

CHAPTER 3

Patchworks: The Ontology of the World

Introduction

In ontologies of Resilience, relational interaction is seen to be underlying or immanent to the constitution of 'life' itself; something which is revealed particularly well through the experience of bounded island modes of interaction and adaptation. Here, (island) life is articulated as a complex problem-solver, a little like the market in neoliberal discourses; held to possess immanent organisational powers of bringing order out of chaos. For discourses of Resilience, a key trope is that this power is always self-organising, rather than being controlled or guided by some external or transcendental agency. Complex life is understood as becoming more efficient and adaptive rather than increasingly disordered and entropic. Focusing upon the whole island ecosystem as a bounded laboratory for revealing potentialities of interactive life, islands have become key symbols of 'hope' for many commentators in debates about the Anthropocene (Mission Blue, 2019). The widespread argument, particularly in more managerial-oriented debates, is that the rest of the world can and should learn from the 'indelible resilience' (Nicks, 2017) of islanders.

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However, as we explored in the previous chapter, a growing number of commentators seek to extend and problematise this relational ontology. For contemporary approaches, such as those of Laura Watts (2018), there is something a little too homogenising about a Resilience ontology of relational interactive life; with its mutual and ongoing adaptations and its ‘happy endings’ of ever newer and more efficient emergent orders. One way of grasping this is to see Resilience as only a limited break from a modernist causal ontology, where even though interdependency and interaction are stressed it appears that there is a ‘hidden hand’ guiding the direction of a new telos. Often this alternative telos of ‘progress’ and ‘development’ is read to start with the explosion of life from the Big Bang (Kurki, 2020) right up to our complex and differentiated present. However, this perhaps too easily assumes that we are all in the same boat, guided and shaped by the same underlying forces and sharing the same ecosystem and the same planet. Many advocates of Resilience ontologies engage islands by drawing out similar tropes of relational harmony and self-organisation, from which, it is widely claimed, the rest of the world can derive important insights. This holistic and beneficent framing often aligns Resilience ontologies with romanticised notions such as those of Gaia (Lovelock, 2007) or ‘Earth island’ (Earth Island, 2019).

The Patchwork ontologies examined in this chapter draw upon and develop island thinking as relational ontology beyond the perceived limits of the holistic and interactive systems approach of Resilience. In Patchworks, the modernist imaginary of islands existing in a flat, two-dimensional space, side-by-side, tracing continuities in relation across linear time into the ever more efficient self-regulation of Resilience, is replaced with a more open and disruptive island ontology of spatial and temporal becoming; destabilising the ‘solutionist’ or instrumentalising aspects of Resilience, making Patchwork approaches less governmentalising and human-centred. Patchwork ontologies focus less on adapting to pre-existing processes or powers, than on practices of bringing into being, of engendering or inculcating relational ways of becoming in the world. By drawing upon islands in this way,

Anthropocene thinking becomes a more open, less controlling, process of pragmatically ‘giving-on-and-with’ (Glissant, 1997: 142) the unpredictability of emergent disturbances and effects. Patchwork ontologies spatially and temporally open out an island ontology, understanding life in terms of *patchwork islands* of relational assemblages, knots and nodes of disturbances and effects. Thus, by drawing upon and working with islands, Patchworks becomes a new relational ontology of ‘world-making’, moving beyond the human/nature divide.

The chapter is organised into four sections which elaborate the analytics of Patchwork ontologies and how they draw upon islands and island cultures. In the first section, we examine how anthropologists have long had an interest in how island cultures from around the world relate to their environment in different ways from Moderns (Mead, 1957, 2001; Strathern, 2004, 2020). It is the focus upon the contingent and unpredictable powers of relational disturbances and effects associated with island life which marks Patchwork ontologies and, as noted, this means that Patchwork approaches cannot be easily exported as a set of instrumentalising techniques or practices, as in the managerial ontological imaginary of Resilience. For example, in the Patchwork ontology of Anna Tsing (2015), developed by thinking with Japanese islander practices of *satoyama*, there is less of a focus upon predictability and intentionality, and more on how relational entanglements and feedback effects can be surprising and unintentional, and therefore creative and productive. Thus, as the second section elaborates, the world is seen as lively and full of unexpected possibilities. From thinking with islands in contemporary design practices (Daou and Pérez-Ramos, 2016), to Phil Hayward’s (2012a, 2012b) conceptualisation of the ‘aquapelago’, developed by work on Haida Gwaii (off the northern Pacific coast of Canada), we examine how Patchwork ontologies characterise a broad range of burgeoning experimental contemporary approaches to anthropology, ethnography, the arts and design, all of which draw heavily upon islands as a key resource for contemporary Anthropocene thinking.

In the third section we explore how Patchwork ontologies *expand* thinking with islands in the Anthropocene so that island ontology is increasingly imported into an understanding of the quotidian and everyday. Employing the works of Glissant (1997), Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Stephens (2017), Mimi Sheller (2020), Godfrey Baldacchino and Eric Clark (2010), Teresia Teaiwa (2007) and Deborah Bird Rose (2017a, 2017b) as examples, we discuss how islands are configured not as worlds that we are merely in or on, there to be managed and adapted to; they are also ways of expressing and understanding our own processes of world-making. In this framing, islands are not so much the outcome of a process or relational ontology, as the process of becoming or of movement itself (Glissant, 1997). We examine how, in Patchwork ontologies, working with islands becomes a practice of opening ourselves to the world. This experimental set of infinite openings contrasts with the use of relational ontology at the other end of the ontological continuum, of Resilience, which tends to reify the world and suborn us to it within bounded self-regulating systems. The final section of the chapter turns to how, for many contemporary Anthropocene thinkers, this process of world-making, frequently emerging from engaging and working with islands, is generative for an ethos or duty of care (Spahr, 2005; Bird Rose, 2017a; Wetlands Wanderers, 2018).

A Patchwork World of Islands: Disturbances, Emergences and Relational Affects

Before turning to what we mean by Patchwork ontologies explicitly, it is useful to examine why islands and island cultures are such an important resource and reserve for non-modern thinking more generally today. At least since Margaret Mead (1957, 2001) played her pivotal role in shaping the discipline, in the 1950s, anthropologists have been fascinated by how islanders understand their relationship to the world differently from modernist or ‘mainland’ thinking. Here, for Marilyn Strathern (2004), we do not need Donna Haraway’s relatively recent addition

of the ‘cyborg’ into Western critical theory to help us realise that many people across the world, exemplified by the Melanesian islanders, the interlocutors for Strathern, do not construct their existence in terms of modernity’s human/nature divide. What Strathern (2004: 118) calls these ‘Melanesian cyborgs’ see themselves as inextricably part of relations, where ‘[o]ne person or relationship exists cut out of or as an extension of another. Conversely, these extensions – relationships and connections – are integrally part of the person. They are the person’s circuit.’ This is widely reflected in Melanesian island culture so that:

There is no difference between shell strands and a matrilineage, between a man and a bamboo pole, between a yam and spirit. The one ‘is’ the other, insofar as they equally evoke the perception of relations. The different components or figures are thus all parts of persons or relationships fixed on to one another ... [For example] the flutes that both are children and produce children, or spirits that are both within and beyond the body-form of persons. Melanesians have a cultural facility for presenting their extensions of themselves to themselves, a facility for, we could put it, moving without travelling (Strathern, 2004: 118).

For Strathern (2004: 118), these islanders are therefore non-modern through and through – ‘[t]he distinction between the Melanesian cyborg and Haraway’s half human, half mechanical contraption is that the components of the Melanesian cyborg are conceptually “cut” from the same material’. What is key then about Melanesian island cultures (and, as we will shortly see, for the development of more recent Patchwork ontologies in Anthropocene thinking) is ‘the creative act of severance, the burst of information that makes one person visible as an extended part of another’ (Strathern, 2004: 118). Thus, for Strathern (2004: 118), it is not merely that people and things are cobbled together as hybrids or cyborgs of human–non–human relations; rather, what exists on the island *already* emerges from the ‘perception of the common background to all movement and activity’.

Similarly, for Deborah Bird Rose (2017a), there is a shared prefiguring relationship in the island cultures of Australia which she studied. Bird Rose (2017a: G52) draws out how the more-than-human is the *starting point* for these cultures, the beginning for understanding (island) life, and not something which is to be only factored in after some critical reflection:

Of the many stories one might tell about multispecies connectivities, the starting point for me is in Aboriginal Australia, where I have been learning about multispecies kinship and connectivity for many years. The stories might be said to begin ‘in the beginning’ with the Dreamings, also known as the creation ancestors. The Dreamings are the creators of much of the biotic life of earth. They are the shape-shifters and are the founders of kin groups. Those kin groups include the human and the nonhuman descendants of the ancestors.

For Jun’ichiro Suwa (2007: 6), commentating upon island cultures from Japan, there is also already a prefigured more-than-human world from which entities and peoples derive their connections to each other:

The Amami Islands of southwestern Japan are marked by their population’s deep attachment to their own *shima*, as enacted through various practices and performances of demarcation. Each *shima* is a work of territorial imagination, an extension of personhood and a ‘cultural landscape’. In this sense, a *shima* is a sanctuary, in that the natural environment and social space are articulated by the performative in such a way that one imagines them as a totality. Islands are both the ground and product of cultural practices and threats to their viability can thereby be construed as threats to human security more generally.

In these anthropological studies, island cultures offer us insights into worlds which cannot be reduced to the binaries that sustained the modernist imaginary (subject/object, mind/body, human/nature divides).¹ Importantly, their starting point is the flux of relational interaction, in which fixed entities are much less

distinct and stable; inspiring understandings of the everyday and the ordinary as intricately co-related. Thus, for many contemporary commentators, they help us face the Anthropocene as the ‘Age of Entanglement’ (Daou and Pérez-Ramos, 2016: 9).

Bruno Latour (2017) captures the stakes of this shift well in his particular reading of Gaia. As Latour (2017: 81) says, many people are not aware that the theory of Gaia, in both Hesiod and James Lovelock, was developed by thinking with islands:

We have all read *Lord of the Flies*, the story of some young British schoolboys marooned on a desert island from which they can no more escape than we can from our blue planet, and on which they slide little by little down the slippery slope that leads to barbarity. It so happens that its author, William Golding, was Lovelock’s neighbour in a little Wiltshire village with the delightful name Bowerchalke, and it is to Golding that Lovelock owes his theory.²

This matters a great deal. Against readings of islands as bounded spaces of self-regulating harmony, for Latour, Gaia is a more troubling figure, leaving us with a very different moral lesson for the Anthropocene, particularly when we go back to the Greeks and Hesiod: ‘[w]hat is certain is that she is not a figure of harmony’ (Latour, 2017: 82). Here, working with islands, with Gaia, invokes a different imaginary for Latour, concerned with how the planet is not there ‘for us’, to enable human flourishing as a goal; instead the ‘intervention of Gaia’ is associated with humbling and increasingly unpredictable forces (see also Stengers, 2015). This approach not only foregrounds multispecies connectivities but also the disturbances and emergent effects of human–nonhuman relations which can no longer be understood, managed and directed in the governmental understandings of Resilience (Latour, 2017).

For many such Anthropocene thinkers today, working with islands in this less controllable and predictable way – but, importantly therefore, more creatively and experimentally – shines a powerful light upon the hubris of modern ways of thinking (Tsing, 2015; Watts, 2018). It offers us alternative, more generative, ways of thinking through the central problematic of relational

entanglements, and for engaging the Anthropocene as a condition which we are all already in. As Tsing (2015) makes clear in her highly influential *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, working with islands and islanders brings to the fore the localised figurations and co-shaping of relations which cannot be grasped by formalised and abstract modern reasoning and interventions. Tsing's (2015) study of Japanese islanders cultivating the matsutake mushroom is a contemporary example of Patchwork ontologies coming to the forefront of contemporary thought.

Exploring the relationship between people, landscapes and mushrooms, Tsing follows the commodity chain of the matsutake mushroom from North America and China to the islands of Japan. In contrast to what is seen as the modern hubris of North American and Chinese practices which separate humans from nature, for Tsing (2015: 151–152), it is above all the Japanese concept of *satoyama* woodlands which offers us the most hope in the Anthropocene:

Satoyama are traditional peasant landscapes, combining rice agriculture and water management with woodlands. The woodlands – the heart of the satoyama concept – were once disturbed, and thus maintained, through their use for firewood and charcoal-making as well as nontimber forest products. Today, the most valuable product of satoyama woodland is matsutake. To restore woodlands for matsutake encourages a suite of other living things: pines and oaks, understory herbs, insects, birds. Restoration requires disturbance – but disturbance to enhance diversity and the healthy functioning of ecosystems. Some kinds of ecosystems, advocates argue, flourish with human activities.

For Tsing, humans and other forms of life are intricately entangled through such islands of interconnection, which are brought to the surface via momentary or contingent disturbances and effects, and each island requires the care of constant and delicate reconfiguration to engender these creative processes. Work within island Patchwork ontologies shifts the focus to concrete interactions in specific moments, often via rich ethnographic research,

that enable us to see the creativity in the everyday (see also the discussion of Watts 2018 in the previous chapter). Thus, an islander approach, for a Patchwork ontology, is understanding oneself to be part of, but not directing of, processes of creative emergence at local and micro levels. As Tsing (2015: 152, emphasis in original) continues:

Ecological restoration programs around the world use human action to rearrange natural landscapes. What distinguishes satoyama revitalisation, for me, is the idea that human activities should be part of the forest in the same way as nonhuman activities. Humans, pines, matsutake, and other species should all make the landscape together, in this project. One Japanese scientist explained matsutake as the result of ‘unintentional cultivation,’ because human disturbance makes the presence of matsutake more likely – despite the fact that humans are entirely incapable of cultivating the mushroom. Indeed, one could say that pines, matsutake, and humans all cultivate each other unintentionally. They make each other’s world-making projects possible. This idiom has allowed me to consider how landscapes more generally are products of *unintentional design*, that is, the overlapping world-making activities of many agents, human and not human. The design is clear in the landscape’s ecosystem. But none of the agents have planned this effect. Humans join others in making landscapes of unintentional design.

This focus upon ‘unintentionality,’ ‘effects’ and ‘disturbances,’ rather than instrumentality, is clearly different from the ‘solutions-thinking’ of those who seek to draw upon and develop ‘island powers’ of Resilience. Indeed, for such Patchwork island approaches as Tsing’s, solutions-thinking would be a barrier to the need to be constantly attuned, alert and responsive to emergent effects. Neither is the power of interactive island life understood in terms of self-regulating, harmonious systems which tend towards order. The promise of ‘order’ or ‘solutions’ would be too modernist, denying our entangled responsibilities and commitments, while greater sensitivity to effects and disturbances enables us to become increasingly aware of them.

The key word for Tsing (2015: 160) is ‘disturbance’ of human and non-human relational entanglements, which is not understood as negative but rather positively framed as opening up the possibilities for new co-relations to emerge. Bearing close relation to Strathern’s (2004) research on islands and island cultures noted above, disturbance of relations is ‘a beginning, that is, the opening for action. Disturbance realigns possibilities for transformative encounter. Landscape patches emerge from disturbance’ (Tsing, 2015: 152). Responsivity to disturbances and the emergence of landscape patches are positively contrasted with modern processes of command and control, where:

... humans were *not* part of forest assemblages in matsutake management in the United States and China; managers there leaped to anxieties about too much human disturbance, not too little. In contrast, too, to satoyama work, forestry elsewhere was measured on a yardstick of rational advancement: could the forest make futures of scientific and industrial productivity? In distinction, a Japanese satoyama aims for a liveable here and now. (Tsing, 2015: 162–163, emphasis in original)

Such approaches are heuristically or analytically similar to the traditional Japanese gardens which first appeared on the island of Honshu around 600 AD, where Buddhists developed a new style of gardening by working with care, and ‘intensively’, to attune to disturbances and emergent relations on the island, rather than working to a preset plan. Patchwork ontologies focus upon patches or islands of creativity and refiguration forming in nodes or knots of assemblages across time and space. The ontological assumption that all forms of being emerge through webs or networks of co-relation puts the emphasis on creative crossings and interconnections, meaning that new opportunities arise to see with and through these relations and co-dependencies. These are relations of ‘affordance’ and ‘affect’; when some entities or processes are affected by others, they can be seen as ‘networked’ or ‘assembled’, but they have no relation of immanent or linear causation which can be mapped, reproduced or intervened in, as in

Resilience (see Latour, 2004). Tsing's is an example of a Patchwork approach which draws upon and works with islands after the end of the world (as a coherent object which could be managed or controlled by way of the nature/culture schema).

A Lively World of Islands

At this point it is perhaps worth briefly restating that our argument is not that Patchwork ontologies, or Resilience ontologies, should be reduced to 'island thinking'. There is no such thing as 'island thinking', only variations of ways of drawing upon and working with islands in different places and at different times in history. As we noted in the introductory chapter, in European and modern thought, the island was more often understood very differently; as insular, isolated, and backward when compared to continental, mainland reasoning (Gillis, 2004). What we are highlighting in this book is that islands are important sites for Anthropocene thinking,³ partly because of their marginalised or liminal position within modernity and the fact that non-modern attributes were often projected upon them. After the supposed closure of the modernist imaginary of progress, these attributes have come to the forefront in the search for alternative forms of thought and practice in the Anthropocene. This shift has enabled island associations with Patchwork ontologies to be a major influence on many contemporary design processes associated with the Anthropocene. Daou and Pérez-Ramos (2016: 8) describe how 'the island [has become] a design tool, in scales ranging from gardens to cities to regions'. This is because, for these authors, more than any other geographical form, working with islands:

allows us to better understand the interactions between things and the world and also to construct new forms of thought that help reveal the world and render it legible. Precisely by transcending the dichotomy between interior and exterior the island avoids slipping into particularism, and becomes instead the figure through which a new form of universalism can be conceived.

In this way, the island bolsters the ecological imaginary, helping design face an entangled world. (Daou and Pérez-Ramos, 2016: 9)

For the Patchwork approaches of world-renowned garden designers, like Gilles Clément, ‘the island as both a physical manifestation and symbolic representation has significantly influenced’ their work (Herrington and Lokman, 2016: 144). Examples of this include Clément’s design of *Parc Henri Matisse* in Lille, and the concept of ‘Garden in Motion’, which forces ‘designers to break down long-standing conceptions of gardens and landscapes as simply governed by human processes and needs’ (Herrington and Lokman, 2016: 145). Such approaches conceptually and practically work with the relational entanglements and feedback effects of islands to design gardens as ‘open-ended processes’, reconfigured, for example, ‘as a seed bank for the surrounding area’ (Herrington and Lokman, 2016: 144). Thus, gardens become spaces of species becoming and movements. For Herrington and Lokman (2016: 143), what they call the growth of these ‘[m]igratory gardens’, reflected in the designs of Clément, and the Dutch artist Herman de Vries, is the best strategy to engage ‘the Anthropocene – an era that demands a rethinking of gardens as part of atmospheric, geologic, hydrologic, and biospheric changes ...’.

In the Age of Enlightenment, the dominant tropes were those of power and command, embodied in the design of famous gardens such as those of Versailles. But in today’s ‘Age of Entanglement’ (Daou and Pérez-Ramos, 2016: 9), leading designers like Clément and de Vries are thinking with islands in order to reconceptualise design processes to better reflect the Anthropocene as a condition that we are all already in. As in the work of Tsing noted above, for Clément, gardens are patchwork islands of creativity, experimentation, and refiguration.⁴ Working *with* the disturbances and emergences of relational effects, illustrated by Patchwork thinking with islands, rather than in terms of bounded spaces of human control or the self-regulating harmony of Resilience, is seen as central for attuning designers to the conditions of the Anthropocene.

Key here is the idea that '[f]ar from suggesting a more hands-off design attitude, this actually requires a more intimate relationship between the designer and the designed' (Herrington and Lokman, 2016: 145). As in Tsing's analysis of satoyama practices, or Watts' (2018) work on Orkney, Patchwork approaches are far from *laissez faire*; on the contrary, they are deeply immersive, worlding practices. Again, it is work with islands which has played a notable role in bringing these concerns and the development of these approaches to the fore. For Libby Robin (2014), '[i]slands are a natural laboratory for science, they gave us evolution.' But, as she says, thinking with islands as important sites of ecological degradation in the Anthropocene in the ways of older, modern frameworks of separation and control, is not a model many contemporary conservationists embrace. Today, the space around island national parks is less likely to be understood as 'a biological desert' than a 'key to the success of the reserve. Animals use both surrounding landscapes and reserves in unexpected ways, and make ecological management more about watching and creating flexible responses to their needs, rather than demanding they follow human assumptions and building these into legislation' (Robin, 2014). A good illustration of this can be found in *The Island with a Key to Our Future*, where Selkirk (2020) examines the intensive Patchwork approaches being developed on Ascension Island; an exemplar of a 'novel ecosystem' approach where humans have purposely introduced and intensively managed non-native species on islands in order to increase biodiversification, with the result that the 'island's other native plants actually grew better because of the introduced species.'⁵

The focus upon the relational entanglements and feedback effects of *islands* in Patchwork approaches brings out to great effect how the co-shaping of species or sympoiesis are understood as key characteristics of island life – something which aligns closely with Donna Haraway's (2008: 4) concept of 'figuration' which entered the analysis in the previous chapter, when referring to Laura Watts' (2018) work on the Orkney islands.⁶ Here, figures illustrate 'material-semiotic nodes or knots in which diverse bodies and

meanings coshape one another' (Haraway, 2008: 4). As Haraway (2016: 56) says, it was the corals around islands which 'helped bring the Earthbound into consciousness of the Anthropocene in the first place.' It is the sympoietic feedback effects, capacities and affordances of island life which signify and draw out these new capacities from entities rather than an autopoietic process of self-development. Once it is clear that it is specific relational inter-connection that enables creative becomings, every relational nexus becomes a Patchwork island of potentiality, regardless of scale or fixed separations of time and space. Haraway powerfully reinforces the importance of this approach, arguing that ongoing processes cannot be grasped through homeostatic or autopoietic frameworks, which assume too many separations between entities, i.e. that relations are structured and limited. As she states:

The earth... is sympoietic, not autopoietic. Mortal worlds ... do not make themselves, no matter how complex and multileveled the systems ... Autopoietic systems are hugely interesting – witness the history of cybernetics and information sciences; but they are not good models for living and dying worlds ... Poesis is symchthonic, sympoietic, always partnered all the way down, with no starting and subsequently interacting 'units'. (Haraway, 2016: 33)

For Patchwork ontologies, which work in a different way from the self-regulating approaches of Resilience, working with islands in the Anthropocene thus foregrounds a lively and unpredictable world of more-than-human relations. Phil Hayward's (2012a, 2012b, 2018) work on the 'aquapelago' is another example of this. Hayward has drawn upon Suwa's above noted research into Japanese island cultures and *shima*, reading this alongside Jane Bennett's (2010) *Vibrant Matter* and his own research into Haida Gwaii (off the northern Pacific coast of Canada), to develop the aquapelago Patchwork ontology. Made up of islands, oceans, rivers and interweaving liquid relationalities in flux, for Hayward (2012b), the aquapelagos of Haida Gwaii draw our attention to a vibrant world that cannot be grasped by way of modern frameworks of reasoning (mind/body, subject/object and human/nature

divides) or by Resilience analytics. For Hayward (2012b: 3), ‘the humans who constitute aquapelagos through their engagements with terrestrial and aquatic spaces are (necessarily) ... characterised by the “vitality” of various non-human things.’ They provide us with a rich relational ontology in which all entities, by existing or ‘enduring’, demonstrate an active persistence, a liveliness of ‘*conatus*’, having their own interests and effects.⁷ The aquapelago is a Patchwork ontology where relationality is revealed to be too rich and too complex to be reduced to a human/nature divide, or to be grasped or controlled by way of Resilience analytics.

As an island-oriented Patchwork relational ontology, Hayward’s conceptualisation of the aquapelago has rapidly gained influence and informs a wide range of contemporary Anthropocene thinking – from research into monsoons in India (Bremner, 2016) to the geopolitical aesthetics of the subterranean processes of the emergence and disappearance of islands (Hawkins, 2018).⁸ Insightfully, Hayward links island studies scholarship itself to Anthropocene thinking more generally when explaining the development of his concept:

Aquapelagic relations are shifting and reconfiguring at rapid rates. The land areas, elevations and general viability of islands to support particular populations and their relationship to mobile expanses of waters and the nature of subsurface biomasses are in flux and require constant attention. To be an islander is, increasingly, to live in flux. To be an Island Studies scholar is, increasingly, to be scholar of flux. (Hayward, 2018)

To put this a different way, it is precisely because islands have long been understood as such key sites of relational entanglements and affordances in the wider sciences, social sciences, and in disciplines such as anthropology, that they are so useful for wider Anthropocene thinking today. It is the island as an important site of expansive relationality – and for the development of relational ontologies – which comes to the fore, and it is today heavily drawn upon for the development of Anthropocene thinking. As Haraway (2016: 57) astutely observes, ‘[w]hy is it that the

epochal name of the Anthropos imposed itself at just the time when understandings and knowledge practices about and within symbiogenesis and sympoietics are wildly and wonderfully available and generative in all the humusities, including noncolonizing arts, sciences, and politics?’ Her point, ‘it matters which thoughts think thoughts’ (Haraway, 2016: 57). It makes no sense to separate out social thought from the material world. We cannot separate out island imaginaries and contemporary broader trends in social and political thought from the material characteristics of islands as geographical forms which are doing important ‘work’ in such debates. Neither the Anthropocene nor islands exist purely ‘out there’ or purely ‘in our heads’; rather, ontological statements made from working them – such as the relational ontologies or onto-epistemologies examined in this book – should be understood as objective facets of the given world itself (existing simultaneously in materiality and in thought) (Whitehead, 1967, 1968, 1985).

Thinking with islands for the development of what we are calling Patchwork ontologies and approaches – in this case with the aquapelago – recasts the world as rich and full of creative possibilities. Our appreciation of the liveliness of the world enables us to think more humbly about ourselves and our relation to the environment. Relations become less anthropocentric, narrow and instrumentalist compared to Resilience analytics. Instead, drawing upon the figure of the island and islanders, they are seen to become sympathetic, symbiotic and sympoietic, as we realise that we are not separate from the world but are interdependent with other nonhuman forms of life which we cannot grasp or control in the ways imagined by modernity. Working with islands in this way is thus generative for such Anthropocene thinking, where the aquapelago is one such example of:

... an ‘onto-tale’ in which everything is interacting ... it is the multiplicity of submarine depths, of regions of water and currents, of seafloor surfaces and their interactions with topologies of land and of aerial and weather systems, and of flows of

materials between them, that produces an aquapelago ...
(Hayward, 2012b: 12)

We agree with Stephanie Wakefield (2018: 7) when she argues that today's '[c]ritical thinkers almost unanimously portray the infrastructures – and promises – of modernity with scorn or as ruins themselves (to think otherwise, the current discourse suggests, would be out-of-touch with the times – and perhaps worse, eliding or erasing the true nature of the world)'. Patchwork ontologies, such as those developed by Hayward, Clément, and Tsing discussed above, productively work with island disruptions or perturbations, which may enable us to see new attributes, affordances and relations, and develop our own responsivities in 'learning to be affected' (Latour, 2004: 205). Instead of stories of Resilience, with their self-regulating and harmonious systems which seek to prevent or slow climate change, preserving the status quo, a Patchwork ontology approach leads to a different set of, much more affirmative, assumptions and practices engaging with the present in ways which are more open and creative, rather than merely adaptively responsive:

Staying with the trouble does not require such a relationship to times called the future. In fact, staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful and edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings. (Haraway, 2016: 1)

Island Ontology as the New Ontology of the World

To return to Haraway's (2016: 57) point, that it matters a great deal 'which thoughts think thoughts', it is useful to continue to mark the difference between Patchwork and Resilience ontologies of relation, in order to draw out what is at stake in these distinctions. The world of Resilience is one in which working with islands

enables us to see the world as an immanent world in dynamic inter-relation, but the world is imagined as amenable to understanding and seen to be ‘there for us,’ such that we are required to adapt to emergent effects by increasing our understanding of processes of interaction. The world of Resilience is one of increasing transparency, a world of adding agencies and attributes due to our appreciation of interactive interdependencies. But, as we have seen above, relationality is grasped differently in the approach of Patchworks; the intensity of relational interactions makes the world increasingly immune to human understanding and adaptive forms of governance. In a Patchwork world, we become aware that the world’s liveliness and diversity are increasingly ungraspable, uncontrollable or incomprehensible as we ever plunge in and experiment anew. Thus, as we practice what it might mean to explore, journey or enter into the world in relation, another aspect comes to the fore in Patchwork ontologies: it is the opacity of the world, rather than its transparency, which matters.

In other words, Resilience approaches capture the experience of island being from the ‘outside,’ as observers work to understand and adapt to the self-regulating nature of systems. Patchwork approaches, on the contrary, are analogous to being ‘within’ a world ontologically formed and reformed by islands as relational knots of time and space. Thus Patchwork practices reveal the complexity, richness and vitality of the world, as if on a journey which we cannot grasp from some external positional view or standpoint. The *experience* is ontologically quite different to that of Resilience. This matters for the development of thought in debates about the Anthropocene. In Resilience analytics, we are adding a new way of understanding and explaining difference, providing alternative possibilities or choices for instrumental application. In Patchwork approaches – such as those of Tsing, the new experimental designers, and Hayward’s aquapelago above – we are not discovering the world but always in the process of making it, through practices of relation. Resilience approaches separate us as subjects from the world, adding to our knowledge about it as external systems or processes; Patchwork approaches bring us back into the world,

not as knowing or separated subjects but as creative co-creators in multiple ‘islands’ of relational entanglement.

As we said in Chapter 1, island thinker Édouard Glissant intimates what is at stake in distinguishing Resilience and Patchworks approaches to relational ontology. In *Poetics of Relation* (1997), Glissant articulates an island analytic to highlight the limits of ‘reductionism’ in much Western thinking. He argues that Einstein’s theory of relativity does not take relational ontology far enough and thereby ‘is not purely relative’ (Glissant, 1997: 134). For Einstein, ‘[t]he universe has a “sense” that is neither chance nor necessity’, this provides ““guarantees” [both of] the interactive dynamics of the universe and of our knowledge of it’ (Glissant, 1997: 134). Thereby: ‘Just as Relativity in the end postulated a Harmony to the universe, cultural relativism (Relativity’s timid and faltering reflection) viewed and organised the world through a global transparency that was, in the last analysis, reductive’ (Glissant, 1997: 135). Glissant is here highlighting that relationality provided different viewpoints or standpoints which still located the human as external to the world of relation, still managing and directing the powers of immanence, understood as amenable to universal laws and regularities.

Thus, for Glissant, as for our heuristic framework of relational ontology developed throughout the first half of this book, there are two ‘tendencies’ or key locus points in a continuum within ontological approaches of relational becoming, both of which appear in contemporary thinking drawn from island experiences and practices. The first approach to working with islands, that we analyse as Resilience, appeals to scientific, evolutionary, or underlying cybernetic laws and rationalities of ‘interactive life’ and ‘has become increasingly based on attempts to imagine or to prove a “creation of the world” (the Big Bang), which has always been the “basis” of the scientific project’ (Glissant, 1997: 136–137), enabling a Darwinian evolutionary telos of progress and increasingly complex differentiation. Despite claims often to the contrary, nevertheless, ‘The idea of God is there. And the notion of legitimacy reemerges. A science of conquerors who scorn or fear limits; a

science of conquest' (Glissant, 1997: 137). The second approach to relation though, tends in:

... the other direction, which is not one, distances itself entirely from the thought of conquest; it is an experimental meditation (a follow-through) of the process of relation, at work in reality, among the elements (whether primary or not) that weave its combinations... This 'orientation' then leads to following through whatever is dynamic, the relational, the chaotic – anything fluid and various and moreover uncertain (that is, ungraspable) yet fundamental in every instance and quite likely full of instances of invariance. (Glissant, 1997: 137)

Thus, Glissant (1997: 142) advocates an alternative science of *poetics*, which seeks to dig deeper into the world through 'giving-on-and-with', challenging universal, generalising or transcendent totalities in its focus on ever 'more stringent demands for specificity'. His approach is a practical one, like that of Tsing, Hayward or the designers noted above, in which the subject is no longer an observer of relations but *practically worlding itself* in a concrete embedded and embodied way.⁹

For Glissant, then, there are two ways in which relational, interactive or processual ontologies can be related to, and the stakes involved make a major difference. Another way in which he expresses this is in the binary pairing: 'thought of the Other' and 'the other of Thought'. For the former, there is a moral generosity and an appreciation of alterity as new forms of knowing and adapting are enabled as the world to be governed expands (as in the discourses of Resilience). For the latter, the world opens to experience in 'an aesthetics of turbulence whose corresponding ethics is not provided in advance' (Glissant, 1997: 155). Thereby, the 'other of Thought' is an onto-ethical practice: 'the work I am to undertake, the road I am to travel' in order to contribute to and 'to join the dynamics' (Glissant, 1997: 155). This is the ontology of Patchwork approaches, which Glissant foregrounds, or prophesises, where to undertake island work is to make a difference not by discovering something or contributing to a universal store of

knowledge, but by ‘joining the dynamics’, taking the immersive plunge and ‘staying with the trouble’.

For Roberts and Stephens (2017: 19), engaging Glissant’s thinking with islands in this way facilitates an ‘anti-explorer’ method, a feminist approach that challenges the idea of the (White, Modern male) explorer who ‘sallies forth with confidence that if the world is as yet unknown, then it at least may be surveyed and hence known via Euclidean geometry’ (Roberts and Stephens, 2017: 20). In Glissant, this is articulated through ‘the infinite island’ (Roberts and Stephens, 2017: 26) ‘a maelstrom, a place constituted by infinitely large numbers of analytical frames moving toward the infinitely minute’ (Roberts and Stephens, 2017: 28). This is not about boasting to modern, mainland thinking ‘*If you have the massive continent, then we have the infinite island*’ (Roberts and Stephens, 2017: 23, emphasis in original). Rather, it is to foreground how Glissant’s thinking with islands is a practical one in which the subject no longer stands apart, outside or above as an observer of relations, but rather practically worlds themselves – expanding their world – in embedded and embodied ways which cannot be known in advance. Thus, the anti-explorer method expands worlding into:

... those experiences of islands that have not or have yet to be integrated into our discourses, our measurements, our archives, and our tropes. These may be local, island knowledges, some of which are lost, contingently receding, or resurgent within the dominance of other epistemological frames, ranging from the most local use of an herb to the cosmic navigational worldview of Pacific Island canoers who have perceived the islands as moving in relation to the stars. (Roberts and Stephens, 2017: 24)

For such Patchwork ontologists, islands are not understood as worlds that we are in, to be merely adapted to; they are ways of expressing and understanding our own processes of world-making.¹⁰ Mimi Sheller (2020) similarly examines how the Taino/Arawak and later Afro-Caribbean peasant gardening practices of intercropping, silviculture, silvipasture, and conuco gardens,

function as sites of inter-species relationality and Patchworks. In Patchwork approaches, it is the bringing into relation and awareness which matters and is key to generating creative outcomes or possibilities (see also Sheller, 2018; Mika, 2018). Patchwork approaches are not determined by the power of entities but the contingent effects of inter-relation. They draw upon islands and certain islander practices as processes of relating, of bringing together, and the capacities for attentiveness or attunement to effects generated through these relations.¹¹

Godfrey Baldacchino and Eric Clark (2013: 131) have written in this way about islanding as world-making, where they quote the Pacific island poet and scholar Teresia Teaiwa: ‘Shall we make “island” a verb?’. Teaiwa (2007: 514) continues:

As a noun, it’s so vulnerable to impinging forces. Let us turn the energy of the island inside out. Let us ‘island’ the world! Let us teach the inhabitants of planet Earth how to behave as if we were all living on islands! ... The islanded must understand that to live long and well, they need to take care. Care for other humans, care for plants, animals; care for soil, care for water. Once islanded, humans are awakened from the stupor of continental fantasies. The islanded can choose to understand that there is nothing but more islands to look forward to. Continents do not exist, metaphysically speaking. It is islands all the way up, islands all the way down. Islands to the right of us, islands to the left... Yes, there is a sea of islands. And ‘sea’ can be a verb, just as ‘ocean’ becomes a verb of awesome possibility. But let us also make ‘island’ a verb. It is a way of living that could save our lives.¹²

For contemporary Anthropocene thinkers like Sheller (2020: 153) there is much to be gained from this way of ‘islanding’ the world:

Teaiwa presciently moves toward a new horizon for thinking through ‘islanding’ as a positive healing practice that holds out hope not just for [islands like] Haiti, the Caribbean, or the Pacific, but for humanity as a global archipelago. If we can all be islanded, become islanders, and do islanding, then we can perhaps learn to reject the forms of violence and ecocide that we have been

inculcated in, and to better cooperate in making a more just Island Earth.

For us, thinking ‘island’ as a verb, a process of world-making, rather than a static noun, has been informed by Deborah Bird Rose (2017b: 34) on how the Aboriginal islanders of Australia ‘have picked up the English word “country” and used it discursively; they have absolutely run away with it’. For these islanders, the term ‘country’:

... is multi-dimensional: it consists of people, animals, plants, Dreamings, the dead and the yet to be born, underground, earth, soils, minerals and waters, surface water and air. There is sea Country and land Country; sky Country too. Country has origins and a future; it exists both in and through time ... The sites of Dreamings’ or creators’ actions are in Country, and their tracks criss-cross Countries, connecting one to another through the great songlines or travels that were at the origin, and now are at the centre, of the on-going-ness... So Country is not ‘ours’ as the government says in its literature on ‘Caring for the Country,’ as if it were some sort of entitlement or as if we were the boss. Country is an intergenerational, interspecies gift of life. (Bird Rose, 2017b: 34–35, 41)

Tsing (2015: 23) calls this open-ended process, of collective and connective experimentation, ‘ways of being’, understood as ‘emergent effects of encounters’: the possibilities inherent in fluid assemblages with others.¹³ In life after modernist dreams of progress, disturbances and perturbations – thinking with islands as verbs rather than reductive nouns – is not a threat to the status quo but an interactive invitation to creativity, seen as a positive opportunity to make ‘life in capitalist ruins’:

Making worlds is not limited to humans. We know that beavers reshape streams as they make dams, canals, and lodges; in fact, all organisms make ecological living places, altering earth, air, and water... In the process, each organism changes everyone’s world. Bacteria made our oxygen atmosphere, and plants help maintain it. Plants live on land because fungi made soil by digesting rocks.

As these examples suggest, world-making projects can overlap, allowing room for more than one species. (Tsing, 2015: 22)

Thus, as noted, drawing upon her research into Japanese islander practices, Tsing (2015: 258) tells the story of woodland revitalisation groups ‘who hope that small-scale disturbances might draw both people and forests out of alienation, building a world of overlapping lifeways in which mutualistic transformation, the mode of mycorrhiza, might yet be possible.’ She states, ‘They hope their actions might stimulate a latent commons, that is, an eruption of shared assembly, even as they know they can’t actually *make* a commons’ (Tsing, 2015: 258; emphasis in original). Patchworking ontology informs a set of techniques not so much for ‘making’ something but rather as a creative stimulus; cultivating, exploring, probing, facilitating, repurposing and amplifying what already potentially exists, but which can only come into being ‘with’. The new potentialities for thinking with island ontologies in this process of world-making rely not upon latent essences within a pre-existing entity but in the interactive creation of a new ‘commons’ and have come to be associated with a duty or ethics of care for living in the Anthropocene as a condition in which we are all already in.

Patchworks as a Duty of Care: Amplification and Attentiveness

Patchwork thinking with islands is thus productive, and nowhere is this more obvious than in the work of Glissant. John Drabinski (2019: 46, emphasis in original) has recently underscored how the geographical specificity and materiality of the Caribbean islands were central to the development of Glissant’s approach:

Glissant’s literary and theoretical work consistently engages with the image and botanical-geographic meaning of the mangrove in order to characterize the poly-rooted, rhizomic character of Antillanité ... The tropical mangrove, the *Rhizophora*, survives

precisely because it is lifted above the sea with special roots. Propped above the tidal pulse, the tree's body is given oxygen, which keeps it alive despite the unpredictable and often violent crashing of salt, time, memory, and waves on the shoreline. Yet, the mangrove is also constantly contested by the sea. *Becoming mangrove* is no easy piece. It survives because the roots have lifted what is essential above the contingent destructive reach of the waves. The mangrove is a border plant. Roots like no other – plural and in no relation of dependency to the One. Difference without identity, yet an identity. The botanical archipelago, the repeating island bordering the island that repeats. Death and life intertwined without melancholy. The fecundity of the *Rhizophora*.¹⁴

Glissant, explicitly thinking with Caribbean shorelines, provides a very different, more productive, way of engaging the ruins of modernity than that of Walter Benjamin's famous treatment of 'allegory, ruin, and history' (Drabinski, 2019: 66) – there is thus a 'critical chasm between Benjamin's Europe and Glissant's Caribbean in terms of the structure and meaning of historical experience' (Drabinski, 2019: 68). Whilst Benjamin focused upon how allegory is employed in such a way which makes it difficult to 'make any distinction between pain, history, and memory' (Drabinski, 2019: 68), foremost in Glissant's work is how 'history gathers itself into the ruins of landscape and language' (Drabinski, 2019: 68). Glissant's 'Caribbean historical narrative sets out, not from Benjamin's analogy of allegory, but from the abyss [of the Middle Passage] in order to arrive at place and the peculiar mixture of times and spaces that comprise the nonlinear constitution of beginning' (Drabinski, 2019: 78). This was, of course, not only Glissant's, but Derek Walcott's '*project of the storyteller*' – a question of '*becoming Caribbean through the reading of ruins*' (Drabinski, 2019: 71, emphasis in original); thus, demanding the work and labour of the islander's own processes of world-making:

Ruins are fragments, yes, but ruins and fragments are also always in need of the poetic work of bringing forth, forming and reforming, and so a kind of beauty-making memory project that loves

the past as much as the future. Love reassembles fragments. [As Walcott says in his Nobel Prize-winning speech.¹⁵] The sigh becomes the poet's fidelity to possibility. (Drabinski, 2019: 71)

This is nothing less than an alternative worldview to Benjamin's European perspective of the ruins of modernity. For Glissant, like Walcott, "Thinking ruins, which is productive rather than (solely) melancholic, is already thinking the archipelago as a geography of the globe and the geography of thought. The archipelago is already the crossroads of the world, so the Caribbean and Caribbeanness is already *tout-monde* in memory, history, and experience ...' (Drabinski, 2019: x). Patchwork ontologies are thus stories of *cultivation rather than extraction or melancholy*; an ethico-political duty of care that is situated fully in the present.

The Patchwork approach of cultivation and care is exemplified in the work of María Puig de la Bellacasa. Drawing upon her experience of permaculture training, she states:

Obligations of caring in naturecultures cannot be reduced to 'stewardship' or 'pastoral' care in which humans are *in charge* of natural worlds. Such conceptions continue to separate a human 'moral' subject from a naturalized 'object' of caring. Nor need we go to the other extreme: diluting the thinking of specific obligations of care in situational relations with nonhumans ... These are poor generalizations that avoid engaging with actual situated naturecultures and the speculative efforts demanded from ecological thought and practice. (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017: 164, emphasis in original)

For Puig de la Bellacasa (2017: 165), if discourses of Resilience are a biopolitics then the Patchwork ontologies examined in this chapter are an 'alterbiopolitics'; creating different forces of world-making relationalities, capable of cultivating "power with" and "power-from-within" rather than "power-over". Patchworks are not only sensitive to feedbacks and unintended effects; Patchwork approaches hold unexpected possibilities for creative experimentation in the Anthropocene, understood as a condition we exist

within. Patchwork ontologies are not necessarily against technological applications, any more than those of Resilience, but seek to apply them differently. In Patchwork ontologies, technologies are experimental ways of bringing out relational capacities rather than constraining them (Viveiros de Castro and Danowski, 2018: 187).

A good example of this is ‘Hubs in a Sea of Knowledge: The Startling Adventures of RonR’, presented at the 2018 International Small Island Studies Association (ISISA) conference by the Wetlands Wanderers (comprising Jan de Graaf and Jeroen van Western). Creatively bringing together expertise in science, art and engineering, as well as inviting members of the general public into the process, ‘The Startling Adventures of RonR’ recounts the story of hacking (with permission) into bird-tracking devices, in order to expand awareness of and care for Terschelling Island’s (Netherlands) rich and multidimensional relations; and, in the process, problematise the all-too-coherently drawn boundaries of the Wadden Sea UNESCO World Heritage Site. Doing this, the Wetlands Wanderers (2018) draw attention to:

... how migratory birds know more than the average well-informed citizen of the world. They fly over dangerous places, on their way to strange places where coarse languages are spoken. Their map is a map of the world. Sometimes they observe things that should stay hidden, and we are left wondering what they’ve seen. The bird’s eye view implies a certain distance to the object of perception. Birds inspire a curiosity in us because they are windows to the world ... The Wadden Sea is part of the North Sea, which in turn is part of the Atlantic Ocean. Lines intersecting the Wadden Sea draw our gaze north to the polar regions, and south to well beyond the equator.

‘The Startling Adventures of RonR’ tracks the complexity of bird movements into the North Sea, Atlantic, Canada, Africa and Russia. It richly expands island relations into cloud, atmospheric, oceanic, terrestrial and a range of other entanglements; incorporating both expert and public engagement in processes of surveying,

scanning, listening, tasting, looking around, observing weather, writing history, navigating, bird-watching, spying and imaging. This is a much more expansive, Patchwork approach than merely correlating the patterns. As the project designers say, it is:

... an exercise in observing, a training in sensory perception and awareness. To watch, listen, taste and identify. We count – and we recount stories, operating on the brink of fact and fiction. We do light-hearted science and experimental philosophy. (Wetlands Wanderers, 2018)

Importantly, unlike Resilience responses to adaptation which assume beforehand the correlations and changes to be modulated to maintain equilibrium, such Patchwork island analytics make no assumptions about the meaning or consequences of signs. Thus, as in the case of previous examples discussed, the process of attentivity, attunement or ‘affectedness’ is much greater and more intense. It is this process of Patchworking which ‘expands the present’ and cares for the future, literally bringing the future into being by responding through close attention to feedbacks. But unlike the more instrumentalising approach of Resilience, every sign, signal or change in the state of being provides an ‘opportunity’ to bring new futures into being and demands to be ‘seized’ rather than ‘wasted’.¹⁶ In counterposition to a Resilience analytic which subsumes islands under the power of the world, this form of interpretation goes beyond modernist distinctions of self and other as ‘there is no illusion of transcendence or transparency’ (Marques, 2017: 34). Thus, Patchwork approaches, such as those exemplified by the Wetlands Wanderers, enable us to:

... rupture the hegemonic gaze which sees objectivity everywhere. To think images as the embodiment of worlds means not only thinking the ontology of images but also thinking images ontologically, that is, not as representations but as *representatives*: ... images through which we see other images. (Marques, 2017: 37)

The key point is that in Patchworking approaches, such as those adopted in ‘The Startling Adventures of RonR’, or Tsing, or Bird

Rose, signs or signals are held to enlarge the world of possibilities and of potentials rather than subtracting from or limiting it. Here island ontology opens up as the ontology of the world: a process of world-making which extends and expands in space and time as a way of enlarging the present through a more open, less reductive, ethos or duty of care.

We can further see this process of thinking with islands as world-making and an ethos or duty of care in the work of the highly acclaimed poet Juliana Spahr, who writes about Hawai'i. In *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs*, Spahr (2005: 9) slows down her pulse in order to breath in, bring into consciousness, amplify and attune to the vastness of island relations in her own inimitable rhythmic style of writing:

The entering in and out of the space of the mesosphere in the entering in and out of the space of the stratosphere in the entering in and out of the space of the troposphere in the entering in and out of the space of the oceans in the entering in and out of the space of the continents and islands in the entering in and out of the space of the nations in the entering in and out of the space of the regions in the entering in and out of the space of the cities in the entering in and out of the space of the neighborhoods nearby in the entering in and out of the space of the building in the entering in and out of the space of the room in the entering in and out of the space around the hands in the entering in and out of the space between the hands.

In these Patchwork approaches island relations stretch out massively in space and time, and any attempt to grasp and control them in the way of modern frameworks of reasoning, or the analytics of Resilience, simply slips through the fingers. On the one hand, there is a dizzying sense of being overwhelmed and the desire, which is continuously thwarted, to take everything in. On the other hand, the slowing down of the pulse, the body, the breathing, 'the entering in and out,' works to amplify what already exists, bringing it into awareness via processes of attunement.¹⁷

Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2016: 186) provides an extremely useful and informative philosophical framing, with his two con-

ceptions of a ‘sociology of absences’ and a ‘sociology of emergences’ which can be read as a how-to guide for working with a Patchwork ontology in order to develop an ethics or duty of care. The ‘sociology of absences’ is designed to make the everyday unusual so that we can pay attention to it, thus ‘expanding our available realm of experiences.’ We can then see more ‘signs or clues,’ thus in working with islands’ relational entanglements, disturbances and emergent effects, our world becomes stranger to us. The ‘sociology of emergences’ then expands this speculative moment ‘decelerating the present, giving it a denser, more substantive content,’ enabling ‘ethical vigilance over the unfolding of possibilities’ aided by such emotions as (negative) anxiety or (positive) hope. Together this method provides what de Sousa Santos (2016: 186) calls ‘symbolic amplification.’

Juliana Spahr’s Hawaiian poetry is a particularly good illustration of this ‘symbolic amplification.’ So is the work of Deborah Bird Rose (2017a: G53), who draws upon the conceptualisation of ‘shimmer,’ an Australian Aboriginal aesthetic, to discuss the ways that signs and signals ‘appeal to the senses, things that evoke or capture feelings and responses ... lures that both entice one’s attention and offer rewards.’ As Bird Rose (2017a: G54) explains, shimmer pervades many aspects of Aboriginal island life, for example:

At an ecological scale in northern Australia, one of the most obvious patterns is the pulse between wet and dry seasons. The desiccation of the dry season dulls the landscape in many ways (although the country is always beautiful): there is a winding back of fertility, a loss of water, and thus loss of the possibility for sun to glint on the water. But then, things begin to move toward brilliant again: the lightning starts to spark things up, the rain starts to bring forth shiny green shoots, and rainbows offer their own kind of brilliance. Shimmer comes with new growth, the everything-coming-new process of shininess and health, and the new generations.

Shimmer is a form of expansive amplification of the richness and complexity of island relations, which does not understand the

world as being ‘composed of gears and cogs but of multifaceted, multispecies relations and pulses’ (Bird Rose, 2017a: G55). For Bird Rose (2017a: G55), only in this way can we bring out the full potentiality of (island) life; its ‘diversity, complexity, abundance, and beauty’. Rather than a universal theory of progress, where the past was always a necessary moment, fixing the determination of the present, for such Patchwork ontologies, the past is an ‘inexhaustible’ resource for holding open transformative hope in the present and for an ethics of care: ‘[f]or shimmer to capture the eye, there must be absence of shimmer. To understand how absence brings forth, it must be understood not as lack but as potential’ (Bird Rose, 2017a: G54). This is why there is a need to expand thinking with islands into a focus upon the richness and depth of relation as potential and possibility.

For Patchwork ontologies, the world is always necessarily more than its surface appearance. This is why ‘symbolic amplification’ is necessary in such works as ‘The Startling Adventures of RonR’ about Terschelling Island’s expansive relational entanglements, the Hawaiian poetry of Spahr, and the research of Bird Rose with Australian Aborigines – to work with islands is to see beyond the limits of modern modes of thought. What does not appear to exist, or is not readily apparent, may be important and rich in potential. We have also seen this, as noted above, in, for example, Glissant’s (1997) ‘the Other of thought’, Roberts and Stephens’ (2017) ‘anti-explorer’ method and Hayward’s (2012a; 2012b; 2018) ‘aquapelago’: all approaches developed by working with islands. This is why thinking with islands as significant figures of relational entanglements and awareness in the Anthropocene has become important for contemporary commentators, and it is what gives the analytics of Patchworks its agential and futural appeal. As Bird Rose (2011: 114) argues: ‘Part of what makes our common Earth condition so interesting is that that which may yet be is infinitely more extravagant than that which already has been.’ Uncertainty or unknowability do not close down our world but open it up as ‘the possibilities of the living world always are greater than the mind or knowledge system that wants to understand’ them (Bird

Rose, 2011: 114). The ‘not yet’ and the ‘may yet be’ are here and not here at the same time and thus the purpose is not to reproduce or conserve the present but ‘to enable’, ‘to engender’, ‘to cultivate’, or ‘to care’ futurally.

While Resilience ontologies work with islands by paying attention to systemic interaction, feedback effects and to tipping points, for Patchwork ontologists such approaches would inevitably be productionist, consumptionist and extractivist. Resilience analytics are always focused on saving, or on prolonging, or making more efficient what already exists. In the Anthropocene, these approaches stand accused of refusing to see that these contemporary forms of being are, themselves, the problem. The alternative ontological islands lens which promises change and transformation is that of Patchworking, which can be learned by working with islands and island peoples and cultures. This approach trains us to attend to the world around us, enabling us to develop skills giving ‘symbolic amplification’ to the clues and signs all around us. We believe it matters that the examples discussed in this chapter have been explicitly developed from work on islands. This attentiveness, cultivated by thinking with islands as important sites of relational entanglements, can be transformatory, expanding our reality beyond modernist constrictions and making available infinitely more possible, concrete futures (de Sousa Santos, 2016).

Conclusion

The key premise of this book is that working with islands helps to engender and to clarify the core methodological and conceptual frameworks for Anthropocene thinking today. Thus, whilst many commentators would perhaps choose to focus upon how Patchwork ontologies could be aligned with, say, the work of Deleuze and Guattari’s (1986) assemblage theory,¹⁸ this would tell us little about the particular geographical forms and cultures which are doing the ‘work’ in Anthropocene thinking. We think this is something which has been missing from contemporary debates, which we will pick up and develop in more detail in the concluding

chapter of the book, turning to a critical agenda for island studies in the Anthropocene. For now, we want to make this simple claim: it matters that contemporary experiments in governance, design and theorising regularly engage islands and islanders in order to aid and develop their thinking.

This chapter has focused upon the emergence of what we call ‘Patchwork ontologies’ in Anthropocene thinking; which, like Resilience analytics, draw heavily upon islands as sites of relational entanglements and feedback effects. But whereas Resilience engages islands in terms of self-regulating systems and cultures which tend towards organisational harmony and adaptation, Patchwork approaches ‘stay with the trouble’, where working with islands foregrounds a world which is too lively, too complex, and too unpredictable to be grasped by modern frameworks of reasoning. Patchwork ontologies, widely prevalent in experimental approaches to Anthropology, design, the arts, technological experiments, poetry, and ethnography, thus think with ongoing disturbances and emergent relational effects. Developing and drawing upon particular ways of thinking with islands, this becomes a way of expressing and understanding our own processes of world-making; which, for Patchwork ontologies, is often associated with a duty or ethos of care.

In bringing this first half of the book to a close, we suggest that Resilience and Patchwork relational ontologies are two important ways of understanding how thinking with and from islands has influenced wider Anthropocene thinking. The figures of the island and islander are not peripheral in these developments, but have an important place on the international stage, as we have seen in the wide range of examples above. Islands are both important in terms of being the key symbols of transforming planetary conditions, *and* in terms of the increasing attention given to non-modern, relational entanglements and ontologies in debates about the Anthropocene. As we said in the introductory chapter, readers may think of other ways in which work with islands in the Anthropocene can be analytically and heuristically clarified to help us better understand and contribute to contemporary debates;

and, indeed, we very much hope that they will. We see this book as a beginning, exploring some avenues for engaging the work that islands do in shaping contemporary Anthropocene thinking more generally. Whilst the first half of the book has focused upon what we understand to be two dominant approaches to relational ontology, the second half turns to the analysis of two contrasting approaches to onto-epistemology, both strongly associated with thinking with islands in the Anthropocene; what we call ‘Correlation’ and ‘Storiation’.

Notes

- ¹ For example, in art and island culture, as Hsinya Huang (2017) points out, Bill Reid’s sculpture *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii, the Black Canoe* of an Indigenous canoe from the Pacific Northwest of the Americas, is an ecological metaphor of a lifeboat during the great flood. Centrally, the inclusion of many different species on the boat is said to foreground ‘the restored continuum of human and nonhuman beings in ecological peril, and retrieves a multispecies eco-aesthetics rooted in Indigenous stories and myths of the Pacific’ (Huang, 2017: 286).
- ² As Lovelock (2020: 12) recently affirmed, ‘In Greek mythology, Gaia is the Greek Goddess of the Earth and, at the suggestion of the novelist Willian Golding, I gave her name to the theory I developed fifty years ago. The theory is that, since it began, life has worked to modify its environment.’
- ³ For example, where a geographical form like the desert is engaged this is more frequently envisaged as a blank space for the projection of modernity, rather than as a productive space for thinking through relational entanglements (Günel, 2019). Compare this to commonplace statements about islands, which are today widely understood as ‘particularly potent landforms for a reimagination of the earth and our relation to it, which is partly due to the imaginative potential of their geo(morpho)logical instability (think, for instance, of volcanic islands). Indeed, if islands lend themselves to a discussion of productive processes, they can equally be mobilized to negotiate destruction and dissolution’ (Riquet, 2020: 4). As noted throughout this book, this perspective is commonplace in the literature when it comes to both islands and island cultures. As another example which reflects

contemporary Patchwork approaches more specifically, Katie Ritson (2020: 10) discusses how ‘The portrayal of northern Atlantic subsistence cultures is an imagination of a different kind of past, one that existed simultaneously with but outside the mainstream narrative of capitalist progress and industrialisation; it creates an open-ended space where the imagination of possible futures can be explored.’

⁴ Similarly, for Grove et al (2019), commenting on design practices more generally: ‘Recent decades have seen design shifting its concern from objects to processes, systems and futures. Design orients thought and action not towards questions of how something came to be, but rather what something might become, crafting new futures from within, rather than outside, the present.’

⁵ Thus, debate has moved on significantly when thinking with islands in the Anthropocene. Compare the Patchwork, more open-ended approaches of becoming, examined by Robin (2014), Herrington and Lokman (2016) and Selkirk (2020) above, to older approaches where it was argued that ‘immigration, which is important in maintaining species equilibrium on true islands, will not contribute significantly to the maintenance of equilibrium on reserves in the future because of the disappearance of recolonisation sources’ (Pickett and Thompson, 1978: 27).

⁶ As Crane and Fletcher (2017) further point out, Ursula K. Le Guin, one of the central influences upon Haraway, also thinks with islands in this way. Focusing upon a world of island and archipelagic relations, with no continents, Le Guin’s *Earthsea* series ‘eschews the closed system narrativization of so many island genre fictions’ (Crane and Fletcher, 2017: 161) in favour of a Patchwork approach, foregrounding a world of islands of creativity, emergent disturbances and effects.

⁷ See also Kelly and Lobo’s (2020) work with tidal country and cultures in North Australia.

⁸ Thus, Hayward’s work has been widely drawn upon in the journal *Shima* to develop ‘a form of collective ‘thinking with islands’ to understand contemporary phenomena with implications for other natural-cultural systems. [For example, working] at the intersection of Anthropocene studies, cultures of infrastructure, and tourism studies on islands and aquapelagos across the globe’ (Moore, 2020: 2).

⁹ Thus, Gökçe Günel, Saiba Varma and Chika Watanabe (2020) term a ‘Patchwork ethnography’ as one that ‘does not react to the externalities of the world by demanding more productivity. Instead, it seeks

to remake that world by erasing pre-given categories and boundaries between our personal and professional lives.’

- ¹⁰ Such an approach is highly influential in contemporary work. Much of Katherine McKittrick’s (2006: 128) *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* is centred upon literal and metaphorical island imaginaries which enable us ‘to think about how the production of space is worked out through mapping and attempting to constitute the space of human Others as disembodied and then transparently abnormal’ (see also Roberts, 2020). McKittrick (2006: 129) engages the work of Caribbean island scholar, Sylvia Wynter, to draw attention to how, through colonialism and slavery, the islands of the ‘New World’ became places where ‘the uninhabitable was abstracted by cartographic translations of where and who can constitute the terms of normal habitability’. The extension of this logic manifests today in what McKittrick (2006: 133) calls ‘archipelagos of poverty’, from North American prisons to the islands of the Caribbean. The counter-move, for McKittrick, is to follow Glissant, in drawing out the “real but long unnoticed” places of interhuman exchanges: cultural sharings, new poetics, new ways of being, “a new world view” (quoted in McKittrick, 2006: 132):

These encounters always include the under-represented conceptions of being *in place* – the spaces of Otherness, subjective worldviews – that may not be immediately available in our geographic imaginations because Man’s sense of place is naturalized as normal. However, archipelagos of poverty, hemmed in and categorized by global color-lines and biocentric logics – are, like Man’s geographies, inhabited. And, if we return to Glissant and connect his poetics of landscape to this present discussion, encountering, saying, and living geography brings this present subject into being ... spaces of Otherness are ‘palpitating with life’. (McKittrick, 2006: 132–133).

- ¹¹ For island scholars, such approaches have a longer lineage in Hau’ofa’s (2008) invocation to think in terms of a ‘world of islands’ (rather than, in the modern or mainland sense, ‘islands of the world’). For Hau’ofa (2008), the island cultures of Oceania have a different *worldview* from continental and mainland thinking. They do not think in terms of parts or wholes but rather through interactions and relations. As

Rakuita (2017) explains, relations are not reduced to intermediaries between autonomous entities, but neither are entities constituted or fully determined by their relations. Rather, a ‘world of islands’, while contingent and porous, is generative of effects: i.e. (island) life is not determined by the power of autonomous entities but the effects of inter-relation. To quote Hau‘ofa (2008: 32–33): “Oceania” denotes a sea of islands with their inhabitants. The world of our ancestors was a large sea full of places to explore, to make their homes in, to breed generations of seafarers like themselves. People raised in this environment were at home with the sea. They played in it as soon as they could walk steadily, they worked in it, they fought on it. They developed great skills for navigating their waters – as well as the spirit to traverse even the few large gaps that separated their island groups ... Theirs was a large world in which people and cultures moved and mingled, unhindered by boundaries of the kind erected much later by imperial powers.’ (See also Jolly, 2007).

¹² The notion of thinking with islands as a verb is today widespread in many Patchwork approaches. As another example, thinking with the islands of the Caribbean and with the work of Glissant, for Yountae (2016: 137–138, emphasis in original): ‘the common world is not something to be “discovered”, or taken for granted. The ground ... is not a noun, a mere description of the given ground, but a verb, an action in process, a process in action. It *grounds*. It refuses, therefore, to be a mere description of the cosmopolitan state of globalized capital or the elitist ideal of neonomatic transnationalism accompanying it... [Rather, it] begins from the ruins, from below, by cocreating the world ... Its making is also its unmaking in that it is an open project, always becoming, always creolized.’

¹³ There are many contemporary examples of thinking with islands as world-making, in this way; from Emanuela Borgnino’s (2020) work in Hawai‘i, to Flores and Stephens (2017) ‘relational undercurrents’, to the powerful poetry of Perez (2020b) from Guåhan (Guam), and Pippa Marland’s (2014) work on Wales’ Bardsey Island.

¹⁴ In drawing out how Patchwork and Resilience relational ontologies exist on a spectrum, or sliding scale, we can compare Glissant’s Patchwork approach to thinking with mangroves and the Resilience thinking with mangroves examined in Sahana Ghosh’s (2020) article ‘How Rhizophora mangroves on Car Nicobar Islands fought back a rapid sea-level rise in 2004 tsunami’. As noted, Glissant focuses upon how mangroves have roots which are plural, in no relation to the

One. Thus, disturbances and emergent effects open out to much less predictive, more generative or creative possibilities, which cannot be reduced to linear space-time imaginaries. This is whilst, in Resilience thinking with mangroves, the focus is more upon how mangroves facilitate islands to ‘bounce back’ after disasters – protecting ‘shorelines from eroding and shield[ing] communities from floods, hurricanes, and storms’ (Ghosh, 2020). Thus, the focus is upon how mangroves exist within closed-loops circuits of ‘adaptability’ which allow them ‘to thrive in habitats that experience a long duration of flooding by seawater’ (Ghosh, 2020). Whilst both Resilience and Patchworks are non-modern relational ontologies, Resilience adopts a more linear, or fixed, understanding of space-time.

- ¹⁵ ‘Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape. It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars. This gathering of broken pieces is the care and the pain of the Antilles, and if the pieces are disparate, ill-fitting, they contain more pain than their original sculpture, those icons and sacred vessels taken for granted in their ancestral places. Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent’ (Walcott, 1998: 69).
- ¹⁶ See also, for example, *Sound of Mull*, which is ‘a series of performance scores developed through artistic practice-as-research into how to perform geochronology in the Anthropocene’ (Rawlings, n.d.) on the island of Mull. The book *Sound of Mull*, by Angela Rawlings (2020), contains a range of instructions from how to listen to deep time to how to knit plastic collected from shorelines.
- ¹⁷ As Nicole Merola (2018: 43) says, ‘It is not enough, Spahr’s work argues, to merely represent or think the affects of the Anthropocene. Rather we have to performatively embody them in ways that materialize our vulnerabilities, whether shared or particular. Spahr’s continued formal experiments and her activisms around constructing literary communities help us practice forms of Anthropocene inhabitation. While these activities will not assure survivability, they do operate as critical coping mechanisms that register and compose how we conceptualize and live in the Anthropocene, its effects, and its affects.’ We find a

similar approach in the work of Nadim Samman and Julian Charrière (2018: 138–139), who, diving into the waters of Bikini Atoll, the most famous nuclear testing grounds in the world, say:

A deep breath, as we take in the scene. We require air to survive. As a consequence, we can rarely see beyond it. We are sixty percent water, and because air is less dense than us, we associate it with a void. This allows us to view the atmosphere as something we cannot affect. Such is the epistemological narcosis that has led us all the way to climate change. Today, we must pass through this state of intoxication into controlled dreaming – a new environmental reverie. One where our sense of individuality – a cultural complex – diffuses, slightly. Here, below the surface, in the water, above the coral, we feel more *within* the environment; living ourselves as bigger, overflowing terrestrial selfhood. We feel set in motion by things we only partly comprehend; physically compressed, *made smaller*. Here, this minute, we can dominate neither animal nor current. And we cannot stay forever. We are an impermanent phenomenon. And yet, we read our bodies in the space surrounding. Above the water, if you swing your arm, it is rare to see a reaction in a nearby tree. Your impact can be imperceptible. In diving you learn, in a visceral way, what particle physics has proved in the abstract: to observe is to influence. One kick, and a bank of nearby algae begin to flutter. (emphasis in original)

¹⁸ There is much debate over the extent to which Glissant's (1997) *Poetics of Relation* was influenced by Deleuze and Guattari. For some, the connection is more straightforward (Hallward, 2001) than others (Burns, 2012; Allar, 2019). But what is not questioned is their understanding of the importance of thinking with islands. As Lorna Burns (2012: 1) points out, thinking with islands was 'at the heart of Deleuze's philosophy'; where islands were understood as emblematic sites of 're-creation, not the beginning but a re-beginning that takes place.' (Deleuze, quoted in Burns, 2012: 2). As in the case of Derrida (2011), Deleuze understood the central importance of thinking with islands as a way of challenging modern or mainland reasoning. As noted, here we find Drabinski (2019: 100) particularly useful when it comes to grounding Glissant's approach in island geographical specificities

and materialities; when he says that 'Glissant's ontology of the subject emerges out of [thinking with Caribbean islands and islanders], rather than intervenes upon, space, time, language and history. In fact, siting that emergence [in the Carribean] is essential for moving from generalized Deleuzian geophilosophy to the specific geography of Glissant's subject.'