On an Ungrounded Earth: Towards a New Geophilosophy

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1: **Wormed Earths, or, Abyssal Ungroundings and Torsional Porosities**

Although solidus, or the ground, with its gravity, integrity and tyrannical wholeness is ultimately restrictive, the eradication of the ground also results in the rise of another hegemonic regime—the regime of death and destruction. . . . Ungrounding is involved with discovering or unearthing a chemically-degenerating underside to the ground.

Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia*

The infrastructure of the terrestrial process inheres in the obstructive character of the earth, in its mere bulk as a momentary arrest of solar energy flow.

Nick Land, *Thirst for Annihilation*

1.1. **The Earth is a Living Island**

In one of their many plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari subject the earth (in both meanings of the term—to affect and to subjugate), through the recapitulated figure of Professor Challenger, to pain. They torture our home planet to reveal its secrets, thereby solidifying their codification of the earth as a “who” and not an “it.” This harkens back to Aristotle’s tetrasomia or Kant’s image of nature as geosomatic, in which the earth becomes something corporeal that can be tied to the
rack and then stretched for her secrets. Our concern here is slightly different. As Iain Hamilton Grant points out in *Philosophies of Nature After Schelling*, Kant’s own somatization of the earth operates via a crypto-Aristotelianism. For Aristotle, physics must always be a “science of the body.” As Grant points out in the closing chapters, Deleuze is complicit in this somaphilia, which reduces nature to a collection of objects, wherein the earth becomes a place or set of places, instead of a materially vital life/thought engine.

This is to say nothing of Husserl’s ark-ization of the earth (the earth as the “original ark,” where the Earth is flung back in time to its pre-Copernican state as merely the bounds of experience), as over-romanticized ground (*Boden*), or of what Heidegger would call *Offenheit*, or openness, as Meleau-Ponty shows. It is such images of Earth as both dead body and mute cradle that we set out to destroy with digging machines, massive energy weapons, and total ecological collapse. These images perform a dual criminal function: one, to stabilize thinking, and two, to give gravity to anthropocentric thinking and being.

The earth-anchoring of thought has a long tradition. In his study of Bataille, Nick Land writes, “A dark fluidity at the roots of our nature rebels against the security of *terra firma*, provoking a wave of anxiety in which we are submerged.” Through the oceanic metaphor Land demonstrates how the auto-binding of thought to Earth caricatures both. This oceanic thinking leads us to the image of the island (which functions as a liminal point between the terrestrial and the aquatic), a common element in philosophical texts. The island stretches from Ibn Tufayl’s *Philosophus Autodidactus*, to

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Plato’s Atlantis, to Bacon’s Atlantis, to Kant’s island of truth in the Critique of Pure Reason, all the way to Deleuze’s desert islands. Outside philosophical texts, one hardly need mention the television series Lost and its population of characters named after philosophers.

Lost is just one of the more recent examples of the long metaphoric use of islands, a use which Milan Cirkovic explores, in his essay “Sailing the Archipelago”:

We live on a small island. We have not yet ventured much beyond our immediate locale on this small island; even our own inconspicuous location still holds great mysteries for us. It seems that we find ourselves near the mountain peak of our island, but even that is uncertain. We have only recently discovered that there are other islands besides our home scattered in a vast (possibly infinite) ocean. And the ocean is dead.”

The idea of the earth as an island reinforces the fact that the earth is not bounded in a well-defined way, nor is it immune to the rages of the ocean and other forces—radiation, cosmic rays, meteorites and so on. Cirkovic defines an island as “a set of parameters describing habitable universes which are close in parameter space.” He thus denaturalizes the earth, making it a particular parameter of nature and not an automatically stable philosophical given.

Here we wish to subject the earth to pain—not as a somatized creature, but as a planet, the glob of baked matter that it is—in order to test its limitropic porosity and see how much ungrounding the earth can take before it ceases to be simultaneously an example of nature’s product and also its

10 Cirkovic, “Sailing the Archipelago,” 297.
productivity. The digging or ungrounding of the earth is often tied to thought, as the work of depth is a digging that occurs, to borrow Deleuze’s phrase, in the image of thought. For Deleuze, thought does all the digging: dynamism is contained within the idea.\textsuperscript{11} This is unfortunate given the following passage:

There is necessarily something cruel in this birth of a world which is a chaosmos, in these worlds of movements without subjects, roles without actors. When Artaud spoke of the theater of cruelty, he defined it only in terms of an extreme ‘determinism,’ that of spatio-temporal determination in so far as it incarnates an Idea of mind or nature. . . . Spaces are hollowed out, time is accelerated or decelerated, only at the cost of strains and displacements which mobilise and compromise the whole body.\textsuperscript{12}

Again, the specter of somatization returns. Furthermore, Deleuze’s virtualization of the idea guarantees a pre-thinkability of nature in-itself: a necessary move given Deleuze’s denial of transcendence and his valorization of the univocity of being, or singular ontology.\textsuperscript{13}

Against such somatization and over-ideation of nature and the Earth, Iain Hamilton Grant argues that the dyad of producer and produced disappears via the cosmic striations of matter over time, and yet, the retroactive recognition of mammalian perception digs objects out of the flatness of time as if they were static, thereby orienting them to our attempts to make sense of time, a time-for-us. One must, against correlationist \textit{doxa} (where the universe is only understood in

\textsuperscript{12} Deleuze, \textit{Difference and Repetition}, 219.
\textsuperscript{13} Deleuze, \textit{Difference and Repetition}, 35.
relation to human frames of perception) take the weight of the cosmic cascade into the pulsations of everyday life as saturating the seen and unseen. This requires a certain inaccessibility regarding the materiality/reality of existence (thereby shattering any all-encompassing univocity/immanence) as well as a redefinition of the transcendental to appease such inaccessibility. This task is assisted by differentiating Deleuze’s use of ground from Schelling’s, through the transmogrification of the transcendental.

As Grant indicates, Schelling’s ground and process of ungrounding moves against the Kantian/Fichtean privileging of world over earth. While it would seem that Deleuze combats this move, his thinkable (inter-ideal) differentiation-as-transcendence departs significantly from Schelling. Grant writes: “the nature of the Schellingian transcendental is, as we have seen, as different from the Deleuzian as from the Kantian: the earth itself, as a productive product, is to that extent a natural transcendental or a Scheinprodukt.” Where Deleuze somatizes nature, Schelling searches for the unthinged.

1.2. SCHELLING’S UNGROUND

Grant’s resuscitation of Schelling’s transcendental geology functions to realize Schelling’s ground by developing a realism (i.e., Schelling’s idealism remains qualified by nature), whereas by contrast, “Deleuze maintains the antithesis of nature and freedom, and thus does not determine the one by the other . . . at the cost of regionalizing matter with respect to ideation.” As Grant continues, this line of thinking brings Deleuze close to his nemesis Hegel, in that both seem to deny how geology

15 Grant, Philosophies of Nature, 201.
16 Grant, Philosophies of Nature, 165.
could affect thought.\textsuperscript{18}

The transcendental geology of Schelling not only redefines the transcendental as the capacity for the unknown to seize thought, and to produce thought and thought’s necessary material ground, but also redefines the temporal quality of all actualization.\textsuperscript{19} The central concern for Grant in regards to Schellingian anteriority is what he calls powers—a concern that Deleuze recognizes but then seems to forget.\textsuperscript{20} The importance of a powers-ontology lies in the fact that any object cannot contain its own conditions for coming to be that object, whether that object be an idea, a terrestrial sphere, or a perforation of that sphere. Hegel’s world of eternal becoming, like Deleuze’s world-as-egg, denies actuality its temporality— hence Hegel’s and Deleuze’s rejection of realist geology.\textsuperscript{21}

Grant summarizes the importance of such a geology in the following way:

If geology, or the ‘mining process,’ opens onto an ungroundedness at the core of any object, this is precisely because there is no ‘primal layer of the world’, no ‘ultimate substrate’ or substance on which everything ultimately rests. The lines of serial dependency, stratum upon stratum, that geology uncovers do not rest on anything at all, but are the records of actions antecedent in the production of consequents.\textsuperscript{22}

The mechanics of ungrounding, however, cannot be reduced to anteriority in either its physical or ideal forms. If

\begin{itemize}
\item[Iain Hamilton Grant, “Mining Conditions,” in \textit{The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism}, eds. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman (Melbourne: re.press, 2010), 41–46.]
\item[Grant, “Mining Conditions,” 44.]
\item[Deleuze, \textit{Difference and Repetition}, 190.]
\item[See Grant, “Mining Conditions.”]
\item[Grant, “Mining Conditions,” 44.]
\end{itemize}
we hold to a powers-ontology, then the process of grounding and ungrounding must be articulated in the most base articulation of powers, that of spatio-temporality. This spatio-temporality is a simultaneous ungrounding/grounding and interiorizing/exteriorizing. As Ray Brassier notes in his text “Concepts and Objects,” such dualities are not outmoded metaphysical baggage, but are necessary, especially given the troubling indistinction of ontology and epistemology once anthropocentric veils have been torn.23

While Schelling is easily the master of grounding and ungrounding, we will have to look elsewhere to develop a theory of interiority/exteriority and the relation of the two terms to one another. Michael Vater points out that Schelling’s utilization of temporality as the individuating factor in his identity philosophy leads to an opposition of the internal and external that is far too simplistic.24 However, this claim denies the naturephilosophical concerns of Schelling, according to which the real is connected with externality, while this externality is separated from the internality of the mind only formally and not qualitatively. Schelling’s philosophy has frequently been disregarded as a step towards Hegel, as failing to extend or transform Kant in the degree which Fichte and Hegel did—the former exacerbating the ego to an extreme positivity, the latter intensifying the I in a negative sense in order to overcome the being/knowing balancing act of Kant. To see Schelling in this way is to see him as far more Kantian than he is. Schelling, then, must be thoroughly spatialized. In one of Grant’s many Schellingian adventures, he comments on the disregard of interiority when it comes to temporal expansion.25

25Ray Brassier, Iain Hamilton Grant, Graham Harman, and Quentin
Interiority becomes problematic from a point of view of realism, as it cannot merely be a temporal distinction; temporal distance cannot determine the reality of objects, of their inaccessibility. That is, time alone cannot explain the layering of the world; there must be a materiality which is not merely formal. Space suffers a similar problem (perhaps unsurprisingly, given the logical interdependence of time and space) as, at its deepest ground, it blurs the distinction between base materiality and pure formalism. Or, in other words, space cannot be taken as merely the stage of matter. It is a quality of gravity that controls the motion of matter and is warped by matter in kind. This brings us back to Schelling’s powers and how the interaction of powers can be called a materialism, materiality, or perhaps, realism.

1.3. EXAGGERATED DECAY

Two theorists will aid us in the project of a realist and truculent theory of space-time as non-formal and generative: Reza Negarestani and Martin Hägglund.

Reza Negarestani further destructs the Deleuzo-Guattarian terrestrial determination by investigating the poromechanics of the Earth: the vital but non-vital work of decay, hollowing out life, where “[t]he cosmogenesis of decay unfolds within solidity, [and] spreads from interior to outer surfaces.” These intrinsic temporal dimensions are brought out explicitly in Negarestani’s “Memento Tabere: Reflections


27Oldenwald, Patterns in the Void, 109.
28Oldenwald, Patterns in the Void, 138.
29Negarestani, Cyclonopedia, 181–182.
on Time and Putrefaction”:

We can say that in decay space is perforated by time: Although time hollows out space, it is space that gives time a twist that abnegates the privilege of time over space and expresses the irrepressible contingencies of the absolute time through material and formal means.\(^{30}\)

Negarestani’s rot-thought likewise sets up an important relation of the interior and the exterior in both ontological and epistemological concerns.

This is not to ignore the spatial dimensions of decay, where “dimensions and metrons deteriorate beneath the machinery of rot”\(^ {31}\) non-metrically, disintegrating objects in a non-fragmentary way.\(^ {32}\) Proceeding in an ostensibly anti-Deleuzian fashion, Negarestani notes: “Chemistry starts from within, but its existence is registered on the surface; ontology is, so to speak, merely a superficial symptom of chemistry.”\(^ {33}\) Understanding the acidity of space-time against the soft infirmity of matter is paramount for any realist articulation of geophilosophy. Or as Grant puts it, geology is the corpse grinder of the earth.\(^ {34}\)

Furthermore, in his unpublished essay “Triebkrieg,” Negarestani discusses the two traumas of the earth in relation to internality and externality. He writes:

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\(^{31}\)Negarestani, Cyclonopedia, 186.

\(^{32}\)Negarestani, Cyclonopedia, 187.

\(^{33}\)Negarestani, Cyclonopedia, 187.

If geophilosophy is a philosophy that grasps thought in relation to earth and territory, then it is a philosophy that, perhaps unconsciously, grasps thought in relation to two traumas, one precipitated by the accretion of the earth and the other ensued by the determination of the territory. Whilst the former trauma lies in the consolidation of the earth as a planetary ark for terrestrial life against the cosmic backdrop, the latter is brought about by a combined geographic and demographic determination of a territory against the exteriority of the terrestrial plane and fluxes of populations of all kinds.35

It is the former trauma with which this text is concerned. Against Heideggerian and Agambenian fascinations with the open, homeness, and so forth, Negarestani does not subject place or topos beneath a phenomenal sensibility or sense of being, but instead notes the tensions between lifeforms (not forms-of-life) and territories—territories as hunks of matter and biological and socio-political demarcations.

If Negarestani’s texts pull out the dark spatial ramifications of a realist geophilosophy, then Martin Hägglund’s philosophy can be taken as a temporal addendum to Negarestani’s twisted space. Hägglund’s highly innovative reading of Derrida’s work, elaborated in Radical Atheism and subsequent projects, develops a fascinating articulation of time and space’s relationship. Hägglund argues that time is ultratranscendental36 and must be, first and foremost, a logic of succession and not a category of thought that is (phenomenologically) obsessed with the present.37 Time must be spatialized or thought in terms of the becoming-time of

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35Reza Negarestani, “Triebkrieg” (unpublished manuscript), 5.
37Hägglund, Radical Atheism, 15–16.
space,\textsuperscript{38} where space is what remains after temporal succession. Hägglund further argues that the time of survival is the very is-ness of life.\textsuperscript{39}

The thrust of Hägglund’s argument runs against the psychoanalytic bastion of the death drive, for Hägglund suggests that life means survival and not, as Freud suggested, an irrational drive beyond desire which may or may not result in self-destruction. Hägglund’s use of time rallies against philosophical uses of immortality. He speaks of Derrida’s mortal germ as something “inseparable from the seed of life,” writing,

To think the trace as an ultratranscendental condition is thus to think a constitutive finitude that is absolutely without exception. From within its very constitution life is threatened by death, memory is threatened by forgetting, identity is threatened by alterity, and so on.\textsuperscript{40}

Or, following Land’s reading of Freud, life itself becomes merely a labyrinthine route toward death.\textsuperscript{41}

Time and space are each the trace of the other leaving behind materiality, a materiality which confirms the mortality of both the living and the non-living as well as the increasing difficulty in separating the two, given the violent force of succession. How and if succession can be separated from decay becomes a complex problem.\textsuperscript{42} This complexity arises not only from the function of decay but also from the massive knot of epistemology and ontology and their subsequent

\textsuperscript{38}Hägglund, \textit{Radical Atheism}, 18.
\textsuperscript{39}Hägglund, \textit{Radical Atheism}, 33–34.
\textsuperscript{40}Hägglund, \textit{Radical Atheism}, 19.
\textsuperscript{41}Land, \textit{The Thirst for Annihilation}, 47.
\textsuperscript{42}On the relation of succession and anthropocentricity, see Julian Barbour’s \textit{The End of Time: The Next Revolution in Physics} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
indistinction. As Land writes,

This coherence of existent knowing has always been taken by philosophy to be the evident principle of ontology, or the harmonious reciprocity of knowing/being. From Plato, through the Scholastics, to Descartes and beyond, thought presupposes and confirms existence, just as existence bears witness to its origin in divine ideation. . . . Only an immortal entity is able to reflectively apprehend pure being, without becoming inevitably lost in the swamp of matter; that dangerous compacted mass of being and annihilation, malignantly metaphoric, infectious, gnawed, and rotten with time.43

This onto-epistemological indistinction is of course only an indistinction from the point of view of thinking beings, whereas the collusion of decay and process is deeply metaphysical. Again, Land is the most useful touchstone here:

As the destroyer the universe is time, and as the destroyed nature, but in the destruction nature sloughs off the crust in which it had petrified itself and infests time like rot, regressing to its molten core; base matter, becoming, flow, energy, immanence, continuity, flame, desire, death.44

As Land reiterates through his text, reason and its material manifestations (civilization, religion, etc.) only serve as a poor salve to this wound. The trauma between process and decay becomes one of the limits of thinking, of the madness of reason.

It is impressive that Negarestani manages to short circuit

the madness of reason and thinking of rot-as-process. Rot cannot be seen as merely the undermining of bodies, as only a negative undoing completely separate from the formative processes of nature, as seen above in the quotation from Land.

In his essay “Undercover Softness: An Introduction to the Architecture and Politics of Decay,” Negarestani engages medieval theorists of rot to explore the somatically nullifying mathesis of their philosophies. As Negarestani confirms, “the troubling aspect of decay has to do more with its dynamism or gradation than with its inherently defiling nature.” He continues:

Decay does not result in the equivocation between putrid and wholesome; it rather constructs both ideas as its gradationally proper forms, so that what is considered wholesome can in fact be seen as a rotten derivative of an initial construction that has limitropically diminished.

The most interesting thrust of Negarestani’s piece is the relation between exteriors and interiors inaugurated by decay: “To put it simply, decay is a process that exteriorizes all interiorities via their own formal or ideal resources.” Further, decay builds towards the exterior via the formation of nested interiorities. These interiorities, once taken into thought, are traumas—with trauma here understood as interiorized exteriority. While the psyche attempts to nest (back in the earth) the exterior barrage of nature’s succession, in the end (since thought itself is an outgrowth of nature), the nested traumas only open the thinking individual up to

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further ungroundings and regroundings.

These traumas plant instabilities within the earth and initiate the internal ungroundings we will explicate. To engage a complex matrix of ungroundings and groundings means to build, or at least start to articulate, a metaphysics that escapes both the somaphilia of Kant, in which collections of bodies are woven via consciousness, as well as any vitalism (whether classical or modern) in which the substantiality of matter is given too little attention.

Exaggerating decay means both pushing it to the smallest extremes—as perforating particle, the micro-meteorite which punctures the hull, the small projectile of rail gun (fictional and factual), and the thrown-about atomic ammunition of particle accelerators—and also to the largest degree, in the destruction of massive bodies based on machinic and cosmological ruptures.

The first task is to construct, through somewhat strange means, a theory of ungrounding, both internally and externally. A realist theory of ungrounding, following Negarestani, must engage with decay, with the intensive interaction between forces and bodies, without allowing either to abject or exterminate the other.

1.4. WORMS, OR INTERNAL UNGROUNDING

Internal ungroundings function on various scales. The small function of decay of the tiny earthworm (within the carcass or the soft soil) meets the colossal destruction of the worm in the manifestations of speculative literature, films, and video-games. With the Riftworm (from Gears of War), the Antlions (Half Life 2), the sand-worms of Dune, the graboids from Tremors, the cytidic Mongolian death worm, Edgar Allen Poe’s Conqueror Worm, as well as H.P. Lovecraft’s and Thomas Ligotti’s various horrific utilizations of worms both large and small, the worm has enjoyed—and continues to enjoy—a
lively speculative life. To get a strong grasp of the oddness of internal un-grounding, it will be helpful to pass through the lairs of the worms.

Poe’s Conqueror Worm is the least literal and is generally viewed as a representation of inevitable death, as that which gobbles up masked angels. But still, the worm carries all the weight of death and decay, invoking the giant dragon-like worms of medieval maps.

Out—out are the lights—out all!
And, over each quivering form,
The curtain, a funeral pall,
Comes down with the rush of a storm,
While the angels, all pallid and wan,
Uprising, unveiling, affirm
That the play is the tragedy, ‘Man,’
And its hero the Conqueror Worm.49

The giant worms of Frank Herbert’s *Dune* are the most well-known worms in science fiction. They are enormous creatures that churn the sands of the planet of Arrakis, and are worshipped by its inhabitants (the Freemen) as Shai-Hulud, or “the old man of the desert.” The crystalline-toothed gargan-

tuan worms are driven mad by electrical fields and produce a physiology-altering drug known as *melange* as they move through the ground. The Freemen use the worms to traverse the desert planet and harvest their teeth as daggers. The sandworms are hundreds of meters long and appear as a mix between an earthworm and a sea worm. They have a peculiar relation to their planet, in that, as spawn, or sandtrout, the creatures quartered off all water on their world, turning the sphere into a massive desert.

Besides ungrounding the interior of the earth as common worms do, the sandworms of *Dune* unground the surface of the planet by reducing the planet’s biomass almost to nothing. The worms participate in the organic/inorganic blur, as well as in the indistinction of madness and reason as a byproduct of their movement, especially in the production of a spice that has drastically mind-altering effects on the humanoids.

The worms of *Dune* have inspired other invertebrate science fiction horrors. In the military science fiction videogame *Gears of War*, for instance, the depths of the planet Sera are rife with various worms. The largest of these is the rift worm, which is worshiped by the game’s antagonists, the Locust Horde. The Locust use the rift worm to sink the cities of man as humans have invaded their underground space (the Hollows) in search of Imulsion, a highly sought-after fluid that can be converted into energy. The planet and its worms from *Gears of War* are less interesting than those of *Dune*, but nonetheless hold an ecological lesson: the outer hollows were used as a dumping ground by humans before the Locust Horde made their way to the surface to begin their genocidal campaign.

The other significant fictional giant worms are the graboids of the *Tremors* film franchise and the Mongolian death worm on which they are based. The Mongolian death worm, according to local accounts, resembles a giant cow intestine and is capable of spitting acid and generating...
electricity. The graboids of *Tremors*, which are also called sand dragons, are in many ways smaller versions of the worms of *Dune*. In addition to worms as larger, more ecologically complex versions of their real world selves and as agents of death, worms are also engines of a terrestrial weirdness.

Weird fiction, and particularly the work of H.P. Lovecraft, entertains the strangeness of worms. “What the Moon Brings” is filled with brief musing on odd sea worms. Most disturbing are the worm-people found in Lovecraft’s “The Festival,” but also in Robert Howard’s “Worms of the Earth” and Thomas Ligotti’s “Last Feast of the Harlequin.” In “The Festival,” Lovecraft fictionalizes the Danish physician Ole Worm as a translator of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred’s forbidden grimoire, the *Necronomicon*, citing the following unsettling passage:

> “The nethermost caverns,” wrote the mad Arab, “are not for the fathoming of eyes that see; for their marvels are strange and terrific. Cursed the ground where dead thoughts live new and oddly bodied, and evil the mind that is held by no head. Wisely did Ibn Schacabao say, that happy is the tomb where no wizard hath lain, and happy the town at night whose wizards are all ashes. For it is of old rumour that the soul of the devil-bought hastes not from his charnel clay, but fats and instructs the very
worm that gnaws; till out of corruption horrid life springs, and the dull scavengers of earth wax crafty to vex it and swell monstrous to plague it. Great holes secretly are digged where earth’s pores ought to suffice, and things have learnt to walk that ought to crawl.”

Negarestani situates the above passage as an outline of Lovecraftian poromechanics, which allow for the emergence of the Outside from within the Inside. The earth as a worm-infested body illustrates the structural twist of the operation of nemat-space, in that the void does not merely unground the earth into oblivion. Indeed, such envoiding is necessary for the very possibility of architecture. The best geophysical detail of Lovecraft’s “The Festival” is the “oily underground river,” which is described as “that putrescent juice of earth’s inner horrors.”

It is important to note the difference in the use of the worm: for Lovecraft the worm is about the possible and terrifying transmutations of the human, whereas for Negarestani the worm and worming indexes a more disturbing and twisted aspect to nonhuman life-in-itself. Ligotti revisits the strange worm cult in “The Last Feast of the Harlequin,” in which an academic becomes one of the worm-like people who gather in the depths of the earth. Ungrounding and subhumanity are also found in The Descent, both Jeff Long’s novel and Neil Marshall’s unrelated horror film of the same name. Underground human life often leads to demonology. In Long’s novel, a race of cannibalistic human-like creatures are

51Negarestani, Cyclonopedia, 44.
52Negarestani, Cyclonopedia, 45–47.
54I owe this point to Nicola Masciandaro.
discovered living under the earth, suggesting the possibility of a historical Satan (which we will explore later).

We can also consider the Shoggoths, the amorphous biological digging machines from Lovecraft’s novella *At the Mountains of Madness*, which were engineered by the “Great Old Ones” as slaves (living machines). Lovecraft describes them this way:

> It was a terrible, indescribable thing vaster than any subway train—a shapeless congeries of protoplasmic bubbles, faintly self-luminous, and with myriads of temporary eyes forming and unforming as pustules of greenish light all over the tunnel-filling front that bore down upon us, crushing the frantic penguins and slithering over the glistening floor that it and its kind had swept so evilly free of all litter.55

*At the Mountains of Madness* is a masterpiece of weird fiction that repeatedly invokes notions of deep time as two researchers explore an ancient city built by the Shoggoths for the Great Old Ones. The Great Old Ones existed on the earth aeons before the rise of humanity from the slime pits, and it is suggested that the creation of human life on the earth might be a result of the Great Old Ones’ failed experiments in bioengineering. Land explores the possibility of Shoggothic Materialism through the invented figure of Hank Hackhammer. While it is unclear what such a materialism would be, the Shoggoths can easily be tied to the oddness of underground construction and internal ungrounding. Again, from *At the Mountains of Madness*:

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For this place could be no ordinary city. It must have formed the primary nucleus and center of some archaic and unbelievable chapter of earth’s history whose outward ramifications, recalled only dimly in the most obscure and distorted myths, had vanished utterly amidst the chaos of terrene convulsions long before any human race we know had shambled out of apedom. Here sprawled a Palaeogaean megalopolis compared with which the fabled Atlantis and Lemuria, Commoriorim and Uzuldaroum, and Olathoc in the land of Lomar, are recent things of today—not even of yesterday; a megalopolis ranking with such whispered pre-human blasphemies as Valusia, R’lyeh, Ib in the land of Mnar, and the Nameless city of Arabia Deserta.56

The apparent massiveness of this megalopolis is elided in the surface of a flat horizon, yet at the same time, it becomes big enough that it can serve as a stage for all living things. The actions of the Shoggoths and their wormy compatriots demonstrates life as an ungrounding force that essentially porositizes the earth—an exaggeration of the lowly earthworm that aerates the soil with its piston-like movement and restructures the soil for better drainage of water. The part of the earth influenced by the activities and biological residue of earthworms is appropriately called the drilosphere.

This Shoggothic, or perhaps vermicular materialism, that we have articulated in the above few pages is intended to emphasize that the organic and inorganic co-conspire to unground, and that it does not take much to realize that one cannot merely slap on peasant shoes and stroll across the open as if the ground beneath one’s feet were stable. In addition to the fact that the ground crawls with life both on and beneath

56Lovecraft, “At the Mountains of Madness,” 759.
its thoroughly porositized surface, the matter of the shoes themselves, strange artifice that they are, are always already defamiliarized.

Ligotti’s indirect response to Heidegger’s “The Origin of the Work of Art” can be seen in the following:

The most everyday objects may turn peculiar and uncanny if we focus on them long enough, as if they were functionless lumps of matter-questionable and alien. Some old shoes in a clothes closet catch your eye and appear as shapes you have never before pondered. Soon you are not as at ease with them as you once were. . . . You select a pair of shoes to wear and sit down to put them on. It is then you notice your stockinged feet . . . and the body to which they are connected . . . and the universe in which that body is roving about with so many peculiar and uncanny things. 57

Ligotti ruthlessly opens humans to the exterior, not an exterior that is romantically exteriorized from the human brain itself, but, following Negarestani’s rot-thought, one that is coiled up and nestled in the softest parts of our brain. It is for these reasons that Ligotti argues that horror is more real than we are.

It is therefore also horrific that we are capable of creating and utilizing tools that go even further in ungrounding, or even degrounding, that very place (the earth) on which our feet happen to be more or less planted. That is, the human capacity to carve and dig into the earth points to the oddness of how created objects themselves have little solid ground—and yet they are capable of the eradication of the very surface of the earth.
