Island metapoetics and beyond: introducing island poetics, Part II

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ABSTRACT: This is the second part of a two-part paper co-authored by the members of the Island Poetics Research Group, which introduces a larger project on the poetic construction of islands in island fictions across media, genres, and geographical regions. Traditional island scholarship tends to discuss islands as tropes for a set of often preconceived and fixed meanings (such as isolation, imprisonment, paradise, remoteness, etc.) and thus often bypasses the complex poetic processes through which islands come to be in literary texts. Our intervention in the debate seeks to offer a precise analysis of the practices and operations through which islands are conceived and reconceived. The two parts of this paper examine different modes of island (re)conception in 20th- and 21st-century island fiction. They discuss fictional islands as particularly mobile spatial figures that raise the question of what an island is, refusing to offer easy answers and allowing for a reconsideration of the role of islands in contemporary discourse. Against potentially essentialist accounts of what islands 'are' and 'mean', our close readings of key moments within island narratives engage with the processes through which island spaces are constructed in different media. Part II engages more deeply with the textures of the media themselves in order to analyze the ways in which island metapoetics implicitly or explicitly exposes the processes of island construction. The article ends with a discussion of how island narratives can draw attention to and resist their own conceptions of islandness and thus interrogate the very object of island studies.

Keywords: deferred island conception, intermediality, island narratives, island poetics, metapoetics

Introduction

Our approach to literary islands coincides with the basic ambition of nissology as we try to "study [literary] islands on their own terms" (McCall, 1994, p. 1) even though we are fully aware of the longevity, vast production, and continuing force of island discourse and island intertextuality that led Derek Walcott (2005, p. 51) to advise his readers to "erase everything, even the name of this island, if it is to be rediscovered. It is the only way to begin." Walcott's comment calls into question the manifold meanings that are so readily ascribed to islands and too often taken for granted. These include assumptions about the island as a site of 'isolation', 'boundedness', 'discreteness', 'timelessness' (Franks, 2006; Schalansky, 2010; Weaver-Hightower, 2007)—or, indeed, 'interconnection', 'openness', or 'mobility' (Dean Moore, 2004; Gillis, 2004; Hau'ofa, 1994; Stratford et al., 2011). The reduction of a literary island to any *one* exclusive meaning, be it in the form of an easily consumable icon, symbol or metaphor, runs contrary to the attention and intention of the Island Poetics project. Indeed, our focus does not presuppose an exclusive and stable meaning of the island in any text, but is rather interested in analyzing the textual details (the ways in which islands are conceived and re-conceived within the text) that lead to the formation of the island itself as a textual topography. In essence, we are concerned with how islands are *made* within texts and not just with how they are viewed or interpreted.

Part I of this double article outlined the various ways of theorizing the conception of islands through sensory impressions and spatial practice (Graziadei et al., 2017). We noted that the textual construction of islands often prioritizes the role of vision, with its attendant imperialist assumptions. We presented an analysis of how broader poetical experiences of islands are offered through hearing, smell, and taste in texts including *King Kong*, *The Blue Lagoon*, *Life of Pi*, *Shutter Island,* and the Bounty chocolate advertisements. We then suggested that another way of conceiving islands is their textual construction through spatial practices. This can include travelling across the island, exploration, movement, and interventions in the island space, as identified in texts such as *Jurassic Park*, *Pantomime*, *Dear Esther,* and 'Æpyornis Island'. In Part II of this double article, we turn to various mechanisms through which island conceptions are self-reflexively foregrounded and complicated. The first half of this paper examines the medial dimension of island-making, focusing on a number of examples in which the mediality of the island is emphasized. Our approach responds to the recent proliferation of island fictions that have a strongly metafictional bent. By the term 'metapoetics' we mean the various ways in which the attention of the reader or viewer is specifically drawn to the creative processes through which islands are constructed in mediation. That is to say, island metapoetics is expressly concerned with the art and study of those visual and linguistic techniques through which islands are created within literary, cinematic, and other texts. We are furthermore interested in the multiplication and interrelation of fictional islands that arise intermedially. In the following, we examine the specific ways in which the island operates and is constructed through and between different media.

In order to examine these processes in a variety of settings, we will outline various ways in which the island is constructed by way of a specific emphasis on mediality. These are a metapoetic representation (which draws attention to the creative practices by which the island is made), an intermedial image (whereby the island is conceived through the interplay of different media), and finally the hyper-image of the island as a purely medial object (a simulation beyond which there is no corresponding reality). To illustrate these three mechanisms, we have selected three island texts that employ them in striking ways: Umberto Eco's *L'isola del giorno prima (The Island of the Day Before)*, Adolfo Bioy Casares' *La invención de Morel (The Invention of Morel)*, and Michael Bay's *The Island*. The second half of this paper moves beyond an exploration of island conceptions altogether and looks at a particular grouping of texts in which the conception of the island itself is rendered problematic. We will turn to John Boorman's film *Hell in the Pacific*, J. M. Barrie's play *Peter Pan*, Patrick Chamoiseau's novel *L'empreinte à Crusoé,* and the television series *Lost* to demonstrate the potential of island narratives to multiply, resist, and defer their own conceptions of islandness.

Island metapoetics: *The Island of the Day Before* **(1994)**

One of the most striking metapoetic reflections on literary islands is offered by Umberto Eco's *The Island of the Day Before*. The novel follows the exploits of the "only man in human memory to have been shipwrecked and cast up upon a deserted ship" (Eco, 1995, p. 1; trans. William Weaver). The protagonist Roberto, who cannot swim, finds himself abandoned on the deck of the *Daphne*, a ship that is anchored some distance offshore of what we suspect to be an island. Roberto, moreover, informs us that the seascape between the ship and the shore of the unidentified landmass crosses the International Date Line. As such, though the landmass is visible from the deck of the ship, Roberto makes it clear that the land he is viewing is not of the present moment—but of the day before. The sea divides the spatial topography of the narrative between a *today* (the ship) and a *yesterday* (the island), across which Roberto desires to pass. Similar to this division of present and past, the narrative structure is bifurcated between the presentation of letters that Roberto has written (which detail how he has ended up on the ship) and the monologic stream of Roberto's consciousness in the present tense, in which the reader follows Roberto's imaginings of the island as well as his quest to make it to shore.

In terms of the narrative's metapoetic concerns, the text is comprised largely of transcribed letters that Roberto has written in the past, with the novel persistently highlighting the literary endeavours of its protagonist. The omniscient narrative voice (ostensibly the editor of the text) that recounts Roberto's exploits on board the ship in the present tense also constantly alludes to these letters, thus further underlining the importance of writing within this text. While using the evidential quality of the letters for his purposes, the narrator questions the reliability of his source when noting that "in one letter [Roberto] says he went off to venture below. But in another he writes that […]" (Eco, 1995, p. 17). Indeed, so pervasive are Roberto's letters in the text that the narrator continuously highlights for the reader Roberto's role as an author-figure, which foregrounds the unreliability of his narrative. Thus, the narrator states, for instance, that "he went back into the wardroom: stepping out into the gallery, he could see the island, he could stare—*Roberto wrote*—with lynx eyes at its silence" (Eco, 1995, p. 10; emphasis added). There is no particular diegetic reason for the narrator to continue to allude to the letters; instead, such allusions emphasize the poetic construction of Roberto's narration. The interjection "Roberto wrote" makes explicit what is implicitly understood by the extratextual reader: that the world we are reading about in Eco's narrative is directly informed by the protagonist's epistolary construction of his past—indeed, by Roberto's impulse to create and to construct his own story. The narrative seems to imply that there is a distinct relationship between Roberto's perception of the island, the act of writing (his epistolary narration), and the construction of the island within the text—that there is certainly a symbiosis between Roberto's literariness and his island poetics. For example, the narrator notes the following:

> At first Roberto *imagined* a horde of natives cramming into long canoes to raid the ship, and he clenched his musket, but then the concert sounded to him less combative. It was dawn [and] with his eyes half-closed he tried to make out the shore [...] he saw pastel hues: a sky foaming with dark clouds faintly edged in pearl, while a tinge, a *memory* of pink was rising behind the island, which seemed coloured turquoise on *rough paper*. But that almost nordic palette *was enough for him to understand* that the outline, which at night had seemed homogenous, was created by the lines of a wooded hill that ended in a steep slope over a stretch covered with tall trees, down to the palms that lined the white beach. Slowly the sand grew more luminous, and along the edges, at the sides, *he could discern what seemed* gigantic embalmed spiders as they were moving their skeletal limbs into the water. *Roberto, from the distance, conceived of them as 'ambulant vegetables,' but at that moment the glare of the sand, now too bright, made him withdraw.* (Eco, 1995, pp. 17–18; emphasis added)

What is notable here is the highly questionable nature of Roberto's perception. Indeed, the narrator specifically underlines the perceptual distance between Roberto and the island itself. Roberto's perception is framed in distinctly ambiguous terms: the reader is told that he "imagined a horde of natives"—a comment which reflects traditional 18th- and 19th-century European perceptions of the South Seas and the embellished threat of the savage cannibal native, and which emphasizes the *imagined* savagery of traditional island communities (i.e., as an enduring topos in the western cultural imaginary). Furthermore, Roberto's vision of the island is also framed as a "memory." This particular choice of wording is significant, for it not only aligns Roberto's perception with something imagined or imaginary, but also posits the island as not present—as something already consigned to the past—and as something that is fragmentary, inaccessible, or otherwise out of reach.

Moreover, the perceptual distance that Eco creates between Roberto and the eponymous island is paralleled in the mediated distancing of the implied reader from the island. It must be remembered that everything presented of the island within the text is mediated—indeed, mediated twice over: once through Roberto's letter-writing, and again through the narrator's editorializing. The narrator focuses largely on Roberto's visual processing of the island, deducing from Roberto's notes that "like any shipwrecked man, Roberto could not tell if it was an island or a continent" (3) —a comment that reflects the protagonist's insecurity about his geographical location and is, in all likelihood, a reference to Robinson Crusoe's initial inability to identify the geographical parameters of his own island topography. By focusing on the visual processing of the island, the island itself comes into existence within the text as a consequence of traditional island imagery (Roberto's fears of imagined island natives, for instance) and fragmented perception ("with his eyes half-closed he tried to make out the shore"). The island, it seems, is viewed not in its totality, but rather as a fragment of implied topography. The narrative goes to great lengths to illustrate for the reader exactly how the "outline" of the island alone was "enough for [Roberto] to understand" that it was an island—an observation which implies quite strongly that, even when Roberto is looking directly towards the island, he merely *assumes* that it is an island as opposed to knowing that it is one. The reader is told that Roberto could only "discern what seemed" to be aspects of the island. At no time is Roberto's vision clear, uncomplicated, or unmediated. Indeed, the narrator underlines Roberto's inability to see clearly when it is noted that "the glare of the sand, now too bright, made [Roberto] withdraw." Thus, Roberto's perception—his ability to see the island for what it is—is highly questionable, and the narrator makes it clear that it is only through the medial construction of the island as a *textual* object that the reader ascertains what it is. The description of the outline of a landmass given here is couched in a particular discourse that is designed to emphasize its metapoetic construction: the dawning sun is likened to "a *memory* of pink" against "rough *paper*." The very image of the island serves not only to underline its constructedness—as something written, something written down, something *on paper* (the island is described elsewhere as a "hieroglyph" to be deciphered; Eco, 1995, p. 105) —but also aligns the aesthetic construction of the island with *memory*. *That is, it aligns the construction with something* that has already happened and is being recalled, with something that exists before or in the before and is recalled precisely through the narrator's recounting of Roberto's letters. It is through the epistolary form—the very textuality of Roberto's text as a text—that the reader's attention is drawn to the constructedness of the narrative and, in turn, to the construction of the island as a metapoetic image. As the textual interplay between Roberto's letters from the past and the omniscience of narration in the present is foregrounded, Eco's island becomes a confluence of memory and writing.

The text's awareness of the metapoetic nature of the island is evident in the explicit conjunction of geographical and textual spatialities. The narrator informs the reader that, in his inability to discern whether or not he is looking at an island, Roberto moves around the ship gazing at different aspects of the landmass before him. In this way, the island (or what the reader

presumes to be the eponymous island) is fragmented, segmented into smaller visions of space, and problematized due to changing perspectives. By combining his perceptions of these various spatial fragments, Roberto comes to the conclusion that the landmass is, in fact, an island. This construction is strongly metapoetic, for the narrator notes that

> the very fact that Roberto, a moment before, had named through various tropes of what he believed he saw, *creating in the form of words* what the still formless something suggested to him, now confirmed for him that he was indeed seeing. (Eco, 1995, p. 65; emphasis added)

It is only when the narrator recounts what Roberto is doing in moving around the ship that we understand the narrative production of the island to be a process of naming ("creating in the form of words"). In this instance, the island comes to be not only through Roberto's naming and dismissing of various things the landmass could be—by process of elimination—but also through the *narrator's account* of this process, which draws attention to the creation of the island from a distance. It is in the reader's understanding of the act of *narrating the processes of narration* that the island, here, becomes a metapoetic construction; to create in the form of words is poetic, but to bear witness to this creative act by way of narration transforms the poetic into the metapoetic.

Intermedial island layering: *The Invention of Morel* (1940)

While *The Island of the Day Before* creates a metapoetic awareness of the process of island conception through a combination of epistolary homodiegesis and omniscient narration, this act of creation occurs within a single medium. Adolfo Bioy Casares' *The Invention of Morel* (1940) takes metapoetic awareness a step further by drawing attention to the conception (or 'invention') of the island through the interplay between and layering of different media. Indeed, the novel draws explicit attention to the *literal* mechanics by which the island-image is constructed intradiegetically (the novel also intertextually refers to H.G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* and its theme of scientific island experimentation, as well as Benjamin Morrell's fanciful *A Narrative of Four Voyages* from 1832). When the novel's protagonist-narrator, a fugitive who has found refuge on an unnamed Pacific island, stumbles upon an anachronistic group of party-goers on an island, he becomes enamoured of one of the women, the beautiful Faustine, and begins to follow and observe her. Much like Eco's novel, *The Invention of Morel* is an example of autobiographical writing mitigated by a fictional editor. After some time, the protagonist notes in his journal that the guests seem to have the same conversations repeatedly and are unable to see him or interact with him. He soon discovers that the party-goers are in fact simulated projections of real people who were once spending their holidays on the island. These party-goers have been filmed and are now being projected recurrently as tri-dimensional objects by the novel's curious titular invention. Morel, the man hosting the party, has constructed a machine that allows him to capture and re-play moments of time spent with Faustine (with whom he, too, is in love) in order that their time together on the island might be preserved and replayed forever. Thus, Morel's island becomes a seemingly real representation of his love for Faustine that is played out again and again through the medial layering of fantasy and reality on the island.

Bioy Casares' novel is significant precisely because the mediality of the island—or the way in which the mechanics of Morel's machine literally recreates and overlays the *real* island of the text with an indistinguishable reproduction of the same island recorded at an earlier point in time—explicitly literalizes the metapoetic construction of the island as the product of a mechanical engine, something literally designed to capture, record, and reproduce the island as a mediated image of itself projected onto itself. The machine operates according to the flow of the ocean tides around the island, and so as the tide rises and falls the machine intermittently stops and starts, projecting the filmic images of Morel, Faustine, and their companions on the island like moving three-dimensional holographic projections. But whenever it is in operation, the machine also

literally reproduces the exact spatio-physical conditions of the island as they were recorded. Indeed, so well-conceived and well-constructed is Morel's invention that we are told that if the real island were ever to be submerged, the recorded image of the island would still be visible to those passing by as long as the machine situated in the building on the highest point of the island were preserved intact. Here, we have an entirely medial island-image—an image that is based in and on the reality of the island, but that coexists alongside it—by way of and through a mechanized reproduction of itself. Morel's machine repeatedly reactivates the literalization of island metapoetics—the very mechanics by which we may comprehend the ways in which the island is produced and reproduced.

The form of the text itself replicates and reflects the metapoetic concerns of the narrative's content. Firstly, there is an odd structural relationship between the words and the many illustrations by Norah Borges de Torre. The illustrations emphasize the medial layering of the island well before the narrator-protagonist has understood the importance of Morel's invention, and they emphasize and visually foreshadow what the text later reveals. For example, several of the illustrations present highly stylized images of the characters on the island, with two suns clearly visible in the background of these scenes. Once the reader has read the novel in its entirety, the image of the two suns takes on a greater significance—for, by then, the reader understands that the island is, in fact, a layered simulation of itself, with the projected imagery of the machine overlaying the real island with a double of its own image. In this way, the illustrations hint at the metapoetic construction of the island, but it is not until the reader looks back through the illustrated images—the interplay between narration and illustration, between word and image—that the island becomes a metapoetic construction: it draws attention to the process and mechanics through which it is created.

Most intriguingly, the text is configured as a mechanized reproduction of itself, reflective of the intratextual concerns of the narrative. Towards the very end of his narration, the narrator-protagonist tells us the following:

> On one of my first pages I said: "I have the uncomfortable sensation that this paper is changing into a will. If I must resign myself to that, I shall try to make statements that can be verified so that no one, knowing that I was accused of duplicity, will doubt that I was condemned unjustly. I shall adopt the motto of Leonardo—*Ostinato rigore* [constant rigour] —as my own, and endeavour to live up to it. (Bioy Casares, 2003, p. 95; trans. Simms)

Indeed, this is a word-for-word replication of the exact text as it appears earlier in the manuscript (on page 12 of the text). Given the content of the narrative, this redoubling is highly significant. Most importantly, though, at the bottom of page 95, after the narrator-protagonist has reproduced this piece of earlier text, Bioy Casares includes a footnote, ostensibly a note by the manuscript's editor, which states the following in relation to the above text:

> It does not appear at the beginning of the manuscript. Is this omission due to a loss of memory? There is no way to answer that question, and so, as in every doubtful place, we have been faithful to the original. (Editor's note)

The ostensible editor of the unnamed narrator's story thus claims that the aforementioned text *does not appear* earlier on in the narrative, while the reader, if he/she cares to investigate such a claim, discovers that this piece of text *does indeed appear verbatim* towards the beginning of the narrative. With this conundrum, Bioy Casares posits part of the text itself as both present and absent while enforcing questions about the status of the text, and the reliability of the editor himself. Like the appearance and disappearance of Faustine, Morel and the island within the narrative, this textual fragment, it would seem, is meant to engender a similar confusion for the reader. Thus, readers are meant to assume that the physical text they are reading and holding has

itself been subject to, perhaps mechanically reproduced and altered by, Morel's invention. This further implies that if the reader *can* see this fragment of text—as we are meant to—then the text very cleverly posits its readers as subject to the self-same medial layering of the island within the narrative, which ultimately leaves it to the reader to discern whether the narrator-protagonist or the editor is to be considered more reliable. We can see the fragment of apparently missing text where the editor cannot, precisely because the machine is still in operation, so to speak. In this way, the mechanics of Morel's projector are transferred to the medium of Bioy Casares' text; the novel itself becomes a medially layered object made up of overlapping textual fragments in much the same way that the island within the narrative is comprised of overlapping topographies (the projected image of the island and the diegetic island of the text).

A purely medial island: Michael Bay's *The Island* (2005)

While *The Invention of Morel* presents us with an island that is constructed intermedially, the island still exists within the diegesis. Morel's vision of an island existing in purely medial terms is fully realized in Michael Bay's science fiction thriller *The Island* (Bay, 2005). As both protagonists and viewers come to learn, the film's eponymous island is a purely medial simulation—indeed, the generic title itself suggests an absence of specificity and location, accentuating the film's conception of an island that has no existence beyond its image. The film is set in a dystopian North American landscape of the future in which the world has apparently been scorched and burned. In order to survive, human colonies have been set up within purpose-built hermetic structures, designed to regulate temperature and air supply. Occupants are organized into rigid social and hierarchical professional structures. A resident is regularly selected, by lottery, to leave the colony and to go to 'the island', ostensibly the last remaining patch of natural beauty preserved on earth. Yet as it transpires, the colony is actually a breeding centre for clones, and as resident after resident is selected to go to the island, their body tissue is, in fact, being harvested for wealthy and powerful people outside in the real world—which has not really been destroyed at all. The island, then, is a pure construct, a floating simulation that exists only in mediation. It represents the reification of ideology *par excellence*, as the colony features what appear to be transparent glass windows that look out onto a lush, tropical paradise of green and blue: in reality, these windows are actually gigantic media screens that intermittently flash between images of the island. They appear at first glance to be representative of something that exists elsewhere (on the outside), but there is no corresponding island reality outside of and beyond the screens and projections.

However, in one curious scene, the camera pulls out from a window in the facility to reveal a wide-angled shot of the island behind and beyond the institution. Thus, in this very brief shot, the viewer is positioned in a world where the island apparently exists. If the island is a purely visual simulation, a medial construct, then this shot is not diegetically motivated. It is illogical for this projection to exist or to be shown to the viewer in this way. The viewer is accorded a positional vantage point that parallels that of the clones and is also deceived into believing in the reality of the island. Yet the film also underlines the metapoetic construction of the island-as-image when revealing it as a hollow simulation, a deliberate construct. In other words, the film deliberately draws the viewer's specific attention to the illogicality of this shot. The only logic that can be ascribed to this shot is the intention to put the viewer in the same uncomfortable position of uncertainty and ambiguity as the protagonists. Hence, our belief in the island, our perception of it, is made to be entirely medial.

We have thus traced the medial conception of the island from its metapoetic construction in Eco's *The Island of the Day Before* through its intermedial layering in Bioy Casares' *The Invention of Morel* to its purely medial existence in *The Island*. In all three cases, the mediality of the island goes beyond mere postmodern play and towards the fundamentals of how an island is constructed. Of course, the perspectives developed in the first part of this double article (sensory perception and spatial practice) are also relevant for these three island texts; indeed, sensory impressions (like

the enticing vistas in *The Island*) and spatial practice (like the movements across the island by the narrator-protagonist of *The Invention of Morel*) are themselves inflected by mediality in these texts. The final section of this article seeks not to disentangle these modes from one another but looks at the ways in which they further interrelate.

So far, we have been looking at moments that establish a specific form and concept of the island through the poetics of the text—in other words, moments in which the island comes into being in its specificity. Conversely, we have also been examining those moments during which initial conceptions of islands are changed in some way. This approach implies a temporal logic: namely, that an island is established in a particular way and undergoes one or several transformations in the course of the text. But there are also texts that cannot quite be discussed in these terms. These texts are particularly reflexive about their own constructions of islands. Indeed, the 20th and 21st centuries have seen an increasing number of literary texts, films, and computer games that reflect on and destabilize their own constructions of island space, and thus interrogate the cultural desire for islands and the mechanisms by which they come to be. In what follows, we will explore four brief examples of texts in which the island refuses to "be" any one thing, in which any single identity, any imagined or essential "being" of a given island, is immediately called into question.

Multiple conception: *Hell in the Pacific* (1968)

Our first example of the ways in which island conceptions are destabilized is what we term the multiple conception of islands, which will be discussed in relation to John Boorman's film *Hell in the Pacific* (Anderson & Boorman, 1968). The film tells the story of an American and a Japanese solider who are both stranded on a Pacific island during World War II. From the beginning, the film juxtaposes conflicting (but coexisting) conceptions of the same island. These conceptions are aligned with two ideological positions that divide the protagonists—they are, after all, enemies in a global war. At first, the soldiers fight each other constantly, turning the island into a war zone that crystallizes the larger conflict in the Pacific theatre, where islands played a crucial role as strategic strongholds; many of the crucial battles of the war were fought on and around islands, and many islands changed their occupants several times (cf. Fisher, 2002; Geiger, 2007; Keown, 2007; Rottman, 2002; Wilson, 2000).

In this section, we focus on a scene from the beginning of the film, which shows us the first face-to-face confrontation between the men. This scene follows several minutes of film in which we never see the two men in the same frame. The medial organization of island space thus initially constitutes two separate islands in one, which are aligned with the 'Japanese' and the 'American' version of the island, respectively. The confrontation scene, however, foregrounds two distinct borders. The first of them is the border between land and sea, where the confrontation takes place. The initial moments of the film, during which we only see the Japanese man, foreground this first border, staging the occupation of the island in an experiential, philosophical sense. The second border in the confrontation scene, created by a log on the beach, serves a very different function. Lying perpendicular to the shoreline, the log establishes a physical border between the two men, but also creates a symbolic border that separates the two (mental and cinematic) versions of the island. This second border is tied to a different kind of occupation in which the island becomes a space for military movements and manoeuvres. Thereby, the associations of the island's spaces (e.g., water, beach, forest) and borders (the shoreline, the edge of the forest) with openness, (in)visibility, and cover take on a new significance in terms of military strategy. The film thus allows the viewer to experience the phenomenological mechanisms that alter the soldier's perception of the landscape, as the island becomes a war zone.

In this creation of a combat landscape, perception, spatial practice, and mediatization combine in a striking negotiation of space and spatial borders. As the men walk towards each other, the camera accentuates their movement through a series of tracking shots. In the following,

we see two imagined scenarios in which the men kill each other. The two war scenarios are presented in terms of the men's visual perception, signalled by close-up shots of their faces and extreme close-up shots of their eyes. The imagined scenarios constitute an imaginary spatial practice as the men cross over into the "other" island and occupy it. Before and after these imagined scenarios, however, we see a static long shot of the two men that places them on opposite margins of the frame. This produces an ironic contrast between the fast tracking shots, which create proximity between the protagonists, and the long shot, which creates maximum distance between them. The scene thus foregrounds the creation of space and borders through the medium itself in order to comment on the protagonists' mediated construction of the island through their own cultural and ideological lenses (cf. Howe, 2000, p. 1). The island therefore exists in two separate mental constructions; it is doubly conceived. There is, however, also a possible third conception, which at this point exists only for the viewer: namely, a version of the island that accommodates both protagonists (this third conception foreshadows the film's later utopian, shared island space where enemies in a global war can be seen to enjoy a brief moment of friendship over drinks). The foregrounding of the border between water and land on these two (or three) islands is thus highly significant; it becomes entangled with the second, purely symbolic border signalled by the log and performed by the camera, which itself creates space and challenges borders. In the context of the film's destabilization of the "naturalness" of any form of occupation, this scene thus calls into question the creation of territorial borders in general. Any version of the island becomes visible as a construction; the shifting border of land and sea is no more stable than that constituted by the log, which was initially washed ashore from the water, itself complicating the opposition of land and sea.

Conception as perpetual reconception

While the island is conceived in multiple ways simultaneously in *Hell in the Pacific*, in other island narratives conception becomes trickier in that there is no stable island to be conceived at any point. This is the case in J. M. Barrie's (1904) *Peter Pan*, where the conception is one of perpetual reconception. This becomes apparent in the unusually long stage direction at the beginning of Act 2:

> When the blind goes up all is so dark that you scarcely know it has gone up. This is because if you were to see the island bang (as Peter would say) the wonders of it might hurt your eyes. […] The first thing seen is merely some whitish dots trudging along the sward, and you can guess from their tinkling that they are probably fairies of the commoner sort going home afoot from some party and having a cheery tiff by the way. Then Peter's star wakes up, and in the blink of it, which is much stronger than in our stars, you can make out masses of trees, and you think you see wild beasts stealing past to drink, though what you see is not the beasts themselves but only the shadows of them. They are really out pictorially to greet Peter in the way they think he would like them to greet him; and for the same reason the mermaids basking in the lagoon beyond the trees are carefully combing their hair; and for the same reason the pirates are landing invisibly from the longboat, invisibly to you but not to the redskins, whom none can see or hear because they are on the war-path. The whole island, in short, which has been having a slack time in Peter's absence, is now in a ferment because the tidings has leaked out that he is on his way back […].
>   What you see is the Never Land. You have often half seen it before, or even three-quarters, after the night-lights were lit, and you might then have beached your coracle on it if you had not always at the great moment fallen asleep. I dare say you have chucked things on to it, the things you can't find in the morning. […] It is an open-air scene, a forest, with a beautiful lagoon beyond but not really far away, for the Never Land is very compact, not large and sprawly with tedious distances between one adventure and

another, but nicely crammed. It is summer time on the trees and on the lagoon but winter on the river, which is not remarkable on Peter's island where all the four seasons may pass while you are filling a jug at the well. (Barrie, 1904, pp. 105-106)

First of all, the stage direction suggests that there is no island that can be seen in its totality beyond the individual elements that make it up. As it is taking shape before the viewer's eyes, the island gradually reconstitutes itself to get ready for Peter's arrival. There is initially nothing to be seen, and then the first things we supposedly see are spots of light: the fairies, followed by Peter's star. And as we are told, we also see the shadows of wild beasts. In its first guise, then, the island is nothing but mobile and insubstantial effects of light and shadow: uncertain effects of perception. This is enhanced by the many modals, conditionals, and uncertainty markers ("would", "might", "you think", "if you were to see", etc.) that suggest possible and hypothetical rather than real seeing. Several agents are doing things "invisibly", again existing only in the spectator's imagination. If the play is performed, things are yet more uncertain: as the audience does not receive the stage directions, they may, depending on the staging, not actually be told what hides in the darkness and thus imagine their own versions of what it is they see.

In addition to drawing attention to the uncertain effects of perception, the stage direction evokes the spatial practices that constitute the island with its various spaces and corresponding actors, i.e., the lagoon for the mermaids, the beach for the pirates, and the forest for the Indians. But these spaces do not exist beyond the functions they serve: in a metadramatic reference to the theatricality of the island, it is suggested that these spaces are solely activated for the arrival of Peter, who is figured as the privileged spectator of the island's nocturnal show. The island's ongoing reconstitution, however, is also linked to its function as a dreamscape—not just for Peter, but also for the audience, whose imagination it is related to; the assertion that the spectators "have chucked things on it" in their dreams confirms this sense of the island as a space full of the stuff of dreams. In line with this dreamlike quality, the island is not governed by linear time (which is evident in the simultaneity of different seasons in different parts of the island) and Euclidean spatiality (the island is "nicely crammed"). Rather, space and time emerge from the narrative and dramatic requirements of the play as well as the desires of Peter and, by association, the imaginative faculty he stands for. Spatiality and temporality are flexible, fluid, and entwined.

The island, of course, is not only the stuff of dreams, but also the stuff of stories, specifically other island stories. If the island is nothing but the sum of its ever-changing elements, these elements also come from a repository of texts like Robert Louis Stevenson's (2014 [1883]) *Treasure Island*, Robert Michael Ballantyne's (1995 [1858]) *The Coral Island,* and Johann David Wyss's (1991 [1812]) *The Swiss Family Robinson* (which themselves, of course, speak back to texts like Daniel Defoe's (2001 [1719]) *Robinson Crusoe).* The blatant unreality of the island is thus also a comment on the unreality of cultural island fantasies and the clichéd figures that populate imaginary islands. This unreality is explicit and self-reflexively marked; the references to mediation in the perception of the island (i.e., the viewer's spectacles) reinforce this. If a text like *Treasure Island* takes its pirates rather seriously, at least at first sight, and *The Swiss Family Robinson* is confident in portraying its setting as an unquestioned island space (see Hartmann, 2014, pp. 68-72 for a discussion on the text's curious lack of island evidence) filled with an incredible array of required plants, animals, and natural resources, *Peter Pan* takes pains to foreground and explicitly flag its unreality through its fluidity and changeability. Although the island in *Peter Pan* is conceived at the very beginning of the text, its conception is perpetual reconception—it exists precisely in always reconstituting its dreamspace.

Anti-conception

This ironic engagement with previous island texts becomes more explicitly critical in a text like Patrick Chamoiseau's (2012) *L'empreinte à Crusoe*. A postcolonial rewriting of the generic ur-text, *Robinson Crusoe*, this text goes yet a step further in complicating the conception of its island. The

novel is about Ogomtemmêli, Crusoe's former slave who is marooned on an island before Crusoe, and whose account Crusoe hears before being shipwrecked himself. Accordingly, the novel undermines the primacy of the Western storytellers and narratives. The novel conceives its island in several ways: as a space of amnesia, as a space of transit and passage, as a space of repetitive exploration, and as a space of colonial ordering (cf. Graziadei, 2015, pp. 428-429). These conceptions, however, are shattered by an earthquake, and the island explodes into a multiplicity of presences. After the earthquake, the text resists island conception, and any form of spatial reference point is lost: "*I perceived the island in a new and very touching totality*; each of its presences contained the quintessence of a totality larger than it; it began nowhere, did not extend in any perspective, appeared in its entirety in each of its presences, and at the same time well beyond itself" (Chamoiseau, 2012, p. 179; emphasis original; authors' translation).

The island cannot be geometrically grasped; it has no starting point, no graspable extension, and no definable scale. In a striking musical metaphor, the island is described in terms of a "gigantic and atonal emergence," which suggests a mode that is not grounded in any harmonic organizing principle. The "totality" of the island is, in an almost fractal sense, larger than anything that can be experienced; the emergence of the island is located in the unfathomability of both microscales ("in the infinity of its detail") and macroscales ("the excess of its entirety"). The island is constituted as an emergence that cannot be contained in a conceptual frame, which is encapsulated in the phrase "the island was simply-there." Textually, for the reader, this impossibility of conceiving the island takes the form of many fragments of close-up visions that cannot be integrated into a coherent sense of the island. In sum: in the earthquake, the island is shaken as a physical space, and with it any stable *concept* of it. Shaken himself, the narrator can no longer relate to the infinity of presences of the island in the same way as before; now, his interaction with its "new and very touching totality" is impeded—the island is "simply-there" (Chamoiseau, 2012, p. 203).

Deferred conception

The final resistance of Chamoiseau's novel to previously established conceptions of the island is only a small step away from our fourth and final category of destabilization, which is the ultimate deferral or refusal of conception. This mode is dominant in the recent television series *Lost (Abrams et al. & Bender et al., 2004-2010)*, which recounts the mysterious experiences of a group of castaways on an island after a plane crash. The island of *Lost* is, in many ways, a vast repository. In physical terms, it contains fauna and flora from all over the world, including a polar bear—reminding us of Darwin and Wallace, who saw islands as crossroads of evolution and biogeography containing many evolutionary oddities and "living fossils" (Darwin, 2003 [1859], p. 160, p. 395; cf. also Wallace, 2013 [1881]). Culturally, the island contains people from all continents and social classes—as well as a plethora of objects and sites related to their respective backgrounds. Intertextually, the island contains references to just about everything—not just other island fictions such as *The Lord of the Flies* (Golding, 1954), *Jurassic Park* (Kennedy & Spielberg, 1993), *None But the Brave* (Okuda & Sinatra, 1965), *The Coral Island* (Ballantyne, 1910), *Gilligan's Island* (Schwartz & Arnold, 1964-1967), and many more—but also a range of mythical and philosophical discourses from John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau to quantum physics and different religions.

In all of this, however, *Lost* continually defers its conception of the island. The series plays with the viewers' desires, and comments on the multiple meanings that have been ascribed to islands by generations of writers, filmmakers, and critics. However, it takes this *ad absurdum*: the island is so overdetermined and imbued with meanings that it ceases to mean anything, and the series always withholds from the viewer any definite conception of the island. The difference from a text like Chamoiseau's *L'empreinte a Crusoé* is that there is no anti–conception impulse after a series of conceptions ('anti' implies countering something). To the end (perhaps with the exception of the somewhat forced final episode), the series is predicated on the impossibility of

fathoming the island. The initial exploration of the island in the first episode is thus never completed, and the culturally anchored desire to map and control island space is continually frustrated. The island refuses to be fixed in any definite way; the serial nature of *Lost* itself functions as a structural correlative to this deferral. The fact that the island is mobile in space and time, moving between different locations and times, literalizes this conceptual deferral.

From the first season, the series plays with the viewer's desire for islands and sets in place a series of clichés only to undo them again immediately. Our final examples, then, are two moments from *Lost* that epitomize this mechanism by which the viewer's desire to see the island in its totality is activated—and frustrated. In the first episode of season six, we seem to have an aerial view of the island, a contemporary version of the monarch-of-all-I-survey scene of classic island fiction in which the castaway climbs to the highest point of the island to establish visual control and dominance over its space (cf. Weaver-Hightower, 2007, pp. 1-42, based on Pratt, 2008, pp. 197-223). We see what seems to be the island, but might in fact be all clouds. The shot gestures towards a possible shape of the island, yet this possibility dissolves into insubstantial images—and thus aligns the island with chimeras and dream-visions. In the last episode of season four, an aerial view of the island is withheld from the viewer even more strikingly. As the island changes its location, we see it only in its disappearance as it dissolves in an excess of light. We see its trace only in the effects it has, in the ripple of the waves it causes. As the waves spread outward in concentric circles, their perfect geometry stands in opposition to the actual impossibility of gauging its size or shape; the image could be on any scale. This physical disappearance is the perfect emblem of the ongoing deferral of island conception in the series: the island can neither be pinned down physically nor grasped as a concept. At the moment of supposed maximum visibility, the island stops existing as a substance. The viewer is teased as the scene holds out the promise of a shot that shows the island in its totality. And yet, we do not see nothing: we see the island in the effects it creates. This play with expectations points towards the phantasmatic core of the island in the cultural imaginary; the pervasive cultural effects of islands and their intersection with a range of fantasies. The island sinks into the sea, and with it we witness the disappearance of 'The Island' with a definite article and a capital I, the island as a trope and concept, as a site of projection of definite meanings.

Conclusion

The texts presented in this final section are important to us because they do something that is closely related to the aims of the Island Poetics project. By presenting multiple coexisting conceptions of the same island, as in *Hell in the Pacific*, conceiving the island as a space that always reconstitutes itself, as in *Peter Pan*, by resisting island conception after a series of conceptions, as in *L'empreinte à Crusoé*, or finally by deferring island conception altogether, as in *Lost*, these narratives ask not *what* islands mean, but *how* they mean what they mean, and how they are experienced before they even mean anything. In a sense, then, the disappearing island in *Lost* epitomizes our project, as it drowns 'The Island' as a site of projection for preconceived meanings under the weight of multireferential intertextuality (cf. Kinane, 2016, p. 218), and thus counters its function as a cultural trope invested with essentialist assumptions. In conclusion, then, the island narratives that we have discussed in this double paper are certainly invested with ideology, but they also call for an analysis that is attentive to the multiple processes of island conception and reconception that complicate simple accounts of what these islands mean. Island poetics, as we propose it, therefore examines multiple islands in their immense geographical and textual variety—as they are sensed, practiced, and medially experienced.

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