On sensing island spaces and the spatial practice of island-making: introducing island poetics, Part I

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ABSTRACT: This two-part paper, co-authored by the members of the Island Poetics Research Group, 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 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. In this first part, we develop a phenomenology of fictional islands that focuses on the ways in which island topographies are constructed through the senses and through spatial practices. In our analysis, islands emerge through sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch (and frequently a confluence of these sensory experiences) or they are (re)conceived through the movements across and/or interaction with their topography.

Keywords: island narratives, island poetics, perception, phenomenology of islands, spatial practice

Introduction

This two-part essay seeks to devise a poetic approach to island studies, and to answer the question of how precisely islands emerge from texts. Discussions of islands in literary and cultural studies frequently gravitate towards the meaning of islands and discuss islands as either supremely meaningful and knowable spaces (cf., among others, Brunner, 1967, p. 24; Glaser, 1996; MacArthur & Wilson, 2001, op. 3-4; Perosa, 2000; Ruddick, 1993, p. 56; Tuan, 1990, p. 11), tracing their associations with concepts such as isolation (Franks, 2006), paradise (Fuller, 2016), antithetical counter-spaces (Brunner, 1967, p. 19-25) and spaces of colonial control (Balasopoulos, 2008; Loxley, 1990; Weaver-Hightower, 2007), or as spaces that resist meaning. Thus, Chris Bongie (1998, p. 18) suggests that "the island is a figure that can and must be read in more than one way." Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith (2003, p. 5) view the island as "the most graspable and the most slippery of subjects," while Ottmar Ette (2005, p. 137) views it as a site of semantic oscillation. While these discussions have added much to our understanding of the metaphorical and conceptual appeal of islands in the Western imagination, they have sometimes obscured the multilayered experiences of islands conveyed by island narratives (cf. Riquet, 2017). These discussions have perhaps emphasized textual structure at the expense of sensory, corporeal, and material *textures* of islands in different media.

In this first part of this two-part paper, we develop a phenomenology of fictional islands that focuses on the ways in which island topographies are often presented as a confluence of sensory experiences (sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch) and spatial practices (the movement across and/or interaction with the topography of the fictional island). In an important article, Pete Hay (2006) first called for a "phenomenology of islands" within island studies to contest the reduction of islands to metaphor. While Hay was talking about real islands, we would like to propose a similar shift of attention in relation to fictional islands. In the second part, we will engage more deeply with the mediality itself in order to analyse the ways in which islands are imagined and presented across different media, and with the manner in which island narratives can draw attention to and resist their own conceptions of islandness (Graziadei et al, 2017). The overall aim of this two-part article, then, is to probe the multiple ways in which islands are constructed through, by, and in fiction; in this sense, advocating a poetic approach to island studies means calling for a nuanced understanding of the particularities of islands as they are experienced by characters, readers, and viewers.

Our analysis of fictional islands is concerned specifically with the manner in which they arise through narrative and poetic devices. In our examination of the poetics of islands in various examples from literature, cinema, television, and computer games, we strive to go beyond an analysis of the island as a stand-in or substitute for something else; rather, we examine the ways in which different facets of narrative are used to build fictional islands within texts. This phase usually coincides with the first moment in which the island is present(ed) *as an island* within the diegesis, that is to say within the fictional world that is established through storytelling. We are thus not simply looking at the stable image of the island as it arises from these various texts, but rather at the ways in which fictional islands are conceived and reconceived at different textual moments. By island *conception*, we refer to the precise moment in the narrative in which the island emerges as a specific space or thing, for instance through sensory imagery or corporeal experience. Consequently, we use the term *reconception* to refer to the phases in which the island is transformed and/or conceived differently by those protagonists who occupy it and (frequently) by the reader, viewer, or player who experiences this transformation. The island undergoes a morphological shift—either geophysically, spatially, conceptually, figuratively, or, as is common, a combination of some or all of the above. Overall, then, we examine the shifting representation of the island in these texts, and ultimately explore the ways in which the concept of 'islandness' itself is destabilized. Indeed, the change of discourse on islandness (from a negative insularity to a nissological view) as proposed by McCall (1994, p. 1) and Baldacchino (2007, p. 16) is a fundamental part of our perspective. With this in mind, we shall now turn to an examination of

several island narratives in which the island is conceived and reconceived through sensory exploration.

Sensing island spaces

In his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2002) offers a critique of the Cartesian *cogito* and of Euclidean space, arguing that our knowledge of the world is grounded in perceptual and embodied experience. Extending Edmund Husserl's "critique of the mathematization of nature" (Casey 1997, p. 238), which aimed to reject a "single universal causality underlying an absolute, objective spatiotemporality" (Casey, 1997, p. 222), Merleau-Ponty (2002, p. 327) argues that geographical orientation is an artificial construction, and advocates a view of space that privileges the body and the "flow of experiences" that constitutes our perceptual and cognitive horizons:

> One cannot take the world and orientated space as given along with the contents of sense experience or with the body in itself, since experience in fact shows that the same contents can be successively orientated in one direction or another, and that objective relationships as registered on the retina through the position of the physical image do not govern our experience of 'up' and 'down'. What we want to know is how an object can appear to us as 'the right way up' or 'inverted', and what these words mean. (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 288)

Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on embodied experience and lived space serves as an important starting point for more recent challenges to structuralist perspectives on the world. Thus, while defending the experiential and qualitative approach to knowledge and language over the purely logical, Michel Serres tells us that "the linguistic school is a school with no sense of smell, and no taste" (qtd. in Pearce, 2010, p. 89; see also Serres, 2008). Responding to Serres, Jacob Vivian Pearce (2010, pp. 89-90) notes that "Serres is attempting to save the body from the addiction of language—the transformation of the world into one governed by the word." Recent approaches to literature and culture, notably in the field of spatial studies, have seen a revival of phenomenological perspectives (cf., among others, Berberich et al., 2015; Brown & Toadvine, 2003; Gallagher & Raman, 2010; Rodaway, 2011; Vandevelde, 2010; Wylie, 2013), complemented by cognitive literary studies that foreground the reader's (or viewer's) own multisensory and embodied experience of fiction (cf. Freeman, 2013; Spolsky, 2015; Starr, 2010). These recent debates about the perceptual basis of experience and the embodied quality of thought and language suggest that sensory and embodied experiences share a complex relationship with narration and the act of reading (cf. Iser, 1978, p. 225-226), and direct *attention* towards phenomenal representations of objects (cf. Metzinger 2003, p. 356). For the purpose of this particular article, we wish to interrogate this relationship and explore the ways in which island spaces can be conceived and reconceived through specific sensory and corporeal experiences in language. To put it another way, we seek to understand the role that language plays in the sensory and embodied construction of the island for the characters and, most importantly, for the reader, viewer, or player.

An island emerges: islands and visual perception in *Shutter Island*

The opening sequence of Martin Scorsese's 2010 film *Shutter Island* (Fischer & Scorsese, 2010) stages the emergence of the island as an object of perception both for the audience and for the characters within the diegesis. The island is literally and figuratively configured before us, and the way in which it is sensorially conceived at the very beginning of the film emphasizes its importance. Prior to the diegetic opening of the film proper, a combination of uncomfortably

high and extremely low string notes plays over the Paramount logo instead of the usual brassy flourish. The music is both dissonant (and therefore sinister and discomforting) and atonal, without a centre towards which it might comfortably resolve. This imbues the music with a certain instability and lack of direction which are echoed visually in the film's opening shot. As the extradiegetic music fades out and is replaced by the sound of lapping waves, the intertitle cuts jarringly to an off-white screen, resolving into a shot of dense, cloudy mist—an image that further serves to foreground the sense of conceptual disorientation the viewer experiences. Slowly, a dark object emerges through the fog and becomes visible. The film's title suggests that this is, in fact, the eponymous island; its placement within the film's frame as well as its shape strengthen this suggestion. However, as it transpires, the object that emerges from the fog is not an island, but a ferryboat that is moving towards the position of the camera. Thus, the viewer's expectations (i.e., of an island on the horizon) are immediately undercut; what emerges from the fog is, in fact, the *absence* of an island. Indeed, the direction in which the ferry is advancing (it seems to be moving from middle distance in the centre of the frame directly towards the vantage point of the viewer) suggests that the audience is positionally situated on the implied island, as though it is towards us (as viewers aligned with the island's potential inhabitants) that the ferry is moving.

The scene then moves from the multisensory uncertainty of the island's first conception to the hyper-visibility of its (re)conception as a framed image. After a cut to a reverse-angle shot of the island, we see it as a clearly outlined, stabilized image that is contained within the filmic frame. The starkly hyper-real visuals of the frame (the island looks like a computer-generated image precisely because, in part, it is) hints subtly at the conflict between geographical reality and psychological fantasy, a thematic issue that is central to the film's protagonist. Thus, it is apparent from the film's opening that seeing or viewing—both the audience's ability to conceive of the island in visual terms, and the film's presentation of the island as a hyper-real image—is bound up with notions of the way in which the island is conceptualized. The island at first remains *un*seen—in that the dark, conical shape that emerges from the fog is not what we imagine it to be—before the film calls specific attention to the image-quality of the island itself; its scenic view is captured and visually contained within the film's frame, as though it were a still picture. The film's opening scene thus foregrounds for the audience the visuality of islands as framed images. Indeed, in their article 'Qu'est-ce qu'une île?' ('What is an Island?'), Françoise Létoublon, Paola Ceccarelli, and Jean Sgard (1996, p. 11; *translation our own*) emphasize visibility as one of the key criteria for the definition of an island:

> The navigators who perceive from afar an island 'on the sea' recognise it without hesitation and distinguish it from a continent. There is doubt only for the large islands, which allows us to define the island as being of limited extension, allowing it to be embraced in a single glance from a certain distance.

Here, Létoublon et al. assert that the very *islandness* of islands is conditionally rooted in visuality—or in the subject's ability to visually discern and comprehend the island. This is one of the conditions of colonial island narratives posited by Rebecca Weaver-Hightower (2007, pp. 1-42), who points out that island-bound protagonists typically ascend to the highest geographical point of whatever landmass they happen to find themselves on in order to discern that they are, in fact, on an island. Thus, the castaway must first *see* that he (in colonial island fiction, it is usually a man) is on an island before it can be classified as such. In such texts, then, the island becomes an island by being seen. Yet *Shutter Island* also *foregrounds* this visual paradigm, and the perceptual confusion of the opening shots gestures towards alternative ways of conceiving islands. Sensory perception (as well as a *lack* of sensory perception) is thus used to unsettle and disturb the audience's conception of the titular island, and comment on the visual primacy of a long tradition of cinematic island narratives.

Hearing an island: aural perception in *King Kong*

The Western visual tradition found a striking manifestation in the wave of tropical island films in 1920s and 1930s Hollywood cinema (cf. Geiger, 2007). Perhaps the most striking self-reflexive comment on the desire to see (or visually consume) tropical islands is offered by the 1933 film *King Kong* (Selznick et al., 1933), which problematizes the ways in which islands are conceived in visual terms. In the following, however, we will demonstrate that *King Kong* not only critically interrogates the visual tradition it belongs to, but also suggests the possibility of an island being heard rather than seen.

When the (diegetic) movie director Carl Denham and his crew approach Skull Island, which they wish to capture on film along with the giant ape of the title, they sail through thick fog. Initially, the island is not conceived in visual terms, but evoked aurally. After Jack Driscoll asks "Listen! Hear anything?", Denham replies in the negative. One of the crew announces "breakers ahead," but Jack responds "that's not breakers, that's drums" as the sound of 'tribal' drumming rises slowly in volume and becomes distinct enough to be heard over the non-diegetic music. Thus, in the conflation of drumming with breakers, the film juxtaposes two alternative aural island conceptions which are tied to the crew's inability to *see* the island through the fog (into which they stare intensely). Immediately after this, however, the image fades to black; in the next shot, the fog has disappeared and we see an image of the island framed by the railing and ropes of the ship. Although the first conception of the island is aural, both Denham and the ship's captain privilege visual comprehension over acoustic perception. It is not until Denham can *see* the island—when it appears from amidst the fog—that we are given a sense of arrival: "Well skipper, do you believe me now?" It is the island's visuality that gives Denham confidence in its existence; in Denham's universe, where island and ape exist in order to be visually captured as a spectacle, there is no room for the more diffuse acoustic experience that marks the ship's arrival.

Smelling and tasting islands: the 'Bounty' adverts

While aural perception is directly accessible to the viewers of a sound film, the remaining senses pose more problems to representation. Indeed, one might wonder whether fictional islands can be smelled and tasted at all; a useful framework for understanding the appeal of literary evocations of smells and tastes is offered by cognitive literary studies' suggestion that fiction can simulate sensory experiences for readers and viewers to the extent that it partly activates the same areas of the brain as "real" sensory experience (cf. Freeman, 2013; Spolsky, 2015; Starr, 2010). Indeed, taste and smell play an important role in conceptions of islandness. Certainly, the experience of islands through smell and taste is bound up with (pre-)colonial encounters between Europeans and island cultures, particularly in the Pacific. A recurring topos of the Pacific journals is the islands' perceived bountifulness and abundance of food. Joseph Banks (2011, pp. 135-136), the naturalist sailing with James Cook, stresses the apparently spontaneous and labour-free production of fruits in Polynesia in 1769: "Besides the Bread fruit the earth almost spontaneously produces Cocoa nuts, Bananas of 13 sorts the best I have ever eat, Plantains but indiffer[e]nt, a fruit not unlike an apple, which when ripe is very pleasant, Sweet potatoes, Yams, Cocos." The sensory experience of the perceived bountifulness of the Pacific region has been exploited to great effect by the print and television adverts for 'Bounty' chocolate bars. Despite being filled with coconut rather than breadfruit, the product resonates with the Pacific history of economic exploitation, and perpetuates the West's perceptions of the Pacific as a land of bountiful plenty. Television advertisements have constructed an elaborate chain of associations that lead from the chocolate bar to the tropical island. Invariably ending with the tagline "Bounty—a taste of paradise," they suggest that biting into the chocolate bar gives the consumer access to a tropical island paradise—indeed, to the very taste of islands themselves.

One advert from 2007 begins with an aerial image of a low-lying tropical coral island in turquoise water; however, the island at this stage consists of nothing but white sand. After a cut to a lateral view, we see a woman sitting on the sand and biting into a Bounty bar. The bite is immediately followed by another cut and we are aligned with the woman's perspective as she turns to look at the ground. From this vantage point, we see greenery and flowers sprouting rapidly from the sand, first around the woman and then over the entire island, which is soon covered by lush vegetation—including, of course, coconut palms. The viewer witnesses, in other words, the poetic construction of an island: the syntagmatic alignment of the shots clearly suggests that the island's physical construction is directly triggered by the woman's taste of the chocolate bar. Our alignment with the woman suggests that the same experience is available to us, too: tasting the chocolate can supposedly transport us to a tropical island that is otherwise inaccessible.

This metonymic conception of a tropical island through its supposed taste is further reinforced by a highly pointed metaphor. The advertisement continues by showing us a highly sexualized shot of a coconut falling onto a rock, splitting in two, and ejaculating its white liquid in a splash. Right after this, the woman's half-naked lover enters the frame, and as they prepare to kiss, the advert cuts back to the initial aerial shot of the island as we see and hear the product's tagline—only this time, the island is covered by a perfect circle of greenery, metaphorically aligning it with the round shape of the halved coconut. Thus, the implication is that the consumer can only experience the island vicariously by biting into its metaphor and tasting its metonymy (cf. Samson, 2017).

Multisensory island experiences

The Bounty example demonstrates that one should not equate only visual island conception with imperial histories: the advertisements show that the evocation of taste is inextricably linked to a Pacific history of economic exploitation. However, we would like to suggest that island narratives also have the potential to challenge conceptions of islands as fixed and controllable images by constructing islands as complex sensory landscapes, even if they are otherwise caught in colonial discourse.

Henry De Vere Stacpoole's 1908 novel *The Blue Lagoon* introduces its island through multisensory perception (De Vere Stacpoole, 2013, pp. 55-58). The novel tells the story of two young cousins—Emmeline and Dick—who, together with deckhand Paddy, are shipwrecked on a Pacific desert island. The children's first knowledge of the island is mediated through Paddy. Dick and Emmeline look up to him while he scans the horizon from the top of the mast: "'Childer! …There's an island forenint us'," he shouts. The indirectness of Dick's own perception is underscored by his difficulty in processing the information cognitively: "he was not quite sure what an island might be like in the concrete." Rather than a definite answer, the reader is provided with a series of perceptual effects that convey a partial and incomplete sense of something called 'island', at least to begin with. As the castaways get closer to the island, the smudge of "an undecided colour" turns to an "oasis of verdure in the sparkling and seraphic blue." However, perceptual ambiguity and subjectivity remain, with Dick "straining his eyes towards the land" as though he is having difficulty in perceiving what the reader is told is a phantasmagoria of colour. Thus, modes of perception and conception in this text are to be treated suspiciously. We then enter the smellscape of the island:

> The breeze had freshened up, and was blowing dead from the island, as though the island were making a weak attempt to blow them away from it.
>
> Oh, what a fresh and perfumed breeze it was! All sorts of tropical growing things had joined their scent in one bouquet.
>
> 'Smell it,' said Emmeline, expanding her small nostrils. (De Vere Stacpoole, 2013, p. 56)

After this, our attention is directed to the aural: "Now, as they drew nearer a sound came on the breeze, a sound faint and sonorous and dreamy. It was the sound of the breakers on the reef." Both the smells and the sounds of the island serve to question its discreteness; the scents extend the island's olfactory boundaries indefinitely into the sea. The arrival on the island ends in a climax of senses. Sight, sound, and the tactile motion of the dinghy all converge into a sensory overload to which Emmeline reacts by apparently attempting to block out her visual perceptions of the island: "Emmeline shut her eyes *tight*" (emphasis original). This miraculously works: "Then, as though a door had been swiftly and silently closed, the sound of the surf became suddenly less. The boat floated on an even keel; she opened her eyes and found herself in Wonderland."

Yann Martel's novel *Life of Pi* (2001) similarly contains an island approach that is rich in multisensory perception (Martel, 2001, pp. 344-346). Pi has been cast adrift in a life raft, and discovers an island composed entirely of vegetable matter. It is initially apprehended visually by a gaze made unreliable by the reader's knowledge of Pi's visual and cognitive difficulties. We are told that the boy opens his eyes after drifting off to sleep in the lifeboat, and that, suddenly, "in the near distance I saw trees;" not an island but a part of one. Pi notes that the luscious greens of the island, after the sheer repetitive blue colour of the ocean, "was like music to my eyes." This synaesthetic conflation of sound and vision is developed when Pi notes that the green of the island was "a green to get drunk on." This multisensory—or even intersensory—approach allows Pi to better interpret his surroundings and thus assimilate the island as a reality: "'*Look* for green,' said the survival manual" (emphasis added), but it also tells him that a tactile, bodily sensory perception can be helpful: "'Ultimately, a foot is the only good judge of land'." Dangling over the side of the boat, Pi's "foot sank into clear water and met the rubbery resistance of something flexible but solid"—he thus finds the island to exist, but in an unstable state. When Pi applies more pressure and more of his weight to the surface of the island, we are told that, even though he "expected the bubble of illusion to burst at any second," it does not (i.e., as a physical entity, assimilated through Pi's sense of touch, the island proves to be real, for all intents and purposes). Pi nonetheless decides that the survival manual and his sense of touch are not, after all, to be trusted. Disbelieving the tactile, he must now rely on his sense of smell: "Still I did not sink. Still I did not believe. Finally, it was my nose that was the judge of land." The smell of the island's vegetation then "came to [his] olfactory sense, full and fresh, overwhelming." It is only as a result of combining different sensory experiences of the island *together*, the narrator implies, that Pi finally believes that the island is real.

In this multisensory approach, the preference in traditional Western historical and literary cultures for constructing the island as a solely visual image is undermined; the text provides various other modalities by and through which the island is conceived in its plurality of form. Looking back to *Shutter Island*, it is no coincidence that the deceptive conception of the island as a comprehensible and stable totality—something that can be easily understood in a single frame—is aligned with the sense of sight, while the more diffuse initial conception activates several senses. In accordance with the privileging of sight as the sense leading most directly to an ideal truth in Western thinking since Greek philosophy, Western conceptions of islands through "imperial eyes" (Pratt, 2008, pp. 7-12) have often relied on the primacy of the eye to construct islands as images in the service of a strongly ideological perspective, representing islands as supreme images. By paying attention to alternative sensory approaches and multisensory conceptions, our analysis reveals islands that are outside of the paradigms of 'Eye-land' (cf. Weaver-Hightower, 2007, pp. 9-14) and 'I-land'. In the following, we want to move even further away from the possibility of the ocular observation of an inert island waiting to be colonized towards corporeal and social actions that lead to the making of an island. We thus continue our examination of fictional island conceptions by taking a closer look at the construction of islands via spatial practices.

On the spatial practice of island-making

The question we pose is concerned with the sociopolitical and physical practices that lead to the constitution of spaces: what spatial practices allow for the conception of a fictional island? Or, more precisely, what specific actions by what kind of agents are to be discerned in the process of creating an island space? In order to find answers, some theoretical foundations that allow us to discern the power and impact of physical (as well as political) creativity on island spaces are needed. The social constitution of space can be described in detail via the theories of spatial practices that evolved in France in the 1970s.

Henri Lefebvre's foundational study *The Production of Space* thinks 'space' and 'production' from a Marxist tradition, especially the notion of land being altered by human production, conceiving space not only as a part of the means of production and the economic infrastructure, but also as a product of social practice (Lefebvre, 1991). What is crucial for our purposes is the trialectic model of social spatiality where Lefebvre differentiates between the social practice of perception (*perçu*), the representation of space (*conçu*), and the spatiality or mediality of this representation. In line with avant-garde emphasis on the direct interaction between life and art, he calls this third space a lived or experienced space: "espace vécu" (Lefebvre, 1991). As Andrew Thacker (2003, pp. 19-20) explains:

> *Spatial practices* refer to the multiple activities that form spaces in each society, embracing features such as production and reproduction; it also refers to the spatial actions of each individual in a society [...]. Lefebvre refers to these as *experienced spaces*, to indicate how an individual practically relates to the outside world. [R]epresentational spaces embody space as imagined by inhabitants, and [are] often linked to artists and writers, and [...] [refuse] the rational order and cool logic of representations of space; instead representational space 'is alive: it speaks.' (emphasis original)

Michel de Certeau's work from around the same time is based on semiotics and was crucial for preparing the field of cultural studies for the *performative turn*. Central for the theory he proposes in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1998) is an interrogation of the visual control as described in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977), whose analyses of discourses and power structures he challenges. Against Foucault's emphasis on spatial control from above, de Certeau offers a focus on individuals' spatial practices from below, which are primarily based on corporeal movement. In his theory the space of experience and the *parcours* of relational references are differentiated from geometrically determinable places and their 'maps'.

As is so often the case, the translation of cultural theories for literary analysis implies a doubling of the question. On the one hand, we have to examine the specific spatial practices required for the production of island space and ask what embodiments and performances of imagined island practices lead to the emergence of representational spaces and island *parcours*. This means exploring how human and non-human agents establish and perform the island status of a given fictional topography, for instance by mobilizing the interplay of water and land in an embodied way. Beyond the spatial practices of diegetic agents, however, narration, poetics, film editing, etc., themselves participate in or interfere with the constitution of islands. Our examination of the spatial practices that lead to a specific island space therefore focuses both on agents within the fictional world *and* on narrative and poetic devices. Thus swimming, circumnavigating, and landing can be seen as central spatial practices for the emergence of a specifically insular contact zone between land and an all-surrounding sea, but we should also explore how these are framed by the specific poetics of a given text, and what further practices emerge from this framing; with Lefebvre we can therefore ask how spatial practices convert the representations of spaces into representational island spaces. These questions allow us to examine

how specific island conceptions emerge through spatial practice, and how islands are reconceived in the course of the action.

Rehearsing island space: Walcott's *Pantomime*

In Derek Walcott's *Pantomime* (1978), hotel owner Harry Trewe and his employee Jackson Philip rehearse a play on an island about an island to be staged for the amusement of their future guests. The theatrical island is first constructed semantically and mentally through a mixture of song and dance, thus enacting the conception of an island through spatial practice. The beginning of the first act includes a multimedial but also clearly metafictional act of creation. Although the dance and the song are being rehearsed, the melody was recorded beforehand and can be stopped, rewound, and started again at will. Thus, when the viewer of this rehearsal—and the implicit or actual audience—is asked to 'just picture an island', this happens within a complex frame of metafictional reference. A rhetorical gesture recalling a magic spell allows for the crossing over from one island to another, from the level of the initially staged theatrical world in its contemporary and realist mode to the level of an imagined and subsequently performed fictional desert island: "Just picture a lonely island [/] and a beach with its golden sand. [/] There walks a single man [/] in the beautiful West Indies!" (Walcott, 1978, p. 93).

From this moment onward, the corporeal movements of Trewe and Jackson are also those of different versions of Robinson and Friday on their respective islands. They invent, rehearse, debate, and reject islands and their island life with their bodies on the stage and with the help of stage props. Indeed, the title of the play does not refer to the dance steps the owner rehearses for future performances in front of his guests, but to the act his aide Jackson proposes when seizing the director's powers during the rehearsal. In line with the aesthetics of contemporary 'director's theatre', Jackson proposes turning himself into a black Crusoe. By rowing in his table-boat, crawling ashore on the verandah, and dwelling under his table-hut, he is the one performing *Pantomime* and creating a contested island space out of thin air. Corporeal spatial practice, song, explanation, and imagination convene in this decolonizing reconstitution of the desert island. But in Jackson's version of the stage-island, the imperial master narrative of the owner and the guest is at risk of ridicule through *mimicry* (cf. Bhabha, 2004, pp. 121-131). The blackening of the colonial master and the whitening of the native result in an inversion of stereotypes and hierarchies as the deviant exotic and the norm switch referents. This implies a serious change to the position and value of the tropical desert island topos within global relations. As home of the white Friday, the exotic place turns into a white place: and, indeed, Harry Trewe himself sarcastically proposes white sand as one of his (rejected) secondary metamorphoses. This countercolonizing revolution of hierarchies makes a clash between boss and employee inevitable.

Similarly, the clash of different meanings and values created via different spatial practices seems unavoidable and open to a direct accusation. While the possible theatrical gesture of the actor/character spans further than the (physical) stage and could indeed include the "whole fucking island" (p. 157) in all its postcolonial pride, the question about the relations and hierarchies among ideas, property rights, spatial practices, and material components, as well as the island's transformations (via fiction, rehearsal, and play), remains open. *Pantomime* shows in various theatrical forms and from different viewpoints that fictional islands can be established via spatial practice in combination with an explanation or a diegetic verbalization, and that the value and power of such island enactments can lead to island reconceptions and counterpoetics that can shake so-called reality. By imaginatively constructing a sea, a shoreline, and a beach via different spatial practices that involve swimming, getting up from the shallows, jumping up and down, walking, and collapsing, Jackson is creating an imaginative geography of the desert island's shoreline. The pantomimic representation allows for the nonhuman surroundings to become momentarily established. The corporeal actions of a human body allude to specific spatial practices and make them readable as reactions to specific physical forces and conditions. It is by way of

these reactions that the zone between land and sea is constituted as a part of the island. Within the hijacked rehearsal the waiter, actor, and director Jackson ends his proposal for the landing scene by kissing the stage floor in front of his fellow actor, dethroned director, quizzical spectator, and furious boss. The rehearsals of spatial practices of border crossings thus have multiple values and suggest multiple readings and implications on different levels of fictionality. Their unstable status, malleability, contested value, and performativity simultaneously comment on the practice and effort of a (re)conception of the island.

(Is)land art and the transformation of space: 'Æpyornis Island'

While *Pantomime* stages the conception of a second island through gestures and words, H.G. Wells' short story 'Æpyornis Island' (1911), which describes the four-year captivity of a fossil collector on a desert island near Madagascar, dramatizes the transformation of an island through the physical interactions with its topography. The fossil collector arrives at the island accompanied by the egg of an 'æpyornis', a huge, aggressive bird thought to be extinct. The story is framed by a first-person narrator to whom the collector (a secondary first-person narrator) tells his tale. The narration is complicated by a footnote by 'H.G.W.' specifying that the Æpyornis really existed. The first travelling view of the eponymous island portrays the atoll as an active and powerful element in a movement of *rapprochement*. The island is unstable both in its sudden emergence and in its double denomination (island/atoll):

> Then came the atoll. Came out of the sunrise, as it were, suddenly, close up to me. I drifted straight towards it until I was about half a mile from shore, not more, and then the current took a turn, and I had to paddle as hard as I could with my hands and bits of the Æpyornis shell to make the place. However, I got there. It was just a common atoll about four miles round, with a few trees growing and a spring in one place, and the lagoon full of parrot-fish. (Wells, 1911, p. 79)

The proximity of the atoll rapidly transforms the current, which brings about a reversal of agency and activates the autodiegetic narrator-protagonist, whose hard work successfully counters the change of course. While the narration changes from an initial reaction of surprise to a complaint of ordinariness ("It's rum how dull an atoll is"; Wells, 1911, p. 79), the landing scene is stereotypical and intertextual. The narrator describes his spatial practice as spending time in idleness, moving around lazily and thereby exploring the area thoroughly. This lazy exploration enacted by a soon-to-be-bored protagonist becomes a vehicle through which the atoll constitutes itself. This spatial practice thus leads to a frustration of the canonical expectations of island excitement.

Yet it is the avian hunter's hatching from an egg—thought to be a collectible and shown to be consumable—which constitutes the wonder and novelty that leads to the telling of the story in the first place. While a nightly thunderstorm threatens to drown the atoll, the elemental forces pressure the narrator to reconceive the island space. The establishment of a *bricolage* shelter from the remains of the boat is matched with the birthing of a seemingly extinct animal from ancient times—an impossible Other: "I rigged up a kind of storm-shelter with these vestiges. And that day the egg hatched" (Wells, 1911, p. 80). The change of spatial practices that evolve with the hatching and growing of the bird reconstitute the "common" and "dull" atoll as well as the attitude of the protagonist. The protagonist turns into a land artist and denominates, inscribes, and decorates the shores of the island with various spatial representations that resemble official signs and maps from the protagonist's cultural background:

> I amused myself, too, by decorating the island with designs worked in sea-urchins and fancy shells of various kinds. I put ÆPYORNIS ISLAND all around the place very nearly, in big letters [...]. And I used to lie watching the blessed bird stalking

round and growing, growing […]. In the rainy season we lay snug under the shelter [...]. It was a kind of idyll, you might say. (Wells, 1911, pp. 81-82)

A further reconception of the island occurs when food becomes scarce and man and bird are suddenly competing for survival. The inferior *homo sapiens* needs to keep a safe distance and uses the lagoon and the few palm trees for that purpose:

> He [the bird] started strutting up and down the beach. I'll admit I felt small to see this blessed fossil lording it there. [...] I decided to swim across the lagoon and leave him alone for a bit, until the affair blew over. I shinned up the tallest palm-tree, and sat there thinking of it all. (Wells, 1911, p. 83)

The specific locality of the tropical lagoon thus becomes essential for survival and is turned into different spaces through spatial practices that include a demonstration of power and territory (via walking, swimming, and climbing). Yet, at the end, the initial solitude and monotony of the protagonist's time on the island is restored when the raptor is killed by the collector in self-defense. With a simple and imprecise "Then one day" (Wells, 1911, p. 85), the arrival of a yacht reconnects the island with a larger "sea of islands" (Hauʻofa, 1993).

If one compares this tale of shipwreck on a desert island with the movie *Cast Away* (Boyd & Zemeckis, 2000), one can find a number of similarities in spatial practices concerning island inscription and island exploration. Read alongside *Cast Away*—which sees its protagonist write 'HELP' with logs in the sand, dig a grave for the deceased air-pilot of the plane on which he was travelling, and survive on the island—the anti-Robinsonian tone of Wells' story becomes even clearer. Finally, postcolonial Robinsonades like Tournier's *Vendredi* (1979) and Chamoiseau's *L'empreinte à Crusoé* (2012) similarly rely heavily on the change of the master-slave dynamics (a parallel, also, with Walcott's *Pantomime*), physical moments of change, and the creative spatial practice of land art in order to reconceive the desert island and the experience of being shipwrecked.

Virtual island spaces: *Jurassic Park* and *Dear Esther*

The interstices between and among corporeal, mental, and virtual island conception are enhanced whenever digital technology is incorporated within the spatial practices of an island text. In Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (Kennedy & Spielberg, 1993), large dinosaurs thought to be extinct are shown to be living in the gigantic enclosures of a theme park through which visitors can ride on a mechanized rail system. The rail system is very much a mediated form of spatial practice that gives the characters, and, indeed, the film's audience, a map and a prescribed itinerary to follow. About forty minutes into the film, the visitors and the spectators are confronted with an animation and then with many screens on which the island is simulated in order to have complete surveillance of the zoological island prison. This representation falls apart when the screens go blank, the digitally enhanced 'monarch-of-all-I-survey' position (cf. Pratt, 2008, pp. 197–223; Weaver-Hightower, 2007, pp. 1–42) collapses, security protocols fail, and the protagonists are left to cross the island in one of the oldest forms of spatial practice: walking on foot.

Our final example of spatial practice is also virtual but offers a direct interaction with virtual space: *Dear Esther* (Pinchbeck, 2012) is a computer game, and "as controller of the action we occupy the dual identity of player-character" (Spittle, 2011, p. 316). Despite the consumer of the text being an armchair traveller and simply moving a few fingers, without performing pantomime, walking, swimming, climbing, or writing on an island, "space is actively created when a gamer becomes entangled with the game world and the possibilities of a game's code" (Wood, 2012, p. 88). *Dear Esther* heightens the representation of the tactile by mimicking corporeal experiences of spatial practice. When the player's digital avatar walks on the beach, it moves much more slowly than when on a path. This is an engagement with a 'realistic'

representation of spatial practice, which also has the effect of constructing the outer edge of the island as experientially different from the interior. That movement is collapsed at the end of the game, when the avatar reaches the beacon, the highest point and landmark on the island. Normative gameplay ends and a *cinematic* (i.e., a non-playable video sequence) begins in which the avatar is shown to climb the beacon. When we reach the top, the avatar stops climbing and flies over the island, with a shadow suggesting that it is now a bird. The experience changes from a partial vision from the ground to the first aerial view of the island. In this final cinematic, the perception of a small peninsula with adjacent cliffs changes the mode of island creation. The experience of space is removed from tactility and the engagement with surfaces; instead, the ending prioritizes visual perception from a vantage point that is closely linked to a hierarchic representation from above; the *parcours* finally gives in to the mode of the map, but ironically the movement of the bird is outside the player's power and control.

Conclusion

As this paper has shown, close attention to the role of sensory perceptions and spatial practices in the constitution of fictional islands can lead to a more nuanced and pluralistic understanding of their narrative and poetic functions. We started by discussing how island narratives activate and draw attention to different senses; while Western island fictions and the scholarly discussions they have provoked frequently (over)emphasize the role of controlled vision in the construction of island experiences, our discussion of the possibilities of hearing, smelling, and tasting islands suggested by novels and films like *King Kong*, *The Blue Lagoon*, *Life of Pi*, and *Shutter Island*, as well as by the Bounty adverts, has aimed to broaden the range of how islands can be experienced poetically. Our discussion of the spatial practices of island-making has complemented the initial emphasis on perception by showing that fictional islands are conceived not only through sensory experience, but also through active movements (the pantomime in Walcott's play of that name, exploration in 'Æpyornis Island', traversing the island on foot in *Jurassic Park*) and interventions in island space (land art in 'Æpyornis Island', digital control in *Jurassic Park*) on the part of both fictional agents and audiences (the player's own simulacrum of spatial practice in *Dear Esther*). However, as our examples have also made clear, the sensory perceptions and spatial practices that lead to the (re)conception of islands in fiction are mediated by the specific languages of literature, film, and computer games. In the second part of this double paper, we will therefore turn our attention to a set of narratives that explicitly draw attention to the mediality and multilayered complexity of fictional islands. These narratives, too, play an important role in destabilizing cultural certainties of what an island is—to the point of dissolving them altogether.

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