Abstract
With the invention of the concept of ‘geosophy’, Deleuze and Guattari did not intend to invoke a new subfield of philosophy; for them, all philosophy is geosophy by virtue of its constitutive relationship with contingency. What is less well understood, however, are the implications of Deleuze and Guattari’s geosophical approach for how we think about subjectivity today. Working against phenomenological forms of ‘earth-thinking’ that tend to reduce the ‘geo’ to a phenomenological concept of ‘world’, Deleuze and Guattari conceptualize the earth as an immanent plane of forces that both precedes and exceeds the subject. Turning to Deleuze’s earlier essay on the literature of Michel Tournier, this paper offers a reading of geosophy in which aesthetic practices help us to grapple with the unthought forces of the earth beyond the phenomenological logic of world, and where art itself becomes a process that radically refuges our sense of what subjectivity can become.

Keywords Art · Deleuze · Geosophy · Earth · Subjectivity · Tournier

Introduction
“Philosophy”, Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p. 95) argue, “is a geosophy”. This simple yet extraordinary claim represents a radical critique of the history of philosophy, which, while traditionally narrated according to a presumed teleology of reason, becomes in Deleuze and Guattari’s hands a matter of geographical contingency and socio-spatial difference. Thus, from a geosophical perspective, “the hallowed questions that have guided Western philosophy’s search for truth may well be the products of historical accidents and contingent geographic proximities” rather than a logic internal to human reason (Woodward 2016, p. 3). In their own words, Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p. 93) set out the stakes of their geosophical
intervention by noting that the principle of philosophy “is a synthetic and contingent principle—an encounter, a conjunction”.

Beneath this specific commentary on philosophy’s history, however, there remains a sense in which Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of geophilosophy also entails a profound problematization of the figure of the human subject, a figure whose transcendence has long supported philosophy’s teleological tradition by acting as a foundation for reason. It is this aspect of geophilosophy—namely, its implications for how we think about subjectivity today—that the following paper seeks to explore. Geophilosophy, we argue, demands a radically new, non-phenomenological approach to subjectivity as a condition of its critique of philosophy’s principles. Our argument in this paper hinges on Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding of the ‘geo’ as an earthly plane of deterritorializing forces that cannot be contained within the horizon of a subject’s phenomenal ‘world’. Interpreting geophilosophy in this way is significant, we believe, because it allows those with an interest in the future of this planet to pose new questions about the kinds of aesthetic practices needed to experiment with and make sense of subjectivity today, at a time when the need to think beyond the human perspective is more pressing than ever (Williams et al. 2019).

Deleuze’s famous disdain for the concept of the subject is one of the signatures of his thought and of geophilosophical thinking more specifically. By ontologically privileging the subject as either the starting point or terminus of thought, Deleuze argued that philosophy places significant constraints on the question of what thinking can do. While Deleuze rejects the conventional image of the subject as an atomistic substance or fixed unity, several scholars have highlighted how a peculiar theory of subjectivity still permeates his work (O’Sullivan 2006; Bains 2001; Ruddick 2017). But this concept of subjectivity, like so many other of his concepts, is one that undergoes important modifications, variations and displacements. Boundas (1991, p. 12), for instance, offers a rough periodisation of Deleuze’s shifting attitudes on subjectivity: moving from an early “historico-philosophical interest in the Structure-Subject and its actualisation” (e.g. Deleuze 1991a, b, 2008); through a middle period interested in “dynamic individuations without subjects, which constitute collective assemblages” (e.g. Deleuze 1988; Deleuze and Guattari 1986, 2004); to a “belated, timid retrieval of the subject” as interior fold of the forces of the outside (e.g. Deleuze 2006a, b; Deleuze and Guattari 1994). A periodization like this, as Boundas (1991, p. 12) himself admits, is obviously too facile and ignores the complex relationships between and within Deleuze’s texts. But what it does help us do is identify important refrains across Deleuze’s work that mark him out as a radically original thinker on the problem of subjectivity: namely, his insistence that subjectivity is never given. Subjectivity, for Deleuze, is always under construction, best understood through processes of individuation whose source is not the interiority of any image of thought.

Deleuze’s final collaborative work with Guattari—What is Philosophy?—continues this discussion of creatively refiguring subjectivity in terms of the invention of a “people to come” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 109). Philosophical thought and artistic creation, specifically, are figured as crucially important sites for the reinvention of possibilities of life in the present (Lundy 2021). What is significant about the ‘Geophilosophy’ chapter of What is Philosophy is how Deleuze
and Guattari connect this problem of the creation of a people to come to another seemingly different problem: “the creation of a future new earth” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 88). “A new earth”, as Lundy (2021, p. 120) writes, “would seem to call for a new people that populates it; and [...] only a new people can bring forth a new earth”.

Combining this call for a new earth with that of the creation of a new people is, as Bogue (2019, p. ix) argues, more than “mere rhetorical flourish”. The concept of a new earth is inseparable from Deleuze and Guattari’s vital materialist ontology, “which is that of a perpetually self-organising, disorganizing and reorganizing, metamorphic ‘chaosmosis’” (Bogue 2019, p. ix). The creation of a new earth is, therefore, also the call for new modes of thinking and living in resonance with the material forces and elemental intensities of the cosmos. This relation between the concept of the earth and a new ontological image of thought is expressed clearly in the opening lines of the ‘Geophilosophy’ chapter, when Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p. 85) write

Subject and object give a poor approximation of thought. Thinking is neither a line drawn between subject and object, nor a revolving of one around the other. Rather, thinking takes place in the relationship of territory and the earth.

This definition of geophilosophy as a mode of thinking that seeks to untether thought from the limiting presuppositions of the subject–object relation reveals the staunchly non-phenomenological stance of his and Guattari’s philosophy. On the one hand, Deleuze and Guattari rally against the tendency of phenomenology to reduce an immanent thinking of subjectivity to the form and logic of an a priori, transcendent subject. And on the other hand, they argue it confines a thinking of the earth within the phenomenological horizon of the concept of ‘world’.

Against those that would seek to draw from Deleuze’s work something of a phenomenological (Reynolds 2010; Somers-Hall 2019) or even post-phenomenological orientation, we argue that the real force of the concept of geophilosophy for contemporary social science is how it seeks to untether thinking from the phenomenological setup and relation of subject and world. In delineating the non-phenomenological contours of geophilosophy, our paper takes as its starting point Deleuze and Guattari’s idea that the earth insists as any force that deterritorializes our horizon of meaning, and, in doing so, abstracts us from the concrete familiarity of our world. Moreover, these forces make themselves known to thought through the violence and ‘shock’ of sensation (Roberts and Dewsbury 2021, p. 1521), which is why art plays such an important role for Deleuze in problematizing the subordination of earth to world.

In developing these lines of argument, the rest of the paper is structured as follows. In the following section we draw out Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of the phenomenological reduction of ‘geo-’ to ‘world’, a move they argue that makes it impossible to conceive thought’s encounter with forces of the earth outside the topos of human meaning and recognition. Here, then, we argue that one of the key stakes of Deleuze and Guattari’s geophilosophy is how it enables us to construct
ways of grasping and rendering the unthought forces of the earth outside of the phenomenological logic of ‘world’, a process that opens towards an immanent refiguring of subjectivity.

We then move to consider the question of what is left of subjectivity when the phenomenological structure of ‘the world’ falls away. To answer this question, we explore how Deleuze (2004) foreshadows these geophilosophical themes through an analysis of his earlier essay on Michel Tournier’s novel *Friday, or The Other Island*. What Deleuze finds in Tournier’s novel is an account of the dissolution of a certain kind of perception and, thus of subjectivity, in its humanistic, transcendental form. We argue that it is this transformation in how we think perception that distinguishes the unique contribution of Deleuze and Guattarian geophilosophy to contemporary debates around subjectivity. A rich range of theoretical formations have emerged in recent years united in their attempt to question the ontological primacy of the human subject in social science thinking, including postphenomenology (Ash and Simpson 2016; Ahmed 2014), affect theory (Venn 2020; Lara et al 2017) and posthumanism (Braidotti 2013; Callus and Herbrechter 2012). However, there is still a tendency in such work to understand the problem of perception through the frames and terms of the human subject, such that the event of perception is still presumed to be located in a specific individual that would perceive the world around them. What is so radical about Tournier’s geophilosophical novel, then, is how it experiments with a thought of the ‘earth’ rather than the ‘subject’ as the ontogenetic site for the production of perceptions. What this entails is an inversion of the traditional phenomenological logic: it is not subjects that have perceptions, but rather it is perceptions that produce subjects.

Deleuze’s essay on Tournier also offers a compelling theory of the capacity of art to engender an encounter with the earth’s elemental forces and intensities outside the categories and frames of the phenomenological subject. In the final section of the paper, we situate Deleuze’s analysis of Tournier’s novel within Deleuze and Guattari’s broader theorization of art, which, they argue, entails the production of affects and percepts that go beyond the lived affections and perceptions characteristic of phenomenological experience. It is through our encounters with art, then and the mutant forms of subjectivity it produces that we can become capable of encountering the earth as that which precedes and exceeds the world.

**Conceptualizing geophilosophy: from ‘world’ to ‘earth’**

For Deleuze and Guattari, then, the concept of geophilosophy cannot be understood as an appeal to the concrete foundations of phenomenological experience. It is not a matter of humbling thought by bringing the abstractions of philosophical enquiry ‘back down to earth’. The earth, Deleuze and Guattari argue, does not afford subjectivity with the reassuring solidity of a foundation because its dynamic materiality radically precedes the meaning ascribed to a world, both temporally and ontologically. The image of the Earth that emerges here is, somewhat counterintuitively, predicated on an insistent tendency towards the ungrounding of thought and an immanent re-modelling of subjectivity, a tendency that unfolds through forces that
cannot be recognized within the horizon of meaning that we refer to as our ‘world’ (Deleuze 2004, p. 176). Another way of saying this is that Deleuze and Guattari’s earth is characterized by movements of deterritorialization: “The Earth merges with deterritorialization itself; it is an earth in infinite movement, with neither bottom nor support” (Lapoujade 2017, p. 54). Geophilosophy, then, is an attempt to dramatically broaden the conditions of subjectivity by resituating the impetus to think in movements that precede the boundaries set by human meaning, movements that Deleuze and Guattari associate with the earth rather than world.

With this, it becomes clear that geophilosophy is much more than an empirical appeal for philosophy to contemplate aspects of our planetary condition. Thinking about the earth in a literal sense is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition of geophilosophy. Moreover, very little of what passes for environmental philosophy today could be considered geophilosophical in Deleuze and Guattari’s sense. To understand why this is the case it is first necessary to map the contours of the philosophical landscape that the concept of geophilosophy is situated within. As we have already hinted, Deleuze and Guattari’s concept takes aim at the assumption, inherited from phenomenology that our capacity to think is fundamentally constrained by a horizon of meaning or ‘world’. There are, of course, a host of different trajectories within the tradition of phenomenology and not all of them place equal emphasis on this notion of world (e.g. Merleau-Ponty developing the concept of flesh in his later works). That said, the phenomenological underpinnings of the concept of world become clear when one considers that a world—any world—exists in constitutive relationship with a subject. The condition of a world is, therefore, an a priori synthesis of subject and world, such that for every world, there must be a subject for whom that world is rendered meaningful.

The nature of this distinction between the concept of world and the phenomenological tradition is clearly emphasized by Claire Colebrook, who, in seeking to critique what she refers to as a “fetishization of the world”, draws attention to a significant philosophical distinction between world and earth as competing renditions of the ‘geo-’. Colebrook (2019, p. 13) frames the issue in this way: “The world is different from the Earth; one might speak of the Earth in material, physical, historical terms as that which exists before and beyond conscious life, but the world is always a world for some being”. This extract shows how the concept of world is linked to the phenomenological theory of intentionality, formulated by Husserl, which takes the directedness of the subject’s experience as the starting point for thought and subjectivity (Roberts 2019, p. 545). A world, then, is composed of those aspects of the environment that appear to a subject as meaningful as a result of the directedness or ‘intentionality’ of consciousness that phenomenological approaches assume. While she does not use the term herself, Colebrook’s critique could be fruitfully described as geophilosophical because it highlights the limitations placed on subjectivity by the phenomenological concept of world. For Colebrook (2019, p. 13), “[t]o say that our experience is made possible by the sense of having a world is to presuppose a subjective condition as the horizon through which the world is given”. By reducing ‘geo-’ to world, we forsake any relationship with forces that escape our existing horizon of meaning, which is to say, with an earth whose expressivity does not depend upon a transcendental subject.
For Deleuze and Guattari, geophilosophy’s promise of an expanded notion of subjectivity for a “people to come” requires that we situate the conditions of thought in its relationship with the deterritorializing fluxions of the earth. To capture forces that cannot be recognized because they exceed the horizon of meaning constitutive of our current world: this is what it means to enact geophilosophy by establishing a generative relationship between thought and earth. The radical nature of this claim with respect to the phenomenological tradition cannot be overemphasized. Indeed, the recent emergence of speculative realism has illustrated the fundamental constraints of phenomenological approaches by challenging their unwillingness to affirm a reality that far exceeds that which can be given to (human) consciousness. Drawing on the speculative realism of Quentin Meillassoux, Vincent Blok argues convincingly that phenomenology—specifically, the ontological phenomenology of Martin Heidegger—is unable to provide a positive concept of the earth in a way that would enable societies to sufficiently confront these harms. For Blok, the earth remains an ‘unthought’ concept in Heidegger’s phenomenology because its being is conceptualized as a movement of concealment that can only be given from the ‘unconcealment’ of a world. Contra Heidegger, Blok (2017, p. 462) argues that what is needed is a positive concept of earth which “is not embedded in concealing-unconcealing, but is its ontic-ontological origin, the elementary which at the same time remains exterior to this strife”.

What Blok’s paper makes clear is that the earth, as the deterritorializing force of the unthought, is also rendered unthinkable from a Heideggerian perspective and that this is profoundly troubling given the significant influence of Heidegger’s thought today. In Blok’s (2017: 462) own words, this means that “the challenge of contemporary environmental philosophy is to further reflect on this Earth as that which really matters to us, to think the Earth after Heidegger”. How, then, might philosophy provide a means of relating subjectivity to the earth, to the insistence of forces that undermine the subject’s transcendental status? This is the kind of philosophical relationship to the earth that Deleuze and Guattari are pushing towards with their concept of geophilosophy. While Heidegger’s phenomenology leashes earth to world through the logic of concealment–unconcealment, Deleuze and Guattari’s geophilosophy shows us what our relationship to thought—and thus, our subjectivity—might look like if we no longer subordinated earth to world. Deleuze’s earlier works provide important clues as to what this new relationship entails—in particular, his engagement with the literary creations of Michel Tournier, to which we now turn.

**Subjectivity in a ‘World without Others’: what is wrong with the phenomenological subject?**

What is left of subjectivity when the phenomenological structure of ‘the world’ dissolves? We argue that one of the most original and radical explorations of this question in Deleuze’s work appears in the essay, ‘Michel Tournier and the World without Others’, first published in 1967 in the journal *Critique* and later appended to the appendix of *The Logic of Sense* (Deleuze 2004). Through an engagement with
Michel Tournier’s novel, *Vendredi ou les Limbes du Pacifique* (translated as *Friday, or the Other Island*), Deleuze offers an experiment for how we might think subjectivity in a way that is unrecognizable from the transcendent framework of ‘world’. This early essay is important in the context of geophilosophy because, as Bogue (2019) highlights, it anticipates many ideas that will be developed with Guattari in *What is Philosophy?*, especially the role of art (in this case a literary encounter) in helping us to intuit the earth’s forces outside the constraints of phenomenological thinking. His essay on Tournier continues his assessment of art as involving what he terms a profound “enterprise of desubjectivation” (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, p. 297). The aim of art for Deleuze, as Dan Smith (2012, p. 206) notes, “is not the development of forms or the formation of subjects”. It is instead a question of *becoming*, trading in forces (affects, percepts) and modes of individuation (impersonal haecceities) that are not subject based.

What Deleuze finds in Tournier’s novel is an account of the dissolution of a certain structure of subjectivity, one that is produced through and sustained by a relationship with “others”. Deleuze (2004, p. 356) refers to this structure as the “a priori Other”, which has the function of securing the margins and limits of the world, and which renders a certain kind of perception (of objects and subjects) possible. However, when Deleuze uses the term ‘Other’ he is not referring to specific and concrete individuals (other subjects or objects), but rather a transcendent structure that “conditions the functioning of the entire perceptual field in general” (2004, p. 356). As O’Sullivan (2006, pp. 95–96) puts it:

> It is not necessarily concrete others that perform this function, but rather it is the structural other, or the perceptual field organised by the other that operates to produce a certain subjectivity. The other is then not an object in my perceptual field, although it is that too, but it is in fact that which constitutes the field itself.

To better grasp what is at stake for Robinson, Deleuze’s essay offers a detailed examination of the ‘Other-structure’ and its role in the production of a highly particular, phenomenological vision of ‘The Human’, as a being whose perception is ultimately conditioned by the possible worlds of Others. Deleuze explains how the Other-structure generates a particular kind of perception in this way: the Other-structure, Deleuze (2004, p. 345) argues, “relativizes the not-known and the non-perceived, because Others, from my point of view, introduce the sign of the unseen in what I do see, making me grasp what I do not perceive as what is perceptible to an Other”. Under the condition of the Other-structure, then, we find our perception somewhat shielded from the vertiginous depths of the non-perceived. The effect of the Other-structure is to tame the extent of this vertigo by positing the non-perceived as a possible perception in the world of an Other. This is why Deleuze equates the Other-structure with the existence of a possible world. Furthermore, while Deleuze clearly describes the Other-structure in transcendental terms, he distinguishes himself from the Kantian tradition by refusing to extrapolate a universal definition of humanity from this structure. Instead, what interests Deleuze is the way that specific Capitalist forms of social and economic organization have come to rely upon the Other-structure as a condition of perception and, therefore, subjectivity. We need
only turn to Defoe’s original novel, where Robinson restores civility to the elements by retaining his humanity, to see how this relationship plays out.

Robinson’s ‘adventure’ in Tournier’s novel dramatizes the experience of this transcendent mechanism breaking down. In the first part of the novel the Other-structure is still functioning, and much like in Defoe’s original story, the shipwrecked Robinson attempts to organize and administer the island, codifying rules for his new ‘civilised’ life on the island of Speranza. The persistence of the Other-structure is made manifest through the various rituals that Robinson repeats to attempt to fashion a world that could tame the island’s unruly elements and, in so doing, support his previous mode of subjectivity. Everyday timekeeping devices such as a water clock and a diary soon take on an existential significance as Robinson strives to reinvent the island in such a way that the Other-structure might survive. As Deleuze (2004, p. 353) explains, the ordering of time “bears witness to an effort to repopulate the world with Others (who would still be himself) and to maintain the effects of the presence of Others when the structure has failed”.

On Tournier’s island, however, this humanist structure quickly begins to dissipate, and by the time the character of Friday appears it has almost completely broken down. It is here that Tournier’s novel radically departs from Defoe’s. Rather than Friday fulfilling the function of the ‘uncivilised other’ that must be initiated into the civilized world that Robinson has created on Speranza, he is instead encountered as the opening towards a different kind of subjectivity produced through a new relationship to the earth (Thiele 2012). As Deleuze (2004, p. 355) explains:

What is essential, however, is that Friday does not function at all like a rediscovered Other. It is too late for that, the structure has disappeared. Sometimes he functions as a bizarre object, sometimes as a strange accomplice … Sometimes he treats him as if he were falling short of the Other, sometimes as if he were transcending the Other. The difference is essential. For the other, in its normal functioning, expresses a possible world. But this possible world exists in our world, and, if it is not developed or realized without changing the quality of our world, it is at least developed in accordance with laws which constitute the order of the real in general and the succession of time. But Friday functions in an entirely different way – he indicates another, supposedly true world, an irreducible double which alone is genuine, and in this other world, a double of the Other who no longer is and cannot be. Not an Other, but something wholly other (un tout-autre) than the Other; not a replica, but a Double: one who reveals pure elements and dissolves objects, bodies and the earth.

Friday therefore acts as an “intercessor” (Deleuze 1995, p. 126) that inducts Robinson into a non-phenomenological and nonhuman relationship with others, as a means of refashioning subjectivity in the absence of a world.

There are two key dimensions to this that Deleuze (2004) spotlights in his essay. The first is how Friday interrupts the “strange detour” that the Other-structure introduces by pulling down “the elements into the earth, the earth into bodies, and bodies into objects” (Deleuze 2004, p. 356). In contrast, what Tournier’s novel describes are processes and events of “counter-actualisation:” through which, as Deleuze (2004, p. 351) puts it, the terrestrial becomes celestial. Crucial here for Deleuze are
the various *rituals*, such as Friday’s transformation of the dead goat’s carcass into an aeolian harp, creating a “music that was truly of the elements” (Deleuze 2004, p. 341). Here, it is Friday’s artistry that frees earthly forces and virtual singularities from their containment in specific bodies and objects. O’Sullivan (2006, p. 96) argues that the strange practices described in Tournier’s novel offer us a different thinking of art, understood here in terms of the productions of rituals that open thought to other possible worlds. He notes that the phenomenological structure of perception binds the human subject to a specific spatio-temporal register in which “we see only what we have already seen” (O’Sullivan 2006, p. 47). Art, he argues, has always had a “ritualistic function” in creating situations and encounters that force a ‘switching’ of registers, allowing those who experience them to access states and experiences outside the frameworks of habitual subjectivity (O’Sullivan 2006, p. 47). Reading a novel, watching a film, or listening to music are all events that, even if only for a moment, take us out of mundane consciousness to perceive forces and intensities hitherto imperceptible. Understood in terms of this ritualistic function, then, art can be reimagined as the event that “reconnects us to the nonhuman universe that we are part of but typically estranged from” (O’Sullivan 2006, p. 50).

The second key function of the Other-structure that Deleuze argues Tournier’s Robinsonade disrupts is the phenomenological tendency to separate consciousness from its object. In the early part of the story, where the Other-structure is fully functioning, Robinson appears fully invested in a particular mode of subject production predicated on a strict separation between subject and object, or ‘I’ and ‘World’. However, and as the story progresses, this structure begins to dissolve and we see the emergence of a different kind of consciousness through what Deleuze (2004, p. 342) describes as “Robinson’s becoming elemental”. This process of Robinson’s gradual merging and becoming-with the island of Speranza reaches its culmination later in the story following his aberrant nuptials with the island through the moss-filled opening of a fallen tree. This healing of the subject/object split produced by the phenomenological Other-structure, Deleuze explains, is also the discovery of a more elemental kind of consciousness:

> Consciousness ceases to be a light cast on objects in order to become a pure phosphorescence of things in themselves. Robinson is but the consciousness of the island, but the consciousness of the island is the consciousness the island has of itself – it is the island in itself (Deleuze 2004, p. 350).

One of the remarkable strengths of Tournier’s experimental novel is that it allows us to grasp perception as a philosophical problem that has been overdetermined by the phenomenological tradition. What Deleuze draws from Tournier’s novel is how we might begin to think perception without the placeholder of the subject, highlighting instead a concept of the earth as a field of forces generative of its own immanent perceptions. And it is these elemental perceptions—the universe of forces seen without the lens of habitual subjectivity—that artistic practices and encounters can help render visible (Lapworth 2021).

Tournier’s Robinsonade uses the dramatic example of the desert island to undermine the fanciful humanism implied by Defoe’s classic morality tale. It is important, therefore, to situate Deleuze’s philosophical re-telling within this literary milieu and
in relation to the pervasive trope of the (western, male) castaway who, through a combination of ingenuity, discipline and good faith, always manages to build a life that approximates ‘civilization’. Ultimately, then, Deleuze’s focus is on the ability of Tournier’s novel, understood as a work of art, to produce the breakdown of the Other-structure in its readers through the affects and percepts of his character, Robinson. Deleuze knows that we do not have to be washed up on a desert island to experience the limits of the world through a dissolution of the Other-structure; rather, it is the work of art itself—in this case, Tournier’s fantastic novel—that engenders a re-thinking of subjectivity no longer tied to a familiar world. To the extent that art achieves this, we find that we are like Robinson: experiments in producing subjectivity without the phenomenological placeholder of a world.

**Art, sensation and the problematization of perception**

Deleuze was clearly taken by the imagery of Tournier’s desert island and the thought experiment embodied in Robinson’s attempts to carve out a new form of subjectivity without the transcendental structure of the Other. But there is also a sense in which Deleuze sees something in Tournier’s novel that speaks to the vital significance of artistic creation in general, understood as a mode of thought that no longer accedes to the unitary horizon of a world. On the one hand, then, Tournier’s story provides Deleuze with a narrative that enables him to dramatize his conceptual argument that the transcendental structures constitutive of human experience are far from the immutable phenomenological principles that we often take them to be. Thus, in Conway’s (2010, p. 80) analysis, Tournier’s narrative was attractive to Deleuze because it served to illuminate the radical contingency of the ordinary compositions of perception, desire and sexuality by “imagining a set of material circumstances that would threaten this composition”. On the other hand, however, Deleuze’s essay clearly foreshadows his later philosophical writings on art—specifically, the idea that it is through art that we find ourselves exposed to a deterritorializing shock of sensation that reveals the contingency of our most familiar modes of perception and affection. It is to this second aspect of Deleuze’s encounter with Tournier and its implications for contemporary understandings of Deleuze and Guattari’s geophilosophical project that we now turn.

Art’s ability to make us perceive, feel and think in ways that are radically, indeed, sometimes violently new is central to Deleuze’s philosophy, both in his solo works and his collaborations with Guattari. In an essay titled *Literature and Life*, published in 1997, Deleuze argues against what he terms “an infantile conception of literature”, defined by an overemphasis upon the personological dimensions of writing. “To write”, Deleuze (1997, p. 227) argues, “is not to recount one’s memories and voyages, one’s loves and griefs, one’s dreams and phantasms”. The problem with this infantile conception of literature is that it fails to create any kind of ‘shock’ at the level of our perceptions and affections. In other words, this kind of writing is content to perceive and feel according to habits that it presumes to be the immutable conditions of a universal human nature. For Deleuze, however, writing only
becomes literary—which is to say, artistic—when it creates the conditions that thought requires to grasp the contingency of perception and affection.

There are clear lines of resonance here between Deleuze’s conceptualization of art as a practice of problematizing perception and Robinson’s desert island ordeal. In Tournier’s novel, it is Robinson himself who is subjected to this problematization through a process of subjective breakdown that leads him to the very edge of psychosis. It is not so much the situation of being marooned, however, but rather Robinson’s brutal exposure to the habitual and, thus, ultimately contingent nature of perception that is at stake in Tournier’s novel. The fact that this breakdown never occurs in Defoe’s original novel betrays the author’s fundamentally Kantian understanding of human experience as something conditioned by laws that are both universal and unchanging. The shock transmitted to Robinson through Tournier’s Speranza speaks of a much broader violence enacted upon thought through the realization that there are no transcendent principles of human nature, only contingent habits and institutions that can always be called into question given the appropriate conditions.

And yet, as we noted in the preceding section, we do not need to imitate Robinson’s ordeal to attain such a realization. This, Deleuze argues, is the power that art has to bring us face to face with the habitual nature of our ‘selves’ through the violence of sensation. From Deleuze’s perspective, we could say that there is an element of Tournier’s ‘Robinsonade’ in every encounter with art, to the extent that all art aspires to problematize that which is taken for granted in our habitual manners of perceiving and feeling. When it comes to encounters with art, then, we find ourselves marooned on a desert island of sorts because, like Tournier’s Robinson, we are brought face to face with the impossibility of a universal human nature.

Deleuzian scholar Claire Colebrook (2019, p. 16) comes to a similar conclusion when she argues that “one of the ways we might think about artworks or what it requires to view something as art is that it creates a form of life without world”. In speaking of ‘world’, Colebrook is taking aim at Heidegger’s ontological distinction between the animal and the human, which posits the human as unique in its world-forming capacities. For Heidegger, this definition of humanity as world forming is bound up with language; as Felice Cimatti (2020, p. 40) explains, for Heidegger, “to be the linguistic animal means being the animal who can have a relation with the world only through the mediation of the word: there can be no ‘world’—as opposed to mere animal ‘environment’—without a language”. The world, as figured in Heidegger’s ontological phenomenology, is something that must be read and not simply sensed in the way that an animal detects and responds to the stimuli presented by its environment. Colebrook argues that this valorization of humanity’s world-disclosing capacities forecloses art’s capacity to shock us out of the existing habits that constitute our world as a horizon of meaning. In these instances, art no longer operates as a sign of a world waiting to be read. When pushed to its limit, art is what happens when a fragment of the world is presented in such a way that it becomes “an image as such, without world, without sense, and without humanity” (Colebrook 2019, p. 16).

One of the great achievements of Tournier’s novel is that it pushes this idea of an experience of life without world to its extreme and attempts to capture what this might look and feel like through literary means. For Robinson, the collapse
of the Other-structure shatters the world into a chaotic assemblage of fragments that cannot be read or interpreted within the context of an assumed whole. Each fragment rises up before him as an image that demands to be experienced in its own right. Deleuze (2004, p. 345) is under no illusion when it comes to the traumatic nature of such an experience, describing Robinson’s altered perception in the following way:

Everything is implacable. Having ceased to stretch out and bend towards one other, objects rise threateningly; we discover then wickedness which is no longer that of man. One might say that each thing, having been rid of its relief and reduced to its sharpest lines, slaps us in the face or strikes us from behind.

Thus, while Deleuze clearly valorizes the capacity for art to disrupt and rework our habits of perception and affection, it remains a matter of careful dosage. To encounter all of life as we encounter art, without a meaningful world to afford some degree of insulation from the shock of the new, would be to undergo something akin to Tournier’s Robinsonade.

Deleuze’s writing on art arguably reaches its apotheosis in his final collaboration with Guattari, What is Philosophy? In this book, Deleuze and Guattari put forward a non-phenomenological concept of the artwork as a ‘bloc’ or ‘compound’ of sensation. Art, Deleuze and Guattari argue, is the being of sensation. By this they mean that art should not be understood in phenomenological terms as a subject’s sensation ‘of’ something, whether the perception of a landscape or the affections attributed to an object or person. Rather, the sensations that artists create should be understood as “beings whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 164). Artistic creation, thus, testifies to the fact that reality is not reducible to the subject–object relation. It achieves this, Deleuze and Guattari suggest, by producing scenarios whereby matter itself ‘passes into’ sensation to become wholly expressive of forces beyond the human. If the sensations produced by art refer to anything, it is only to the materials themselves and never the objects or persons that their depictions happen to resemble. Thus, for Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p. 166), the power of art refers solely to “the smile of oil, the gesture of fired clay, the thrust of metal, the crouch of Romanesque stone, the ascent of Gothic stone”.

The compounds of sensation that Deleuze and Guattari attribute to artistic creation act directly upon the body’s nervous system, bypassing the habits of perception and affection that we assume to be the unchanging and universal features of human experience. Again, this is precisely what takes place in Tournier’s novel, as evident in Deleuze’s (2004, p. 345) analysis:

Instead of relatively harmonious forms surging forth from, and going back to, a background in accordance with an order of space and time, only abstract lines now exist, luminous and harmful – only a groundless abyss, rebellious and devouring. Nothing but Elements.

The structural conditions of Robinson’s perception give way in the face of his extreme isolation, and he is suddenly confronted with a reality that impinges
violently upon his senses in a manner that seems to generalize the disruptive capacities attributed to art in Deleuze and Guattari’s later work. Without the Other-structure, there is no longer a “background of expected or anticipated objects” (Conway 2010, p. 77) available to protect Robinson from the chaotic excesses of the earth—and indeed the cosmos. His nervous system is, quite literally, plugged in to these nonhuman forces, disrupting the evolutionary pressures responsible for shaping humanity’s organismic consciousness into a functional tool for extracting meaning—and, thus, a world—from a much more overwhelming reality.

This, Grosz (2008, p. 21) argues, is what Deleuze and Guattari understand to be the ethical and political value of art, namely, its singular capacity to engender situations where the body can be “directly touched by the forces of chaos from which it so carefully shields itself in habit, cliché, and doxa”. Art’s compounds of sensation consist of affects and percepts that have been wrested from the affections and perceptions of lived experience (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 167). Affects differ from affections in that they refer to events of feeling that are no longer constrained by the subject’s horizon of meaning. While affections work by habituating the organic relationship between environmental stimulus and response, affects are characterized by the temporary breakdown of this relationship in the face of novel sensations (Lapworth 2016). Affects entail, for this reason, “the nonhuman becomings of man [sic]” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 169). Percepts, on the other hand, are the nonhuman visions and auditions associated with art’s compounds of sensation. Thus, for Deleuze and Guattari, we ‘see’ a work of visual art not as subjects who perceive objects, but rather because, when encountering the work, we find ourselves drawn into a percept that is already a kind of vision immanent to matter’s expressive capacities. The body passes into the sensations of the paint itself and, in doing so, we experience its nonhuman vision as a percept that stands alone.

The nonhuman becomings that Deleuze and Guattari attribute to the affects of art’s sensations resonate with Deleuze’s (2004, p. 342) earlier assertion that, in Tournier’s novel, the final aim of Robinson represents a process of ‘de-humanization’. Similarly, Deleuze’s description of the merging of Robinson’s consciousness with the island as a generalized “phosphorescence of things in themselves” (2004, p. 350) bears a remarkable resemblance to the concept of the percept developed in collaboration with Guattari. The key implication of this observation is that the critique of phenomenology associated with Deleuze and Guattari’s geophilosophical shift from world to earth is intimately related to art, where art is understood as a mode of thought that reveals the fundamental contingency of human perception, affection and, therefore, subjectivity. In this essay we have shown how Deleuze’s analysis of Tournier’s novel represents a significant moment where this relationship between the forces of the earth, the capacities of art and the ethico-political implications of nonhuman becomings is laid out in affirmative terms. Tournier’s Robinsonade provides Deleuze with a literary dramatization of what happens to subjectivity when the habits and institutions that structure our worlds are undermined by the deterritorializing forces of the earth and the cosmos. To this end, we see art’s geophilosophical significance in terms of its capacity to recreate the fantastical and disturbing
conditions of the desert island that remain immanent to the world in its everyday familiarity—if only for a short time.

**Conclusion**

Geophilosophy remains a significant, albeit often overlooked concept in the work of Deleuze and Guattari because, as we have shown, it synthesizes two fundamental refrains within their philosophical project: first, an experimental creation of forms of subjectivity that go beyond the universalizing perceptual landscape associated with the figure of the human—or, as Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p. 88) refer to it, the creation of a ‘people to come’; and second, a reconceptualization of the earth or ‘geo-’ as that which precedes and exceeds the experiential consistency of a phenomenological world. Geophilosophy, then, is a concept that encourages us to see these two problematics as two sides of the same coin, the reason being that it is the phenomenological fixation upon a recognizable world that constrains subjectivity to the modes of perception and affection that we assume to be both universal and unchanging. While the notion of the Anthropocene has given rise to many new and exciting interpretations of geophilosophical thought within the humanities and social sciences, nonetheless, we believe that Deleuze and Guattari’s concept remains somewhat unique in its ambition to think and act the forces of the earth without the phenomenological foundation of a world.

Deleuze’s conceptual engagement with Tournier’s experimental novel provides a much-needed opportunity to situate the more explicit references to geophilosophy found in *What is Philosophy?* within the context of Deleuze and Guattari’s broader critique of phenomenological thought. What Deleuze sees in Tournier’s re-imagining of Robinson is a way of articulating the process by which phenomenological perception breaks down following the dissolution of the Other-structure. Unlike Defoe’s original character, Tournier’s Robinson must come to terms with the fact that this familiar structure of perception is a product of habits and institutions that are ultimately contingent and that these can no longer be sustained on his desert island. Indeed, through Robinson’s escapades, Tournier shows his readers that perception neither begins nor ends with the figure of the human subject in its relationship to a world. Instead, Tournier’s Robinson is forced to navigate a dehumanized mode of perception, one that exposes thought—and, therefore, subjectivity—to the affects and percepts immanent to Speranza’s nonhuman landscapes.

If geophilosophy insists upon the need to create new forms of subjectivity as a prerequisite for experimenting with less anthropocentric relationships to our planet, then Deleuze’s encounter with Tournier takes this idea still further by showing us what perception might look like from the vantage point of this new, non-phenomenological perspective. It is also significant to note that Deleuze turns to artistic practice—in this case, in the form of a novel—as a means of problematizing the limits of perception in ways that go beyond habitual experiences of the everyday. For Deleuze, then, there is a broader question at stake, namely: what is the significance of art as a mode of thought that enables us to intuit forms of perception that precede
the subject and that, in doing so, allows us to reimagine thought’s capacities in ways that take us beyond the human condition (Ansell-Pearson 2018)?

Phenomenology does not and should not have a monopoly on the problem of perception. It fails to grasp what is at stake in art because it remains bound to subject–predicate modes of thought that reduce its forces and sensations to the recognized perceptions of an already-constituted subject. Such a thought is inadequate because, as Deleuze and Guattari (1994) make clear, art trades in of modes of perception and affection—‘affects’ and ‘percepts’—that do not have their foundation in the human but which, instead, entail the nonhuman commencements of subjectivity. The important lesson to take from Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of art is that we don’t abandon perception by getting rid of the subject. Instead, we stand to gain a new understanding and relationship to the earth as an immanent plane generative of its own affects and percepts. And it is precisely this geophilosophical realization, which art itself helps render perceptible to thought, which calls forth ‘a people to come’ characterized by subjectivities that are no longer constrained to a universalizing concept of the human.

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Tom Roberts is a cultural geographer and Lecturer in the School of Science at UNSW Canberra. Using new materialist, post-humanist and non-representational theories, Tom’s research examines the vital agency of matter within contemporary social and cultural processes. He is especially interested in emerging practices of material design and the lively capacities of ‘new’ materials. Tom’s research has been published in a range of geography journals including *Area*, *Progress in Human Geography*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* and *GeoHumanities*.

Andrew Lapworth is a Lecturer in Cultural Geography at the University of New South Wales, Canberra. His research interests lie in social and cultural theory, and especially the implications of process and event-oriented philosophies (particularly Deleuze, Simondon, Guattari and Whitehead) for contemporary theorisations of subjectivity, art, politics and ethics. His recent published work has explored the contemporary art–technology and art–science interface; the material and conceptual refiguring of ‘life’ in bioart and biohacking; and the nonhuman encounter of cinema. His research has appeared in journals such as *Theory, Culture & Society, Body & Society, Cultural Geographies* and *Deleuze & Guattari Studies*.

J. D. Dewsbury is a Professor in Human Geography at the School of Science, UNSW Canberra. His research focuses on the performative and non-representational nature of social life, in particular, on how we view space, environment, affects, human behaviour and subjectivity within the humanities and social sciences. Using post-continental philosophy, his research looks at understandings of habit, agency and technology, addressing politics and identity through the relationship between ontology and events, and the impacts of assemblage theory and affect in research practice. JD’s research has been published in journals including *Area, Cultural Geographies, GeoForum* and *Performance Research*. 
