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Chapter 14

Fictioning Great War Island

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Abstract

This chapter looks at Great War Island, a river island located in Belgrade, Serbia. The island's name comes from its role as the historical site from which to stage attacks on the city, yet the warfare the island represents in popular imagination is ongoing: over ecological preservation, capital investment in the city, and as a potential site for sourcing fresh water. Rather than pursue the seeming opposition between ecology and capital, the chapter investigates the island through the notions of fiction (inherent in Gilles Deleuze's 'Desert Islands') and 'fictioning' (as developed by David Burrows and Simon O'Sullivan) to ask what it might mean to speak of a queer institution of second origins of the world – and what role architecture assumes in the institution of worlds as well as in their *un-institution*.

[Fig 14.1 here]

Great War Island is a river island located in Belgrade, Serbia, formed around several pillars of sediment that coalesced and eventually acquired stability at the meeting of the Sava with the Danube. It emerged in historical records in the 15th century and remains an unstable, dynamic formation to this day. Since the 1960s alone, it is said to have grown by one fifth of its surface, while its northern tip is still occasionally having to be separated from the main banks of the river to allow for the flow-through of river waters.

Great War Island represents a minor example of what an island is, and how it can be understood. It is a river island, rather than oceanic or bounded by seas; made of silt and held together by vegetation, rather than through the geological drama of volcanic or continental islands, with their more solid and solidified characteristics. Small and relatively insignificant, Great War Island is hardly convincing in its attempts at permanence. And yet, it remains central to the stories and histories the city of Belgrade has been telling itself over the centuries.

When observed from the elevated and highly representative vantage point of Kalemegdan Park, the island appears uninhabited: a pristine green territory unmarred by human activity. But its north-western tip holds a seasonally accessible sand beach (Lido), and a series of improvised wooden dwellings are hidden in the thicket, inhabited by aspirational

‘Robinsons’, as they are routinely referred to in the media. The island was occupied in such an impermanent manner at various points throughout its history and remains associated with a romanticised idea of being within the city yet beyond its grasp. It represents nature itself – desert island as a green oasis – which avian and fish species use as an invaluable point of rest in their continental migrations, and the site of spawning in their reproductive cycles.

The island’s name comes from its role as the site from which to stage attacks on the city, perhaps most memorably under the command of Prince Eugene of Savoy in 1717.¹ But the warfare the island represents in popular imagination is ongoing: over ecological preservation of its animal and plant life²; over capital investment in the city that keeps encroaching on the island through facilities of dubious value; and most recently, as the potential site for bringing fresh underground waters to the surface. In this final speculative iteration (abandoned in 2022 after a public outcry) Belgrade was to be supplied with drinking water from this spot, so that the existing sites of freshwater springs could be redeveloped into new urban districts in the vein of the notorious Belgrade Waterfront, which lies on the right bank of the Sava. Within sight of the island, this urban district still under construction keeps battling subterranean waters that threaten to undo it the moment the machinery pumping them out is switched off.

Suspended between this apparently uninhabited island site – with its latest association not only with greenery and wildlife but also water, as a life-enabling, city-building element – and the expansive urban area of miniscule social value, lies the modernist project of New Belgrade. Marking the left bank of the Sava, it remains a testament to the era of post-WW2 social programmes and modernist architectures. As such, New Belgrade would offer a more than valid conceptual position from which to tell the absurd stories of the 21st century city. But the trajectory I want to follow here pursues a more convoluted line, one less obviously affirmative. It is a trajectory of violence, its histories, and their murky, fictional undercurrents – a trajectory that recasts the place of this island in Belgrade’s official histories, and the ‘institution of worlds’ it gives form through its architectures.

Instituting Fictions

This chapter originated in an exhibition I curated in Belgrade in 2017, titled ‘Great War Island: Desert Fictions’,³ to which I had invited sixteen international academics, architects, and artists to propose island-centred work that combined writing and visuals in a manner surpassing standard essay formats.⁴ The initial premise to which the exhibitors were to respond was Belgrade Waterfront, which, as I suggested in the invite, was a desert island

of sorts: neoliberal delirium dreamed up by a Gulf state developer, which had erupted in the legislative, economic, environmental, and material contexts of the city like a discontinuous patch of territory ripped out and transplanted from the deserts of the UAE. As a counterpoint to this, a literal island offered itself as an imaginary foothold from which to attack the city that had allowed for Belgrade Waterfront to emerge: Great War Island, with its histories of warfare and shelling, presented a perfect metaphorical toponym and critical mirror for the Waterfront project. Connecting these two material reference points, Gilles Deleuze's 'Desert Islands' was offered as a provisional theoretical ground from which to fire critique, with its emphasis on literature and mythmaking, and 'second origins' that take shape in the form of newly instituted worlds.

Crucially for the discussion I pursue in this chapter, forms of fiction appeared on both sides of this imaginary battlefield. On the one hand, the fictions of globalisation, given architectural form in the neoliberal delirium that spins them; and on the other, the critical-theoretical fictions manifest in the contributions to the exhibition (visual, textual, often both) whose agile, multipronged attacks were delivered in the form of experimental, speculative scholarship.

Such a distinction between the fictions of capitalism and fictions of creative criticality is the conceptual scope David Burrows and Simon O'Sullivan substantially and creatively explore in *Fictioning: The Myth-Functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy*,⁵ where they offer a terminology that transmutes fiction as a noun to fictioning as a verb. As they write:

By using the term fiction as a verb we refer to the writing, imaging, performing or other material instantiation of worlds or social bodies that mark out trajectories different to those engendered by the dominant organisations of life currently in existence. Or, to put this another way, we are interested in exploring those fictions that involve potential realities to come [...] as well as the more general idea of fiction as intervention in, and augmentation of, existing reality. In this, we are also concerned with how fictioning can take on a critical power when it is set against, or foregrounded within, a given reality.⁶

While Burrows and O'Sullivan repeatedly refer to the work of Deleuze and Guattari, they don't engage "Desert Islands" overtly. And yet, their conceptual framework is very much in keeping with Deleuze's premise in "Desert Islands", with its emphasis on literary fiction as a form of modern mythmaking, and relying, in part at least, on Deleuze's

appropriation of the notion of ‘fabulation’ from Henri Bergson.⁷ This orientation towards myth found its reflections in Burrows and O’Sullivan’s notions of mythopoesis, myth-science, and mythotechnesis⁸, and borrowed from fabulation a reference to ‘the people to come’ – relating this string of affiliated concepts eventually to the island-centric concept of utopia.

Without pursuing this string of concepts too far, or unpicking the rich relationships between fabulation, literature, and history in Deleuze’s own oeuvre⁹, it is worth noting that O’Sullivan and Burrows’s fictioning is anticipated in Deleuze’s understanding of literature in ‘Desert Islands’ as an “attempt to interpret, in an ingenious way, the myths we no longer understand, at the moment we no longer understand them, since we no longer know how to dream them or reproduce them”.¹⁰ To illustrate this, Deleuze references Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Jean Giraudoux’s *Suzanne and the Pacific* (1921). But his assessment of the restaging of myth – what could precisely be understood as the fictioning of the world – and the ‘second origins’ offered by these literary works is damning: they are representative of the machinations of religion and capital, and their re-imagining of the world offers nothing more than mere reproduction of the existing one, one aligned with European colonial projects. The role architecture plays in these novels is telling, even if Deleuze doesn’t elaborate on it: Robinson re-builds the world exactly as he knows it, a world in his own ‘civilized’ image, whereby architecture is to be reconstructed in its implicitly European likeness (i.e., “where everything comes from the ship”). Meanwhile, Suzanne’s impermanent constructions and delirious conjunctions, while lighter on their feet and less rigidly centred on recognisable architectures, remain equally doomed to failure. As Deleuze wryly notes, hers is a particularly Parisian death. Which is to say: urban.

This is where fictioning becomes a useful concept for thinking through the institution of worlds through their “material instantiations”, as Burrows and O’Sullivan put it – for what better manifestation of world-instituting material instantiations than architecture, with all of its manifold fictions? In fact, if fictioning were to be developed to a higher material-social register (which are the two categories O’Sullivan and Burrows foreground) than that of the arts, it might precisely be thought of as *architecturing*, bringing together the three conceptual operations Burrows and O’Sullivan name as mythopoesis, myth-science, and mythotechnesis under one overarching term, while simultaneously expanding the scope of their arts-centred project.¹¹ But fictioning also offers a certain level of productive ambiguity – in that it can be found in critical and uncritical projects alike. As Burrows and O’Sullivan put it:

fiction is a term that has increasing valence in wider political cultures, as indicated especially in the new terminology used to describe contemporary political reality: ‘post-fact’ and ‘post-truth’. Reality is itself an increasingly relative term on this terrain, with ideas of perception management replacing any idea of truth. It is here that we would position the urgency of our own work – not simply as a critique of this new terrain, but as something that operates on the same level as these fictions, and engages with the strategies and tactics deployed by agencies engaging in managing and experimenting with perception and reality.¹²

Acts of fictioning, critical as well as highly uncritical, are already inextricable from Great War Island’s stories and histories, and the meaning the island is made to assume in relation to Belgrade itself – a point implied in the framing of that 2017 exhibition and the contributions made to it. But this specific island also foregrounds the fictions of conflict, and the many forms of violence inextricable from it, with architecture assuming a central role in the institution of worlds – but also their *un-institution*. Fictioning, when taken to stay with conflict, violence, destruction and eventually catastrophe, helps recast the notion of islands, and this island specifically, in ways that go beyond the various interpretations currently on offer.

Instituting island architectures

As is the case in many island contexts, every gesture of architectural institution of worlds on Great War Island becomes representative of the forces and principles that drive such world-building, together with the fictions they produce and reproduce. To that effect, the narratives of Great War Island construed in popular imagination and widely circulated in the press are particularly instructive. Over the decades, Serbian daily papers have repeatedly reported on the island’s temporary dwellings and their occupants, with the recurring motif that of a Robinson Crusoe-like castaway.¹³ The island is portrayed as a refuge from the city, offering views of modernist high-rises across the water, those post-Second World War housing blocks that embody social programmes the likes of which have not been repeated since. This highly communal model of living, inseparable from the history of Yugoslav socialism, is then contrasted with the improvised wooden dwellings erected by Great War Island’s supposed ‘Robinsons’, dwellings that are depicted as architectural constructions easily reclaimed by nature in an implicit nod to ecological imperatives, and grounded in history and tradition, if one freely interpreted.

In such narratives, the architecture that is deemed appropriate for the island – that is inherently *island-like* – is a small, primordial hut, conducive to a life equally originary, which is to say, in harmony with nature. Within its parameters, people form tightly knit communities and grow their own food, while the visitors are oriented by signs announcing inhabitants' first names and the direction to their equally personalised, unique dwellings. And the dwellings themselves are fairy-tale-like: singular acts of architecture, rooted in the essential qualities of nature as much as society, and delivered in a flourish of enchanted vision. Furthermore, most of these temporary dwellings are inextricable from the production of food on adjacent plots where the vegetables grown are said to be bigger, plumper, more nourishing than elsewhere – to the point of one article detailing their weight, while omitting the problematic issue of invasive species, such as the colonially-libidinally suggestive American cucumber. Meanwhile, the island's temporary inhabitants are represented as guardians of nature, rescuing eagles and fawn when the island is flooded, and cohabiting with wild boar populations that are occasionally found on the island, in an idyllic interspecies coexistence. This is, in short, a proto-utopian island: simultaneously harking to a simpler past and an idealised future, where architecture will reject modernity and its undesirable models of infrastructure and urbanisation.

Recent plans for the island¹⁴ have assigned it the status of an urban park and regulate its use more rigidly, dictating the removal of all improvised constructions.¹⁵ And yet, these plans frame the island within a matrix of contemporary reference points, both ecological and those of education and tourism, which are the three key descriptor categories (alongside the less prominent mention of historical heritage, to which I will come back shortly). In this vision for, or indeed fiction of, Great War Island, the ecological tourist who is to be educated by the visit to the island, represents the central figure around which to construct island architectures. Suggested viewing towers and platforms,¹⁶ along which to walk above land and water as if removed from them, contribute to the overall sense of a theme park in the making. Meanwhile, on the tiny beach of Lido, the north-western tip of the island, there are regulations for facilities appropriate to its seasonal recreational use in a mere sketch of infrastructures treading lightly.

A third fiction of architectures appropriate to this island (after the primordial hut and the eco-park) lurks under them both, and reveals the direction of the ecological push proper: an island with no architecture on it at all. Its radical implication is that no human should set foot on the island, allowing it to become an exclusive home for all the non-human species that already inhabit it, serving them under external human guardianship. It offers a form of

instituting worlds in which architecture plays no role, for the human species itself has no role in the inhabitation of such an island. In this scenario, all architecture becomes animal architecture, as much as it is geological: fluid, dynamic, impermanent, and deeply at one with its milieu. From the perspective of the human then, this is an *un-institution* of the world, a premise appearing in a number of guises in current theoretical dealings with the Anthropocene, which range from decentring the human to downright self-erasure.¹⁷

A utopian primordial hut, an ecological park, and a complete erasure of all human presence: these are the three fictions that seem to be playing out currently in the collective imagination of Serbia when it comes to Belgrade's Great War Island.

But violence is present in all the processes described thus far. For the primordial hut implies the erasure of modernity, a violent and likely impossible ideal; the ecological park is inextricable from tourism thinly veiled with education, at the service of neoliberal goals through which nature is reduced to monetizable experiences leading to teachable lessons; and finally, the radical violence of the option that we leave the world to its own devices by removing ourselves from it altogether.

Is there a way of articulating, or indeed *fictioning*, violence that stays in the moment of troubling, of not providing easy answers, yet one that isn't aligned with any of the three directions described above? To that effect, I will retrace a specific historical moment in the history of Great War Island, monumentalised in its name and, as such, a matter of historical preservation – albeit in a perverse manner. It is a (hi)story of violence and the architectures that violence gives shape, and asks how to conceive differently of the process of articulating architectural institution of worlds, with islands as their conceptual and material distillations.

Instituting worlds of war

Belgrade is located at the fault line of two storied empires: the Ottoman, which held most of modern-day Serbia for approximately five centuries, and the Habsburg, later Austro-Hungarian, which mostly held the lands to the north and west. As a result, from the 15th century onwards, and after the Ottoman conquest of 1521 specifically, the city would become a border town over which a tug of war would play itself out repeatedly, with institution and counterinstitution of worlds making their mark on the city.

The siege and conquest of Belgrade in 1717 is particularly illustrative here, for it was during this battle that Prince Eugene of Savoy, under the cloak of mist, landed on the territory known today as Great War Island, and proceeded to shell the fortifications of the city from there, claiming it ultimately for the Habsburgs. By doing so, his army pushed the

frontier separating the two empires further south, and for the next couple of decades Belgrade would undergo a transformation into a Baroque European city.

But it was an aborted transformation: most of these ambitious yet only partially executed interventions were erased once the city came back under Ottoman rule, where it would remain until the national liberations of the 19th century. This is because the 1729 erasure of the world instituted by the Habsburgs was marked by one of the more bizarre terms of the takeover: the Austrians were to demolish what they had built before departing from the city. In other words, they were to *un-institute* the world of their own prior making. As a result, the very idea of a Baroque Belgrade remains elusive, and closely wedded to near-mythical alternative histories of Serbia.¹⁸ There are only a few material traces of the built environment of this period left, haunting the city through visual depictions of Baroque buildings, fortifications, and unrealised plans for an orderly, decidedly Baroque urban matrix.

This historical moment reveals the status of Great War Island as being perpetually part of the city and simultaneously beyond it. It also paints a complicated picture in terms of competing empires, whose acts of colonisation and counter-colonisation played out over the settlement, its geological formations, and its populations, human or other. This small river island, dynamic and unstable, is historically inextricable from various forms of violence, as is evident in its name. It is the violence of the churning waters that perpetually form and deform it; the violence of warfare fought at grand scales, at one of the fault lines between the so-called East and West; and violence conceived more broadly, as it manifests in various registers and assumes less obvious forms, not least in architecture.

This historical moment also reveals – as much as Belgrade’s contemporary one does – one of the integral characteristics of Great War Island: it remains a distinct territorial component in the machinery of perpetual *instituting*, *un-instituting*, and *re-instituting* of the city. And while the current narratives and regulations regarding acceptable forms of architecture push the island in the direction of an idealised blank slate – as if that were ever possible in the Anthropocene – the history of the island as the post for staging military attacks on the city reveal it to be identical with a peculiar form of architecture already: improvised, unstable, and always aimed at the city and its official architectures. Architecture proper to Great War Island, in other words, is inextricable from destruction – the fact given its most overt form in the depictions of the 1717 battle, where cannons can be seen to be hidden behind temporary barriers shielding these instruments of war and the men who operated them. Great War Island’s architecture was, and remains, a scenography in the theatres of war, with the city across the water the main target of cycles of destruction and

renewal. Neither a utopian blank slate of nature, nor an institution of a primordial hut, colonial or otherwise; Great War Island's architecture is the architecture of eternal warfare.

To look then at 1717 and all the subsequent attacks revealed and obscured in Great War Island's name (such as the Serbian national liberation attacks of the early 19th century), is also to foreground the fact that the institution of worlds this island stands for is the institution of the mainland world, the world of the city across the streaming river waters. The island's architecture is always elsewhere. It is always yet to arrive on the island where, in the meantime, battles are fought for the city, behind improvised barricades that give material form to the production and reproduction of death.¹⁹

What the architecture proper to this island reveals, in short, is the *violence inherent in the notion of institution itself*.²⁰ For to institute a world is to bring to the surface the violence seething right under its present form – and what more appropriate architecture of war than its reduction to a mere shelter for the instruments of annihilation?²¹

Perhaps it is not surprising then that in all the documentation and regulation of recent years, the least clear category has been the notion of historical preservation. Ecology, education and tourism, tied in neatly as they are, show exactly to what extent ecological imperatives can be manipulated for the purposes of neoliberal development. But it is less clear what historical preservation is supposed to entail here, or what it refers to. The way this geological formation – an island birthed by the meeting of rivers, rivers that also gave the city its reason to exist²² – operates, is precisely in the murky area between the preservation of the mere cartographic image of an island as an autonomous unit of deurbanised and potentially dehumanised quasi-nature, and a more universal call for conserving the current state of affairs – a vague and essentially regressive impulse.

I would suggest that one possible answer regarding what stories and histories are worth preserving here – indeed, what *fictioning* is worth bringing to the fore – is already embedded in the very name of this island: the history of warfare, conflict, and violence. It would no doubt be possible to align the current neoliberal push with the regressive nationalist project from which Serbia (not uniquely in today's world) can't seem to extricate itself, by centring on the shelling of Belgrade by the early 19th century forces battling for Serbian ethnic and national liberation from the Ottoman Empire. And yet, it was precisely with that early 18th century Habsburg incursion that the island is said to have acquired its name; and because of it, the historical preservation will always inherently carry a complex set of fictions of conflict and destruction, of colonial projects of empires past and present, materialised in the constructions and destructions of the city and its architectures – with the island as a mere

stepping stone from which to launch into the institution of worlds by destroying the ones already in existence.

Ultimately, the issue of preservation also offers the possibility of foregrounding moments in history that can't easily be subsumed in ideologically purified fictions of historical conservation. It opens the space for stories that haunt historical narratives like irrepressible spectres ready to conquer the present.

Violent histories, queer histories

Eugene of Savoy is a man whose 'queer' status remains a persistent yet unverifiable footnote in histories. In his biography of the famous general, historian Nicholas Henderson describes Eugene's early years and complicated circumstance at the court of Louis XIV: Eugene's mother's Italian background was looked down upon by the French aristocracy, while her complex relationship to Louis XIV, subsequent widowhood, and eventual escape from France, all contributed to young Eugene's precarious standing at court. At the age of sixteen, left in the care of his French grandparents, he would start developing the "severe self-discipline which [was] to stay with him the rest of his life", as Henderson notes – a stark contrast to his unruly early years.²³ Having subsequently been rejected for army service by an unsympathetic Louis XIV, the young man fled to Austria and, having impressed Emperor Leopold I, joined the Habsburg Imperial army to end up, decades later, leading that Habsburg assault on Ottoman Belgrade.

Crucially for the history I want to trace here, Eugene had been "a debauched boy", and was said to belong to a "small, effeminate set that included such unabashed perverts as the young Abbé de Choisy"²⁴. And while the source of this information, the then Duchess of Orléans, would have likely been biased due to his switching of allegiance and fighting against the French – i.e., might have maliciously created a fictional version of the child Eugene – "there can be no doubt of the existence of shadows in Eugene's early boyhood", as Henderson pointedly puts it.²⁵

Eugene of Savoy thus remains one of those historical figures whose supposed queer status (setting aside here the exact meaning of the term in the context of the 17th and 18th centuries) is suspected yet cannot be confirmed. The official tourism portal of Vienna tellingly eschews the issue of historical veracity of Savoy's deviant sexuality, simply claiming that "[t]oday, the local gay community claims Eugene as one of their own, and he is front and center in every Vienna gay city tour"²⁶. Eugene of Savoy, in other words, has

become a standard bearer for historical erasure of ‘queers’ – as well as their dubious reclamations.

As it happens, Eugene’s winning tactic in the siege of Belgrade was to temporarily bridge the Danube and use Great War Island as one of the bases from which to shell the fortress.²⁷ In other words, he had taken an unexpected direction of approach, coming at Ottoman forces from behind – even as that behind was, in many ways, the face of the city, its tallest summit overlooking the meeting of the rivers, the island crowning that meeting. Under the guise of mist, the man who had grown out of a ‘shadowy’ childhood had chosen – the back route.

To focus on Eugene of Savoy is to draw attention to all manner of violence permeating history, not least queer histories and historiographies. Eugene of Savoy’s supposed queerness is unverifiable and, as such, unrecoverable, if it ever was the fact; and to label him ‘queer’ is itself an act of appropriation and violence. This is further complicated by the fact that he was a court-raised imperial general, i.e., a figure central to systemic forms of oppression, rather than an easy symbol of non-normative sexual practices in urgent need of historical recovery and affirmation.²⁸ In any number of ways then, Eugene of Savoy is the exact opposite of a representative figure of victimhood. And yet, he remains a highly visible stand-in for ‘queer’ people throughout history, and for the erasures of archives of queer life, written or built.²⁹

Instituting, queering

Tucked away towards the end of “Desert Islands”, there is a reference as to how we might think islands in the context of the queer, and the fictioning proper to such a project. When making the establishment of ‘second origins’ the very essence of desert islands, Deleuze points out that “the deserted island [...] is not creation but re-creation, not the beginning but a re-beginning”.³⁰ It is here that we find an indication of how *queer* and *island* might be thought together. As he writes: “on sacred islands, exclusively female communities can come to be, such as the island of Circe or Calypso. After all, the beginning started from God and from a couple, but not the new beginning, the beginning again, which starts from an egg: mythological maternity is often a parthenogenesis”.³¹

This island of exclusively female communities is indeed a queer island, single-gendered yet self-replicating, mythological and queerly utopian as well. But what of the queer, non-mythological paternity, that second origin that always seems to fail to materialise, a reproduction that eschews the parthenogenetic ideal? The queer paternal line specific to

islands' re-beginning should be understood as *the repetition of violence to which nothing is reborn except fictioning itself* (or fabulation, or myth-making); a line of potential counter-actualisation, to use Claire Colebrook's take on the queer,³² in which the very logic of reproduction, even one fictioned as parthenogenetic, is brought into question. It is the queer that persists as a trace of counter-actualizations never given form, queer understood as an interruption and discontinuity. Queer as pure difference.

In turn, the architecture proper of desert islands – and all islands are ultimately desert islands, as Deleuze rightly points out³³ – should always be understood as the architecture of fragmentary machineries of war. The violence they embody is inherent in the very notion of re-beginning, of starting anew; the violence involved in the building of a city, of instituting a world. It is the architecture made visible in those 18th century depictions of Great War Island, the architecture of cannons aiming at the city across the relentless rush of river waters, waters that constantly make and unmake the island itself. It is the architecture of deathly ejaculations alongside which life merely subsists, as fictioning repeats itself over and over again.

Coda: Instituting catastrophe

What I explore above can be linked to an approach in queer theory that does not pursue the route of utopian thinking, writing, fictioning or indeed architecturing. It has variously been named as antisocial or antirelational and is most famously exemplified by Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. In Edelman's work, which he continued in similar vein in his more recent *Bad Education: Why Queer Theory Teaches Us Nothing*, the future-oriented reproduction – of worlds, ultimately – is brought into question via the figure of the child. This vision, on the surface at least, stands in contrast to the utopian thinking of the likes of José Esteban Muñoz, whose equally influential *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* followed a different route, and one that more easily resonates with island thinking.

Indeed, with its potentially utopian, and certainly future-oriented inflection, relationality is a key theme in island studies. In 'No man is an island', a commentary on the work of David Chandler and Jonathan Pugh regarding islands in the Anthropocene, Claire Colebrook draws attention to the implications of such thinking. Chandler and Pugh argue that the issue of relationality is key for Anthropocene thinking, and that islands offer the central figure for it, since they amply demonstrate the interconnectedness of all aspects of life on Earth (human, inhuman, geological, etc.). Islands appear severed from mainland but are, in

fact, through that exact characteristic illustrative of a lack of apartness, highlighting the interconnectedness of things, phenomena, and processes. Colebrook counters this notion by suggesting that this insistence on interconnectedness is precisely “bound up with capitalism and globalism that assumes that *no man is an island*, and that “our” proper future, including the very constitution of this collective subjectivity is fully and inclusively relational”.³⁴ As she elaborates further, “there is something hyper-humanist and species-exceptionalist about relationality in the European tradition” and its insistence on a very particular understanding of what constitutes a whole. Instead, Colebrook pushes for an Anthropocene ethic that is concerned “less with maximizing relations and far more with learning to live with those forces – those hot spots of islands – that fracture relationality”.³⁵

One of the two examples Colebrook reflects on towards the end of her commentary comes from N.K. Jemisin’s Broken Earth trilogy of science-fiction novels. Colebrook uses Jemisin’s fiction to illustrate a point about the usefulness of thinking through and with interruption, discontinuity, and violence, a term Colebrook doesn’t foreground, but that is implicit in Jemisin’s novels.³⁶ And indeed, for Deleuze, the ‘re-beginning’ of the world is inextricable from catastrophe and destruction. As he writes, “from the deserted island it is not creation but re-creation, not the beginning but a re-beginning that takes place. The deserted island is the origin, but a second origin. From it everything begins anew.”³⁷ As a result, “[i]t is not that there is a second birth because there has been a catastrophe, but the reverse, there is a catastrophe after the origin because there must be, from the beginning, a second birth.”³⁸

The fictioning proper to islands is illustrative of that moment of re-beginning, of the institution of worlds; not of the weaving of everything with everything else, but of the moment of aberration, interruption, and violence from which new worlds issue forth.

Great War Island, that small, seemingly insignificant river island in the Balkans, reveals what all islands are about: “a potentiality – a capacity to see matter as in motion, and yet always resistant to the connections it demands”,³⁹ as Colebrook puts it. It is the same potentiality that lies at the heart of Deleuze’s notion of the desert island when he writes that “[i]n the ideal of beginning anew there is something that precedes the beginning itself, that takes it up to deepen it and delay it in the passage of time.”⁴⁰

What fills that gap, what is revealed through it, is the ever-unfolding power to fiction. And architecture, that world-instituting practice, should best be understood as *the perpetual enaction of the catastrophe of second origins through which the fictioning of worlds takes place*. Nothing reveals this more than an island, especially one converging on

desert, one whose architectures are twinned with un-institution and violence. An island named after warfare.

1 'Great' in the island's name does not refer to war; it's the generally accepted translation of Veliko ratno ostrvo ('veliko' meaning large, or big, as well as great) into English. The island is simply the larger of two islands, with the small Little War Island next to it representing a sliver of land between Great War Island and the mainland, hence not worthy of further mention, on this occasion at least.

2 See Kašanin-Grubin, M., Štrbac, S., Antonijević, S., Djogo Mračević, S., Randjelović, D., Orlić, J., Šajnović, A., 'Future environmental challenges of the urban protected area Great War Island (Belgrade, Serbia) based on valuation of the pollution status and ecosystem services', *Journal of Environmental management* 251, 109574, Elsevier, 2019.

3 *Instituting Worlds: Architecture and Islands* had its conception in this exhibition, with a number of contributors participating in both, be it with chapters developed from the same material as those exhibition contributions (Frichot, Gurney, Gabriellson, Lavery and Hassall) or new ones (Smith).

4 These were: Ronnen Benarie with Tamir Zadok, André Bideau, Simone Brott, Nic Clear, Helene Frichot, Catharina Gabriellson, Kim Gurney, Katharine Harrison, Carl Lavery with Lee Hassall, Chris L. Smith with Vesna Trobec, Neil Spiller, Jill Stoner, and Nicholas Whybrow.

5 Burrows, D. and O'Sullivan, S., *Fictioning: The Myth-Functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019. , page.

6 Burrows and O'Sullivan, *Fictioning: The Myth-Functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy*, 2019. p.1.

7 As Ronald Bogue points out, the term was translated into English by Bergson's translators as 'myth-making'; unlike Bergson though, Deleuze cast it in a positive light. Bogue, R., *Deleuzian Fabulation and the Scars of History*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.

8 Burrows, D. and O'Sullivan, S., *Fictioning: The Myth-Functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019., p.1.

9 See, among many: Jay Lampert, *Deleuze and Guattari's Philosophy of History*, London: Continuum/Bloomsbury 2006; Ronald Bogue, *Deleuzian Fabulations and the Scars of History*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010.; Claire Colebrook, 'Introduction', in J.A. Bell and Colebrook C. (eds.) *Deleuze and History (Deleuze Connections)*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

10 Deleuze, G., 'Desert Islands' (1953), in *Desert Islands and Other Texts (1053-1974)*, Semiotexte, 2004, p.12

11 In their introduction to *Writing Architectures: Ficto-Critical Approaches*, Frichot and Stead note that: 'Architects and fiction writers share much the same ambition: to imagine new worlds into being. Whether situated in the past, present or future, or layered as complex spatio-temporal strata, architects and writers of fiction describe and document these worlds, subsequently inviting others to occupy them'. As a result, 'Every architectural proposition is a kind of speculative fiction before it becomes a built fact', making architecture 'a world-making or constructive practice' and ficto-criticism 'a means of critiquing the present'.

12 Burrows and O'Sullivan, *Fictioning: The Myth-Functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy*, page. 9.

13 Leskovic, M. and Beljan, M., 'Gledaju u solitere a žive u prašumi: zemunski robinzoni u divljini čekaju penziju' ('They overlook high-rises but live in a jungle: Zemun's Robinsons await pension in the wild'), *Telegraf*, 10.08.2019,

<https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/beograd/3089119-gledaju-u-solitere-a-zive-u-prasumi-zemunski-robinzoni-u-divljini-cekaju-penziju-foto>

(accessed 19th January 2024); Lopušina M., 'Robinzoni usred Beograda' ('Robinsons in the middle of Belgrade'), *Politika*, 11.07.2011,

<https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/reportaze/aktuelno.293.html:337649-Robinzoni-usred-Beograda> (accessed 19th January 2024);

Luković, S. 'Robinzoni sa Lida' ('Robinsons from Lido'), *Blic*, 09.07.2017, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/beograd/robinzoni-sa-lida-oni-su-se-odrekli-betona-i-televizije-a-evo-sta-imaju-da-kazu-o/kyhk78e> (accessed 19th January 2024).

14 A big thank-you to Nataša Đurić and Maja Lalić for drawing my attention to the plans and studies for the island.

15 The plan of general regulation for the city of Belgrade (Plan generalne regulacije Beograda) <https://www.beoland.com/planovi/pgr-beograda/> (accessed 13th March 2024).

16 Urban planning institute study (studija Urbanistickog instituta Beograda)

17 For example, the recent work of Patricia McCormack, or Claire Colebrook, both of whom advance projects that owe a debt to Deleuze and Guattari.

18 I discuss this in more detail in 'Queering Architectural History: Anomalous Histories and Historiographies of the Baroque', in M. Jobst and N. Stead (eds.) *Queering Architecture: Methods, Practices, Spaces, Pedagogies*, Bloomsbury 2023.

19 One only needs to think of Venice or Manhattan, Mumbai, Hong Kong or Singapore, to note the paradigmatic difference between islands that coincide with architecture – most obviously in the form of island-cities – and islands such as Great War Island, which are in constant tension with various forms of architectural creation taking place on the mainland.

20 While Deleuze doesn't refer to violence in 'Desert Islands', it is nonetheless inherent in the conceptual and material operation he traces. For to institute a world is to participate in the creation of simulacra without origins, one of the key conceptual manoeuvres that link 'Desert Islands', as a short and very early text, with his monumental *Difference and Repetition*.

21 This is revealed most starkly in the current production of South China Sea islands of war, whereby existing geological formations are engineered into military bases. They are the contemporary version of Great War Island, whose barricades and cannons remain positively quaint in comparison.

22 In this sense, it would be possible to say that Great War Island is an index of the very forces of violence that birthed the city, i.e., the forceful flow of the rivers, yet given as separate from the creation of the city itself. Not just a war island, but violence island, one that gives body to the violence of processes reaching far beyond those of human activity.

23 N. Henderson, *Prince Eugen of Savoy: A Biography*, London: Weidefeld and Nicolson, 1964, p. 10

24 Ibid, p. 9.

25 Ibid.

26 <https://www.austria.info/en/austria-s-beauty-secrets/belvedere/prince-eugene> (accessed 19th January 2024)

27 A detailed description of the battle can be found in H. Karagöz, 'The 1717 Siege of Belgrade and the Ottoman War Equipment Captured by the Habsburgs after the Siege' in *Belgrade 1521-1867*, Belgrade: The Institute of History Belgrade, 2018.

28 H. Lemmey and B. Miller, *Bad Gays: A Homosexual History*, Verso, 2022, is a recent project that pursues the trajectory of complex historical figures classed as queer.

29 This man might have spent his life inside the repressive architectures of a closet, and if so, will remain in that closet for ever, just like the numerous unnamed others whose life trajectories did not lead them to history books via grand narratives of imperial warfare.

30 Deleuze, G., 'Desert Islands' (1953), in *Desert Islands and Other Texts (1053-1974)*, Semiotexte, 2004, p.13.

31 Ibid.

32 Colebrook seeks to shift the focus from differences as conceptualised in relation to norms (as per Judith Butler for example) to an interrogation of the very conditions of the emergence of selves, identities, or said norms. 'The queer self,' she writes, 'might be better thought of as a counter-actualization of the material repetitions that make up 'man,' rather than as a deviation from actual norms of man' ('On the Very Possibility of Queer Theory' in *Sex After Life: Essays on Extinction Vol.2*, Open Humanities Press, 2014, p. 249). Instead of taking queer to be perpetually dependent on the pre-existence of norms, she offers a position grounded in the very process of differentiation – a conceptual framing indebted to Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* (whose initial kernel, as already mentioned, is to be found in 'Desert Islands').

33 Deleuze, 'Desert Islands', p.10.

34 C. Colebrook, 'No Man is an Island', in *Dialogues in Human Geography Journal*, Volume 11, Issue 3, Sage, 2021, p. 2.

35 Ibid., p.3

36 Queer scholar Jack Halberstam has similarly used Jamieson's trilogy to speak about the necessary destruction of the world. See, for example, his 2021 University of Nebraska-Lincoln lecture 'Aesthetics of Collapse' (<http://tinyurl.com/ywhf5wye>).

37 Deleuze, G., 'Desert Islands' (1953), in *Desert Islands and Other Texts (1053-1974)*, Semiotexte, 2004, p.13.

38 Ibid.

39 Colebrook, 'No Man is an Island', p. 4.

40 Deleuze, 'Desert Islands', p.14.