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CONCEPTS, THEORIES, & INTRODUCTIONS

Worlding the World Otherwise? Islandness as a Critical Problem

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Influential strands of Island Studies have spent decades moving from the island as a bounded object towards relational, processual and generative islandness. This paper turns that critical achievement back upon itself by asking what work islandness is now being made to do. It situates this question within a wider orientation of contemporary thought, in which calls to 'world the world otherwise' increasingly seek critical purchase through relationality, attentiveness, immersion, care, opacity, fugitivity, and more-than-human responsiveness. The paper asks what is at stake in this shared reliance on worlding, and how world came to acquire such authority. Extending the abyssal analytic, it returns to late medieval Latin Christendom and early modern European expansion to trace a historical transformation in which the work once secured by external and divine ground increasingly passes into world. On this account, the familiar Enlightenment narrative in which Man replaces God is not only incomplete but misleading, directing critique toward the subject while leaving the authority acquired by the demand that world must hold less examined. The modern 'Geographical Subject' emerges as one historically commanding bearer of the work, not its source, and that subject's current displacement need not bring the work to an end. Today, islandness itself increasingly becomes another bearer—recruited to connect, salvage, repair, remain open to and furnish other futures. The paper is diagnostic and asks why transformation so readily takes the form of further worlding, and why what has already borne violence is so readily assigned the work of bearing another world.

1.0. Introduction

Calls to 'world the world otherwise' have become prominent across influential strands of contemporary critical thought (de la Cadena & Blaser, 2018; Müller, 2021; Tsing, 2015). Across relational, posthuman, more-than-human, and decolonial approaches, this orientation is not simply ethical or methodological, but structural. It rests on the conviction that sustained critique of modern power cannot be achieved by exposing domination alone, but must also take the form of further worlding (Derickson et al., 2025; Oswin, 2020). Across these otherwise different approaches, relational entanglements are traced, harms connected, responsibilities expanded,

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humility developed, opacity and fugitivity engaged, a world of many worlds embraced, and differences sustained. Yet what is harder to notice amid such diversity is the term through which these different critical moves come to make sense together: world. The paper therefore asks what is at stake in this shared reliance on worlding, and how world came to acquire such authority. In Island Studies, that question turns attention to islandness itself.

The paper turns Island Studies' critical movement from island to islandness back upon itself. Influential strands of the field have spent decades asking how islands might be understood otherwise: not as bounded, isolated objects, but through relation, process, openness and more-than-human life (DeLoughrey, 2019; Glissant, 1997; Stratford et al., 2011). This paper asks a different question: what position does islandness now occupy in the continuing work of worlding? Its argument is that, as the island has ceased merely to be an object of worlding, islandness has increasingly become a bearer of that work—recruited to connect, endure, repair, remain open and furnish other futures. Islandness thereby becomes a site in which the redistribution of worlding's (and worlding otherwise) work is especially concentrated, as relation, openness, vulnerability and generativity acquire the force of capacities that islands and islanders are increasingly expected to bear.

The stakes, then, are how world acquired an authority whose work can persist as its bearers change. The paper proceeds in three movements, beginning with the contemporary forms in which this redistribution is most visible before turning historically to ask how such redistribution became possible. First, it begins from the islands as a current critical problem by revisiting two heuristics which characterise a great deal of island studies today: 'correlation' and 'storiation' (Pugh & Chandler, 2021). Correlation renders island and islander relations, disturbances and consequences followable within an expanded world. Storiation responds to the limits of such followability by refusing the external standpoint and redistributing the work of worlding through immersion, opacity and practices of unlearning mastery. These modes overlap, coexist and recur across contemporary work; neither simply replaces the other. Their coexistence matters structurally: the increasing displacement of a mastering standpoint does not end the work through which world is sustained, but redistributes where and by whom that work is borne.

Second, the paper turns historically to ask how world acquired an authority whose work can persist even as the forms made to carry it change. Returning to late medieval Latin Christendom and early modern European expansion, rather than treating the 'Age of European Expansion' as homogeneous, it isolates a specific trajectory through which geographical, sovereign, colonial, and later philosophical practices increasingly had to make divisions and claims operative across widening distances. It traces a transformation in which work once secured through external and divine ground increasingly passes into the world, drawing out how what can be called the modern 'Geographical Subject' became one particularly powerful

bearer of that work rather than its source. This distinction matters because displacing this Geographical Subject need not displace the demand that world hold. The final movement returns to contemporary Island Studies to ask what happens when that work is redistributed through islandness itself. The paper develops the abyssal analytic (Pugh & Chandler, 2023) by asking how, through historically specific arrangements, what exposes a bearer's insufficiency can itself be made to carry unresolved work.

2.0. Correlation

In its broad contemporary usage, worlding otherwise names attempts to unsettle the assumption of a singular, pre-given world by foregrounding the situated and relationally entangled practices through which worlds are made and sustained (Haraway, 2008; Müller, 2021; Tsing, 2015). It therefore commonly proceeds through relational ontologies and epistemologies, emphasising interdependence, becoming, more-than-human entanglement and plural ways of knowing and being. This orientation has clear affinities with the relational and archipelagic turns in Island Studies, where islands have increasingly been approached not as bounded and self-sufficient objects but as constituted through movements, connections and relations that exceed simple land–sea or island–world divisions (DeLoughrey, 2019; Glissant, 1997; Hau'ofa, 2008; Hayward, 2012; Pugh, 2018; Stratford et al., 2011). Across these approaches, islandness takes form through these relations: entities do not simply precede their relations but take form through them.

'Correlation' names one influential way in which this relational orientation has been made operative through islandness. As the cuts and distinctions of modernity have increasingly been understood as reductive, extractive and violent, correlation makes disturbance critically available by tracing how bodies, environments, histories and consequences register across one another (Pugh & Chandler, 2021). Islandness acquires critical force here less through the bounded island than through its capacity to disclose a relational field across which disturbance and consequence can be followed. Correlation is therefore one contemporary form of worlding: relation gives disturbance worldly standing by making its consequences available to be traced.

More specifically, correlation names an onto-epistemological logic of indirect registration: like the 'canary in the coalmine', changes in one entity become readable as signs of changes in another because relations exhibit sufficient regularity to be sensed, compared or acted upon (Pugh & Chandler, 2021). Within this register, what islandness is cannot be separated from these processes of relational registration: island ecologies, species, technologies and islander practices themselves register change across one another. Donna Haraway's (2008) description of organisms and worlds as "material-semiotic nodes or knots" (p. 4) gives this logic a useful image: change becomes perceptible because bodies, signs, environments and histories register one another through their connections. 'Followability' names the requirement this understanding places upon islandness: its relations must remain sufficiently available for disturbance to be traced, read or acted upon.

Correlation therefore names a logic of registration whose authority is not exhausted by the external scholar: that standpoint is one historically powerful bearer of the broader requirement that relations remain available to be followed.

In the context of climate breakdown, extinction and ongoing colonial extraction, correlation is not limited to documenting effects. Within this mode, islandness itself takes form as a relational field in which disturbance becomes intelligible and can be acted upon through the ways it registers across human and more-than-human relations (Ferbrache, 2024). Islands condense vulnerability and interdependence in ways that make feedback, exposure and return difficult to deny. Hadfield and Haraway's (2019) Tree Snail Manifesto gives this a particularly concentrated island form: threatened Hawaiian tree-snail lives draw together extinction, habitat transformation, scientific practice and more-than-human vulnerability, so that no single disturbance can be treated as isolated from the multitude of relationalities through which it travels. In the correlation mode, islandness acquires critical force then precisely because consequences can be made to register through this intensification of relational entanglement (Kanngieser, 2020).

Islandness consequently bears a core requirement of correlation: followability. Coastlines, reefs, ports, plantations and hazard zones provide interfaces across which relational disturbance can be followed. Their apparent boundedness dramatises the collapse of 'away': circulation, extraction and climate effects become difficult to parse as separable domains. A coastline, for example, can bring apparently distant processes into the same analytic field: extraction elsewhere returns through altered currents, sediments or infrastructures; climatic disturbance registers through shorelines and habitats; circulation connects what bounded territorial reasoning would separate (Wang, 2023). The question is what islandness must become in order to carry this relational work of worlding.

Bruno Latour's (2017) *Facing Gaia* provides a wider formulation of the correlational sensibility. Gaia does not name a harmonious planetary whole but a troubling condition in which actions return through feedback and relations compound rather than disappear elsewhere. The importance of this for island thinking is not scale but form: islandness itself is understood through recursive exposure rather than bounded separation. What happens here returns there; what appears external re-enters through another relation. This is worlding through recursive connection. Within correlation, this recursive exposure acquires the force of a requirement that consequence remain sensible, traceable and followable.

Yet it is precisely these strengths that mark correlation's limit. Unsettling human/nature divisions does not remove the requirement that relations remain available to be registered, followed, mapped or narrated. In scholarly practice, this requirement is often concentrated in a standpoint from which island, islander and their relations can be followed and brought together. The authority concentrated in that standpoint gives positionality a structural

force: the division between a subject that follows and a world made available to be followed can persist even as the relations composing that world are radically expanded.

But the structural force of correlation does not reside in that standpoint alone. The requirement that relation be available to be followed enters into the constitution of islandness itself. Islandness acquires critical standing through its capacity to disclose connection, register disturbance and make consequence followable across an expanded world. The stake is therefore not only what relation reveals, but the work relation and islandness perform in sustaining world as the field within which consequence can count. Relational critique can transform the worlds it contests. What persists is the work of worlding islandness is made to bear: openness, connection and the capacity to register consequence become increasingly constitutive of islandness itself, rather than simply qualities through which islands are interpreted. Engaging the figure of the island, Doreen Massey's (1991) 'global sense of place' provides an influential relational account of place. Read through the question developed here, that account raises a further issue: how openness can acquire the force of a constitutive norm through which places, peoples and practices are judged.

The difficulty is therefore not only contemporary. Relational openness has itself long operated as an evaluative demand within modern thought. Rei Terada (2023), for example, shows how seas and islands recur across figures including Kant and Hegel as spaces in which contact, circulation, and exposure become conditions of development. Conversely, those marked as insufficiently open to relation can be positioned as 'backward' or 'savage', lacking the capacity for becoming in the world. The point is critical: relation already has a history as a means of distinguishing and evaluating capacities for worlding. Within the trajectory Terada traces, relation functions as a safeguard against fixed identity—while simultaneously distributing, hierarchising, and policing who or what counts as capable of such openness. Islandness can consequently become exemplary for worlding otherwise precisely insofar as it is understood as open, connected and capable of becoming through relation.

Within this history, relational openness is more than descriptive: contact with the foreign is rendered catalytic, and the Other becomes both object of pedagogy and condition of the subject's development (Terada, 2023, pp. 27–33). Relation can therefore become an evaluative test through which refusal, withdrawal or nonparticipation appears as a failure to become. Correlation carries this history forward when relational availability becomes a criterion through which islandness and worlding otherwise acquire critical standing. The consequence becomes particularly stark when difference is valued for what it can contribute to relation. Dixa Ramírez-D'Oleo's (2023) *This Will Not Be Generative* demonstrates the violence of precisely this expectation. Under the sign of relation, the Other is too easily rendered

available in advance: a source of vitality, lesson, or repair; a figure whose difference is valuable insofar as it can be incorporated, mobilised, or made productive.

Taken together, these pressures reveal correlation's structural constraint. Within this mode, the requirement that disturbance become followable assigns islandness a continuing task: it must provide the relations through which disturbance, harm and consequence can register. Each extension of the relational field brings further relations, disturbances and consequences into view that must in turn be followed. Where harm cannot be stabilised as relation, correlation encounters a real limit; where it can, successful connection still does not complete the work. Islandness, thus constituted, becomes a bearer of this work of worlding, recruited to sustain the relational availability through which disturbance can continue to acquire critical standing. It is here that the structural stakes sharpen. Once islandness acquires critical standing in debates about worlding otherwise through relational availability, pressure on the external standpoint also places this register of islandness itself under pressure. Can islandness continue to be understood as a field of followable relations once the position from which those relations are gathered becomes itself an object of critique? Positionality therefore marks the point at which the bearer of followability itself comes under pressure. What follows turns on whether displacing that bearer also displaces the work islandness has been made to carry in sustaining a relational world.

3.0. Storiation

Storiation marks a shift in the register through which islandness and worlding are constituted (Pugh & Chandler, 2021). Correlation renders islandness through relations that can be followed as disturbances, connections, and consequences register across a wider field. Storiation begins from a radically different understanding: to constitute islandness from the external gaze is a reductive, violent act. Instead, islandness must be experienced through its immanent becoming, continually composed through materialities, practices, encounters and relations whose significance is not available in advance from elsewhere. The pressure placed upon the external standpoint therefore concerns more than the position of the researcher. What comes into question is whether islandness itself can be rendered (intelligible) from outside (Burgos Martínez, 2024). The question for this paper is what happens to the work of worlding when that external position can no longer securely bear it.

Storiation redistributes worlding. Once islandness is understood in this register of immanent becoming, the forms associated with storiation follow. To encounter islandness on these terms requires deep immersion in the processes through which island and island life are themselves composed: hence the emphasis on dwelling and co-becoming with island and islander (Barker & Pickerill, 2020). Opacity characterises relation here precisely because what takes immanent form cannot be grasped from an external

position; structurally then, the limit to apprehension belongs to the account of islandness itself. As Mark Jackson (2014) puts it, critique ceases to be "the aesthetic and epistemic exercise of perpetual self-examination in the face of *im*possible (...) otherness" (p. 78, italics in original) and becomes attentive to the fact that "practices, processes, and material interactions (...) *are* existence" (p. 81; italics in original). Dense social relations, repetitive encounters and viscerally experienced ecological limits give islands particular force as milieus in which positional distance becomes difficult to sustain (Boon et al., 2018). There is a redistribution in what islandness is and is made to bear: the island milieu carries the immanent, unfinished work through which worlding proceeds, while the researcher's immersion structurally follows from that transformation.

A comparable redistribution appears in Estalella's (2026) account of ethnographic experimentation, where knowledge is produced through the arrangements of inquiry rather than secured by an unmediated encounter with a field. Parikka and Bhowmik's (2024) *Lost Islands* gives this movement an island-specific form. Its participatory expeditions through Vallisaari engage the island's entangled ecologies, infrastructures and histories through immersion and performance. Read through storiation, islandness is not simply an object represented by the encounter: the island milieu carries the relations through which the encounter, and its worlding, are composed.

An important shift follows in how limits are treated. Where, in the correlation mode, the unknown functions as a problem to be resolved—something to be traced, rendered legible, or integrated—within storiation, not-knowing becomes productive. As Stacy Alaimo (2024) emphasises, what is relinquished in clarity and cognitive control is taken to be compensated by deeper immanence. Supported by particular readings of Glissant (1997), opacity is affirmed as that which cannot be possessed from an external standpoint. Yet this affirmation does not interrupt worlding within the storiation mode. On the contrary, it intensifies, and immersion in the opacity of relation becomes the means through which worlding is engendered: legitimacy is re-secured by treating immanence as the condition under which meaning can register at all. Within storiation, opacity thus enters the constitution of islandness as a capacity for sustaining further worlding: what cannot be obtained from outside becomes part of what the island milieu is required to bear.

What is at stake here is not the sincerity of the researcher, nor the moral adequacy of particular engagements. The question is structural and about the constitution of islandness and worlding itself. The storiation mode does not simply reconfigure contemporary understandings of islandness; it also re-reads the past. Both modern reasoning and the correlation mode are recast as a sequence of missteps whose exhaustion legitimates storiation's emergence. Central here is the altered standing of the limit, which gives storiation a distinctively productivist, temporal and affective signature: humility, hesitation, quietness, and the ongoing injunction to 'fail better'. As Julietta

Singh (2017) writes in *Unthinking Mastery*, failure becomes not an endpoint but a generative and temporal posture—one through which critique continually renews itself. Sundberg's (2014) account of decolonisation makes this temporal structure concrete. Decolonisation is something "to be aspired to and enacted rather than a state of being that may be claimed" (p. 39). Failure no longer marks the termination of the work but becomes a way of worlding without end.

Taken together, correlation and storiation bring the wider stakes of the paper into view. They are not simply different ways of interpreting islands: each helps constitute what islandness can be and what work it is expected to perform within worlding otherwise. Correlation gives islandness critical force through followability, connection and the registration of consequence; storiation shifts that force towards immersion, opacity, incompletion and immanent becoming. These are consequential differences, and the movement between them can involve a genuine transformation in the register through which islandness is understood. Yet across that transformation, islandness becomes increasingly constitutive of worlding itself: as the external standpoint comes under pressure, more of the work is carried through the relations, limits and capacities attributed to island life. The movement from island to islandness is therefore also a movement in where the work of worlding is borne. This raises the question that motivates the historical turn of the next section: how did world acquire an authority capable of persisting as the forms, subjects and registers through which its work is carried change?

4.0. The Abyssal Analytic: the Early Modern Demand that World Hold

The contemporary analysis creates a historical question. Correlation and storiation show that the work of worlding need not remain concentrated in an external, sovereign subject. They instead understand relational becoming as an a priori setting, as the constitutive bearer of worlding. Islandness, thus constituted, becomes generative. These are genuine transformations, not simply new contents placed within an unchanged ontology. Yet precisely because these transformations can substantially alter the position of the subject while world and worlding continue to organise the terms through which transformation is articulated, they allow the historical status of world itself to come into view. How did world acquire an authority capable of persisting across such transformations? My development of the abyssal analytic therefore turns to the particular formation in which the subject–world arrangement contested by contemporary worlding otherwise acquired extraordinary force. It follows a trajectory through late medieval Latin Christendom, early modern European expansion and the colonial, racial and philosophical formations that developed through them. This is not a genealogy of worlding in general. The trajectory taken matters because it acquired global power through conquest, empire, racialisation and geographical ordering, and because it is within this history that Man came to occupy the violent and racialised position from which world could be known, divided, judged and transformed. The historical question is whether Man's

accession exhausts the familiar story of modernity wherein the dominant narrative is that Man displaced God. The argument developed below is that something wider was occurring. Divine, papal, and sovereign authority did not simply disappear, but what such authorities instituted increasingly had to become operative through forms within and bearers of world. A commanded division had to acquire terrestrial position; distant observations had to become commensurable; colonial claims had to become repeatable and enforceable across distance. My point is that the work once secured through external or divine ground increasingly passed into *world*.

The development of the abyssal analytic made here names the problem disclosed by that history. This is not the self-description of the heterogeneous formations traced below, nor does it determine in advance whether world will be singular or plural, externally ordered or relationally immanent. It identifies a historical-ontological demand whose bearers can change without necessarily displacing the demand itself. The contemporary significance of the history is therefore not that correlation or storiation secretly reproduce an early modern ontology. It is that they transform the very subject–world arrangement whose authority was historically consolidated and globalised through this trajectory, allowing a more precise question to be asked: whether displacing its sovereign subject also displaces the authority world acquired through it, or redistributes that authority through different forms of relation, opacity, immersion and islandness.

Within late medieval Latin Christendom, geographical description operated within theological and cosmographical orders whose authority was not generated by the earth itself (Livingstone, 1992; Mayhew, 2000). Mapping, travel writing, and cosmographical compilation could organise terrestrial space while the authority that secured that order still referred beyond the mapped earth. As John Gillis (2004) illustrates, islands could acquire intense sacred, devotional or providential meaning within such orders, with the authority securing that meaning remaining located beyond the island itself. Even early modern works such as Ortelius's *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (1570), "regarded as the first atlas of the world" (Dunnett, 2020, p. 666) could assemble the earth cartographically as a totality without thereby making that totality its own ground. The point is not that God simply disappears, or that a clean secular break separates one period from another. Divine, papal, and sovereign authorities persist. What changes is the work required to make what they institute operative through the world. With early modern European overseas expansion, command could institute claims and jurisdictions, but could not by itself make them operative across distance. The transformation becomes visible in a series of practical theatres. For example, the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas sought to divide Castilian and Portuguese rights by an imaginary pole-to-pole Atlantic line, 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands. Nothing in the ocean marked it. The islands enter this ordering as positional references: one of the terms through which an invisible division is given geographical location. Here island form is made

to bear orientation and jurisdiction: the islands must become determinate and repeatable terrestrial references across chart, voyage, calculation and jurisdiction so that an instituted division can acquire worldly standing. For the division to hold, the line had to be carried through charts, bearings, voyages, measurements and administrative practice.

Likewise, the Padrón Real (Royal Pattern Chart) of 1508, the Spanish Crown's official master map maintained at Seville's Casa de Contratación, gathered information brought back by pilots so navigational charts could be revised and sent out again (Sánchez Martínez, 2022). The Padrón also served as the prescribed model for nautical charts produced in Seville, with chartmakers facing penalties for working without permission or without using it as their model. The significance here is not simply that sovereign command required practical instruments to implement a prior decision. The decision did not contain within itself the terrestrial determinations through which it could become operative. Those determinations had to be produced through voyages, observations, calculations and charts; once assembled, these forms could themselves become standards against which subsequent charts and navigational practices were judged. The Padrón therefore did more than transmit sovereign authority. A cartographic form assembled and repeatedly revised through information returned from voyages acquired authority over the worldly practices that followed. Worldly forms increasingly supplied the conditions through which instituted claims could acquire determinate and repeatable force. This is the more precise sense in which the work of ground passes into world: not because world becomes self-grounding, but because what is instituted from elsewhere increasingly depends upon forms within world to determine how it can hold. A sovereign could draw the line; worlding had to make the line hold.

The globe gives the changed relation between ground and world an unusually concentrated form. The sphere is not deficient or unfinished. Its surface already composes a common order: every terrestrial point belongs to the same continuous whole and stands in relation to the others through that form. Its symmetry matters because this common standing does not itself privilege one terrestrial position over another. The sphere can be complete without one point possessing a different kind of authority simply by virtue of its place upon the surface. The historical globe gives that wholeness another standing. Lands, seas, islands and unknown places appear not simply alongside one another but as differences internal to one terrestrial world. Distance remains within the same surface; unknownness can appear as blankness within a whole already given; places encountered through different histories acquire standing as positions belonging together. Yet, as intimated, the standing of the globe is retroactive. The globe comes after the places, journeys, observations and knowledges through which its surface becomes determinate. Yet once globular wholeness acquires authority, the direction of dependence can appear to reverse. Places no longer confront the whole merely as the heterogeneous materials from which it was assembled. They appear

as places that had always already belonged to it. The globe comes after its places and stands before them. A historically emergent bearer of wholeness can therefore acquire the force of what world itself had seemingly required all along. Its authority to respond to the demand that world hold becomes difficult to distinguish from the terrestrial wholeness through which it is borne.

Such forms are what this paper calls bearers: historically contingent forms through which the work of making world hold becomes operative. The globe bears wholeness; Man concentrates orientation, synthesis and judgement; relation can bear consequence; islandness can be made to bear openness, resilience or generativity. These bearers perform real work and can acquire real authority within the worlds they organise. Historical and ontological order must therefore be distinguished. Historically, bearers emerge under particular conditions, overlap, acquire authority and may later recede or be displaced. Ontologically, however, the order can run differently: once a bearer acquires authority, it can come to stand prior to what it organises, so that what historically preceded it appears as though it had always required the form through which it now acquires worldly standing. A historically contingent bearer can therefore become necessary within the world it organises and come to appear as though it had always been required. No bearer thereby becomes the source of the demand it carries. The significance of the history lies precisely in following how that demand can persist as its bearers change.

5.0. Islandness and the Work of Bearing: the Geographical Subject

As orientation, comparison and judgement become increasingly important to making instituted order operative within world, these capacities become concentrated in a subject able to locate itself, distinguish positions, judge relations and act upon them. Sylvia Wynter's (1995) account in *1492: A New World View* is crucial because it shows that this consolidation cannot be separated from Atlantic conquest and the racialised organisation of human beings. The so-called 'discovery' of the Caribbean islands does not simply add new territory to an already completed European world. It participates in producing Man as the authorised position from which human difference can be organised and judged. The Caribbean island is therefore not merely an object encountered by Man. It is one of the theatres through which the positions of discoverer and discovered, human and non-being, sovereign and subordinated acquire worldly standing.

Early modern philosophy gives this concentration of work in the subject a more explicit form. In the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes sets out to doubt everything that might possibly be doubted: the evidence of the senses, inherited beliefs and even apparently secure forms of knowledge. What survives the doubt is the thinking that performs it. But the significance of that survival lies in what can now be rebuilt through it: world must return as something ordered, distinguishable and capable of holding together. Descartes captures this through the image of Archimedes, who sought one

firm and immovable point from which the earth might be moved (Descartes, 1641/1984, p. 4). The thinking subject begins to occupy a comparable position. God remains indispensable to Descartes and ultimately guarantees the possibility of true knowledge. The subject has not simply replaced God. What has shifted is where the work of making world hold becomes concentrated: its order is increasingly reconstructed through an internal point from which distinction, orientation and judgement can resume. This is what can be called the 'Geographical Subject', a term coined by Carl Olsson that I develop here in a different direction. This way of thinking about the subject matters, then, not because it becomes the source of world, but because it becomes a bearer through which world can once again appear coherent from within. Descartes gives philosophical form to a bearer that had already been taking shape through much wider geographical, colonial and political transformations.

Kant further intensifies this movement. The mind does not simply receive an already ordered world and reproduce its forms. It contributes the basic conditions through which what is encountered can become a coherent experience at all. Space, time, causality and relation do not simply arrive from outside as ready-made features that thought passively records; they belong to the conditions through which appearances can be gathered as an intelligible world (see Terada, 2023). The shift is therefore not simply an enlargement of subjective power. More of the work through which world can hold as a coherent order is now concentrated in the conditions of experience themselves. This does not mean that the Geographical Subject creates reality. It means that whatever is encountered must increasingly acquire standing through forms that allow it to count together as one world. The Geographical Subject consequently acquires a particularly powerful standing: not as the ground of world, but as a bearer through which world's coherence is made operative from within.

An obvious question follows. If people map, conquer, enslave and kill, why shift attention from Man to world at all? The answer begins with a 'yes': people map, conquer, enslave and kill. But this 'yes' names the problem rather than resolving it. To identify Man as the actor is not yet to identify Man as the source of the authority concentrated in this position. Man is a historically commanding and violently racialised bearer of the demand that world hold. The shift to world becomes necessary because the authority of that demand is not exhausted by the bearer through which it has been so powerfully enacted. Challenging Man's claim to ground world does not in itself challenge the requirement that world hold. The claim is rather that the work concentrated in Man can be redistributed even while Man remains powerfully operative. The work can survive the insufficiency of this bearer and be redistributed through other forms. The question is therefore not only how Man's violence acquires standing as world, but why the demand that world hold retains authority across the changing bearers through which it is carried.

It is within this concentration of world-order in the modern Geographical Subject that islandness acquires a particular critical standing and burden. As the authority of this subject expands, modern philosophy repeatedly makes the island bear the pressure of what that subject cannot finally contain (Simoniti, 2020). In Fichte, the island can be both a laboratory of appropriation and a place of withdrawal from it. Nietzsche's islands offer a strange ground for a subject that has lost any secure ground of its own. Heidegger encounters Delos as a challenge to a world rendered calculable through technological ordering. Deleuze turns the desert island into a form whose desertedness cannot simply be abolished by human occupation. These are very different philosophical projects. Yet across them, material features of island form—bounded land, separation, desertedness, exposure to sea, withdrawal from the continent—are made philosophically consequential. Islandness takes shape through this work: as a patch of ground, an edge, a separation, a place where the subject's claim upon world can be made to falter. The island stands as a figure which comes to "question the very form with which the subject holds the entire world captive" (Simoniti, 2020, p. 60). What appears as an "utterly a-subjective object" (p. 65) matters because islandness is being constituted against a subject whose claim upon world has become so extensive. The island is no longer only something to be located, compared and judged; it acquires critical standing as a form through which those capacities are themselves shown to exceed the bearer in which they have been concentrated. Islandness is made to carry the exposure of that insufficiency.

6.0. The Footprint: Islandness, Effacement, and Racialised Bearing

Robinson Crusoe (Defoe, 1719) makes this problem concrete. It shows what happens when a bearer's standing falters, but the work of making island and world hold does not end. A footprint appears in the sand. The mark is plain, but the ground that bears it no longer secures the order Crusoe has made. Something has appeared within his island world that the position from which he ordered it cannot place. The bearer falters; the demand that the island hold does not. It returns as further work. What must now be done to make that island hold, and where is that work made to fall?

Defoe's writing participated in the geographical culture of its period, and the novel was received as a plausible account of worldly experience (Mayhew, 2000). Crusoe can therefore be read not merely as an eccentric individual confronting isolation, but as a credible bearer of geographical work. In *Robinson Crusoe*, islandness takes form through a materially worked order in which locating, dividing, ordering, interpreting, remembering and anticipating are inseparable from cultivation, storage, enclosure, movement and fortification. The island is therefore not merely the setting for Crusoe's ordering; islandness is constituted through the material working of its ground.

Providence remains active throughout Crusoe's narrative, but providential interpretation does not release him from the work of making world hold. Signs still have to be carried into repentance, discipline, cultivation, calculation, defence and routine. Divine reference can orient what happens without bringing the labour through which the island is ordered to an end. Crusoe can therefore be read as a Geographical Subject: one historically specific bearer through which an island order is made operative. His obsessive measurements, inventories, classifications, enclosures and routines give that island order duration: time is kept, provisions counted, land divided, danger located and labour organised. Through them, ground becomes property and route, shelter becomes enclosure, uncertainty becomes preparation. The island acquires the texture of an ordered world. The footprint will bring the standing of that order into question.

The footprint places Crusoe's island under pressure first of all in the materiality of the island itself. Before its source is known, the island's ground bears an impression that Crusoe cannot securely assign to a body, cause or relation. A single indentation disturbs the island this Geographical Subject has produced. Stores, paths and enclosures no longer compose a secure order around him. Crusoe interprets the footprint compulsively—as his own footprint, a devilish sign, providential warning, trace of a 'savage' or announcement of attack. Defoe gives this vertigo a strikingly geographical expression: Crusoe returns to his fortification "like a man perfectly confused and out of myself (...) not feeling, as we say, the ground I went on." (p. 120). What falters is the standing of the order through which he had made his island world.

Crusoe later describes the labour prompted by the footprint. After rebuilding fortifications, concealing his habitation and reorganising his movements around the possibility of another presence, Crusoe reflects: "All this labour I was at the expense of, purely from my apprehensions on the account of the print of a man's foot which I had seen; for, as yet, I never saw any human creature come near the island" (Defoe, 1719, p. 129). Before Crusoe meets Friday, his response has already worked the island: habitation is concealed, enclosure thickens, and movement becomes guarded. Islandness is constituted through these efforts to secure an order whose authority has faltered.

Crusoe's response is already racialised before Friday appears. His search for security and escape comes to include an anticipated relation of mastery and service: an unknown other is imagined as someone whose labour and knowledge can sustain his purposes. In a dream anticipating the later encounter, the man who escapes to him "became my servant," enabling Crusoe to imagine that "this fellow will serve me as a pilot" (Defoe, 1719, p. 162). On waking, Crusoe converts the dream into a plan: his "only way" of escape is, "if possible, to get a savage into my possession" (p. 162). The racialised position through which the unknown other will become intelligible

is being prepared before Friday arrives. The island is being constituted as a world of command and service, in which Crusoe's security and escape are to be sustained through another's labour and knowledge.

When Friday does appear, Defoe renders that assignment with clarity. Defoe situates Friday in the Caribbean rather than as an African slave, a distinction that does not lessen the racialised work his position is made to bear. Crusoe interprets Friday's gestures as "subjection, servitude, and submission" and immediately begins to organise their relation linguistically: "I made him know his name should be Friday (...) I likewise taught him to say master, and then let him know that was to be my name" (p. 170). Naming, teaching and mastery are therefore not incidental details added to an already established relation. Naming institutes both positions: Crusoe assigns Friday a name while declaring 'master' to be his own. The work imposed through these positions is concrete: Friday is made into the pilot through whom Crusoe imagines escape from his bounded island, the servant through whom mastery is organised, and the pupil through whom Crusoe's linguistic authority is enacted.

Yet the movement from footprint to Friday is complex and cannot be read as a passage in which disturbance is straightforwardly mastered through relation. It is important to slow down here and stay with the difficulty, for what is at stake is how the island itself holds as world when the authority of Crusoe's position is placed under pressure. David Marriott's (2021) reading of *Robinson Crusoe* matters here because it requires us to ask what the racialised trait reveals about the authority concentrated in that position.

Marriott's reading is especially important for what the racialised trait exposes about the dialectical movement through which disturbance and failure can themselves be taken up. Within the Hegelian and Lacanian dialectical frames Marriott interrogates, the fear, crisis and anxiety registered around the trait risk being taken up into the dialectical labour of signification, so that disturbance itself becomes preservable within forms compatible with the renewed authority of the white subject. In the Lacanian dialectical reading of *Robinson Crusoe* Marriott makes, "signification is structured by division through and through" (p. 41): "in its relation with the other the signifier which makes the other absent (...) affirms its own difference and enjoys this difference as a *suturation* that is perpetual" (p. 40, emphasis in original). Within this dialectical movement, negation retroactively produces its own positivity, "*as* passage" (p. 40, emphasis in original). Yet, for Marriott, the stakes of the footprint scene are different. What plays out is a "direct challenge to the dialectics of recognition proposed by Lacan" (p. 151):

> The question which Lacan constantly repeats, 'how is the signifier inaugurated, what does it refer to or is structured by?', must not be understood as the search for Friday's dark obscurity, whose trait [instead] represents a crisis for the white cogito. What Crusoe wants to affirm is sovereign difference. In his essential relation to the trait of the other racial difference is

> that which remains unknown, an object of terrible fascination. The knowledge of the signifier in its difference is not one of trust but one of danger; this is the new, aggressive, and incredulous element that the novel allegorically substitutes for the dialectics of sovereignty and above all, as a dialectic, for the *labour* of negativity. (p. 41, emphasis in original)

For Marriott, the footprint scene allegorises the confounding of "being-thought": the racialised trait figures "a being-ness that is not thinkable," and therefore "a limit to dialectics" (pp. 41–42). Marriott's Fanonian framing of *n'est pas* sharpens the stakes:

> Make no mistake about it. What else does it mean to say that to be black is to enter into a zone of non-being, to cross over into the part that has no part, that has no guarantor or status even though it introduces a panic into all civic structure, the panic and confusion produced by an identification played out against and within a social hierarchy of differences (with whiteness acting as the safeguard against any confusion or panic and precisely because it is irredeemably exposed to both at the level of need and desire). (p. 151)

What Marriott exposes is not the collapse of Crusoe's order, but a difficulty in the authority through which that order secures its distinctions. Whiteness appears as the "safeguard" against panic and confusion, yet Marriott insists that it is itself irredeemably exposed to both. His language makes the stakes sharper than panic alone: the white cogito can find "no form" adequate to the trait and "no foundation" that is not already vain or deluded (p. 41); "*the cogito has no foothold*" (p. 42, emphasis in original). This matters because the position that organises racial difference cannot stand apart from the difference through which its authority is exercised. Crusoe can classify, command and impose relation, but the security of that position is not simply given by the position itself: it is continually at stake in the racialised distinctions through which the island world is organised. This is the sense in which the trait places pressure on an apparently grounding position: the white proprietary subject is itself exposed within the racial distinction through which it claims sovereign difference.

The complication is that dialectical thought has powerful means of making such exposure operative within further movement. What confounds the white cogito can be made operative within the differentiation, mediation and positioning through which the order continues. Marriott's caution is therefore double. The trait cannot straightforwardly be converted into the labour of negativity through which dialectical movement secures another relation, but neither can Black non-being be elevated to disclose a hidden ground. As he puts it, "The unveiling of a universal *ab-sent* (...) is not what Fanon is trying to do (...) On the contrary, what concern him [are]

the disavowals by which whiteness violently lives out its desire, but on the condition that desire is able to avoid the anxiety of its own nothingness" (p. 150). The vertigo lies here. Whiteness acts as the "safeguard" against panic and confusion precisely while remaining, on the island, "irredeemably exposed" to both. The white subject organises the island order—it names, distinguishes, commands and gives racial difference worldly standing—but the surety of that position gives way: there is "no form," "no foundation," "no foothold" beneath the position of the bearer performing that work. Read through the abyssal analytic, this is world as groundless ground: not the disappearance of grounds, but the terrifying demand that grounding continue when no bearer can finally ground the authority it exercises. Whiteness becomes one historically commanding means of carrying that unresolved work, violently making racial difference bear the order that whiteness itself cannot finally secure. The footprint opens the island order onto this groundlessness. The racialised trait remains what Axelle Karera (2022, p. 168) calls an "un-subsumable strangeness to the order of Western discourse and imagination," a strangeness which is constitutive of the order itself.

For the constitution of the island world and islandness, this sharpens the question of how an ordering position remains operative when what it orders also exposes the insufficiency of its standing. The issue is not simply whether disturbance can be brought into relation, but how what exposes the insufficiency of an ordering position can, through historically produced relations, be made to carry further work of worlding. The footprint is made consequential through panic, fortification and compulsive interpretation; later, the racialised position already anticipated by Crusoe is given determinate form through mastery, service, instruction and use. The historical forms are different, but the structural question can recur in contemporary critique: what refuses transparency can be valued as opacity, the acknowledged limit of mastery can become a reason for deeper attentiveness, and what unsettles relation can become the occasion for further relation. Karera's (2022, p. 168) warning that "opacity remains thematizable" is crucial here. For the abyssal analytic, even refusal of availability can acquire a determinate critical vocation. The abyssal question is therefore not whether relation is false, but how, under the historically acquired demand that world hold, historically specific arrangements can make what exposes one ordering's limits bear further work of worlding. For Island Studies, that question turns upon islandness itself: how openness, opacity, relationality and generativity acquire the standing not simply of descriptions of island life, but of capacities through which islands and islanders are expected to sustain further worlding.

7.0. The Redistribution of Bearing

Crusoe makes the distinction between bearer and ground concrete. The Geographical Subject remains a powerful bearer through which world's authority acquires practical force, but its continuing force does not prevent the work of worlding from also being distributed through other bodies,

relations and forms. In contemporary critique and understandings of islandness, these other bearers acquire standing through what they are made to carry. The question is therefore what this redistribution reveals about subordination to world.

'Worlding otherwise' can refuse colonial worlds, break inherited relations and displace the detached subject. Yet the appeal to other worlds does not place critique beyond the history it contests. Within the storiation mode examined here, critique cannot secure another world as an available alternative from a standpoint untouched by the relations through which it encounters that world. By definition, that would be to return to the 'God's Eye View'. As drawn out above, opacity is therefore constitutive of what worlding otherwise entails, not a temporary failure to obtain the alternative. The sharper difficulty then is that opacity is made to carry work. It need not be overcome to be made generative: the acknowledged limit to comprehension itself becomes a warrant for further immersion, attentiveness and participation.

The abyssal analytic turns on precisely this redistribution: the limits and injuries through which inherited worlds are refused can themselves become terms through which the demand for further worlding is carried. Worlding otherwise can therefore reject inherited worlds while still taking up their unfinished work: injury becomes something to endure and transform, opacity a reason to remain in relation, and refusal a basis for further composition. The burden of this continuation is borne in the very lives and relations in which injury persists. None of this requires a subject standing above the world. Relation itself can acquire anterior force, so that subjects, bodies and responsibilities take form within relations that already organise their emergence. Yet relation remains a bearer rather than a ground. Its contemporary priority does not explain why transformation must continue through worlding; it is one historical form through which that demand is carried. The work is redistributed across relations, institutions, practices and responsive subjects without being discharged.

This movement from response to requirement gives Catherine Malabou's formulation particular force: "The question of the *wholly other*—something that cannot be thought without a feeling of vertigo—is always in fact a question about origin that could have been wholly otherwise (...) Yet it is a solicitation that does not come from a real outside" (Malabou, 2005, pp. 163–164, italics in original). The vertigo here is not simply that an existing world could have been otherwise. The authority of world is acquired historically, yet comes to govern the alternatives through which that history is contested. The absence of final ground does not make this authority any less binding. It is in this sense that world comes to operate as a groundless ground: nothing finally grounds the requirement that transformation take worldly form, yet that requirement continues to organise what the otherwise must provide. Relation, openness and responsiveness arose as responses to

real violences of mastery, separation and appropriation. When these responses govern what counts as an adequate transformation, their contingency becomes harder to locate.

This acquired necessity binds endurance to further obligation. Damage is carried as a demand for endurance, vulnerability for resilience, survival for continuing capacity and exclusion for more immersive relation. The violence lies in requiring what has borne injury to also bear the capacities through which that injury can be carried forward as world. These obligations remain tied to the unequal histories of relation traced above. Karera's (2022) warning about the "potential carceral effects" (p. 170) of fugitivity further sharpens the problem examined here: a form valued because it resists enclosure can itself become an expectation about what its bearer must continue to provide. The limit to capture is then not abolished; it is made to carry further critical work.

The question returns here to the relational island ontologies, epistemologies and ethics examined in the storiation and correlation sections of this paper as illustrative of wider shifts in the contemporary register of islandness. Opacity, vulnerability, endurance, refusal and relational openness can all name real qualities of particular island lives and struggles. The difficulty begins when these qualities acquire the standing of what islands and islanders are expected to be: resilient because they have endured, generative because they have been marginalised, relational because boundedness has been criticised, or capable of furnishing other futures because existing worlds have failed them. What resists capture can thereby become the very capacity through which islandness is recruited to further worlding. The critical revaluation of the island is not merely descriptive; it gives form to islandness itself through the work it requires.

The title of this paper therefore needs to be read carefully. The critical problem is not ultimately the island. The island is a problem for world. Its recurrence across modern thought does not testify to an agency or negativity proper to island form. Rather, bounded ground, separation, withdrawal, desertedness and interruption are repeatedly made to bear a difficulty internal to world-holding itself: the inability of world, as groundless ground, finally to ground its own requirement to hold. The terms and bearers of worlding can change—from globe, chart and Geographical Subject, towards relation, openness, opacity, resilience or generativity—without displacing that requirement. Islandness itself can then be constituted through this redistribution of authority: what becomes legible through island form as the insufficiency of a bearer—and ultimately of world-holding itself—is returned to islandness as unresolved work it is required to bear.

8.0. Conclusion: What Islandness is Made to Bear

This paper has turned Island Studies' movement from island to islandness back upon itself. Over several decades, influential strands of the field have refused the island as a bounded, isolated and passive object, transforming both what an island can be and how island research is conducted. Relational,

archipelagic, more-than-human and decolonial approaches have unsettled the detached subject, widened responsibility and brought practices of immersion, care, opacity and responsiveness to the centre of critique. These transformations are real. The argument is that the movement from island to islandness also changes what islands and islanders are asked to do. The island is less understood as merely a passive object of worlding. Islandness itself increasingly becomes a generative bearer of its work.

Current modes of understanding islandness—exemplary in correlation and storiation modes—make this redistribution visible. The stakes are structural: correlation configures islandness through relational registration and followability; storiation understands island life as an immanent becoming that cannot be obtained from outside. This is a consequential transformation. It does not require the Geographical Subject to disappear: it can remain powerfully operative alongside correlation and storiation even as the distribution and standing of the work changes. Yet limits can renew the work: disrupting the human/nature divide opens up further relations to follow, while what cannot be obtained from outside can become a reason for deeper participation. The demand is carried not only through what can be made available to relation, but through opacity when its refusal of availability becomes a reason for further worlding. The particular development of the abyssal analytic in this paper shifts inquiry to the historical-ontological transformation within which these redistributions acquire force: work once secured through external ground increasingly comes to be carried by forms within world. The Geographical Subject was one powerful bearer, not its source; when that subject recedes, relation itself can acquire anterior force without becoming ground.

For Island Studies, the contribution of this paper is not another model of relationality or a return to the bounded island, but to bring the vocation assigned to islandness into view. The question pursued here is how the requirement to sustain further worlding constitutes the islandness through which that work is borne. The abyssal analytic does not answer by proposing a third method or a better way of worlding. That withholding is deliberate: turning interruption, refusal or injury immediately into a new prescription would risk assigning them the very generative work at issue. Island Studies has long asked how islands might be understood otherwise. This paper adds another question: what is the resulting islandness required to carry—and why should islands and islanders be expected to bear that work at all?

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