

Postcolonial Literatures and Deleuze

Colonial Pasts, Differential Futures

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Undercurrents and the Desert(ed): Negarestani, Tournier and Deleuze Map the Polytics of a 'New Earth'

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In their *Geophilosophy* (in *What Is Philosophy?*), Deleuze and Guattari offer us an important connection between the movements of thought and the connections to the soil in which thought grows. They state that 'thinking takes place in the relationship of territory and the earth' (1992, p. 85). Thought happens in a double movement: 'territory and earth are two components with two zones of indiscernibility – deterritorialization (from territory to the earth) and reterritorialization (from earth to territory)' (p. 86). As territory and the earth are inseparable from the moment that thinking (as a mode) began, it is impossible (for us) to take them apart; all thought removes itself from a territory, towards the earth, while it is at the same time installing a territory, removing itself from the earth. Thought itself, moving parallel to the matters from which it breaks free, necessarily involves both the earth *and* territory, while it is being deterritorialized *and* reterritorialized *ad infinitum*. Or, to use the concepts that Deleuze and Guattari introduced in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987, p. 480), thought moves *both* by means of a *directionality* and a *dimensionality*.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, a politics of space is immediately enforced in this opposition, as Deleuze and Guattari claim that dimensionality *entrenches* (*s'instaurer*) directionality, thus organizing the latter according to the dimensionalities enforced upon the earth. Alfred North Whitehead referred to this process as 'grooving', claiming that '[t]he groove prevents straying across country, and the abstraction abstracts from something to which no further attention is paid' (Whitehead 1967, p. 197). Grooves are the worldly 'ribs and the rhythms' that we so easily slip into, that distort directionality and superimpose their dimensional organization upon it.

Whitehead was convinced that because of technology, this grooving more and more removed us from the face of the earth. Deleuze and Guattari, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, similarly announce that directionality, though inventive and always capable of opening up new routes of navigation, is more and more bothered by these dimensional processes of territorialization. They talk in this regard of money, work and housing, examples that in today's capitalist system more than ever prove to give form to the way we live our lives. Contrary to how (financial, blackboard) economists reduce these issues to set theoretical equations, Deleuze and Guattari insist that money, work and housing are as real as they can be: these are the dimensions that dramatically entrench the urban landscapes in our age, but just as well give form to the sea, the stratosphere and the desert (cf. 1987, p. 481).

An ecosophical or geophilosophical search for a 'new earth', as Deleuze and Guattari emphasized it later in their careers (Guattari 2000; Deleuze and Guattari 1992) but which was already present in Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense* (1990) and other earlier texts such as *Desert Islands*, seems to be of the greatest importance to contemporary thought (now more than ever). Their cry for a permanent revolution in thought is a general cry to break free from the entrenchments in which we live and should be taken very seriously, especially in combination with the plea to actually *think* the earth and to *map* its ethical, social and political involvements.

Contrary to how the ecological movement envisions this, a 'new earth' cannot be established through preserving or conserving, or by considering the earth as equal to 'nature', an idea that has received remarkably little attention in philosophy since Kant, or better, that has, after Kant, rarely been thought independent of his heritage. In his later writings, Guattari puts it as follows:

Ecology must stop being associated with the image of a small nature-loving minority or with qualified specialists. Ecology in my sense questions the whole of subjectivity and capitalistic power formations, whose sweeping progress cannot be guaranteed to continue as it has for the past decade. (2000, p. 35)

In recent years, ecologists like Timothy Morton have gone even further claiming that 'Environmentalism is a work of mourning for a mother we never had. To have ecology, we must give up nature. But since we have been addicted to Nature for so long, giving up will be painful. Giving up a fantasy is harder than giving up a reality' (2010, p. 95).

But the ecologies suggested by Deleuze and Guattari are not 'without nature' as Morton proposes them. Guattari said it most convincingly: 'Now more than ever, nature cannot be separated from culture; in order to comprehend the interactions between ecosystems, the mechanosphere and the social and individual Universes of reference, we must learn to think "transversally"' (2000, p. 29). A critical and clinical Deleuzian (Deleuzo-Guattarian) perspective means that we *have to* rethink nature, reconceptualize the earth in order to *ungroove* it (ungrooving in the sense of getting rid of the grooves *and* of finding the ungrooved earth).

In an attempt to free thought from the 'finitude', from the grooves in which thought has become stranded, Quentin Meillassoux's speculative materialism is continuing this Deleuzian line of thinking, especially where Meillassoux stresses that nature can very well be known (absolutely) – contrary to how Kant and his followers have always considered nature to be thinkable but unknowable: in other words, 'doomed' to be stuck in anthropocentrism. In his much-discussed debut *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, Meillassoux starts his anti-metaphysics (as he calls it) with an interest in 'ancestrality' (a phrase that he uses to refer to all realities *before* they appeared to humanity or actually any form of life on earth) or 'diachronicity' (a term he introduces later in the book and which concerns the events *after* human life or life on earth) and in the 'arche-fossil' (those materials that index the existence of an ancestral reality).

Meillassoux searches for 'the great outdoors' (as he calls it); the absolute outside which is anterior or posterior to life (or thought) and which thus wards off the possibility of grooving. Moving away from Kantian ideas of consciousness which are only interested in how objects appear for and to us (as in, fully embedded in the grooves we have created), Meillassoux wants to free thinking *through* the earth, or as he puts it:

And if contemporary philosophers insist so adamantly that thought is entirely oriented towards the outside, this could be because of their failure to come to terms with a bereavement – the denial of a loss concomitant with the abandonment of dogmatism. The *great outdoors*, the *absolute* outside of pre-critical thinkers: that outside which was not relative to us, and which was given as indifferent to its own givenness to be what it is, existing in itself regardless of whether we are thinking of it or not; that outside which thought could explore with the legitimate feeling of being on foreign territory – of being entirely elsewhere. (2008, p. 7)

The idea of being 'on foreign territory', as stated above, of being confronted with grooves that are not familiar to us or perhaps even with an elsewhere which has not been grooved at all (because it has not been grooved, or because it cannot be), is a major challenge to philosophy because it means that philosophy must sacrifice its greatest possession: consciousness and its language as the essential point of departure for thinking about the world. Meillassoux is here more radical than Nietzsche when he considers the necessity of forgetting to be only the first (superficial) step to take in order to come to a philosophy that is not limited by human (Kantian) finitude, by the grooves we created, to a philosophy that, in the end, is indeed more earthly. Only when philosophy accepts that 'the same cause may actually bring about "a hundred different events"' (2008, p. 90), it can begin to fulfil its task, which is to take into account *all* of those consequences that refuse to be understood, that refuse to act according to our terms (since the laws of nature, Meillassoux claims, are *our* inventions).

Tournier's Speranza

A direct answer to Meillassoux's ancestry and diachronicity, his search for the great outdoors and his interest in foreign territories or ungrooved 'entirely elsewheres', can be found in Deleuze's earliest published text called *Desert Islands* that was first published in 1953. Anticipating Meillassoux, Deleuze starts by telling us that 'islands are either from before or for after humankind' (2004, p. 9). Interested in what we may refer to as 'the unterritorialized' (which could be that space not yet inhabited but just as well the space being smoothed) Deleuze starts his career by searching for the kind of thought that 'happens' at the unterritorialized. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, this kind of thinking is famously referred to as 'nomad thought', where Deleuze and Guattari conclude that 'the nomads make the desert no less than they are made by it' (p. 382). But it is in his first text *Desert Islands*, which has been paid scant scholarly attention, that Deleuze, rudimentarily, offers us an ecological alternative to the way that thought grows from the earth. Far removed from money, work and housing, far removed from the Others, as will be discussed shortly, the deserted island might offer us new ways to think the earth, the unterritorialized.

Of all possible islands it is, above all, the *deserted* island which necessarily provokes a most radical *dehumanization*, as Deleuze calls it throughout this text. The deserted island, even more so than the ancestral and diachronical statement Meillassoux introduced us to,

demands a full surrender (as we will soon see) in order to be thought, or rather, in order to find out in what way thought could be possible here in the first place. Lacking territory, the deserted island cannot be thought, it insists on remaining unthought. This means that it is impossible to continue one's life when arriving at the shore of a deserted island. A 'new life' has to be invented with the 'new earth' time and again. In a new life 'there is an extraordinary fine topology that relies not on points or objects, but rather on haecceities, on sets of relations (winds, undulations of snow or sand, the song of the sand or the creaking of the ice, the tactile qualities of both)' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 382). Thus, the truly deserted island, as Deleuze already concluded in *Desert Islands*, has to be that place from which thought *itself* is created anew; as a necessarily unfixed, unfixing perhaps, variation on the ungrooved, uninhabited earth.

Ideally then, and this is what makes the deserted island such a wonderful and unique place on earth, new lives and thoughts, radically different from existing lives and thoughts, can be recovered from the deserted and the unpeopled. It requires a radical reducing of oneself, of the Human Being, before one is able to reach this 'consciousness of the movement which produced the island' (Deleuze 2004, p. 10). Yet it is only there, that one can find

an Idea of humanity, a prototype, a man who would almost be a god, a woman who would be a goddess, a great Amneseiac, a pure Artist, a consciousness of Earth and Ocean, an enormous hurricane, a beautiful witch, a statue from the Easter Islands. There you have a human being who precedes itself. (2004, p. 11)

As far away from anthropocentrism as one can be, way after finitude, it is at the deserted island that life can be recreated, that a true alternative can erupt.

A very good example of how to think the deserted island and all that it can do is to be found in Michel Tournier's novel *Friday*. Contrary to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, which Deleuze refers to as a very boring novel, Tournier's revitalization of the story offers us a fine example of how the deserted island happens and how it refuses grooving. As in Defoe, Robinson intrudes upon the deserted island (one that, as we soon find out, has always-already been inhabited) and searches for ways to be included in the island's existence. And, again, as in Defoe's novel, this turns out to be extremely difficult. Robinson tries to establish two of the fiercest systems that he took from the modern world

(monotheistic religion and capitalism) and – in turn – tries to adapt them to Speranza, the island.

Speranza does not resist Robinson's colonization. On the contrary, both strategies actually work very well. Yet, as he installed these alien regimes, the island did not *re/veil* itself (it did not *reveille/reveal/unveil* itself). Despite Robinson's efforts (which included actual penetration) no openness was realized, there was no awakening, which explains Robinson's alienation in this part of the book. Christianity, to start with the first of the two regimes, seems to be simply ignored by the island. In the beginning of the novel, the Bible plays an important role, but gradually it disappears. It is true, as Petit (1991, p. 10) suggests, that there are interesting parallels between the Bible and this novel as a whole (for example, that the explosion central to the book marks the switch between the Old and the New Testament). But in the end Robinson himself seems to have lost interest in Christianizing the island (and Friday). Perhaps it is *through* Friday that Christianity no longer makes any sense. Friday is not simply a name Robinson gives to personify an alleged unhumanity that always already lives on (with) the island. But it necessarily also signals the day of Christ's death, the day of Venus's birth, as Robinson notes (Tournier 1969, p. 228), and the day of fasting (p. 70). Friday, then, is the vector of deterritorialization.

Capitalism, despite its relatively short existence, proves to be an even stronger force than Christianity. Note how Robinson, after a short period of desolation at the beginning of the book, quickly believes in accumulation again. As he notes in his journals: 'Henceforth I shall abide by the following rule: all production is creation, therefore good; all consumption is destruction therefore bad [...]. To accumulate!' (Tournier 1969, p. 61). But, although rather successful (Robinson collects a huge surplus), even capitalism is eventually abandoned. It takes about half the book before he is capable of resisting it, but quite early in the text, the island itself (later repeated through Friday) shows Robinson once and for all that these imported strategies (capitalism, Christianity) will not work here:

There was a radiance in the air; and in a moment of inexpressible happiness Robinson seemed to discern *another island* behind the one he had labored so long in solitude, a place more alive, warmer and more fraternal, which his mundane preoccupations had concealed from him. (Tournier 1969, p. 90)

The key term in the above quote is 'another island'. Another island is concealed from Tournier's Robinson: it is impossible. But why is another

island impossible for Robinson? Because of Robinson's mundane preoccupations. In his reading of Tournier in *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze defines the limits of the possible in his conceptualization of 'otherness' (which is opposed to 'anotherness', as we will find out later). The Other explains what these 'mundane preoccupations' may be. Deleuze claims that this is what happens:

I desire nothing that cannot be seen, thought, or possessed by a possible Other. That is the basis of my desire. It is always Others who relate my desire to an object [...]. The Other is initially a structure of the perceptual field, without which the entire field could not function as it does. (1990, pp. 306–307)

In other words, it is through *Others* that my desires are directed, thus continuing (for instance) Christianity and capitalism. Others *are* the mundane preoccupations that keep Robinson from catching up with the movement of the island prior to humankind, from finding a new form of life.

Deleuze claims that Tournier's novel *Friday* presents 'Robinson: the man without Others on his island' (1969, p. 304). In the end, Robinson rids himself of the Others that have haunted him, and that, although not actually present, directed his desires, until the island revealed to him 'another island': a place more alive, warmer and fraternal. Tournier's novel tells us how deserted islands reveal their desertedness, their impossible colonization, their ability to wash away all the grooves made in the sand. Speranza shows its islandness, surrounded by the sea that immediately erases all of its inscriptions, that always already ungrooves. Anotherness comes into being through these earthly dynamics so essential for the deserted island. It can only come into being when the Others have vanished.

Negarestani's Xerodrome

There are many different deserted islands. And they can be found everywhere, but, of course, only where you least expect them. Deserted islands are impossible, or necessarily unforeseen. They reveal their desertedness, their entirety elsewhere, when you least expect it. Reza Negarestani, in his debut *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*, states that the Middle East springs from the Dead Sea. Its deserts refuse to be inhabited and, after being grooved by colonial and postcolonial forces – among them Christianity and (even more

so) capitalism – the earthly dynamics are now surfacing from beneath and starting to reveal another island underneath. Contrary to Tournier, whose *Robinsonade* is a novel which ‘gives rise’ (as Deleuze would say) to a rich complex of philosophical concepts, Negarestani’s work has little to do with the novel form anymore. It is H.P. Lovecraft *and* early Greek Chthonic mysticism. It talks of Pazuzu and Ugallu-demons *and* of Deleuze and Guattari’s war machine. It combines astrophysics with the fictional diary of a Hamid Parsani.

Cyclonopedia, in every way, practises the ‘radical paranoia – as a speculative line of schizophrenia’ (Negarestani 2008, p. 220). Yet it is in this sheer madness, which is impossible to summarize, that the Middle East reveals an otherness: a world more alive, warmer and more fraternal. It is a world that suffers, that has been ridden by extreme violence in many ways, but that slowly and gently finds a way of *undying*. It has already started to wash away the alien (Occidental, post-Kantian) grooves that had been overcoding its space for so long. Such is the world after 9/11, the explosion in the middle that marks capitalism’s final stage (which might nevertheless last for eternity) and that has shaken the earth as a whole, including its deserted islands and the seas that surround them (for instance, the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement).

Like Tournier, Negarestani is convinced that the process of dehumanization has set in with the ultimate desert(ed). Tournier refers to the ultimate desert(ed) as *Speranza*, Negarestani talks of *Xerodrome*, or the Tellurian Omega: that which has presented itself as ‘another island’ to Robinson, and which is at work beneath *Speranza*, is also at work underneath the Middle East. Negarestani shows how a politics of space (Deleuze/Guattari’s ecosophical or geophilosophical search for a new earth) necessarily comes with an ungrooving of colonial/postcolonial ribs and rhythms that cover up the Middle East similar to the way in which *Speranza* was not awakened by Robinson’s colonizing efforts.

It is this ecosophy which Negarestani’s main character in *Cyclonopedia*, Hamid Parsani, develops as his *philosophy of oil*. Parsani is an Iranian archaeologist, who, before disappearing under mysterious circumstances (later he reappears again), convinces us that the philosophy of oil can *re/veil* the mighty undercurrents of the Middle East. He notices that the oil is the speechless and consciousnessless physical spirit that opens up the body of the island Asia Minor. Oil, he claims, is by now greasing Integrated World Capitalism (as Guattari would refer to it), recomposing its flows accordingly. Yet only recently (in the wake of 9/11) oil has started to realize the entirely ‘new landscape’ we find ourselves in today.

With the accident, with 9/11, its Furies were satisfied and slowly and kindly a new earth can come into being.

Although discernible only on a hidden level, *Cyclonopedia* demands the collapse of the two major systems of grooving that we saw in Tournier's *Friday*: capitalism and religion. Parsani first of all talks of the gods, who must die. Or rather they ought to take solar voyages to the earthly ground (to be grounded) to become dead gods. But what do dead gods do? Parsani explains:

The dead god is not a tired, abolished or doomed god but a god with its ultimate weapon of catastrophic devastation. A plague coming to earth to make of the earth's restrictive ground a direct passage to openness, the dead god mortifies itself by affirming the earthly ground within which it is buried. If the act of descent, as associated with dead gods, is identified as the secularization of the divine's body (departing from the divine's sovereignty), the dead god itself is by no means a secular entity. In the process of descending, the dead god rediscovers its supposedly secular corpus as a pestilential but love-saturated communion with the sacred. Through descent, the god commits a crime at once secular and sacred: It opens itself by eating and infecting the human, and opens the human by turning itself into a corpse. (Negarestani 2008, pp. 204–205)

Could we think of a more radically deterritorializing theology? The dead gods, the Chthonic deities from beneath the surface of the earth, fertilize the land, vitalize it again, smoothing the alien grooves that had organized its surface *including* the humans that never really inhabited it.

In a similar vein, a new earthly economy has to be reinvented: 'According to Parsani, the Earth always plays the role of the subversive Insider against the Empire of the Sun, which has given rise to terrestrial orders, politics and modes of living based on hegemonic stardom' (Negarestani 2008, p. 42). And it is this economy, a molecular economy, that is currently starting to rise from the Middle East, he claims.

In his interview, Parsani suggests that the Middle East has simulated the mechanisms of dusting to mesh together an economy which operates through positive degenerating processes, an economy whose carriers must be extremely nomadic, yet must also bear an ambivalent tendency towards the established system or the ground. An economy whose vehicle and systems never cease to degenerate themselves. For in this way, they ensure their permanent molecular

dynamism, their contagious distribution and diffusion over their entire economy. (Negarestani 2008, p. 91)

Yet, this religious and economic revolution starts with oil; this heaviest of the hydrocarbons that flows rapidly, in every direction underneath its soil, is *the essence* of the Middle East. Negarestani follows geophysicist Thomas Gold's theory of the Deep Hot Biosphere which suggests that

petroleum is not a fossil fuel, and that oil has its origin in natural gas flows which feed bacteria living in the bowels of the Earth. Therefore, the demonarchy of oil is not subjected to the laws of the dead (i.e. the preserved corpses of prehistoric organisms) but rather is animated by a Plutonic vitalism (abiogenic petroleum generated by nether biosphere of the Earth) [...] rather than from decomposition of fossils and organic body-counts. Consequently, oil is far more substantial and follows a different, autonomous logic of planetary distribution. (2008, p. 72)

Full of new forms of life, but consisting solely of highly condensed dead organic compounds, oil, Parsani concludes, is everywhere. Or, as Negarestani tells us: 'Books, foods, religions, numbers, specks of dust – all are linguistically, geologically, politically and mathematically combined into petroleum. For him, everything is suspiciously oily' (2008, p. 42). Surfacing at the deserted island called the Middle East, oil is the undead capable of virtually vitalizing everything.

A Great Health and Death

Negarestani's search for a new life offered to us by the earth, for the oily undead, is precisely the search, or rather the flow, that Robinson, near the end of Tournier's novel, started to live. The feeling of being in a place more alive, warmer and more fraternal, or better, to create one's life on *another* island, to rise from its wholly other, ungrooved soil, is conceptualized by Deleuze as 'a Great Health'. Commenting on Tournier, whose Robinson, in searching for a new life with the island, is constantly concerned with his health, Deleuze only briefly mentions this idea in the analysis of *Friday* as published in *The Logic of Sense*. There, a Great Health is mainly considered to be the future state that Robinson is anticipating: the new life he hopes to establish: the dehumanized Robinson, the ethereal double liberated by the island (along with the rest of the world).

In *What Is Philosophy?*, health is conceptually linked to the lives of the great artists who, like great philosophers, often suffer from serious illnesses or neuroses, for they 'have seen something in life that is too much for anyone, too much for themselves, and that has put on them the quiet mark of death' (Deleuze and Guattari 1992, p. 172). Of course this is precisely what happened to Robinson when on Speranza, and perhaps this also explains Parsani's unsolved (yet anticipated) disappearance from *this* side of the Middle East.

Even more so than in *The Logic of Sense* and *What Is Philosophy?*, it is in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* that Deleuze conceptualizes a Great Health most convincingly, personifying health with Nietzsche himself.¹ Here we once again see that a Great Health does not equal an ideal physical condition that we should all strive for, but rather signals the *movement* from sickness to health and from health to sickness. It is the Great Health that allows Nietzsche, in his role as pathologist of the earth, to state even until the very end (in *Ecce Homo*) that he was actually very healthy. Yet, it could well be phrased the other way around. For, to evoke Artaud (and, in doing so, to do justice to Negarestani), we could also claim that we are searching for 'a real sickness [...] which touches the essence of being [...] and which] applies to a whole life' (Artaud 1976, p. 44).

A Great Health has to be acquired over and over again because one is continuously required to sacrifice it. It is a healthiness of people 'who are often shipwrecked and bruised' (Nietzsche in Deleuze and Guattari 2004, p. 100). They are people who are *dangerously healthy* and who find before them

a country still undiscovered, the horizon of which no one has yet seen, a beyond to every country and every refuge of the idea that man has ever known, a world so overflowing with beauty, strangeness, doubt, terror, and divinity, that both our curiosity and our lust of possession are frantic with eagerness. (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, p. 100)

In the ecosophical art of moving between health and sickness, of finding joy in both of them *at the same time*, the Greatest Health, that dangerously great health, crucial for all creation, for all absolute deterritorialization, reveals itself. Robinson's striving to catch up with the movements of the island, the wind, the power of the sun, was a creative act and gave him his Great Health, and which, in turn, made him 'live perpetually in a moment of innocence', as Tournier writes (1969, p. 205). As if he had witnessed the hidden treasure chambers of the

Mesopotamian necropolises opening up their overwhelmingly different fields of distribution.

A Great Health is about being reborn *by* the earth. In *Nietzsche*, Deleuze referred to it as sickness, sometimes madness, but Negarestani's necropolitics makes an even more radical *vitalist* claim. It is a celebration of death, which again rewrites the vitalism of Deleuze and Guattari, pushing it towards the desert of the real in 21st-century postcolonial thinking as it surfaces time and again, from the Arab Spring to the Occupy movement. In *Anti-Oedipus*, perhaps their most straightforward political manifesto, Deleuze and Guattari already conceptualize 'death' in a similar vein, as they state that 'every intensity controls within its own life the experience of death, and envelops it' (2004, p. 363).

Not only here but in all of Deleuze's work the experience of death is neither life's denial nor its absence (death is not 'the other' of life). On the contrary: it has always already been the *essence* of every living thing much more so than life.² Death is by all means *enveloped* into every individuality. *It gives birth to its creation*. Death is the humus, it resides in the bowels of the earth from which everything stems, pushing everything in the direction of the sun. It opens up the individuality carrying life; it eats and infects the human being, creating life anew. Death eats its way through everything, creating the strings of matter which life itself opens up.

To Become a Target: Anotherness and Openness

The plurality of forms demands death (even more so than madness and sickness) to happen, demands that man *let himself* be killed. Only then can new thoughts and new lives happen, lives that are not harassed by the Others that organized our bodies. Tournier's another island, from which Deleuze conceptualized 'anotherness' as a radically different strategy from 'otherness', is all about rejecting the existence of man-and-his-changing-relationships-with-the-earth, prioritizing the event, or perhaps even prioritizing life itself, to give form to man (amongst others) as a series of non-essential features. Negarestani, on the other hand, talks of a *complicity* with anonymous materials (which is the subtitle of *Cyclonopedia*) by which he emphasizes the closedness of the necrocratic regime.

When Robinson searched to create a new earth, a new style of life, he was keen on 'inventing a possibility of life, a way of existing', as Deleuze puts it (1995, p. 100). Robinson was 'the result of circumstances on the desert isle' (Deleuze 1990, p. 309), which meant that he, and

everything he embodied, had to emerge into the island's ecology. He had to die. He had to be taken over by the island. He had to be eaten and infected by Speranza – *and he had to allow that to happen*. He had to become *a target* for Speranza.

To become a target is what Negarestani keeps referring to with his neologism 'polytics', his term to replace 'politics', which has become too infected with post 1968 philosophies of Otherness. It is no doubt the most important argument of the book and definitely demands much more attention from theory in the near future (if only because it has become *the* political agenda of the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement). Becoming a target comes close to what our main character, Hamid Parsani, in his numerous publications, has referred to as 'the enigma of openness' which is to lie at the heart of polytics. The enigma of openness, Parsani tells us, is that true openness involves a radical closedness, as is made clear in the following example of 'love':

The openness associated with love is itself a yet stronger closure to the outside world. Between two lovers, openness is initially established to close them upon themselves and from the outside. Love (*philia*) in all its forms entangles openness with closure, and ultimately closure with the radical exteriority of the outside, from which only impossibility actively emanates: the impossibility of being closed as well as the impossibility of affording the outside. (Negarestani 2008, p. 220)

The enigma of openness, this inverse mechanism of complicity, radicalizes Deleuze's otherness, Tournier's another island, Meillassoux's Deleuzianism and, above all, the polytics that Negarestani himself proposes. It comes down to the idea that true revolution, true change, is about *being opened (by)* rather than *being open (to)* (cf. for instance Negarestani 2008, p. 242, and 2011a, p. 15). Presented by Negarestani as a continuation of Deleuze and Guattari's politics of becoming (cf. 2008, p. 196), polytics calls for an ecology of *clopenness* (a term from topology combining closed and open), which does not start from language, conscience or even man (and his Other), but from a need to become a target, from a need to be opened up (by).

In the following citation, Negarestani summarizes the power of 'being opened (by)':

'I am open to you' can be recapitulated as 'I have the capacity to bear your investment' or 'I afford you'. This conservative voice is

not associated with will or attention but with the inevitability of affordance as a mesophilic bond, and with the survival economy and the logic of capacity. If you exceed the capacity by which you can be afforded, I will be cracked, lacerated and laid open. Despite its dedication to repression, its blind desire for the monopoly of survival and the authoritarian logic of the boundary, the plane of 'being open to' has never been openly associated with paranoia and regression. Such is the irony of liberalism and anthropomorphic desire. (2008, p. 198)

To be 'opened up by' is the invention, the moment of creation, the *accident* that just has to happen, as the painter Francis Bacon would have it: it brings forth the possibility of a wholly other life. The idea of 'being opened (by), not being open (to)' suggests the ways in which the politics of 'anotherness' can be understood to replace that of 'otherness'. For Negarestani, the politics of Otherness has haunted the postcolonial discourse of, in his case, the Middle East (think of Edward Said) for too long. Deleuze's rejection of the Other in *The Logic of Sense* already emphasizes the 'being opened (by)', most notably in the way that he puts so much emphasis on the moment that Robinson realizes that he has forgotten the Others: 'Those lights have vanished from my consciousness. For a long time, fed by my fantasy, they continued to reach me. Now it is over, and the darkness has closed in' (Tournier in Deleuze 1990, p. 309). Robinson is cracked, lacerated and laid open. Only now can he experiment with the another island that is alive, warmer and more fraternal.

'Anotherness' has nothing to do with the Other. Read Derrida's *Of Hospitality*: 'absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner, etc.), but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other' (Derrida and Dufourmantelles 2000, p. 25). Like Derrida, Said himself, by staging the Orient as Europe's Other (Said 1979, p. 1), both questions and broadens their correlation. But are both not talking only about 'being open to' and *not* about 'being opened by'? Derrida still talks of the Kantian Subject when he himself opens his own house, in the same way that Said envisions Europe opening itself up to the Orient. Isn't this exactly the kind of anthropocentrism that Negarestani, Deleuze, but also Tournier are *not* talking about? And isn't this Deleuzian 'anotherness', this Negarestanian polytics, or rather, this Robinsonian 'another island', this Parsanian 'philosophy of oil' *by all means* offering us that very different revolution, very different from what we have seen before? Negarestani is fierce in his rejection of the Other: 'To become open, or to experience the chemistry of openness

is not possible through “opening yourself” [...]. Radical openness can be evoked by becoming more of a target for the outside [...] one must seduce the exterior forces of the outside’ (2008, p. 199).

Otherness does not presume the Self that is or is not sympathetic to the Other, to an outside. Negarestani’s polytics *is* the radical outside. Thus, this New Earth (as Deleuze and Guattari present it in *Anti-Oedipus*) can also never be *of* the earth (it cannot be its property). As Negarestani puts it: ‘Deleuze and Guattari’s slyly appropriated “New Earth” presents a model of an earth whose every surface and trellis is an unground, a terminal planetary body tolerating neither solar economies nor its own terrestriality’ (2008, p. 43). Indeed, the New Earth is being opened (by), not being open (to). It does not tolerate anything, not even the earth itself. It resists the present as a whole. It is opened by its undercurrents as they secretly flow in all directions, creating transversals *ad infinitum*.

This mythological dream for undercurrents not only holds true for the body of the island but equally for Robinson himself, who, when in a state of almost pure joy, is himself opened up by a Great Health underneath:

He pictured his own lungs growing outside himself like a blossoming of purple-tinted flesh, living polyparies of coral with pink membranes, sponges of human tissue [...]. He would flaunt that intricate efflorescence, that bouquet of fleshy flowers, in the wide air, while a tide of purple ecstasy flowed into his body on a stream of crimson blood. (Tournier 1969, pp. 193–194)

Negarestani (following authors like Lovecraft and Houellebecq and perhaps also Artaud [think of his *Body without Organs*]) in a similar way celebrates ‘necrocracy’, claiming that ‘necrocracy suggests the strictures of the conservative economy not in regard to life but in regard to ways the organism dies; and it is the way of returning to the originary death that prescribes the course of life for the organism’ (Negarestani 2011b, p. 192). Getting rid of the organs, of the grooves that order, death is the only way out: ‘necrocracy suggests that the organism must die or bind the precursor exteriority only in ways that its conservative conditions or economic order can afford’ (Negarestani 2011b, p. 193).

Do not Survive!

Negarestani’s polytics, in the end, opts for a new understanding of life, posing the question ‘if life is the source of living then why do we need

to survive?' (2008, p. 210). For once we realize that the ethics of life is external to that of survival, and that survival is a means of resistance to the epidemic and overpowering presence of life, we must conclude that to be pro-life is, essentially, to be anti-survival. Or as Negarestani concludes: 'when it comes to the exteriority of life to the living being, survival is intrinsically impossible' (2008, p. 210).

Negarestani's 'radical paranoia' resists the continuation of life (as survival): 'Closed and folded in upon itself, radical paranoia is a speculative line of schizophrenia that no longer believes in openness to the outside, since for the living being the outside is merely a vitalistic environment' (2008, p. 219). The outside then is Otherness, it is a possible world that, Negarestani insists, reinstalls the regimes that we have always known. This is then survival as we knew it: it is Defoe's Robinson who insists on staying alive (staying true to the capitalist and religious grooves he lived in). Then, '[t]o be part of the environment (viz. the economical outside) is to survive' (Negarestani 2008, p. 219).

Negarestani, as expected, is onto something different. We have already rejected otherness and its ethical need to be 'open to' as it was promoted in work in the writings of Jacques Derrida (and Edward Said). Now Negarestani also rejects Derrida's claim that there is nothing outside context. On the contrary, he seems to urge us to get rid of all possible contextualization. Unlike deconstruction then, radical paranoia opts for

a detachment of itself from the economical outside (the environment) for and by which survival becomes possible [...]. Radical paranoia reforges survival as that which can sunder the correlation between the paranoia of the living (survival) and economical openness and therefore end its own repression in regard to the unaffordable outside. In radical paranoia, survival is no longer a parasitic (mutually beneficial) symptom of affordability and economical openness, but an event which is disobedient to its vitalistic ambitions. (2008, p. 219)

Or to conclude, as Negarestani says, '[t]he separation of survival from openness offers survival the opportunity to act strategically on behalf of radical exteriority and its refractory impossibility' (2008, p. 220).

We could pose this question (Why do you need to survive?) directly to Robinson, the moment he sets foot on Speranza. It was in this moment that Robinson immediately understood that 'this place was wholly alien and hostile [...] his boat [...] was his only link with life'

(Tournier 1969, pp. 36–37). Robinson knew he had first to die in order to realize a new type of living, in order to find his Great Health. Death was his only route towards sustainability, to pick up the movement of the island prior to humankind, to be released from religion and capitalism, to be released from the others, from the mundane preoccupations that turn us into minds in a groove. The oceans had to devour his boat, let it sink to the bottom of the sea, without leaving a ripple at its surface.

Notes

1. In a strange analogy, Robin Mackay recently compared the invention of geotrauma to the invention of Negarestani, who is indeed a dark and unknown character himself (Mackay 2011).
2. Spinoza (2000) had already taught us that the experience of death is the first and foremost reason for any individual (an island, a Robinson, any possible ecology) to persevere in its being, constantly searching for ways to revitalize the relations between the individuals of which he is made. His claim that the free man thinks of death the least of all things (cf. E4P67), does not mean that his unity is not haunted by death, but rather that the free man equals the creative man who constantly finds new ways to free himself from grooves that limited his being.

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