weirding… is that it's kind of some sort of a morphic force that that drives the plot that there's not really… yeah, so like, bad things might happen or good things might happen, but they're not necessarily, like, they don't necessarily have agency behind them. So therefore it plays with, I guess your perception of, like, whether what is happening, like, whether it matters what's happening, what's happening is good or bad. Anyways, okay, I'm gonna pass over to you now. Rebecca,

RE

Well, I mean, I'm not like the leading voice of like new weird theory. But yeah, I guess just to, yeah, to bring it back to the new weird, and kind of how this came about. So, in 2008 Jeff and Anne VanderMeer. So Jeff VanderMeer is, like a renowned sci fi writer. He wrote the Annihilation trilogy and things like this. So yeah, they released a book in 2008 called The New Weird. And in it they proposed that the new weird was crystallized with the publication of China Miéville’s Perdido Street Station, this huge book that came out in the 2000s and it marked a shift from traditional weird fiction like Lovecraft to urban secondary world narratives that fully embrace The Strange.

So I'm just going to actually read Jeff and Anne's working definition of the new word as it was in 2008.

“Urban secondary world fiction subverts romanticized fantasy tropes using realistic, complex models, often blending science fiction, fantasy and surreal horror, deeply aware of the modern world and defined by immersive world building. Don't really like that word, but defined by immersive world building and a surrender to the weird.”

So there's this idea that you're surrendering to it. As you said, Nina, it's not like this force of good and evil. So that's where it kind of was in 2008 and then since then, I mean, there's been a whole load of stuff on the weird in itself. And kind of, you know, Eric Davis's High Weirdness that came out his essay, The Weird and The Banal from 2023 which came up on his burning shore substack. He talks a lot about this idea of counterculture and psychedelia and this like unknowable beyond of the weird. He links us to AI, which I would like to go into later, but we'll get back to that.

You've also obviously got Mark Fisher's idea of the weird. So this idea of there being something present, but that it doesn't belong, which contradicts his, not contradicts, but it counters his idea of the eerie, which is the absence. It's this idea of presence or absence.

But then, yeah, so Elvia Wilk as well, wrote an essay about the new weird in 2019 that kind of was similar to what the VanderMeers was saying, but in it, she's kind of talking about relocating the weird to be something from the outside to something within. So for Elvia, this idea of the new weird, is deeply rooted in nature and the landscape of feminism. So in it, she's like calling to mind all of these authors that have written about women becoming plants, or this like entanglement of nature and bodies, the idea of becoming inextricably linked to the earth. So she's kind of coming at it from a different angle, I would say, than the VanderMeers.

But within all of this is this idea of, like the weird having, or the new weird having potential, like this kind of present potential that you can't really grasp. So that's kind of in a roundabout way, where I guess we came to then looking into the artists that we worked with.

ND

yeah, maybe just as a recap, fist we spoke with or invited Phil Speakman. Is it Phil Speakman or Philip speak anyway? Some people might know him as Philip. Some people might know him as Phil. I think either works. And Phil had made a work which was like a live… No, it wasn't Live Action Role play, it was like a tabletop like D&D style game, but it was like, what was a game within a game? Or it was like a script within a script, wasn't there.

Re

He was kind of referencing D&D logic within, yeah, within the script. So the players were playing a game, but then they also entered into another game. It was like an inception, right?

NS

Yeah. So that was episode 23. Episode 24 was with Jelena Viskovic whose work. Motonation, we showed an audio clip from the longer film that she made last year, which was more around forms of individual versus collective desire. And I think maybe one thing that's helpful or we’ll go into across this recap is also the different terms that we learned from different artists along the way. So, for example, with Philip's work, it was around weirding, so tools of weirding, not thinking about speculating or world building, but Weirding. And with Jelena as well, a very distinct act against speculation, not as thinking about how financial markets are speculated upon, or, let's say, these kind of massive world building projects, but instead thinking about surrealism as well, which kind of, in a way, falls within kind of this world of perhaps the weird and the eerie, but is more so a political gesture, I would say.

Then we had Chris MacInnes Impotent Island, which was looking at, kind of this relationship with chaos theory, but also thinking about the relationship of the body to place and to industrialisation, and sort of, how do you wrap your identity, or how your identity can become wrapped around this form of industry that can no longer exist? And what are you left with when you have that absence, which in itself is an inherently weird or strange thing, also coming back to, kind of the Mark Fisher and that absence.

And then our last episode was with Monya Riachi Concerning Geographies Entangled Histories, which, I think one of the big things that came out of that, at least from my side, was conflicting the word world building as a colonial gesture. And so how do we think about forms of speculative fiction, against world building through Monya’ s practice and mapmaking?

ND

So what we're gonna so I guess moving on from that is, I guess the point of this conversation is also for us to kind of be, the three of us are going to kind of talk about what we think the next new weird is, as well as sort of reflect on on these previous episodes that Niamh’s just explained way better than I was going to do. I couldn't even get the name right of the the artist… [laughs] and so, yeah, so what we're going to do is the three of us are going to kind of like introduce something maybe not like a complete theme, they're not really going to be well well thought through, or at least mine's not going to be. And we're just going to kind of talk about what things that we see are emerging right now, or things that we're thinking about at the moment, that we think might be taking weird into, like the the next the next moment or the next decade.

NS

In our preparation for this, we were all joking that we're more so bringing you opinions than references in this episode. We'll be referencing the previous artists, works that we've been kind of embedded in for the past few months. But it's much more so a free flowing space. We're going to anchor it a bit in the statement that we've written, and so thinking about, kind of, what are technology, structures or disciplines within the different episodes, and using that to help kind of root our individual forms of research, as Rebecca was talking about with AI, maybe that's a really nice place to start to talk With the AI,

Re

Sure. Yeah, we can start there, yeah. [laughs nervously]

NS

But kind of using these forms of language. Also, we're aware that there are kind of many artists and students who are kind of listening to the show and thinking about, if there's things that you've picked up through these episodes that you want to you're trying to think about, how do I explore this within my own practice or my own research? This is a little bit what we're thinking about now as well.

**Conversation**

RE

Yeah, we can definitely start with AI. I mean, it's an incredibly large field, so maybe I'll focus it a little bit more on Erik Davis' essay, where he's also looking more AI and weird. Okay, so in this essay, The Weird and The Banal, he's kind of saying that traditional weirdness implies mystery counterculture, ontological uncertainty, etc. All of this is linked to the occult, psychedelia, high strangeness, but AI often lacks this kind of radical otherness. And I think this is a really interesting point, because I think if… so, to maybe break it down a little bit to if we're talking about AI here, I think what I'm talking about is like, text to image, text to video, kind of Ai. I'm not talking about, like, huge AI infrastructures that deal with, like, economics. I'm really talking about the kind of artistic use of these tools.

NS

Do you mean like, generative AI?

RE

Generative AI, yeah. So I think when things like Dali mid journey, these kinds of tools first came out, they were weirder, like they were inherently weirder. But now, now that they're advancing, with this advancement comes with it, a lot of predictability, obviously, a lot more data for these, for these tools to be trained on and to give output of. And so, generative. AI now for me, lacks this kind of radical otherness. It's predictive, it's statistical, and it's born from these bureaucratic systems, or these systems that are kind of headed up by these people that kind of don't want it to be a weird tool, as far as I can tell. Like there's been a lot of controversy at the minute around like, Studio Ghibli within AI data sets. And obviously there's a lot of artistic movements against having your work in these data sets.

ND

Sorry, no, I was just gonna say this Studio Ghibli is such an interesting like, reference. Or like, just because I would say that Studio Ghibli is, they work like, within the realm of the weird, and it's interesting that they're sort of like, it's sort of like the like, we don't want… I don't know whether that's that's not necessarily what they're saying, but it does feel a little bit like this is our territory. Sorry, carry on,.

RE

So thinking about how so in this article, he warns against pseudo weirdness, something that he calls pseudo weirdness, which, in the case of AI, is technology that looks novel, but is just a remix of norms, or commodified quirkiness. And I was thinking about this in relation to like, Niamch, you're probably too young to remember this. But when we were young, it would be, like, people would be like, “Oh my god, I'm so random”. But like, I think he, he talks about this...

ND

I was thinking about that on my way here. I was like, millennial, like, early millennial culture was, like, so much about randomness, yeah? And, like, weirdness, like something to aspire to be, but for no reason, like, yeah, it's so random.

NS

I'm thinking the kind of like “RAWR”, like images, like of emo kids, yeah, which also feels like quite random, in a way that suddenly that just became a craze that, like, everyone was was doing, yeah, with, like, the big side swoop fringe.

RE

Which is born off a counter culture, might I add.

NS

Yeah, yeah.

RE

But he's talking about this thing of, Keep Austin weird. Austin Texas, not the state. Yeah. Anyway, so he's like, warning against the pseudo weirdness and proposing an ethics of weirdness. So I know that this isn't exactly in the realm of the new weird, but I will get to that. So he talks about embracing risk, magic, improvisation and openness to the unknown as a counter to these bland simulations that AI is kind of coming up with.

And for me, this is kind of interesting to think about, right, like, as I said, like these tools were inherently weird, but now they're just kind of regurgitating themselves. They're kind of becoming more and more realistic. I mean, Nina, you can probably definitely speak to this as well, because you're looking at this in your work at the moment,

ND

yeah, yeah.

RE

But yeah. So I'm thinking about how, how does this play into this idea of the next new weird, and what becomes of these technological and algorithmic structures when weirdness gets added back in? So I'm thinking about manipulation of imagery, right? Like, that's one thing that we can definitely point towards when we think about AI and you know, everything from Yves Klein to Swaggy Pope, like, what happens? What does this bring to the table of weirding or new weirding the image? And I think for me here, there's definitely something about the digital weird and thinking about everything from the Balkanization of the Internet all the way through to like, this idea of the digital weird is being like… the weird here is no longer just the intrusion of alien forms into familiar spaces, but it's the real realisation that the familiaritie’s already alien. So these AIs are spitting out stuff that we know, but it's also it's so it…

ND

It doesn't come from anywhere that's actually, I mean, it obviously, it is coming from the training data, which is, which is real data. Like, well, we don't necessarily know whether it's real data or not, but sorry, I'm just thinking about this. Someone told me about a fake data company and, like, there's, like, company and, like, there's like, actual companies that sell fake data, and it's like a whole thing. So anyways, that's another rabbit hole to go down.

But, but like these images, like this is sort of like what I'm looking at with what I'm making at the moment right now, where the like these images are these things. They're not like, they're not captured, they're not like, they're not an imprint of the real world. They're like, complete, uh, fabulations, but presented to us in the form of an image which we can only ever relate to as being like, archival or like, that's what our relationship to it has been for a long time. Like, take that, what I'm saying with a pinch of salt, because, of course, like we have fictional films and fictional images, and we understand that fiction operates within images, but there's now this, like, I don't know, but even, even though images are fictional, they always somewhat relate, In terms of from going off, off track here, but they do kind of always relate to something that is real. Like, even if it's an edited image, it's still like an image has been taken that you're that you're editing with, whereas now, like these images of humans, they're… this human might potentially not exist unless you've been, like, put in Elon Musk, like, yeah.

NS

I'm thinking of something when we were preparing for this, for this episode, and we're kind of, like, figuring out these different avenues we wanted to talk about, one of the big things that I'm thinking about as well, Rebecca, when talking about this weirdness of I'm thinking particularly like in the 2000s and the 2010s the weirdness of a lot of kind of social media spaces, or like spaces people would gather online. And I'm thinking about part of that being around different forms of media literacy, in terms of how much you could do with Photoshop, or how much you could do with Word Art, as well as like, lending into the weirdness, because there was only so much accuracy that you could get in any image, whether as now, there's a level of accuracy in AI generated images that, as you're saying, are getting better and better. And I'm wondering how this literacy that we have and kind of how we're reading images that they are fictional, that they are generated, that they are factual, if those terms even make sense anymore in kind of reading digital imagery? How this A is a distinct marker in what the next new weird is as we get this slippage, but also thinking about.. So then, what does that mean?... Is introducing the weird, or is like, back into these systems, or not introducing, bringing them back in, but also, like, roles of weirding, is that also something around our own media literacy that we need to relearn, or we need to kind of develop as a toolkit for ourselves? Like, I'm not…

RE

yeah, I think what these tools often do is they sort of distort meaning, and they kind of push, they fragment things across different zones; whether that's time zone, language zone, whatever that is. And I think this is what I was trying to get out with this idea of the Balkanization of the internet is, like, by weirding, I feel like there's also this fragmentation where nobody really understands anyone anymore. Where we can't trust imagery, where there's, like, you have things like Skibidi Toilet, and kids understand that, but adults don't. To me, like the Skibidi Toilet is essentially the same as an AI generated image of the Pope wearing a puffer jacket, like it's born out of this, like instability of ourselves and like not really knowing what like the ground that we're standing on is not stable anymore.

ND

You spoke to me a while ago about model collapse and about this, about like model class being this, sort of like, eventually, at some point, when these generative models have been trained like, there will there is now more, I think it's like more generated images on the internet than there are like real images. So at some point, those images become part of the training data for new models. And at some point, like the model, that's where, like, the model collapses. It doesn't, it doesn't… it's not basing it what it's generating off of it doesn't relate to the real world anymore.

But I also think that that's also happening with us. It's like, no. Model collapse, but it's like, it's like, human… Well, I've I use this term in the script for what I'm what I'm working on the moment, but I call it Perception Collapse, where it's like, is that what is also happening to us? Like we are, we're getting fed images that we sometimes, sometimes, sometimes, you just know an image is AI, but they're like, there are some that are very believable. And like, there's a point where, like, how much like, I'm sure that. I'm sure everyone can relate to this of like, saying something to someone, where you're like, “oh my god, did you hear about X, Y, Z”, and someone's like, “are you sure that that's real?” I think actually even like the Pope, like, I think when I first saw that image, I thought, no, no, it was the Harry Potter people doing Balenciaga. I was like, “Oh, my God, that is such a great campaign that Balenciaga…”, I believed it. So I was like, That's genius,

RE

Yes, yeah. I think there's also something quite weird about and quite weird about, you know, like, I see a lot of exhibitions at the minute, interrogating these things, but then there will be people on social media like plugging this show when it's actually supposed to be critiquing this stuff, and it feels like such a backwards loop of perception. But yeah, there's also something in what you were saying around how we're actually all just becoming a little bit more infiltrated into this system, and the way that we're thinking is very systematized now. I think I was speaking to you about this, like, how television shows, or maybe you were speaking to me about this, how television shows now, they always have recaps. They're always kind of made in such a way that allows for you to scroll on your phone at the same time as watching.

ND

oh, you know it's then, yeah, it's called Secondary Screen Watching, where it's where they're designed, the plot plays out on a much slower time scale, because they know everyone is like playing a game on their phone or working on their computer, which is why… But then also, flip side of that, which is also why some of these shows are unbearable to sit down and watch. If you actually want to put your devices away, because there is no plot, or the plot takes so long for it to happen that you're like, I'm trying to think like Bridgerton or something like that. That's a show I could not sit down and watch, yeah, because it took too long to get to where I was trying to get to...

NS

Sorry Nina and I are sharing them like this episode. So if you hear us like screaming across one another, but it's making me think a lot about I just finished watching Adolescence, which is massive right now. The reason why I bring it into this is because they're one shot episodes, and so there's something quite interesting for me in that that's kind of countering the second screenwriting, which also just drives my head in, because then the writing is just unbearable, and you can feel your brain cells dying as you're watching… no with like Bridgerton, as in, like, wonderful, pompous, fluffy end of day stuff. But like, but I think with Adolescence, because it's this one hour typically long take that there's a liveness to it. And I think in particular, because there is an element of the show, and this is not a spoiler, there's an element of the show about how this teenager's life acts online versus in person, in terms of the version of himself that is seen online, versus the version of him that is seen by his parents in the flesh let's say, that there's something very powerful in the single take where you're kind of forced to pay attention because it's it's real life, and if you blink, you'll miss it.

And I think there's something about that that maybe slightly segues to what I'm thinking about with the weird. But I don't want to quite cut off the AI conversation just yet, but one of the things I'm thinking about a lot when we're talking about this weirdness in terms of a digital weird is what that means in terms of certain forms of embodied politics, or just like fleshiness, like how do… if our online and digital spaces are becoming increasingly, or they just are increasingly significant parts of our day to day, what does that mean for the bodies we inhabit, in terms of how those bodies move through the world? And how also thinking about this form of like next new weird, in terms of image generation, because it's built off of what's already there, of course, how that perpetuates standards that we know are racist or misogynist or transphobic, like if we understand that those things are already inherent in many data sets just based of who historically has been more represented online, what does that mean for the very bodies and flesh that we have if those things no longer represent those historical hierarchies?

RE

Yea, just before we go into that, and to round off my bit, by referring to an actual episode we did I'm thinking a lot about Phil's episode and this kind of adoption of character within this narrative of game making, and how… I've been doing a lot of thinking around tabletop role play games at the moment, and kind of inhabiting different people. And for me, like the next new weird also lies in this creation, or like the collective imagination of a group of people. So this liminal space where it's not the written word that you're kind of discussing, it's also not solely imaginary in one person's head, but it's weirded, or next new weirded in the fact that it exists only as a collective construct within a particular moment, with a particular set of people, and with these dice rolled, randomised decisions. So maybe that's a good way of kind of transitioning into what you're saying about embodied… this, this idea of embodied weirdness, or weird weirding the body, because that happens a lot within tabletop role play games and gaming in general, actually.

NS

Yeah, completely, completely, I mean, there was… because, I think when we were initially talking about the new weird, it's funny because we sat down in a sunny park, no, we sat down in a sunny garden in, like, what August, July of last year (2024), and it was just after the general election. So there was a general feeling about what politics are going to look like in the next in the next few years, kind of having a change, Labour government got in, and having that change, and sort of, I think for me as well, I was thinking a lot about this idea of, like the other or anarchy. And like, what can politics provide for us? Or, kind of, how do we claim back those terms? And thinking about the weird as being this very slippery term as well, this like, amorphic term that can be good or bad. So like, does it give us… Does it give us tools then? And perhaps, as we've been working more and more on this series, one of the things that I keep on thinking a lot about is this form of embodied politics, and what happens when the body you inhabit is labeled as weird, and thinking about that as sort of a slippage point.

And of course, right now there's… so we're recording in spring of 2025, Trump has been in office for four months. And there's, there's many scary policies that he's enacting, many very violent and unsafe ones. But the thing that I'm thinking a lot about is those that are against trans people, such as kind of returning trans people's passports, caught up reissuing passports with the gender they were born at birth, not the gender that they have transitioned to, or that they identify as. Things like genital searches, as people are entering into countries, many European nations are warning gender nonconforming people to enter into the US right now, and it's making me think a lot about kind of weirdness in terms and forms of weirding as like a place of reclamation versus a place of slippage.

And what I mean by that is, I'm thinking about Trump's first term in office, and how it felt like there was this moment in the 2010s where there was a lot of queer rights that were being won in terms of access to different forms of trans healthcare, being able to self identify your gender. Things like there was the marriage equality referendum in Ireland in 2015 and then later on in that year, I think Barack Obama did an executive order to legalise gay marriage across all of the states, and there was this wave of rights that kind of came out, and it felt very positive. And then something started to slip, and homophobia and transphobia rose again as queer people were being considered weird or more weird or othered.

And I'm thinking about that slippage of weird as a term that you can claim, versus weird as a term that is placed onto you, and part of that is around the term queer. So queer being kind of an old synonym of like peculiar, and also as a derogatory term, as a slur towards gay people historically, kind of emerging in like the 1800s and then continuing to the 1980s when the term got reclaimed. And now you hear many, many people say, “Oh, I'm queer”. And it's a very joyful thing to say that, and it's sort of emblematic of a part of gay culture that is, I would say, more political in terms of, “just because I have the right to get married means I can choose not to” and kind of choices around non heteronormative structures. And I guess for me, the way I'm thinking about that is in Jelena’s episode, in particular, how she talks about forms of embodied politics in terms of understanding history with the re-performing of historical avant garde art by this Post 98 generation as a way for them to understand, or to kind of get an embodied understanding of their own like context, perhaps not necessarily their history, but their context. And I'm thinking about that form of surrealism or weirdness as being both slippage of othering, but also as space of reclamation.

ND

Yeah. So I was just thinking about… because the only thing that I'm sort of really kind of clued into in what's what's happening, sort of in the current discourse, is about the passports being reissued to people with their with the gender they were assigned with at birth, rather than the one they've chosen or transitioned to.

And it's funny, then I was thinking about Rebecca, what you were saying at the beginning of the episode, kind of when you're introducing this idea of the weird and you were talking about Mark Fisher, and about sort of presence and absence. Because I feel like there's something there with… I don't want to say erasure, but there is, there is kind of like an absence that they're trying that the US government is trying to create there of being like, “it's not that we're going to call you weird. We're just going to, we're just going to make it. We're, yeah, we're just, we're going to get rid of what you claim you are. And we're just gonna, we're just going to not we're just going to see that as invisible and ignore it”, and we're not going to so it's interesting. But then I was just trying to think about, like, what is that link? And maybe Rebecca, whether you can chime in about Mark Fisher and this idea of, like, presence or the eerie in the you say there's the eerie in the absence? I'm interested whether there's any kind of interesting links that we might be able to make there.

RE

Well,the weird is the presence of something that's… how does he say it something that does not belong. The weird is the presence of something that does not belong, whereas the eeries is the absence of something. So if you're thinking about a horror film, areas like the Blair Witch Project, weird is like something else where there's like something visible, like The Substance that you would say, I would say, that's pretty weird because it's weird. That's weird, not eerie.

NS

because it's present, because it's present. Yeah, and I mean, just to clarify, I hope it goes without saying, but there's no part of this conversation where we are describing any member of the trans community as weird unless they choose to identify with that word and they enjoy that word.

I guess I think, for me, I'm, I'm thinking a lot about these parallels of also thinking about kind of the weird and the eerie, but like thinking about the origins of the word queer as peculiar and peculiarity, like, even, like when I grew up, my grandmother used to say it's like, “oh, she's a bit queer” as a way to, like, talk about someone she thought was odd, you know. And I'm thinking about how that term got reclaimed, but I'm also thinking about maybe certain things within parts of queer culture that are also… in terms of thinking about maybe this role of what you're talking about in terms of certain types of generative AI, missing weirdness. I'm also thinking about the connections that might have to certain types of heteronormativity and queerness as being against that. So it's yes, it's a yes, it's sort of, it's not about being cisgender or it's not about being heterosexual, but also things like the ways in which you live might also not be heteronormative in terms of you might be a relationship anarchist, or you might choose to not have a family. I mean, for some people, it's not a choice, but thinking about also all those roles of sort of queering, and that sense of peculiarity in a way, as something that's seen as or framed as positive. And I'm wondering about how this operates, in terms of what we're talking about with, sort of the estrangement of the next new weird. You know, how does this fall into, let's say, the fleshiness of forms of embodied politics, when your identity itself is claimed to be invisible or is claimed to not exist. Kind of, is there something in those slippages of when weird is something that is not violent, you know, in terms of its presence, in terms of someone being called weird on the street, versus perhaps maybe when it slips into the absence? Is the eerie the violent part of it? I don't know,

RE

you know, I'm just thinking about you mentioned erasure, and…

ND

I don't know whether erasure is necessarily the right word to use there. Maybe,

NS

Maybe it's helpful to think a little bit about Chris' episode ImpotentIisland and thinking about that way in which, for many Northern men that their identity became in part, constructed around industrialisation in terms of their ability to work with a steam engine, and what happened in the absence of those industries, either de scaling or closing down?

RE

Yeah, I think yeah, or maybe not even like just working with the steam engine, but just like getting your hands dirty, like being a miner, like your body showed your labour. It showed your work, like you had calluses on your hands because you worked really hard. It was kind of like, in the same vein as, like, rich people in like, the 1800s would have, would really prefer to be fat, because it showed that they had enough money to buy loads of food. You know, it's that kind of idea, but… But, yeah, I think like that with this new the new industrial revolution, or the kind of new technological revolution that we're going through, I think that definitely shifts things into being something other than that.

I was thinking a bit about a little bit like Schrodinger's Cat, where you open the box is the cat alive or dead? And it's kind of this theory of quantum thing, quantum physics. But this idea that the weird for me, it's like, it's only weird if it stays under the hood. As soon as it becomes common, cultural, commodified knowledge, it's no longer weird. It's like, until it suffers this identification it's still, by non weird things, it's still weird. So even by like, just saying, “Oh, that's weird”, it's no longer weird because it's known. Do you know what I mean?

NS

I guess I'm thinking about that in relation to what you're saying about Phil's work, of like, the collective creation of in terms of, like a collective decision making of and maybe for me, that comes back to also this form of thinking about tools of weirding, in terms of these forms of embodied politics, and like the tools of weirding also being generative of kind of gathering, or like, the collective creation of like, I don't know. I don't even want to think about it as being like emancipatory frameworks, because that's asking a lot, but maybe like spaces to rest within.

Like we were talking slightly before this, about also thinking, you know, when you have such kind of violent political policies that are being enacted against you, as in, I can't go to the States right now because I'm worried that I will be kind of searched in some way, because I don't appear feminine enough to a border guard, because I don't decide to assign to the gender I was born as. And thinking about then for me, what are the spaces that I need in order to kind of find safety within so that if I'm going out into a world that's going to be violent against how I choose to define my gender, it's like, are there roles of weirding that allow me to create or find or have those spaces of kind of safety and protection in maybe either like self declaring or like claiming, this kind of collective weirdness somehow of being like, you're gonna call me weird, yeah, I'll be weird.

RE

I was gonna ask you, is the next new word for you about reclaiming?

NS

I think so, I think that's where it feels like it's kind of sitting for me right now. I mean, I'm thinking about that a lot in terms of the different terms that the artists we worked with have given us. You know, both in, like Monya’s rejection of the term world building, in Jelena’s specific use of the term surrealism, in Phil's use of the term weirding, and thinking about those series of terms in terms of creating spaces where we get to decide the language that is used to describe us or our work. You know, I think there's a lot of kind of a cultural violence around like being assigned language rather than deciding your language. You know, thinking about the reclamation of the word queer as being one of them, it's like, “oh, you're going to use it as a slur?”, “Oh, I'm going to use it to describe my entire identity”, and it disarms the violence of the term. And I wonder if there's something around weirding in the present that can help with that.

ND

That kind of segues in perfectly. I don't know whether you set that up for me, but into into sort of what I wanted to talk about. And actually, I kind of want to go back really briefly to like… because I feel like on the show, we've dabbled with the new weird with other artists, not just like within, within this, within this mini series. And I remember one episode that we did with Yuli Serfaty when they recommended that we listen to Annihilation….

and sorry, let me say, let me finish that. That was a Jeff VanderMeer book. Is that right?

RE

Yes, it's a trilogy, but Annihilation is the first book of.

ND

Yeah, yeah. And there's a scene in it where the character notices that this kind of virus, or whatever we want to call it amorphic force, like starts to mimic parts of the world. So it, you know, like we have, we see, like plants growing in the shapes of animals and humans, and it's and there's one part where it looks like there's some text written on the wall, and the main character walks up to the text to read it, and then it releases it spores into her face.

And I thought there was something really interesting about this idea of like language that's not meant to necessarily be read. But the idea is that you… that this, this virus or whatever, understood that if you make something look like language, someone will then read it. That's the reaction that we have to language, which means that someone will walk up close to it, and this thing will happen anyways.

And so, and I've been and I've probably spoken about about it on the show before, but there's Katherine Hayles, who I speak about a lot in relation to my work, has a sort of not prediction, but she proposes this idea that with sort of increasing technological advancement, especially with autonomous systems, autonomous language systems that we are not the only beings now that understand and use language like we now share that with, like chat, GPT or like large language models. And so how do we define… her question is, sort of, how do we define the human against against these systems? And for her, she thinks it's with language and that for these sort of large language models, meaning has no meaning, so language doesn't relate to the physical world. And she thinks that part of being human is the enjoyment of meaning making and mark making, and that meaning doesn't necessarily have to be like in language in the same way that we understand it, but we have the capacity to kind of expand what meaning making meaning is. And so she …. Sorry, I'm going somewhere with this.

And so she thinks that we will start to see the rise of asemic languages, which are languages that don't belong to any form of semantics. So like in one of her talks, she shows pictures of like pages that look like it's writing, but it's not any sort of language, but the page is still conveying something. And I sort of wanted to… so sorry, that's kind of just a little, a little kind of like where my mind's at with thinking about language, and this, maybe this potential rise of asemic languages.

And in the winter I had gone, this was like, after Trump won the election, and I went on to Instagram, and, oh, I can't remember what it was, but Oh, no, I think I went on to TikTok. And someone had made a video saying, like, “Look, you can't look. Up on Instagram, you can't type in Donald Trump rigged the election”, but there are, like, loads of videos of him admitting that he rigged the election. And it said, “so you can find these videos if you type in Donald Trump, ridged electron” and I was like, this is a complete hoax, this video is not real. But then I was like, I'm just gonna try it out. And I typed in rigged election, “Donald Trump, rigged election”, no search results. Like, it was like it had completely censored it. And then I typed it, and I did exactly what this guy had done, and put in “ridged electron” and then it was like, just like, loads and loads of videos of the same clip over and over again.

And while like these are still like words that we understand, like ridged electron is still two words that we understand the meaning of. They have like for that purpose, they have sort of changed, or there's something about spelling something wrong to gain access to censored material that I wonder whether is kind of this new… or the or maybe like a sort of precursor to the rise of asemic language that Katherine Hayles is kind of suggesting that we'll begin to see

RE

I think that's a good point, because this is not something new. Yes, now they're using it to try and sort of get away from the algorithm detecting things, you know, like instead of sex in a YouTube video, S, E, double, G, S, so it still sounds the same, but it's not.

NS

I'm thinking about Yeah, this kind of role of shadowbanning that you see a lot, both in well, when you're thinking about, not necessarily tick tock, but I'm thinking about kind of Instagram kind of, obviously run by Meta, you know, Zuckerberg, being a fan of of Trump, and then terms that are that would be against him, being shadowbanned, or just generally, things of political nature.

I mean, as we've all seen, I'm sure, as well, anyone who's speaking about the ongoing violence in Gaza, you know, people have to rewrite Gaza, because that term, that geography, is being shadowbanned. The same for Palestine, even the same for Israel. You know that these terms are sort of kind of taken off the the main feed. And I was thinking a lot before about how these terms also like… what gets placed as a term that will be shadowbanned in terms of, how does that get decided? I guess thinking before you know what we're talking about in terms of like, the language, like, or the tools of weirding, is like creating these like collective spaces where we can gather, like is the version of the word that not that is not shadowbanner is that that collective space?

Thinking about this amazing moment where all these young people on TikTok bought the tickets to Trump's rally and then danced around them on Tik ok rather than going to the rally, and then he was left in this empty stadium. And so that that new form of like the asemic language that they would have created to have not had that be a shadow bound event, is that what that collectivity is. But then I guess there's, on the other hand of it, there's this worrying thing about maybe the weird and counterculture around things that typically would have been quite normal now needing to be part of a counterculture, such as voicing voicing an anger towards your president, voicing an anger towards your political leaders, more generally, sort of who gets to decide what falls in and out of that asemic language?

RE

But I think that you've got something there in terms of, yeah, thinking around maybe also computer language. I mean, there's, there's a lot of kind of fear around the idea that AIs are sentient and that they can talk to each other, and that they have a language that we don't understand that's all around us, but we can't see it.

So I think you've definitely got something there. But it also reminds me of, do you remember, like, I don't know, the Amazon, sort of like makeup brushes that have, like, it's this word soup, and it's like, every single word to try and get the algorithm to feature them at the top. So it'd be like “makeup kids, colorful eyeshadow, hairstyle, 90s”, and it's like, all of these words to try and get it to the top of the algorithm. What you're saying is kind of the opposite, but it's similar to me.

ND

yeah, well, it's Yeah, and I guess it's sort of like, this idea of like, like, I don't know whether it's weirding language or like, I mean, it's… you could describe it as that, or, like, embracing error as a sort of human, like a, something that humans can almost kind of see beyond.

Yeah, so I think about even like, and I have included this in like, one of my older films, but like, reCAPTCHA, technology, it's like we're able to read, like, warped phrases, we're able to… some of us who are dyslexic can read misspelling like it's quite severe misspellings and words and still be able to understand it or read it upside down, whereas how well can a computer… like, if a if an algorithm knows what ridged and electron mean, is it going to be able to?

RE

Well the thing with, like, moderation is that actually a lot of it is done by people, low paid workers in India, for example who have to look through content. So it's not all done by computers, which is interesting, but, but yes. I mean, theoretically, you could teach a computer. You could teach, like, teach a computer to do, yeah, anything, yeah. They are trained to be perfect. They're trained not to make spelling mistakes. They're trained… like these large language models. I mean, they're kind of not trained to be glitchy. The glitch is not what they want. You know, the glitch for them is not Legacy Russell's space for kind of reinterpreting failure. You know, that’s bad. That's a bad thing for them, it's binary.

ND

So is like, embracing failure part of, like… Is that the next new, weird, embracing failure or, like, embracing the glitch?

It feels weird to end it there.

NS

I think, yeah. But I think you're, I think you're right around that, that sense of weirding the language. I mean, there's a certain element of this that maybe we're coming back to, or in my mind, I think I feel like we're coming back to, of like enabling space for mistakes and failure through the language of weirding, somehow that there's something around the roles of binary in terms of like we speak about like good and evil in the statement.

I'm thinking, even this conversation we're having around embodied politics and different forms of trans care as well around, you know, an expectation that someone's going to fall within a specific binary of gender that, you know, it's just so untrue. And thinking about, does thinking about weird and like this next new weird and weirding, soes it allow space to A. get outside of that binary in terms of the spectrum of choices of like, you know, good and bad is so boring, there's so much in between. You know, having just male and female or man and woman also is like, there's so much more in between. So does that also, does weirding also give us the space to think through those forms of language and creating those spaces where we can have that?

RE

I see it as like a splintering of groups as well, like everybody wants to be part of something. And I think the next new weird exists not as one thing, but as a splintering off of different groups, where a select few know about a select thing and that exists infinitely.

ND

Well, I think we're gonna have to end there.

RE

This was good, yeah, this was great to recap on what we've done!

ND

Yeah, yeah. It's like, it's, yeah, it's a whole new format. Well, it obviously won't be, every episode will be like this, but hopefully there will be another mini series, which we're kind of starting to cook up, but, yeah, I don't want, I don't want to say, I don't want to, I don't want to say anything just yet. I don't want to jinx it.

ND

I mean, let us. Let us know how you… if you enjoy this format because, or if you don't because we're we're enjoying sharing these kind of backgrounds. Yeah, hot takes, as we said, more opinions than references.

RE

Phone in Let us know. 0-800-new-weird.

NS

you have our Insta. Um, thanks for listening, guys, as always,

RE

Yes, see you next time

ND

See you next time, bye, bye.