MYTHIC NOISE: ARCHITECTURES OF GEOLOGICAL COMMUNICATION ADAM NOCEK

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Geocommunication technology—this is likely to call to mind geoinformational tools capable of aggregating, synthesizing and communicating complex geological, atmospheric, and infrastructural data to a variety of stakeholders concerned with planetary systems at a variety of scales.¹ Such a notion might also encompass satellite technologies—geostationary and low earth orbit (LEO) satellites, for instance—that have had important applications in weather forecasting, planetary telecommunications, defence and intelligence systems.² One might also be inclined to think more broadly about geocommunication in terms of the multiple layers of planetary-scale computing that exist simultaneously, as well as the new systems of planetary governance that have emerged in their wake.³ Whatever the case, geocommunication tends to call up notions of highly sophisticated computational systems that gather, store, and process data about earth systems at multiple spatial and temporal scales.

What we usually do not associate with geocommunication technologies, however, are low-tech and/or analogue methods for information transfer. And we certainly do not associate systems of oral communication that flourished in prehistoric and pre-modern eras with a modern technics of geocommunication. But that is exactly what I claim here, or rather, I demonstrate that myths about geological transformations and natural disasters are a part of the intellectual genealogy of modern geocommunicational media. In many ways, this is new territory for the humanities. While media studies have become ever more attentive to the materiality of media by unearthing new connections to geological systems⁴ and science studies has made room in its epistemologies for mythmaking and non-modern practices more generally,⁵ the humanities and social sciences have yet to see mythmaking through the lens of geocommunicational media.

- 1 See for instance, Anuj, Karpatne, Imme Ebert-Uphoff, Sai Ravea, Hassan Ali Babaie, and Vipin Kumar, *Machine Learning for the Geosciences: Challenges and Opportunities*; Hua-Dong Guo, Li Zhang, Lan-Wei Zhu, “Earth Observation Big Data for Climate Change Research”; NRC (National Research Council), *Earth Observations from Space: the First 50 Years of Scientific Achievements; and Communicating Environmental Geoscience – Special Publication no 305 (Geological Society Special Publication)*, edited by David Gordon Earl Liverman, C. G. Pereira, and Brian Marker (London: The Geological Society, 2008).
- 2 See for instance, Huadong Guo, Wenxue Fu, Xinwu Li, Pei Chen, Guang Liu, Zhen Li, et al., ‘Research on Global Change Scientific Satellites’, *Science China Earth Sciences*, 57.2 (2014), 204–15 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11430-013-4748-5>> and Huadong Guo, Lizhe Wang, Fang Chen, and Dong Liang, ‘Scientific Big Data and Digital Earth’, *Chinese Science Bulletin*, 59.35 (2014), 5066–73 <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11434-014-0645-3>>
- 3 Benjamin H. Bratton, *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).
- 4 See Sean Cubitt, *Finite Media: Environmental Implications of Digital Technologies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); and Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).
- 5 See Isabelle Stengers, ‘Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices’, *Cultural Studies Review*, Vol. 11, no. 1, 2005; and Latour, Bruno, ‘Facing Gaia’, *Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2017).

In what follows, I flesh this connection out by showing how a very specific information architecture underwrites the practices of the rapidly growing field of geomythology in the earth sciences, an architecture that in many ways guarantees its participation in the long lineage of geocommunication technologies. What I go on to demonstrate, however, with the help of Afrofuturist film, the work by François Laruelle, Isabelle Stengers, and others, is that this lineage also presupposes a deeply colonialist conception of noise that primes us to ask whether there are other communicative, or perhaps post-communicative, architectures for geomythic media. In the concluding sections of this chapter, I propose one such architecture that is liable to open up new post-communicative genealogies for myth.

MYTH: A NOISY CHANNEL

The field of geomythology has emerged in recent years as a hotbed of research activity, especially as the earth sciences scramble to piece together histories of the planet that predate modern scientific thought.⁶ Although geomythological methods of scientific inquiry have been around for centuries (Robert Hooke, for instance, used myths about land formations from Plato, Virgil, and others to buttress his theory about geological transformations; and the father of palaeontology, Georges Cuvier, drew on Native American legends about petrified bones to support his research into fossilization⁷), the geologist, Dorothy Vitaliano, was the first to identify it as a legitimate scientific field in 1968.⁸ And in the past ten years, geomythology has begun to capture the imagination of many earth and atmospheric scientists as they endeavour to cobble together a comprehensive theory of the earth's transformations over time.⁹

In its most basic formulation, the science of geomythology seeks to extract verifiable facts about the earth's prehistoric and pre-modern history from out of the explanations dreamed up by civilizations that did not have the benefit of modern scientific methods. So for instance, Plato's *Timaeus* and *Critias* include the earliest references to the myth of Atlantis, and scientists have determined that this story accurately depicts changes in landmasses and coastlines. Similarly, Noah's flood in the Book of Genesis actually describes, "postglacial melting elevated sea levels to the extent

6 See for instance, L. Piccardi, and W.B. Masse (eds.). *Myth and Geology: Geological Society Special Publication 273*. (London: The Geological Society, 2007)

7 See Adrienne Mayor, 'Geomythology', In *Encyclopedia of Geology*, eds. Richard Selley, Robin Cocks, and Ian Palmer (San Diego: Elsevier Science Publishing Co Inc., 2004).

8 See Dorothy Vitaliano, 'Geomythology: Geological Origins of Myths and Legends', In Piccardi, L and W.B. Masse (eds.). *Myth and Geology: Geological Society Special Publication 273* and Dorothy Vitaliano, *Legends of the Earth: The Geologic Origins* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973).

9 In a forthcoming article, 'Geology, Myth, Media', I offer a more thorough investigation of the methods and aims of this field, especially as they relate to modern scientific epistemology. See Adam Nocek, 'Geology, Myth, Media', *SubStance* 146, Vol. 47, no. 2, (2018).

that the Mediterranean broke through into the Black Sea depression, drowning out so many settlements that a universal flood legend resulted.”¹⁰ Countless other geomyths are now the subject of serious scientific scrutiny that aims to track down “the actual geologic origins of natural phenomena which were long explained in terms of myth and folklore.”¹¹

There is much more that could be said about the methods and aims of this relatively young science.¹² But in what follows I want to identify two fundamental assumptions regarding the design of geomythic communication that guarantee myth’s relevance for modern scientific epistemology. In each assumption, we witness the emergence of a communication architecture capable of divesting the mythic statement of what distinguishes it from the scientific statement.

FIG 1
*The Last Angel of
History*, dir. John
Akomfrah (1996)

1. *Geomythologists presume the truth of a classical information theory.* According to the editors of the 2007 Special Publication of the Geological Society titled, *Geology and Myth*, scientists aim to decode the “encoded memories of past geological events” as a part of a general strategy to collate scattered and fragmented planetary memories in ways that are legible to scientific thought.¹³ What this means,

¹⁰ See Vitaliano, “Geomythology,” 4.

¹¹ According to Vitaliano, there are really two kinds of geological myths. The myth is either a story about “some geologic feature or the occurrence of some geologic phenomena has inspired a folklore explanation” or it is a “garbled explanation of some actual geologic event, usually a natural catastrophe” (Piccardi, L. ‘Preface,’ *Myth and Geology: Geological Society Special Publication 273*, (London: The Geological Society, 2007) vii; see also Vitaliano, “Geomythology”).

¹² See Piccardi, and Masse *Myth and Geology* for a careful and comprehensive assessment of the methods and stakes of geomythology.

¹³ See Piccardi, “Preface,” vii.

according to W. Bruce Masse and his colleagues, is that “mythology is the function of oral transmission of linguistically encoded data”; and thus “myths are not just silly ‘cultural fiction,’ they are carriers of information...” even though “[r]ecovering that information is not always easy or even possible.”¹⁴ The debt to classical information theory should be clear: Just as Claude Shannon demonstrates in his seminal paper from 1948, *A Mathematical Theory of Communication*, how a sender encodes a message into a signal so that it can be transmitted across a channel and decoded by a receiver, and in doing so attempts to resolve how to “reproduc[e] at one point, either exactly or approximately, a message selected at another point,”¹⁵ likewise, pre-modern myths are thought to encode (original) messages about planetary events that can be now decoded by contemporary scientists.

This is precisely why geologists and archaeologists claim that only scientists, instead of literary and cultural theorists, can appreciate the efficacy of myths. These stories carry valuable information from another epoch; they are not *mere* historically and culturally situated fictions.¹⁶ Where humanities scholars fixate on the situated and fictional aspects of myth, scientists, by contrast, pay special attention to how they are transhistorical couriers of information. Geological myths are like time capsules designed to communicate with future geoaarcheologists. This is not unlike the communicative scenario that John Akomfrah imagines in his seminal docufiction, *The Last Angel of History* (1996). Where the drum is depicted as a mythological Afrofuturist technology that communicates across distant times and spaces (the drum “sound covered the distance between the old and the new world”), and provides acoustic messages from premodern Africa to a technoscientific future, likewise the geological myth is a communication technology, a mythic media device, for connecting the ancient past to the present and future.¹⁷ What the scientists’ wager, then, is that this mythic communication device is designed in order to permit ancient messages to be decoded by modern scientists.

14 W. B. Masse, Elizabeth Wayland Barber, Luigi Piccardi, and Paul T. Barber, ‘Exploring the Nature of Myth and Its Role in Science’, in Piccardi, L and W.B. Masse (eds.), *Myth and Geology: Geological Society Special Publication 273* (London: The Geological Society, 2007), 18.

15 Shannon, Claude E., ‘A Mathematical Theory of Communication’, Bell Labs Innovations. Repr. with corrections from *Bell System Technical Journal* 27 (1948). Available at: <http://affect-reason-utility.com/1301/4/shannon1948.pdf>. (Accessed on December 2017), 1.

16 See Masse et al., ‘Exploring the Nature of Myth and Its Role in Science’, 9. After discussing the history of myth and its many theories (from antiquity to hermeneutics and post-structuralism), they conclude that “these [theories] have one fundamental shared characteristic—none is seemingly willing to suggest that a real observed natural process or event may lie at the core of myth storylines” (ibid., 13). See my discussion of this in ‘Geology, Myth, Media’.

17 See Francesca Royster, *Sounding Like a No-No: Queer Sounds and Eccentric Acts in the Post-Soul Era* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2013), 169.

FIG 2
Stringing telephone
wire on a tree
in Enewetak Atoll,
Marshall Islands,
c. 1944.

2. *Myths are noise.* This assertion may come as a surprise given that geological myths are also communication devices carrying messages from distant pasts. And yet a myth is only valuable to geoaarcheologists and other scientists insofar as those elements in the narrative that bear the mark of situated and poetic figurations of the earth's processes are muted or otherwise controlled so that a scientifically verifiable message can be extracted from it.

In the Shannon communication model, noise refers to any physical disturbance to the transmission of information. This disturbance is not outside of the overall communication model, however; rather, it is a part of communication system as such.¹⁸ Though Shannon's paper identifies

¹⁸ In reference to Shannon's communication model Jussi Parikka rightly notes that "even though noise is seen as coming from the outside and invading the mediating powers of a communicative act, it is still is diagrammed in the same image, as an integral part of the system. Hence it is accorded a position within the diagrammatic framework instead as residing as pure noise outside of the communication act" (Parikka, Jussi. *A Geology of Media*. Of course the image Parikka is referring to is the classic diagram of a general communication system that Shannon develops in his seminal paper, 'A Mathematical Theory of Communication' (Figure 1).

various kinds of “noiseless systems”—even offering a theorem for a “noiseless channel”¹⁹—communication is generally seen to be a noisy process, and so the noise in any given communication system has to be measured and managed. To this end, Shannon’s “noisy channel coding theory” was able to show how every channel has a maximum capacity to transmit error-free messages.²⁰ This is even true for channels with low-bandwidth, or channels that are determined to be excessively noisy. In these instances, error-free communication of discrete data is achievable provided that the maximum capacity has not been exceeded. What’s more, Shannon also describes how the error detection and correction techniques, first developed by Richard W. Hamming, and later synthesized in his paper, *Error Detecting and Correcting Codes* (1950), may be applied to the communication system to retrieve the original message that may have been contaminated.²¹

My hypothesis is that what we see happening in the field of geo-mythology is the deployment of error detection and correction techniques to retrieve messages that have been corrupted. Mythical stories are noisy channels for geological messages. Scientists endeavour to detect and restore what has been “garbled” (*sic*) through mythical communication.²² What’s at stake here is washing the message clean of those elements that would prevent it from being verified by scientists, or in other words, those culturally situated modes of making sense of geologic and atmospheric phenomena. In short, the wager is that the message can be cleansed of its ‘superstition’. This epistemological stance is precisely what motivates Masse and his colleagues’ telling assertion that, “myths are not just silly ‘cultural fiction,’ they are carriers of information...” (cited above); or Vitaliano’s claim that geological myths often contain “the garbled explanation of some actual geologic event, usually a natural catastrophe.”²³ Scientists are betting on the fact that the noisy interferences of situated knowledge can be detected and controlled so

19 See Shannon, ‘A Mathematical Theory of Communication’, 9.

20 Also known as Shannon’s Theorem or the Shannon-Hartley Theorem that was based on the work of Ralph Hartley. See Ralph Hartley, ‘Transmission of Information I’, *Bell System Technical Journal*, 7.3 (1928), 535–63 <<https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1538-7305.1928.tb01236.x>>

21 See Shannon, ‘A Mathematical Theory of Communication’, 27. Also see Richard W. Hamming, ‘Error Detecting and Correcting Codes’, *The Bell System Technical Journal*, vol. 29, no. 2, (1950); and Thomas M. Thompson, *From Error-Correcting Codes through Sphere Packings to Simple Groups*, Vol. 21. (Washington, D.C.: The Mathematical Association of America, 1983).

22 As Luigi Piccardi insists, the “interpretation of geological folklore, to be correctly and exhaustively carried out, requires the integration of knowledge in the fields of geology, archeology, history, comparative mythology, and anthropology” (Piccardi, ‘Preface’, vii). For this reason, “the process of extracting from myth such records of natural events and processes in most cases will not be easy” (Masse et al., ‘Exploring the Nature of Myth and Its Role in Science’, 25).

23 *Ibid.*, vii.

that error-free communication can be forged between the past and present. The wager is that geological myths can be placed in very same lineage as other forms of modern geocommunication, with the caveat that a great deal of error detection and correction will have to be carried out, and this will likely happen at the intersection of multiple disciplines.²⁴

In the ideal scenario, myths that are cleansed of their subjective and cultural mediation can bring the geological and atmospheric past into full view for scientists. These are messages capable of standing up to the careful and rigorous scrutiny of scientists because they have proven themselves to be thought independent. They index a planetary past that is fully independent of the historically and culturally situated subjects who produced them.²⁵ The situated, felt, and poetic modes of sense making, or in other words, all those things that distinguish mythic statements from scientific ones, are noisy interferences that disrupt the communication of verifiable information about the earth's prehistoric and premodern history.

So if there is indeed some resonance between the mythic time capsule dreamed up by geomythologists and the mythic drum depicted in Akomfrah's film, then we cannot confuse or conflate their political projects. Where there is an all but explicit "ethnic cleansing" of the message in the communicative architecture presupposed by geomythologists,²⁶ the percussive communication technologies fabricated in *The Last Angel of History* build a continuity between the past and future of the African diasporic condition. Such communicative technics emerge out the need to piece together the fragments of *alien(ated)* black experience rather than out of the desire to build an objective modern history. And so what amounts to noisy interference for geomythologists, namely, stories about the experience of situated subjects, is precisely what is brought into sharp focus through the new sonic mythology that Akomfrah fabricates.

POST-COMMUNICATIVE MYTHIC MEDIA

I want to start this section with a question: Might there be another way to think about the efficacy of geological myths outside of, or perhaps adjacent to, a genealogy of geocommunicative media? While this

²⁴ Ibid.; see note 22.

²⁵ There are interesting resonances between what Quentin Meillassoux's claims in *After Finitude* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), especially his attempt to think a Real independent of, or decorrelated from, all thought, and the work of geomythologists, or at least the latter's commitment to a mythical statement that can index a geological time and space independent of the thought that produced it.

²⁶ In his essay, 'Fragment from The Message Is Murder', *Social Text*, 34.3 128 (2016), 137–52, Johnathan Beller explains that Shannon's communication model produces the "structural exclusion of social difference," and "the weighted bias against nonnormative, which is to say nonhegemonic, signification ..." (Johnathan Beller, 'Fragment from The Message Is Murder', *Social Text*, September 2016; 34.3 128 (2016), 151).

lineage uncovers the mytho-technics of geomythology, this technics is also inseparable from the colonial violence of Western science and technology.²⁷ In short, classical communication theory is inadequate for addressing the situated practices of geomythic storytelling: It performs an “ethnic cleansing of the message.” To unpack what an alternative to this communicative framework might mean, I want to entertain the following hypothesis: that communication might not be an adequate model for addressing the value of geological myths—in any era. Why, for instance, do we assume that geological myths must communicate something in order for them to be important to our thinking about the earth’s processes? Clearly, the deeper issue here has to do with what we take to be Reality and whether it is inherently communicable.

François Laruelle writes about the philosophical presumption of “sufficient communication” in his 1987 (translated 2010) essay, *The Truth According to Hermes: Theorems on the Secret and Communication*. He begins this short and provocative piece by noting that, “[t]he unitary or dominant way of thinking is that of a generalized hermeneutics, a hermetology. The economy of hermetology and its most general structure are both those of a ‘difference’. Hermetological Difference is the indissoluble correlation, the undecidable coupling of truth and its communication.”²⁸ Laruelle goes on to demonstrate the deep and abiding correlation between communication and truth in philosophical thought, and then proposes that,

[n]early all philosophers were the mailmen of truth, and they diverted the truth for reasons less to do with the secret than with authoritarian censure. Meaning, always more meaning! Information, always more information! Such is the mantra of hermetological difference, which mixes together truth and communication, the real and information. The most extreme version of this hermetological ambiguity is the Hegelian and Nietzschean principle: The real is communicational, the communicational is real. It is in the omnipresent effectiveness of communication that hermetology itself deteriorates.²⁹

For Laruelle, the crucial point is not only does philosophy assume that everything is philosophizable according to the Principle of Sufficient

27 On colonization and science, see Kavita Philip’s groundbreaking, *Civilizing Natures: Race, Resources, and Modernity in Colonial South India* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003); and Susantha Goonatilake’s insightful, *Global Science: Mining Civilizational Knowledge*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana U Press, 1998).

28 Laruelle, François, “The Truth According to Hermes: Theorems on the Secret and Communication”, trans. Alexander Galloway. *Parrhesia* (2010), 19.

29 Ibid., 22.

Philosophy,³⁰ but that it is also communicable via a communicational decision; and in some ways, writes Eugene Thacker, the latter “is even more insidious than the philosophical decision.”³¹ Laruelle’s own non-philosophical stance, as it plays out across his works and in his very particular vocabulary, is unmistakably committed to radical immanence, as there is no transcendent ‘Real’, since it is everywhere and all pervasive. Hence, Laruelle is in many ways a part of the same French intellectual genealogy as Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Henry, and other thinkers of immanence.³² However, and this is one of the crucial differences, the Real or the One is completely inaccessible for Laruelle; it does not manifest itself, it is not given to thought or experience, and is therefore withdrawn, and equally so for all thought and practice.³³

There is no thought *of* the One in Laruelle, only *from* the One, or as “Vision-in-One.”³⁴ The Real is ‘unilateral’; it is unaffected by any thought or representations of it, although they nevertheless all proceed *from* it. In this context, Deleuze, the philosopher of immanence *par excellence*, still instates the sufficiency of philosophy for Laruelle: In Deleuze (and Deleuze and Guattari) immanence is not radical enough, which is to say, *given without givenness*. Immanence is *given* to itself through philosophical intellection: The evolving duality of philosophical concepts—virtual and actual, molar and molecular, and so on—is what produces the plane of immanence that it must nevertheless presuppose for its existence.³⁵ For Laruelle, in contrast, the Real is radically immanent, it is already given, but is not philosophizable and cannot be communicated to thought.

30 According to Laruelle, “philosophy is regulated in accordance with a principle higher than that of Reason: *the Principle of sufficient philosophy*. The latter expresses philosophy’s absolute autonomy, its essence as self-positing/donating/naming/deciding/grounding, etc. It guarantees philosophy’s command of the regional disciplines and sciences. Ultimately, it articulates the idealist pretension of philosophy as that which is able to at least co-determine that Real, which is most radical (Laruelle, François, ‘A Summary of Non-Philosophy’, trans. Ray Brassier, in *Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy* 8 (1999) 138–139).

31 Eugene Thacker, ‘Dark Media’, in *Excommunication: Three Inquiries into Media and Mediation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 124.

32 See John Mullarkey, especially *Post-Continental Philosophy: An Outline* (London: Continuum, 2007), as well as *All Thoughts are Equal: Laruelle and Nonhuman Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

33 See Laruelle, ‘The Truth According to Hermes’, 22; and François Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, trans. Taylor Adkins (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2013).

34 See Laruelle, *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy*, 33–78.

35 In *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), Deleuze and Guattari explain that immanence is both the ground of the philosophical concept and constructed by the concept. Hence, immanence is presupposed by the concept but it does not preexist it, which is to say that the plane of immanence is constructed as the presupposed ground of philosophical thought. See *What is Philosophy?*, 78.

Laruelle's work has profound implications for media and communication theory. And as I have written about elsewhere,³⁶ it is in an effort to disentangle the Real and its communication that Alexander Galloway, Eugene Thacker, and McKenzie Wark co-author *Excommunication: Three Inquires in Media and Mediation*. Drawing on Laruelle, both together and separately, they explain that any and all communication is always already an excommunication (or xenocommunication³⁷) of some sort. Where media theory (and philosophy more generally) tends to presume the sufficiency of communication as a model for media, they want to draw attention to broader practices of mediation (where media devices are only one species of media) and how this challenges the fundamental assumption, at least in the West, that "communication is possible and even desirable... that 'there will have always been communication,' even before a single word has been uttered? A common language, a common ground, an agreed-upon topic and rules of engagement... so much has already taken place prior to the first words being uttered or the first message being sent."³⁸

To suspend the sufficiency of communication, and to put forward a model of excommunication, "does not simply destroy communication, but evokes the *impossibility* of communication, the *insufficiency* of communication as a model. In this way, excommunication is prior to the very possibility of communication."³⁹ This does not mean that nothing is communicated, and that we are living in vacuum-sealed capsules with no information exchange whatsoever, rather, and far more provocatively, it means that any and all communication also harbours the annihilation of its own communication. "Every communication," they go onto insist, "evokes a possible excommunication that would instantly annul it. Every communication harbours the dim awareness of an excommunication that is prior to it, that conditions it and makes it all the more natural. Excommunication—before a single word has been said."⁴⁰

In the short space that remains, I won't take us any further down the rabbit hole of Laruellian thought, and the possible media theory that follows from it; I leave it to others to be our guides through these murky waters.⁴¹ I would, however, like to pay special attention to how the insufficiency of communication might function as a proposition for us

36 In 'Geology, Myth, Media', I generate a more elaborate framework for thinking about the relation between geomythic fabrication in a non/excommunicative framework, as well as how it relates to Isabelle Stengers' work on Gaia (see below).

37 See McKenzie Wark, 'Furious Media: A Queer History of Heresy', in *Excommunication: Three Inquiries into Media and Mediation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

38 Alexander Galloway, Eugene Thacker, and McKenzie Wark, 'Introduction: Execrable Media', in *Excommunication: Three Inquiries into Media and Mediation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 10.

39 Ibid., 16.

40 Ibid., 10–11.

41 See Alexander Galloway, *Laruelle: Against the Digital* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

instead of true statement about the communicative act. A proposition, writes Alfred North Whitehead, is neither true nor false in itself, but it is rather a lure for feeling the world differently, and its efficacy is determined by what it does, by what it makes possible to feel and think.⁴² And it is in this spirit that I want to entertain how the insufficiency of communication, the fact that all communication also harbours its own impossibility, might function as an opportunity to think about the efficacy of geological myths today outside of a communicative framework.

To see what might be at stake here, it's worth looking to Isabelle Stengers' most recent work that centres on the problem of climate change and more specifically on how to fabricate responses to the threat the earth poses to human and nonhuman life.⁴³ Like many other theorists, she bemoans the faith that so many of us place in mathematical models and information technologies to answer questions that we pose to them about the history and transformation of the earth's surface environments. The threat that these technologies announce "has no face," Stengers writes; rather, scientists propose "a complex interrelated set of models and data" that are incapable of addressing themselves to the lives, experiences, and situated practices of those who are so dramatically affected by the changes on the earth's surface.⁴⁴ And yet Stengers insists that there can be no aggregation of perspectives, no collating or synthesizing of data points—from science and elsewhere—in order to forge a coherent, if always evolving, perspective on the whole.⁴⁵ And it is precisely insofar as geomythology—*qua* scientific discipline—finds itself embedded in this discursive and epistemic space of aggregation that it is captured by the very same abstractive operations as mathematical modelling.

What Stengers drives home for us is that the earth is *mute* concerning our requests for it to be understood, to our desperate pleas for it to manifest itself, to give itself over to comprehension, however partial and incomplete that givenness may be.⁴⁶ This is why she insists that the earth—named, Gaia—intrudes in our lives but it is indifferent to us and our requests, it does not offer an explanation for itself, nor does it prescribe

42 Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: Corrected Edition*, edited by D. R. Griffin and D. W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978 [1927–28]), 178.

43 See Isabelle Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism*, trans. by Andrew Goffey. (Open Humanities Press, 2015); and Isabelle Stengers, 'Gaia: The Urgency to Think (and Feel)'. Delivered in Rio de Janeiro, September 2014. Available at: <https://osmilnombresdegaiia.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/isabelle-stengers.pdf> (Accessed December 2017).

44 See Stengers, 'Gaia: The Urgency to Think (and Feel)', 2.

45 See Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times* and Adam Nocek, 'On the Risk of Gaia for an Ecology of Practices', in *SubStance: A Review of Theory and Literary Criticism* 146. Vol. 47, no. 2 (2018).

46 Stengers: "their Gaia [the scientists'] is definitively mute for what concerns the answer to be given to the question she imposes on us. She has no unifying power other than to authorize sounding the alarm" (Stengers, 'Gaia: The Urgency to Think (and Feel)', 3).

a course of action or adequate response.⁴⁷ The earth is *given without givenness*, as Laruelle would say. What is at stake in this hypothesis is that there actually is no possibility for sufficient communication with the earth's surface environments, every geocommunicative act always already harbours its own insufficiency, which is to say that the communicative act is haunted by the fact that no common ground has actually been forged, which is the very presumption of communicative acts as such.

What's so striking then about the geological myths featured in the field of geomythology is that anything that deters the narrative from communicating verifiable information about the earth's history is deemed to be a noisy interference. But what I want to suggest here, and in conversation with both Laruelle and Stengers, no matter how dissimilar their intellectual projects appear to be, is that the inverse of this is actually true: The efficacy of geological myths might actually lie in their capacity to bring their own situatedness and therefore insufficiency for communicating planetary processes into sharp focus. Those elements deemed to be *noisy* interferences to the science of geomythology, and therefore to modern science more generally, are actually the ingredients that resist providing a global or totalizing perspective on planetary phenomena. Mythic *noise* is what is most relevant.

In this view, geomythic communication always harbours its own insufficiency for communicating global climate transformations, the timescale of geological epochs, the emergence and fate of the 'Anthropocene', and so on. These myths are from somewhere, rooted in a specific historical and cultural milieu, and addressed to someone, instead of from nowhere and therefore capable of speaking on behalf of a planetary whole. Thus, any attempt to frame planetary events in mythic form is already an insufficient communication of the earth's processes.⁴⁸ They are stories catalysed *by* the earth, expressions and enactments of sense making that are produced out of humans engaging with and being shaped by the earth's transformations, but they are incapable of speaking on behalf *of* the earth. Perhaps then geomyths perform a non- or even post-communicative mediation of planetary phenomena? Finding the right media-mythic vocabulary will require much more fine-tuning, but the hope is that it would be able to flesh out how the post-communicative architectures of mythic media are capable of impacting us today.

47 Stengers writes that *Gaia* is "blind to the damage she causes" (Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times*, 43). Indeed, she is "indifferent to our reasons and our projects" (47), and she is "herself is not threatened unlike the considerable number of living species who will be swept away with unprecedented speed by the change in their milieu that is on the horizon" (46).

48 Please see *Dust and Shadow*, a design-research collaboration among FoAM (Earth), the Laboratory for Critical Technics (Arizona State University) and the Global Institute of Sustainability (Arizona State University), for an attempt to design mythic propositions for engaging the unacknowledged dimensions of urban desertification in the American southwest: <https://fo.am/dust-and-shadow/>

I want to end this chapter with a final thought concerning Stengers' own invocation of the Gaia myth. We might speculate that Stengers is already helping us to think through what geomyths might mean for us today as a part of genealogy of geocommunicative media. Stengers' Gaia is a myth explicitly fabricated in the midst of a historical and cultural milieu—it is constructed *par le milieu* in Gilles Deleuze's sense⁴⁹—that no longer has the privilege of forgetting about the threat the earth poses to life and that has been thoroughly cleansed of the efficacy of myth for addressing this threat.⁵⁰ Her myth has no quasi-scientific pretension that aims to communicate verifiable facts about the interconnectedness of the earth's surface environments as James Lovelock's or Lynn Margulis' Gaia seems to.⁵¹ Stengers' Gaia is a geofiction that is not beholden to the same communicative project. Rather, her wager, I'm almost tempted to suggest, is that this fiction is capable of communicating the impossibility of communication with the earth, and on this basis, ask whether and to what extent this provides the ground for a very different relation to the earth's surface environments, one that is attuned to what a mythic practice does, to what its effects are, instead of whether it has an appropriate signal-to-noise ratio.

My final provocation then is this: that Stengers, along with Laruelle, provide the ingredients for a *mytho-praxis* of geomythology. Such a mytho-praxis would determine the relevancy of a myth based on what it does, what it makes possible, how it transforms our sensibilities—it is a *doing*—and not whether it is conformal to a pre-existent model. Not only does such a mytho-praxis align with what Whitehead says about the proposition (that its relevancy is determined by what it does), and so leaves open the possibility that myths are *propositional media*, but it also opens up a very different genealogy for geomythology: one that places geomyth in an increasingly important lineage of practices (such as those imagined in *The Last Angel of History*) that are noisy interferences to the technics of geocommunication.

49 See Isabelle Stengers, 'Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices', in *Cultural Studies Review*, Vol. 11, no. 1 (2005).

50 See Stengers, *In Catastrophic Times*, 49.

51 *Ibid.*, 47.