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Infinity Lyric: Lysergic Excess in the Poetry of Dana Ward

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how the work of contemporary American poet Dana Ward generates ecological thinking through 'infinity lyric': a mode shaped by psychedelic aesthetics, drifting attention and shifting scales of perception. By close reading Ward's two collections, *This Can't Be Life* (2012) and *The Crisis of Infinite Worlds* (2013), in conversation with poststructuralist, new materialist and contemporary poetic theory, the article explores how Ward performs an active reorganisation of everyday experience, forging a psychedelic ecosophy in which mind, society and environment connect through lyrical voice and movement. Situating Ward's work within the cultural ecologies of Web 2.0 and anti-capitalist critique, the article argues that Ward's aesthetic of lysergic excess offers an ethical practice grounded not in transcendence but in immanent, relational forms of being. It concludes that infinity lyric provides a distinctive contribution to ecological thought by modelling participatory, heterogeneous and open-ended ways of attending to the world's material agencies.

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Introduction: the spirograph

> I feel like one of those, oh, what was it called, the toy that in pastel coloured pencil made geometric patterns, circles & diamonds & so on. I've forgotten, but I feel like I'm repeating myself in coloured pencil . . . It makes me feel *weird*. (Ward 2010)

So answers Dana Ward (b. 1976) to an interview prompt regarding his poetics. The forgotten toy here is likely the Spirograph, developed in the 1950s by Denys Fisher. As a drawing device, the Spirograph produces elaborate mathematical roulette curves whose circular patterns resemble the swirls of psychedelic art. As a defamiliarising motion, this tracing elicits a sense of the '*weird*': dislodging structures of hierarchical or binary thinking in favour of improvisation around pattern and repetition, like we might find in poetry.[1] For the purposes of this essay, psychedelia includes not just the portrayal of drug-induced altered states but also the qualities of poetry that catalyse and intensify altered consciousness and relationality in speaker and reader alike.

Ward is an American poet based in Cincinnati. Blending poetic forms, art writing and a citational practice inclined to friendship and community, his work bears affinities with

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both generations of the New York School, Language Poetry, New Narrative and a contemporary cohort of Anglosphere writers read variously in the contexts of metamodernism (see Ashton 2013), digital culture and small press publishing. Ward's work is expansive in length, density and vocabulary, adopting a baroque, excessive style which defamiliarises daily life, draws in high and low culture and orients itself through lyric address. My reading of Ward's two full-length collections, This Can't Be Life (2012) and The Crisis of Infinite Worlds (2013), uses Félix Guattari's notion of 'ecosophy' to explore how poetic form might generate psychedelic insights whose ecological value lies in the dissolving of boundaries and the recalibration of attention from ego to environment. Ecosophy is a term developed by Guattari in *The Three Ecologies* (1989). As an 'ethico-political articulation', ecosophy operates between the registers of 'environment, social relations and human subjectivity' (Guattari 2014, 17–18). Guattari's approach aims to shift ecology from 'the image of a small nature-loving minority' or 'qualified specialists' to a 'generalised ecology' which 'questions the whole of subjectivity and capitalist power formations' (2014, 35) – thus pre-empting more recent framings of environmental thought within critiques of capitalism.[2] The ecosophical project is one that functions in realms of the 'individual or collective, in everyday life as well as the reinvention of democracy'; ultimately, it explores 'the production of human existence itself in new historical contexts' (Guattari 2014, 22). In Ward's voice, lyrical introspection is charged with fractal movement: recursive and self-embedding poems within poems, motifs (including rainbows, songs and candy) reiterated in non-linear fashion; a sonnet cycle ('My Diamond'), plus intertextual summons of other poets, musicians and friends through dedications, epigraphs and anecdotes. Ward's poetry is a shimmering, dense surface of references, which enable ecosophical traversal through an 'invit[ation]' to 'glossolalia matrix' (2013, 91): to poetry's trancelike nurturing structure, a sonic mould, lines of response and communication pulsing through a lyric 'I'.

While Ward's work rarely engages explicitly with environmentalism, its preoccupation with the effects of various substances (including acid, codeine, barbiturates and marijuana) locates ecological possibility within altered states of consciousness. This essay identifies a productive connection between Guattari's ecosophical project, Richard Doyle's notion of the 'ecodelic' and the possibilities of transforming self, relation and poetic production in Ward's lyrical experiments. Doyle's term 'ecodelic' suggests the use of psychedelic research for ecological purposes, including the dissolution of the egoic self into greater nature connectedness, intensified perception and therapeutic insight. Taking inspiration from Doyle's readings of 'ecodelic testimony' (2011, 21), I offer a notion of 'psychedelic ecosophy' to explore how psychedelic logics, aesthetics and relational practices can foster an ecopoethical project. Here, Ward's spirograph is a figure for the poet as psychedelic ecosopher: tracing relations between realms, turning enquiry back to the medium (poetry) itself. Applying this 'eco' prefix foregrounds an ecological approach to Joan Retallack's 'poethics', a neologism whose 'attitude' tends to 'a certain poetics of responsibility with the courage of the swerve, the project of the wager' (Retallack 2003, 3). I propose 'infinity lyric' as a mode that pushes the limits of expressive subjectivity through formal maximalism. It is a poetics of drift, swerve, association, boundary dissolve and scalar shift, where 'the self becom[es] tangibly a gift manifested by a much larger dissipative structure – the planet, the galaxy, the cosmos' (Doyle 2011, 21). My wager is that infinity lyric enables a transversal world-making.[3] Not only do the poems portray this

melting of self, but their form invites readers to 'trip' on excesses, which might generate less egocentric modes of consciousness and make the strictures of life under capitalism seem more soluble and expansive.

In the interview above, Ward characterises as 'weird' a reverie in which internal processes (linguistic iterations of experience, the movement of speech and mind) are discovered through an external mechanism (the mark-making motions of a Spirograph). Mark Fisher suggests that the weird lets us 'see the inside from the perspective of the outside', since it 'brings to the familiar something which ordinarily lies beyond it' (2016, 10). Ward's poetry is rich in these elliptical folds of inside/outside, drawing through discursive lyrical voice to effect clarities, revelations and contradictions in a spirit of relational enquiry. 'Psychedelic', a word that combines *psyche* with the Greek *dēlos* (meaning clear, manifest), bears that sense of manifest: such a poetics is imbued with a motile, demonstrable experience of connection and becoming, nevertheless inseparable from the conditions of the Capitalocene. Ultimately, it is the ecosophical world of daily life to which Ward turns the most attention: sleeping, parenting, reading, writing, seeing friends, chatting online and mall-walking.

I will begin by suggesting that Ward defamiliarises the everyday via an attentive, present-focused lyricism which performs infinity through rhetorical immediacy, rainbows and other motifs. I will then explore Ward's link to psychedelic substances through his poetic address to Krystle Cole, creator of the educational platform *NeuroSoup*, in the section entitled 'Lysergic feeling', which focuses on psychoactive drugs. I situate Ward's work within the cultural ecologies of Web 2.0, where channels for disseminating poetry and psychedelic knowledge foster ecodelic insight, and where the lyrical effects of intimacy and connection replicate the motile, affective experience of an acid trip. Having tracked the atmospheric figure of the rainbow in Ward's poetry, I then theorise shimmer as an ecopoethical phenomenon, tracing its oscillations between paralysis and potential through Guattari, Deborah Bird Rose and Doyle. Finally, I move towards a conclusion, which shows how infinity lyric, in the psychedelic form adopted by Ward, generates transversal modes of attention, relation and world-(un)making that gesture towards anti-capitalist ecopoethics without resolving contradictions into programmatic solutions. Throughout, I adopt a spirographic mode of critique which accumulates meaning through iteration and Retallack's 'courage of the swerve', moving across ecosophical nodes of environment, society and mind in ways thickened with Ward's lyrical excess. Rather than moving towards resolution, my emphasis is transversal: paying attention to crossings and self-referential asides, and ultimately refusing mastery in favour of an essaying 'trip' into psychedelic ecosophy.

Over the rainbow

What is psychedelic about Ward's depiction of the everyday is the aesthetic capaciousness through which he performs infinity with a roving, spirographic attentiveness. Crucially, such infinity avoids reification into pure abstraction through a present-focused lyricism which involves the reader acutely in the moment of the poem's unfolding. This temporariness is suggested by frequent references to a rainbow. Rainbows, as effects of atmospheric refraction and dispersal, carry a spectrum of symbolic connotation – from queer pride to good fortune, transience and renewal. Fisher's prepositional 'beyond' comes into

play here. In *The Crisis of Infinite Worlds*, Ward returns to the rainbow via its incarnation in Victor Fleming's fantasy musical Fleming (1939) as a place of hopeful beyond, riffing on the musical number 'Over the Rainbow' repeatedly and fractally across the collection. The book's opening poem, 'Aeolian Phone', invokes *Oz* through explicit reference to 'Wicked' and the swerving imminence of a 'tornado' (Ward 2013, 2–3). It is written in a rhapsodic prose-poetic style which captures transversal consciousness:

> Ok I had some "insane" thought about my phone with its own ballet dynamism … called myself at night & spoke abstractly when I spoke I made an account the screen blushed when I stroked its cheek & pencils they are pretty hard to come by … so I spoke my thought in American English a command language currency embittered in radiant letters on this limitless screen I am limitlessly kissing the motile space I wish would be my writing's form a constellated saffron more sensitive than even the inside of my thigh or when hair brushes over my neck it's unsurprising writing is looking for a blurring of surfaces somewhere over the rainbow of what can be thought & what can't (5)

Several stanzas in 'Aeolian Phone' open with the expression 'Ok', creating a fractal, iterative effect: perhaps referencing a kind of present check of text-speak performing informality and intimacy on the (telephonic and poetic) line. The effect is revisionary and accretive in the sense that we constantly stop, start and re-enter, as in conversation – reminding us that we are still in the middle of thinking, 'ma[king] an account', and that writing is a personified agent, 'looking'. In this passage, the speaker gives us a paraphrased, psychedelic impression ('some "insane" thought', whose scare quotes remind us of irony and judgement from outside) of his aeolian phone. The word 'aeolian' refers to the wind, and in poetic terms, Ward has transposed his call to the lyrical instrument that plays itself (via the wind, the swirling tornado, the coming storm) in nature.

In Ward's poem, the speaker calls himself 'at night' and in doing so makes of his voice a mediating container for a possible outside. His 'account' provokes an emotional reaction from the screen, its 'blush[ing]'. Lacking a pencil, the poet resorts to speech – 'American English' – becoming 'a command language' capable of computational functioning via code-like performance. What happens next, as the letters light up, is mind-bending: the manifestation of erotic texture via sonic and linguistic caress; writing as activating command language, 'looking'. Infinity then occurs in 'limitlessly kissing the motile space I wish would be my writing's form' and so we can imagine the poet's speculative desire for writing to become endless, responsive surface, capable of motion and muscular response ('motile'). The spirograph poet is one of Guattari's 'machines of virtuality', operating nocturnally as if in dream, 'already there in sensation and outside themselves in fields of the possible', working in 'limitless interfaces which secrete interiority and exteriority' as 'becomings' (1995, 92). To dwell on the 'sensitiv[ity]' of Ward's image, with its fleshy sensations of skin contact, is to suggest infinity's arousal function of that im/possible 'beyond': 'over the rainbow of what can be thought & what can't'. Here, spirographic self-iteration rests in the shaky contingency of 'wish' – what it does for us, transversally, in our readerly encounter, what it pushes of the possible. This sensuous self-iteration, coupled with Ward's allusions to *Oz* (a film with an enduring affiliation with LGBTQ+ history and culture), is decidedly queer, functioning as both a parasocial gesture and embodied re-visioning.[4]

The queer proliferations of such wishful thinking contain a deeply relational poetics of infinity, through which we get closer to the ecological stakes of Ward's work. Reading Ward's titular poem 'The Crisis of Infinite Worlds' in the context of recent developments in new materialist philosophy, Christopher Nealon suggests it 'persuasively develops an idea of the infinite as a kind of mediation among people, experienced in poems as an embodied comportment carried out in language; that is, as rhetoric' (2023, 6). The rhetorical flourishes of Ward's prosimetric style (combining both prose and lineated verse) indicate a heightened consciousness whose receptive impulse bends towards discovery. Here I am thinking of Doyle's '"ecodelic" insight: the sudden and absolute conviction that the psychonaut is involved in a densely interconnected ecosystem for which contemporary tactics of human identity are insufficient', resulting in 'a sudden appreciation of immanence, a connectivity that exceeds the rhetorical capacities of an ego' (2011, 20). As I will show later, Ward's writing (both on and off the page) bears the spoken word poet's intimate charisma: it pairs the 'laconic demeanour' (2013, 32) of a psychedelic muse with a mode of aureate density delivered at speed. Building on Nealon's reading of infinity, I want to argue that Ward's poetry uses the rhetoric and aesthetic of infinity as transversal mediation between the social, environmental and mental realms, offering an anti-capitalist poethics of being in relation. We see this later in an alphabet poem dedicated to his baby, where the speaker describes unknotting and knotting 'the figure eight' whose form is 'rainbow lace', 'watching fibre optic particles of opalescent light chase one another through the course of it forever' (60). This mobius strip produces a mental intensity of lysergic excess which is atmospheric, communicative and playfully technological (dancing with fibre optic particles – like digital information sent swirling at the speed of light).

What lubricates such rhetoric to spirograph ecosophy, 'that frictionless feeling' (Ward 2013, 32)? In the aforementioned quote, Ward refers to a 'blurring of surfaces', an image we might compare to some lines from 'The Crisis of Infinite Worlds': '[m]agic marker on a / surface doesn't have / much depth of skin' (5, 37) and of course, the infinity symbol of the mobius strip – where there is no seam connecting one side to another, but instead a smooth surface, running across a twist. Nealon refers to this meeting of smooth surfaces as 'a textureless texture – "magic", industrial' (2023, 121), suggesting such writerly production has a weird, large-scale materiality – human and more than. We might think of its operation in the seam between lineated poetry and prose, in the absorptive process of reading itself, quoted without attribution in 'Quiet Thoughts' as 'waiting to learn, learning to melt' (106). I take this slant-chiasmic phrase as a keystone for this essay, with its suggestion that in lysergic feeling learning and melting are two sides of the same surface. In 'Aeolian Phone', riffing on Samuel Taylor Coleridge's aeolian harp (2006), Ward describes '[a]n aerosol rainbow in permanent saturating transit' (Cole 2007, 3), marking the particulate matter of a graffiti whose airborne, intensifying scripture is lyric (staining the air, then surface, with multitudinous rainbow song).[5] Ward's rich sensoria produce a heady reading experience, and the subsequent 'melt[ing]' into such images establishes what Doyle calls the 'rhetorical conditions' and 'sensory and symbolic framework' (2011, 22) in which ecodelic possibility is set up for experiment.

Lysergic feeling

The conditions for experiment are rhetorical, offered in poetic form, but also environmental: the platforms and cultural ecologies in which psychedelic content circulates, often as esoterica or ephemera (through the memetic and crowd-sourced accretion of trip advice, media and archival material). Given Ward's oeuvre covers the first two decades of the twenty-first century, I want to focus on the significance of Web 2.0: where social media and user-generated content produce a more dynamic circuitry than the static webpages of Web 1.0. My example is a YouTube video in which Ward performs, against a backdrop of lush greenery and twittering birds, his poem 'The Crisis of Infinite Worlds' (Versoza 2012). The poem opens with a direct address to notorious psychonaut Krystle Cole. Cole's involvement in a large-scale LSD outfit, housed in a former missile silo in Wamego, is well documented in popular culture, including a *Vice* documentary episode titled 'Getting High on Krystle' (Morris, 2011) and Cole's own memoir, *Lysergic* (2007). Further documented is her involvement in a legal case brought against her husband Gordon Todd Skinner, who was sentenced to life imprisonment for kidnapping and assault with a dangerous weapon (Skinner v. State, 2009). Ward's speaker reports watching Cole online, alluding to her prolific YouTube channel *NeuroSoup*. Also a website active from 2007 until the late 2010s, *NeuroSoup*'s mission was 'based upon principles of harm reduction … striv[ing] to educate people around the world on responsible drug use' (NeuroSoup 2012). Cole's *NeuroSoup* channel, now taken down, contained a mix of trip reports, interviews and advice for ingesting mood-altering substances, with special emphasis on entheogens. Ward's video poem occupies a transition period in Web 2.0 at the tail end of the blogosphere's literary heyday, but before the wholescale 'pivot to video' around 2015, when short-form videos started to replace written content. This context puts extra pressure on Nealon's idea of the 'infinite as a kind of mediation among people' (2023, 6). To what extent is intimacy achieved with this hybrid form, the video poem, with its expanded modalities of attention? On the page version, where short line breaks foster a sense of hurtling motion (as Cole is described 'hurtl[ing] alone through mirrored tunnels'), the speaker watches Cole's videos in moments of domestic repose, addressing her directly: 'I watched you while our daughter slept', commenting on the 'un-embittered empathy your voice conveyed / on YouTube / which is our loving cup' (Ward 2013, 32). Just as the speaker recalls streaming Cole's videos, Ward's own video invites us to redouble this further, as we watch his replayable reading, its 'un-embittered' magnanimity.

Ward's connection with Cole is mediated by the digital screen, via the 'loving cup' of YouTube. Before it became a trophy, the loving cup was a shared drinking vessel used ceremoniously for toasting and symbolising unity. Something of those videos is then passed around, imbibed, shared: even if their presence is digitally provisional, easily lost to archival erasure. While she carries complex historical baggage, Cole's name is also a viral artefact of that corner of the internet where psychedelic communities gather in online forums to share spiritual, recreational and therapeutic notes.[6] The early internet's social promise was proclaimed as such by fellow psychonaut Terence McKenna: 'the way in which [the internet] will dissolve boundaries is by making us transparent to each other' just as 'psychedelics are catalysts for language', accelerating cultures through its formation (1995). We might view the speaker's address to Cole as an appeal to the psychedelic

muse to initiate an ongoing journey and dialogue – through the mind, the palace of high capitalism (the poem's setting, the mall) and online realms. Underlying Ward's 'loving cup' of YouTube is a sense of soluble connection, where screen is liquefied as affinity's medium.

Ward's onscreen performance enacts this: he does not read from a page but rather from memory, evoking a sense of spontaneous connection (Versoza 2012). To watch this video is to endlessly inhabit the poem's lyric present, even as the scenes and subjects described (the mall, the movie *Limitless*, the industrial city of Detroit and the DC Comics series of multiversal catastrophe, *Crisis on Infinite Earths*) are a far cry from its dreamy, bucolic setting.[7] The poem ventures across the psychedelic contact buzz of voice, citation and *things*, alchemised in compact lines to a kind of liquid poem now held in the 'loving cup' of video. Cole becomes his solvent muse, whose presence and inspiration propel the poem's 'super-compressed journey of the soul' (Nealon 2023, 117), which we trip with also in the stream. The effect of drinking from the poem's loving cup effects not enlightenment so much as a 'radiance we can't make / any sense of' (Ward 2013, 36). What is the ecosophical wager of such radiance? The 'soul' traverses frictionless spaces of capitalism in search of its ideological 'fault' and spatial limits, 'a precipice in this world' whose 'boldness' is paradoxically 'far too faint / & not enough' (37). In other words, finding the seam or edge of the world is too crude a gesture to itself elicit change or meaning. The plan for critique remains 'faint'; the poet is suspended in excess radiance.

Shimmering alterities

So far, we have seen how Ward's poetry is a lyrical instrument for transversal consciousness, influenced by the social mediations and attention dynamics of digital culture and the relational dimensions of infinity. Ecosophy does not follow a single line of thought but passes through intersecting surfaces and multiple, mutating domains. Ward's poetry stages possibilities for change in the responsive, ecodelic encounter through which the trip immerses us in environmental, social and mental alterations. His performance of psychedelic ecosophy relies on mutability. Fisher's unfinished project *Acid Communism*, posthumously published in its introductory fragments, riffs on the political potential of the psychedelic:

> The crucial defining feature of the psychedelic is the question of consciousness, and its relationship to what is experienced as reality. If the very fundamentals of our experience, such as our sense of space and time, can be altered, does that not mean that the categories by which we live are plastic, mutable? (Fisher and Colquhoun 2000, 41)

As we have seen, Ward's poetry is frequently concerned with the soluble boundaries between art and life, consciousness and its outside, intimacy and distance. By altering everyday experience, his poetry opens capaciously towards heterogeneity and change. Guattari suggests that 'ecosophical logic' is reminiscent of what happens when an artist changes their work in response to 'the intrusion of some accidental detail, an event-incident that suddenly makes [their] initial project bifurcate, making it drift [dériver]' (1995, 35). This recalls Ward's image of the 'little glitches' that corrupt the cohesive ego (2013, 7), and the 'sites of derive' (2012, 53), which connect the poet's embodied experience to a dream world through improvisation, distraction and drift. Guattari calls

for 'new micropolitical and microsocial practices, new solidarities, a new gentleness', which contribute to 'ecological praxis', often via desire played out in the 'connective tissue of struggle' (1995, 34). In Ward's work, such practices offer plasticity (a kind of lysergic softening of forms) within daily life. His poetry (expansive, kaleidoscopic, social) generates ecodelic depictions of the movements of mind, inviting us to question materialised and idealised dimensions of reality.

Ward's work is anti-capitalist, though not as overtly political as other work in his sociohistorical milieu. Ward's radical contemporaries can be found, for example, in *Tripwire*, a journal of experimental poetics founded in 1998, and the Bay Area press Commune Editions, which emerged out of various struggles in the late 2000s and early 2010s (including uprisings against racist police violence, the Occupy movement and resistance to university tuition hikes) to explicitly combine poetry and militant politics. As the speaker muses in 'Typing "Wild Speech"', following the nested poem 'A Note on Utopia': 'my politics are in some sense wholly negative, they are anti-Capital & I can say with confidence what I would see destroyed', and as such 'I believe either too much or too little in my daydreams' (Ward 2012, 78). His speaker notes being 'scolded' for loving the idealistic slogan from the May 1968 student revolt in Paris, 'under the paving stones the beach', conceding that his attempts to speak 'thick[ly]' of 'that promising, necessary space' beyond revolution remain 'faint': under 'my negativity it's all vexatious shimmer' (78). Describing political paralysis and failure to speak clearly, the speaker worries that the 'beach' remains shrouded in frustration, like televisual static. The poetic context for such reflections is an extended meditation on his friend Geoff's suicide. The speaker tries to imagine a counterfactual possibility in the face of this loss and pain, 'some other way … than leaving so soon' (78). The note on utopia ends with 'Burns a deep hole / Inside me that is all', and later Ward wonders 'haven't I been, all this time, trying only to sound out the depths of that hole' (78). The risk of tuning in and dropping out is that one carves the hole even deeper, until it is 'all': a kind of sunk cost of psychic escape. Spending too long in the shimmer-zone of psychedelic musings does not automatically produce a blueprint for hope, or a better society.

The frustration of this underlying shimmer emerges from formlessness, a poetics that is too hopeful or hopeless and so stuck in perpetual oscillation, unable to resolve into coherent vision. I want to counterpoint this poethical suspension with a notion of shimmer which nudges infinity lyric back to its promise of transversal becoming. Deborah Bird Rose describes shimmer in her work on 'the Yolngu term *bir'yun* which translates as shimmering or brilliant' (2022, 141). In Rose's analysis of Australian Aboriginal culture, shimmer is connected to artistic production and ancestral ritual; it captures the viewer and brings them into knowledge, energy flow and intimacy with the 'vibrating world' (2022, 142). What Rose calls shimmer's 'dynamics of quiescent-to-brilliant pulses' manifests something and returns us to the dormant state that 'signals the potential to come forth' again (2022, 143). Crucially, shimmer is 'performative in the sense of being world-making': it offers 'a site of witness', which also involves others (Rose 2022, 143–144). Shimmer is participation and multiplicity rather than passivity and transcendence; it does not occlude with radiance so much as 'bring living beings into actions that ripple across daily life, continuing creation and at the same time renewing possibilities' (98). We might compare shimmer to Guattari's idea of 'heterogeneity': 'an expression of desire, of

a becoming that is always in the process of adapting, transforming and modifying itself in relation to its environment' (Genosko 2014, 105). To encounter shimmer in nature is to be called to life. While Ward's shimmer suggests obfuscation and suspension, it also refuses mastery and projection. We can learn from the speaker's 'frailty of mind' (Ward 2012, 78), their documented attempts at coming-to-thought, that psychedelic ecosophy is less about transcendence and more about environmental, cultural and social immanence.

Heterogeneity is crucial to this process. That shimmer is a between-state of brilliance/quiescence speaks to a key claim for ecodelic experience: that of boundary dissolve. As McKenna suggests, this is 'the ultimately subversive behaviour' of psychedelics, since they allow us to 'dissolve' the 'boundary-defining' rules of our cultural 'operating systems' (McKenna 1999). One such boundary lies between death and life. In 'Typing "Wild Speech"', the long poem that enfolds 'A Note on Utopia', Ward variously encounters the shimmer between these two realms in a prosimetric lyric, 'this mumbling, drunken soliloquy', whose length gestures at possible endlessness (2012, 84). Rosi Braidotti's 'vital notion of death' comes into play here, as she describes an 'experiment of de-familiarisation [which] consists in trying to think to infinity, against the horror of the void', where 'working across' 'the paralysing effects of suspicion and pain' 'is the key to ethics' – not to 'aim at mastery', but to transmute negativity into 'positive passions' (2013, 134). This passage, meditating on the death of a friend, shows Ward channelling poetry from the vacuum of grief and confronting his inability to conjure utopia amid political disillusion. Shimmer is a surface you move across or are pulled towards; you cannot grasp, fix or master it.

Shimmer is Ward's sounding out that surface, his psychedelic eloquence. I am thinking here with Doyle who points to the word's etymological sense as 'an outburst *of* language, a provocation *to* language', manifest in psychedelic encounter as transient, material change 'through language' (2011, 106). Doyle is here drawing on examples from Walter Benjamin's experiment with hashish, a substance which serves as 'an assassin of referentiality, inducing a butterfly effect in thought', as paratactic sentences 'less connect to each other through an explicit semantics than resonate together and summon coherence in the bardos between one statement and another' (107). As shimmer is the mutable surface through which Ward's poetry effects a thickening, psychedelic mediation, shimmer is also a reverberance and wavering between. A prose poem, 'untitled birth narrative' (which explicitly mentions 'being on LSD'), adopts Joe Brainard's accretive 'I remember' style of litany to recount peak social experiences (childbirth, childhood friendships) through a chain of quoted song lyrics. It culminates in a Carl Sagan-like snapshot of 'earth from outer space', moving through clipped images of 'iridescen[ce]' and presence ('[w]e were there. We were still there'), before arriving at a paragraph of domestic bliss (Ward 2013, 30–31). The neurological and semiotic plasticity implied here, with scalar reverberation played out through iridescence, is useful for thinking about the contradictory logics of environmental embeddedness and utopian elsewhere within daily life. Even the most domestic of moments contain the paradise residue of dream continuity, the 'still there' of an infinite state of being.

The potential for such scalar thinking in the ecosophical matrix is a key feature of infinity lyric. While we might encounter the sublime in these images, the effect of planetary scale is less transcendent and more about generating protocols for transversal

subjectivity on an ongoing, quotidian scale. Ward's reference to the 1990 'Pale Blue Dot' photograph of Earth seen from space reminds us of our cosmic fragility, but in this list poem, its sublimity is cut through with other remembered frequencies: '[t]he fog moving in', 'The sunset. It was nothing', a childhood field trip, 'listening to so much rock' (Ward 2013, 30–31). These are the shimmer states, brilliant and quiescent, that make up a transversal position.

Conclusion: infinity lyric

In claiming psychedelic experience for ecological thought, I want to avoid reproducing the tendency for what Stacy Alaimo calls 'navel-gazing, spiritual transcendence'; so I will now consider how, by contrast, the performance of a 'materially immersed subjectivity' (2016, 166) is achieved through infinity lyric. In 'Breathless', Ward relays a story from his partner's mother, a Baby Boomer, regarding the effects of existential catastrophe on one's mind and body: 'she expected to have died in a nuclear war, & her metabolism, emotional & otherwise, behaved a certain way' on 'the basis of, & surety in, that horrific expectation' (2012, 50–51). The younger generation (in its privileged class, relatively safe from immediate climate harm) have inherited an 'apocalyptic feeling' or 'dark ecology' which Ward describes as 'hypodermic infractions, accounting for the surplus of holes we exhibit', experiencing 'the end of the world [a]s a prickling life-blood, relentless & diffuse' (51).[8] Just as the 'tiny little error' may wholesale remake a story, the relentless 'infractions' described indicate the myriad human errors committed that harm our Earth. Ward's weird image of the 'surplus of holes' produces a trypophobic reaction (disgust at clusters of small holes) proportionate to an evolutionary response to signs of disease (our world is dying and we are dying with it). A surplus of holes makes a body porous and so Ward's poetry, I suggest, goes into as many of these pores as possible, seeking wormhole glimpses of other worlds in and beyond our own. There is no longer one apocalyptic void but rather tunnels and portals to elsewhere.

On the one hand, psychedelic ecosophy offers a galvanising and reorganising will towards anti-capitalist reinventions of social, mental and environmental relation; on the other, the distortion effect of so many affective holes might blur real conditions into redundant platitudes – '[t]he easiest thing is to repeat oneself forever, or to become righteous' (Ward 2012, 102). How do we stay in the shimmer, the dissolve, the motile and mutable? Of Ward's work, Thom Donovan asks: 'How can forms of story become life-forms themselves?', bearing an imperative to seek 'transformation in a kind of radical porosity, a giving over of the work to others, a desire for vulnerability and openness, for lack of control, for infusion and dissolution in discourse' (Donovan 2010). The 'radical porosity' Donovan mentions resembles Ward's 'self [a]s an aspirin' (Ward 2000), portable and widely used, a mild therapeutic absorbed by the bloodstream – a solvent speaker, inclined to disperse. I want to think of this porosity as characteristic of reading Ward's work, a porosity itself staged in the various 'readings' of other media and subjectivities that Ward performs. While psychedelia inflects the work thematically, it is also enacted through a poetics of attention inclined to sensuous, repeating excess.

As Nealon claims Ward's infinity 'as a kind of mediation among people' (2023, 6), might we extend this to more-than-human entities and environments? The ecopoethical wager of Ward's poetry is psychedelia in the thick domain of lyric. Ward writes of struggling, in such repetition, to 'find the lilt' (2012, 102). Throughout his work, we are presented with images of

wonder in unfolding potential, only for these images to later be worked through, contradicted – sometimes in discursive prose sections, sometimes after the slip of a line break. Chris Pusateri suggests that '[i]n the moment before the lyricism achieves flight, the lines unzip into enjambment', bringing us 'back to earth', so that 'Ward denies the lyric its usual conceits – its song and lilt – by lending them and suddenly rescinding them' (2007). These cycles of lending/rescinding, like Rose's brilliance/quiescence, are oscillations which gesture towards infinite world (un)making, without fixed ego or mastery. Immanence over transcendence.

Through ecodelic experience, we are gifted ecosophical vision quests for imagining infinite worlds, their hopefulness and failure knotted together. In his 'Notes' to 'Things the Baby Likes', Ward describes the vision quest as: 'a noetic honey pot left out in an evanescing textural paradise embodied by somatic, material fact & vice versa, where the social is at all points enlivened & is this a precious way of saying "the world"?' (Ward 2013, 72). The reward, paradise, is crystallising and fading, shimmering in the lysergic feeling through which everything is 'textural' (of surface or substance, of combinatory elements in text). For there to be world as such, there must be an ecosophy of mind/society/environment, 'at all points enlivened' with transversal potential, expressed in language. For Nealon, Ward's project is poethically inclined 'to think personless infinity *through persons*' in a 'lysergic wildness' premised on address and curious pursuit (2023, 118). With Alaimo, I echo caution around overstating ecodelic dissolve's usefulness for direct, concrete issues of 'social justice and climate justice', and agree that attending to what she calls 'your shell on acid', dissolving in acidified waters (or here, psychedelic substances), is instead a reminder of our mortal vulnerability, as exposed creatures inseparable from our environment (2016, 166). Rendering his poetry transparent and faint, while also calling us back via daring rhetorical brilliance, Ward admits a rainbow-like ephemerality whose lack of substance or resolution invites the reader's active involvement in the generation of meaning. The 'I' is a soluble avatar for aesthetic, ethical and environmental discovery. Infinity lyric is a different form of excess than the hyperbolic claims made for psychedelic value in other spheres of culture: the very premise of its ongoingness is based on the ability to reconfigure, to participate, to move fluidly between outside and in.

Ward's work teaches us to do the work of a 'scale shifting that is intrepidly – even psychedelically – empathic, rather than safely ensconced' (Alaimo 2016, 168). The psychedelia of these poems is woven not in transcendence so much as everyday encounter, where the poet is an ever-moving, vulnerable conduit of lines, relations, associations, places: '[f]riendship, feeling, the mortal & political fact interweave. That's from where, & through which, I sing & talk, & again, from where & through which I'm sung & spoken' (Ward 2010). Excessive, vexatious and immersive, Ward's poetry is less interested in the utilitarian value of psychedelics, dramatising instead how we might access environmental modes of thought that require expansions of time, feeling and relation across traversal realities. It's all in the trip.

Notes

1. I will use Spirograph to denote the trademarked toy, and spirograph (lowercase) to refer to the symbolic figure derived from it.
2. For example, Jason W. Moore's 'the Capitalocene' (2016).

3. Transversality is a complex term that Guattari intended for use in institutional, psychotherapeutic contexts. A transversal line is one which lays across a system of lines: in Guattari's ecosophy, interventions in one milieu (mental/social/environmental) must draw across the others, heterogeneously, to forge new assemblages of subjectivity. The transversal is a nomadic, heterogenous subjectivity, which collapses sterile and fixed individual-versus-social distinctions; in group contexts, transversality defies hierarchy and fixity of social arrangements, often through the productive force of desire. See Guattari, Bains, and Pefanis (1995), Tinnell (2012), Genosko (2014).
4. While a more developed queer reading is beyond the scope of this article, recent work on queer reading and psychedelic perception can be found in Li (2021).
5. For more on how Ward articulates material issues of aesthetic surface via music as an experiential '*world-dissolving agent*', see Clune (2013).
6. We might contrast these community aspects of Web 2.0 with the isolated conversations users now have with Generative-AI chatbots. See for example a recent case of a teenager who died of an overdose 'after being coached by ChatGPT on how to take drugs' (Stephens 2026).
7. In *Limitless*, a struggling writer uses an experimental drug to unlock his full brain potential and makes a fortune by 'un-riddl[ing] the patterning / hidden in the ceaseless / flow of capital' (Ward 2013, 34–35).
8. We can link Ward's use of 'dark ecology' to Timothy Morton's, which describes a 'dark-depressing' form of 'ecological awareness' whereby humans recognise their entanglement with nonhuman entities via a 'strange loop' of coexistence – marked not by harmony but by ontological gaps, through the weird, uncanny and ironic (Morton 2016, 5, 7).

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