

## 1. Empire's Exile

On May 5, 1725, Leendert Hasenbosch, a thirty-year-old bookkeeper for the Dutch East India Company, became the first known inhabitant of Ascension Island, a small volcanic landmass about thirteen kilometers wide, located in the Atlantic Ocean some sixteen hundred kilometers from the west coast of Africa.<sup>1</sup> Hasenbosch had been stationed on the *Prattenburg*, part of a fleet of twenty-five ships returning from the Cape of Good Hope to Holland. After he was found engaging in sexual intercourse with a male sailor, the ship's council ordered his immediate punishment. While the sailor was sentenced to death for sodomy and thrown overboard, Hasenbosch, due to his higher rank, was given a lighter punishment: exile.

A small boat left him on what is known today as Ascension's Long Beach with a tent, a cask of water, a musket without bullets, a bale of rice, two buckets, a copy of the Bible, and an old frying pan. Hasenbosch kept a diary of his days as the first human inhabitant of the volcanic island, a document found by English sailors the following year. From his writings, we know that he managed to survive for about six months wandering the island in search of water, hunting birds and turtles, all while looking for passing ships, hoping for salvation.

After his water reserves became undrinkable, Hasenbosch was tormented at night by hallucinations of screaming shadowy beings raging outside his tent. The last entries in his diary describe him parched, sucking blood directly from the neck of a bird, and draining the bladder from a turtle to drink its urine. His final words read:

October 8, 1725

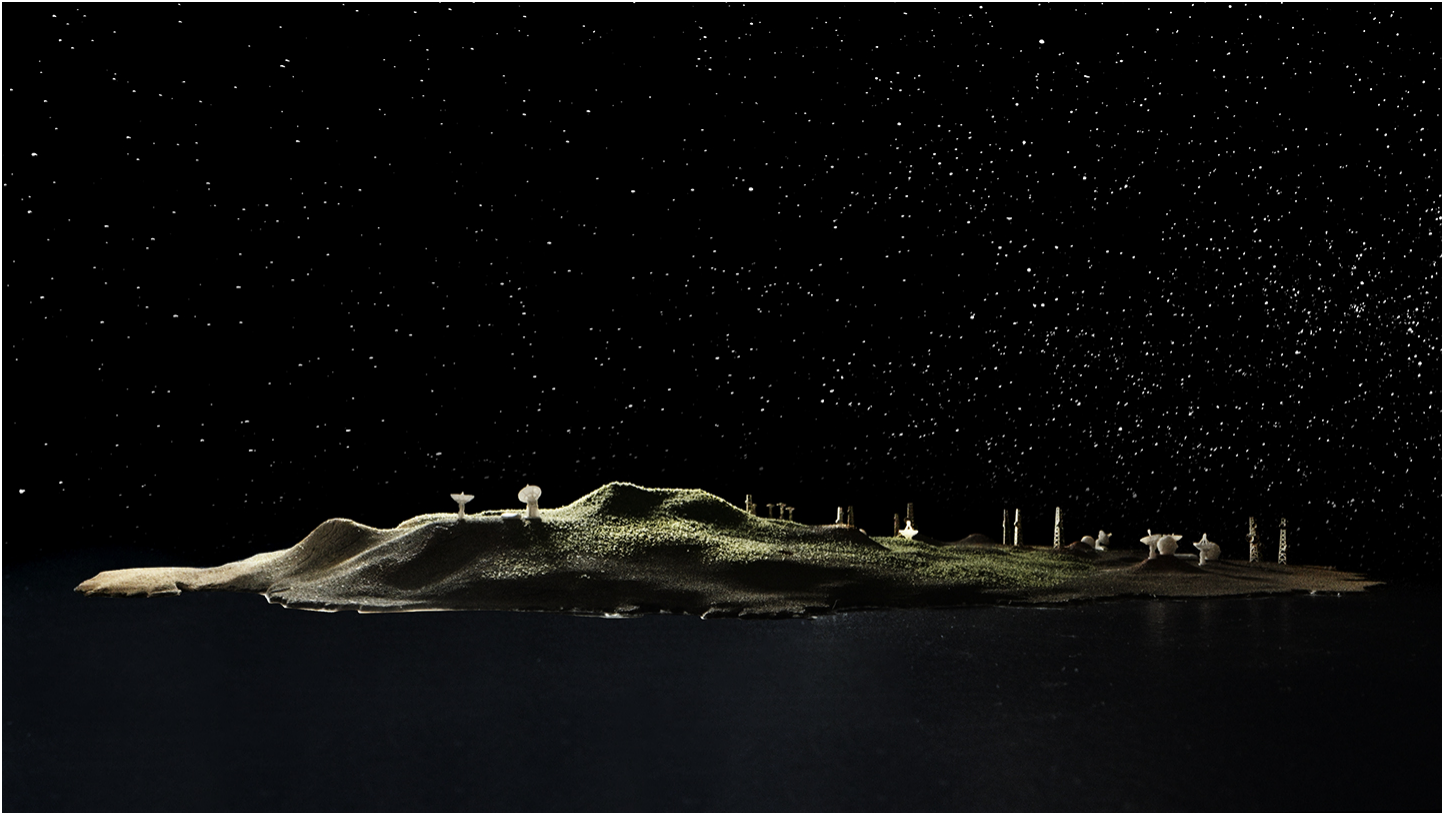
Drank my own urine, and ate raw flesh.<sup>2</sup>

Though Hasenbosch's body was never found, his diary was brought to England, where it was edited by Daniel Defoe, the author of *Robinson Crusoe*, before being published in varying editions in 1726, 1728, and 1730, each subsequent edition becoming more elaborate and gruesome to expand its readership.<sup>3</sup>

Though Hasenbosch was a victim of heteropatriarchy, he was also undoubtedly an agent of Empire. In 1713, aged eighteen, he enlisted as a soldier with the Dutch East India Company, the first multinational corporation in history. Stationed in Cochin (Southwest India), he rose through the ranks by taking part in punitive campaigns against the monarch and ruler of the Kingdom of Kozhikode, known as the Zamorin of Calicut. After participating in the massacre of two thousand Indigenous people in 1717, he was promoted to corporal and then to bookkeeper.<sup>4</sup> With the promise of a privileged life ahead as a reward for his service to the Dutch empire, he was planning his return to Holland when he was exiled to Ascension Island instead.

Jonas Staal

# Empire's Island, or, Who Is the Island?



Model depicting the outcomes of the terra- and techno-forming of Ascension Island across three centuries. Jonas Staal, *Empire's Island*, Video Study, 2023, still.

Hasenbosch showed no signs of resistance against the murderous unworlding campaigns of the Dutch East India Company. His only divergence from the terms of order was his sexual desire for men, which had no place in the white Christian doctrine central to the Dutch empire's command structure.<sup>5</sup> As such, Hasenbosch was exiled from the very world he had helped to propagate. However, the transformation of the island into an open-air prison was only the first step towards molding its ecosystem into the mirror image of a new emerging form of global power: Empire.

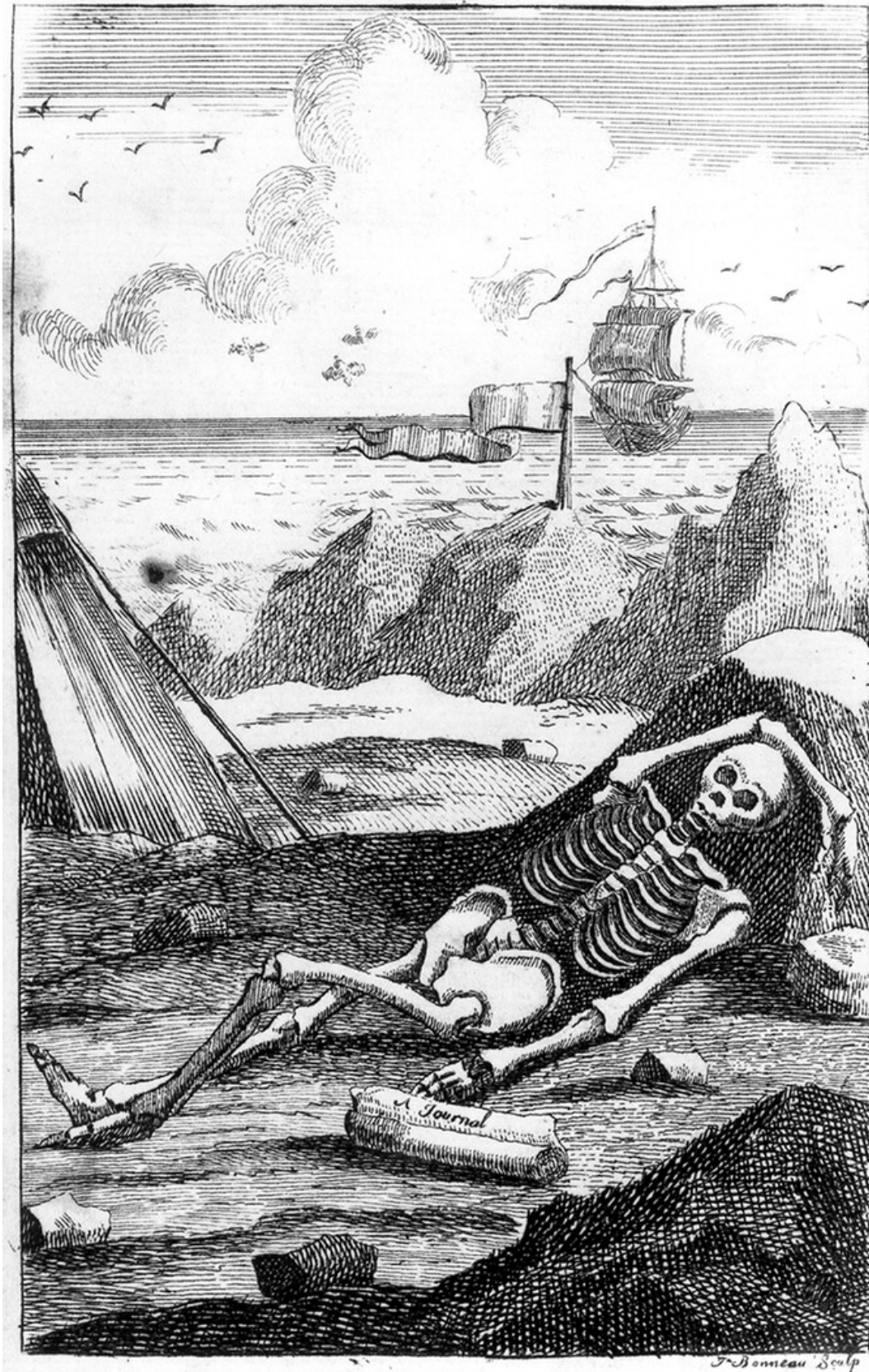
## 2. empires and Empire

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (2000), the first of their "Empire Trilogy" books, is a theoretical cornerstone of the alter-globalization movement, which contributed to the creation of alternative global organizational bodies of solidarity and cooperation, such as the World Social Forum. The most generative part of the trilogy is that Negri and Hardt gave us a term with which to identify a formation of power previously unknown to the world. There are and have been "empires," and then there's "Empire." The Dutch and the British empires were imperialist forces working from a hierarchically defined center in specific spatialized territories across specific periods of time. Their formal dissolution, however, does not mean that their political, economic, and legal legacies

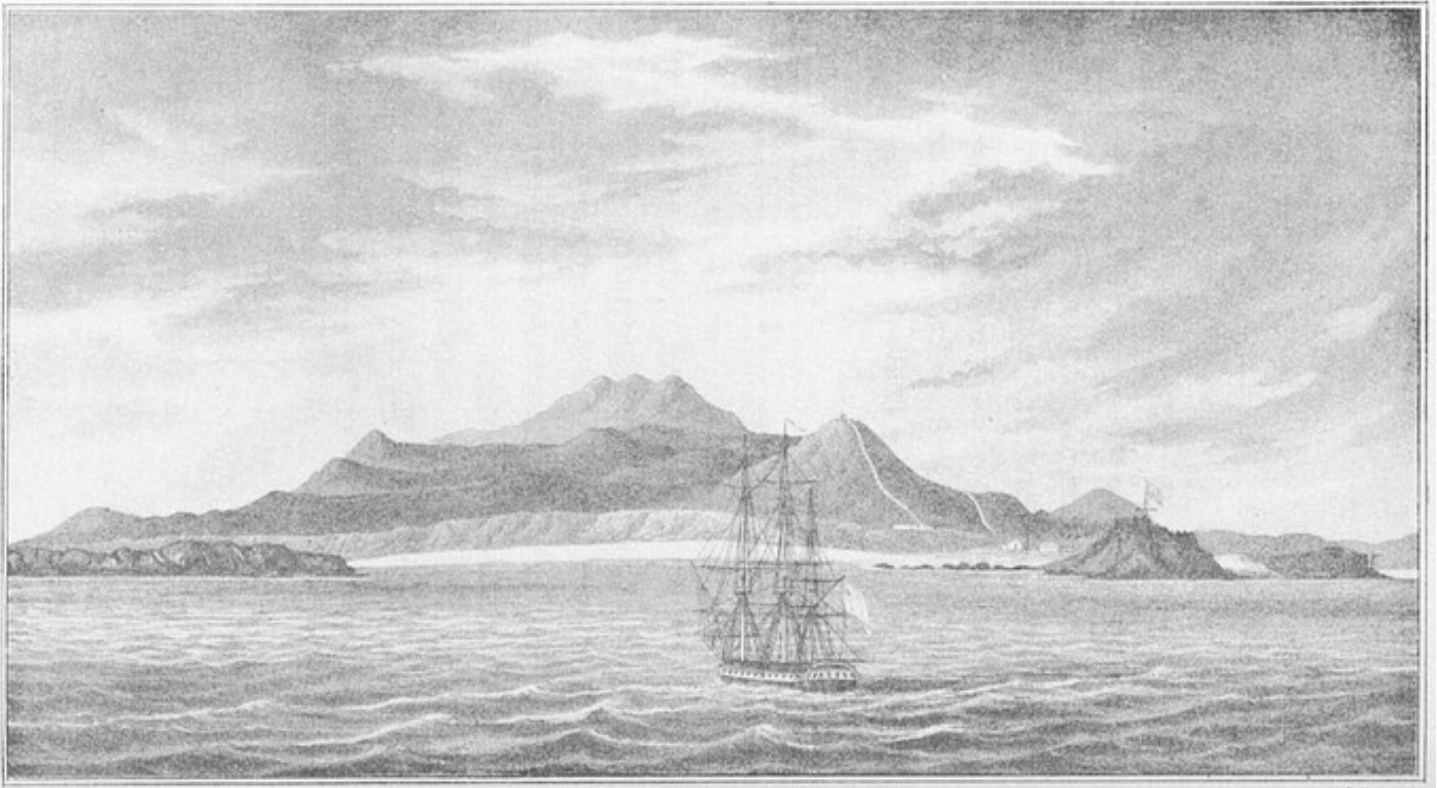
do not continue to shape the present. In this text I look at Ascension Island as a marker of developments across time and discuss how empires merged into Empire, a concept that represents the multi-century propagation of colonialism and imperialism in the form of global capitalism, defined by Hardt and Negri as follows:

Empire constitutes the ontological fabric in which all the relations of power are woven together—political and economic relations as well as social and personal relations. Across this hybrid domain the biopolitical structure of being is where the internal structure of imperial constitution is revealed, because in the globality of biopower every fixed measure of value tends to be dissolved, and the imperial horizon of power is revealed finally to be a horizon outside measure.<sup>6</sup>

For Hardt and Negri, at the turn of the century Empire was a signal concept for periodizing the transition from what they perceived as a thoroughly modern world managed by nation-states to a postmodern, decentralized world with many ruling powers. Even if the United States, and today the People's Republic of China, remain key actors in global political rule, they are part of Empire's overall "mixed



Opening image by Jacques Bonneau of the third edition of *The Just Vengeance of Heaven Exemplify'd* (1730), wrongfully depicting Hasenbosch's skeleton, which in reality was never found.



Ascension Island after a decade of British rule. J. Clarke, Ascension Red Hills, 1834.

constitution” that further consists of “captains of industry, financial barons, political elites and media tycoons.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, Empire is more than the sum of various powers. Rather, it represents the shared interests and claim to a new global, imperial sovereignty that emerges from between them.

Hardt and Negri’s position might inadvertently suggest a willingness to adopt Fukuyama’s end-of-history thesis, as when they argue that “with boundaries and differences suppressed or set aside, the Empire is a kind of smooth space across which subjectivities glide without substantial resistance or conflict.”<sup>8</sup> In fact, Negri describes Fukuyama’s thesis as mere “caricature.”<sup>9</sup> I would argue that, similar to how Marx describes the process of capitalist development in *Capital*, Hardt and Negri describe Empire both as it is and *as it wants to become*. To describe Empire as a “smooth space” with no meaningful resistance is not to negate alternative visions or the very real instances of resistance, such as the form of counterpower that Hardt and Negri later theorize as the “multitude.” This description rather emphasizes and embodies the horizon Empire sets for itself. It helps us understand not just what we are fighting against, but what this adversary desires to become.

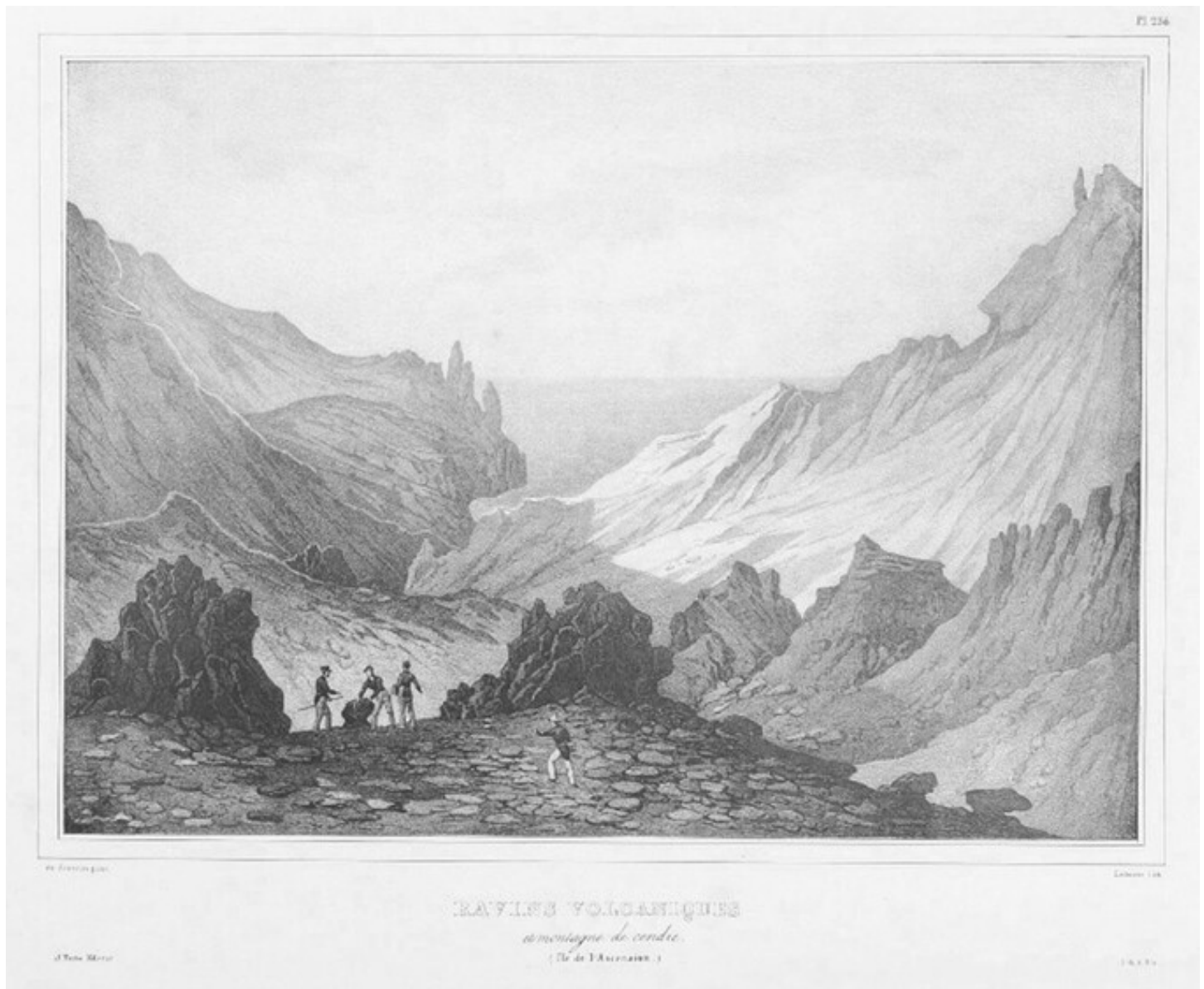
Through the history of Ascension Island we can trace the multi-century propagations of Empire as it strives to declare itself universal beyond even the confines of the

earth. In order to grasp the new mutations and violences of global capitalism, including the neo-feudalist and techno-feudalist doctrine of the emerging spacefaring billionaire class, Empire remains a critical heuristic.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Seeding Empire

On Ascension Island, the empires of old would return time and again, in the form of the volunteer and enlisted soldiers of capital and the nation-state, who sowed the seeds for the manifestation of Empire in the present and pre-enacted Empire’s propagation into outer space. Following Hasenbosch’s grueling end on Ascension Island, it was Charles Darwin who became one of its most impactful visitors. His influence would be a key catalyst for engineering the island’s future. Darwin was part of the second voyage of the HMS *Beagle* in 1831, by which time the British Empire had laid claim to Ascension Island in order to block any escape plan concocted by supporters of Napoleon Bonaparte, exiled on the neighboring island of Saint Helena. En route back to England from the Galapagos Islands, Darwin stopped by Ascension. Overlooking its volcanic landscape, on July 20, 1836 he noted in his diary: “The day was clear and hot, and I saw the island, not smiling with beauty, but staring with naked hideousness.”<sup>11</sup>

For Darwin, Ascension was “barren”—which is why he appreciated the small garden that Royal Navy soldiers made on the largest mountain of the island. Loyal to the



The volcanic landscape of Ascension Island. Jules Sebastien Cesar Dumont D'Urville, Ravins Volcaniques et montagne de cendre (Ascension), 1833.

doctrine of the British Empire, Darwin declared his desire for the island to become “productive.” In other words, he longed for the tiny garden to expand across the entire island and facilitate Empire’s further propagation. This is a critical point, as it unifies propaganda’s double meaning: firstly as the propagation of a political, economic, and ideological order; and secondly, in biological terms, as the propagation of plants and animals.<sup>12</sup> In other words, Darwin knew that ecology was a political weapon.

Darwin’s directives were passed on by the British Admiralty to Joseph Dalton Hooker, premier botanist of the Victorian era and Darwin’s closest friend, who visited the island seven years later. Hooker’s advice to the navy involved a four-point strategy: establishing trees on the main mountain to increase rainfall,<sup>13</sup> clothing steep slopes with vegetation to protect soil, planting dry-adapted

shrubs in lowlands, and introducing a wide variety of crops. With the help of the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew, London, hundreds of shipments of trees were sent to Ascension. From 1847 through to 1850, Kew Gardens dispatched 330 shrubs and other plants to the island. Further consignments of seeds and plants from London and the Botanic Gardens in Cape Town continued over the following decades. About five thousand trees were planted in the period spanning 1860 to 1870. By the late 1870s, on the island’s highest peak at nine hundred meters, eucalyptus, pine, bamboo, and palm trees had taken root. Green Mountain was terraformed into existence. Darwin’s Garden of Empire had been propagated into reality.<sup>14</sup>

Essentially, Darwin and Hooker succeeded in what we would today call “geoengineering”: the alteration of an



Ascension Island's Green Mountain today demonstrates the successful geoengineering of the island by Darwin and Hooker. Clare M. Fieseler, National Geographic, 2017, still.

existing biosphere, or the creation of a biosphere where there was none previously. In the words of Mihnea Mircan:

The discourse of geoengineering updates the old metamorphic imaginary of Ovid [the Roman author of *Metamorphoses*] as an exponential increase of future entanglements: wholly new symbioses, unforeseen ricochets, interrelations across enormous distances, architectures of climate control partitioned by degrees of access to their affordances.<sup>15</sup>

For this large-scale climate-engineering event to succeed, plants and seeds stolen from occupied land were translocated to Ascension Island. Through this successful weaponization of ecology, Darwin and Hooker established a new colonial ecosystem that quickly pushed the native fern vegetation to near extinction, just as the agents of Empire had exterminated the human communities and ecosystems from which these plants had been abducted in the first place. As Mircan notes, Ascension's ecology produces

an image that geotags—in the middle of the Atlantic—Charles Darwin's elaboration of an economy

of nature, motivated to an extent by his experiences, in Brazil, of the combined ravages of deforestation and slavery, and the display of "green imperialism" at The Royal Botanic Gardens, London.<sup>16</sup>

Darwin and Hooker had established the Empire's very own biosphere. For Empire's propaganda cares not merely to rule the world as it is: after colonial extermination it terraforms, it seeds, and it geoengineers the world in its own image.<sup>17</sup>

#### 4. Empire's Eyes

This was only the beginning. From the late nineteenth century onwards, the island was transformed into a remote global situation room—the operations hub for theaters of war and mass surveillance on earth and far beyond. In 1899, an underwater telegraph cable, known as the All Red Line, was installed; this major piece of infrastructure initiated the transformation of Ascension into a critical node in a worldwide system of modern communication and warfare.<sup>18</sup> The All Red Line was an information net cast across the British Empire to oversee its colonies. It also laid the foundation for Britain's first modern propaganda bureau to intercept and control messages from enemies and allies during the First World



Photograph by Montgomery Williams depicting the laying of cable for the Western Telegraph Company on Ascension Island in 1910.

War.<sup>19</sup> Today, the massive antennas of the British Broadcasting Corporation's Atlantic Relay Station, located on Ascension and installed to broadcast to England's former colonies, echo this first imperial propaganda web.

Ascension's geostrategic importance became evident again during the Second World War when, in 1939, the US government built Wideawake Airfield on the island: a base named after the sooty tern, a bird native to Ascension whose high-pitched sounds earned it the nickname "Wideawake," as it kept soldiers from sleeping.<sup>20</sup> From July 1942 until the end of the war, twenty-five thousand US planes, aided by the British, transited through Ascension Island, destined for war zones in North Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. In 1982, the British Royal Air Force reactivated Wideawake Airfield after Argentina reclaimed the colonized territory of Islas Malvinas. Ascension Island was a key transit zone for the subsequent Falklands War, at one stage becoming the busiest airport in the world.<sup>21</sup>

The island did not only supply and direct theaters of war across continents, but also surveilled other possible

threats to Empire. During the Cold War, the US Air Force constructed a target-tracking radar station on an area of the island known as Cat Hill. Nicknamed the "Golf Ball," it would subsequently become the location of a global surveillance facility established jointly by the US's NSA and the British GCHQ.<sup>22</sup>

But, as we now see more clearly, orchestrating planetary war and mass surveilling the globe is not enough for Empire. Its eyes eventually reach toward the stars. In 1967, NASA built a tracking station on Ascension Island to support the Apollo lunar landing program.<sup>23</sup> Today, NASA and the Air Force Research Laboratory operate a Meter-Class Autonomous Telescope from the island as part of a deep-space surveillance system. The European Space Agency has also established a station on the northeast coast of the island to track its commercial Ariane rockets.

And so, Ascension Island is terraformed *and* techno-formed. Alongside Green Mountain and its surrounding volcanic remains, the island is now festooned



Joint NSA and GCHQ target-tracking radar station on Cat Hill, Ascension Island. Jerrye and Roy Klotz, 2005.

with an array of aerials and satellite dishes. Empire's colonial ecosystem is not limited to the organic realm alone: its tech-infrastructures of domination and surveillance—the ears and eyes of Empire—grow and map, once more, other worlds to propagate in its image.

### 5. *Universal Empire*

For Empire, places like Ascension Island are designed to propagate beyond earth, serving as proto-colonies for the martian terraforming missions ahead. Officially, nobody is “from” Ascension: the UK government denies the right of abode to anyone, turning the island's approximately eight hundred citizens into temporary residents. Ascension is known as a “work island.” Most of the workforce moving in and out are British, American, or Saint Helenian. The latter, known as “Saints” for short, descend from African peoples, mixed-race Africans and Europeans, British settlers, East India Company employees, and indentured laborers from the South Asian subcontinent, the East Indies, Madagascar, and China.

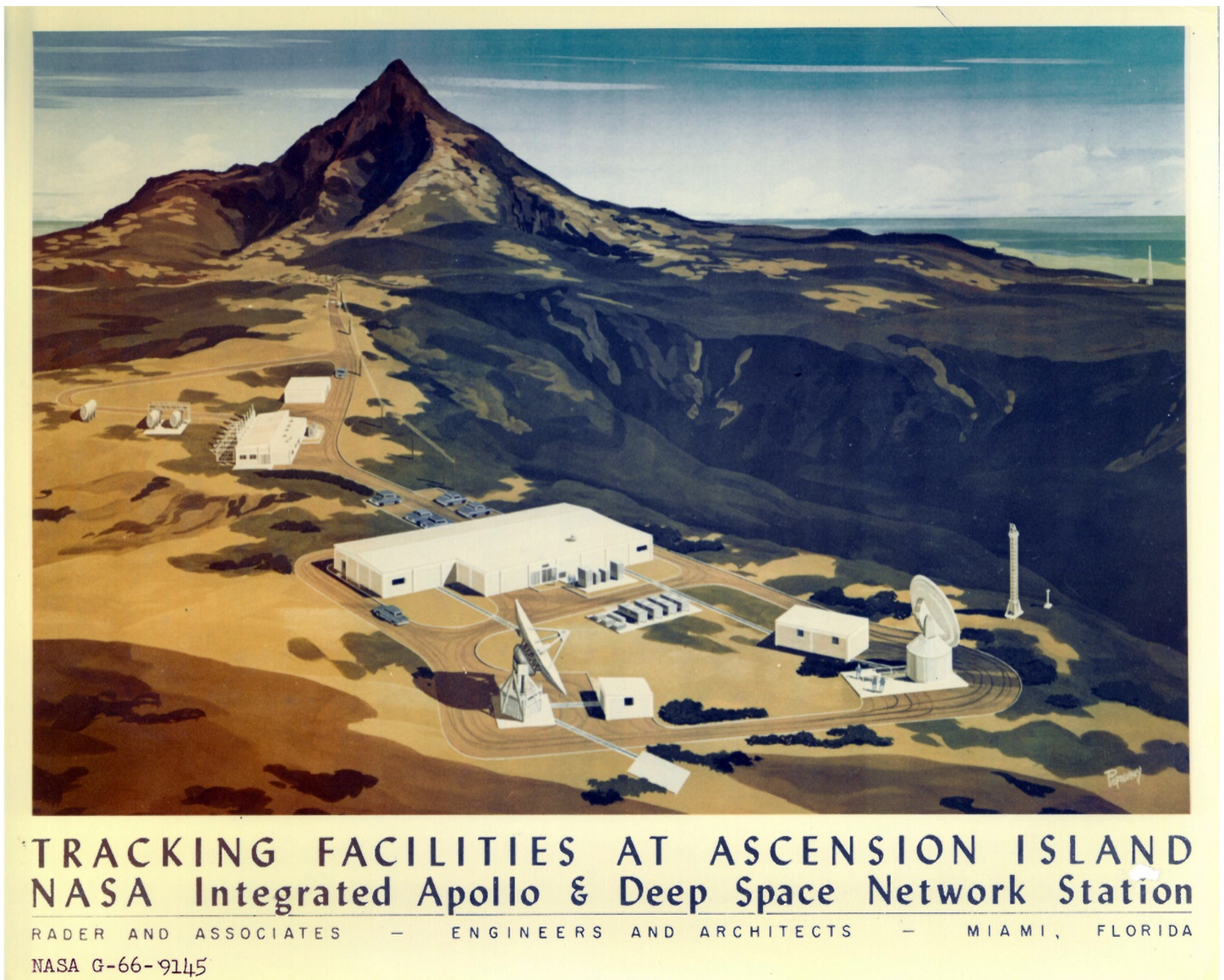
Today, the US and British air forces control monthly access in and out of Ascension Island, and the British government appoints the governor of Ascension. There is

an elected Island Advisory Council, but it's rife with corruption. In the words of a group of island residents: “The elected Council has been used to legitimize an illegitimate system that has never been a true democracy and, it seems, was never intended to be.”<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, inhabitants of the island cannot even die there, let alone vote in any meaningful way. When the UK took control of Ascension, people who passed away on the island were officially classified as “died at sea.” Ascension is Empire's utopia, a place to store exiles, air bases, and surveillance systems without any scrutiny from a citizenry, or even the vague appearance of a democratic system. No wonder the former Tory regime explored the possibility of sending asylum seekers to Ascension Island to await processing.<sup>25</sup> In Ascension, population numbers are controlled based on exactly what Empire needs in order to garden its colonial ecosystem and maintain its eyes and ears over the world and deep space.

And so, we can recognize another seed that was planted in Ascension's volcanic rock: the seed of neo- or techno-feudalism. Today, Ascension Island embodies a renewed colonial dream, one conjured by tech entrepreneurs like Peter Thiel, Jeff Bezos, and Elon Musk.





1966 painting produced by Rader and Associates depicting NASA's Manned Space Flight Network Station on Ascension Island, which would play a critical part in the Apollo Missions. Visual Archive, NASA Goddard Space Flight Center.

This dream declares large parts of earth and outer space to be terra nullius, "nobody's land." Like Ascension Island, these imagined space colonies are sites of massive technological experimentation and no democratic oversight, where rights-bearing citizens have been replaced by disposable workforces and governance is tightly controlled by a small group of elites. For the spacefaring trillionaire class to thrive, the precarious laborers tasked with terraforming Mars will, like Hasenbosch, be first recruited and then exiled by Empire.<sup>26</sup>

Already in 1877, Scottish astronomer David Gill and writer Isobel Black Gill traveled to Ascension Island to view the alignment of Mars with the sun and the earth.<sup>27</sup> As a result, the southern bay of the island, a favorite nesting ground of the sooty tern, was named "Mars Bay." Many

agents of Empire have compared Ascension to the moon or Mars when setting foot on the island, and over the years they have terraformed and techno-formed the island into what they have actually wanted the moon and Mars to become: islands of Empire.

The power of the nation-state is waning. The new Ascension Islands that emerge are no longer the products of former kingdoms and states of old, but are firmly under the remit of the trillionaire class and its new techno-feudalist vision of Empire. In light of Hardt and Negri's observation that "with the appearance of Empire, we are confronted no longer with the local mediations of the universal but with a concrete universal itself," we see that the aim of elites today supersedes that of declaring Empire universal on earth; instead, they want to literally



Top: grave of the first generation of terraform workers on Mars, depicted in Elon Musk's SpaceX infomercial series Mars (National Geographic, 2016).  
Bottom: graves at Bonetta cemetery of British colonists tasked with settling and later terraforming Ascension Island, who died of the yellow fever epidemic.

turn the universe into Empire.<sup>28</sup> We should thus not look at Ascension Island as the past, for Ascension's history is our future.

redefines the working class to include the “non-working class social class” in the post-Fordist service economy, as well as informal domestic and care work.<sup>30</sup> They recognize workers' power in collective organizing and in



Two models of Ascension Island, one preceding colonization (left) and one following colonization, with its three centuries of geo-and techno-engineering (right). Jonas Staal, *The Island and the Island*, 2023.

### 6. *Unknowning Empire, or, Who Is the Island?*

I have narrated how Empire propagated Ascension into Empire's Island. The island's reconstitution shows us the transition from empires to Empire, and underscores that Hardt and Negri's description of the universalizing desires of Empire needs to be taken literally in the age of techno-feudalism.

But there is one more central concept in Hardt and Negri's work on Empire that I believe needs to be linked to Ascension Island. In parallel with the formation of Empire, Hardt and Negri describe the possibility of “counter-Empire” as the expression of the general will of the “multitude,” which they define as “an open and expansive network in which all differences can be expressed freely and equally, a network that provides the means of encounter so that we can work and live in common.”<sup>29</sup> Building on the workerist (*operaist*) movement and the autonomist Marxist tendencies that situated the working class at the center of capitalist development, Hardt and Negri argue that the “multitude”

the cooperation of “autonomous, independent, intellectual development; development of the potentialities (*potenze*) of labour.”<sup>31</sup> This multitude is not just a reaction to Empire: it precedes, exists within, is parallel to, and acts as a counterpower to Empire. Could we then say there is a multitude that also shaped Ascension Island, well before the island was given a name it did not chose for itself? A multitude of other-than-human earth workers that formed the island's ecosystem?<sup>32</sup> This leads to another critical question: Who is the island without Empire? How do you tell these two concurrent stories, the story of the island *and* the island?<sup>33</sup>

Over the centuries, many have claimed to “discover” Ascension Island. João da Nova encountered the island on March 20, 1501—the day of the Feast of the Annunciation—and called it “Ilha Concepcao” (Island of the Conception). In 1503, Admiral Alfonso de Albuquerque encountered the island on Ascension Day and named it “Ilha Ascensao” (Island of the Ascension).<sup>34</sup> Many more agents of Empire, self-declared “discoverers,” landed on the island, and many wrote about it with scorn. The



Video collage of the island as multitude. Jonas Staal, *Empire's Island*, Video Study, 2023, still.

English tradesman and traveler Peter Mundy set foot on Ascension in 1656 and noted that “it is the most desolate and barren land, as if it were a land that God has cursed.”<sup>35</sup> So little do the colonists care for the island that it is deemed beyond even the declaration of *terra nullius*: not nobody’s land, but nobody’s land that nobody wants.

In truth, the island emerged from the ocean one million years ago and formed the tip of an undersea volcano. From an earth-time perspective, it is a young island. Before human settlement, its plant ecology included about thirty species, of which two grasses, two shrubs, and six ferns were native to the island.<sup>36</sup> Its most numerous inhabitants were green turtles and birds—including the sooty tern and the Sula—that bonded with the island through nesting and fishing. The Sula is more widely known today as the “booby,” in reference to the Spanish slang word “*bobo*,” meaning stupid.<sup>37</sup>

There is much to say about the naming of the inhabitants of the island, as much as about the naming of the island itself. The Sula was considered stupid because it did not know to be afraid of Empire. It famously landed on the shoulders of visiting sailors, only to be clubbed to death and eaten. Similarly, the green turtles that lay their eggs on the island’s beaches were easily subdued by simply turning them on their backs. They were then loaded onto ships alive to provide fresh meat during long months of travel. Today, like much of the native vegetation, the green

turtles’ existence is threatened. Like all mass extinctions in the history of organized human society, this one begins in the colonial era. Climate catastrophe is a colonial catastrophe.<sup>38</sup>

For the colonists and self-declared discoverers, the island could never truly be encountered. At first, it was a cursed land useful only for gathering meat and exiling deviants. To become valuable, Ascension had to be made “productive” through geoengineering. Today the island is still not considered a place but a mere staging ground for warfare, surveillance, and space colonization. The agents of Empire have always ascended away from Ascension Island. To ask *who is the island?* is to unknow Empire. It is to insist that the island was never “discovered” by Empire in the first place, as everything in this world already knows itself in its own way. We need to encounter the island on its own terms, as a multitude of its own, so that henceforth we can decide the terms for our future propagation together.

## X

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1  
Duff Hart-Davis, *Ascension: The Story of a South Atlantic Island* (Merlin Unwin Books, 2016).

2  
Quoted in Alex Ritsema, *A Dutch Castaway on Ascension Island in 1725* (pub. by author, 2010), 102.

3  
The most extensive study on Hasenbosch, which cross-checks his diary with the East India Company archives, is Michiel Koolbergen, *Een Hollandse Robinson Crusoe: Dagboek van de verbannen VOC-dienaar Leendert Hasenbosch op het onbewoond eiland van Ascension A.D. 1725* (Menken Kasander & Wigman Uitgevers, 2002).

4  
Koolbergen, *Een Hollandse Robinson Crusoe*.

5  
On the East India Company and the definition of "sodomy," see Diederick Wildeman, "1727: Sodomy, the Zeewijk and the Dutch East India Company," in *The Wreck of the Zeewijk*, ed. Drew Pettifer (Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, 2020).

6  
Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2000), 354.

7  
Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, "Empire, Twenty Years On," *New Left Review*, no. 120 (November–December 2019): 69.

8  
Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 198.

9  
Negri summarizes the end-of-history thesis in this way: "The globalization of capital is in itself a globalization of democracy." He goes on to note that "this position has been carried to the extremes, even to the point of caricature, by Francis Fukuyama." Antonio Negri, *Reflections on Empire* (Polity, 2003), 7.

10  
The terms "neo-feudalist" and "techno-feudalist" describe a shift in capitalism where trillion-dollar companies like Amazon replace the neoliberal market with a full monopolized environment. They grant digital fiefs to vassals (vendors) in exchange for rent. Consumers themselves are exploited as unpaid data workers who train algorithms and other

forms of artificial intelligence. See Jodi Dean, "Neofeudalism: The End of Capitalism?," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, May 12, 2020 <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/neofeudalism-the-end-of-capitalism/>; Yanis Varoufakis, *Technofeudalism: What Killed Capitalism* (The Bodley Head, 2023); and Varoufakis, *Another Now: Dispatches from Another Present* (The Bodley Head, 2020), 145–46.

11  
Charles Darwin, *The Voyage of the Beagle* (P. F. Collier & Son Corporation, 1909), 495–96.

12  
"The word 'propaganda' comes from the ablative singular feminine of *propogandus*, which is the gerundive of the Latin *propagare*, meaning 'to propagate.' The original use of the word stems from the field of biology." Erwin W. Fellows, "Propaganda: History of a Word," *American Speech* 34, no. 3 (October 1959): 182.

13  
Trees and forests increase rainfall intensity through the fungal spores, pollen, bacterial cells, and other particles they release into the atmosphere.

14  
David C. Catling and Stedson Stroud, "The Greening of Green Mountain, Ascension Island," in *XXL-XS: New Directions in Ecological Design*, ed. Mitchell Joachim Mike Silver (ACTAR Publishing, 2017).

15  
Mihnea Mircan, "A Biography of Daphne" (PhD diss., Monash University, Melbourne, 2022), 154.

16  
Mircan, "Biography of Daphne," 145.

17  
While this is partly like other colonial terraforming projects, such as the introduction of European vegetation into occupied Palestine, the difference is that Israeli settlers brought pines from Europe, whereas Darwin and Hooker brought samples from *existing* colonies to a *new* colony.

18  
George Johnson, *The All Red Line: The Annals and Aims of the Pacific Cable Project* (James Hope and Sons, 1903).

- 19 Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: Selling Democracy* (Edinburgh University Press, 1999).
- 20 This is where the name of Mike Linley's documentary *Wideawake Island* (1984) comes from.
- 21 Hart-Davis, *Ascension*, 175–90, 200–7.
- 22 Sarah Mainwaring and Richard J. Aldrich, "The Secret Empire of Signals Intelligence: GCHQ and the Persistence of the Colonial Presence," *International History Review*, no. 43 (2021).
- 23 See Michael Orrom's film *Apollo in Ascension* (1967).
- 24 Editorial, *The Islander*, October 2015.
- 25 Kevin Rawlinson, Diane Taylor, and Aletha Adu, "UK May Try to Send Small Boat Arrivals to Ascension Island, Minister Confirms," *The Guardian*, August 7, 2023 <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/aug/07/uk-may-try-to-send-small-boat-arrivals-to-ascension-island-minister-confirms>.
- 26 The agreement that users of Starlink, Musk's SpaceX subsidiary, must sign embodies the techno-feudalist strategy for monopolizing outer space. The tenth clause reads: "For Services provided on Mars, or in transit to Mars via Starship or other spacecraft, the parties recognize Mars as a free planet and that no Earth-based government has authority or sovereignty over Martian activities." Referring to Mars as a "free" planet in this context does not mean that Mars or its future inhabitants will have political agency themselves; rather, it speaks to the proprietary rights of SpaceX to extract and geoengineer the planet without any governmental or democratic interference.
- 27 Isobel Sarah Black Gill, *Six Months in Ascension: An Unscientific Account of a Scientific Expedition* (John Murray, 1978).
- 28 Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 19.
- 29 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (Penguin Press, 2004), 323, xiii–xiv.
- 30 Negri, *Reflections on Empire*, 101.
- 31 Negri, *Reflections on Empire*, 101.
- 32 On the concept of "earth workers," see Radha D'Souza and Jonas Staal, *Court for Intergenerational Climate Crimes* (Framer Framed, 2024), 10–21.
- 33 Paraphrasing China Miéville, *The City & the City* (Pan Books, 2011).
- 34 Koolbergen, *Een Hollandse Robinson Crusoe*, 115–16.
- 35 Quoted in Koolbergen, *Een Hollandse Robinson Crusoe*, 126.
- 36 David M. Wilkinson, "The Parable of Green Mountain: Ascension Island, Ecosystem Construction and Ecological Fitting," *Journal of Biogeography*, no. 31 (2004): 1.
- 37 *Wild World: Ascension Island*, produced by Ned Kelly, 1973, BBC Bristol. See also Philip Ashmole and Myrtle Ashmole, *St. Helena and Ascension Island: A Natural History* (Anthony Nelson, 2000).
- 38 D'Souza and Staal, *Court for Intergenerational Climate Crimes*.