On an Ungrounded Earth: Towards a New Geophilosophy

Ben Woodard

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Great star! What would your happiness be, if you had not those for whom you shine! . . . I must descend into the depths: as you do at evening, when you go behind the sea and bring light to the underworld too, superabundant star!

Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

One might equally denote this planet as the muddy planet, for it is the only one to be encased in a thick shell of mud and mudrock, being literally enveloped in its own decay products.

Jan Zalasiewicz, *The Earth After Us*

### 5.1. DARK EARTH

Throughout Negarestani’s *Cyclonopedia*, the possibility of a tellurian insurgency against the sun is posited, working in the vein of a Tiamaterialism, where the earth itself is taken up as a weapon against the solar empire. The earth, as we have seen, does not require much labor to become a monster. The earth is a stratified globule, a festering confusion of internalities powered by a molten core and bombarded by an indifferent

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147 Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia*, 42.
star. This productive rottenness breeds the possibility of escaping the solar economy through the odd chemistry of ontology. The darkness of ground in Schelling, as Grant has argued, is a productive one.

The earth is “the dark ground of nature”\textsuperscript{148} that attempts to create all on its own while always sinking back into a black chaos.\textsuperscript{149} This odd and failed generation makes itself into immanent compost: “everything goes as into its ground; one ought rather to say: everything preceding grounded itself by the fact that it lowers itself to being the ground of what follows.”\textsuperscript{150} The ground of the earth constantly makes itself the ground of something else. Expanding the earth’s productivity, Schelling writes:

\begin{quote}
The abyss of forces down into which we gaze here opens up with the single question: in the \textit{first} construction of our Earth, what can have been the ground of the fact that no genesis of new individuals is possible upon it, otherwise than under the condition of opposite powers?\textsuperscript{151}
\end{quote}

The earth must be a part of a larger system of forces, a system at the cosmic scale\textsuperscript{152} in which the ground of the earth is the dark principal of night,\textsuperscript{153} all of which, following Lorenz

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{149}Schelling, \textit{Philosophical Investigations}, 45.
\textsuperscript{151}Schelling, \textit{The First Outline of a System}, 230.
\end{flushleft}
Oken, lay in a chaotic yet stabilizing tension.\footnote{Lorenz Oken, \textit{Elements of Physiophilosophy} (London: The Ray Society, 1847), 41–43.} Furthermore, “The earth is the corporeal gravity, the substance as a perfectly simple position without emergence out of itself, the 0, the terrestrial monad.”\footnote{Oken, \textit{Elements of Physiophilosophy}, 89.} Oken’s failure in articulating the earth as a dark heavy zero (despite its genesis in crystallization) is in stating that it is only earth at its center. The complex immanence of the earth rests neither only at the core nor only on the surface. Deleuze and Guattari understand this when they write: “The earth is not one element among others but rather brings together all the elements within a single embrace.”\footnote{Deleuze and Guattari, \textit{What is Philosophy?} 85.}

This geological immanence occurs at various depths. For Negarestani, oil, as a geopolitical lubricant, is the rotten corpse of the sun\footnote{Negarestani, \textit{Cyclonopedia}, 12.} that helps fuel the insurgency against the solar empire. This lubricant works with the ( )hole complex of the Earth as the first few components of the rotting earth move against the blazing star. This “degenerate wholeness” oscillates “between surface and depth—within solid matrices, fundamentally corrupting the latter’s consolidation and wholeness through perforations and terminal porosities.”\footnote{Negarestani, \textit{Cyclonopedia}, 43.} This ungrounded earth is, in a naturephilosophy without bodies, somewhat less peculiar. Engaging Land again: “Bodies are not volumes but coastlines; irresolvable but undelimitable penetrabilities, opportunities for the real decomposition of space.”\footnote{Land, \textit{The Thirst for Annihilation}, 161.} And simply put, “Void excludes solidarity, but solidarity does not exclude void.”\footnote{Land, \textit{The Thirst for Annihilation}, 164.}

In its most triumphant moments of assault, the Earth (along with nature’s most terrible invention, thought) vomits
demons, pollutant clouds, and solar grubbing organisms as forced participation in, yet also secret resentment for, the Sun. Since the Earth cannot escape the Sun’s orbit, it can only mutilate itself in the guise of cooperation. *Pace* Deleuze and Guattari, the Earth cannot merely swing between territory and non-territory—such swinging says nothing about its molten insider. Negarestani digs deeply on this point:

Tellurian Insurgency does not merely run on oil and dust: A substantial part of it works with Cthellium and feeds on metal. The core (Cthelll), as a protrusive xenochemical insider, tries to induce violent anomalies in the Earth’s body.\(^{161}\)

But let us not forget that bodies themselves are completely envoided, swirlings of matter and forces, and, in a philosophical sense, messes of onto-epistemological indistinction. In terms of Schellingian transcendental geophilosophy, the transcendental is the surface and not the depths.\(^{162}\)

But if the transcendental is what makes the ideal into the real, it is not because the ideal has ontological priority but because our grasp of immanence is ideal since it never stops moving. The first force of nature would be endlessly productive if not for a second negative process.\(^{163}\)

Earth as a storm of forces, as a darkly productive monster, seems far removed from the Earth discussed in ecology studies and in popular culture, where it is caught between a thing to be worshiped and a thing to be exploited, or as Pierre Hadot puts it, between the Orphic and the Promethean. The Earth is caught in a torrent of irreversible sludge as if all the pollution machines of all the Captain Planet villains were unleashed simultaneously and without end. The

\(^{161}\)Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia*, 162.

\(^{162}\)Grant, *Philosophies of Nature*, 205.

irreversibility of this collapse, of this rotten-ness, is typically highly resisted.

It is a surprise that even in a cultural cloud as dark as that of Black Metal, the fantasy of complete ecological reversal remains. The central issue of Black Metal’s inhumanity (or perhaps, the voiding of humanity proper) is the questionable place from which that void-loving misanthropy emerges, the core from which the disintegration of the human is loosed. Ecological Black Metal, such as that of the band Wolves in the Throne Room, indirectly highlights this problematic by narrowing the blackening of BM to target post-industrial inhumanity—posing a neo-pagan or otherwise earthly human as the proper inhuman subject to replace the contemporary capitalism-drenched being (a clear appeal to the Orphic tendency of thinking nature).

Such actions not only become increasingly indistinguishable from naive attempts at green thinking and ethics, but also require a presentation of the Earth as ordinary arche as well as a retention of the possibility of a miraculous reversibility of capitalist energetics—in the possibility of a purely earthly (non-artificial) production and form of life. The earth is always self-exteriorizing from our conceptions of it, via dramatic exteriorization (cosmological expansion) or via a horrifying deepening of its interiority (through the microbe, the virus, and so forth), but this is ignored by Wolves in the Throne Room’s project of setting out to “purify Black Metal” tout court in order to mirror their ecological view—stipulating not creation in the void of planetary destruction but a pre-Oedipal dream-harmony with nature.

It is with this invocation of Oedipus that we move to the great solar mother.

5.2. BLACK SUN

We see at a glance wide seas of fire, raising their
flames towards the heavens, frantic storms, whose fury doubles the intensity of the burning seas, while they themselves make the fiery seas overflow their banks, sometimes covering the higher regions of this world body, sometimes allowing them to sink back down within their borders. Burned out rocks extend their frightening peaks up above the flaming chasms.

Kant

The sun is a whore.

Daniel Schreber

Kant wants the sun to be a planet, badly. Hoping that the sun has an atmosphere of its own, Kant praises the force of the sun, but this is only because he cannot stand the sun’s distance. The philosopher’s problem is that he wants to be the sun. At least Zarathustra is honest about it: “Thus spoke Zarathustra and left his cave, glowing and strong, like a morning sun emerging from behind dark mountains.” Judge Schreber took it a step further with the concept of the solar replenishment of his insides, which allowed him to exist without organs, to be made only of sunbeams. Deleuze and Guattari see this as a positive condition—Schreber’s ability to attract sunbeams with his slippery body.

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165 Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 336.
This is also the driving horror of Danny Boyle’s *Sunshine*. In the film, a vessel is sent to the sun with a massive nuclear warhead in order to reignite the solar core. On the way, the crew experiences various problems—one goes sun-mad and spends more and more time in the viewing room, transfixed by the rage of the sun, before eventually allowing himself to be cooked alive. Another, while attempting to repair the sun, is overwhelmed by the cascading light of the sun and is killed. The crew eventually picks up a distress signal from the first ship, *Icarus I*, that attempted this mission, and they go aboard for repair materials. They soon learn that the captain of the first ship went sun-mad and, as a scorched piece of meat, he begins killing the remaining characters. True to the ship’s name, the vessel is unable to withstand proximity to the sun, and it sacrifices itself in order to restart the sun, destroying the survivors in a blaze.

The sun is a destructive monster, yet its productive capacity cannot be overestimated. For Schelling, it is the chemical synthesizer of the earth,\(^\text{169}\) as well as the imperfect

\(^{169}\text{Schelling, First Outline of a System, 88, 96.}\)
hearth of the world that wishes to consume the earth.\textsuperscript{170} Schelling describes the sun as a dynamic trigger this way: “External nature and earth would remain cold, dark, and completely secluded and devoid of creativity if they were not opposed by the effect of the sun.”\textsuperscript{171}

For Oken, it is also a strange gelatinous animal, an important creature in a totally organic cosmos.\textsuperscript{172} For Negarestani, the sun is both vitalist and annihilationist in its empire over the earth.\textsuperscript{173} What is required is a perverse immanent meld of the earth and the sun.\textsuperscript{174} Furthermore, this sun-earth axis is the producer of hell from the black egg of the earth.\textsuperscript{175}

Again it is tempting to return to Land and his pseudo-Bataillean naturephilosophy. The sun must be the illuminator for Plato and Socrates.\textsuperscript{176} But there is, for Bataille, a second sun, a dark sun, a black sun:\textsuperscript{177} “The sensations we drink from the black sun afflict us as ruinous passion, skewering our senses upon the drive to waste ourselves.”\textsuperscript{178}

There are strange dreams about surviving this aspect of the sun, which culminates in the cataclysm of its destruction preceded by its darkening, its blackening, and its degradation towards meltdown. In the closing pages of \textit{Nihil Unbound}, Brassier writes:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Everything is dead already.} Solar death is catastrophic because it vitiates ontological temporality as configured in terms of philosophical ques-
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{170}Schelling, \textit{Bruno}, 175.
\textsuperscript{171}Schelling, \textit{Idealism and the Endgame of Theory}, 211.
\textsuperscript{172}Oken, \textit{Elements of Physiophilosophy}, 70.
\textsuperscript{173}Negarestani, \textit{Cyclonopedia}, 92.
\textsuperscript{174}Negarestani, \textit{Cyclonopedia}, 147.
\textsuperscript{175}Negarestani, \textit{Cyclonopedia}, 147.
\textsuperscript{176}Land, \textit{The Thirst for Annihilation}, 28.
\textsuperscript{177}Land, \textit{The Thirst for Annihilation}, 29.
\textsuperscript{178}Land, \textit{The Thirst for Annihilation}, 29.
tioning’s constitutive horizontal relationship to the future. But far from lying in wait for us in the far distant future, on the other side of the terrestrial horizon, the solar catastrophe needs to be grasped as something that has already happened; as the aboriginal trauma driving the history of terrestrial life as an elaborately circuitous detour from stellar death.179

Two twisted conclusions resulting from this are an attempt to outlive the solar withering and the possibility of a dead and black sun. In the first instance, there is no better example than the work of William Hope Hodgson, and in particular Night Land and The House on the Borderland.180 In the former, humanity cowers in a gigantic metal pyramid, watching the world mutate under the faded light of an extinct sun, whereas in the latter, the protagonist watches the universe and everything around him decay due to the ravages of time. In the second instance, we have the long cultic use of the black sun.

Goodrick-Clarke’s text Black Sun provides a litany of interpretations of this occult phenomenon—from the alchemical sol niger as the first stage of creation, to Horbiger’s black sun as a dark earth capturing planets, to Wiligut’s black sun as an extinct star orbiting the earth, and finally to the black sun as the Babylonian inner light.181 All the black suns form a vomitous circle of matter with the earth.

The figure of the black sun allows the earth to break out

of its slavery, out of its baked mass, striking toward the sun or breaking away from it, before it boils the oceans away and kills all life on the planet. A black sun is the hope that the sun will rot and fall into the earth, and the dark earth is the wish that the planet will rocket, like a perforating monad, towards the sun—this is the dream of destroying it.