

Geopower

A Strato-Analysis of the Anthropocene

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What is thought's relationship with the earth?

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*

What kind of historicity does the human possess if it is a being that can both read and write its own future in the rocks?

—Kathryn Yussoff, 'Anthropogenesis'

The discourse on the Anthropocene has accounted for human impact on the earth and challenged the liberal conception of the human subject as living in a vacuum. In the early 20th century, much of continental philosophy focused on revising Cartesian conceptions of subjectivity to shift the perspective onto the milieu, the environment and inter-subjective relations. By thinking the material and temporal constitution of the human, geologists have confirmed a large part of this research. The discourse on the geological force of humans (Anthropocene) has then created a much-needed common ground between geophysicists and philosophers. Social scientists such as Jason Moore and Dipesh Chakrabarty have emphasised the need to historicise the Anthropocenic discourse, and focus on *longue durée* processes as well as global historical relations. But, philosophy lacks a critique of geocapitalism, if we understand geocapitalism as the systematic attack that capital launches on the psycho-social and physical strata.

With the advent of the Anthropocene in philosophical discourse, conceptual work needs to be done to rethink and extend the relation between the earth and thought, a new ecological thought that neither fetishises nature nor simply cancels it out of the equation. Frédéric Neyrat (2016a) refers to a third concept of nature (*natura denaturans*) to overcome this opposition. He argues that positions on the Anthropocene can be reduced to two main conceptions of the earth: one as a full body and the other an empty body. In the first one, nature still exist and has ontological properties, as an object

(*natura naturata*) and a subject (*natura naturans*), while in the second, the earth is seen as a pure object, a prosthetic modernist project, geologically altered by the *anthropos* and therefore fully malleable to human governance. In this discourse, nature is thus conceived either as an object or a subject, or as both object and subject. But Neyrat notes that by arguing that everything is constructible and referring to the ‘end of nature’, eco-constructivists and eco-modernists end up re-affirming (or ‘re-booting’ in Bruno Latour’s terms) positions inherited from modernity (Descartes, Bacon). To put it differently, nature is the ‘empty square’ in the Anthropocenic discourse since it comes down to human action, human will. Even the discourse on biodiversity only deals with the symptoms of the global climate change and not the social, economic and political causes. Contrary to eco-constructivists and eco-modernists, Razmig Keucheyan (2014) notes that nature is a battlefield, it is composed of geophysical, geohistorical, geoeconomic, geophilosophical and geo-fictional forces. It is from this perspective that the concept of geowpower can find an operability. For Kathryn Yusoff, the discourse on the Anthropocene has made the processes of stratification and destratification and their social and political consequences more visible. She works through Deleuze and Guattari’s own concept of *strata* to further Grosz’s intuitions on geowpower (Yusoff 2017)

Yusoff uses the term ‘geosocial formation’ to mark the coupling, the interlocking or the sub-tension of the earth and the social strata, as well as to oppose the ‘dark character of Western scientific reason’ (Yusoff 2017: 107): the *anthropos*. Yet before rejecting it straight off, I want to insist that thinking the Anthropocene is first an encounter with the enormous question of this majoritarian and consensual *anthropos* that is contained within it. Giovanna Di Chiro (2016) is right to ask: who is the *anthropos* of the Anthropocene? Does he or she have a race, a class, a gender or a sex? Who is the ‘We’ suddenly produced by the awareness of the geophysical impact of human activities? Thus, some have thought that this meant the emergence of a new global subject, a new species-being, while other thinkers have thought of other denominations, releasing the speculative drive – Entropocene, Misanthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene, Anthro-not-seen, Sociocene, Anglocene, Thanatocene, and so on. The question of the Anthropocene has led these protagonists to adopt differentiated positions in order to contest the return to an undifferentiated universal humanity. They marked the singularity of their positions with new concepts to express their worry about and wariness of the practical consequences that the popularity of the Anthropocene has brought or could bring. There are good reasons for this healthy scepticism since, as is well-known, Paul Cruzen, who invented the term, is a fierce advocate of geo-engineering solutions.

This multiplicity of concepts also reveals the difficulty of raising climate change as a problem and finding a common language or terrain for entering a dialogue on this issue. How can we approach the problems of the Anthropocene and geowpower from Deleuze and Guattari’s geophilosophy? A good place to start is the opening of the chapter

‘Geophilosophy’, in which Deleuze and Guattari argue the centrality of the earth and territory for philosophy:

Subject and object give a poor approximation of thought. Thinking is neither a line drawn between subject and object nor a revolving of one around the other. Rather, thinking takes place in the relationship of territory and the earth. (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 85)

Ecological problems were not as central for Deleuze as for Guattari, and his concepts are not immediately present in the debate on the Anthropocene, however there is a necessity to think with Deleuze, through Deleuze in the age of the Anthropocene; when a large geowater is being configured, with landscapes altered drastically with geo-engineering and land-grabbing projects. This is the focus of Arianne Conty’s fascinating article from this issue. With the great acceleration of global warming and politics, as well as in terms of financial return on investment, and the social return on social engineering policies, the cartography of flows and the geometry of power have metamorphosed. There is a drive to interconnectedness and to smoothen territories into an integrated whole. Deleuze and Guattari have argued that philosophy was born with the encounter of thought with the earth (the Greek milieu). To what extent can we argue that the Anthropocene transforms this principle? We can only start answering this question by thinking of space not as a topic of philosophy but as a scheme of thought, as Vincente Montenegro Bralic (2017) argues powerfully in his article. By altering the milieu in which people live, the Anthropocene has entirely transformed the *geos* of geophilosophy since Deleuze and Guattari’s last book *What is Philosophy?*, published in 1991.

This issue of *La Deleuziana* explores the notion of geowater as a way to face these challenges. The contributors have aimed to work with the notion of geowater, participating in its process of conceptualisation and imagining its potential critical functions. As we see it, geowater would be the alternative concept to think not the age of the human (Anthropocene) but the birth of new powers that attack the strata. It is a concept springing from Deleuze and Guattari’s materialist geophilosophy. If they hold that philosophy (or thought) has always had the earth as a central preoccupation, it ‘should not be understood as a thought rooted in a territory, but rather as a thought about the earth itself’ (Montenegro Bralic 2016: 49).

We need to see how everyone, at every age, in the smallest things as in the greatest challenges, seeks a territory, tolerates or carries out deterritorializations, and is reterritorialized on almost anything – memory, fetish, or dream. Refrains express these powerful dynamisms: my cabin in Canada ... farewell, I am leaving ... yes, it’s me; I had to come back. We cannot even say what comes first, and perhaps every territory presupposes a prior deterritorialization, or everything happens at the same time. (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 67-68)

Far from affirming identity politics and particularisms, the deterritorialised and deterritorialising tendencies show that the earth is what constantly estranges and unsettles.

The notion of geopolitics exposes new possibilities and new dangers, a Prometheism to come that needs to be countered and counter-balanced with an Epimetheism to come. This Epimetheism starts with a critique of geopolitics. As Neyrat puts it in his article: 'this modernity defines contemporary geopolitics as a project of remaking the Earth as if it were a virgin land without history, without autonomous materiality, and without peoples inhabiting it and having produced cultural alliances with it' (Neyrat 2016b: 15). A multitude of narratives have proliferated with the advent of the Anthropocene, and they sometimes converge in a metanarrative about the sudden awareness of the human as a geological force (Malm and Hornborg 2014). The metanarrative of the Anthropocene has produced a new collective being and a collective consciousness about the sense of humanity, where it is going or where it should be going. Geo-constructivists have argued that the only solution to climate change is for humans to fix the earth with more technology, to continue with a carbon economy, based on fossil fuels. This re-engineering of the Earth as Earth 2.0 follows a new geo-capitalist blueprint of interconnectedness. The authors in this issue propose to shift the perspective from Anthropocene to geopolitics to highlight political questions (power) that would otherwise remain closed.

The notion of geopolitics wants to make visible the geophysical power relations at play that are erased with contemporary discourses on the end or the death of nature. As Neyrat has shown in *La Part inconstructible de la terre* (2016a), the anaturalism of recent theories has conceptually made possible and even legitimated large geo-engineering projects. These projects are based on the simple equation that only more technology can fix technological entropy: *technofix* (Hamilton 2013). Have we become addicted to technology? The coordinates of the debate are the toxicity of the Anthropocene; the coordinates of either/or demand that: either we accelerate the process or we withdraw and therefore return to some pre-modern and archaic projects of a communion with nature. It is not about settling for some consensual third way, but about multiplying the coordinates, and avoid universalisms and metanarratives even when they come as the most sincere, protecting this or that nonhuman, affirming the hybrid nature of entities and so on. It is not about the love or the hate for technology, technophilia or technophobia, but about distinguishing between different projects of life, different institutions, social norms, lifestyles and so on. By celebrating the end of nature or the originary artificiality of nature, some eco-critics and constructivists end up

legitimizing technological projects to redesign or reconstruct the earth (the ‘earth stewardship’), thereby sidestepping these debates.

Global climate change concerns each of us (and not only ‘humanity’) and should not remain an independent problem to be treated by specialists. The discourse on the Anthropocene has indeed produced a multidirectional field of ‘climate change blame’ (Rudiak-Gould 2014) but it seems more useful to think the global climate change crisis in legal terms rather than in strictly moral terms. Indeed focusing on geowater permits us to overcome the ‘climate change blame narratives’ that Rudiak-Gould neatly breaks down into four broad categories (ubiquitous blame, ubiquitous blamelessness, selective blame, and partial blame) since it is counterintuitive to claim (as Rudiak-Gould does) that events as such can be blamed.

Rather than thinking in terms of blame, we can make use of Deleuze’s brief insights on shame. Shame as an affect draws relations to processes of subjectivation that blame narratives shut down by externalising responsibility. To put it differently, it reformulates the existential vocation of a being-for-others against a being-against-others implied in blame narratives. Blaming is a classic political strategy that attempts to reinforce the political subject who formulates it. On the contrary, ‘shame tells us that we are all sullied and tainted by what we humans have done to one another, and by the state of our world. This is not to say we are guilty – to suggest so would be to diminish the acts and responsibility of the perpetrators’ (O’Donnell 2017: 10). Of course shame can be used to humiliate and exclude in the same way that blaming would, but the nuance lies in the very feeling of surprise and experience that shame produces. It is not something inert and passive but an active affect that calls for a response, against indifference and insensibility. O’Donnell reads Agamben’s commentaries on an early text by Karl Marx on shame. At that time (in 1843), Marx conceived shame as a positive affect, as an antidote to self-deception: ‘if a whole nation were to feel ashamed it would be like a lion recoiling in order to spring’ (Marx in O’Donnell 2017: 13). Shame is expressed when the intolerable is *seen*, but for Deleuze, one becomes a seer not in the classical empiricist manner but in a radical or transcendental empiricist way. In the case of global climate change, though everyone knows about it, it remains invisible and beyond the realm of the perceptible. We cannot simply wait for natural catastrophes to be harsh enough to unite the people of the world:

Do not see the snow storm as a sign that there’s no global warming, as it does not erase or allow us to read as secondary all the other matters at hand (droughts, floods, resource depletion, extinction); we do not see a rise in employment as a sign that there was a brief recession that must (like previous recessions) return to normal. Do not read catastrophe as a sign that there must be a humanity to come. More importantly still, perhaps if one began to read catastrophe – rather than fold it about one’s own person, world and temporality – one might have to confront a radical temporality, in which what comes to pass might not be in the order of history. (Colebrook and Cohen 2015: 18)

Global climate change lies in the silent catastrophe, in the catastrophe-to-come but also the unequal sheltering that geo-capitalism provides. We live in a time of experiments, in which current shameful treatments of refugees only prefigure the authoritarian solutions against climate refugees. Achille Mbembe (2016: 165) notes that ‘we are now witnessing a growing universalisation of the condition that was formerly reserved to negroes’. The production of ‘race subjects’, as Mbembe calls them, is done through processes of *zoning* and evictions. Territories are being restructured to fit the new demands of global capital, classifying and sorting out peoples and zones. Mbembe uses the term zoning to refer to the production of surplus population and its sorting out by capital: ‘Zoning is what happens to the losers in the unfolding global competition’ (Mbembe 2016: 38). The new ‘race subjects’ are not slaves since ‘masters today no longer need slaves’ (Mbembe 2016: 166) but are deemed superfluous by global capital. With the becoming-rentier of capitalism, capital can self-generate using a few concentrated poles of intense labour, leaving large zones disenfranchised.

The figures of the migrant and the stranger come once again to the centre of politics, but they have also been powerful motifs of philosophy. The simultaneity of the COP21 in Paris, the terrorist attacks in France and the large influx of people from the Middle-East to Europe due to the Syrian civil war made 2015 a particularly perilous and dangerous year. For Deleuze and Guattari, the unconscious was always territorial and temporal, geographical and historical, full of becomings and returns:

The problem of the unconscious has most certainly nothing to do with generation but rather peopling, population. It is an affair of worldwide population on the full body of the earth, not organic familial generation. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 30)

The Anthropocene also reconfigures the problem of peopling, and re-peopling, engendering great movements of people, migrants, refugees, strangers, foreigners but also thought. The transformation of identities from strangers and foreigners into migrants, refugees and victims modifies the collective unconscious of the earth as a full body. It is our imagination, and together with it, narratives and metanarratives that are set forth. New fictions are produced when life is dominated by the incapacity of calculating risks and imagining the future.

When we refer to climate change as an ‘ecological crisis’, we should be wary of solutions to fix the climate as explained earlier, and understand this time of crisis as *krinein*: how to think and live with the Anthropocene. The tipping-point is precisely

where decisions need to be taken, where bifurcations happen. It is not an ‘ecological crisis’ that can be solved, but an anthropological transformation that requires a change of cosmotechnics, as Yuk Hui explains in the short piece included in this issue.

The Anthropocene is also what makes us think, as well as what makes us read and write. Now that the Working Group on the Anthropocene has officially agreed in August 2016, after 7 years of research, that our current geologic time is significantly distinct from the Holocene and should be called the Anthropocene, it is waiting for the International Commission on Stratigraphy (ICS) to recognise the Anthropocene as a stratigraphic epoch (Voosen 2016). It is now in the hands of the stratigraphers to agree on a start date for the Anthropocene. As it is well-known, the main propositions were: the birth of agriculture 7000 years ago perhaps causing a spike in carbon emissions; the invention of the steam engine marking the beginning of the industrial revolution around the late 18th century; or the last and most popular candidate the 1940s that started the period sometimes known as the ‘Great Acceleration’.

This scientific work will certainly have a significant impact on the international community, in determining how humanity sees its relation to the environment and non-humans, but also more widely on governments, educational institutions and large corporations. Stratigraphers will probably agree that the geological timescale of the Anthropocene begins in the 1940s given the omnipresence of radionuclides (from nuclear bomb tests) in the strata, but they have also elected other candidates to evaluate the material traces of the human in geological composition, such as ‘plastic pollution, aluminium and concrete particles, and high levels of nitrogen and phosphate in soils, derived from artificial fertilisers’ (Carrington 2016). The multitude of candidates chosen to establish a start date in the geological timescale proves that human activities have modified the strata at numerous points, possibly in differentiated though contiguous ways.

This radical breakthrough in geology has huge consequences for philosophical and cosmological reflection. Even before reflecting on these consequences and on the several responses that philosophers and theorists have already provided, it is fundamental to account for the recent history of geology and geosciences in general, as scientific disciplines and knowledge regimes. This point is affirmed by Neyrat (2015; 2016a), whose work is at the centre of this special issue. From the 1970s, the climate becomes the object of new sciences (geosciences) that study the human impact on the ecosystem, such as on the air quality, on the ozone layer or global warming due to the greenhouse effect. It is from this period that the climate has come under scrutiny and has challenged societies on their ecological and economic models. At the same time, economists had also begun to integrate predictability in their models to account for complexity and chaos theories. Some economic paradigms started to integrate ever-changing phenomena in their models, like the climate, making it difficult to assess what is really changing or what is meaningful when everything changes. Economists found parallels

between the paradigms of turbulence in geosciences and in the self-organising regimes of the market, and partly led to the naturalisation of economic rationality.

In a recent article, Isabelle Stengers wonders whether the Anthropocene does not signal a return to science wars, or even to the chaperoning of the humanities by the sciences. ‘Clearly the evaluation of what counts as proof has nothing neutral about it. Also, why not accept that Gaia “exists” for her own sake at a time when the Market is accepted as such?’ (Stengers 2015: 136). Worse still, by challenging scientific facts and proofs, eco-constructivists have increasingly been associated with climate deniers, not on political grounds but epistemologically. Although they do not contribute to the same political epistemology, by wanting to bridge the gap between science and politics, eco-constructivists end up being singled out for relativising science and allowing scientific facts to be subject to interpretation. But climate deniers do not share the same political epistemology and what is contested is precisely the reality of the real as well as the legitimisation of political institutions. A critique of geopower of course sides with the eco-constructivists against climate deniers since climate change is not about belief but about power relations, the production of ‘cheap nature’ (Moore 2015) and land-grabbing processes.

Indeed, why should we consider truth-value, realist arguments and abstractions? As Jacques Derrida noted more than 20 years ago, with the development of the ‘techno-scientific reason’, we live with a ‘deracination of abstraction’ or an ‘abstraction fever’ (*mal d’abstraction*) (Derrida 2001). New technologies and technoscience concentrate and diffuse so much abstraction that it has become difficult to orient ourselves. And this is possibly what Stengers is getting at, by questioning the truth-value of scientific research, we decouple knowledge/science from techno-science/technics, while in fact we know from Bernard Stiegler that technics is the condition of knowledge and science, and not the opposite. Hence, beyond the disagreements in the philosophical and epistemic conceptualisations of nature and climate change, we look for a positive politics. It is not about first getting the knowledge or science right in order to know how we might use our technical tools and technological progress that are at the moment destroying the planet, but the opposite, the very production of new technologies has conditioned the contemporary forms of knowledge and science. These technologies can be used in either toxic or in therapeutic ways. Following Stengers, we first posit that climate change is real and then think of new tools for practitioners of all kind to take care of the Earth and nature, and not add to the poison.

If we look at academic production we must admit that none of our sophisticated critical and analytical tools have produced knowledge that helps others, those “activist” groups who need to cultivate cooperative, ongoing collective intelligence’, rather Stengers continues, ‘the only generalities [concepts like the Anthropocene or Capitalocene] are about what inhibits, poisons or destroys such practices and academic critical pondering

may well be part of the poison. (Stengers 2015: 142)

In face of this geopower, proposals for a progressive politics differ, whether it is about taking into account a new protagonist (Gaia), or changing cosmotechnics, as argued by Yuk Hui in this issue. However, a general complicity is everyday growing larger: where there is geopower, there is georesistance (protests, blockades, sabotages).

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