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## Desert Earth: Geophilosophy and the Anthropocene

Abstract:

The figure of the desert features extensively throughout the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* and is a recurring motif in Deleuze's sole-authored works. While recent book length studies place geophilosophy at the forefront of Deleuze and Guattari's thought (Flaxman 2012; Woodard 2013; Gasché 2014), the theme of the desert is mentioned in these studies only in passing, if at all. Understanding the role of the desert in the evolution of Deleuze and Guattari's collaborative enterprise is, however, important for a number of reasons: firstly, it allows us to track the relationship between schizoanalysis and the wider project of geophilosophy and why the one necessary implies the other. Secondly, it helps us to position Deleuze and Guattari's work relative to other key figures such as Nietzsche and Heidegger who employ images of deserts and wastelands in their critique of modernity. Thirdly, and most importantly, it gives us a framework for theorizing the Anthropocene—and the forms of capitalist spatiality that dominate it—as an epoch of both physical and metaphysical desertification in which the relationship between life and its material ground becomes ever more uncertain. The article concludes by relating Deleuze's remarks on desert islands to our contemporary environmental condition.

### I. Desert Desire

The theme of the desert occupies a curious place in Deleuze's work, positioned somewhere between a concept proper and an aesthetic figure. From his earliest writing, the desert is used to evoke the sense of a 'world without others'. The early article 'Desert Islands', for example, discusses the Robinsonades of Defoe and Giraudoux and argues that the literary figure of the desert island manifests a 'mythical recreation of the world' (Deleuze 2004: 12). Creation is defined here as a geoaesthetic movement of separation and beginning anew. Our aesthetic fascination with geography more generally may thus be said to embody the deterritorialising movement of desire. We can discern here an important link between desire as flight or errancy and the desert as a nomadic topography, the word 'desert' stemming from the Greek 'eremos', meaning not only a barren or empty place but a place into which one may flee, as an eremite. It is all too easy to write off Deleuze's fascination with desert islands—to which I return in more detail below—as the manifestation of an escapist or regressively 'other-worldly' tendency in Deleuze's thought, as Hallward does (Hallward 2006: 23). What I argue here, however, is that a consideration of the desert contributes much to our understanding of what Gregg Lambert has called Deleuze and Guattari's 'political geology' (Lambert 2005: 220). This is especially relevant when it comes to theorizing the Anthropocene, which has been characterized by some as an age of deserts (Eswaran, Reich and Veraslip 2006; Vince 2014: 192).

The desert imagery deployed throughout *Anti-Oedipus* forms a key part of the mythopoetic, frequently apocalyptic, style in which that book was written. Yet there is a conceptual consistency at work in this desert poetics that can to be

used to understand how the schizoanalytic conception of desire involves the production of a particular kind of space. The body without organs—a concept I return to throughout—is frequently defined in topographical terms as ‘the edge of the deterritorialized socius, the desert at the gates of the city’ on which desire, freed from its investment in social reproduction, roams nomadically (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 102). The ‘revolutionary investment of desire’ is thus said to be ‘desert-desire’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 378). From the libidinal and emotional impoverishment generally associated with schizophrenia, Deleuze and Guattari seek to extrapolate the principles of the production of reality itself:

everything has been said about the paucity of reality, the loss of reality, the lack of contact with life, autism and athymia. Schizophrenics themselves have said everything there is to say about this, and have been quick to slip into the expected clinical mold. Dark world, growing desert: a solitary machine hums on the beach, an atomic factory installed in the desert. But if the body without organs is indeed this desert, it is as an indivisible, nondecomposable distance over which the schizo glides in order to be everywhere something real is produced, everywhere something real has been and will be produced. (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 86)

We shall see to what extent this idea of a production of reality from the basis of a zero intensity state, conceived via the aesthetics of the desert, encompasses much of Deleuze’s thought.

Throughout *A Thousand Plateaus*, the desert theme is developed in increasingly complex ways. Deleuze and Guattari argue that European Romanticism in its different forms, including its fascistic variants, invokes depopulation, the absence of a people, through an experience of the Earth as ‘solitary’ or ‘deserted’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 340). Likewise, they tell us that modernist composer Varèse’s *Dèserts* ‘populated the Gobi desert with insects and stars constituting a becoming-music of the world’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 309). The ‘denuded tree’ of the Wolf-Man’s dream is a ‘full body’ on which desire can be redistributed anew according to the logic of animal packs. The production of any multiplicity is repeatedly said to require a bare or impoverished surface of this sort on which the ties of old lineages can be dissolved.

The desert and steppe are frequently used to exemplify smooth or intensive space. Smooth space is defined through the concept of the *nomos*, an ancient Greek term relating to the inhabitation of spaces peripheral to the city: ‘[the *nomos*] stands in opposition to the law or the *polis*, as the backcountry, a mountainside, or the vague expanse around a city’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 380). In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze had begun articulating an ‘aesthetic of intensities’ forming the basis of the concept of smooth space (Deleuze 1994: 244). The properties by which we perceive space—length, area, volume—exist not only as measurable quantities but as immeasurable, purely ‘ideal’ or intensive differences: distance in itself, size in itself. These intensive quantities constitute a transcendental aesthetic—the conditions governing all sense perception—by way of a paradox: they cannot be perceived because their

realization in measurable extensity conceals or—in thermodynamic terms—‘cancels’ them, hence their pure ideality. But they are also ‘what can only be perceived’ in that they alone furnish the energetic raw material from which our perceptions forge reality (Deleuze 1994: 231).

Deleuze is drawing on a philosophical tradition stretching back to Plato when he maintains that the ground of physical reality is ideal. But he also subverts this tradition by suggesting that ideality leads us into groundlessness. The closer we try to get to the physical ground of the thing-in-itself the more we approach an ‘unground’ (Deleuze 1994: 288-9). Objects in space possess the physical depth and permanence they do by keeping this unground, or metaphysical depth, concealed in extensive forms. Crucially, however, the unground becomes accessible to thought not as some abyssal nothingness behind appearances but as a pure surface. The ground ‘rises to the surface’, as if our perception were part of the genesis of matter itself (Deleuze 1994: 275). There is a point at which we discern something absolute in space—intensive quantities, differences in their pure form: distance in itself or size in itself. These intensities are ideal, but—crucially from the point of view of Deleuze’s political philosophy—they are not rational. In fact, they precipitate a collapse of rational categories into a delirium; they cause a ‘catastrophe’ to overwhelm the rational order of our representations (Deleuze 1994: 35). Deleuze borrows from Schelling the geological example of a volcanic line whose eruption announces ‘universal “ungrounding”’ (Deleuze 1994: 230). The ideality of grounding thus forms a paradoxical identity with the irrational thing-in-itself.

This is what explains why Deleuze and Guattari’s account of the production of space is based much less on a history of labour and social relations—as it is, for example, in Henri Lefebvre’s work—than a history of desire and perception. While, for Lefebvre, ‘bodies—deployments of energy—produce space and produce themselves, along with their motions, according to the laws of space’, for Deleuze and Guattari the body produces space precisely through an overturning of law, including the law of entropy itself (Lefebvre 1991: 171). The body without organs is produced by a libidinal energy crisis of the desiring machines—what psychiatry calls schizophrenia—by which the machines freeze or ‘stop dead’. The petrified, rigidified body that results is marked by an impoverishment of life. But, to the extent that the body has been stripped bare of its organic investments, it provides a new ground via an ungrounding by which the rational divisions of space characteristic of the *polis*, or State form, as opposed to the *nomos*, may be critiqued, challenged and resisted.

## II. Desert Immanence

In his discussions of grounding Deleuze is exploiting a tension deeply embedded in the Western experience of space which Deleuze and Guattari develop in overtly environmental and agricultural terms. If ‘the tree has dominated Western reality and all of Western thought’, they argue, then this is because Western culture has generally adopted the form of the ‘root-foundation: *Grund*, *racine*, *fondement*’. The metaphysics of grounding and the physics of cultivation are

implicated in one another: 'the West has a special relation to the forest, and deforestation: the fields carved from the forest are populated with seed plants produced by cultivation based on species lineages of the arborescent type' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 18). But this obsession with roots has from the very first coexisted with forms of cultivation that draw close to desert experience. The clearing of forests is, after all, a deracination. It is thus only against the backdrop of rootlessness that Western arborescence emerges.

The very notion of transcendence, 'a specifically European disease', has its origins in the desert experience of the seminomadic Biblical Hebrews (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 18). As Bible scholar Herbert Schneidau writes,

to Bedouin, as to Don Juan in Mexico, the desert is full of immanent 'power spots,' the landscape is mythologized, and is neither lifeless nor terrifying. But to the seminomad who must live next to it yet could not flourish on it, the desert's formlessness could suggest ... the 'Wholly Other.' Ultimately, it is the discontinuity of the desert with the usual forms of life that could give the paradox of a concrete image of transcendence. (Schneidau 1976: 143)

Western culture developed in close proximity to deserts in a way that has led to a complex entanglement of immanence and transcendence. Environmental philosopher Paul Shepard maintains that 'the dry landscapes of Egypt, Sumer, Assyria, Palestine, and the Eastern European and Eurasian borders of the Mediterranean Sea fashioned many of the concepts that define Occidental civilization' (Shepard 1982: 47). The opposition of immanence and transcendence is thus not a dualism but relates to different ways of perceiving the same space: the desert, with its unbroken expanses, can suggest pure presence or continuity, but in its hostility to organic life it also suggests the radical discontinuity of a world left bereft by a presence that has withdrawn to the heavens.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, philosophy began in the commercial world of Greece, which was 'like an "international market" organized along the borders of the Orient'. The Greek archipelago constituted a zone of immanence in relation to the transcendent model of the archaic eastern imperial States. The first philosophers are those who 'come from the borderlands of the Greek world, strangers in flight, breaking with empire and colonized by people of Apollo' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 87). The historian Jean-Pierre Vernant would appear to back this up when he argues that the Platonic innovation of the immortal, rational soul arose not with the Dionysian cults but with the *iatromanteis*, literally 'physician-seers' who 'where the precursors of the philosophers and whose legend suggests a comparison with the figure and conduct of the shaman of the civilizations of northern Asia'. These shamanic or sage-like figures 'are individuals on the margins of the social group, distinguished by their asceticism, which might include retreats in the desert' (Vernant 2006: 384).

It was Nietzsche who first proposed that the philosopher emerged from desert ascetics: 'In the desert the truthful have always dwelled, the free spirits, as the

rulers of the desert; but in the cities dwell the well-fed, famous wise men—the draft animals’ (Nietzsche 2006: 80). The first philosophers followed the religious ascetics into the wastes, drawn there by a promise of sovereignty, and philosophical abstraction is thus seen as inseparable from this dissolution of social bonds provided by the desert. But the philosophers returned to the marketplace, bringing something of the desert back with them. As Vernant suggests, the Greek city’s ‘social institutions established the separation between nature and society that is the conceptual prerequisite for the exercise of rational thought. With the coming of the city, the political order was separated from the organization of the cosmos’. This broke the old continuity of nature and society and the philosopher’s success was in part down to his ability to theorise this new separation and thus contribute to social harmony. Desert immanence, in the form of metaphysical abstraction, is established within the transcendence of law: just as nature or *phusis* could be judged to be purposeful, so too could social order be submitted to a just measure. Vernant argues that there emerges in the sixth century BC a new distribution, replacing the old *nomos*, based on an abstract conception of justice characterized by *isonomia* or geometrical equality stressing equilibrium and the balance of forces (Vernant 2006: 387-8).

### III. Desert Earth

What geophilosophy amounts to, then, is a means of tracing the relationships between thought, politics, and space that have dominated Western consciousness, but it also insists that our concepts and institutions have been geographically conditioned. We have yet to explore this in relation to the Anthropocene, but we can note how the desert plays a key yet extremely ambiguous role in all these respects both as physical space and metaphysical *topos*. Deleuze and Guattari even suggest, at one point, that desire as a political force can be first detected in the ascetic Christians of the third to the fifth centuries who fled the Roman Empire for the deserts of Egypt, Syria, and Palestine. In figures such as St. Anthony, a simultaneous retreat from the world and an attempt to reconstitute it as a spiritual empire in the wilderness gave rise to the duality of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation that defines the modern State (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 222).

Throughout *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari develop Nietzsche’s contention that capitalism is established within the Christian ascetic ideal and produces a secularized form of it in its insistence on the punitive logic of debt. Marx diagnosed the essential contradiction of capital as the ever-diminishing relative rate of profit accompanying every absolute increase. Deleuze and Guattari’s Nietzschean interpretation of this is that the capitalist machine works via a self-inhibiting movement akin to the paradox of a growing barrenness. The means by which money produces money realizes a form of growth shorn from life yet which continues to rely on the formal properties of organic reproduction:

Capital is indeed the body without organs of the capitalist, or rather of the capitalist being. But as such, it is not only the fluid and petrified substance of money, for it will give to the sterility of money the form whereby money produces money. It produces surplus value, just as the body

without organs reproduces itself, puts forth shoots, and branches out to the farthest corners of the universe. (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 10)

With this arborescent desert, capital takes on the role previously occupied, in the primitive social machine, by the Earth. If the latter is typically mythologized as a primary fertility, a cosmic egg or placenta, then the capitalist socius recreates the Earth in its own image as a mode of propagation without life. As the State acquires global reach through surveillance technologies and military expansion, it needs an immanent environment in which to move and must regard the Earth as a vast smooth space:

one no longer goes from one point to another, but rather holds space beginning from any point: instead of striating space, one occupies it with a vector of deterritorialization in perpetual motion. This modern strategy was communicated from the sea to the air, as the new smooth space, but also to the entire Earth considered as desert or sea. As converter and capturer, the State does not just relativize movement, it reimparts absolute movement. It does not just go from the smooth to the striated, it reconstitutes smooth space; it reimparts smooth in the wake of the striated. It is true that this new nomadism accompanies a worldwide war machine whose organization exceeds the State apparatuses and passes into energy, military-industrial, and multinational complexes. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 387)

It is no longer a question of a simple opposition of smooth and striated but of a worldwide mode of production of smooth space that State power must find ways to manage. This suggests a kind of desert theopolitics of the modern State. Deleuze and Guattari observe that religions have so often taken root in the desert because they need an 'encompassing element' to oppose to a 'center': 'the entire history of the desert concerns the possibility of its becoming the encompassing element, and also of being repelled, rejected by the center, as though in an inversion of movement' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 574). The desert provides a geography in which transcendence is continually reclaimed within an expanding immanence. Thus, 'the great imperial religions need a smooth space like the desert, but only in order to give it a law that is opposed to the *nomos* in every way, and converts the absolute' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 495). Capitalist globalisation itself is a chapter in the history of desert immanence: 'The absolute is now the horizon or background, in other words, the Encompassing Element without which nothing would be global or englobed' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 494).

A geophilosophy of the Anthropocene would surely have to acknowledge how, since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of nature has played the role of encompassing element in a way that has shaped our contemporary environmental condition. Timothy Morton has argued that many of the key ideas of environmentalism stem from a Romantic era aesthetics that sought to evoke an idea of the environment as a surrounding atmosphere: 'the rhetoric of nature depends upon something I define as an ambient poetics, a way of conjuring up a sense of a surrounding atmosphere or world' (Morton 2007: 22). We find such rhetoric

running through the language of Wordsworth and Shelley, for example. Morton's polemic is that contemporary environmental consciousness suffers as a result of its Romantic heritage from the contradictory position that nature is said to be, at once, a substantial 'Thing Over There', withdrawn and separate from us, and an ethereal medium that exists in-between things, holding them together (Morton 2007: 1). We can leave Morton's object oriented solution to this problem to one side and observe that the deadlock he describes corresponds to the foregoing account of geophilosophy: nature is habitually invoked by environmental discourse as both a transcendent, withdrawn object and an immanent, encompassing world.

Understood in this way, geophilosophy offers some key resources for theorising the spread of physical deserts that has come to define our contemporary environmental condition. What is called 'desertification' has been acknowledged as a key aspect of life in the Anthropocene (Eswaran, Reich and Veraslip 2006). While definitions have been hotly contested by environmental and social scientists, desertification generally relates to the ways in which the productivity of land degrades as a result of human practices such as overgrazing and deforestation. While it has been acknowledged as a major problem occurring on every inhabited continent, with some accounts suggesting that arable land is being lost at a rate of 12 million hectares a year (Vince 2014: 192), debates over the causes of desertification often centre on the cultural and aesthetic values attached to desert landscapes and the biases ingrained in Western conceptions of nature.

At issue in the political ecology of desertification is the link between value—cultural and economic—and the land as ground of human activity. The forced settlement of nomads has a long history in colonial policy, and a certain image of the desert as a place nefarious rootlessness has accompanied this. The French colonial administration in Africa, for example, sought to settle nomads not only for ecological reasons or to manage the population but because it was deemed necessary as part of their 'civilising mission' (Benjaminsen and Berge 2004: 52). Today, however, it is recognized that one of the major causes of desertification in Africa has been 'the conversion of nomadic pastoral societies to sedentary lifestyles with a focus on raising cash crops instead of subsistence ones' (Whyte 2013: 143). Nevertheless, the image of the desert as the site of social and moral degeneration retains a currency.

Recent work on desertification has drawn on Deleuze and Guattari to acknowledge the baleful influence of a certain view of the natural environment based on ideas of predictability and equilibrium. In the colonial encounters in the 'New World' deserts of Australia, the Americas and Southern Africa,

landscapes have been carved into fenced holdings with defined livestock carrying capacities, while people have been encouraged and coerced to settle, often in bounded reservations and following ethnocide ... or as an underclass and labour pool ... 'Wild lands' have been purified of undesirable beasts—from wild dog to tsetse fly—only to later become the desired and imagined spaces of 'untouched Edenic Nature', or the locales



of various 'community-based conservation' schemes designed to 'upfront' wildlife and wild landscapes. (Sullivan and Homewood 2003: 7).

It was the agricultural stratification of these non-Western smooth spaces that created the conditions for land degradation. To an eye accustomed to territorialized and stratified space, deserts suffer from being systems lacking equilibrium and stability. Estimations of land productivity are thus made against a conception of the natural environment as a system in equilibrium. Nature can only function as an encompassing element if it remains an indifferent background, a *terra nullius* for human achievement. To the extent that it fails in this role, it becomes an endangered object, an untouchable Eden. It has been widely acknowledged that once non-equilibrium dynamics are applied to dryland ecologies, our valuation of land productivity changes correspondingly and we can see that nomadic land practices, far from spreading the desert, may in fact be perfectly suited to life in it. Our metaphysics of nature, however, prevent us from seeing in what sense the desert produces, just as colonial agriculture stifled nomadism.

In short, desertification as a physical process involves a metaphysics of values, and this is why it has led to so much contention among scientists. But, extrapolating from this, we can suggest in a properly geophilosophical register that the desert is precisely where the link between ground and value becomes broken or uncertain and thus amenable to change as our traditional methods of evaluation break down. As Deleuze says in 'What is Grounding?', 'all who propose values to us appeal to a ground' (Deleuze 2015: 16). Ungrounding would then be a loss of all values, an abyssal *Abgrund* consummate with the universal desertification signaled in the warning cry raised by Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* that 'the desert grows' (Nietzsche 2006: 248). If, however, as Deleuze says with respect to Nietzsche, all values are the products of the forces of an evaluating agency—which might be termed will to power, becoming, desire or, simply, life—then ungrounding also serves to liberate this agency and produce new values on a global scale (Deleuze 1983: 1).

#### **IV. Robinson's Paradox**

Desertification is the reduction or loss of the biological productivity of land, but this presupposes a set of values concerning what land is for and how it should be used. Crucially, it also presupposes a model of what Deleuze and Guattari call antiproduction: a limit to production, a realm of anti-value that conditions production as the latter's zero intensity ground. How could we recognize a landscape from which all value has disappeared, and how could we determine to what extent its valuelessness is human or natural in origin? These are mere questions of method to scientists (Bestelmeyer et al. 2015), but they go far beyond ecology and raise the Nietzschean problem of nihilism. For Nietzsche, a 'basic fact of the human will' is its '*horror vacui*', its fear of nothingness or emptiness (Nietzsche 1997: 68). The will is innately capable of apprehending its own voiding in a generalized loss of meanings and aims. The ascetic ideal—the attachment to a 'spiritual' domain of values rather than to the physical here and

now—emerges as a solution to this horror. Faced with the spectre of a nothingness of will, the will instead decides to will the nothingness of a spiritual reality.

If, following Nietzsche and Deleuze and Guattari, the problem of nihilism and the ascetic ideal is how we should understand the history of Western consciousness from monotheism to capitalism, then the Anthropocene, as the product of capitalist modernity, is an environmental inscription of the ascetic ideal in global, geological terms. The ascetic ideal sought a solution to the problem of nihilism by constructing another world, a spiritual empire built from the will's own self-denial. The desert, where nature appears to void itself, was the perfect location for this project. Capitalism, however, disenchanting empty space in a historically unprecedented way. Capitalist globalization proceeds, as we've seen, through a movement of displacement from centre to periphery. It borrows from religion the manner in which it displaces its own limits. It goes to the very ends of the Earth, to the polar wastes, but it also produces artificial wastelands and non-spaces within its own metropolitan centres. These, however, lack the sublime power of the deserts that produced the ascetic ideal. The latter, having once sought out the desert in order to cultivate itself, has given rise, in its transition from religion to capital, to a concretization of its spiritual deserts in the shape of the junkspaces, drosscapes and edgelands that are now acknowledged as an increasingly prominent feature of the post-industrial landscapes of the developed world (for discussions of these concepts, see Koolhaas 2013, Berger 2006, and Farley and Roberts 2012).

We can return to the Robinsonade here as a key component of Anthropocene aesthetics. Robinson on his island plays out a paradox, Deleuze writes in *The Logic of Sense*, because he must eke out an existence from the meager resources offered by the island while obeying social and moral codes that presume the conquest of nature has already taken place (Deleuze 1990: 49). Deleuze compares this with similar paradoxes identified in different ways by Levi-Strauss and Lacan: we always have an excess of signifiers over signifieds, too many signs relative to what we actually know. No matter how totalizing our symbolic systems are, they fail to map fully onto the reality they are supposed to capture. There is thus a structural imbalance that fuels totalisation (or what Deleuze and Guattari will go on to call paranoia). What allows a symbolic system such as language to work despite this is what structuralists call the 'empty' or 'floating' signifier, a signifier with a zero symbolic value. This is a mobile 'empty square', as Deleuze calls it, a transcendental 'object = x' that 'is always displaced in relation to itself' and thus allows the structure to work despite its inherent contradiction (Deleuze 2004: 185-6). Levi-Strauss's concept of 'mana' and Lacan's concept of the phallus are the best-known examples of these.

The theme of the empty signifier is well known as an aspect of structuralist thought, but what is remarkable is that Deleuze's engagement with it brings into view a geophilosophical transformation of psychoanalysis that ultimately leads him beyond the limitations of the latter and into the realms of schizoanalysis. Deleuze names the paradox of the empty signifier 'Robinson's paradox' because he identifies its zero symbolic value with the energetic zero of the desert island.

Two texts from different parts of Deleuze's career are relevant here. The first is his early essay 'Desert Islands', and the second is the appendix to *The Logic of Sense* in which he provides a quasi-Lacanian reading of Michel Tournier's novel *Friday*.

'Desert Islands' presents us with what is perhaps Deleuze's earliest articulation of the concept that he will come to call 'the desert of the body without organs'. In this text, Deleuze writes, echoing Heidegger's terminology, that desert islands reveal a profound opposition or 'strife' between land and ocean, surface and depth (Deleuze 2004: 9). There is a strife, a war or *polemos*, at work in the elemental heart of nature. Later Heidegger texts such as 'The Origin of the Work of Art' engage with the paradox of grounds in explicitly geophilosophical terms and draw on a Romantic poetics of nature: art works manifest a fundamental strife between the Earth, which is the withdrawn depth of things, and a world that discloses itself only by being grounded on the abyss of this withdrawal (Heidegger 1971: 47). Deleuze is clearly indebted to Heidegger in this early piece, but he's also developing a conception of 'desertedness' that differs from the latter's.

In his remarks on Nietzsche's growing desert Heidegger suggests that the age of secular, technoscientific rationality threatens to put an end to the strife of revelation and concealment through a technological homogenisation of experience (Heidegger 1968: 45-6). The modern world, in which the Earth is regarded as mere standing reserve of raw materials, becomes the desert of which Zarathustra warned. For Deleuze, on the other hand, the desert is the very product of elemental strife:

that an island is deserted must appear *philosophically* normal to us. Humans cannot live, nor live in security, unless they assume that the active struggle between earth and water is over, or at least contained. ... In one way or another, the very existence of islands is the negation of this point of view ... humans can live on an island only by forgetting what an island represents. Islands are either from before or for after humankind. (Deleuze 2004: 9)

We can never quite forget the original desertification, the shock of the original emptiness underlying every inhabitation; the unground rumbles beneath our territories and seeps into them. The desert is thus geophilosophically normal, but traumatic from the point of view of a life-world or a territory.

Deleuze and Guattari define geophilosophy as a form of 'thinking that takes place in the relationship of territory and the earth' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 85). At issue, then, is a disjunction between two kinds of origin: we are the products of our sociolinguistic territories or life-worlds, but we are also products of the Earth itself, of its geophysical processes. The inclusive disjunction between the two origins forms an originary desertedness, an absolute deterritorialisation underlying every territory. The desert is an 'Idea of humanity' before it is a geographical feature because every territory presupposes a primal intimation of the Earth as separate and alien from us, a bare surface on which our territories

can be formed (Deleuze 2004: 11). If we banish this Idea in order to live in a world, it continues to haunt the imagination, like a geological return of the repressed.

The origin is thus displaced, as if riven by an inherent self-opposition. The Robinsonade, starting with Defoe's novel, presents the desert island as the site of a rebeginning, a 'second origin'. Deleuze observes that myths and religions have long borne witness to notions of a second origin, often involving environmental catastrophes, such as Noah's flood. In this sense, myth tells us that the origin is always displaced, discovered only as rediscovered:

It is not enough that everything begin, everything must begin again once the cycle of possible combinations has come to completion. The second moment does not succeed the first: it is the reappearance of the first when the cycle of the other moments has been completed. The second origin is thus more essential than the first, since it gives us the law of repetition, the law of the series, whose first origin gave us only moments. (Deleuze 2004: 13)

We can read in these lines the germ of Deleuze's first two syntheses of time in *Difference and Repetition*, but we can also discern the emergence of the concept of the body without organs. The latter is described in *Anti-Oedipus* as 'an enormous undifferentiated object', an impassive whole body that interrupts the linear, connective chain of desiring machines which thereby experience an energy crisis as the body is flooded with antiproduction: 'everything stops dead for a moment, everything freezes in place-and then the whole process will begin all over again' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 7). Whereas the second origin has been mythologized in prior societies as life giving, 'a cosmic egg' facilitating miraculous rebirth, for modern experience it is felt in purely economic terms as an energetic zero, 'sterile' and 'unconsumable' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 8). Defoe's desert island is in this sense the exemplary ground of the reproduction of capital: 'the mythical recreation of the world from the deserted island gives way to the reconstitution of everyday bourgeois life from a reserve of capital' (Deleuze 2004: 12).

The desert island is the desacrilised second origin, the geographical manifestation of a *horror vacui* stripped of its sublimity and functioning only as a moment of an economic reproduction. For Defoe's Robinson, the problem is a reconstitution of bourgeois society on the basis of the second origin, but Tournier's reimagining allows Deleuze to speculate on how things might proceed differently once Robinson's energies are directed not towards origins but goals:

for Defoe it was the same thing to relate Robinson to the origin and to have him produce a world consistent with our own; it is the same thing for Tournier to relate him to aims and have him deviate or diverge with respect to the aims. Related to origins, Robinson must necessarily reproduce our world, but related to ends, he must deviate. (Deleuze 1990: 303-4)

In *Friday*, Robinson's goal is not to recreate bourgeois society but "dehumanization," the coming together of the libido and of the free elements, the discovery of a cosmic energy' (Deleuze 1990: 303). In contrast to Levinas's reading of the story, what Robinson discovers is not a transcendent 'other' in the guise of Friday, but an immanent 'world without others' (Levinas 1989: 148). This is not to say that Deleuze reproduces the traditional reading of Robinson's experience as one of heroic self-sufficiency. Rather, without others Robinson finds something beyond the world and beyond humanity, a 'pure surface', the Earth as ground. This is inseparable from the discovery of a new kind of energetics: 'the pure surface is perhaps what Others were hiding from us. It is perhaps at the surface, like a mist, that an unknown image of things is detached and, from the earth, a new surface energy without possible others' (Deleuze 1990: 315)

Lacan famously defined desire in terms of an 'Other' ingrained in us by our earliest experiences, a structure of exterior recognition that we internalize in order to give our desires meaning. Sexuality is thus defined as a relationship to this Other within subjectivity. But if sexuality is so prone to disorders it is because the Other is fundamentally lacking, its demands inscrutable or impossible to realise. There *is* no Other as such, nothing that could grant desire the ultimate meanings it seeks. This constitutes an energetic deadlock of lack and excess because desire is sustained only by way of an abyssal real that absorbs and neutralises it, while this real itself returns in the form of a traumatic, unconsumable remainder. Deleuze here can be seen as attempting to spring desire from this trap through what he calls 'desert sexuality'. Deleuze exploits Lacan's account of perversion as not only a deviation with respect to aims—Freud's classic definition—but also as a means of suspending the lack in the Other. For Lacan, the pervert plugs up, 'disavows', the lack in the Other and dissolves its essential otherness. Deleuze observes that the frozen or suffocating character of perverse scenarios—the iciness of Masoch, the apathy of Sade—stems from the fact that the pervert surmounts lack by living in a world without the 'Other structure'. The lack, disavowed, becomes an intensity = 0. The pervert makes of desire 'a virtual centre or zero point' (Deleuze 1990: 304).

Desert sexuality offers something of a solution to Robinson's paradox because it liberates desire from the structures that effect its social capture. Schizophrenia may be said to pick up where perversion leaves off in Deleuze's thinking. In being disengaged from the structures that orient it to a world, desire becomes an exile, a desert desire. But through this very solitude, it becomes capable of investing the Earth's elemental strife or *polemos*. What Deleuze and Guattari go on to describe as the war machine—whose 'positive object' is to 'make the desert, the steppe, grow'—has its conceptual origins here (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 417).

This speaks to our libidinal-economic condition today with respect to the Anthropocene. The energy crises that threaten our social worlds bring us face to face with an Earth stripped of life. We are being forced to confront a paradoxical 'object = x' that is, at once, beyond our capacities to represent—since the very notion of an Earth anathetical to life, a post-Holocene Earth, is an appalling contradiction—but which is also the ultimate object and destination of our

capitalist desires. Desert Earth is our Anthropocene body without organs. To this extent, we are mired in Robinson's paradox, driven to reproduce our world even in the absence of the natural resources presupposed by it. But, following Deleuze, does this paradox not appear to provide us with the terms of its resolution? The Anthropocene, even as it signals the rampant anthropomorphisation of the planet, provides the conditions by which desire can become consistent with the Earth's 'inhumanity' precisely through the elemental strife revealed in the falling away of the world.

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