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SOVIET GHOSTS IN THE RUSSIAN HYDROCARBON CULTURE

Faculty of Management and Business
Master's Thesis
November 2021

ABSTRACT

Victor Théorêt: Soviet Ghosts in the Russian Hydrocarbon Culture
Master's Thesis
Tampere University
Leadership for Change: European & Global Politics
November 2021

This inquiry addresses the actualisation of the Russian hydrocarbon culture. The research aim is to investigate the spectral presence of the Soviet past in that hydrocarbon culture. Concepts of *haunting* and *spectres* refer primarily to the philosophical work of Jacques Derrida. The two research questions are: How does the Soviet past haunt the hydrocarbon culture in Russia? How does this haunting presence affect the virtuality of a decarbonised energy future? In this inquiry, the “method” is described as a deconstructive hauntology. An operationalisation strategy is carved out from two Derridean concepts: *hauntology* and *deconstruction*. The research materials come from two sources: the primary materials are five biographical profiles of workers on the website of Russia's biggest gas producer, Gazprom; secondary literature consists of prior research used to identify the spectres.

This hauntological research unveils the haunting of the Soviet past in the selected publications of Gazprom. The study found that the haunting of Soviet work culture invokes the ghosts of the New Soviet Man and the Stakhanovite movement. More, the spectres of the Soviet patriarchy and the Soviet empire haunt as well the Gazprom content. Among the conclusions, engaging with the Soviet spectres is recommended to settle and re-narrate the past. Thus, an energy narrative for a decarbonised future can be constructed freed from Soviet ghosts.

Keywords: Post-Soviet Russia, hauntology, hydrocarbon culture, fossil fuels, spectres, spectralities

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview of the Thesis

Fossil fuels occupy a fundamental role in our modern societies. It powers our modes of transport, creates the fibres of our clothes, offers versatile materials; the presence of fossil fuels cannot be circumscribed. This study is part of an endeavour to research the influence of this energy source on the articulation of social reality. More specifically, the national case of Russia will be taken for analysis.

The Russian energy landscape can be expressed through an amalgam of its rich territorial features and its historical legacy. In 2006, the former Russian minister of industry Viktor Khristenko penned an article in the Financial Times arguing for the end of “Soviet-era arrangements” with neighbouring states concerning energy prices. Mysteriously, Khristenko chose to express this policy shift by promoting the disappearance of “Soviet ghosts” (Khristenko, 2006). At first glance, this odd mention of the Soviet spectre in current energy relations seems anecdotal, but it crystalizes the unescapable haunting of the Soviet experience.

In the global context of decarbonisation, which consists of significantly reducing the production and consumption of fossil fuels, the contemporary energy politics in Russia are guided by the interests of the hydrocarbon industry. The intertwining of the Putin regime with the fossil energy industries is a powerful force holding back this transition. An energy transition is hindered through the mechanisms of a so-called *hydrocarbon culture*. While plural concepts address a similar idea among these scholars, the hydrocarbon culture is chosen to be the conceptual ground for this research. It is first justified by the epistemological compatibility of the concept with a post-structuralist approach. Secondly, as opposed to the concept of petroculture, a hydrocarbon culture encompasses a broader range of energy sources than just oil, which reflects the problematic reality of gas and oil.

The present inquiry will address both the phenomena of the haunting of the Soviet past and the hydrocarbon culture. More precisely, the research will investigate this haunting presence in the Russian hydrocarbon culture.

Hauntology is the study of spectres and spectrality, but also an analytical approach to pursue that same study (Lorek-Jezińska & Więckowska, 2017a). It primarily originated

from the philosophical work of Jacques Derrida that he carried in his book *Specters of Marx* (2006). The hauntological approach calls to reconsider the fundamental constituent of ontology which that is presence and proposes absence as an inquiry site. The term “deconstructive hauntology” will be used throughout this inquiry to distinguish “hauntology” as an analytical approach.

This inquiry is then situated at the intersection of plural research fields such cultural studies, International Relations, Russian studies, energy studies, and spectrality studies.

The thesis is structured in five chapters, each consisting of multiple sections. In the current chapter, the upcoming section sets the research context by drawing the contours of the Russian energy landscape and will set the stage of the hydrocarbon culture. Following, a literature review of relevant prior research will pinpoint this inquiry, leading to the research gap. The fourth section presents then the aims and the research questions that will guide this inquiry.

In chapter 2, the presentation of the methodology unfolds the ideas and aspirations behind the chosen research design, a deconstructive hauntology. In the first section, a genesis of the hauntological field is made to situate the philosophical underpinnings of such “method”. The second section describes the research materials for the analysis, which are Gazprom articles from their webpage “Our people”. Ensues then a proposed strategy to operationalise the deconstructive hauntology. The chapter is concluded with the research limitations and ethical considerations that steer this thesis.

In chapter 3, the analysis takes the form of the deconstruction of five Gazprom articles. Following the deconstructive strategy, a “first” and “second” reading of each article aims to uncover the semiotic constructions in Gazprom content.

In chapter 4, an hauntological analysis is applied to the deconstructed articles. To reveal the spectral presence, the findings of the previous chapter are joined to secondary materials.

In the final chapter, the spectral presence unveiled by the deconstructive hauntology is interpreted to answer the research questions. Final words come to suggest research prospects for continuing the theoretical discussion.

1.2. Background of the Russian Hydrocarbon Culture

Russia is a particular case when it comes to energy. The Russian Federation has the largest territory in the world, which comes with advantages and disadvantages. While it possesses enormous potential in minerals, biomass, hydropower, solar power, carbon storage and hydrocarbons, Russia is tightly locked into a heavily hydrocarbon-based energy system. Most of contemporary hydrocarbon projects in Russia are in remote areas of Siberia and the Far East, where the biggest oil and gas reserves are (Gazprom, 2021a). Also, the Russian Federation is continually claiming the world's largest reserves of natural gas, and second for coal (Braun & Glidden, 2014, p. 57). Spanning from Europe to the Pacific Coast, the territorial reality of Russia plays a defining role in developing the energy sector, such the transportation and distribution infrastructures. While the physical settings of the country play considerably in the energy landscape, the way that Russia had developed their energy sector takes origin in the 20th century.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian political elite sought to mark a clear fracture with the Soviet past (Malinova, 2018, p. 90). This desire covered all aspects of the state, from its national identity to its economic system. For decades, the Soviet regime had invested monumental efforts into building a one-dimensional social reality, in which the official socialist culture and identity were the only ones allowed. Every detail of life was thus enshrined into a planned future. An abrupt rupture was thus made with the Soviet experience through neoliberal reforms and an urgent reinvention of the state on the agenda. The reorganisation of social life in the 1990s was a strenuous process marked by neoliberalism's shock doctrine, attempting to integrate the nascent state in the global market economy (Collier, 2011, p. 136). Just as every former Soviet republic, Russia faced the delicate but difficult task to interpret its collective past. In response to the ideological nature of the Soviet regime, the successor state had to create a new national identity that would not take root in same grounds. Conjugating the Soviet legacy continued throughout the new millennium and was reasserted under the Putin government. Interestingly, historical references to the Soviet past have been encompassed in the contemporary national narrative, such as the Red Banner of Victory and the melody of Soviet anthem (Malinova, 2018, pp. 92-94). Undoubtedly, Soviet symbols have been "resurrected" in the making of a new national identity. An important shift in Russian politics occurred in 2012 with a conservative political project. This conservative "turn"

was discursively promoting a contrastive national identity with values diametrically opposed to the Western ones (Romashko, 2018, pp. 103–104).

In parallel, the period of nation-building in the 1990s never resulted in a clear consensus over ownership forms that the Soviet industries should take (Gustafson, 2012, p. 483). The nascent Russian society then witnessed the privatising effects of the shock therapy, redistributing the resources of the Soviet Union in new hands. Only later, the renationalization and rehabilitation of the fossil fuel industry on the global market were orchestrated in the early presidential years of Vladimir Putin (Moser, 2018, p. 107). Since the 2000s, his political leadership and the global oil prices have increased the importance of the national hydrocarbon companies. Nowadays, the fossil fuels production sector in Russia is characterized by majority state-ownership of major companies, exemplified by Gazprom and Rosneft (Moser, 2018, p. 108). These two energy producers, respectively gas and oil, can be qualified as parastatal companies. This means that while being commercial companies, the Russian state has great control over the national energy output. Since the renationalisation of gas, Gazprom has risen as one of the world's top gas producers. To be mentioned as well, there are independent Russian gas producers such Lukoil and Novatek that are nonetheless significant energy actors.

The rehabilitation of the hydrocarbon industry translated into a substantial increase of revenues for the Russian state. With a gas and oil elite loyal to the Kremlin (Rutland, 2015, p. 73), the Putin regime instituted a powerful catalyst for their political economy at home and abroad. However, the mutual rise of the hydrocarbon industry and the state engendered a dependency between the two. Considering that nowadays the export of gas and oil accounts for more than a third of the national budget, Russia is dependant to hydrocarbons (Simola & Solanko, 2017, as cited in Tynkkynen, 2019, p. 8). The line between the hydrocarbon industry and the government can be blurry. In 2012, a Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Energy Committee declared: “what is good for Gazprom is good for the state, and everything that is good for the state is good for ‘Gazprom’.” (Gazprom, 2012a). Like other petrostates, the dependence of the Russian state on hydrocarbons is difficult to conjugate. This relationship also metamorphosed the influence of the gas and oil industry beyond their conventional economic purposes.

During Soviet days, the sector of fossil fuels was not acknowledged as a primary industry (Rutland, 2015, p. 79). As the USSR was a centrally planned economy and not market-based as in the capitalist countries, the socialist oil exploitation, although lucrative

through oil exports, did not lead to the sudden foundation of boom towns and an oil elite as seen in other regions of the world. This is mainly caused to the centralised structure of the regime, which did not return these profits in local investments (Rogers, 2012, p. 287). Since the end of the Soviet experience, the hydrocarbon industry faced abrupt metamorphoses to adapt to the new economic paradigm. This naturally involved the long history of the Soviet gas industry: for instance, Gazprom is the institutional successor of the Ministry of Gas, inheriting most of the Soviet industrial installations (Tynkkynen, 2019, p. 13). Whether it is the Soviet-era power plants or the tentacular network of pipelines running across the country, the contemporary material energy reality in Russia carries a heavy legacy from the Soviet Union. The contemporary organisation of the Russian energy sector can thus be described in terms of a Soviet heritage or as institutional memory. The influence of the Soviet past is also perceptible on export markets. Political implications of the Russian energy configuration on its foreign relations have been widely discussed, especially concerning the European clientele and former Soviet republics (Henderson & Mitrova, 2020, p. 95).

Russia is undoubtedly a key player in the contemporary global energy market. Producing 10% and consuming 5% of the energy in the world, the Russian Federation stands third in global energy production and consumption. The country steadily ranks at the top of fossil fuels exports, dominating particularly the gas sector. Industrially harnessing the plentifulness of energy resources made Russia a leader in energy exports, selling abroad more than half of its primary energy produced. (Makarov et al., 2019, p. 132) Regarding its domestic use, 68% of the Russian electricity is produced from fossil fuels (Braun & Glidden, 2014, p. 57). While Russian oil is mostly exported, natural gas plays a central role in domestic energy consumption. In terms of renewables, the share of solar and wind power in the Russian energy mix is however marginal, with a projected increase of 1% by 2035 (Henderson & Mitrova, 2020, p. 95). The current energy configuration for domestic and foreign uses reflects the dominance of hydrocarbons in Russia.

However, the Russian carbon lock-in is at crossroads. Over the last decade, the international community has been engaged in cooperative efforts to mitigate the consequences of climate change, committed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through a common climate agenda. One avenue taken to initiate structural changes is the decarbonisation of the global energy market. Multiple climate targets have been set in the

last decade to guide decarbonisation policies, exemplified by the European Green Deal and the Paris Climate Agreement. In its special report “Net Zero by 2050”, the International Energy Agency (IEA) recently called for an end to invest in new fossil fuel supply projects (IEA, 2021, p. 21). The global community is thus engaged in an energy transition, a decarbonised vision of the future where fossil fuels remain in the ground. This call to transition is addressed without exception to Russia. Europe, its biggest client for gas, aims for carbon neutrality by 2050. Consequently, the decarbonisation agenda will potentially have “significant consequences” for fossil fuels producers such as Gazprom and decrease export rents for the Russian state (Henderson & Mitrova, 2020, p. 111).

Although Russia shares oil production world chart with other petroleum producers, its relation to hydrocarbons is not manifested similarly. As the industrial interests of gas and oil companies consist of increasing their growth and maintaining the industry’s perennity, it is quite expected that these companies seek to promote agendas that meet their interests. What differs in the context of Russia is the influential presence of this industry in state affairs. More, it is the intrusion in the fields of culture and national identity.

This thesis will profusely use the term “hydrocarbons”. According to the online encyclopaedia Britannica, hydrocarbons are “the principal constituents of petroleum and natural gas. They serve as fuels and lubricants as well as raw materials for the production of plastics, fibres, rubbers, solvents, explosives, and industrial chemicals.” (Carey, n.d.). As the difference between hydrocarbons and fossil fuels is not technically relevant here, the terms will be used interchangeably. Even though coal is a fossil fuel and is considerably present in the Russian energy mix, it is not referred to as one in this study except contrary mention. Therefore, hydrocarbons and fossil fuels will refer to natural gas and oil, the latter also called petroleum below. While gas and oil are two distinct industries, this research will use on some occasions the unifying concept “oil and gas industry”. Given their significance in the political economy of the Russian state, these two industries are combined to be a conceptual synonym of hydrocarbon industry. In addition to clarifications, national identity is understood as a “subjective sense of belonging to a collective with a shared culture and history” (Rutland, 2015, p. 69). Concerning the understanding of “Russian culture” in this research, it is a floating concept that various groups and entities – here the Russian state – appropriate and use for their purposes.

1.3. Energy and Russia: A Literature Review

This section compiles previous research that provide a theoretical foundation to build on the present inquiry. Simultaneously, presenting these related works allows to ground this research in prior literature.

This thesis joins the rich field of Russian studies, characterised by decades of varied inputs. Since the importance of hydrocarbons in Russia emerged about two decades ago, multiple observers have theorised diverse phenomena related to fossil fuels. To grasp how various empirical approaches have investigated the studied phenomenon, a journey through numerous inquiries will be conducted. The upcoming pages will therefore introduce the contributions of energy studies in social, historical, and semiotic fields, and of cultural studies in the post-Soviet context.

1.3.1. Energy and Social Reality

The concept of hydrocarbon culture is intrinsically bonded to the literature on energy. Occasionally merging, the social and cultural fields of energy studies have been actively analysing the role of energy in modern societies.

To visualise the material landscape of fossil fuels, one can think of the influence of combustion engines and the automobile industry on city design, the heating system at home, or simply the ubiquity of plastic in everyday life. The hegemony of hydrocarbons has material implications, but also non-material. These implications are therefore not always visible to the human eye. Through the banalities and necessities of everyday life, energy shapes our existence. While accessing hydrocarbons have revolutionised ways of doing, it also changed ways of being.

In his book *Carbon Nation* (2014), the historian Bob Johnson exposed the deployment of top-down narratives by major players of the American oil industry that led to “what today we would call a culture war to rescript the meaning of oil in national life to emphasise its benefits and to downplay its ill effects.” (2014, p. 146). This embodies the definition of what is called a petroculture. Johnson then documented the American petroculture by reviewing fictional and non-fictional works to assess deep and complex relation of the United States with fossil fuels. He found that the oil industry was actively

engaged on two fronts: suppressing the environmental and social disturbances to the industrial development and creating a discourse where the industry signifies opportunity, wealth, and freedom (Johnson, 2014, p. 147). For Johnson, the denialist posture of petroculture led some Americans to view a transition as traumatic (2014, p. 78).

The cultural theorist Imre Szeman has explored the role of oil in the development of modernity and capitalism, questioning how it shaped contemporary societies in relation to these two (2013). He looked at diverse “energy epistemologies” that analysed oil to find more appropriate politics for contemporary petrocultures (2013). As oil penetrates every aspect of our lives, we must pursue its path and study its articulations and shapes. “The energy that makes modernity possible has, until recently, never been named, and its conceptual, as well as social and historical, significance never explained.” (Szeman, 2013, p. 162). Not only energy powers our modernity, but it also shapes it too. For Szeman, scholars should have questioned much earlier the forces and practices that enlivens the politics and economics of energy, as only now we question the influence of energy on social and cultural life (Szeman, 2017, p. 277).

The topic of energy materiality has been a rich research terrain. This is the object of a multidisciplinary review essay from eminent energy scholars, who minutely outlined some of the endless ramifications of energy materiality (Balmaceda et al., 2019). To grasp the intertwinement of energy and human societies, the authors echoes Szeman’s call to find new theoretical and methodological approaches. They stress that the materiality of energy offers an opportunity to “states, corporations, and other powerful entities to insert themselves into the daily lives of citizens and consumers, as well as an arena in which alternate energy futures might be imagined.” (Balmaceda et al., 2019, p. 10). Thus, this deep relation between energy actors and the social reality is a topical subject that deserve further attention.

While this thesis swims among the material aspects of energy, it will focus on the non-material ones. Nonetheless, the present inquiry acknowledges that energy materialities have social and political implications in the articulation of the hydrocarbon culture in Russia.

1.3.2. Becoming an Energy Superpower

In the last century, the energy landscape in Russia has varied – exception to the nuclear sector – and had since attracted scholars. Although oil and gas constituted the national

energy mix for the entirety of that period, their presence was not producing the same socio-political role that is observable nowadays. Veli-Pekka Tynkkynen (2019) coined the concept of *hydrocarbon culture* to analyse that role. He describes this culture as the fossil fuel industry's project to build a "new kind of sense of belonging to place and community by using the materiality of hydrocarbons as the basis for this cultural and political construction" (2019, p. 21). Tynkkynen's research joins a rich repertoire of scholars who studied the rise of fossil fuels in Russia.

The history of Russian energy informs on the origin of the current energy landscape. The work of the historian Paul Josephson is a valuable input to this thesis. He has been contributing to the historical account of the Soviet industrial development through environmental and technological lenses. For instance, in his book *Would Trotsky Wear a Bluetooth?: Technological Utopianism under Socialism, 1917–1989* (2010), Josephson probed the environmental consequences of the use of technology in Stalin's Plan for the Transformation of Nature, which consisted in harnessing the Soviet territory to modernise rapidly the country. Josephson relates the role of Soviet principles that forged the dominant narrative concerning the Russian environment.

Along Josephson, Nat Moser had researched the Soviet energy sector from another historical perspective. In his book *Oil and the economy of Russia: from the late-Tsarist to the post-Soviet period* (2018), Moser provides a meticulous record of the industrial development of Russian oil over one century. The Soviet oil industry was characterised with technological backwardness and was far behind the American competition (Moser, 2018, pp. 74–78). This work supports the idea that the Soviet oil did not lead to same effects on society that is apparent these days. Such historical literary contributions on Soviet and Russian energy allow to comprehend the origin of the contemporary hydrocarbon culture.

Continuing with literature on Russian energy, attention have been gravitating around the concept of petrostate, and the narratives of resource curse and energy superpower. First, a petrostate can be defined as a polity that is "subordinated and restructured according to the needs of either the Big Oil multinationals or the global political economy of oil or both." (Mookerjea, 2017, p. 331). The structural role of hydrocarbons in Putin's regime makes the country a petrostate, a claim supported by many observers (Rutland, 2015; Tynkkynen, 2019).

Then, the analysis of the Russian energy system through the theory of resource curse have been widely occupied the energy literature. It can be described as a syndrome of a state that relies entirely on one plentiful – nevertheless limited – natural resource that distorts its economic and industrial development (Bouzarovski & Bassin, 2011, p. 790). Having explicit symptoms of the resource curse, the Russian situation has been examined by numerous commentators. The approach of resource curse starts “from the assumption that natural resources, most prominently oil, provide a state with huge windfall profits that then have a variety of negative consequences on the domestic political system” (Balmaceda et al., 2019, p. 3). With no incentives to change, the narrative of resource curse explains the inertia of some states, especially in diversifying their energy system and their economic policy. Enchaining the future of a country, the resource curse can therefore weaken “state institutions, and puts brakes on the introduction of democratic practices.” (Tynkkynen, 2007, p. 862). This narrative is then strengthened with the discovery of new energy reserves. In the case of Russia, new oil deposits and gas fields manifest this curse.

While this analysis entails a poisonous effect to Russia’s natural riches, other observers have noted a different reading of the energy situation. Indeed, the narrative of energy superpower is well present in discussions on Russian energy. It implies that the Russian state instrumentalises the political and economic power of energy to retrieve the former Soviet *grandeur* abroad. For Stefan Bouzarovski and Mark Bassin, the superpower narrative has been resurrected in official discourses by coupling the national identity with the fossil energy industries (2011, p. 783). The popular conception of Russia as a Great Power was thus fitting in the simultaneous projects of modernisation and identity-building. However, this narrative is not exclusive to hydrocarbons. Indeed, it has the potential to enable an energy transition towards renewables: becoming an Ecological Great Power (Tynkkynen, 2019, p. 127). As described, an energy source can have more than an economic influence on a political form; it can influence its identity.

1.3.3. National Identity, Culture and Hydrocarbons

What differentiates Russian hydrocarbon industry from other national contexts is the way it is intertwined with its polity. Unlike other energy-dependent states that accept and embrace their economic configuration (Rutland, 2015, p. 67), Russia has a complex relationship with fossil fuels.

In terms of public perception, bonding the national identity with fossil fuel is a risky procedure. There is a sentiment among Russians that the oil sector contributes to social inequality and the enrichment of oligarchs (Rutland, 2015, p. 80) who are seen in certain regions to steal “their oil” (Rogers, 2012, p. 285). The ruling political elites do not incorporate all the elite groups in Russia. Thus, although the fossil fuel elite is a powerful group with close ties to the Kremlin, the political regime can have divergent positions with the hydrocarbon industry. The researcher Olga Malinova insists that the political elites have a limited range of historical symbols for building a national identity (2018). While the selection of symbols from a collective past is determined by their political interests, the acceptance of this official identity depends on the “already existing repertoire of notions, narratives, images, and symbols” (Malinova, 2018, p. 88). Thus, post-Soviet Russia witnessed the rehabilitation of Soviet symbols. With a multitude of empty historical signifiers, the national narrative is fragmented, often contradictory and even domestically controversial (Malinova, 2018; Likhacheva et al., 2015). To some extent, other powerful actors can influence or contest the symbolic politics. Some suggest that hydrocarbon giants in Russia have somehow integrated this process of identity-building.

The hydrocarbon culture in Russia is a relatively recent phenomenon, emerging from the oil boom in the early 2000s. Through the unleashing of a modernising project based on fossil fuels, the Putin regime has simultaneously allowed to the deployment of a hydrocarbon culture. Tynkkynen supports this idea in his book *The Energy of Russia: Hydrocarbon culture and Climate Change* (2019). Through a distinct geographical perspective, he studies the spatialities and materialities of the political power of energy. For Tynkkynen, the wealth and power emanating from fossil energy are used to construct a hydrocarbon culture in Russia which in return intensifies the country’s dependency on oil and gas (2019, p. 22). Elasticising the concept of petroculture to include natural gas, Tynkkynen argues that the fossil energy industries seek to transform opposition to hydrocarbon projects to preserve and reinforce the power structures that emerged from the state dependency on gas and oil revenues (2019, p. 24). By defending the current energy status quo, the fossil fuel industry plays an important role in shaping Russia’s energy future.

Regarding the national identity and energy in Russia, additional scholars have contributed to understand the relation between these two. First, Peter Rutland draws in his article “Petronation? Oil, Gas, and National Identity in Russia” (2015) the genesis of

the dominant national narrative in Russia. The semiotics around the hydrocarbon industries are then in tension between the capitalist interests of these fossil fuel companies and the Soviet principles of industrialisation, both powerful forces in the post-Soviet national identity (Rutland, 2015, p. 67).

This is reinforced by the work of Douglas Rogers, an anthropologist who notably conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the Perm region. Escaping the scholarship on Moscow and the Kremlin, Rogers focused on a regional unit of analysis to understand how Russians “encounter the new role of natural resource wealth in their lives.” (Rogers, 2015, p. 90). In Rogers (2012), he focuses on the giant producers Gazprom and Lukoil in the Perm region to showcase corporate initiatives that aim to convert positively criticism. This article displays the deployment of a hydrocarbon culture. Here, Russian gas and oil companies consolidate their power in districts where the subsidiary has industrial activities by associating material qualities of their natural resource with local communities. This idea can be summarised this way: the potential of cultural depth depends on the depth of oil deposits it sits on (Rogers, 2012, p. 286). The metaphorical depth of traditional culture is therefore bonded with the regional oil potential. Same semiotic process occurred with gas according to Rogers (2012).

Continuing in the same vein, Rogers (2015) highlighted this change in regional development of cultural projects in the 2000s. In the Perm region, rising oil potential transformed the role of the private oil company Lukoil in what was a traditional space of state power: celebration of culture (Rogers, 2015, p. 91). Lukoil has been actively engaged in the social and cultural spheres of this region, funding projects that emit a positive image of their regional presence. These projects are generally in the public space and can vary from schools and hospitals to sports and cultural centres (Rogers, 2014, p. 444). The presence of fossil fuels companies in culture has been documented, for instance on TV commercials (Johnson, 2014, p. 167), in sports (Tynkkynen, 2019, p. 49) and museums (Plets, 2016). Rogers remarks however that this phenomenon of corporate funding of social and cultural projects is not unique to Russia: it associates this to the broader global capitalist system where several big oil companies behave in a very similar way around the world. For Rogers, this regional strategy to invest in such projects can be understood by the corporate exercise of corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Rogers, 2015, p. 80). This structuring power of hydrocarbons and its ramifications on the organisation of social life is thus relevant for the present research and well covered by prior research.

The contemporary energy landscape in Russia appears as a stagnant modernising process. Although Russia has all the material resources to become a world leader in renewable energy, it is not a significant player in renewables, electric vehicles, battery research, smart grids nor carbon sequestration (Tynkkynen, 2019, p. 122; Gustafson, 2012, p. 487). The intertwining of Russia's future with hydrocarbons endangers the ability to imagine an alternative energy path (Tynkkynen, 2019, p. 8).

1.3.4. The Soviet Past in post-Soviet Russia

The contemporary hydrocarbon culture in Russia was born at a particular moment of history. It emerged logically in the age of fossil fuels but more interestingly, in the so-called *post-Soviet* Russia. This creates an assumption that a certain temporal determinism played in the birth of that culture. The effects of the floating concept *post-Soviet* has been explored in scholarship on Russia.

Two researchers in particular stand out in the confection of the present inquiry. The first scholar whose contribution to this subject is highly valuable here is Alexander Etkind. Alternating between history and cultural studies, his research involves the haunting of the past in Post-Soviet Russia. In one of Etkind's publications (2014), he visits the unachieved mourning of the past through post-Soviet literature. He attributes the perpetual melancholic post-Soviet condition to the unprocessed memory of the catastrophic Soviet past. For him, there is an incapacity to mourn a loss associated to the Soviet regime. An incomplete mourning integrates the loss into the subject and persist within it (Etkind, 2014, pp. 155–156). The nostalgia for a lost object such the Soviet greatness shows the unsuccessful mourning of the Soviet past, which perpetuates a melancholic condition (Etkind, 2014, p. 155).

In his book *Specters of Marx* (2006), Derrida crafted the analytical approach of *hauntology* to scrutinise the haunting of the past. As this research concerns the application of hauntology, it is further discussed in the following chapter. Nevertheless, the growing literature on spectres and haunting has benefited the understanding of the influential concept of "hauntology". Thanks to Edyta Lorek-Jezińska and Katarzyna Więckowska, the conceptual possibilities of the "haunting" figures are neatly explained while concrete examples of hauntological inquiries are provided to promote spectrality studies (2017a). Also, Maria Del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren compile in their work *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory* (2013) the contributions of plural researchers who operationalised variants of hauntology. Among very few

scholars, Etkind has applied hauntology to the Russian case. Etkind introduces the concept of *ghostware* to analyse Russian cultural content (2013). He defines it as a form of cultural memory that can take the shape of “ghosts, spirits, vampires, dolls, and other simulacra that carry the memory of the dead” (Etkind, 2013, p. 211). More specifically, ghosts for him are iconic, resemble the signified and are uncanny (p. 212). Additionally, in relation to mourning the past, hauntology seems to be a relevant perspective to analyse the failure of promised progress. This research offers great guidance on the application of hauntology, especially in the same national context.

Ilya Kalinin is another researcher whose distinguishable contribution explored post-Soviet Russia from the perspective of the politics of history. He highlights the ways the conservative turn in Russia has transformed the historical past in a resource to exploit: “the particular and characteristic interest of the contemporary Russian political elites in the historical and cultural past is based on the same mechanisms as their interest in oil and gas.” (2015, p. 121). He argues that the oil and gas industries in Russia have been encompassed in a national idea in which it stands as a natural wealthy heritage (Kalinin, 2015, p. 121). Consequently, oil can be seen as more than an energy source: it reaches a mythical dimension, where promises of the past – the potential wealth from extraction – are brought in the present for possible concretisation (Kalinin, 2015, p. 122). The hydrocarbon culture appeared during the period of identity-building of Russia, where time was out of joint, and the collective conjugation of the past was recoded.

According to Kalinin, the persistence of the Soviet past in Russian culture and “common consciousness” cannot be attributed solely “to traumatic effects having to do with the ongoing ‘reliving’ of this past, nor with the tension between various modes of perception and description of that past.” (2011, p. 156). He then describes a phenomenon in Russia, where nostalgia for the Soviet past has been employed for the construction of Russian patriotism. However, he argues that this recoded Soviet past refers to a vague blend of cultural legacy (Kalinin, 2011, p. 156). Sanitised from any ideological proposition and its historical specificity, the *soviet-free Soviet* – as Kalinin calls it – is the prevailing nostalgic component in the Russian statehood and culture (Kalinin, 2011, p. 158). Like Etkind’s observation on melancholy, nostalgia limits socio-political transformations in the country. Not only the Russian hydrocarbon culture is affected by this nostalgia, but it also seems that the fossil fuels are interlaced in the mechanisms of collective memory.

As the inquiry will establish, the ways the Russian hydrocarbon culture is articulated – here through corporate content – involves a haunting presence. This lends weight to the idea that the spectral effect in the Russian hydrocarbon culture should be investigated.

1.4. Research Aims and Guiding Questions

The broad aim of the research is to study the hydrocarbon culture in Russia. Hereafter, this culture is understood as the cultural production that normalise and secure the current energy landscape locked in fossil fuels. Powered primarily by the industry, the Russian hydrocarbon culture foregrounds gas and oil in the Russian culture and national identity.

More precisely, the purpose of this inquiry is to scrutinise the revival of the past in this hydrocarbon culture, searching for uncanny discontinuities and ambiguities. It seeks to establish that the Russian hydrocarbon culture does not escape a temporal disjunction with the Soviet past, which result in spectral effects in the present. This position originates from the observation that the past sporadically resurges in many facets of post-Soviet Russia, a phenomenon investigated by multiple commentators (Malinova, 2018; Bouzarovski & Bassin, 2011; Etkind, 2013). This is then an occasion, on the one hand, to join the growing hauntology field in research. The manifestations in the present of *things* that are considered “dead” are a fascinating phenomenon for analysis: although they are uncanny, they are not part of privileged scholarship. On the other hand, this will contribute to the interdisciplinary discussion on the energy transition in Russia, notably concerning Russia’s ability to conceive energy utopias freed from its hydrocarbon dependency. While actuality is what is realised, which is what is active in the real, virtuality has *not yet* come to realisation. As the virtual is in tension with the actual, it can be presence (Lawlor, 2000, p. 64). Virtuality remains a space where the actual can be challenged. In this thesis, it is argued that the hydrocarbon culture interferes with the virtuality of an alternative energy future.

At the analysis level, the objective is to locate, identify, and interrogate the various spectres that haunt the hydrocarbon culture. Explained more meticulously in the subsequent section, the “spectre” refers to an analytical figure that escapes binary categorisation, situated rather between them. Analysing the corporate content of Russia’s most important gas producer, Gazprom, yields a multitude of research avenues. As

mentioned earlier, Gazprom is an active force in the making of the Russian hydrocarbon culture and the chosen content is understood as an actualisation of this culture. Given its institutional and political proximity with the Russian state, the gas company qualifies as a fertile case. This supports the objective here to reveal spectres in the publications of Gazprom.

The inquiry does not aim to establish that the resurrection of the past in the hydrocarbon culture is sought or voluntary. In other words, it does not argue that Gazprom intentionally structures their industrial development in accordance with Soviet principles, nor that the company is guided by some nostalgic sentiments. It is rather the application of an hauntology on the constructed meanings in Gazprom publications.

Although the political constituency of the Soviet Union covered now numerous independent states, the thesis will only address the Russian context. Regarding the temporal scope, the hauntological inquiry will be set in the post-Soviet period, more precisely during the Putin era. Concerning the timespan, it is openly justified by the fact that the Putin regime has strategically invigorated the hydrocarbon industry, bringing it to new heights since the downfall of the USSR. Following the thoughts laid out so far, the research questions are:

- How does the Soviet past haunt the hydrocarbon culture in Russia?
- How does this haunting presence affect the virtuality of a decarbonised energy future?

2. HOW TO SPEAK WITH GHOSTS

The research will be articulated around a deconstructive hauntology, a literary strategic posture that will be explained in the following pages. This chapter is divided in four parts: the first will introduce the work of Jacques Derrida, which unfolded powerful criticism that forged the concepts of deconstruction and hauntology. The second part describes the selected data that will be deconstructed later in the thesis. Then follows the delicate presentation of the operationalisation of a deconstructive hauntology by drawing upon the experience of several scholars with Derridean concepts. The last part consists of the research limitations of a deconstructive hauntology, as well of the ethics at play behind such research design. Throughout this chapter, the insightful work of Penny Griffin

(2013) is particularly helpful to grasp the underpinnings and operationalisation of deconstruction.

2.1. Derrida, Deconstruction, and Hauntology

Derrida was a philosopher notably known for his post-structuralist contributions. Among plural fields in and outside academia, he considerably shaped modern linguistics. Derrida rejected the plain acceptance of presence in reading. According to him, it would be a mistake to take texts as they are. Reading Derrida is a strenuous exercise, as he constantly questions and challenges the institution of writing by writing. He argued that there is more than what is present, what is made visible. Derrida's analytical approach to textuality is thus reflected in his philosophical notion of writing. To grasp how he forged his deconstructive approach, we need a brief genesis of modern semiotics.

2.1.1. Saussure and Western philosophy

Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of linguistics played a monumental role in the study of language. He saw language as a closed system of signs, a sign being the representation of things. For instance, a picture of a gas pipeline and the word "family" are signs by evoking something through language. Saussure theorised that signs are formed from a signified and a signifier. The signified equals a concept, while the signifier consists of an indivisible "sound image" (Griffin, 2013, p. 210). As Georges Douglas Atkins (2015) explains, structuralism considers that meaning in language is constructed and comes from the difference between signifiers, more specifically the sound difference (p. 17). For instance, the written word "culture" signifies the idea of *culture*, because it differentiates phonetically from "vulture" or "multure" and relates to other signs such "traditions", "beliefs", "group" and so on. The word "car" can provide another example. The relationship of the signifier "car" with others such "vehicle", "road", "fuel", and "driving" can constitute the meaning of what is known as "car". Therefore, in a structural network of signs, the interrelation between them produce meaning. As this difference is absent in writing, speech is then perceived as "complete" by structuralists. In opposition, writing is seen as a derivative and thus dependant on speech.

In his criticism of Saussure's theory, Derrida attacked parallelly the underpinnings of Western metaphysics, namely what he called logocentrism (Griffin, 2013, p. 209). Derrida denounced that logocentrism stands as a philosophical tradition in Western metaphysics of establishing binary oppositions. The logocentric structurality has been

reducing discourses into transcendental signifieds, resulting into privileging a side of a binary over the other (Griffin, 2013, pp. 210–211). History has shown that texts can influence the course of societies, religions, and ideologies. Systems of words are then the foundation of institutions, playing a defining role of social reality. For Derrida, one should not therefore overlook this influence in the traditional modes of thought, as they have constantly established metaphysical truths. As Saussure’s theory prioritises the phonic difference in the creation of signs, it places the spoken word over the written one, thus speech over writing (Griffin, 2013, p. 210).

Derrida opposed to this repression of writing. He discarded the stable connection between a signified and a signifier, claiming that this is solely arbitrary (Atkins, 2015, p. 16). The concept of “car” could have been easily expressed with any other signifier. Departing from the structuralist theory, Derrida sketched the base of a new semiotic perspective. Derrida did not reject the Saussurean scheme of signified and signifier, dual component of a sign. Rather, he rejected the relationship between these two in the formation of meanings. By the same motion, he shattered a long tradition in Western philosophy.

2.1.2. Derrida’s post-Structuralist Response

Derrida has brought forth the project of deconstruction after a dissatisfaction with structuralism in linguistics. In response to a system of words founded on binary oppositions, Derrida questioned the relation between each component of a binary. He noticed that meaning is often based on binaries that have a privileged side. Logocentrism grants speaking this preeminence, but it also attributes it to other dichotomies that participated in the foundation of power structures (Griffin, 2013, p. 211). Derrida argued that there is an implicit presence of one component in the other, and the two components of a binary are not as separate as a text would command them to be. He advanced that the components of a binary can even be dependent on each other (Griffin, 2013, p. 211). Through such strategy, Derrida concluded that speech cannot be primary and does not supplant writing. Understanding language as a stable and closed system implies that signs have a fixed meaning by their relationship with other signs. For post-structuralism, “*meaning is a process*: the sentence may end, but the process of language does not.” (Griffin, 2013, p. 210). Therefore, instead of a closed system of self-referencing signs, meanings are not rigid.

This semiotic approach of Derrida sets the ground for the notion of haunting. It is prominently based on the Derridean concept called *trace*. Departing from the assumption that meaning is produced by the difference between signs, Derrida argues that this dependency introduces the presence of other signs within a sign. When a sign is invoked through its signifier, a web of signifiers, signifieds and signs are necessarily present to sustain the meaning of that sign. An example can illustrate the concept of *trace*. Taking the word “man”, “strong”, “brave”, “confidence”, and “handsome” can partly constitute the concept of “man”. This list of concepts varies between individuals, as the meaning of “man” has been constructed by oneself differently from others. The relationship of signifiers that create a meaning is then subject to constant transformation (Griffin, 2013, p. 210). With this view, meaning is never definitive, complete, fixed. This leads to a notorious Derridean idea: a trace is never fully present (Atkins, 2015, p. 18). This ghostly effect is further explored below. *Trace* is part of what Derrida coined as *différance*. In his book *Positions* (1981), Derrida outlines this concept:

Différance is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the *spacing* by means of which elements are related to each other. This spacing is the simultaneously active and passive [...] production of the intervals without which the 'full' terms would not signify, would not function. (p. 27)

The coining of *différance* illustrates with brio Derrida’s argument against the preeminence of speech. When the word is spoken, the phonetic distinction from “difference” cannot be made, therefore appropriate meaning is not conveyed. Contrary to the structuralist claim that meaning originates from difference between signs, Derrida argued that *différance* works within signs as well as between them (Atkins, 2015, p. 18). As the meaning is not fixed, it is deferred. This position yields a different understanding of language: it is not just a “medium through which the world is expressed [...]”; rather, language is the world, constructing meaning” (Griffin, 2013, p. 212).

In Derridean terms, a *text* is more than an ordering of written words forming meaning. As Mazzei expresses: “The text is not a limiting set of marks on a page, but is an opening up of words both written and spoken, of traces in speech and in writing. Writing is simply the paradigm while textuality is the sewing together of these traces.” (2007, p. 18). Thus, the Derridean concept of a *text* sustains the idea that words are not originating from the text but imprinted on it by writing. Words are then reinscribed not *on* a text, but *in* a *text* (Mazzei, 2007, p. 17). Leaving momentarily a literary context, a *text* could even be “a theory, an image, a performance, a structure, an organisation, event

or artefact, and so on” (Griffin, 2013, p. 208). To clarify this idea, one can think of a recording of a speech on an audio file.

From this post-structuralist perspective comes the birth of deconstruction. It can be summarised as “the pursuit of a reading or analysis that seeks the excesses, the breaches, the ruptures, while keeping the analysis destabilised enough that something unexpected, something silent, something impossible, may emerge” (Mazzei, 2007, p. 15).

Most importantly, deconstruction is not destruction. The process of deconstructing vibrates disruptively the logocentric structures, revealing the mechanisms that hold the meanings together. According to Mazzei, this breach into the *text* exposes the absence of what is not *at first* present, but nonetheless present (2007, p. 18). Deconstruction is thus already in the text, whereas it resides in the own construction of language. It obliterates any claim of “objective truth”, as it presupposes that meaning emerge from the reader through reading. The significance of the text – the meanings conjured to be communicated – is dependent on the constructed word systems at play within the text (Griffin, 2013, p. 212). The role of the analyst is then to help the text to undo itself by identifying the deployment of centred meanings (Griffin, 2013, p. 209). Analysing the centring processes of these discourses can disclose how they exploit the unsteadiness of meanings to establish commands on social life (Griffin, 2013, p. 213). Emanating from the anti-foundationalism of deconstruction, a *text* is never entirely deconstructed nor deconstructing (Atkins, 2015, p. 30). There is no claim by deconstructing to reach complete meaningfulness or a *true* reading. Thus, a same text can be deconstructed several times.

2.1.3. Hauntological Turn: The Figures of Spectre and Ghost

The hauntological “step” in this analytical design stands as a further moment of deconstruction; in other words, a theoretical continuation of this “anti-method” (Fisher, 2012, p. 19; Lorek-Jezińska & Więckowska, 2017b, p. 10). For some, hauntology is a new aspect of the “ethical turn” of deconstruction (Davis, 2005, p. 373). In this inquiry, hauntology and deconstruction are the same analytical strategy, but at different times. However, in the sake of clarity, the appellation “deconstructive hauntology” is used to illustrate the relation between the two concepts.

In *Specters of Marx* (2006), Derrida disputed the ambient belief in the 1990s that capitalism has prevailed as the ultimate ideology after the “death” of the Soviet

communism. Challenging the “end of history”, *Specters of Marx* uses the case of post-Soviet Russia. Despite the death of communism, the ghost of Marxism persists in the living present. The revival of Marx’s philosophy in the global capitalist world, after its proclaimed death, induces a sense of broken time. This temporal dislocation is investigated by Derrida, who explored what is between death and life. With deconstruction, he found out that the dead and the living are not as separated as time would command them to be, stating that every binary “can only *maintain itself* with some ghost” (Derrida, 2006, p. XVII). This was the introduction of a “turn” in ontology.

In his response to the traditional stance of ontology, Derrida reversed the privileging of presence over absence with the concept of *hauntology* (Davis, 2005, p. 373). He therefore introduced the conceptual figure of the ghost and the spectre. Set in the spirit of deconstruction, the spectre hovers between life and death, neither present nor absent (Derrida, 2006, p. 9). It is to acknowledge what has been always remained from traditional ontology, to see the invisible (Derrida, 2006, p. 187).

Relying on other works can enhance the Derridean approach. Since its introduction, hauntology has been adopted – and adapted – by various research fields, striking a particular interest in cultural and literary studies and art criticism, but also creating a life on its own: the spectrality studies (Lorek-Jezińska & Więckowska, 2017a, p. 16). The recent interest in the analytical figures of ghosts and haunting can be attributed to “a broader (and somewhat earlier) turn to history and memory, concentrating in particular on dealing with personal and collective trauma” (Del Pilar Blanco & Peeren, 2013, p. 10). Hauntology is thus an interdisciplinary tool that can be appropriated and applied in a fascinating number of ways and fields.

Hauntology can be described as the study of spectrality and spectres: “The very idea of spectres – positioned as they are between worlds and times – disrupts the conventional means of measuring time and space, as well as all kinds of dichotomous conceptualisations” (Lorek-Jezińska & Więckowska, 2017a, p. 15). Respecting a Derridean “tradition”, the concept of spectre *should not* be defined (Wolfreys, 2013, pp. 70–71). This would simply replicate the foundationalist mechanisms of logocentrism. Nonetheless, Lorek-Jezińska and Więckowska (2017b) provide guidance with this understanding of *haunting*:

The spectral seems to represent the conceptual and cognitive space between the past and the future. It disorganizes the chronological order, reframes time reference, dislocates the

past from its pastness, and introduces a radical discontinuity into the present, making it not contemporaneous with itself. (p. 12)

This thesis aims to unveil the haunting presence in the hydrocarbon culture. Thus, hauntology can be used to analyse the invoking of representations of the past: these are neither dead nor alive, neither present nor absent (Derrida, 2006, p. 5). The figure of the ghost or spectre is absent from traditional forms of knowledge, it is only accessible if the barriers of what is called knowledge collapse. “One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge.” (Derrida, 2006, p. 5). The analytical figure of spectres fits the aims of this research, as it allows the expression of silenced voices, signs of otherness or the deconstruction of power in norms and identities (Lorek-Jezińska & Więckowska, 2017b, p. 11).

Once the *text* is breached, the revealing of the untold, of secrecy, is the moment to *talk with* ghosts. The conversation unfolds what has been kept secret, absent from the “general reading” of the text. For Davis, this opportunity gives access to “an essential unknowing which underlies and may undermine what we think we know.” (Davis, 2005, p. 377).

One direction of hauntology is turned towards the past, connected to the space of memory: it appeals to what is “*no longer*, but which is still effective as a virtuality” (Fisher, 2012, p. 19). This orientation examines commonly the revival of the past, the spectral apparition. Interestingly, the understanding of haunting took a turn that enriched the conceptual figure of spectre. For Eliot Borenstein, the famous metaphor from the *Communist Manifesto* – “A spectre is haunting Europe, the spectre of communism” – inverted the temporality of the hauntings: “[They] are typically understood to be the supernatural manifestations of a past that refuses to let go of the present; Marx and Engels envisioned a Europe troubled by the ghosts of its future.” (2015, p. 86). This represents another direction that hauntology can take. Oriented beyond the *present* life, attracting *from* the future. It belongs to what “has *not yet* happened, but which is *already* effective in the virtual” (Fisher, 2012, p. 19). By its distance, the future itself is disjointed in the present. It is not itself on its own, as the future originates in the present (Derrida, 2006, p. XIX). Derridean hauntology offers thus a dual temporal conceptualisation of haunting: a way to question the spectral past and the failed promises of the future. The research might

then encounter “failed futures”: utopian views or visions of the future that were never concretised.

2.2. Gazprom’s People: texts as site of haunting

The research material consists of five written texts published by Gazprom between 2011 and 2014. The selected texts are interviews and accounts of personal figures at Gazprom, sketching the portrait of different positions and roles in the gas company. In this hauntology, the deconstructive process is focuses on a limited number of texts. Secondary literature is then introduced to complete the hauntological analysis.

The analysed texts were retrieved from Gazprom main website, and although they are accessible both in Russian and English, the English versions were selected for the analysis. It is assumed in this research that the materials were first published in Russian, then in English for online accessibility. This assumption derives from remarks heading each text, informing that they were originally published in corporate newspapers of Gazprom subsidiaries. The original version can then be found digitally on the online archives of the respective newspaper. Physical copies of these corporate magazines appear to be published only in Russian. For the sake of consistency, the English version of the texts was compared to the Russian version. The difference between versions was found insignificant.

For this research, these texts were accessed on Gazprom’s webpage “Our people”. The English version of this webpage proposes a dozen of personal portraits from the subsidiary magazines, dating back to 2010 (Gazprom, 2021b).

Some of the texts are transcriptions of interviews, some take the form of short biographies. Although portions of the content can be attributed to the interviewees – the Gazprom employees – it is crucial to highlight here that this content was produced in the context of corporate newspapers: it is reasonable to assume that this content is planned, coordinated, and edited by the newspapers’ team. Furthermore, the articles available online were then selected from those published in the newspapers to be shared on the website. These publications can be justified by corporate communication and more specifically the practice of CSR, which create this kind of content for business stakeholders. As the English webpage “Our people” does not regroup all the interviews

and personal profiles published in the newspapers, the motivations behind the selection of these specific articles remain nonetheless unknown.

To ground its discourses, the hydrocarbon culture is seen as a productive impulse that generate cultural content. In this thesis, the webpage “Our people” and its content are thus regarded as an actualisation of that energy culture.

Moreover, these texts are uncanny at multiple levels: personal biographies of the “general worker” are not a common practice in organisations, including other energy companies in the hydrocarbon industry; the topics addressed in these texts are often not connected to Gazprom business activities; centralisation of regional content from remote subsidiaries. Hence these texts were “called” to be deconstructed: they are conveying edified meanings on significant aspects of social reality: work, family, the future, memory.

2.3. Guide for a Deconstructive Hauntology

The deconstructive hauntology chosen for this research relies substantially on Derrida’s work and follows poststructuralist assumptions. In the following pages, this theoretical scaffolding will support the hauntological investigation of *traces* in the selected texts. Lorek-Jezińska and Więckowska (2017a) give this direction to the researcher:

Accordingly, instead of looking for certainties, the scholar of spectres looks for sites of crossings, borrowings, and contaminations, re-discovering traces of other times, places, and beings in the seemingly solid here and now, and producing somewhat melancholic accounts of a culture that is both already haunted and potentially haunting. (p. 15)

In the field of deconstruction, the analysis procedures are often not referred to as a method. Instead, the idea of an “anti-method” is proposed. However, this does not imply the lack of methodology or rigour as Griffin indicates. It is rather “to reject the claims to objectivity, certainty, accuracy and truth that characterise traditional approaches to human behaviour” (Griffin, 2013, p. 209). The lack of clear definition for deconstruction is not accidental but rather reflects Derrida’s rejection to provide a definite “formula” that would hold a “solid” meaning. At its core, deconstruction is meant to be anti-foundationalist. A definite method would imply a predetermined route into the search for knowing. If a map details every step to a destination, the entire itinerary is thus known beforehand, including the final position. For deconstruction, the map is constructed along

the way, leaving “the matter of thought in hand” of the researcher, where the destination remains always unknown, that is to say outside the “realm of knowing” (Mazzei, 2007, p. 13). The rigour of empirical analysis when using a deconstructive “method” relies then on the commitment of the researcher (Griffin, 2013, p. 212).

Deconstruction occurs when continuously “destabilising that which craves stability, sameness, hegemony” (Mazzei, 2007, p. 15). In this reading process, the researcher seeks the excesses, the untold, which has not yet been deconstructed. At this point, the reader makes abstraction of what is self-evident in the text, what is considered presence. By understanding what previously considered absence as presence, the notion of what constitute text is challenged and unfold for deconstruction (Mazzei, 2007, p. 15).

2.2.1. Strategy for Deconstructing the Texts

To conduct the hauntological analysis, the inquiry will take foundation in prior uses of deconstruction. Fulfilling the role, Griffin (2013) provides guidelines to proceed with a deconstructive “anti-method” (p. 214). Based on these guidelines, the following strategy for a deconstructive hauntology will then be applied in the two upcoming chapters for the analysis part.

Hauntological strategy for unveiling ghosts

To complete the first reading:

- ❖ Contextualise the text and its publication.
- ❖ Identify the text’s intended meaning and its general interpretation.
- ❖ Describe how the text achieves maximum coherence and consistency.

Then, follows the second reading:

- ❖ Outline the text’s assumptions and what it defines as normal, natural, primary.
- ❖ Find binaries and/or distinctions between two categories and the induced effects.
- ❖ Locate the text’s tensions and contradictions within it.
- ❖ Outline how the text undoes itself.

Finally, the manifestation of spectres:

- ❖ Identify the *traces* of the past in the text to unveil the haunting.
- ❖ Introduce secondary literature to interrogate the haunting presence.

Griffin divides her procedure in three phases. The first one consists of reading the texts as it is intended to be. Contextualising the publication can help understanding the general interpretation of the text. The first reading discerns what is argued in the text by the author, or what Derrida calls *vouloir-dire*. With the intended meaning outlined, the researcher can identify the arguments within the text that consolidate and solidify that *vouloir-dire* (Griffin, 2013, p. 211). By doing so, the researcher reveals the semiotic structure on which the coherence of the text is based on.

Next, Griffin proposes the second reading of the text. Contrary to its name, this phase does not invite the researcher to simply read again but to engage with the arguments of the texts. Here, the primary assumptions are dissected to expose what the text consider fundamental, natural, primary. Then, find tensions, incoherencies, distinctions within the text between two categories (e.g., women and men, nature and culture) that can affect the accepted meaning (Griffin, 2013, p. 211). Exposing the ambiguity or shakiness of the assumptions reveal how the *vouloir-dire* encompasses more than what it intended.

To understand the effects of the unsteadiness of meanings, Griffin proposes the third and last phase: unsettling the text. In this hauntological research, this part is the stage where the spectres of the Russian hydrocarbon culture are welcomed. Griffin invites the researcher to examine how the argumentation depends on assumptions that conflicts with the arguments and the constructed meanings. In other words, to identify the *traces* at play. Hence the text is “undoing” itself (Griffin, 2013, p. 211). To accomplish this, the assumptions will be put under pressure by secondary literature related to the Soviet past. Displaying the crevices in the texts will set a space for a discussion with the spectres. This deconstructive “anti-method” can thus help revealing socio-political implications, ambiguities, and traumas that inhabit the Russian hydrocarbon culture.

2.4. Limitations and Research Ethics

Limitations are a natural feature that result from the theoretical approach, the scope, and other settings of the research.

Some constraints derive from the aims of this study. This inquiry focuses on the specific case of Gazprom, locating the unit of analysis at the organisational level of cultural production. As it was established earlier, Gazprom is at the foreground of the hydrocarbon culture in Russia and is believed to be a fertile research case. Nevertheless,

the focus on Gazprom remains a personal decision. As this inquiry investigate the articulation of the Russian hydrocarbon culture, it could be imprudent to transplant the analysis to other national contexts. More, the Gazprom content is thus a specific organisational lens through which the hydrocarbon culture in Russia is analysed. For instance, a deconstructive analysis of Lukoil's might encounter different spectres. Similarly, the chosen content for deconstruction incorporates articles from geographically remote locations in Russia. Although the spatiality of these articles is partly addressed in this thesis, it can be assumed that this plays a considerable role in the studied phenomenon.

By understanding the five texts as part of the hydrocarbon culture, there is a risk to ignore the disparities between the regional socio-political contexts, homogenising their particularities in the name of the studied phenomenon.

About the subject itself, some decisions were made to focus solely on the case of Gazprom. In terms of energy production, Gazprom is only devoted to natural gas. The present research uses of the concept of hydrocarbons, which implies the presence of other energy sources such coal and crude oil. As mentioned earlier, the interchangeability of certain appellations related to fossil energy is consciously done throughout the text. "Hydrocarbons" is used despite the lone presence of gas as it is argued that the studied phenomenon related to gas applies to the higher conceptual category of hydrocarbons. This generic use of technical terms is also made for the sake of readability of the text. Rigour is applied when distinctions are relevant.

The language of the selected research materials is English, which leads to the assumption that the targeted audience is therefore international. Nonetheless, these personal portraits of employees were deliberately chosen for their English website. For instance, Gazprom could have omitted this content for the non-Russian audience. As the Russian fossil fuel industry is part of a global community, it could be argued that the hydrocarbon culture is not restrained to one national context. However, the hypothesis of a transnational nature of the hydrocarbon culture will not be examined in this thesis. It remains however an interesting research avenue.

Concerning the articles, their selection was based on qualitative criterion. After reading the fifteen publications available in English, five were chosen for deconstruction after finding *uncanny* aspects in them. This selection method relies therefore on my own experience of reading and on the way "uncanniness" has been constructed to me. In the

context of a master's thesis, a deconstructive analysis of five texts followed by a dialogue with prior research was considered sufficient.

The epistemology of this research involved a paradoxical stance that is no stranger to most research. To find Soviet spectres, knowledge about the Soviet Union is required. Without this background, it is virtually impossible to identify what is *Soviet* and what is *not Soviet*. Therefore, one risks finding what it *knows*. The paradox here lies in the epistemic quest of this research, where the unveilings are to some extent determined by the acquired knowledge on the subjects.

In the given academic context of a master's thesis, there are circumstantial limitations that set parameters such the length of the document. Therefore, due to time and resources, the deconstructive process is limited. However, this joins the aforementioned idea that deconstruction is never final, never fully completed.

Ethics are fundamental to any research. In the present inquiry, the Russian energy sector is acknowledged as an important political force in Russia, especially through its industrial activities in remote regions. The industrial presence particularly in Siberia impacts disproportionately local minority groups and indigenous populations. The development of energy projects in the regions covered in this study, namely the Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrug–Yugra, Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug and the Tomsk Oblast, has been another chapter in a centuries-long struggle for recognition of indigenous rights over their traditional lands and lifestyle. This power asymmetry is acknowledged during data collection and conducting the analysis, while engaged to contribute to social justice.

In this study, the identities of the Gazprom workers have been anonymised by attributing them pseudonyms. The decision results from their “collateral” presence in corporate content that is now accessible online. Their original consent to appear in regional corporate newspapers is not an argument to expose them within the lines of this research. Furthermore, the personal identification of these workers brings nothing forth to the analysis. For the sake of clarity, each worker is identified by their role attributed in their associated publication.

For Derrida, as the world is marked by the existence of ghosts, we must acknowledge them to learn from them, but also to develop a companionship with them: to live *with* the ghosts. This *being-with* goes beyond the simple recognition of ghosts in the *living present*: it is in the name of justice (Derrida, 2006, p. XVIII). In the Derridean

spirit, the hauntological act pursues the idea of retributive justice: the living has a debt owed to the dead, it is therefore just to seek to *talk* to the ghost.

The acknowledgement of the presence of spectres translates into bringing the invisible, the marginal to visibility, to significance. “The recognition of the presence of the spectre entails a call to responsibility for choosing how to react to what the ghosts represent and to the inheritance that they make present.” (Lorek-Jezińska & Więckowska, 2017a, p. 20). The researcher must embody this responsibility in the interaction with the findings. Figures and events of the past that might have been buried in history or silenced by power can remain sensible for some societal groups. There is therefore a responsibility to manipulate the sensibility of the past, where memories and emotions can be entangled with trauma. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida (2006) stressed this position:

No justice [...] seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some ‘responsibility’, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism. (p. XVIII)

In his chapter “Post-Soviet Hauntology”, Etkind notes that while the debt to the dead must be returned, some debtful catastrophes might not allow the establishment of justice, resulting in an endless mourning condition (2013, p. 218). Therefore, he suggests that ghosts “need recognition rather than justice” (p. 219).

3. DECONSTRUCTING THE HYDROCARBON CULTURE

According to each respective webpage where the texts were retrieved, two publications appeared in the corporate newspaper Gas Vector (Газовый вектор) from the Tomsk subsidiary. Two other texts came from Yamburg Pulse (Пульс Ямбурга) based in the town of Yamburg and one text originated from Gas Transport (Транспорт газа) established in the town of Yugorsk. The corporate magazines publish their own analytical materials that cover the subsidiary’s production and socio-economic activities, distributing few thousands of printed copies in their respective regions of operation (Gazprom Transgaz Tomsk, 2020).

As explained in the methodology chapter, deconstruction is an indispensable process to unveil *traces* that inhabits the hydrocarbon culture. In this chapter, the selected Gazprom articles will be individually deconstructed according to Griffin's proposed procedures (2013) and the Derridean spirit. Through the course of the research, I interrogated myself about the appropriate site to invite the spectres. It was decided to welcome them in a separate chapter, once deconstruction is over. At this point, the first and second readings of each Gazprom subject will be done, successively.

3.1. The General Director

In *7 days of a year*, this text portrays the general director at Gazprom Transgaz Tomsk at the time (Gazprom, 2011). The reader is accompanied through a week of travelling in Eastern Russia. From Monday to Sunday, the text compiles some of the director's thoughts and interactions on every day of his busy trip.

Understanding the broader context in which Gazprom was publishing this content can enhance the analysis. First, the text states the importance of the year 2011 in the subject's life: he was appointed Deputy Chairman of the Gazprom Management Committee. This promotion confirms his rising status within the company over the decades, securing its position in the Russian hydrocarbon establishment. Secondly, the industrial development in the Far East is at the foreground of this article. Multiple operation sites are mentioned in these regions while the narrator stresses their benefits to Russia's society.

Throughout the text, there is insistence on the numerous great achievements of Gazprom. The content's intended meaning would then be to publicise Gazprom's efforts in "grandiose projects and creating normal living conditions in certain Russian territories." (Gazprom, 2011). More precisely, this applies to remote regions of the Russian Far East, in which harsh conditions complicate industrial development. Despite the challenges of the natural environment, Gazprom succeeds:

What can I tell you about Sakhalin? The weather is ok... It is raining. Dirt. And mud-locked roads. Only heaven knows how our Transgaz workers survive here. On the way from Nogliki to the Val settlement, my head has nearly flown off. Here another rotation village of gasmen is being constructed for the Sakhalin – Khabarovsk – Vladivostok gas pipeline operation. By the way, it is one of the most important facilities for the Russian economy. The construction site here couldn't be more powerful. The paces are

overwhelming. As early as yesterday there was only bare tundra here and today there is a modern town. (Gazprom, 2011)

This excerpt encompasses well the *vouloir-dire* of the text, which is that, amidst any of nature's obstacles, Gazprom can achieve greatness and still seek the highest standards of performance. In a blink, the company brings modernity in the middle of *nowhere*. Not only Gazprom has succeeded to construct more than just elementary buildings in the harsh environment, but they have also built at the highest standards.

To “centre” this idea, the text draws upon the figure of the general director. First, the division of the text into seven days introduces a pace: the narration of director's week produces a frantic rhythm of trips, inspections, interactions, or anything *worth* telling. The value of telling every action despite their banality enriches the character:

[The director] has to see everything with his own eyes, to touch with his own hands. He paused near stockpiled paving slabs. He examined carefully the address of the producer. He scraped concrete with fingernails. Remained pleased. [The director] pounce to everything: to walls color of the base under construction, to dale quality, to bridge pillars on the Srende-Vorovskaya River... The company striving to work under international standards needs everything to be on the highest level – personnel, technologies, materials. He monitors carefully every production chain. (Gazprom, 2011)

Every second of the director's tight schedule is filled with action. It represents the Gazprom director as a serious, tireless, and nearly perfectionist man. Yet, that same director can joke, takes the time to survey employees about potential improvements or even wanders around a library. The subject – purposefully shown “in a different light” by the text – plays a distinct function. Throughout the week, his performance presents the company through new lens: performant, efficient yet caring. The visits to different Gazprom sites are presented with that lens, showing that the industrial apparatus, yet a humane organisation, contributes to the Russian society.

The past is also conjured to strengthen the image of the director. The story refers at multiple occasions the importance of childhood. It tells that he inherited “the inhuman ability to work hard” from his parents, who were constantly working. Moreover, his incredible sets of skills and rigour were already present at a young age. Described as a prodigy who “had read everything”, the director is nothing less than a mythical man. Interestingly, Soviet symbols are introduced:

This [book], about Ivan Kozhedub, pilot and three-time hero, has been read and reread by him. The memory is a special instrument for [the general director] and he shares it with his children with care. Both grandfathers of [the general director] died during the Great Patriotic War. All that he has left of them are the letters and photos. The Victory Day is a special holiday for him. (Gazprom, 2011)

Second reading

Dressed in an epic narration of a trip in the Far East, the article argues that Gazprom brings social progress to the nation through the development of its social policy. Considered reaching the highest performance criteria, the projects are embodied by the general director's figure.

First, the story itself arises incoherencies with the main interpretation. The entire narrative is based on a high-rank director who travels across the country – it is mentioned that he spent 34 hours in the sky during that week – to inspect the work of others. In addition to a questionable use of resources, the intriguing part resides in the way the general director defines Gazprom workforce. He scrutinised “every corner of the industrial site, garages, storages, living boxes” despite having chosen “partners who are as untiring and programmed for tireless activity as himself.” Exemplified by the subject itself, the company attempts to convince that their drive for performance is embodied by their employees. These are described as “daring, decisive” with “full commitment to work, professionalism and decency”. However, the story presents the accomplishments as if the director himself has done them. Not only this exaggerates the actual role of the general director, but it also undoes the text's own argument to have professionals dedicated to the achieve the highest standards. What results from this incoherency is the inversion of the argument. In an endeavour to showcase the company's achievements, the conveyed idea of workers is weakened by the mythical figure of the general director. Through the “overqualifiedness” of the subject, the meaningfulness of the signified “qualified” is diluted, marking the absence of “qualifiedness” in “qualified”.

Furthermore, the text exhibits the company's settlements as the unique infrastructural presence in these remote regions. This underlying message feeds the assumption that beside the industrial installations, there has been *nothing*. More, it entails that nature is an *empty* space to fill. This modernising vision can be transposed as follows: yesterday, there was nothing; today, there is Gazprom. There is no acknowledgement of another social form that could stain the proposed image of untamed territories. The

Siberian and Far Eastern spaces are thus “presenceless”. Although the industrial development is presented as the progress for the “entire” country, *there*, there is only Gazprom. The general interpretation of the article – being that the Gazprom projects benefit the society – becomes suddenly precarious.

3.2. The True Hero

The article *Gas worker and fire-fighter* introduces the lead specialist for Fire Safety at Gazprom (Gazprom, 2012b). The story presents a former professional fire-fighter who has joined Gazprom Transgaz Tomsk to improve their industrial safety. After decades in civilian ranks, the fire expert used his experience to recommend improvements in Gazprom installations that lacked safety procedures.

Originally published in 2012 from the Tomsk subsidiary’s newspaper, the article relates corporate activities from the Tomsk region, alike the previous analysed publication. This information helps to understand a specific mention here: reaching outside this article, the general director is promptly summoned. Back when he was head of Gazprom Transgaz Tomsk, it is said that he had the clairvoyance to acknowledge that fire safety propositions were a necessity. The intertextual reference contributes to the myth of the general director previously encountered:

In the early 2000s Gazprom started conquering new boundaries, diligently moving farther to the east and extending its sphere of influence. It was the time when the Company needed a competent specialist, an experienced leader and simply a worldly-wise man to organize fire safety in all structural units in a plain, yet qualified way. (Gazprom, 2012b)

The article relates the greatest challenges that the former fire-fighter had faced during his career. It establishes without detour that this man is a hero to his colleagues and to his community. The *vouloir-dire* of this publication is direct: Gazprom is safer thanks to a real-life hero in its ranks. The theme of heroism is indeed impregnated throughout the text, forming the virtuosity and wisdom of the subject. It is partly manifested through the intense story of the biggest fire in the region that he had combatted. Decorated with medals and orders, he “couldn’t be more experienced”. Additionally, as the article states, it is nothing less than his “personal responsibility [to check] for everyone’s safety: from the company’s employees to gas consumers” (Gazprom, 2012b). Undeniably, the text makes the fire specialist a hero:

[He] is also captured on the group ceremonial portrait of hero firemen. That's why his colleagues today have a reason for rightful pride – they have a real hero working with them. (Gazprom, 2012b)

Second reading

While the fire specialist has allegedly brought knowledge and experience concerning the potential dangers on gas production sites, the article turns safety matters into an incredible heroic story.

In the article, the profession of fire-fighter is constantly presented as heroic, except on one occasion. Before he considered the profession, the image of Soviet fire-fighters in his region is depicted as something rather amateur and diminishing with “no heroism at all”. Although the vocation first appeared deprived of prestige, he decided to join the ranks after seeing other fire-fighters living by military regulations and wearing uniforms. Reinforced throughout the text, the signified “hero” is therefore connected to “humility”, “virtuous”, but also “prestige”.

This heroic image is however constructed at the cost of degrading others: the subject is presented as nearly overqualified in an industry where no one has apparently ever considered fire safety. This is conveyed by an incredulous tone relating the accomplishments of the fire specialist: “You may wonder how a highly qualified fire-fighter ended up in a gas workers’ crew” (Gazprom, 2012b). Before the arrival of the fire specialist at Gazprom, the subsidiary board seemed to have never consider the establishment of fire safety procedures:

By the way, before [the fire specialist], nobody paid attention to those ‘trifles’, when [his] domain, that should undergo inspections almost every day, comprises hundreds of gas transmission facilities in 12 regions, from Omsk steppes to the Pacific coast! (Gazprom, 2012b)

The text mentions that these changes were the results of a bottom-up initiative proposed by the fire specialist.

In the text, the professionalism of the fire specialist is praised while “unheroicness” is despised. The binary opposition heroic/unheroic is then related to the binary professional/amateur. The concept of “amateurship” is presented as disorganised and the absence of professionalism, and, of course, the lack of heroism. What is then revealed in Gazprom’s endeavour to build a “hero” is the signified “amateurship”.

Not only the article states that the safety procedures were the result of a personal initiative, but also that Gazprom became mindful of industrial safety only during their expansion towards the East. Unaware of the risks engendered by its activities, the company embodies their own constructed meaning of “amateur”. There is therefore this constant tension at the background of the text. While it is claimed that Gazprom is safer, one can ask: from what is it? From industrial disasters to lack of industrial safety, the answer would surely jeopardise the text’s argument. Therefore, the use of heroic theme allows treating the theme of industrial and work safety in a way that obscures the responsibility and accountability of the company.

3.3. The Living Monument

In *Who of my colleagues had an easy life back then?*, the long history of an experienced worker at Gazprom is recollected through the important moments of his career (Gazprom, 2012c). This short biography presents his passage at various managerial positions and his involvement in social projects before his professional retirement. The text introduces the importance of this manager at Gazprom by erecting him as a legendary character, an historic figure ought to be remembered:

[He] has worked at our company for thirty years. The young generation knows his name only from short extracts from brochures, books and museum exhibitions dedicated to Gazprom Transgaz Yugorsk. Today we have an opportunity to narrate his story. (Gazprom, 2012c)

The accomplishments of his career and his work dedication are performing the intended meaning of the text. It is that an exemplary employee should be remembered. The text portrays him at his beginnings as a talented and promising young worker who always satisfied the requirements. Graduated from a Moscow university, he was then invited to the Sverdlovsk Oblast for a job in the gas industry. Quickly, the management “liked his performance” and he climbed up the ranks.

A picture divides the article, capturing the subject at work. Sitting at a desk covered with papers and exhibiting at least three phones, he holds up a phone to his ear while his other hand searches through documents. The text offers multiple expressions that feed this hardworking image: “not to spare myself” and “Sometimes we had to work round the clock for months”. Despite the intense workload, the subject reminds the

common reality of workers back then: “Was it hard for me? I was immediately overloaded with work! But who of my colleagues had an easy life then?”. However, Gazprom brings meaning behind this hardship: “[...] everyone understood that the country needed gas. Those who couldn’t stand it left for calmer places”. The hard workers provided gas to the country; they powered the progress of the nation.

His “flawless performance” at Gazprom is characterised by his participation in the construction of social infrastructures. All the facilities that he granted – a first swimming pool, a music school, multiple kindergartens and much more – are still in function “[b]ecause I have always been critical to the quality of the work done. I always checked the welded joints, gas pipeline laying, foundations and roofing by myself.”.

Second reading

In contrast to a heroic story, the biography of the manager relates within ordinary what seems a long and successful career. Throughout the text, the reader is informed about the hierarchical structure at Gazprom and its dynamics. In addition to thanking his superiors, the publication mentions names of what can be assumed regional managerial figures. While these references are not explained, their simple mention is intriguing. It highlights a network of relationships, with a particular importance of the older generation. The text reveals a historical hierarchy, in which the manager joins similar individual historicised subjects. This internal hierarchy entails an organisational knowledge that must be perpetuated. In this sense, it is crucial that the “younger generations” learn about the “monuments” of Gazprom. More, they need to know what made them historic.

To become a historic character at Gazprom, the relation to hierarchy must be rightly conjugated. The text informs on the exemplary characteristics of the manager. By acknowledging managerial figures in his career, the subject shows loyalty to the hierarchy. Also, an irresistible call to work adds to the criterion of a compliant and devoted employee.

While the Gazprom publication enumerates the contribution of others, it sets also clear gender roles. The only woman brought into the story is the wife of the worker, which he thanks for her support and understanding in his professional life. All the other people are men related to the career of the legendary man. The men/women binary is thus represented in power structures, where men are in positions of decision-making in professional hierarchies. The role of the wife is then dependent on the subject, supporting him in his professional quest. In other words, it is derivative from the privileged form.

3.4. The North Man

In *A chapter must be closed without any doubts!*, the corporate publication takes the form of an interview with a former Gazprom subsidiary manager who spent 25 years working for the gas company (Gazprom, 2014). Freshly retired from his position at a gas production centre, he was head of the production in the town of Yamburg where he worked on rotating shifts in the North for over two decades. The text locates the subject among the “many famous scientists of the oil and gas industry, prominent managers and qualified experts” (Gazprom, 2014). Interviewed about his lengthy experience in the gas industry, he is questioned on various aspects of life, notably his years in the North. For this reason, the subject will hold the pseudonym “North man”.

The intended meaning of the text lies in the idea that the North is a unique place where only determined people can work. In the text, the “North” seems to refer primarily to the region of Yamburg – a town in the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug founded by the gas industry in the 1980s (Gazprom Dobycha Yamburg, 2021).

From 25 years of my Gazprom’s ‘Northern biography’, 15.5 years were dedicated to my favorite gas production center No. 1B. And later on – to gas production center No. 4. It was there that I was put in charge of a gas production center and I am leaving my post now – I think it’s symbolic. We were working hard, forgetting about the leisure time, and we were busy twenty hours a day if it was necessary. (Gazprom, 2014)

To achieve coherence, the text relies on the northern experience of the manager, a nostalgic account of his venture. The North man considers that to work in the remote northern regions, one must be loyal to a workplace and have the capacity to work incessantly disregarding of personal time. Only the “best ones” who showed “willingness to hard work, discipline and responsibility” stayed and continued in the North. According to him, workers in the North were doing their work without any expectation of rewards.

Also, the text draws upon the North man to centre the category “best ones”. The article dresses the former manager as a very knowledgeable man: at work, he contributed to many projects over decades; at a personal level, he is experienced about “important things” in life. Additionally, at one moment, the interviewee is spontaneously asked about his titles and awards. He proudly states them, which are associated to the army and the gas industry. Following, he adds: “nevertheless, I consider the titles of a husband, father and grandfather to be the highest ones”.

In an effort to describe the uniqueness of the North, the manager offers a personal testimony for environmental protection. Through the theme of nature, more qualities are associated to the workers in the North:

The Northern nature is breathtaking, and it is necessary to treat her fairly. Of course, our society does a lot to protect this fragile northern beauty, but a lot depends on each of us. In our team we habituated employees to culture and aesthetics, environmental friendliness [...]. (Gazprom, 2014)

To those who fulfils the requirements to work in the North, the manager wishes that “gas never ends and new gas fields be discovered!”.

Second reading

Starting the dissection of the assumptions, the topic of nature carries its share. In the description of Yamburg, the North man declares that “[the town] is rich not only in gas reserves, but also in manpower”. As the text reveals that gas workers *come* to the North, the presence of the workforce is reliant on the gas reserves. Thus, one component of the “wealth of Yamburg” is not from Yamburg but rather exterior. Depletion of gas reserves would then provoke the disappearing of the region’s riches, natural and human. While the statement depicted an abundant town, the relation between both components – gas and labour force – is undoing the statement itself. The riches cannot be constitutive of Yamburg, since they are brought *in*. This distinction is significant, as it holds a spatial conception of the Russian territory. Since the workforce goes to the North to extract gas, both inevitably leave the region. One place is primary, and the other is secondary. One is permanent, the other temporary.

What arises from this conception of nature is contradictory with the text itself. In his sentimental comment on northern nature, the North man calls to the respect and preservation of this beautiful and fragile environment. That said, he wishes simultaneously an eternal life to the gas industry in the North, which its own existence jeopardises the northern natural environment. This paradoxical vision of nature is unsustainable and falls by itself. The natural environment of the North is then essentially imagined object, disconnected from the ecological reality.

The text recalls that in the Soviet days, it was “normal” to work excessively. Regardless of the nature of work, there was an obsession to achieve targets. Here, the article gives a contradictory statement. On the one hand, this immeasurable – in hours, in emotions – experience is denounced as a necessity of the time. On the other hand, the

North man encourages the youth to follow their path: climbing up the hierarchy through hardship. This contradiction is replicated elsewhere. For the interviewee, young employees lack experience. Although “theoretically skilled”, they are not all “ready to start from labour positions in order to understand the industry from the inside”. The experience deficit of the youth seems then to eclipse their training. The Soviet conception of “normal” work life is therefore still present in the professional life, transmitted by the old generation.

Moreover, “nature” is assigned a feminine gender. Described as a “fragile beauty” to “treat fairly”, the metaphorical gender exhibits the imposition of femininity on the concept of nature. It expresses the belief that the feminine gender is “frail” and needs to be protected. Also, the category “best workers” incorporates a division of gender roles. In the use of “manpower”, the signifier combination of “man” and “power” is substitute of “labour force” or “workforce” and entails a semiotic relation between the masculine gender and the ability to transform the physical world.

3.5. The Hard Worker

Work flat out! Work with passion! relates the work experience of a cutting torch operator who shares his views on working conditions and the meanings of his labour (Gazprom, 2012d). The subject is presented as the “typical” torch operator. Following his father’s path, he became a welder. The pseudonym of this subject originates from his approach to work: “If I start something, I push it through anyhow. If I need a whole day, I’ll work for a whole day or two, I won’t stop until I finish the work.”. The hard worker is dedicated to his job, even in the worst conditions:

The process enchanted the young man, for the first time he encountered the large-scale construction method. He was amazed: the new gas field was growing in deserted snowy tundra by leaps and bounds. The builders labored without stint, despite hard living and labor conditions, when even metal became as fragile as ice. (Gazprom, 2012d)

The text’s *vouloir-dire* takes this shape: independently of challenges, devotion to work overcome anything. This is conveyed primarily by the subject’s testimony. The hard worker has spent his youth in the North, where he and other “pioneers” were exposed to the inhospitable environment. “[D]espite hard living and labor conditions” in the late 1980s, they always pursued their work. Practicing his profession over two decades, it became a trait of his life. Qualifying his work as “masculine” and a source of pride, he

cannot imagine having a different one. Since he partook in building the field infrastructure, the hard worker can “justly call the Yamburg gas field 1V (GF-1V) his home”. His family is proud of his work as well. The commitment to his job is well manifested in the article:

‘Work with passion’ is [his] principle. Shrinking and goofing off have never been in his character, as taught by his father, this is how he himself does it and now he says it to the young generation, too. (Gazprom, 2012d)

To ground the intended meaning, the article elaborates on the qualities of the North as well. The harsh northern environment is described as white deserts with sparse human marks:

In September everything is white, no trees, no bushes, only one road to the gas fields, a step to the left or to the right – and you step in an unfrozen swamp. As far as the eye could see there was endless tundra, with the scenery interrupted only by rod posts and pipelines stretching to the horizon. (Gazprom, 2012d)

Working in a place where “even metal became as fragile as ice”, the welder comments that not everyone could stand these living conditions and some leave. Overcoming the challenges of the hostile climate is then only accomplished by certain workers. Regarding the subject’s first trip in the North, it came from his uncle who told him: “Come on, get ready, stop leeching of your parents, go to the North, you’ll earn a lot and become a real man!”. Since, his intensity at work made him a model for the other workers.

Second reading

In this Gazprom publication, the hardship of labour appears “normal” through the devoted figure of the welder. The text explains this hardship by the work and living conditions. However, the challenges encountered in the North are not all related to these conditions.

To earn respect from peers, one has “to work flat out”. Hardship is thus not uniquely the product of the physical environment, but also of the social one. This creates the exclusive category “hard workers”, constituted by the *ones who stay*. It is founded by the idea that labour *must* be hard. This meaning is expressed elsewhere in the text. Despite the awful conditions, it is mentioned that, when proposed, the welder first refused moving to a better facility complex. It suggests that the hard worker “got used” to the terrible conditions. When he finally accepted, the new complex made the workers feel “like nobles”. Regardless of the work environment, having proper amenities and living conditions equals to a privileged life. This is fascinating as better conditions would make

the workers' life and job easier. However, the concept of hardship in the text is deeply connected to the manifold ideas of fulfilment: the execution, the achievement, the satisfaction, the filling.

The profession exceeds the simple terms of an employment. "Inherited" from his father, this job has constituted most of his life and even provided him a sense of home. It brings pride to the worker and his family. Through his hard work, the welder is fulfilling these aspects. Not only hardship is portrayed as essential, but it also appears as a defining aspect of life. The resulting formula could take this form: to work hard is to live.

Furthermore, the publication conveys solid meanings on the masculine gender. In addition to "work flat out", the requirement to fit the "hard workers" category is to be "masculine". This is reinforced by the uncle's comment on "becoming a *real* man". The assumption here is that the hardship resides in the harsh northern environment and once encountered, manhood appears. However, as the category "hard workers" is sustained by the idea that labour must be hard, it seems that men themselves are creating the proclaimed hardship, not the North.

4. THE HAUNTING PRESENCE AND APPARITIONS

The previous chapter conducted a deconstruction of the Gazprom texts to disrupt their opaque veil. The deconstructive process outlined the conveyed assumptions in those texts, and how these constructions hold up. The concept of "trace", which is the presence of other signs within a sign, allows to unveil a presence that was first thought absent. The cracks that the deconstructive process had opened are now the site where to search for *traces* "of other times, places and beings" (Lorek-Jezińska & Więckowska, 2017a, p. 16). Through *traces*, the spectres await.

What is quite apparent in the texts is the positive image of Gazprom. Their massive investments in social infrastructures and their contribution to the nation's development are constantly highlighted in the publications. This is something that one would expect from corporate content. After all, it is a content created and promoted by Gazprom itself. However, stemming from the hydrocarbon culture, these texts altogether play another function. They set up personal figures inspired from Gazprom workers to construct subjects. These then become conveyor belts to carry deep-rooted meanings to

the reader through the lens of gas. Constructs on gender, labour, and the Siberian and Far Eastern natural environment were notably deconstructed.

In this chapter, the traces of the Soviet past will be scrutinised and put in reflection with secondary materials. This is how the haunting in the Russian hydrocarbon culture will be uncovered. The effects of this haunting on the virtuality of a decarbonised future will then be analysed in the last chapter. Even though this chapter takes a divided form, it is not in an effort to categorise the revealings of deconstruction or the ghosts but rather in the sake of clarity and readability. The spectres should not be seen imprisoned – especially considering their ghostly feature – within these inconsequential categories. In the Derridean spirit, it would be said that the spectres *already* joined the thesis before building stage (Derrida, 2006, p. 202). Nonetheless, the spectres are invited to appear.

4.1. Refining the Soviet Past

The Gazprom texts are built around biographical profiles of “their people”. As showcased by the articles, the subjectification of employees is used to publicise the achievements and “grandiose projects” that aim to benefit the nation. This way of narrating is no stranger to Russian history.

In the early 1930s, socialist realism in the Soviet Union appeared to forge the Soviet culture for decades. In the same breath, it rose to be “the overarching cultural ethos”, implementing Soviet principles in social life (McCannon, 1997, p. 348). Under Stalin, socialist realism was occupied to craft a “real hero”. Through an endless application of the biographical genre, the socialist realist literature was documenting the incredible achievements of the best Soviet citizens to exhibit the creative and extraordinary character of the individual (Hellbeck, 2006, p. 29). The biographical lens was notably praised by the Soviet regime to build epic tales of Soviet personalities (Hellbeck, 2006, p. 28). John McCannon identifies the fundamental themes of socialist realism as the “mastery over the natural world, technological progress, patriotism, relentless optimism, Stalin's cult of personality, and heroism.” (1997, p. 348).

On this regard, Gazprom’s “Our people” strangely resembles the book project *History of Factories and Plants* (*История фабрик и заводов*) by one of the most famous Soviet writers, Maxim Gorky. Gorky gathered in a series of books autobiographical and

biographical accounts of workers in which he paints them in “heroic, superhuman proportions” (Hellbeck, 2006, p. 30).

4.1.1. The New Gas Man

Across the Gazprom biographies, throughout the textual constructs and the subjects’ reminiscence of their past, the publications unsettle unburied Soviet socialist values. These guiding principles of Soviet life are primarily expressed through the resurgence of the Soviet work culture. The Soviet Union was enshrined in Marxist-Leninist principles that guided its vision of labour. To accelerate and intensify industrialisation, the Soviet state instated a new work culture. Labour was then a material necessity, but it also became a civic obligation (Kotkin, 1997, p. 202). Progressively, devotion of work integrated the social identity of Soviet citizens, while different degrees of intensity would become “a means of differentiating individuals [...] within the working class.” (Kotkin, 1997, p. 205).

More specifically, the semiotic alloy that was progressively undoing itself during deconstruction has the allure of the New Soviet Man. The mythical figure was created during the Stalinist period. Defined by tirelessness, a pure pursuit of increased industrial production, and a devotion to the nation’s technological progress, the New Soviet Man was an important icon of the Soviet culture (Josephson, 1995, p. 556).

The Gazprom publications describe industrial development in a way that resonates with socialist realist literature, which narrated in terms of “glorious pursuit of plan fulfillment” (Josephson, 2010, p. 252). In particular, the article on the general director manifests a spectral presence with a return of the Soviet epic storytelling. In that article, the director embodies the archetype of the New Soviet Man and embarks on a journey across the boundless territory to ensure the progress of large-scale projects, aiming to overcome nature for the nation’s good. The story of the general director, who is accompanied by a journalist through its week, is a clear restitution of the Soviet literature: “Yet writers were still called on to glorify the achievements of the state. Bands of them were sent to Siberia in the 1950s and 1960s to chronicle the heroic mastery of nature.” (Josephson, 1995, p. 556). Furthermore, between the 1930s and 1950s, Soviet novelists praised the nearly heroic role of managers or party members who were seeking at all cost labour production (Josephson et al., 2013, p. 76). Through the undoing of texts, Soviet principles concealed deep inside the texts emerge to the surface. The Soviet past haunts

the description and image of overloaded managers, and the tireless and fearless workers. In the Gazprom content, the figures of authority such the general director and the managers all have traits of the New Soviet Man.

The idea of the New Soviet Man was encompassing Soviet values that were also constituent of the Soviet hero. Under Stalin, heroic expressivism was perceived as a core attribute of the Soviet system and fuelled Soviet literature for decades (Hellbeck, 2006, p. 32). Socialist Realism moulded the figure of Soviet hero in visual arts and literature. Following a rigorous code of conduct, the hero was a brave and virtuous Bolshevik who is determined to win over the nation's enemies. Glorious heroic stories would cast themes ranging from epic adventures to developing new technologies, or even fulfilling plan objectives (Josephson, 2010, p. 252).

However, the advent of the Stakhanovite movement is the best concretisation of socialist realism in the work culture. Named in 1935 after a miner's record-breaking production, Stakhanovism was a Soviet movement that highlighted the extraordinary performance of worker in exceeding targets (Kotkin, 1997, p. 207). Even though it initiated dangerous practices and equipment misuses in workplaces (Kotkin, 1997, p. 212), this unsustainable work pace for overfilling norms was praised in the Soviet Union. The phenomenal achievements of Stakhanovites, the "heroes of labour", were acclaimed publicly in newspapers across the country, which was a state strategy to boost productivity (Kotkin, 1997, p. 211). Another spectral element in the revival of the Soviet work culture is then the figure of Stakhanovite. The Gazprom content presents hardship has a component of work, but also of life. The difference between two is even effaced. For the Stakhanovite, hard labour is normal. These selfless, fearless, virtuous, and patriotic workers are manifested in plural of the Gazprom biographical profiles. From the texts, the Stakhanovites came back to life.

4.1.2. The Old Macho Man

Through the spectral visits of the New Soviet Man, other constituents of the Soviet identity's socle transpire. The theme of family was abundantly used across the texts. The publications relate interactions with wives, sons and daughters, mothers and grandmothers, fathers and grandfathers. Deconstruction disclosed the interplay of different concepts in the making of meanings related to family. Outstandingly, the construction of "family" is based on a gender binary that shapes the interaction of the

subjects with these family members. It is manifested by the gender roles distributed through the texts.

As quickly as rare are they mentioned, women are primarily presented as wives, mothers, sisters, or in a secondary role. Wives are housewives. In opposition, men are the workers, the protagonists, the directors, the managers, the heroes. Workers are *gasmen* and “manpower” is the nation’s working force. Also, the masculine gender is often expressed through the prism of manliness: *true* men are brave, fearless, and seek hardship. The feminine gender is never portrayed with these signifieds. Thus, the signified “family” and its articulation shows dependency on other signifieds and signifiers that are conjugated on a gender binary.

The *traces* of these meanings attached to the signified “family” invoke a spectral presence. This recognisable presence can only be if it has already been. Thus arrives the spectre. This *thing*, if it ever tells its name, bears the name of patriarchy.

While the USSR is not the only example of the masculinist paradigm, the spectre of patriarchy that arises from Gazprom texts is Soviet. In the texts, the social organisation based on gender and its forms entail Soviet conceptions of family, wife, father, worker.

For the researcher Olga Voronina, patriarchy consists of a “system of standardization of the individual through gender, the ascription and prescription to a person of certain sexual parameters in behavior, thought, feeling and perception.” (1993, p. 111). After the socialist revolution, the USSR worked to make men and women in “conscious, devoted socialist subjects.” (Josephson, 2010, p. 266). Since, the Soviet Union seemed a historic guarantor of women’s equal rights and the emancipation of women. Regardless of revolutionary claims, the USSR was just another patriarchal state. Voronina argues that the emancipation of Soviet women was a myth nourished by the state propaganda to cover the over-exploitation of women (1993, p. 108). Furthermore, it was the Communist Party that initiated and controlled the involvement of women in political structures (Voronina, 1993, p. 109). In response to the failure of socio-economic policies, Stalin dismantled the equality of Soviet women and aimed to reinstate the nuclear family (Josephson, 2010, p. 281). Taking care of children and housework, the Soviet women were subject to the dual burden of work and family. The Soviet industrialisation had a catalyst effect on the deprivation of women’s rights, while the Communist Party redacted policies that rule over the body of women (Josephson, 2010, pp. 267–272). According to Voronina, the Soviet Union was then a particular case.

Instead of emerging from the category of men, the patriarchal system came from the totalitarian regime (Voronina, 1993, p. 109).

For Tynkkynen, the assignment of gendered roles by Gazprom, and more generally by the gas industry, is not an irregularity. Instead, he claims that the gas giant embodies a mix of neo-conservative and traditional patriarchal values in Russia (Tynkkynen, 2019, p. 38). Indeed, this is observable in Gazprom subjects which exemplifies the nuclear family and its traditional roles. This is exhibited when the North man proposes that his highest titles, in reference to those from the institutions of army and the gas industry, are of a “husband, father and grandfather” (Gazprom, 2014). The spectral presence of the Soviet patriarchy is manifested

During the Soviet Union, wives of workers were invited to establish their lives around the husband’s factory and were encouraged to take pride in the achievements and performance of their husbands (Kotkin, 1997, p. 218). Gazprom texts are reviving this image by placing the Russian women by themselves at home, showing support and pride in their husband’s accomplishments. The Soviet patriarchy is therefore haunting the Russian hydrocarbon culture.

4.1.3. The Spectre of a (Gas) Empire

The conceptual use of empire here does not refer to discussions about the revival of a lost *grandeur* nor any expansionist intentions from Russia. It rather suggests a temporal connection to an imperial past, particularly Soviet here, where gas is a vector to rehabilitate this memory.

The assumption that nature must be transformed entails an old tradition in Russian and Soviet literature concerning their territory. Under the Soviet regime, there was always a grand vision of the environment: either to fix Russia’s economic backwardness, to develop a strong Soviet state or to improve living standards (Josephson, 1995, p. 522). For this reason, Siberia became perceived as an “energy colony” for the rest of the Soviet Union (Hill & Gaddy, 2003, p. 73). For Widdis (2004) suggests that the territorial “emptiness” have played a role of identity container, in which the wilderness and the uninhabited regions, particularly of Siberia, became a Soviet canvas for a national epic: a space to conquer (p. 48). Other words such “mastery” and “assimilation” have been also used to describe the industrial challenge in Siberia (Hill & Gaddy, 2003, p. 74). The

associated narrative was determinant in the Soviet industrial development of Siberia and the Far East. Through industrialisation and urbanisation, the triumph over Siberia was one of the greatest achievements imaginable for the Soviets (Hill & Gaddy, 2003, p. 72). From this perspective, the vast region became be the display site of Soviet power.

The Gazprom texts present Siberia as a reasonable venture, a destination of opportunities. It is notably associated with ideas of wealth and social progress. When the natural environment of the regions of Siberia and Far East is described, it is portrayed as presenceless, untamed, and empty – as absence of modernity. As the traces in those texts exhibit, this space is recoded to be conquered, domesticated, and fill – to bring modernity. The Gazprom texts command in the general reading that the industrial presence is the only one in these remote regions. Instead, the invocation of what is constructed as *over there* carries traces of the Soviet past. The tradition of conceptualising the Far East in a vast, untamed space has the effect to make local populations of these regions invisible. There is nothing; nothing *except* gas[prom]. While the “gasmen” are *over there*, “alone”, what is argued by the texts to be absent is rather a silenced presence. In the same dichotomous oppositions that formed the conquest narrative, a colonialist structure is embedded.

Colonialist contours emerges from the underlying semiotic tissue of the Gazprom content. It associates a migration of workers to the gas reserves. As deconstruction revealed, this migration induces a dependency to another migration: the one of natural resources. However, these migratory fluxes are inverted in favour of the workforce. Gas is therefore extracted from what is dependant, secondary, thus peripheral, to be brought to what is primary, central. The trace of a colonialist empire – or simply empire – transpires through the imperial apparitions. The Soviet colonialist project in Siberia is not only a spectre of the past.

The Soviet cities in Siberia were built with a specific vision. Siberia was the space for the actualisation of the utopias of “central planners, military strategists, and Soviet ideologues” (Hill & Gaddy, 2003, p. 88). Siberia thus became during the Soviet Union a massive industrial and urbanisation experience (Hill & Gaddy, 2003, p. 92). Siberia became a utopia. However, in the late 1980s, the Siberian industrialisation revealed to be a failure:

“The utopian schemes concocted in the 1960s and 1970s were intended to set Siberian development on a path that would have taken it as far as 2000. This was a long-term

project of gigantic proportions. The Siberian utopia was stopped by resource limitations, not lack of imagination.”. (Hill & Gaddy, 2003, p. 94)

This vision of the future was never concretised. This failed future belongs to what is *already* effective in the virtual. The future of the Siberia utopia is not a new future; it is a *lost* future. Its manifestation through the idea of grandiose projects and the victory over nature shows that this future was never buried. An unburied future that one cannot mourn. Siberia is then a space of broken time, where promises of modernisation are haunting. The future of Russia is thus haunted by the failed concretisation of the Siberian utopia. Not only this haunting deprives the ability in virtuality to re-conceive a future for Siberia, but it also has real implications.

For the Soviets, the natural environment was the break to the nation’s modernisation. Josephson highlights a total lack of environmental consideration in the Soviet planning of industrial projects, with the environment only being something to be managed or tamed (1995, pp. 520–521). The Soviet project of conquering “Nature” encompassed Stalin’s Great Transformation of Nature. On the Soviet modernisation project, Slezkine (2016) informs: “The ‘Great Transformation of Nature’ was to be the last war against the past, and the battle cry was heard by all those whose future was not yet present” (p. 187). This profound conviction to overcome nature as a destiny involved its destruction. In the text concerning the general director, there is a subtle hint on the Russian approach to Siberian nature. If one can think to build a “modern town” in a glimpse, this informs on the transformative force of the Russian modernising project. This imperial conception of Siberia is nowadays haunting Russia through the mean of its past enemy: nature itself.

The narrative from Gazprom that their development projects are benefitting contemporary and future communities is challenged by the colonialist vision of Siberia and the Far East. Considering that around 60% of the Russian territory and the infrastructural legacy of the Soviet industries sits on permafrost (Tynkkynen, 2019, p. 116), the haunting future of the Siberian utopia is a serious threat to Russia’s future. With a vision to exploit the most important Russian gas and oil reserves in Siberia and the Far East (Gazprom, 2021a), the Russian hydrocarbon culture is promoting a future that goes in opposition of a decarbonised horizon. The failed future of Siberia hinders alternative futures.

5. REPORT OF A GHOSTLY CONVERSATION

5.1. Learning From the Past

This brief conversation ended as the spectres returned to their intrinsic environment: between the living and the dead. Speaking with the ghosts aimed to learn about what has been kept concealed in the general reading. Applied to the Gazprom content, deconstructive hauntology undraped the haunting of Russian hydrocarbon culture. The Soviet past was found in crevasses, away from an ontology of presence. Now, it is possible to address the two questions that guided this inquiry.

❖ How does the Soviet past haunt the hydrocarbon culture in Russia?

The research materials are indubitably haunted. The Gazprom collection of bibliographical accounts encompasses a haunting presence within it. The reminiscence of memories – the vast majority from Soviet days – present various aspects of the past. Some are decried, others are lost. Nevertheless, the past is the foreground of these stories. For instance, in the article about the general director, iconic symbols of the Soviet Union are summoned: a Soviet hero; the Great Patriotic War, and Victory Day. To be reminded, these biographical profiles are produced by a gas company and promoted as “their” people. The entanglement of memory and gas is therefore highly uncanny. While the past is revived in the name of gas, it is not always under the form of a proposed future based on nostalgia: a return. Although haunting elements might represent an idealised past such as the Soviet imperial greatness, some spectres came to warn.

The haunting was manifested in diverse forms. For instance, Soviet values are revived by the haunting of the Soviet work culture. More specifically, the spectres of the New Soviet Man and of Stakhanovites haunt the hydrocarbon culture. These spectral figures carry with them Soviet conceptions that are embedded in Stalinist ideology. Thus, it is possible to remark the spectral presence of the Soviet work culture in the Russian hydrocarbon culture.

The spectre of Soviet patriarchy was the clearest manifestation. It conveys the Soviet gender roles, where the genders are associated with specific civic and social roles. This spectre is tainted by its conservative nature. Its spectral presence implies then inertia.

Another element of the spectral presence in the Russian hydrocarbon culture has imperial traits. This spectre manifests in the Gazprom content the characteristics of the Soviet empire. Its most common appearances are through the haunting – the traces – of the Conquest of Siberia. The Soviet narrative of the conquest sets a virtual domesticating space where imperial motifs are articulated. Here, the spectral presence seemed to benefit the hydrocarbon culture’s objectives: the expansion of the endless fossil fuel industries.

The research observed how the Russian hydrocarbon culture appropriate the Soviet past in order to bond it with natural gas. However, the apparitions can be understood as a coproduct of this process. The spectres cannot be fully present, and one cannot command them to be. Their haunting presence in the hydrocarbon culture is thus not intentional.

❖ How does this haunting presence affect the virtuality of a decarbonised energy future?

The spectres found in this inquiry carry a significant legacy from the past. All these spectres represent a certain vision, some overflowing on others, that conveyed solid meanings. These ghosts still interact, from the cracks and corners of *texts*, with the living present. The vision of these spectres does not reflect towards the future; it does not propose a new future. In that way, these Soviet spectres are the guarantor of an old political and social organisation of life: the Soviet life. Establishing contact with these ghosts is a way to learn about them. The exploration of the past offers a space to re-imagine how fundamental aspects of life are approached and conceived. More, it is a way to challenge the dominant constructions about the past, but also the futures. As this research reveal, the imperial spectre carries within itself a failed vision of a past future. This *lost future* is rehabilitated through Gazprom content and thus the Russian hydrocarbon culture.

As mentioned earlier, Tynkkynen argues that the energy superpower narrative – which shares foundations with spectre of empire – could initiate a transition towards renewable energy. Fitting the socio-cultural and political dimensions of the Russian identity, this national narrative could free Russia from its hydrocarbon dependency while repositioning internationally the country as a “green superpower” (Tynkkynen, 2019, p. 127). This would require acknowledging the imperial spectre, to speak with it. It demands to face the ghost’s living life, to recognise its actions. This connects to Etkind’s idea of “unprocessed memory of the catastrophic Soviet past” (2014). This is an opportunity to

engage with the traumas, and silenced moments of the Soviet imperial experience. This re-opening of history is the first step to mourn the Soviet empire. Only then is possible to re-narrate the burdensome past without Soviet ghosts.

5.2. Concluding Words

Manifested through the expression “Soviet ghosts” used by the former Russian minister of industry, the Russian fossil fuel industry holds a complex relation with time. This inquiry was an opportunity to enrich the interdisciplinary discussion on the energy transition in Russia, and in general. The concept of “hydrocarbon culture” has proven to be a fertile soil to probe the complex relationship of the fossil fuel industry and the Russian state. Thanks to this concept and to hauntology, this study could explore the haunting presence of the Soviet past in Russia’s energy context.

From this thesis, new inquiry avenues can be identified. In relation to Etkind’s research (2013), it could be fascinating to study how the online presence of Gazprom – a space of Derridean virtuality – reproduces the displacement of the unburied. As websites can be sites of memory and mourning, remembrance is nonetheless intertwined with a deterritorialised unburied past. Closely related to this, it appeared during my research that through “gas”, the past becomes a nostalgic refuge where one can return repeatedly and “relive”. This idea echoes Kalinin’s research on the metonymic juxtaposition between oil and memory, where oil functions as a mnemonic trigger to relive memories (2015, p. 132). The investigation of the mechanisms through which fossil fuels can interact and recode our memory and our identities would bring insights on the non-material aspects of energy.

Concerning the prospect of hauntological inquiries, it would be interesting to scrutinise the Russian hydrocarbon culture from different perspectives: a different form of digital presence, in another post-Soviet polity, or even from a transnational standpoint. To turn the hauntological projector towards the future, one could interrogate on what could be haunting a *post*-hydrocarbon culture. Indeed, research interests can be explored from a multitude of directions. Hopefully, the application and operationalisation of hauntology in this master’s thesis contribute, even in the smallest way, to the development of the spectrality studies. The ontological shift of hauntology offers research potential that deserves more attention, in all the imaginable and *not-yet* imaginable domains. For my part, I have learned so much from hauntology.

I would like to thank the spectres, none of this would have been possible without them.

Despite their endeavour,

it seems that the gas towns are cursed to become ghost towns.

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