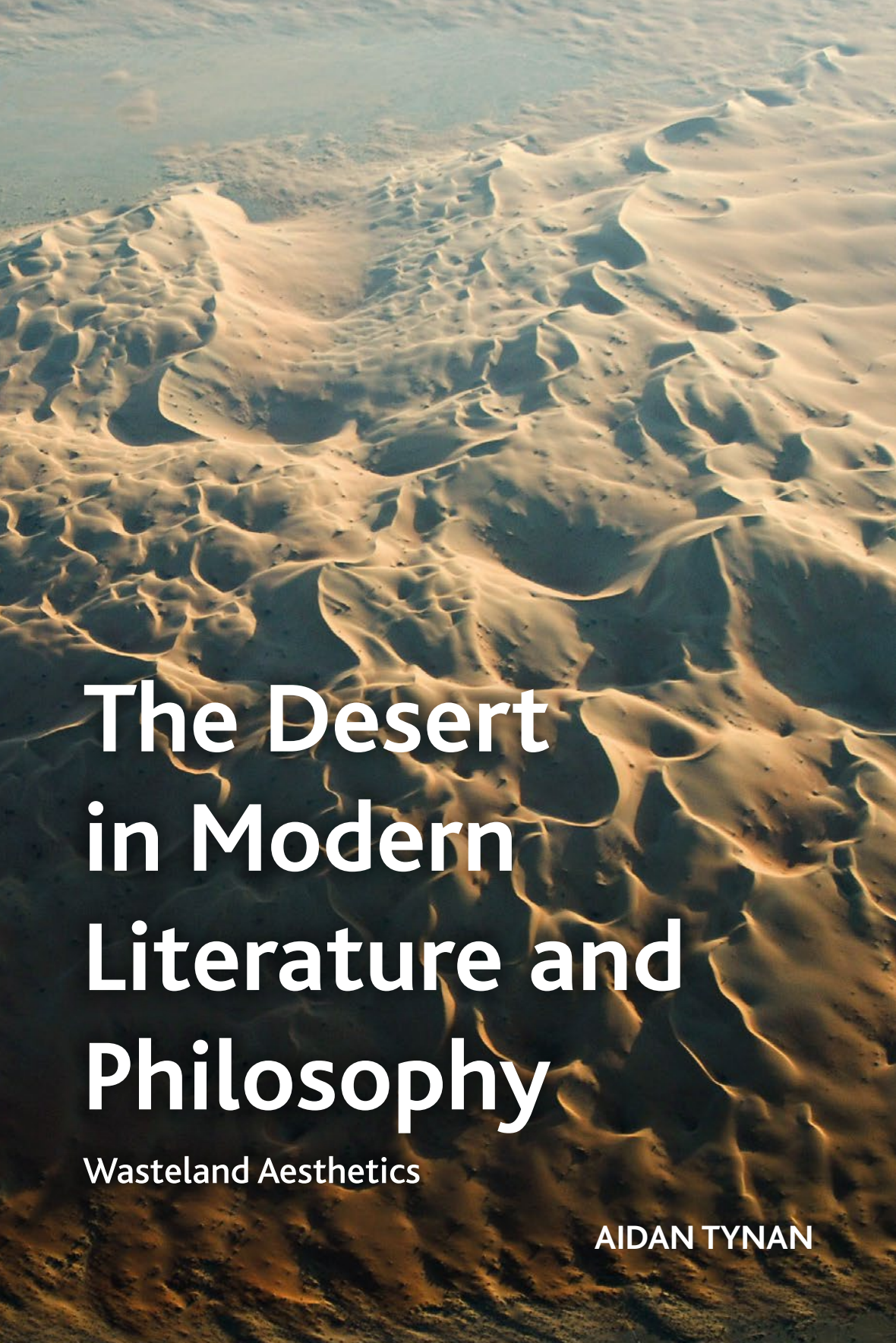

The Desert in Modern Literature and Philosophy

Wasteland Aesthetics

AIDAN TYNAN

THE DESERT IN MODERN LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY

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Series Editor's Preface

Two or more currents flowing into or through each other create a turbulent crosscurrent, more powerful than its contributory flows and irreducible to them. Time and again, modern European thought creates and exploits crosscurrents in thinking, remaking itself as it flows through, across and against discourses as diverse as mathematics and film, sociology and biology, theology, literature and politics. The work of Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou, Bernard Stiegler and Jean-Luc Nancy, among others, participates in this fundamental remaking. In each case disciplines and discursive formations are engaged, not with the aim of performing a predetermined mode of analysis yielding a 'philosophy of x', but through encounters in which thought itself can be transformed. Furthermore, these fundamental transformations do not merely seek to account for singular events in different sites of discursive or artistic production but rather to engage human existence and society as such, and as a whole. The cross-disciplinarity of this thought is therefore neither a fashion nor a prosthesis; it is simply part of what 'thought' means in this tradition.

Crosscurrents begins from the twin convictions that this remaking is integral to the legacy and potency of European thought, and that the future of thought in this tradition must defend and develop this legacy in the teeth of an academy that separates and controls the currents that flow within and through it. With this in view, the series provides an exceptional site for bold, original and opinion-changing monographs that actively engage European thought in this fundamentally cross-disciplinary manner, riding existing crosscurrents and creating new ones. Each book in the series explores the different ways in which European thought develops through its engagement with disciplines across the arts, humanities, social sciences and sciences, recognising that the community of scholars working with this thought is itself spread across diverse faculties. The object of the series is therefore

nothing less than to examine and carry forward the unique legacy of European thought as an inherently and irreducibly cross-disciplinary enterprise.

Christopher Watkin
Cambridge
February 2011

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For Sophie

Introduction

The desert grows: woe to him who harbors deserts!
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

'Devastation' means for us, after all, that everything –
the world, the human, and the earth – will be transformed into a desert. . . .
The being of an age of devastation would then consist precisely in the
abandonment of being. Such a matter is, however, difficult to think.
Martin Heidegger, 'Evening Conversation'

For here is the desert propagated by our world,
and also the new earth.
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*

Stay in the desert long enough, and you could apprehend the absolute.
The number zero was holy.
Margaret Atwood, 'Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet'

It is entirely fitting that there is no simple or self-evident approach, no clear path, to the topic of the desert. We can grasp it as a natural wilderness or as a barren wasteland, as an ecology sometimes unusually rich in life and surprisingly fragile, as an idea of geographical extremity or alterity, as a sacred or accursed site, as a metaphor for nullity, as a subjective or existential terrain, or as an object of sheer aesthetic exultation. This book moves freely between these and other conceptions of the desert. I remain guided throughout, however, by a set of philosophical texts, beginning with the work of Nietzsche, in which the desert is figured principally as a speculative topology, a *place of thought* where an exhausted metaphysical tradition can imagine its self-overcoming. An immediate objection may be that this philosophical topology is not a real desert but a mere metaphor or rhetorical strategy, one concocted, furthermore, by a Western subjectivity ill equipped for life in desert

places. The objection is legitimate, but my response – on which this entire project rests – is twofold.

First, it is not at all obvious where the distinction between the real and rhetorically constructed desert lies. Even scientists have noted the problem of comprehensively determining what a 'real' desert is – as one scientific text puts it, 'no single, conclusive ecological definition of the term "desert" has been accepted'.[1] In any case, all places are, to one extent or another, rhetorical or semiotic constructions. Deserts seem especially so precisely because they challenge life's ability to *make* a place for itself. They thus tend to put our conceptions of place and belonging into question. This is borne out by the analyses of literary deserts from Romanticism to the contemporary period that occupy much of this book. Second, that the Western philosophical tradition has been preoccupied with deserts itself demands investigation given the ecological crises we now find ourselves facing. Since Nietzsche, the problem of nihilism – the loss of confidence in 'higher values', in the transcendent authority of God and state – has been repeatedly explored through the figure of the desert as an ambiguous terrain of both loss and salvation, that is to say, as a risky *soteriological* terrain. That the Earth today is recognised as bearing the indelible marks of industrialised humanity is not unrelated to the fact that philosophers for the past century or more have used the desert to think through a crisis of modern subjectivity in the aftermath of the death of God.

What we find when we look at deserts and wastelands in literary texts from Percy Bysshe Shelley's sonnet 'Ozymandias' (1818) to Don DeLillo's novel *Point Omega* (2010) is that they feature as symbols and motifs for this crisis. The approach I pursue owes much to ecocriticism, inescapably, but I reject the privileging of place found in the vast majority of ecocritical work. Rather than presume the grounding role of the home or habitat (the *oikos*), I enquire into what happens when such a presumption becomes untenable, when earthly life of all kinds must come to terms – as today it must – with an attenuation of the grounding role of its territories. Simply put, ecocriticism must move beyond the ecocentricity on which it is founded in order to grasp the crises of ecology now underway. To the extent that the desert often features as a site of what Deleuze and Guattari call 'deterritorialisation' – meaning a loss or at least a loosening of the links that bind life to its territories – then an exploration of the desert in modern literature and philosophy is able to speak in important ways to our contemporary environmental condition. Rather than place and environment, then, I focus on ideas of Earth, world, territory, and space or spatiality in a manner that

is best described, following Deleuze and Guattari's terminology, as geophilosophical.

Our ideas about the natural environment are connected in deep and complex ways to aesthetic pleasure and unpleasure, that is, to *desire*. Deserts have provoked a range of affective and libidinal responses occupying a wide spectrum: disgust, boredom, terror, apathy, curiosity, joy, contentment and love. By focusing on what I call 'wasteland aesthetics', I might risk overstating the negative end of that spectrum, but this is not at all my intention. Deserts can be and have often been regarded as the geographical correlate of death, places in which life's organic limits are tested. But just as death is for us such a contradictory thing, connoting both mortality and immortality, temporality and eternity, body and spirit, the desert in the literary and philosophical imagination becomes a stage on which a new awareness – a new semiosis – of life becomes possible. The desert is where the very codes by which we understand life, death and the never-living are scrambled. Western subjectivity, to be sure, often sees in the desert an image of its own exhaustion or ruin, and this is why literature from the Romantics on has often sought out such landscapes as places where death and finitude are confronted. At the same time, this literature bears witness to an urge to think beyond the impasses of an exhausted Western metaphysics of self. This distinctly modern effort at self-overcoming goes some way to explaining why the desert barely features in Western art and culture until the nineteenth century.

In his classic book *Scenes in America Deserta* (1982), the British architectural writer Peter Reyner Banham notes a link between the desert and modern aesthetics:

> the desert measurably offers immeasurable space. It is therefore an environment in which 'Modern Man' ought to feel at home – his modern painting, as in the works of Mondrian, implies a space that extends beyond the confines of the canvas; his modern architecture, as in the works of Mies van der Rohe, is a rectangular partition of a regular but infinite space; its ideal inhabitants, the sculptures of Giacometti stalking metaphysically through that space as far as it infinitely extends.[2]

While the emergence of the desert as an aesthetic category was bound to Romantic notions of sublime nature, there is little of the sublime in Banham's account here, despite the encounter with the immeasurable and the infinite that he underscores. Immeasurability amounts to a monochrome regularity, the traversal of the infinite to an interminable wandering in a disenchanted spaciousness. On the one hand, wasteland aesthetics point beyond the buoyancy of the experience of nature that animated Romantic sublimity towards the sheer inescapability of space as a brute and abstract reality. On the other hand, the desert retains the

trace of everything that might populate it and thus manifests infinite possibility.

There is a duality of loss and recovery here that characterises the deployment of the desert in some of the greatest works of literary modernism. In W. B. Yeats's 'The Second Coming' (1920) and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), we can detect aesthetic experiences of a world that is both falling apart and waiting to be born (to paraphrase famous lines from the former poem). While the devastations of war play a crucial role in this, other more ontological issues are at work. Within the phenomenological tradition in philosophy, concepts of world and being-in-the-world emerged around the same time as Yeats's and Eliot's poems in reaction to scientific materialism. For these philosophers, the world is not reducible to the empirical reality of the sciences but can be grasped in our relationships and attitudes to that reality. There is an uneasy sense within this tradition that to be able to philosophise about the world in this way presupposes that we are somehow at odds with it or that we don't entirely feel at home in it, that it inspires us with feelings of anxiety or dread, that it is somehow precarious, insufficient, or on the verge of disintegrating entirely. This is often how we feel about the environment today, while the desert has become central to how we imagine the world as lost and the Earth as dead. When – to give a famous example – the main characters of Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road* (2006) carry their meagre belongings in a shopping trolley through the wasteland of a post-apocalyptic America, what comes through to the reader is not only a vision of a possible dystopian future but a certain sense of what shopping in our contemporary consumerist society really *is*. What I argue in this book is that a critique of modernity involves confronting such an uncanny feeling of being in a world that is no longer really a world. The figuration of deserts and wastelands has provided literature and philosophy with spaces in which this confrontation can take place.

The first chapter outlines the scope of the book and functions as an extended introduction in which I begin to show how the desert has featured in modern philosophy since Nietzsche and in modern literature since Romanticism. I explain how wasteland aesthetics can be used as a category by which to think certain key formulations of modern spatiality. The book's environmental and ecological framework is introduced in this chapter through a discussion of the Anthropocene, which I argue – taking my cue from Donna Haraway and Timothy Morton – forces us to confront the notion of worldlessness as a planetary condition affecting human and non-human life. In Chapter 2, I develop the central geophilosophical impetus behind many of the book's arguments and

outline a post-psychoanalytic understanding of the desert as a libidinal space as well as a space of energetic crisis. While I focus on Deleuze and Guattari and what I call their 'theoretical geocentrism', I show how their work can and should be understood in relation to Nietzsche, Freud, Husserl, Heidegger and others. The problem of what Nietzsche enigmatically identified as modernity's growing desert is conceptualised here as an ambiguously soteriological space. Chapter 3 pursues a genealogy of the desert as a key topos of modern literature from Romantics such as Percy Shelley to the modernism of T. S. Eliot and D. H. Lawrence to the postmodernism of Thomas Pynchon and Paul Auster. I approach the desert in these works in terms of how modern experience tends to provoke an anxiety regarding the semiotic consistency of space. I use Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the refrain to suggest how the desert should be seen as a deterritorialising dislocation by which Western subjectivity seeks out transformative symbols of its own exhaustion. In Chapter 4, I turn to a key feature of capitalist self-mythologisation, the desert island, and suggest how the Anthropocene can be viewed as an age of shipwrecks in which the island of the Robinson Crusoe myth becomes a confrontation with worldless space. I discuss how Derrida and Deleuze understand the Robinson narrative in their different ways, before going on to analyse modern-day retellings of Defoe's story in works by Michel Tournier, J. G. Ballard, Ursula Le Guin and Kim Stanley Robinson. In the fifth and final chapter of the book, I turn to the question of violence and ask what kinds of violence are at stake in the ideas of desertification and devastation outlined in the previous chapters. I argue that in order to understand the violence of environmental damage, we need to understand how what Deleuze and Guattari call the state-form normalises its regime of violence. I explore these ideas through texts by T. E. Lawrence, Cormac McCarthy, William S. Burroughs, Angela Carter, Don DeLillo and Reza Negarestani, all of which concern themselves with the link between the desert and war. Through these desert polemologies, we find ways to combat, at the speculative and affective level, the structural violence by which environmental damage becomes difficult or impossible to signify. The desert in modern literature and philosophy can thus be understood, I conclude, as an eschatological space by which capitalism speculates on its own collapse.

NOTES

1. Olafur Arnalds, 'Desertification: An Appeal for a Broader Perspective', p. 10.
2. Banham, *Scenes in America Deserta*, pp. 61–2.

1. *Desert Desire*

POINT ZERO: THE DESERT AND MODERNITY

Scholarship across a range of disciplines has shown just how indebted our notions of the natural environment are to art and aesthetics. Work in ecocriticism over the past three decades has shown how Romanticism in particular contributed to an aestheticisation of nature that has influenced modern environmentalism in a number of decisive ways.[1] The Romantic period's conceptions of the 'picturesque' were crucial to the emergence of modern environmental consciousness.[2] Thinking critically about the environment would be an empty notion without the kinds of affective power manifest in the poems of Wordsworth.[3] Timothy Morton, in a more polemical mode, has gone as far as to claim that many environmentalist notions of nature at work today remain, often unwittingly and sometimes perniciously, entangled in their Romantic origins:

> the 'thing' we call nature becomes, in the Romantic period and afterward, a way of healing what modern society has damaged. Nature is like that other Romantic-period invention, the aesthetic. The damage done, goes the argument, has sundered subjects from objects, so that human beings are forlornly alienated from their world. Contact with nature, and with the aesthetic, will mend the bridge between subject and object.[4]

But if the environmental consciousness of the modern West has been shaped, even to a harmful extent, by an aestheticisation of nature as a unifying ideal in opposition to industrial modernity then it is also true that this same consciousness has envisioned a world bereft of life, or one in which life is reduced to bare survival, as a *correlate of this same ideal*. 'Green' or hospitable nature has been, in part at least, an ideologico-aesthetic construct of modernity, but this has frequently depended on other kinds of constructions in which nature

appears inhospitable to life. This is particularly the case if we shift our perspective from the local to the global. A text such as Byron's poem 'Darkness', for example, provides us with a total view of earthly life as devastated and the world as void. In a similar way, as Kelly Oliver suggests, anxieties about nuclear war and environmental destruction in the twentieth century produced both pop cultural fantasies of global annihilation and philosophical investigations of notions of Earth and world from the likes of Heidegger and Arendt. It was 'as if we could think the whole earth only by imaging its destruction, [and] all attempts to "save" the planet require first imagining destroying it'.[5]

If nature figured as harmonious or palliative ideal plays an ideologico-aesthetic role from the Romantic period onwards, as Morton insists, then a different though similar role has been played by evocations of inhospitable environments where life and nature seem to diverge. I argue that deserts and wastelands in their various forms, evoking affects of wonder and joy or disgust and terror as the case may be, constitute a crucial but largely ignored component of our global environmental imaginary. From imperial travel writing to postmodernism, from the Old Testament to salvagepunk, the desert has been a *terrain of desire* over which the Western imagination of space and place has ranged. As our environmental and ecological crisis heads in increasingly catastrophic directions, a critique of the figure of the desert in literature, philosophy and wider culture can help us map an environmental affect that finds itself both attracted to and repelled by arid, depopulated, derelict or barren spaces of various kinds.

My approach in this book involves putting two distinct bodies of work into dialogue. On the one hand, the European philosophical tradition from Nietzsche and Heidegger to Levinas, Blanchot, Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, Virilio, Baudrillard and others has repeatedly deployed the image of the desert in its critique of modernity. As I show in this and subsequent chapters, the desert often functions in this tradition to suggest how modern society devastates life and meaning through a homogenising disenchantment of space, but also how these devastated spaces, in their very strangeness and solitude, may offer a potential re-enchantment and revivification. The desert has come to constitute modernity's eschatological horizon for thinkers working in the aftermath of what Nietzsche described as the death of God. In this sense, the desert has been a crucial philosophical figure for thinking difference and indifference, meaning and meaninglessness, metaphysics and the death of metaphysics. On the other hand, I look at how the desert becomes a crucial topos in a range of key literary texts. T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), D. H. Lawrence's

The Plumed Serpent (1926) and T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926), for example, deploy very different kinds of desert environments in the pursuit of new aesthetic and spiritual realities in the aftermath of the devastations of the First World War. The deserts of 1920s modernism give way later in the century to the shocking libidinal wastelands of William S. Burroughs, which serve as the settings for bodies subjected to new technologies of control and manipulation as well as being sites of resistance. Canonical postmodernist authors such as Thomas Pynchon, J. G. Ballard, Angela Carter, Paul Auster and Don DeLillo all deploy the desert extensively in a way that suggests a concern with the spatiality of power, war and American imperialism in late capitalism.

What this book offers, then, is very much *not* a view of the desert as a natural wilderness, nor does it pursue an ecocritical reading of the desert in any kind of traditional sense. My central premise, rather, is that the desert in literature and philosophy can tell us some important things about the experience of being modern. There is a curious link between modernity and the desert that ideas of nature and *oikos* fail to grasp, since modernity itself involves a profound transformation of what we mean by place and dwelling. As the social geographer and historian Kevin Hetherington has suggested, the project of modernity may be said to consist in a certain form of spatial ordering that gives rise to marginal or in-between places, neither utopian nor dystopian, whose precise value is hard to pin down. Hetherington has called these the 'badlands of modernity'. Places such as the Palais Royal of late eighteenth-century Paris allowed for a carnivalesque contestation of norms and intermingling of social classes, much as the famous boulevards and arcades of Baudelaire and Benjamin subsequently would. Since Foucault, social and cultural theory has shown a concern not only with the spatiality of modern capitalist society but also with the possibilities for resistance that marginal 'other' spaces, or 'heterotopia', to use Foucault's famous term, may provide.[6] Theoretically informed work on deserts in modern literature has sometimes insisted on their heterotopic quality.[7] My analysis diverges from this trend. Deserts may function as sites of resistance and alterity. But it is also true that modernity finds, and indeed must find, ways to aestheticise and thus *absorb* its limits, its uncertain borders and cutting edges. This, I claim, is what gives rise to an aesthetic fascination with the desert as a site from which modern experience comprehends the spatial alterity through which it must inevitably pass. Even if the desert can be granted a heterotopic status as a site of resistance, then, it remains central to the ideology of capitalist modernity and its environmental imaginary.

In a classic book on the concept of modernity, Marshall Berman uses Goethe's *Faust* to insist upon the importance of the wasteland to industrial society's conceptions of itself as perpetual self-overcoming and renewal. For Berman, Faust is the quintessential modern hero. He observes that in acts 4 and 5 of Part II of Goethe's text,

> [Faust] and Mephistopheles find themselves alone on a jagged mountain peak staring blankly into cloudy space, going nowhere. They have taken exhausting trips through all history and mythology, explored endless experiential possibilities, and now find themselves at point zero, or even behind that point, for they feel less energetic than they were at the story's start. . . . Suddenly the landscape around him metamorphoses into a site. [Faust] outlines great reclamation projects to harness the sea for human purposes: man-made harbors and canals that can move ships full of goods and men; dams for large-scale irrigation; green fields and forests, pastures and gardens, a vast and intensive agriculture; waterpower to attract and support emerging industries; thriving settlements, new towns and cities to come – and all this to be created out of a barren wasteland where human beings have never dared to live.[8]

The aesthetics of desert spaces, in which we can include not only the desolate sublimity of natural deserts but also the anti-picturesque of urban wastelands and edgelands, relate to the ideological forms by which capitalist culture understands its internal and external limits. Capitalism is unique amongst social formations in that it must render itself obsolete, must *lay waste to itself*, in order to renew and thus sustain its habits of production and consumption. If we take seriously Deleuze and Guattari's post-psychoanalytic libidinal economics (explored in depth in the next chapter) and understand capitalism as a production of collective *desire*, then what desire wants most of all is the desert, the zero point from which it renews itself in the Faustian manner analysed by Berman. The various deserts, wastelands, junkscapes and depopulated zones that our culture so often fascinates itself with constitute the environmental aesthetics of an uneven planetary expansion that devastates the Earth in order to fashion it anew.

This is perhaps as old as capitalism itself. Shakespeare's Lear, as William Viney argues, is an obsolete king 'cast onto the moor or "common" wasteland, . . . a space as inactive as his sovereignty'.[9] An obsession with images of ruin begins in the landscape painting of the seventeenth century and carries through to Robert Smithson's photographs of the waste spaces of New Jersey in the 1960s.[10] Robinson Crusoe's island was a way of imagining the spatiality of the colonial periphery as a site for the reproduction of the centre, and in this way constitutes a privileged figure of the zero point. Even though Robinson is never really alone – his 'Island of Desolation' contains inhabitants of

various kinds – it must be apprehended by him as absolutely unpopulated in order for him to constitute it as ground of the reproduction of the world. In *Concrete Island* (1974), Ballard rewrote Defoe's narrative as a struggle for survival in the wasteland created by the intersection of three London motorways, but in Ballard's text the castaway is ultimately seduced by the island and refuses the opportunity of rescue. What is unique for us today, however, is that this aesthetic obsession with the devastated underside of modernity's cutting edges has taken on an urgently epochal dimension that is reconfiguring our very notions of life.

The anthropologist Elizabeth A. Povinelli argues that the desert is crucial for understanding contemporary formations of power. She describes our current period as one in which biopower – the political management and governance of biological life – is slowly being replaced by what she calls 'geontopower', 'a set of discourses, affects, and tactics used in late liberalism to maintain or shape the coming relationship of the distinction between Life and Nonlife'.[11] She argues that the 'figure of the Desert' is key to understanding these transformations because in it and through it we see dramatised 'the gap between Life and that which is conceived as before or without Life'. This gap is a 'scarred region' of the contemporary global imaginary that informs how we think and feel about fossil fuels, extraterrestrial exploration and apocalyptic futures:

> The Desert is the affect that motivates the search for other instances of life in the universe and technologies for seeding planets with life; it colors the contemporary imaginary of North African oil fields; and it drives the fear that all places will soon be nothing more than the setting within a *Mad Max* movie. The Desert is also glimpsed in both the geological category of the fossil insofar as we consider fossils to have once been charged with life, to have lost that life, but as a form of fuel can provide the conditions for a specific form of life – contemporary, hypermodern, informationalized capital – and a new form of mass death and utter extinction; and in the calls for a capital or technological fix to anthropogenic climate change. Not surprisingly then the Desert is fodder for new theoretical, scientific, literary, artistic, and media work.[12]

The Eurocentric account of life that led to the biopolitical framework by which all systems could be thought of in terms of their organic functioning was only possible on the basis of some conception of the nonliving against which life could be perceived *as* living. Biopower thus, of necessity, gives way to a confrontation with Nonlife, which may possess its own dynamisms and energies, but which a consciousness forged under the biopolitical regime – in other words, the consciousness of the capitalist West – can only recognise as an omega, a zero point or abso-

lute stasis. The figure of the desert thus appears on the horizon of what Povinelli calls our 'Carbon Imaginary', our habit of viewing everything in terms of birth, life, death and finitude. The Carbon Imaginary must contend with 'the problem of how something emerges from nothing and returns to nothingness; how the one (1) emerges from the zero (0) and descends back into it'.[13] What Freud described in terms of the death instinct must be located on a geological and geopolitical and not just a psychosexual level. The zero retains a transformative potential, however, as we will see.

THE ANTHROPOCENE: BEING WITHOUT A WORLD

Deserts are real places, but when we look to the imaginative and speculative figuration of the desert in modern culture it is striking how frequently it is used to evoke experiences of placelessness or dislocation, or of what Deleuze and Guattari call, in their unique theoretical vocabulary, *deterritorialisation*. The desert can be said to be a place that forces us to rethink the very concept of place, to the extent that the latter has arisen as a form of sedentary or rooted being. For Derrida, for example, 'the desert [is] a paradoxical figure of the *aporia*', an impasse suggesting both the loss of a defined sense of place *and* the possibility of signifying place as such. In the desert there is

> no marked out or assured passage, no route in any case, at the very most trails that are not reliable ways, the paths are not yet cleared, unless the sand has already re-covered them. But isn't the uncleared way also the condition of *decision or event*, which consists in opening the way, in *(sur)passing*, thus in going *beyond*?[14]

The place of the impasse is where the 'event' of founding a place or a territory takes place. Since the nineteenth century, the experience of such a paradoxical relation to place has come to feature across a wide variety of work in art, literature and philosophy. Lukács, following Novalis, famously defined Romanticism as a kind of 'transcendental homelessness'.[15] Levinas, in a text written while he was a prisoner during the Second World War, argued that modern art in general aims 'to present reality as it is in itself, after the world has come to an end'.[16] Space in this worldless reality is not fixed but 'a swarming of points'.[17] Deleuze and Guattari's affirmation of nomadism emerges from this break with fixed space and the ontological certainty of being-in-the-world. Where Heidegger stressed dwelling, Levinas stresses nomadism: 'as in a desert, one can find no place to reside. From the depths of sedentary existence a nomadic memory arises. Nomadism is

not an approach to the sedentary state. It is an irreducible relation to the earth: a sojourn devoid of *place*'.[18] The desert becomes important in this discourse on the precariousness of place because it provides an aesthetic resource – an affective environment, a *sensorium* – for forms of thinking and feeling that are no longer certain whether they have an environment. While for Levinas this is a matter of ethical urgency, for us today it is also a matter of ecological urgency.

The ecological relates, of course, to the idea of the *oikos*, the Greek term denoting the home, household, habitat or place of dwelling by which life is embedded in a network of interconnected relations. In this sense, ecological crisis can be understood as a *crisis of dwelling*. This is far from being simply a human issue, as it is for philosophers such as Heidegger and Levinas. Consider, to give just one of many possible examples, how the current mass extinction of parasites is causing the surviving species to migrate to new hosts, leading to all sorts of unpredictable invasions and processes of co-extinction.[19] The plight of dwelling today is coextensive with such vectors of devastation. Elizabeth Kolbert describes our present age of ecological crisis in terms of a 'remixing [of] the world's flora and fauna' produced by the kinds of mobility industrialised humanity has acquired over the past two centuries.[20] Mass extinction is one of the results of this remixing. Transcendental homelessness can be extended to include these non-human forms of homelessness, all of which can be traced to humans as the ultimate invader species. The transcendental, here, no longer relates to subject and object but to Earth and territory. This shifting of the ground of the transcendental is the central idea of what Deleuze and Guattari call geophilosophy.[21] This is why we cannot simply presume the *oikos* as a grounding principle of thought and criticism. Ecocriticism must embrace a geophilosophical concern with Earth, world, territory, ground and spatiality.[22]

In a striking irony, it is precisely the *humanisation* of the Earth that has led us and other species to feel and be not-at-home on it. Much recent work in philosophy, literary studies and critical theory has deployed the concept of the Anthropocene, a term which first emerged around 2000 by way of the atmospheric scientist Paul Crutzen but which has spread since then into non-scientific disciplines and popular discourse. In a 2002 article in *Nature* titled 'Geology of Mankind', Crutzen describes the Anthropocene as the present

> human-dominated, geological epoch, supplementing the Holocene – the warm period of the past 10–12 millennia. The Anthropocene could be said to have started in the latter part of the eighteenth century, when analyses of air trapped in polar ice showed the beginning of growing global concentra-

tions of carbon dioxide and methane. This date also happens to coincide with James Watt's design of the steam engine in 1784.[23]

More recently, scientists have suggested that the Anthropocene may be said to have begun in 1945, when the first atomic bomb tests deposited radioactive material on the Earth's surface.[24] Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin, on the other hand, suggest the year 1610 as a more accurate starting point from a stratigraphic perspective, as this is when carbon dioxide levels trapped in Arctic ice can be seen to dip briefly as a result of the deaths caused when smallpox and other European diseases wiped out more than 50 million people in the Americas. The devastation of indigenous societies in the New World meant farmland reverted to forests which absorbed enough carbon dioxide to temporarily cool the planet. This was 'the last globally cool moment before the onset of the longterm warmth of the Anthropocene'.[25] Such a view aligns with Jason Moore's contention that what he prefers to call the Capitalocene begins 'in the Atlantic world during the long sixteenth century'.[26] However we date it, the idea of the Anthropocene maintains that we are living in a new geological epoch characterised by the indelible impact of industrial, global humanity on the planet. The last time the Earth experienced a comparable epochal shift was about 12,000 years ago with the end of the last ice age and the onset of an interglacial period of global warming called the Holocene. But the environmental conditions under which human civilisation as we know it developed have changed. The biophysical changes being detected by climate scientists are leading us out of the Holocene and into a new chapter of geological history, only this time the reasons for the change have to do with the activities of humans themselves. The key point is that what we have come to regard as 'nature' is no longer to be taken for granted as a grounding principle of earthly life.

There is thus an irony in Crutzen's choice of name for this new epoch. The industrial age is the age of 'man', the Anthropos, who no longer signifies a distinct niche of planetary ecology defined by quintessentially human attributes (culture, language and technology) but a much vaster planetary condition in which man's uniqueness is both dissolved and intensified via perilous entanglements with the non-human. In one sense, the Anthropocene can be viewed, despite the ecological crises it entails, as a triumph of the project of Enlightenment reason, a Promethean liberation of man from the tyranny of nature. A 2007 article written by Crutzen, Will Steffen and John R. McNeill describes the Anthropocene in somewhat optimistic terms as 'the evolution of humans and our societies from hunter-gatherers to a global

geophysical force'.[27] According to another reading, however, the man/nature metaphysical binary breaks down in this new epoch such that the older anthropocentric narrative of human progress is fatally undermined. We should, I insist, fully embrace the irony of the Anthropocene against the temptation of any triumphal humanism *or* celebration of the dissolution of 'man' into an interconnected whole. Neither position fully captures what we are living through. The geological inscription of humanity marks the exhaustion of man as an ideological or metaphysical entity. The transcendental homelessness once thought to be man's unique condition *passes into the biosphere* as a result of the activities of humanity as a geophysical agent. Life in the Anthropocene will increasingly be characterised not only by extinctions and biodiversity loss but by increased adaptability and hybridisation, the ability to invade and exploit new habitats and thrive as an invader species. The popular environmentalist notion of 'rewilding' (returning species to their original habitats) runs counter to the directions in which life is now evolving. In many cases, it is not even clear what an 'original' habitat would be, so any attempts to 'rewild' life takes place in the context of a collapse of distinctions between wild and domesticated.[28]

How, then, are we to continue to imagine the Earth as the *oikos* of life (human and otherwise)? The discipline of ecology first emerged with Ernst Haeckel and Jacob von Uexküll in the late nineteenth century via concepts of home and world. As Peter van Wyck notes, such ways of thinking about the environment in the subsequent development of ecology have tended to figure the Earth as a *container* of life, that in which life is fixed or embedded.[29] One unexpected effect of the Anthropocene, then, is that it calls into question the quasi-phenomenological conceptions of being-in-the-world that have inflected the development of ecology. Indeed, the Anthropocene may be defined, from a geophilosophical point of view, as *the point at which Earth and world diverge*. Donna Haraway argues, following anthropologist Anna Tsing, that the point marking the Anthropocene's onset is the loss of natural refuge areas such as forests and coral reefs: 'the Holocene was the long period when refugia, places of refuge, still existed, even abounded, to sustain reworlding in rich cultural and biological diversity'.[30] The post-Holocene Earth no longer guarantees life the security of a refuge, a world, a territory, an *oikos*. The insecurity at issue here, however, is not merely physical but more deeply ontological. Morton, going further than Haraway and Tsing, argues that there are 'serious questions about whether there is such a thing as "world," and whether world-making ("worlding") provides a sufficient reason for protecting life forms'.[31] World may itself be an aesthetic more than a simply physical reality,

one that is now dissolving as the true interconnectedness of human and non-human life becomes apparent. Instead of world, we should be thinking this interconnectedness, Morton argues.

Some prefer to call the Anthropocene the 'Capitalocene' because the effect of capitalism has been to knit the fate of industrial humanity to that of planetary life itself. Moore, writing from an eco-Marxist position and drawing on the notion of *oikeios*, understood as dialectically combined human and non-human environment-making, argues that global capitalism should be regarded not as a social formation distinct from nature but 'a co-produced world-ecology of capital, power, and nature'.[32] Peter Sloterdijk, from a decidedly non-Marxist position, defines capitalism in similar ways to Moore as a 'world interior', 'a hothouse that has drawn inwards everything that was once on the outside'.[33] This world remains haunted by the extra-worldly, the outside it has tried to banish. What I argue, breaking with the ontological centrality given to the *oikos* or *oikeios* and related terms, is that dissolving the nature/society or nature/culture binary requires that we first think through the disjunction of Earth and world.[34] One way of doing this is to see life as increasingly threatened by worldlessness, in flight from a world that is failing to sustain or environ it. But what does it mean to say that life can be separated from an environing world in this way? How do we envision an Earth that can no longer guarantee its lifeforms the ontological security of a world? The Anthropocene has undeniable eschatological and apocalyptic dimensions. We are, however, living through the 'end of the world' not, or not only, as a physical cataclysm but also as a devastation of certain environmental aesthetic frameworks that have allowed us to picture a self-sufficient natural domain. These frameworks have often involved picturing nature as a discrete 'thing over there', separate from us but also environing and sustaining. World suggests a world *view*, a world *picture*.[35] World and nature are entirely bound up with aesthetic experience, and these are in turn bound up with our sense of place and dwelling. But the Anthropocene tells us that nature, conceived as an indifferent background of human activity, is increasingly obsolete. Bruno Latour, following Isabelle Stengers, calls this 'the intrusion of Gaia', which collapses any contemplative distance between us and the Earth.[36] All distances have become forms of nearness, Heidegger maintained, but because of this, everything seems both far and near at the same time.[37] Desert travellers have noted the same phenomenon.[38] Space itself becomes uncanny under such conditions. Following this Heideggerian inspiration, Morton writes: 'in an age of global warming, there is no background, and thus there is no foreground. It is the end of the world, since worlds depend on backgrounds

and foregrounds. *World* is a fragile aesthetic effect around whose corners we are beginning to see'.[39]

Yet if there is an aesthetics of world there is also an aesthetics of 'unworlding'. The two are necessarily very closely related, since to imagine a world involves imagining what it might be like not to have one. World and what lies beyond it (i.e., interconnectedness) cannot be opposed in any simple or decisive way, which is why Morton ultimately suggests maintaining a version of Heidegger's concept of world.[40] The very aesthetics of world contain conceptions of unworldling and end-of-the-world visions which in themselves point beyond the world. Heidegger, the pre-eminent thinker of world, argued in *Being and Time* (1927) that the world as such becomes a problem for philosophy precisely because it strikes us in certain affective moments – when we feel anxious or bored, for example – as strangely oppressive, insignificant or obtrusive.[41] We are most tuned in to the world when it appears flat and lifeless. For Heidegger, the worldliness of the world can feel strange or uncanny, sensations we would be more likely to associate with the loss or impoverishment of the world than its simple presence. This coexistence of the world with its uncanny disappearance is suited to considerations of the desert, and Heidegger used the desert as a motif to describe this uncanniness, as I show below.

My theoretical approach throughout this book, then, derives from an unlikely mixture of Heidegger, who defined philosophy as homesickness, and Deleuze and Guattari, who are famous for their conceptions of nomadic thought and politics. Despite the differences between Heidegger and Deleuze and Guattari, they are alike in that they define the most fundamental activities of life in terms of dwelling and territoriality. For Deleuze and Guattari, a bird's song or spider's web are territorial markers, what they call 'refrains' or 'ritornellos', signalling the pre-human beginnings of art.[42] For Heidegger, art emerges from a deeply and uniquely human need to build and from what he calls the 'plight of dwelling'.[43] Dwelling is a plight precisely because there is no 'nature' to ground our relationship to space, but it is part of the human 'essence' to forget that fact and to naturalise our being-in-the-world. The intrusion of Gaia is beginning to make this forgetting impossible and thus challenges the human essence, behind which lies a deterritorialised Earth pulsing with refrains.

WASTELAND AESTHETICS

The Western literary tradition does not display much of an interest in the desert prior to the nineteenth century. Michael Ondaatje is only

slightly exaggerating when he writes in *The English Patient* that 'there is, after Herodotus, little interest by the Western world towards the desert for hundreds of years. From 425 BCE to the beginning of the twentieth century there is an averting of eyes. Silence'.[44] It is true, as Richard Bevis has quite definitively shown in a near-encyclopaedic work, that European travellers to desert regions prior to the nineteenth century paid scant regard to the desert as an object of aesthetic value, often passing over it without comment.[45] The main aesthetic sentiment associated with deserts and wastelands in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was *disgust*. Deserts were understood as a form of environmental abjection.[46]

The Romantic aesthetics of nature changed all this and from the late eighteenth century onwards writers came to be inspired by the new possibilities offered by waste spaces of various kinds. This new interest in the aesthetics of deserts was made possible by a new imaginary of landscape in which affect and environment came to reflect one another. The predominance of the desert in this shift is apparent in works such as Charles Doughty's monumental *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (1888) and John C. Van Dyke's seminal work of environmental aesthetics, *The Desert: Further Studies in Natural Appearances* (1901), but we can also look to less obvious sources for the rise of a new awareness of inhospitable landscapes. Thomas Hardy's description of Egdon Heath, the fictitious setting of his novel *The Return of the Native* (1878), can be considered emblematic in this respect, as Bevis points out. Hardy describes his landscape as a 'Thule' – a polar wasteland – that may nevertheless come to be regarded as possessing the Edenic charms of a 'vale of Tempe'. The 'chastened sublimity' of a 'gaunt waste', Hardy suggests, is more in keeping with the modern mood than orthodox forms of natural beauty:

> Fair prospects wed happily with fair times; but alas, if times be not fair! Men have oftener suffered from the mockery of a place too smiling for their reason than from the oppression of surroundings oversadly tinged. Haggard Egdon appealed to a subtler and scarcer instinct, to a more recently learnt emotion, than that which responds to the sort of beauty called charming and fair.[47]

Egdon is not the sublime counterpoint to pastoral beauty but the subdued or chastened *inverse side* of sublime nature by which a prior sense of disgust is transformed into new affects.

That a devastated or barren landscape can convey a sense of what it means to be modern is not, perhaps, such a new idea any longer, and we may even claim that the mood Hardy here begins to detect is now culturally dominant. The brilliant opening scenes of Pixar's animated

film *WALL-E* (2009), for example, show us an empty city reduced to a dusty, windblown wasteland. Billions of tons of rubbish are stacked high in the streets to be endlessly sorted through by the titular robot-scavenger left behind by his human makers, who have long since fled the dying Earth. These opening scenes tell us much about our contemporary condition through the affective force of their images alone, which seem to capture a sense of the epochal not through any distinctiveness in terms of their content but precisely through an erosion and obsolescence of all particularity. This could be any city and this rubbish could have been anyone's. But this generic trash, precisely because it has lost what once made it distinctive and thus desirable, tells us all the more powerfully about who and what we are, as if waste could be the expression of our species being. Our collective desires form a history that can be read in the temporality of the abandoned and the salvaged. Modernist texts from the 1920s – most famously, of course, *The Waste Land* – demonstrate the very same thing. For postmodernism and after, the desert becomes significant because it suggests, in its very timelessness, a loss of the historical sense.

W. H. Auden, in his lectures on the symbolism of the sea in Romantic poetry, observes that 'the desert is the dried-up place, i.e., the place where life has ended, the Omega of temporal existence. Its first most obvious characteristic is that nothing moves; the second is that everything is surface and exposed. No soil, no hidden spring'.[48] And yet, it is precisely the fact that the superficiality of the surface may acquire a profundity usually attributed to temporal depth that explains a large amount of the power of the desert as an aesthetic figure. The surface may be a temporal zero point, but it still has an *epochality* in which we recognise something of ourselves and our own omega. In both Hardy's heath and *WALL-E*'s junkscape, we find an epochal feeling inscribed at a surface level, at the level of erosion and exposure, rather than at the level of a depth in which something might take root, conceal itself or be buried. Edward Abbey opens *Desert Solitaire* (1968), his famous account of his sojourn in the deserts of Utah and Colorado, by admitting that 'I know nothing whatever about true underlying reality . . . I am pleased enough with surfaces – in fact they alone seem to me to be of much importance.'[49] In his remarkable literary history of the Sahara, Sven Lindqvist observes, in similar fashion, that the relationship between surface and depth is, in fact, 'the fundamental experience of the desert'.[50]

Given the significance of the literary texts that feature desert environments, and given the importance of the kinds of issues they raise, it is strange that ecocriticism has largely neglected this crucial topic. Or,

perhaps, it is not strange at all. When we think of literary representations of nature, we tend to think of environments of flourishing, plenitude and diversity. As Rune Graulund, one of the few critics to address the topic of the desert in any extended way, observes:

> We do not find prose praising the desert as Thoreau praised the woods or Hemingway the sea, nor do we find an Ode to Sand by Wordsworth, Keats or Shelley. Yet in a way we do. The texts are out there, floundering on the desert dunes for lack of attention. Critical opinion just never bothered to spend a lot of energy on the subject.[51]

This is not to say that critical work on the literature of the desert does not exist. Bevis details, with remarkably wide reading, an aesthetics of great and vast nature in European and American literature. Arnold's darkling plain, Eliot's wasteland and Frost's desert places, he writes, all use 'vistas of natural voids to make their point'.[52] Bevis's argument, however, proceeds largely through a painstaking enumeration of examples, with extensive quotation, and does not provide an adequate theorisation of the issues that the textual examples raise. But even the texts that he picks out have a bias towards the genres of travel writing, nature writing and memoir. This is a bias that affects most of the critical work on literary deserts. This fact is perhaps best exemplified by Gregory McNamee's *The Desert Reader: A Literary Companion* (1995), which presents a selection of desert writings ordered by continent. This expedient excludes a whole range of key speculative and other-worldly deserts as found in Frank Herbert's science fiction classic *Dune* (1965) and Kim Stanley Robinson's terraforming epic *Red Mars* (1992), to give just two examples. The literary deserts that generally gain the attention of critics are those found in the personal accounts of travellers and naturalists rather than in works of modernism, postmodernism and speculative fiction. The literary desert tends to be sought out in works such as Doughty's *Arabia Deserta*, Saint-Exupéry's *Wind, Sand and Stars* (1939), Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* (1968) and Terry Tempest Williams's *Red* (2001) rather than, say, J. G. Ballard's *The Drought* (1964) or Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993).

The deserts of the American southwest have received a fair bit of ecocritical attention. Patricia Nelson Limerick's *Desert Passages* (1985) and David Cassuto's *Dripping Dry* (2001) approach these desert landscapes via myths of national identity, showing how a confrontation with extremes of aridity had a determining effect on the course of American history from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. Tom Lynch's *Xerophilia* (2008) takes a bioregionalist approach inspired by the poet Gary Snyder. Gersdorf's *The Poetics and Politics of the Desert*

(2009) also focuses on the role of the desert in American mythopoetics, but avoids the simplistic bioregionalist thesis that sees alienation from nature as the central ecological problem. There are some commercial books on the deserts of the world and their inhabitants – for example, Roslynn Haynes's *Desert: Nature and Culture* (2013) and Michael Welland's *The Desert: Lands of Lost Borders* (2015) – but no book on the cultural and literary significance of the desert in general exists. Unlike the above-mentioned volumes, I tend to avoid nature writing, travel writing and memoir. These are the genres in which the vast majority of literary deserts have been sought, as if critics have needed the validation of an author's actual desert experiences before taking the desert as a critical object.

The present book is not strictly speaking a work of ecocriticism, but it has close affinities with strains of ecocriticism that attempt to go beyond the localist and bioregionalist biases that have embraced untheorised conceptions of 'nature' and uncritically favoured nature writing over other genres. The best recent examples of strong ecotheoretical research can be found in the edited volumes *Ecocritical Theory: New European Approaches* (2011) from Axel Goodbody and Kate Rigby, *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory Beyond Green* (2013) from Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, and *General Ecology: The New Ecological Paradigm* (2017) from Erich Hörl and James Burton. These collections signal how in the past ten years the theoretical foundations of ecocriticism have shifted beyond a conventional green awareness of nature as a domain separate from culture, politics and technology. Cohen, in his introduction to *Prismatic Ecology*, explains the limitations for ecocriticism of a purely green analysis:

> A green reading offers an environment-minded analysis of literature and culture, and is typically concerned with how nature is represented within a text and how modes of human inhabitance unfold within an imagined natural world. . . . Yet green readings have a tendency to reproduce . . . a split between nature and culture that founds a structurating antinomy even in the face of constitutive and intractable hybridities. Assuming such a split can lead to analyses stressing anthropocentric and detached concepts like stewardship, preservation, and prescriptive modes of environmental management.[53]

The desert confronts us with a number of intractable hybridities that call for non-green approaches. Even though they are often regarded as the ultimate wilderness and as sublime nature in its purest form, deserts can be found as easily outside of natural environments, in cities, suburbs, shopping malls, apocalyptic futures, utopias, dystopias, alien worlds and battlefields.

Research addressing the desert as a conceptual or theoretical category is hard to come by, but David Jasper's *The Sacred Desert* (2004) is by far the best example of work in this vein. Jasper provides a cultural history of the desert from the point of view of the Judeo-Christian tradition, drawing on a range of sources from the Desert Fathers and Thomas Altizer to Kafka, Derrida and Cormac McCarthy. Jasper's analysis suggests an important link between the early Christians and the modernist sense of spiritual exhaustion found in Yeats and Eliot:

> In the mythic imagination of the poet the desert is becoming the Waste Land, and worse. The centuries of the Christian church have awakened the nightmare, the demons that the Fathers fought, and the desert has become *us*. What is always represented in its otherness from the order of the city and society is now realized as the anarchy of that society.[54]

If the desert has functioned for thousands of years as a space of theological yearning and ordeal, as a site more spiritual than geographic, in the twentieth century it comes into its own as an environment in which exhaustion seems to coexist with forms of abundance and plenitude unique to Western capitalist society. Writers from Yeats and Eliot to Baudrillard, Carter and DeLillo privilege the desert precisely because it seems the *spatial correlate* of twentieth-century capitalism. What Jasper suggests, ultimately, is that a theology of the desert provides an important framework for understanding the spiritual and aesthetic consequences of modernity as the era of the death of God.

Nevertheless, the narrow theological frame of Jasper's work needs to be broadened to include questions of energetic as well as spiritual crisis. The fossil-energetics of environmental crisis and the fate of spirituality in secular modernity must be considered as overlapping phenomena. We live today in an age when the abundances afforded by advanced capitalism exist alongside anxieties over resource scarcity and depletion. The hallucinatory surfaces of mass consumerism have, for all their sophisticated variety, a strangely attenuated and degraded quality, as postmodernist writers and critics have long noted. What Baudrillard famously described as 'the desert of the real' would seem to be the aesthetic manifestation of a whole range of disavowed beliefs: we know God is dead, but we act as if something were nevertheless guiding our fate; we know the images of mass media are simulacra, but we act as though they were the real thing; we know fossil fuels will run out, but we act as if they were infinite, and so on. The theological sense of the desert is carried over into our secular and post-secular condition but in ways intimately connected with contemporary concerns over energy. Energy and spirit today are a lot more closely related than we might think. Clayton Crockett and Jeffrey W. Robbins's book *Religion,*

Politics, and the Earth: The New Materialism (2012) articulates a geophilosophical conception of energy as the mode by which the Earth comes to understand itself as an absolute subject:

> Earth becomes itself by thinking through its own materiality, energy forces, layered strata, atmosphere and magnetosphere, enfolded forms of life, and so on . . . energy is immanent Deleuzo-Hegelian spirit (or Spirit), and energy avoids the traditional dichotomy between spirit and matter, because everything is energy transformation.[55]

Energy in this sense is the mode by which the Earth becomes subject. Entropy and the spectre of depletion, on the other hand, is the mode by which subjectivity encounters its relationship to the Earth. In order to understand energy in this way, I draw throughout this book upon Deleuze and Guattari's post-psychoanalytic conception of desire as the dynamic process that grounds us in territories but also ungrounds and deterritorialises us.

FROM THE ERĒMOS TO THE EREMOZOIC

It is always tempting to begin with problems of definition. It is particularly so for this project as there is little consensus regarding what, exactly, constitutes a desert. Throughout the twentieth century, scientists have struggled to arrive at a comprehensive definition, but today deserts are generally defined in terms of rainfall (along with temperature and humidity), even though parts of the Kalahari and Australian arid regions have a rainfall that exceeds the standard definition of 10 inches a year. Aridity – the rate at which water evaporates – is often more important than rainfall. Ultimately, scientific definitions of the desert are relative to the regions being classified. The geologist Michael Welland remarks that 'how you choose to define a desert depends very much on why you wish to do so in the first place'.[56] The word 'desert' comes from the Latin *desertum*, a translation of the Greek *erēmos,* meaning emptiness or solitude, the place of an eremite or hermit. The Desert Fathers of late antiquity – religious ascetics who retreated to the deserts of Egypt and Palestine – used the term *paneremos*, meaning 'absolute desert'. *Desertum* has an ancient Egyptian origin related to the hieroglyph pronounced 'tesert', meaning a place that has been forsaken. *Desertum* is the past participle of *dēserō*, which means literally to unbind or disconnect. 'Desolation' derives from the Latin *dēsōlō*, which means to abandon. 'Waste' was used to translate *desertus* in early English versions of the Bible and comes via Old French from the Latin *vāstus*, meaning both empty and vast or immense. *Vāstus* is cognate with the German *Wüste*, which means desert or wasteland, while

the adjective *wüst* can mean wild but also vile, rude, ugly and chaotic. 'Devastate' comes from the Latin *vāstare*, meaning to lay waste. As Edward Casey observes, devastate is a 'composite word' combining the senses of *waste* with those of *vast*.[57] This etymological fact is important because it links time and space: *waste* is that which is no longer of use from the perspective of human temporality and intentionality, whereas *vast* suggests the spatiality of this temporal condition. In the desert, time in-itself as both eternity and passing-away seems to be manifest. As the legendary nineteenth-century desert traveller Isabelle Eberhardt put it, 'in this country without green, in this country of rock, something exists: time'.[58]

In the environmental sciences, meanwhile, there is much debate about 'desertification', meaning the degradation or loss of arable land due to deforestation, intensive farming, drought, climate change and other factors. Dryland researchers David Thomas and Nicholas Middleton's 1994 book *Desertification: Exploding the Myth* argues that the use of the term 'desertification' since the 1970s to talk about soil degradation, drought and the misuse of land draws on unfounded European cultural fears about the colonial periphery and non-European forms of agriculture.[59] The term itself originated in the late nineteenth century in French colonial North Africa, and the image of a 'growing desert', as we'll see, has perhaps more to do with European anxieties about the decline of its own civilisation and morality than any ecological reality in the strict sense.[60] The absence of a universal definition of what a desert is in the strict physical sense is thus particularly notable in the history and politics of the idea of desertification. The forced settlement of nomads has a long history in colonial policy, and a certain image of the desert as a place of nefarious rootlessness has accompanied this. The French sought to settle nomads not only for perceived ecological benefits but because it was part of their *mission civilisatrice*.[61] Today, it is recognised that one of the major causes of land degradation in Africa has in fact been 'the conversion of nomadic pastoral societies to sedentary lifestyles with a focus on raising cash crops instead of subsistence ones'.[62] In an excellent recent book, Hannah Holleman suggests, following climate researcher Joseph Romm, that 'dust-bowlification' is a more apposite term for the intertwined processes of drought and soil erosion that have marked the intensification of capitalist colonial agriculture since the late nineteenth century, the American Dust Bowl of the 1930s being a regional manifestation of much larger global processes affecting the viability and productivity of soil.[63] Whatever its shortcomings, however, the term 'desertification' continues to be used widely to denote problems of drought, overgrazing and deforestation,

which have been acknowledged as major problems occurring on every inhabited continent, with some accounts suggesting that arable land is being lost at a rate of 12 million hectares a year.[64]

The desert as a cultural and aesthetic category, meanwhile, has displayed a remarkable flexibility and variability across a range of contexts and traditions. Vittoria di Palma, in her cultural history of the fens, marshes, swamps and other kinds of 'unimproved' common land of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Britain, writes that 'the emptiness that is the core characteristic of the wasteland is also what gives the term its malleability, its potential for abstraction'.[65] Medieval culture was able to regard the forests of Europe as deserts in order to imitate the monastic practices of the Desert Fathers of late antiquity. Jacques Le Goff writes that for the twelfth-century French troubadours, 'an almost natural epithet for the forest was *gaste*, meaning devastated, empty, arid'.[66] Morton argues that the polar wastes of Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* evoke 'imperialism in the abstract, the attempt to grasp the pure space, the intangible spacious*ness* of the environment'.[67] Nature as desert wilderness is here identical with an abstract sense of freedom or mobility beyond any specific immediate goal. This is demonstrated in environmentalist texts such as Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*, in which the city, the *polis*, is equated with tyranny.

Certain elements within contemporary experiences of the desert are strangely akin to the spiritual ordeals of the Desert Fathers. These early Christian monks sought out the deserts of North Africa and Palestine in order to practise an eremitic life of fasting and solitude. The opposition of desert and city that one finds here is, curiously, the inverse of Abbey's. As Jacques Lacarrière observes, for these ascetic mystics 'society is as natural to man as eating or procreation', and 'the retirement to the deserts was therefore at no time a return to any sort of "natural" or wild life but, on the contrary, was a seeking after a way of life as anti-natural as possible'.[68] For the Christian ascetics, the desert is an antidote to a nature identical with sin because it offered life the conditions of unnatural constriction. The desert environment makes possible a profoundly *artificial* life, often embodied in the paradox of a *desertum-civitas* or city in the desert.[69] Desert spirituality, through its abnegation of a society designed to gratify natural appetites, creates not only a life divergent from nature but a paradoxical *world outside of the world*. This speaks to experiences far removed from the monastic cultures of early Christianity. When renowned theorist of the postmodern condition Jean Baudrillard travelled through Las Vegas and other cities of the American southwest in the 1980s, he likewise saw a paradoxical *desertum-civitas* in radical contrast to nature:

> American culture is heir to the deserts, but the deserts here are not part of a Nature defined by contrast with the town. Rather they denote the emptiness, the radical nudity that is the background to every human institution. At the same time, they designate human institutions as a metaphor of that emptiness and the work of man as the continuity of the desert, culture as a mirage and as the perpetuity of the simulacrum. The natural deserts tell me what I need to know about the deserts of the sign. They teach me to read surface and movement and geology and immobility at the same time. They create a vision expurgated of all the rest: cities, relationships, events, media. They induce in me an exalting vision of the desertification of signs and men. They form the mental frontier where the projects of civilization run into the ground.[70]

For Baudrillard, postmodern culture is manifested in the hard, inorganic surfaces of geology. The desert is not nature, here, but a vision of the empty form of the sign and the institutions built upon it. There is a strange asceticism at work in this geological theory of signs: the sensuous fullness of the referent dissipates into a denuded spaciousness where signs acquire a reality and an agency beyond mere representation, while the referent itself is annihilated in the semiotic space. This space is what Baudrillard elsewhere calls 'the desert of the real', and it is for him the terminus of all signifying activity, all history and culture, that we find in postmodern hyperreality.[71] The postmodern desert city in itself renders up a critique by dismantling those categorical oppositions – nature and culture, rural and urban – that have provided the Western *polis* with its grounding principles.

Following a similar path, the American artist Robert Smithson, famous for his monumental land art – much of it desert based – once observed how the modular suburban houses of 1960s New Jersey resembled, in their austere geometric abstraction, the barren, lunar surfaces of a stone quarry.[72] This continuity of built and natural space as seen in the formalism of the desert is suggested by Smithson's idea of 'entropic landscapes'. He defined these as 'visual [analogs] for the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which extrapolates the range of entropy by telling us energy is more easily lost than obtained, and that in the ultimate future the whole universe will burn out and be transformed into an all-encompassing sameness'.[73] That energetic exhaustion could provide an aesthetic principle is something Smithson explores in the realms of science fiction, sculpture, and architecture. In his own practice, he develops these ideas through land art, his signature piece *Spiral Jetty* (1970) being an attempt to provide an environmental representation of entropy.[74] Beyond Smithson's specific aesthetic goals, the entropic landscape provides us with a conceptual category for thinking about how the desert becomes a figure for

exhaustion and depletion. In modernist and postmodernist culture, we repeatedly find the desert being used to articulate the sense of an energetic zero point.

Today, this sense cannot be dissociated from visions of environmental collapse and mass extinction. The way we think about the biosphere is increasingly determined by the thought of its decline and disappearance. The famed biologist E. O. Wilson – who coined the terms 'biophilia' and 'biodiversity' and is known to many for his controversial accounts of sociobiology – has proposed that we are not simply entering into a new geological epoch marked by the dominance of humans, but into a new *era* that he names the Eremozoic.[75] More recently, he has also used the term 'Eremocene' as a direct alternative to the Anthropocene.[76] He argues that the rate of biodiversity loss now being witnessed was last seen with the end of the Mesozoic age 65 million years ago. With the extinction of the dinosaurs the Cenozoic, the Age of Mammals, begun. Today, we may be leaving the Cenozoic and heading into a new age characterised not by the biological diversity of the past two ages but by biological impoverishment. Wilson derives the term Eremozoic from the Greek *erēmos*, meaning both solitude and desert. The Eremozoic or Eremocene is, then, the Age of Loneliness or the Age of Deserts. After the age of cold blood and warm blood comes a kind of bloodless age, an age of biological impoverishment in which man finds himself alone with a nature he has modified so thoroughly as to be an extension and reflection of himself.

Heidegger, writing near the end of the Second World War in a posthumously published text, also proposed an Age of Deserts:

> the desert is the wasteland [*die Öde*]: the deserted [*verlassene*] expanse of the abandonment [*Verlassenheit*] of all life. . . . The geographical concept of the desert [*Wüste*] is just the not yet sufficiently thought-out idea of desolation [*Verödung*], which proximally and thus mostly comes into our view only in particular circumstances and conditions of the surface of the earth. . . . May we call a historical age in which a form of 'life' still in some manner holds sway, 'the age of devastation'? . . . The being of an age of devastation [*Verwüstung*] would then consist precisely in the abandonment of being. Such a matter is, however, difficult to think.[77]

For Heidegger here, for reasons we will come back to, the age of modern technology causes being itself to withdraw, to be abandoned and for us to be abandoned by it in a double turning away. This state of abandonment is the historical condition of the modern West. In its biblical use the *erēmos* denoted a desert or wilderness, but also the place where sheep are abandoned by a shepherd: 'Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the

ninety-nine in the *erēmos* and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?'[78] In his 'Letter on Humanism' (1947), Heidegger wrote that 'Man is the shepherd of Being', but we should add that he is so today under the conditions of abandonment that render him and the object of his care lost to one another.[79]

The idea of an Age of Deserts has been depicted perhaps more powerfully than anywhere else in contemporary literature by Margaret Atwood's science fiction fragment 'Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet' (2009). This brief text describes the history of a planet in four ages. The first is the age of gods, the second the age of money, and the third the age of money-as-god. But

> in the fourth age we created deserts. Our deserts were of several kinds, but they had one thing in common: nothing grew there. Some were made of cement, some were made of various poisons, some were of baked earth. We made these deserts from the desire for more money and from despair at the lack of it. Wars, plagues, and famines visited us, but we did not stop in our industrious creation of deserts. At last all wells were poisoned, all rivers ran with filth, all seas were dead; there was no land left to grow food. Some of our wise men turned to the contemplation of deserts. A stone in the sand in the setting sun could be very beautiful, they said. Deserts were tidy, because there were no weeds in them, nothing that crawled. Stay in the desert long enough and you could apprehend the absolute. The number zero was holy.[80]

Atwood is here giving us a kind of Eremozoic aesthetics in which the devastation of nature gives rise to a new desert asceticism, a new spirituality based no longer in the redemption offered by *another* world beyond human finitude but in the absolutisation of indifferent space in *this* one. Matter is spiritualised by perfect stasis. Atwood's vision is eschatological, then, but crucially does not give us an Earth without humans or an Earth returned to its wild state and reclaimed by non-human life. This is all too easily done, and has been a key ecoaesthetic strategy from Richard Jefferies's *After London* (1885) to the History Channel's *Life After People* (2009). The Eremozoic – an Earth in which life is not eliminated but reduced to a zero-intensity state – would seem a different prospect. The Eremozoic, then, may be a necessary supplement to, and not as Wilson suggests a competitor term for, the idea of the Anthropocene. It suggests not the typical apocalyptic scenarios of nature in revolt against humanity, which all too easily gratify a desire to consume nature as a spectacular object, but something more like an environmental *an*aesthetics, an environmental sensorium reduced to zero intensity in which nothing moves and nothing grows but where the aesthetic persists as contemplation of the inertia of matter in its irreducible indifference to life.

We are so used to thinking of art in terms of newness that we sometimes fail to recognise what it can tell us about indifference, inertia and exhaustion. Theories of the postmodern, of course, have for a long time drawn our attention to the fact that culture can thrive on the loss of originality and the depletion of aesthetic intensity. What if, today, we should understand this not simply in terms of the cultural superstructure of a global capitalism that sees itself at the end of history but, more radically, in terms of a planetary death instinct, an entropic self-depletion of life for which capitalism becomes the means? In *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!* (2002), a book published in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, Slavoj Žižek argued that America had for years prior to the event been dreaming about its own destruction in the form of Hollywood disaster movies.[81] Can we say something similar about the desolate environments that characterise modern art and culture? Are these not the means by which the planet, through the resources of capitalism, imagines its own return to what Freud once called 'the quiescence of the inorganic world'?[82]

PHILOSOPHY AND THE DESERT ORDEAL FROM NIETZSCHE TO DELEUZE

If philosophers, writers and artists have been able to discover a corollary between modernity and the desert or wasteland, it is because the Western metaphysics of space already suggests a kind of impoverishment of our affective links with the environment. Key works such as Lefebvre's Marxist *The Production of Space* (1974) and Casey's phenomenological *The Fate of Place* (1997) argue that Western thought since the Renaissance has conceptualised space in increasingly abstract and homogeneous ways.[83] Foucault famously made the claim in a lecture given in the 1960s that if the nineteenth century was obsessed with time and history, then the twentieth is an 'epoch of space'. The origins of this epoch can, however, be dated to as far back as Galileo, whose chief impact was the reconstitution of space as infinite and open: 'In such a space the place of the Middle Ages turned out to be dissolved, as it were; a thing's place was no longer anything but a point in its movement, just as the stability of a thing was only its movement indefinitely slowed down. In other words, starting with Galileo and the seventeenth century, extension was substituted for localization.'[84] Place (or the local) is dissolved in favour of an abstract notion of space as infinite and indifferent extension.

Despite their methodological and ideological differences, these authors come to the same conclusion: the dominant accounts of space

that Western thought and science have produced attenuate our ability to meaningfully inhabit space as place or – what is the same thing – to resist the malign effects of space as a deracinating abstraction or means of control. Quentin Meillassoux has provided a usefully concise summary of the trend that Foucault, Lefebvre and Casey describe:

> The world of Cartesian extension is a world that acquires the independence of substance, a world that we can henceforth conceive of as indifferent to everything in it that corresponds to the concrete, organic connection that we forge with it – it is this *glacial* world that is revealed to the moderns, a world in which there is no longer any up or down, centre or periphery, nor anything else that might make of it a world designed for humans. For the first time, the world manifests itself as capable of subsisting without any of those aspects that constitute its concreteness for us.[85]

Modernity produces a glacial placelessness or 'atopia', as Casey puts it, which precipitates a crisis of affective or libidinal investment in the physical environment.[86] Once space becomes exhaustively mathematisable, as it does with Copernicus and Galileo, the possibility of dwelling, of meaningfully inhabiting space, is called into question. Concepts such as world and environment thus start to emerge as objects of direct philosophical concern. As Bruno Latour puts it, 'the paradox of "the environment" is that it emerged in public parlance just when it was starting to disappear'.[87] Once we feel ourselves to be 'nowhere', to be atopian, the question of what place is comes to the fore.

The most important modern philosophical attempt to provide an alternative to the Western metaphysics of space came from Heidegger. For Heidegger, human existence equates to Dasein, meaning being *there*, being placed, being-in-the-world. It is impossible to detach from subjectivity the fact of its emplacement. But a strange corollary of this fact is that place becomes an uncanny thing. Work in the phenomenology of place has often deployed Heideggerian approaches while ignoring some of the more interesting avenues down which Heidegger's thought leads.[88] Casey, for example, writes of the need to assert the 'concrete, multiplex, experiential aspects of the place-world' in opposition to the abstractions of space.[89] The concept of world is often presented in ecophenomenology as something vaguely synonymous with the environment as a source of meaning and enriched experience. What tends to get lost in these attempts to remedy atopia by 'getting back into place', to quote the title of one of Casey's books, is that the idea of 'world' is for Heidegger fundamentally problematic in a way that prevents us from reducing it to embeddedness or locatedness in a surrounding environment. The paradox here is that to think world as a problem requires the experience of worldlessness. The world is thus

encountered by way of a perturbing and irreducible *uncanniness*. One of Heidegger's examples of this from *Being and Time* is fear of the dark. In the dark, the world has both disappeared *and* come oppressively close.[90] The world is never 'where' it is supposed to be. Our sense of place is thus fully bound up with a sense of our own *displacement* and, consequently, our being-in-the-world contains some form of awareness, subsequently repressed or forgotten, of a worldlessness without which there would be no being-in-the-world at all.

Ecophenomenological attempts to naturalise the world miss this problematic aspect of it. If the world were *not* a problem for us, there would be no need to philosophise it or regard it as ontologically significant. What Heidegger and Levinas suggest is that world, place, environment and so on can only become objects of philosophical thought because of a feeling that our connection to them is frail, lacking or troubling. There is something *wrong* with the world, as revealed to us in times of trauma or disturbance. As Morton points out, Heidegger conceives the world as 'inherently lacking, inherently ragged and faulty'.[91] *World is its own loss or impoverishment*. Pursuing this idea, Levinas during his imprisonment in the Second World War attempted to go beyond Heidegger's ontology by articulating a philosophy of existential worldlessness: 'Expressions such as "a world in pieces" or "a world turned upside down," trite as they have become, nonetheless express a feeling that is authentic'.[92] In his later work, he argues for an anti-ontological conception of space as an 'outside where nothing covers anything, non-protection, the reverse of a retreat, homelessness, non-inhabitation, layout without security'.[93] Whereas for Levinas this is a distinctly human problematic (the ethical problem of the other), we can now view worldlessness as increasingly the situation of life in the Anthropocene. Heidegger distinguished humans as world-builders from animals by saying that the latter are 'poor in world', while inorganic things such as stones are worldless entirely.[94] But our contemporary condition suggests that all life on Earth is now confronting a *common precariousness of dwelling* rendering such presumptions to human uniqueness obsolete. At the same time, Heidegger's insistence that our being-in-the-world is disclosed to us in moments of boredom and anxiety suggests that we do not grasp the fact of our uniquely human being-in-the-world without the troubling feeling that we are not at home there. There is something specifically human about this paradox, to be sure, but on a humanised planet it might be said to converge with a crisis affecting *all* life.

The philosophical figure of the desert, as I deploy it in this book, begins with Nietzsche's warning in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–5):

'the desert grows [*Die Wüste wächst*]: woe to him who harbors deserts!'[95] Nietzsche is at once describing modernity as a spiritual wasteland and insisting that the desert itself is a mode of growth or self-propagation, a highly fraught mode of becoming where the certainty of belonging is precluded. If nihilism portends the nullity of a desert, it also leads beyond itself in a self-overcoming. The most influential interpretation of Nietzsche's growing desert comes from Heidegger's lecture course *What Is Called Thinking?* (1952). Here, Heidegger argues that the *Wüste* is the terminal metaphysical landscape of modern, technological society. It is also a turning point in history that marks man's 'becoming the future master of the earth' in the form of the Overman.[96] Modern technoscientific rationality is, according to Heidegger, the self-extinguishing of a form of thinking that began with the metaphysics of ancient Greece but whose fate is played out in the societies of the capitalist West. The desert, then, denotes not just the physical devastation of the Earth by modern technology but a devastation of being itself in which the entire Western tradition culminates. At the same time, the desert marks the threshold of an epochal transformation of man's relationship with the Earth. The *Wüste* on this view is an extremely ambiguous terrain marking a pivot in human destiny with elements of what theologians call *soteriology*, a doctrine of salvation.

We can tie this philosophical tradition to the aesthetic possibilities that modern literary texts find in deserts and wastelands of various sorts. These texts do not simply display an interest in certain types of landscapes but constitute something comparable to what Blanchot has called a 'space of literature'. For Blanchot, literature exists at a remove from the world and the writer in a condition of exile or errancy. Like the land surveyor in Kafka's *The Castle* (1926), the writer is forced to inhabit a space 'where the conditions of a real dwelling lack, where one has to live in an incomprehensible separation'.[97] The separation between individual and world is where the literary imagination arises but this 'where' is an atopia, a voided position that precludes dwelling, while the individual becomes the transmitter of an anonymous expression that resonates in the void. In the desert of literary space, language loses its communicative power but gains the curious ability to make silence itself speak: 'the poet is he who hears a language which makes nothing heard'.[98] While for Heidegger dwelling and art are connected by a shared world-building activity, Blanchot seeks a different role for art in which a space distinct from the world and an aesthetic activity distinct from the 'work' of building it become available to thought and creative practice.[99] This space is not inhabited by the kinds of poetic dwelling Heidegger envisions in his well-known analyses of Hölderlin,

Trakl and Rilke but is traversed nomadically by the errancy of refrains that redraw the limits of territory towards an absolute Outside. Levinas underscores the contrast between Blanchot and Heidegger in this respect:

> Art, according to Blanchot, far from elucidating the world, exposes the desolate, lightless substratum underlying it, and restores to our sojourn its exotic essence – and, to the wonders of our architecture, their function of makeshift desert shelters. Blanchot and Heidegger agree that art does not lead (contrary to classical esthetics) to a world behind the world, an ideal world behind the real one. Art is light. Light from on high in Heidegger, making the world, founding place. In Blanchot it is a black light, a night coming from below.[100]

Art not only reveals a world but also the world's desolate underside, the point where world and unworld appear to converge. Levinas is exaggerating the difference between Heidegger and Blanchot here, however, since something of this penumbral, desertified unworld is already at work in Heidegger's account of the devastations wrought by modern technoscientific rationality. The latter have their source in representations that operate by 'enframing' the world for consciousness and pressing being into presence for the purposes of consumption. Through this process 'the "world" has become an unworld'.[101] The unworld forms the conditions under which the world becomes a problem for art and philosophy.

Representational consciousness is bound to a special kind of violence Heidegger calls 'devastation' or 'desertification' (*Verwüstung*), meaning a neutralisation of the ontological difference. The effects of this may be physically destructive – and may indeed involve desertification in the physical sense of ravaging of the Earth's surface to the point where it is rendered unfit for or hostile to life – but for Heidegger mere physical or ontic destruction is not the whole story. The problem of devastation's violence is at once more profoundly ontological and more ambiguous or uncanny (unhomely or unearthly) than that:

> Devastation [*Verwüstung*] is more than destruction [*Vernichtung*]. Devastation is more unearthly [*unheimlicher*] than destruction. Destruction only sweeps aside all that has grown up or been built up so far; but devastation blocks all future growth and prevents all building. Devastation is more unearthly than mere destruction. Mere destruction sweeps aside all things including even nothingness, while devastation on the contrary establishes and spreads everything that blocks and prevents. The African Sahara is only one kind of wasteland. The devastation of the earth can easily go hand in hand with a guaranteed supreme living standard for man, and just as easily with the organized establishment of a uniform state of happiness for all men. Devastation can be the same as both, and can haunt us everywhere in the

> most unearthly way – by keeping itself hidden. Devastation does not just mean a slow sinking into the sands.[102]

The uncanniness of devastation is that we witness in it a kind of growth: there is a spreading of everything that blocks, as if life not only as actuality but as potentiality or virtuality has been anticipated by the desert. In the grips of this paradox, the world itself becomes a kind of virtual realm, increasingly automated, administered and compressed. Nature, meanwhile, becomes mere material to be demanded forth from the Earth and used in human projects. The question to be asked is not just how we can regain contact with a meaningful place-world in an age of globalised placelessness, but – more importantly – where the world's self-propagating desolation comes from and where it is leading us. Rather than following Heidegger's proto-ecocritical readings of Romantic poetry as a way of regaining a sense of place in a devastated world, we can ask instead if there is an aesthetics of unworlding that would also be an aesthetics for the Anthropocene.

There are important links between the modern desert ordeal and much older ones. It has often been noted by theologians and historians that the desert landscapes of Egypt and Mesopotamia were crucial for the development of monotheism. Such landscapes, by appearing abandoned by God, provided the semi-nomadic Hebrews with 'a concrete image of transcendence'.[103] Ernest Renan wrote in his *History of the People of Israel* (1888) that 'the desert is monotheistic'.[104] For Rudolph Otto – a key theological influence on Levinas – the desert's 'empty distances' give sensory actuality to the divinity of the 'wholly other'.[105] Yahweh's withdrawal from the world into a complete transcendence is inscribed, negatively, in the experience of a bare, apparently accursed, geography. With Nietzsche, however, empty space provokes a different kind of ordeal. In the famous section of *The Gay Science* (1882) proclaiming the death of God, Nietzsche's madman asks:

> Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving to now? Where are we moving to? Away from all suns? Are we not continually falling? And backwards, sidewards, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an up and a down? Aren't we straying as though through an infinite nothing? Isn't empty space breathing at us?[106]

To modern, secular experience corresponds a new kind of desert ordeal no longer anchored in divine transcendence. Derrida deploys the image of the desert to discuss the persistence of religious questions through the rationalisations and formalisations of modern knowledge. In 'Faith and Knowledge', he asks whether a discourse on religion can be dissociated

from a 'discourse on salvation: which is to say, on the holy, the sacred, the safe and sound, the unscathed'. The question of salvation can only be addressed, he says, through a consideration of the forces of 'deracination', 'delocalization' and 'abstraction' that produce globalised modernity.[107] The desire for salvation is bound to an automatism that manifests itself in the machine, in technology and telecommunications. The question of religion in modern society, then, is posed on the terrain of 'a desert about which one isn't sure if it is sterile or not'.[108]

In Deleuze's solo and collaborative work, we find a concern for themes of stoicism, asceticism, spiritual ordeal, and states of physical and mental exhaustion. Some of his earliest writing was on Robinson Crusoe and the figure of the desert island, an interest he shares with Derrida.[109] Deleuze's geophilosophical framework – discussed in depth in the next chapter – is first suggested in his article on the Robinson myth. Defoe's novel suggests an imperialist and capitalist outlook: how does one construct a civilised world in the absence of civilised others? For Deleuze, subsequent rewritings of the basic narrative subvert this question by asking: how does the concept of the 'other' structure our experience to begin with? The question is tantamount to asking how one might live without a concept of world, a radical idea that has been present in philosophy since Kant.[110] Deleuze is, of course, most famous for his explosive political theory written with Guattari. In their major works of the 1970s and 1980s, they developed a theory of collective subjectivity aimed at evading contemporary modes of social control. For Deleuze and Guattari, we must remain mobile in thought and behaviour, like a nomadic group. Such a strategy is necessary to evade the political or ideological manipulations of mass desire characteristic of the modern state. The most insidious of these apparatuses is subjectivity itself. Deleuze and Guattari criticise the psychoanalytic account of psychosexual development for recognising but ultimately capitulating to this fact. They criticise Freud's 'familial' model of subject formation, accusing him of neglecting the experience of schizophrenia in order to elaborate a conception of desire modelled on the neurotic triangle of Oedipus with the tyrannical, castrating figure of the father at its apex. For psychoanalysis, desire is necessarily welded to repression because the subject finds a place in society, a *territory*, by accepting and internalising the oedipal conflict.[111]

The schizophrenic ordeal, however, offers a different model of subjectivity in which desire not only invests social reality directly, without the mediating role of the Oedipus complex and its parental imaginary, but does so in a way that ultimately escapes the territories by which social and psychical reality impose organisation on it. Territories *local-*

ise desire. But a desire modelled on the ordeal of the schizophrenic flies headlong into the desert in order to seek a new kind of consistency, a new territory that is not really a territory at all but a deterritorialised surface that Deleuze and Guattari call, using Antonin Artaud's evocative phrase, the 'body without organs':

> Everything has been said about the paucity of reality, the loss of reality, the lack of contact with life, autism and athymia. Schizophrenics themselves have said everything there is to say about this, and have been quick to slip into the expected clinical mold. Dark world, growing desert: a solitary machine hums on the beach, an atomic factory installed in the desert. But if the body without organs is indeed this desert, it is as an indivisible, nondecomposable distance over which the schizo glides in order to be everywhere something real is produced, everywhere something real has been and will be produced.[112]

The idea of the desert of the body without organs is key because it develops the critique of psychoanalysis into geophilosophy, as I show in detail in the next chapter. Geophilosophy is a mode of planetary thinking that transforms the terms by which we understand subjectivity, calling forth something like an absolute subject. The philosophical figuration of the desert relates not only to conceptions of environment and spatiality but also to aesthetics, understood as a theory of art as well as a way of thinking about subjectivity at the level of percepts and affects, sensation and feeling. Heidegger's devastation of being already suggested an exhaustion of representational consciousness; when the frames of representation fall away, the world itself is torn to pieces. What Deleuze and Guattari help us to understand is that the crisis of representation is also a libidinal and energetic one. The schizophrenic body is itself an *entropic landscape* where the codes of sensation are scrambled.

THE DESERT AND MODERN LITERATURE

In this book, I present readings of some of the most significant examples of deserts and wastelands in literature since Romanticism by drawing on the theoretical insights I have begun to outline. As I pointed out above, the desert in literature has generally been neglected by critics. At the same time, the critical appreciation of the desert that does exist has given us an unacceptably narrow view of what constitutes the desert as a literary object. In Glotfelty and Fromm's edited volume *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), to give a dated but still indicative example, the desert is represented primarily by Abbey's *Desert Solitaire*, read as a mid-twentieth-century *Walden* and belonging to a tradition of desert-focused nature writing featuring Joseph Wood Krutch, John C. Van

Dyke and Mary Austin. In trying to move beyond this nature writing paradigm to suggest an alternative genealogy of the desert in modern literature, we can turn to one of the foundational texts of British ecocriticism, Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973). For Williams, the countryside in the English literary canon has served a range of ideological functions, depicting rural life as alternately idyllic and backward, liberating and corrupt. The land or 'working agriculture' defined in opposition to the city is a medium that renders social relations as a set of moral and aesthetic values which appear natural but are social and historical.[113]

Williams's work on the ideologico-aesthetic construction of the English countryside may be a strange place to look for an understanding of the desert as a modern literary topos. Nevertheless, in his analysis of Oliver Goldsmith's poem 'The Deserted Village' (1769), Williams discerns the presence of an entropic landscape. Williams calls Goldsmith's text 'a baffling poem' because it presents two simultaneous yet contrasting visions of the same place.[114] 'Sweet Auburn', the fictional village of the poem, is shown as moving from the conditions predominating in 'feudal and immediately post-feudal arrangements' to a fledgling agrarian capitalism characterised by a new commercial spirit that saw the land as an object of calculation and investment.[115] This shift manifested itself in a 'crisis of values'.[116] Williams notes the predominance in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries of poems that look with melancholy regret on a lost pastoral tradition and a dying mode of country life.[117] Goldsmith's text begins with a retrospective nostalgia suggestive of this earlier work but immediately contrasts this with a protest against the effects of agricultural modernisation:

> Sweet smiling village, loveliest of the lawn,
> Thy sports are fled, and all thy charms withdrawn;
> Amidst thy bowers the tyrant's hand is seen,
> And desolation saddens all thy green:
> One only master grasps the whole domain,
> And half a tillage stints thy smiling plain.
> No more thy glassy brook reflects the day,
> But, choked with sedges, works its weedy way;
> Along thy glades, a solitary guest,
> The hollow-sounding bittern guards its nest;
> Amidst thy desert walks the lapwing flies,
> And tires their echoes with unvaried cries.[118]

What separates Goldsmith's text from earlier work bewailing the loss of an old rural order is the manner in which the social crisis of values brought on by economic development is manifested as an *aesthetic*

crisis. What Goldsmith depicts is not only the collapse of an idealised pastoral economy but also the collapse of poetry itself as a means of depicting the natural environment as something entirely bound up with this economy. The 'one only master' is the absent, city-based landowner representative of an emerging capitalist class for whom the village is merely a source of wealth. The tyranny of capital desolates the pastoral scene. As Williams writes, the 'actual history' of the destruction of the old social relations of the village 'was accompanied by an increased use and fertility of the land'.[119] But this fertility can only be rendered poetically by Goldsmith as wasteland. The entropic landscape inserted into the pastoral scene is an imaginative response to the break-up of an old aesthetic framework for picturing nature, fertility and cultivation as bound up with a set of organic social relations: the desert 'is what the new order does to the poet, not to the land'.[120]

Williams argues that the devastation of pastoral poetics in Goldsmith marks the emergence of a new 'structure of feeling' in the form of Romantic culture's 'assertion of nature against industry'.[121] The version of nature that emerges from Sweet Auburn's desolation is one capable of being regarded as 'out there', largely separate from human society and the social relations of any community.[122] With the Romantic poets, 'there came the sense of nature as a refuge, a refuge for man; a place of healing, a solace, a retreat'.[123] Williams explains the contradiction at the heart of Romantic nature:

> When nature is separated out from the activities of men, it even ceases to be nature, in any full and effective sense. Men come to project on to nature their own unacknowledged activities and consequences. Or nature is split into unrelated parts: coal-bearing from heather-bearing; downwind from upwind. The real split, perhaps, is in men themselves: men seen, seeing themselves, as producers and consumers. The consumer wants only the intended product; all other products and by-products he must get away from, if he can. But get away – it really can't be overlooked – to treat leftover nature in much the same spirit: to consume it as scenery, landscape, image, fresh air. There is more similarity than we usually recognise between the industrial entrepreneur and the landscape gardener.[124]

Underwriting Romantic conceptions of nature as refuge, as aesthetically distanced object of a contemplative consumption, is a vision of ruin and waste. The consumption of nature cannot be separated from the by-products of this consumption. Nature as refuge is a correlate of nature consumed, used-up and exhausted. With Romanticism, then, the desert and wasteland begin to take on a new aesthetic resonance. No longer do they relate to the moral degeneracy of the uncultivated wilderness – as they did for the land improvers of the seventeenth and

eighteenth centuries – but to a new set of values located precariously on the shifting boundaries between the cultural and the natural.

The desert becomes at once a denunciation of tyranny and a site in which humanity's relationship with nature can be considered anew. Auden argues that for Romantic symbolism, the desert denotes a natural wilderness but also urban decay: 'the desert may not be barren by nature but as the consequence of a historical catastrophe. The once-fertile city has become, through the malevolence of others or its own sin, the waste land'.[125] We see this clearly in Shelley's 'Ozymandias' (1818) and in his dramatic poem *Hellas* (1822) documenting the Greek War of Independence. In both, tyranny is associated with a desert landscape, and the signs of civilisation are read as signs of lack, as ruins. Civilisation is a kind of dead letter whose ecological equivalent is the desert. But the desert is also a place of regeneration, a site where empty signs become revitalised and live once more. In Shelley's *Queen Mab* (1813), the desert is depicted as the global stage on which a whole new reign of life on Earth begins:

> Those deserts of immeasurable sand,
> Whose age-collected fervors scarce allowed
> A bird to live, a blade of grass to spring,
> Where the shrill chirp of the green lizard's love
> Broke on the sultry silentness alone,
> Now teem with countless rills and shady woods,
> Corn-fields and pastures and white cottages.[126]

This is what Morton has called Shelley's 'green desert', a place of death and rebirth simultaneously.[127] Shelley is effectively arguing for a 'technohumanist' dominion of benevolent industry over nature.[128] The desert, here, becomes essential to elaborating a vision of technological humanity's stewardship over the Earth.

Deleuze and Guattari's geophilosophical framework is useful for understanding Romanticism's deployment of the desert because they discern across European Romanticism in general a new concern, breaking with classicism, for the Earth as ravaged, deserted or solitary.[129] For the Romantics, the Earth no longer presupposes our dwelling upon it via the ontological security of a divinely created world but instead poses anew the problem of dwelling. If the securities of a divinely created world begin to fall away in the eighteenth century, then it is the Earth as an ecoaesthetic object that replaces it. As Deleuze puts it in one of his lectures on Leibniz, for the Romantic artist 'it is no longer the problem of the world, but one of the earth' that is the key issue.[130] This is not because the world has ceased to be problematic but because the Earth has intruded on the problem of the world. The Romantic problem is

how best to *found* a new territory on an Earth that lacks the grounding function of the world. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari articulate this in terms of a disjunction of Earth and territory:

> With romanticism . . . the artist territorializes, enters a territorial assemblage. The seasons are now territorialized. The earth is certainly not the same thing as the territory. The earth is the intense point at the deepest level of the territory or is projected outside it like a focal point, where all the forces draw together in close embrace. . . . The earth has become that close embrace of all forces, those of the earth as well as of other substances, so that the artist no longer confronts chaos, but hell and the subterranean, the groundless.[131]

The green desert of *Queen Mab* shows us this quite clearly: Shelley rediscovers the Earth as absolutely deterritorialised, as desert, but seeks a territory for it, the process of territorialisation here being both poetic and technological. As Morton puts it using Deleuze and Guattari's own terminology, 'the empty or "smooth" space of the desert has become the populated or "striated" space of agrarian cultivation'.[132] The utopian transformation of the Earth requires the desert as the terrain of absolute deterritorialisation, even when cultivation reterritorialises on it.

When we look at twentieth-century literature, we can trace a concern for the desert that passes through modernism to the Beat Generation to postmodernism and beyond. In each case, the Romantic heritage is important. After 'Ozymandias', *The Waste Land* (1922) is the most famous evocation of the desert in modern anglophone poetry. Casey views the desert of Eliot's London as a manifestation of *horror vacui*, the terror of empty places, becoming a generalised modern malaise.[133] Eliot's 'hooded hordes swarming / Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth' would seem a diagnosis of the mass atopia of the modern city.[134] This illness, Casey argues, goes hand in hand with 'ontomania', an obsession with rendering being present through a technoscientific worldview. Philosophy since Aristotle has found itself panic-stricken before the empty field, before 'the dark vision of no-place-at-all', and has thus wanted to 'have and know as much determinate presence as possible' in order to fill the field at any cost.[135] The epidemic of atopia as a psychosocial malady in the twentieth century may thus be read in Heideggerian fashion as a product of the Western metaphysics of space once the latter becomes concretised in the cities of industrial modernity.

But another reading of Eliot's poem is possible. For Deleuze and Guattari, modern art is post-Romantic in the sense that it takes up the problem of the Earth as deterritorialised. Our dwelling does not need to pass through a territory or a world and thus encounters nomadic

inhabitations of all sorts, whose relationship to the Earth is dramatically uncertain and open. The Heideggerian ecopoetics of dwelling may be contrasted with the refrains of a nomadic or atopian deterritorialisation. A text such as Eliot's can be read in this way not necessarily as a demand for a territory but as an exploration of deterritorialised space. Whereas for Shelley the signs of both nature and civilisation take on an unusual clarity in the desert either through their rebirth or their ruin, for Eliot the 'broken images' themselves lie in a 'heap',[136] their meanings obscured, reflecting the very inter- and intratextual dynamics of the poem itself as a sifting of fragments, or what Viney has called Eliot's 'poetics of residua'.[137] The wasteland is, for Eliot, a land of *waste*, of textual redundancies, excrescences, repetitions and fragments entering into a clamorous resonance. Signs signify only as waste to be salvaged, reused and discarded. The topos of the literary text is itself thus a kind of wasteland, a vacant lot. In his early poem 'Second Caprice in North Cambridge' (1909), he suggests that empty and derelict spaces exert an uncanny attraction in defiance of aesthetic norms:

> This charm of vacant lots!
> The helpless fields that lie
> Sinister, sterile and blind –
> Entreat the eye and rack the mind,
> Demand your pity.
> With ashes and tins in piles,
> Shattered bricks and tiles
> And the débris of a city.
>
> Far from our definitions
> And our aesthetic laws
> Let us pause
> With these fields that hold and rack the brain.[138]

The charm of vacant lots is of the same order as the 'chastened sublimity' of Hardy's Egdon Heath, but Eliot extends the energetic exhaustion of such places to the textual entropy of his own poetic practice. When the debris of North Cambridge is moved to London, it becomes swept up in all the debris of Western culture itself, now regarded as so much rubbish to be sorted through on the page.

William S. Burroughs, for whom Eliot was a major influence, takes this textual strategy to its most extreme point.[139] In experimental books such as *The Soft Machine* (1961), bodies exhausted from the excesses of sex and drugs are depicted in entropic landscapes that reimagine Eliot's North Cambridge fields through a nightmarish, hallucinatory lens:

> In a green savanna stand two vast penis figures in black stone, legs and arms vestigial, slow blue smoke rings pulsing from the stone heads. A limestone

> road winds through the pillars and into The City. A rack of rusty iron and concrete set in vacant lots and rubble, dotted with chemical gardens.[140]

Burroughs's landscapes are places designed to exhaust the possibilities of language itself, textual techniques such as his famous 'cut-up' and 'fold-in' methods aiming to draw on linguistic disorder as a creative principle. The desert landscapes that feature so extensively in his writing include those of North Africa, Mexico and the American southwest and are often depicted as sites of strange fertility rituals in which we see life resurgent amidst death and decay. These barren geographies are, for Burroughs, the frontiers of a war on the agents of social and psychic control, language itself being prime among these. As Kathryn Hume observes, for Burroughs 'the city is not the metropolis of high culture but embodies the gridded spaces ruled by Control society. The desert's drought enables freedom to flourish, because lack of water renders high-density plant and human population – jungle and city – impossible'.[141]

It is mainly via Burroughs that we reach the deserts and wastelands that fill the pages of canonical postmodern authors such as Pynchon, Ballard, DeLillo, Auster and Carter. As I will show in subsequent chapters, these authors consistently return to scenes of waste and desolation. The links between the desert and postmodernism have not gone entirely without critical notice. Gersdorf, for example, points to two key non-fiction texts, both works of travel writing by Europeans, that demonstrate this link: Banham's *Scenes in America Deserta* and Baudrillard's *America*. These texts are, for Gersdorf, emblematic of a new historical moment following the 'accelerated consumption' of the postwar decades, in which space 'began to reacquire connotations of openness and imperial expansion [and] re-emerged as a geopolitical, culturally transgressive category, a development that called for new, expressive images and metaphors'.[142] For the postmodern turn, then, and whatever lies beyond it, the desert seems to provide an image of space as a new site of power, a new *imperium*, a space of death and ordeal as well as global mediatised culture.

For contemporary philosophy and theory, the link between war and the desert is often explicit. This is why philosophers interested in polemology, the discourse of war, have been drawn to the desert theme. Deleuze and Guattari described resistance to global capitalism in terms of a nomadic 'war machine' and Deleuze wrote an extensive essay on Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. Paul Virilio likewise makes frequent use of the desert to suggest contemporary convergences of war, power and media. Explaining the title of his book *Desert Screen* (1991), he remarks that

> the screen is the site of *projection of the light of images* – mirages of the geographic desert like those of the cinema. It is also the site of *projections of the force of energy* – beginning with the desert in New Mexico, the first atomic explosion at the Trinity site, and leading up to the Persian Gulf War when *the screens of the Kuwaiti and Iraqi deserts* were to be linked with the *television screens* of the entire world.[143]

The space of the contemporary image here suggests a kind of ascesis or poverty coexistent with an extreme compression of distances in an accelerated global mediascape characterised by war, mass consumption and eschatological religion. Recent works such as DeLillo's novel *Point Omega* (2010) and Reza Negarestani's remarkable blend of fiction and theory *Cyclonopedia* (2008) approach the desert in this way. In these texts, the deserts of California and Iraq respectively are used as speculative landscapes to address the 2003 war in the Persian Gulf and its aftermath. Both texts provide accounts of the intersections of geopolitics, theology and fossil fuels.

This rough sketch for a genealogy of the desert in modern literature aims to deliberately widen the parameters of what constitutes the desert as a critical object. I have also deliberately approached the desert from a global and geophilosophical rather than a local or bioregional point of view. Viewed in this way, the desert in modern literature demonstrates a concern for the Earth that breaks with the ancient idea of a (divinely created) world. While we are still within the aesthetic space of this break, the Anthropocene and the Eremozoic (or Eremocene) give it a new epochal significance. That the desert as a literary theoretical object may be able to provide an ecoaesthetic or geoaesthetic model for understanding the spatiality of the Anthropocene is one of the claims of this book, therefore. The literary authors addressed here and in subsequent chapters can be read as providing maps of this space. First, however, we need to turn our attention specifically to the question of geophilosophy.

NOTES

1. Ecocritical literary scholarship has, since Bate's seminal *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991), repeatedly returned to the Romantic period in order to construct a genealogy of contemporary ecological consciousness. Bate's work is significant because it challenged a critical orthodoxy according to which the Romantic concept of 'nature' was largely a cipher for culture or ideology. This re-evaluation, which insisted on the importance of bioregionality and local geography, coincided with the emergence of ecocriticism itself as a key critical movement. The centrality of the Romantics in all of this can, to some extent at least, be explained by a concern with the present

rather than with literary history per se. As Kate Rigby writes, 'to return to romanticism from an ecological perspective might . . . contribute to an archaeology of contemporary green thought and feeling' (Rigby, *Topographies of the Sacred*, p. 1). Recent work in this vein – for example, Ottum and Reno's edited volume *Wordsworth and the Green Romantics* (2016) and Nichols's *Beyond Romantic Ecocriticism* (2011) – underscores how the affects and images that characterise environmental discourse today are rooted in the work of the Romantics. Nevertheless, the question of how green the Romantics actually were, to paraphrase the title of an important 1996 article by Ralph Pite, is a hotly debated one. Pite's article is something of a rebuttal of Bate's view that also drives it into more complex and interesting territory. This trend has been developed by Morton, whose contribution in works such as *The Poetics of Spice: Romantic Consumerism and the Exotic* (2000) and *Ecology without Nature* (2007) has been to critique the naive environmentalism of some aspects of ecocriticism (localism and bioregionalism, for example) while insisting on the importance of the Romantics for theorising our contemporary ecological condition. In particular, he has insisted that we need to submit the Romantic aestheticisation of nature to a rigorous critique that sees it as both an expression of and a reaction to the development of capitalism. In this sense, aesthetic theory must join forces with environmental criticism. This is an approach scrutinised by Malcolm Miles's wide-ranging *Eco-Aesthetics* (2014).

2. Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, p. 13.
3. Ottum and Reno, 'Introduction: Recovering Ecology's Affects', in Ottum and Reno (eds), *Wordsworth and the Green Romantics*, pp. 1–2.
4. Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, p. 22.
5. Oliver, *Earth and World*, p. 11.
6. Hetherington, *Badlands of Modernity*, p. 4.
7. See, for example, Gersdorf's *The Poetics and Politics of the Desert*, p. 32, and Grumberg's *Place and Ideology in Contemporary Hebrew Literature*, p. 30.
8. Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, pp. 61–2.
9. Viney, *Waste*, p. 16.
10. For work on the modern aesthetics of ruins, see Edensor's *Industrial Ruins* (2005) and Hell and Schönle's edited volume *Ruins of Modernity* (2010).
11. Povinelli, *Geontologies*, p. 4.
12. Ibid. p. 17.
13. Ibid. p. 183.
14. Derrida, *On the Name*, pp. 53–4.
15. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, p. 41.
16. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 56.
17. Ibid. p. 59.
18. Levinas, 'On Maurice Blanchot', in *Proper Names*, p. 136. The opposition between the sedentary and the nomadic, so crucial for Deleuze and

Guattari, goes back to the question of Heidegger's anti-Semitism and his relation to Nazism. In his seminar from 1933–4, Heidegger makes the following remark, which is indicative of his notion of dwelling:

> people and space mutually belong to each other. From the specific knowledge of a people about the nature of its space, we first experience how nature is revealed in this people. For a Slavic people, the nature of our German space would definitely be revealed differently from the way it is revealed to us; to Semitic nomads, it will perhaps never be revealed at all. This way of being embedded in a people, situated in a people, this original participation in the knowledge of the people, cannot be taught; at most, it can be awakened from its slumber. (*Nature, History, State: 1933–1934*, p. 66)

Di Cesare argues that Heidegger's *Black Notebooks* make clear the extent to which he associated what he saw as the rootlessness of Jews with the desert of modernity:

> To the Jews, seen as the rootless agents of modernity, accused of machination to seize power, of the desertification of the earth, of uprooting peoples, condemned to be *weltlos* – worldless, 'without world' – Heidegger imputed the gravest guilt: the oblivion of Being. The Jew was a sign of the end of everything, impeding the rise of a new beginning. (*Heidegger and the Jews*, p. ix)

Levinas's notion of the nomad thus enters philosophical discourse both as a rebuttal of Heidegger's anti-Semitism and as a critique of his ontology of world. Nevertheless, the eschatological significance of the desert is not adequately accounted for by being-in-the-world as dwelling. Heidegger's thought seems to point beyond the world even as his politics roots itself in the world.

19. See the 2017 article, 'Parasite Biodiversity Faces Extinction and Redistribution in a Changing Climate', by Carlson et al.
20. Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction*, p. 198.
21. Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 85.
22. Bernard Westphal has suggested the possibilities of what he calls geocriticism, and takes direct inspiration from Deleuze and Guattari's analysis of spatiality (*Geocriticism*, p. 24). For intriguing links between ecocriticism and geocriticism, see Tally and Battista (eds), *Ecocriticism and Geocriticism: Overlapping Territories in Environmental and Spatial Literary Studies* (2016). For examples of recent non-Deleuzian work in philosophy that can be called geophilosophical, see Gaston's *The Concept of World from Kant to Derrida* (2013) and Oliver's *Earth and World* (2015).
23. Crutzen, 'Geology of Mankind', p. 23.
24. Zalasiewicz et al., 'When did the Anthropocene begin?'.
25. Lewis and Maslin, *The Human Planet*, p. 13.

26. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, p. 172.
27. Steffen, Crutzen and McNeill, 'The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?', p. 614.
28. Ashton Nichols has proposed the terms 'urbanature' and 'urbanatural' to grasp the hybridity that defines our contemporary environmental condition. See his *Beyond Romantic Ecocriticism: Toward Urbanatural Roosting*.
29. Van Wyck, *Primitives in the Wilderness*, p. 53.
30. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p. 100.
31. Morton, 'Coexistence and Coexistents: Ecology without a World', p. 168.
32. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life*, p. 10.
33. Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior of Capital*, p. 12.
34. This sounds paradoxical, but appears less so once we attend to Heidegger's argument that an essential part of our being-in-the-world involves the withdrawal of the world's worldhood. It is only when we feel that there is something wrong with the world that we notice it (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 105). To be in a world is already to be embroiled in the paradox that the more we are in it, the more we forget that fact. Claire Colebrook critiques a certain misunderstanding of Heidegger's notion of world by contemporary theorists who attempt to restore some essential link between man and world: 'there is a necessary forgetting in any disclosure of being: to experience the world as present for me, and to begin questioning – as we must – from this already given world, relies upon a hiddenness or non-revealing that we must leave behind in living the world as our own' (*Death of the PostHuman*, pp. 14–15). To think the world itself does not mean returning us to the fullness of the man–world relationship but on the contrary to the discovery of the fundamental aspect of the withdrawnness of the world that lies at its origin. For the Heidegger of 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (1935–7), this means thinking the strife or *polemos* between Earth and World as foundational for any being-in-the-world. I discuss this in Chapters 4 and 5.
35. Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, p. 2.
36. Latour, *Facing Gaia*, p. 107. Stengers writes:

> Gaia is neither Earth 'in the concrete' and nor is it she who is named and invoked when it is a matter of affirming and of making our connection to this Earth felt, of provoking a sense of belonging where separation has been predominant, and of drawing resources for living, struggling, feeling, and thinking from this belonging. It is a matter here of thinking *intrusion, not belonging*. (*In Catastrophic Times*, pp. 43–4)

37. Heidegger, 'The Thing', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 164.
38. John C. Van Dyke, *The Desert*, p. 5.

39. Morton, *Hyperobjects*, p. 99. The need for an aesthetic theory of the Anthropocene is suggested by Davis and Turpin (eds) *Art in the Anthropocene* (2015), who write in their introduction to that volume that 'art, as the vehicle of *aesthesis*, is central to thinking with and feeling through the Anthropocene' ('Art & Death: Lives Between the Fifth Assessment & the Sixth Extinction', p. 3).
40. Morton, *Humankind*, pp. 92–3.
41. Anxiety is privileged in this respect. Heidegger writes:

> when something threatening brings itself close, anxiety does not 'see' any definite 'here' or 'yonder' from which it comes. That in the face of which one has anxiety is characterized by the fact that what threatens is *nowhere*. Anxiety 'does not know' what that in the face of which it is anxious is. 'Nowhere', however, does not signify nothing: this is where any region lies, and there too lies any disclosedness of the world for essentially spatial Being-in. Therefore that which threatens cannot bring itself close from a definite direction within what is close by; it is already 'there', and yet nowhere; it is so close that it is oppressive and stifles one's breath, and yet it is nowhere. (*Being and Time*, p. 231)

For Heidegger's remarks on boredom, see *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*.

42. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 300.
43. Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, p. 159.
44. Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, p. 133.
45. Bevis, *The Road to Egdon Heath*, p. 23.
46. Ibid. p. 24; Di Palma, *Wasteland*, p. 9.
47. Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, p. 54.
48. Auden, *The Enchafèd Flood*, p. 19.
49. Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*, p. xi.
50. Lindqvist, *Desert Divers*, p. 57.
51. Graulund, 'Contrasts: A Defence of Desert Writings', p. 356.
52. Bevis, *The Road to Egdon Heath*, p. 3.
53. Cohen, 'Introduction', in *Prismatic Ecology*, p. xx.
54. Jasper, *The Sacred Desert*, p. 71.
55. Crockett and Robbins, *Religion, Politics, and the Earth*, p. xx.
56. Welland, *The Desert*, p. 17.
57. Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, p. 315.
58. Eberhardt, *In the Shadow of Islam*, p. 25.
59. Thomas and Middleton, *Desertification*, pp. 13–14.
60. For work on the origins of 'desertification' in the French colonial context, see Diana K. Davis's article, 'Desert "Wastes" of the Maghreb'.
61. Benjaminsen and Berge, 'Myths of Timbuktu', p. 52.
62. Whyte, *A Dictionary of Environmental History*, p. 143.

63. Holleman, *Dust Bowls of Empire*, p. 9. In a 2011 article for *Nature* titled 'The Next Dust Bowl', Joseph Romm writes that 'many deserts are high in biodiversity, which isn't where we're heading. "Dust-bowlification" is perhaps a more accurate and vivid term'; p. 450.
64. Gaia Vince, *Adventures in the Anthropocene*, p. 192. For a Deleuzian interpretation of desertification in African drylands, see Sian Sullivan and Katherine Homewood's article 'On Non-equilibrium and Nomadism: Knowledge, Diversity and Global Modernity in Drylands (and Beyond . . .)'.
65. Di Palma, *Wasteland*, p. 3.
66. Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, p. 54.
67. Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, p. 53.
68. Lacarrière, *Men Possessed by God*, p. 27.
69. Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, p. 50. In his classic book *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, Peter Brown writes: 'to flee "the world" was to leave a precise social structure for an equally precise and, as we shall see, an equally social alternative. The desert was a "counter-world," a place where an alternative "city" could grow'; p. 217.
70. Baudrillard, *America*, pp. 66–7.
71. Following inspiration provided by a fable from Borges, Baudrillard writes that the map precedes and produces the territory, while the territory itself is dissolved – deterritorialised – by the map:

    > The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory – *precession of simulacra* – that engenders the territory, and if one must return to the fable, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the extent of the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persist here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but ours. *The desert of the real itself*. (*Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 1)

    The Empire relates to the one in Borges's story, but it also describes, as Baudrillard points out, the imperialism of the late capitalist West. The desert of the real is thus space as *imperium*, where the inscription of the map (or signs in general) constitutes an apparatus of power. I return to these themes and to Baudrillard in Chapter 5.
72. Smithson, *The Collected Writings*, p. 8.
73. Ibid. p. 11.
74. For more on Smithson's conception of entropy, see my 2018 article 'Ballard, Smithson and the Biophilosophy of the Crystal'.
75. Wilson, *Consilience*, p. 321.
76. Wilson, *Half-Earth*, p. 20.
77. Heidegger, 'Evening Conversation', in *Country Path Conversations*, pp. 137–8. Heidegger's term *Verwüstung* is usually translated into English as 'devastation', but since it derives from *Wüste*, meaning

wasteland, it should be thought of as a general laying waste or desertification in the ontological sense by which Heidegger understands this process. An argument can be made that 'desertification' is a better translation. Di Cesare in her discussion of *Verwüstung* writes:

> one should not think of the desert that spreads, drying out and devastating everything. Desertification, which 'bursts forth' from machination, constituting its perverse, inevitable effect, is the 'installation of the desert' that enables the emptiness of the desert to expand. Thus, it is not correct to translate this term as 'drying up' or 'devastation,' not only because the reference to the 'desert' is lost, but also because it reduces the phenomenon that, if it has a political weight, nevertheless had for Heidegger ontological relevance and was inscribed within the history of Being. (*Heidegger and the Jews*, p. 99)

The English word 'desertification' is, however, synonymous with processes of soil degradation, while 'devastation' conveys the sense of non-empirical destructiveness that Heidegger intends.

78. Luke 15: 4.
79. Heidegger, 'Letter on Humanism', p. 234.
80. Atwood, 'Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet', pp. 192–3.
81. Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, p. 17. The title is, of course, a reference not only to Baudrillard but to the film *The Matrix* (1999), in which Baudrillard's phrase makes its famous cameo when the central character, having swallowed the red pill, beholds the spectacle of a post-apocalyptic world previously hidden beneath a simulated reality. One of the things Žižek's book accomplishes is to suggest – without actually mentioning him – that Baudrillard may be compatible with Lacanian theory. The hyperreal of mass consumerist society is on this view a manifestation of a 'passion for the real', the real being understood in the Lacanian sense as an excessive or violent element structurally excluded from social reality. Lacan's notion of the body as a desert, and how this relates to Deleuze and Guattari, is discussed in the next chapter.
82. Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *The Standard Edition, Vol. XVIII*, p. 62.
83. The modern Western metaphysics of space might be said to begin with Descartes and his determination of space as extended substance or *res extensa*. Lefebvre writes:

> A homogeneous and utterly simultaneous space would be strictly imperceptible. It would lack the conflictual component (always resolved, but always at least suggested) of the contrast between symmetry and asymmetry. It may as well be noted at this juncture that the architectural and urbanistic space of modernity tends precisely towards this homogeneous state of affairs, towards a place of confusion and fusion between geometrical and visual which inspires a kind of physi-

> cal discomfort. Everything is alike. Localization – and lateralization – are no more. Signifier and signified, marks and markers, are added after the fact – as decorations, so to speak. This reinforces, if possible, the feeling of desertedness, and adds to the malaise. This modern space has an analogical affinity with the space of the philosophical, and more specifically the Cartesian tradition. Unfortunately it is also the space of blank sheets of paper, drawing-boards, plans, sections, elevations, scale models, geometrical projections, and the like. (*The Production of Space*, p. 200)

84. Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p. 23.
85. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, p. 115.
86. Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, p. x.
87. Latour, 'Love Your Monsters', p. 23.
88. See, for example, Edward Relph's *Place and Placelessness* (1976) and Casey's *Getting Back into Place* (1993) and *The Fate of Place* (1997). For work on Heidegger and place, see Jeff Malpas's *Heidegger's Topology* (2006) and *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place* (2012). For a representative range of work in ecophenomenology, see the edited volume by Charles Brown and Ted Toadvine, *Eco-Phenomenology* (2003).
89. Casey, *The Fate of Place*, p. xi. Casey contends that Heidegger's conception of place is inextricable from the *polis*, the Greek term for city-state that Heidegger understands as the place of historical Dasein. Casey is right when he maintains that this conjunction of place and *polis* is conflicted in Heidegger's work. He points, for example, to certain passages in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* where Heidegger implicitly praises Hitler as a violence-doer who leaves or transgresses the limits of the *polis* in a historical venture to become '*apolis*', a ruler without limits (*An Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 152). In this sense, Heidegger's admiration for *deviations* from the containing nature of place and *polis* are in line with his support for Nazism. Casey argues that it is Heidegger's lack of fidelity to notions of dwelling articulated in 'The Origin of the Work of Art' and elsewhere that demonstrates how his thought was led astray by Nazism (Casey, *The Fate of Place*, pp. 261–4). But this is to ignore, first, that Heideggerian dwelling is undeniably steeped in Nazi 'blood and soil' ideology, and second, how the state necessarily oversteps its own bounds in the process of expansion. I develop these points through Deleuze and Guattari's work in Chapter 2 and Chapter 5.
90. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 234.
91. Morton, *Humankind*, p. 91.
92. Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, p. 21.
93. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 179.
94. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, p. 184.
95. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, p. 248.
96. Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, p. 59.

97. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, p. 77.
98. Ibid. p. 51.
99. Ibid. p. 41.
100. Levinas, *Proper Names*, p. 137.
101. Heidegger, 'Overcoming Metaphysics', in *The End of Philosophy*, p. 104.
102. Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, pp. 29–30.
103. Schneidau, *Sacred Discontent*, p. 143.
104. Renan, quoted in Debray, *God*, p. 39.
105. Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, p. 69.
106. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, p. 120.
107. Derrida, 'Faith and Knowledge', pp. 42–3.
108. Ibid. p. 76.
109. Derrida's final seminar focuses on Defoe's novel and mentions Deleuze. I address the two philosophers' different approaches to the Robinson myth in Chapter 4.
110. Gaston, *The Concept of World from Kant to Derrida*, p. 28.
111. It should be noted that the concept of territory, so central to Deleuze and Guattari's work, originates with psychoanalysis. See, for example, Lacan's discussion of the territorial behaviour of sticklebacks in his 1955–6 seminar on the psychoses (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book III*, pp. 93–4).
112. Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, pp. 86–7.
113. Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 3.
114. Ibid. p. 74.
115. Ibid. p. 60.
116. Ibid. p. 61.
117. Ibid. p. 68.
118. Goldsmith, 'The Deserted Village', in *Poems and Plays*, lines 35–46.
119. Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 78.
120. Ibid. p. 79.
121. Ibid. p. 79.
122. Williams, *Culture and Materialism*, p. 79.
123. Ibid. p. 80.
124. Ibid. p. 81.
125. Auden, *The Enchafèd Flood*, p. 15.
126. Shelley, *Queen Mab*, in *The Major Works*, VIII, lines 70–6.
127. Morton, *Shelley and the Revolution of Taste*, pp. 87–8.
128. Economides, *The Ecology of Wonder in Romantic and Postmodern Literature*, p. 101.
129. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 340.
130. Deleuze, *Lectures on Leibniz*.
131. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 338–9.
132. Morton, *Shelley and the Revolution of Taste*, p. 87.
133. Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, p. xi.

134. Eliot, 'The Waste Land', in *The Poems of T. S. Eliot, Vol. 1*, V, lines 368–9.
135. Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, p. xi.
136. Eliot, 'The Waste Land', I, l. 22.
137. Viney, *Waste*, p. 83.
138. Eliot, 'Second Caprice in North Cambridge', in *The Poems of T. S. Eliot, Vol. 1*, lines 1–12.
139. While Burroughs stated that his friend and collaborator Brion Gysin was the one who originated the famous cut-up technique – by which he would scramble syntactic and narrative linearity by randomly rearranging his own writing along with literary and non-literary texts of various kinds – he saw Eliot as being the first major writer to have exploited the collage principle on which it was based: 'when you think of it, "The Waste Land" was the first great cut-up collage' (Burroughs and Gysin, *The Third Mind*, p. 33).
140. Burroughs, *The Soft Machine*, p. 66.
141. Hume, 'William S. Burroughs's Phantasmic Geography', p. 113.
142. Gersdorf, 'America/Deserta', p. 243.
143. Virilio, *Desert Screen*, p. 135.