

Island Movements: Thinking with the Archipelago

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Abstract: Whether in Homer or Plato, Shakespeare or Huxley, throughout history, thinking about islands has shaped how we think about human nature and our place in the world. However, to date archipelagos have received far less attention. This is problematic because we live, increasingly, in a world of island-island movements and not static forms. Not only in the more obvious cases of the Caribbean, Hawaii or the Philippines but, as Stratford et al (2011) say, many ‘continental forms’ like Canada and Australia are in fact archipelagos composed of thousands of island movements. To this list we can add more manufactured archipelagos: wind turbine arrays, industrial oil and military constellations. The key question therefore arises: *what does it mean to think with the archipelago?* This paper argues firstly that archipelagic thinking denaturalizes the conceptual basis of space and place, and therefore engages ‘the spatial turn’ presently sweeping the social sciences and humanities. Secondly, such thinking highlights the trope of what I call ‘metamorphosis’, of the adaptation and transformation of material, cultural and political practices through island movements. In both cases, I argue that thinking with the archipelago requires an important shift in how we frame analysis and engagement.

Keywords: archipelago; Caliban; Caribbean; Derek Walcott; islands; metamorphosis; movement; spatial turn; Tuvalu

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Island movements

As Peter Hay (2006) has said previously in this journal, islands have always loomed large in western discourse (see also King, 1993). Homer, Plato, William Shakespeare, John Donne, Robert Louis Stevenson, Jonathan Swift, H.G. Wells, Charles Avery, G.K. Chesterton, Aldous Huxley, and Gilles Deleuze are just some of the many writers that have transformed how we think about the world by thinking about islands. Indeed, as Gillis (2004, p. 1) accurately observes, Western culture not only think about islands, it “thinks *with* them”. Island studies generate thinking beyond the study of islands.

In this paper, I want to take the theme of thinking with islands in a particular direction: to consider what it could mean to think with the archipelago. The importance of thinking with the archipelago was hinted at by Godfrey Baldacchino (2006) in his opening editorial that launched *Island Studies Journal* in 2006. In 2011, the archipelago theme was picked up more earnestly by Elaine Stratford, Godfrey Baldacchino, Elizabeth McMahon, Carol Farbotko and Andrew Harwood (2011) in their agenda-setting piece entitled *Envisioning the archipelago*. Thinking with the archipelago has not been a prominent concern of the social sciences or humanities to date. But, as Stratford et al. (2011) point out, in many ways it could be said that

we live in a world of archipelagos, not static island forms. Not only are there more obvious cases, like the Caribbean or Philippines, but Canada and Australia are archipelagos composed of thousands of island-island movements.

The question then, is how can thinking with the archipelago change how we think about the world and our place in it? Firstly, I claim that *Envisioning the archipelago* both reflects and contributes to an increasingly prominent theme in the contemporary social sciences and humanities; namely, the ‘spatial turn’. Thinking with the archipelago denaturalizes space so that space is more than the mere backdrop for political or ethical debate. Instead, reflective of a spatial turn in thinking, it emphasizes more fluid tropes of assemblages (Tsai, 2003), mobilities, and multiplicities associated with island-island movements.

Secondly, thinking with the archipelago foregrounds what I further suggest to be a trope of ‘metamorphosis’. What I mean by this idea is that, following the St Lucian Nobel Prize winner Derek Walcott (1974a; 1974b; 1986; 1991; 1992; 1998), we can observe how island movements adapt, transfigure and transform their inheritances into original form. As some initial illustrations of this transformation, the Caribbean carnival, religion, folklore and food are not imitations of something else: through the island-chain movement they all express a transfigurative originality. We are of course not just talking here about the inventive cultures or religions of the archipelago, but also its politics and material forms. To highlight such concerns will require explaining how thinking with the archipelago takes us beyond reductive categories that diminish islands to states of mimicry; to instead foreground how island-island *movements* and middle passages are cognitive spaces of metamorphosis in their own right. As I will explain in my analysis, this idea does not however take us down the line of Benítez-Rojo’s (1996) ‘repeating island’; rather, in the work of Walcott it stresses themes of creativity. Here we can further remind ourselves that the word ‘archipelago’ can be broken down into the *Arch* (the Greek signifying ‘original’, ‘principal’) and *pelago* (deep, abyss, sea). I therefore conclude this paper with how, for me, thinking *with* the archipelago foregrounds how island movements are generative and inter-connective spaces of metamorphosis, of material practices, culture and politics.

Thinking with the archipelago

Stratford et al. (2011, p. 118) say that in “the field of island studies, the archipelago remains one of the least examined metageographical concepts.” To then start with a definition of the archipelago, they usefully outline their conceptualization of it by positioning this against how islands have tended to be previously studied:

Certain limitations arise from the persistent consideration of two common relations of islands in the humanities and social sciences: land and sea, and island and continent/mainland. What remains largely absent or silent are ways of being, knowing and doing—ontologies, epistemologies and methods—that illuminate island spaces as inter-related, mutually constituted and co-constructed: as island and island (ibid.).

Their point is that the study of islands has too often focused upon boundaries and dichotomies, and fixated upon borders: land and sea, island and mainland. Their response is to encourage us to emphasize instead the connections between ‘island and island’ and, therefore, to consider how the notion of the archipelago unsettles static tropes of singularity, isolation, dependency and peripherality that presently dominate how islands are conceptualized in the literature. For Stratford et al. the question is, as they say, ontological. When they write that an emphasis upon archipelagos is a form of “counter-mapping” (Stratford et al., 2011, p. 121) they are referring to producing better maps through more effective empirical research and methodological practices, and seeking to operate on an ontological and fundamental level.

The concept of the archipelago deeply challenges how we think about the world and our relation to it. On this point, Stratford et al. effectively argue for a double-destabilization that dislocates and de-territorializes static island tropes of particularity, so that they are instead conceived as fluid island-island inter-relations rather than the binaries of mainland/island or sea/island. Framing islands as being part of “such and such an assemblage” reveals how practices, representations, experiences and affects produce the dynamic form of an archipelago. This ‘de-framing’ reflects something of what DeLoughrey (2007) has termed archipelagraphy (see also DeLoughrey, 2001 and 2004 for excellent discussions). It further shows how, although each constituent of an archipelago can at first seem isolated, the currents between and among islands reveal a wider horizon.

The key thrust of this ontology is therefore *island movements*; not a simple gathering of islands, but an emphasis upon how islands act in concert; or, as Deleuze and Guattari (1986) would say, through constellations; so that the framing of an island archipelago draws attention to fluid cultural processes, sites of abstract and material relations of movement and rest, dependent upon changing conditions of articulation or connection. Later, I will pick up upon this concern with ‘cultural processes’ in my discussion of Walcott, and in explain how I think island movements produce what I feel is appropriately called ‘metamorphosis’.

Readers who are not concerned with ‘Island Studies’ per se may be tempted to think that this is all well and good for those interested in the Caribbean or Polynesia, but what about the mainland mainstream concerns of disciplines such as geography, politics or sociology? As Stratford et al. carefully remind us, however, many places that are conceptualized as simply ‘mainland’ or ‘island’ are in reality archipelagos. It is on this point that the depth of their ontology and the importance of thinking *with* the archipelago really starts to be revealed for a wider audience. Canada, for example, has the largest number of islands in the world. Stratford et al. paint an accurate picture of Canada not as a unitary body, but as white Arctic icescapes melting to islandscapes of brown, green and blue (and see Vannini et al., 2009, for foundational discussions on this point). They therefore argue that Canada should be understood “not as a unitary land mass but as a series of multiple assemblages of coastal, oceanic and insular identities, even as its centre of politico-economic gravity remains stuck in the Alberta tar sands” (Stratford et al., 2011, p. 121). Turning to Australia as another example, Elizabeth McMahon (2003; 2010) has been active in demonstrating how this continent, island, empire, and nation is a political fiction that seems to constantly deny its reality as an archipelago. While Australia is made up of at least 8,000 and possibly as many as 12,000 islands, islets, and rocky outcrops, these often tend to be submerged by themes of mainland and static form. It is by invoking such powerful examples that Stratford et al. effectively start to erode away at the idea that the world is made up of islands and continents, and instead generate what would seem a more accurate picture of the world as archipelagos.

Thinking *with* the archipelago is therefore, in many ways, the continuation of a tradition that has encouraged us to frame the world as a ‘world of islands’ rather than narrowly focus upon ‘islands of the world’ (Hau’ofa, 1993; McCall, 1994; 1996; Clark, 2004; Kelman & Lewis, 2005; Baldacchino, 2007; 2008; Fletcher, 2011). Stratford et al. provide many contemporary illustrations and historical examples of why it is important to think with the archipelago: the Phoenician network of trade routes built around merchant cities, the Minoan civilization, the Republic of Venice in the Middle Ages, the strategic locations of the British Empire (Lambert, 2005), the dominance of the *Repubbliche Marinare* (Pisa, Genoa, Venice, Amalfi), to name a few. To these we could add manufactured archipelagos such as wind turbine arrays, island military bases, and moving islands that create dynamic archipelagos, like fleets of military vessels or oil tankers.

Paying attention to the *dynamic form* of constellations in this way not only highlights the need for new empirical and methodological approaches, as stated; it also calls for a new ontology. In this regard, Deleuze proposes the archipelago as a model of “a world in process” rather than in stasis; and (although I am less comfortable with his deterministic tone) “freedom” (quoted in Stratford et al., 2011, p. 121). Moving oceans and shifting island boundaries radically decenter and push the notion of ‘island’ beyond singularity to emphasize mobile, multiple and interconnected dynamic forms (Edmond and Smith, 2003). Some key tropes of the archipelago according to Stratford et al. are unsurprisingly therefore those of assemblages, networks, filaments, connective tissues, mobilities, and multiplicities. Such ontologies are, of course, essentially *spatial* because they emphasize the “power of cross-currents and connections” between islands, and stress how “*the movement creates* the relation of an archipelago” (Stratford et al., 2011, p. 124). The purpose of highlighting these fluid, rather than static, tropes is to illuminate, at the level of ontology, “island spaces as inter-related, mutually constituted and co-constructed: as island and island” (Stratford et al., 2011, p. 113). This constructs “archipelagic relations as an antidote to the rhetorics of simpling” by seeking out the “disjuncture, connection and entanglement *between and among* islands” (Stratford et al., 2011, p. 124). Explicitly or implicitly therefore, I now want to contend that the archipelago connects well with what has more widely become known as the ‘spatial turn’ in the contemporary social sciences and humanities (*Spaces of democracy* collective, 2008). I will briefly discuss this turn in the next section before highlighting how thinking with the archipelago advances that turn in important ways.

The spatial turn in the social sciences and humanities

The ‘spatial turn’ sweeping through many academic debates accentuates spatial interconnections and movements rather than static territorial form (Massey, 2005; *Spaces of democracy* collective, 2008; Soja, 2009). Because it seeks to destabilize the idea of space as the mere backdrop for political or ethical ideals, discussions by Stratford et al. of the archipelago place their work within this general area of debate. The spatial turn is, perhaps above all, an attack upon grand narratives of modernity, colonialism, and development. In particular, it is an attack upon their associated binaries and the varied forms of oppression these can produce. For leading geographers like Doreen Massey (2005), binaries associated with grand narratives of progress have oppressed spatial differences. As Massey (1999, p. 271) says:

When, in economic geography for instance, we use terms such as ‘advanced’ and ‘backward’, ‘developed’ and ‘developing’, we are effectively imagining spatial differences (differences between places, regions, countries, etc) as temporal. We are arranging differences between places into historical sequence.

Space is increasingly seen in relational terms rather than as a fixed territorial container. For example, Massey (2005) asks how has the home become relationally constructed to work, and what are the geometries of power that produce these spatial relations? How do spaces get relationally constructed as peripheral, masculine, through neo-liberal modes of production, scientific discourses and so on? Thinking spatially and relationally in this way exposes crude binaries and dichotomies by looking *empirically* to how spaces are produced through the complex geometries of power that make up everyday life. Returning to island studies more specifically, here we could ask what geometries of power make an island archipelago relationally peripheral in peoples’ minds to a mainland. How do people, not least academics, become implicated in these geometries of power, and how could they become more responsible to and for them? Moreover, how can we make such spaces more open to the unknown, to chance encounters with different ways of conceiving space and therefore to possibilities?

While in the past, the rallying cry tended to be ‘History’, today we therefore find that ‘Space’ is receiving more attention (*Spaces of democracy* collective, 2008). New spatial ontologies are emerging that seek to denaturalize space on a fundamental level. This process of denaturalization is illustrated in the increasing attention being given over to such tropes as ‘networks’, ‘space-time imaginaries’, ‘assemblages’, ‘mobilities’ and ‘multiplicities’ across the social sciences and humanities (see, for example, authors as diverse as Connolly, 1995; Tully, 1995; Thrift, 1996; Banerjee-Guha, 1997; Harvey, 2000; Whatmore, 2002; Featherstone, 2003; Barnett and Low, 2004; Fuller, 2005; Latour, 2005; Pugh, 2005; Hawkins, 2006; Marres, 2007; Law and Mol, 2008). With the arrival of such new spatial ontologies, space is less likely to be reduced to a predefined territorial container wherein political ideals and ethical categories are simply parachuted in to be implemented. There is, of course, the sense of a politics at work here that seeks to take the grand historical narratives of the past to task. It was with politics in mind that, in 2004, I formed the *Spaces of democracy* collective with Doreen Massey and Chantal Mouffe. Since then this network has witnessed many debates from across the disciplines foregrounding the different ways in which the spatial turn is generating new ways of thinking (<http://www.spaceofdemocracy.org>). As Ed Soja (2009, pp. 72–73) says in a particularly good commentary:

[T]he spatial turn and the new spatial politics that is emerging from it represent more than a passing academic fad. Nor can the resurgent interest in spatial thinking be reduced merely to an acknowledgement of what the traditionally spatial disciplines such as geography and architecture have been doing for years. The spatial turn is signalling a sea-change in intellectual and political thought and practice ...

An interesting example for me is contained in this issue of *Island Studies Journal*. The paper entitled ‘Tuvalu, sovereignty and climate change: considering *fenua*, the archipelago and emigration’ (Stratford, Farbotko and Lazrus) takes the idea of the Westphalian territorial state to task in a quite profound way. It does so by examining how the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648 has produced an enduring but increasingly problematic legacy in contemporary times. The nation state continues to be defined territorially by organizations such as the United Nations; but the parameters of this definition pose problems for archipelagos such as Tuvalu, where climate change and emigration are powerful forces. In such cases the question arises as to how those who leave or are displaced from the changing archipelago form can and should be both located and connected. This matter raises further questions: for how we can re-think themes of attachment, government and sovereignty in more fluid, *ex-situ* and less bounded times. Thinking spatially with the archipelago in this way challenges basic assumptions about territorially bounded political space, and connects with something many are struggling with today, namely “the dominance of territorially based democracy in a relational world” (Massey, 2005, p. 181).

Metamorphosis

Having briefly made that connection to the spatial turn, I do not however want to pursue it any further because I want to raise a new point instead: how thinking with the archipelago and island movements, rather than the static form, can shape how we think about culture. In particular, rather than draw our attention to such reductive categories as imitation and mimicry, the archipelago can open up our thinking so that we pay more attention to how island movements adapt, transfigure and transform inheritances. Drawing upon the work of Caribbean writer Derek Walcott in particular, this way of thinking with the archipelago foregrounds what I feel is the trope of *metamorphosis*. In different ways metamorphosis is, of course, a theme for many Caribbean writers, such as Wilson Harris, Kamau Brathwaite and Edouard Glissant; which further draws our attention to how thinking with the archipelago is an important device for challenging colonial legacies and their spatial inheritances.

Walcott has written many plays and poems: below I briefly draw upon his essays contained in the edited collection entitled *What the twilight says* (1998), particularly *The Muse of history* (1974/1998), and another essay from outside that collection entitled *The Caribbean: Mimicry or culture* (1974). In developing his unique way of thinking with the Caribbean archipelago, Walcott engages the ideas of ‘History’ and ‘Mimicry’ in interesting ways. My contention is that both have much to offer for those interested in thinking with the archipelago because, although differently from Stratford et al. (2011), they reject the idea of static form and, in Walcott’s case, do so by invoking the trope of metamorphosis.

In the *Muse of history*, Walcott (1998) discusses the idea of ‘history as *time*’. In many respects ‘history as time’ is similar to the concerns of the spatial turn noted above. History as time is linear and sequential; it separates out, arranges and judges people and places according to such binary categories as ‘the modern’ (Western) and ‘the residual’ (Caribbean); ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ countries; ‘central’ and ‘periphery’; ‘mainland’ and ‘island’. History as time conflates and downplays the importance of space; it reduces the importance of spatiality, different spatial trajectories and differences that are the central concerns of many associated with the spatial turn. It reduces island life to the sorts of dichotomies that Stratford et al. suggest thinking with the archipelago can challenge. It emphasizes binaries of

West/Caribbean, Prospero/Caliban, England/Africa, while – of course – the Caribbean island movement itself is the product of the transfiguration of all and more. Walcott, however, has a distinct take on this, because what he does, unashamedly, is to ridicule as "absurd" the idea of history as time. As he says in a comical passage:

In the history books the discoverer sets a shod foot on virgin sand, kneels, and the savage also kneels from his bushes in awe. Such images are stamped on the colonial memory, such heresy as the world's becoming holy from Crusoe's footprint or the imprint of Columbus's knee. These blasphemous images fade, because these hieroglyphs of progress are basically comic. And if the idea of the New and the Old becomes increasingly absurd, what must happen to our sense of time, what else can happen to history itself, but that it, too, is becoming absurd? (Walcott, 1998, p. 41).

In contrast to the idea of 'history as time', Walcott provocatively argues that "history is irrelevant" to the currents that really matter to the Caribbean island archipelago; not because history has never mattered, but because what matters to islands at the crossroads of multiple spatial trajectories is "the loss of history, the amnesia of the races" (Walcott, 1974, p. 6). Think the metamorphosis and creativity of creole island cultures of Carnival, folklore and religion. Think the multispaces of the Caribbean diaspora. Think the transfiguration – sometimes profound – of inherited English and African languages in Caribbean poetry and literature that repeats in different ways through the island archipelago movement. Think Caribbean food. The 'authentic' island movement is not to be found by resurrecting the past, by going back in time and crossing over into some 'original' moment, but is in the immanence of the contemporary present where "maturity is the assimilation of the features of every ancestor" (Walcott, 1998, p. 36).

Walcott highlights the example of the Caribbean Carnival to say that it may have emerged from the sanctions imposed upon it, but the banning of the African drum led to the discovery of the empty oil drum and the improvised use of waste. What may have started as mimicry, who knows, was in fact the invention of the island movement. When it comes to Caribbean religion, the pietistic rhythm of the missionary was transfigured by the slave who introduced a triumphal tribal mode to worship of their own. The missionaries' God was therefore stolen from them, even as the slave was being converted by being taught to swing and clap his hands. The slave became Christian, but in doing so the important point is that Christianity as a religion was born again through the movement of the island chain. Such examples illustrate Walcott's salient point, that mimicry is "not the force of the current, and that its surface may be littered with the despairs of broken systems and of failed experiments, that the river, stilled, may reflect, mirror, mimic other images, but that is not its depth" (Walcott, 1974, p. 6). For Walcott, the island movement does not pretend to exercise power in the historical sense, but is energized by the force of a creolised culture that settles on its own mode of inflection in each island along the change, of in particular "an oral culture of chants, jokes, folksongs, and fables ..." (Walcott, 1998a, p. 15). In short, the island-chain archipelago is a force of metamorphosis.

The movements of Caribbean carnival, religion and folklore are not simply inauthentic forms of imitation of things borrowed from the continents of Europe or Africa. They are inventive forms in their own right. Through the dynamic metamorphosis of the island movement it is impossible to reduce Caribbean life to a 'little Africa' or a 'little England'; to separate apart Caliban from Prospero, because the island movement is the product of all these and so much more. Caribbean island archipelagos transfigure material inheritances into something new. As Thompkins (no date, *my emphasis*) says of Caribbean food:

Once the Europeans brought Africans slaves into the region, the slaves' diet consisted mostly of food the slave owners did not want to eat. So the slaves had to be *inventive*, and they blended their traditional African foods with staples found on the islands.

Like others, including Wilson Harris and Kamau Brathwaite, Walcott emphasized decades ago that the creole archipelago is the product of multiple spatial trajectories, composed of cumulative tossings about and comings together (see also Connell, 1993; Clarke, 2001; DeLoughrey, 2004; Howard, 2005; Pugh, 2005; Lowenthal, 2007; McElroy, 2003; Sheller, 2009; Pugh, 2013; Grove, 2013). For these authors, the Caribbean has never respected linear notions of History. Creole culture and everyday life in the Caribbean bend and warp European time into something new. Take Carnival, for example: it is vulgar because it has no respect for History; historical epoch is placed next to historical epoch, adapted British Naval uniforms are worn at the same time as modified African headdress, without any regard for the History books. It may have taken the West a while to catch on, but as Walcott says, the island movement has always made the European idea of History look absurd.

On this point, it is worth noting that Walcott likes Shakespeare's style of writing in particular, and for good reason. Shakespeare's style is known as 'metaphysical wit' and emerged in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, also having been developed by Webster, Tasso, Middleton, Quevedo, and Tourneur, amongst others (Pugh, 2012). 'Metaphysical wit' was not distinguished by a political project, but by the creative and extended juxtaposition of unnaturally coupled similes (Smith, 1986). As Emerson (2000, p. 27) says, in the works of Shakespeare, the freshness of youth, a dazzling morning, and the growth of a city or state all become relative, tossed around like "baubles from hand to hand." Walcott (1974b, p. 4) says that "Shakespeare creolized" language "as much as any Third World writer". Like creole culture, Shakespeare's wit throws the ordinary use of words into question. As in the Caribbean Carnival, folklore and religion, Shakespeare's wit wrenches language from its original 'home' by putting words into previously unnatural combinations. For Walcott (1974b, p. 4) Shakespeare's Wit is inventive like the Caribbean island movement precisely because it is "vulgar". Indeed, the most vulgar character in Shakespeare, Caliban, is also given the most creative lines of *The Tempest*.

I tend to think about this positioning in the following way. Caliban constantly struggles with and against the language he has been taught by Prospero, in the end concluding that it is useless. When Caliban says, "you taught me language, and my profit on't, Is know how to curse", this is not I believe because Caliban is overwhelmed by the power of Prospero's words. It is rather the opposite. Caliban realizes that the language Prospero has taught him (presumably English syllables, metaphors and similes) is not up to the task of facilitating Caliban's deeper tribal and spiritual relationship to *Caliban's* island. The words Caliban has

been taught by Prospero are so useless that all Caliban can do is “curse” in frustration. Shakespeare’s is not, in other words, an attempt to show the power of Prospero’s civilizing tongue. Rather, it is the contrary. Shakespeare’s is a sophisticated attempt to demonstrate the importance of moments of impasse, weakness, and inadequacy in the inheritance of language; this is what reduces Caliban to a frustrated and angry curse. The language Caliban has been taught is simply not up to the job. He must now go on and adapt it to his own use. Shakespeare therefore unsurprisingly makes Caliban’s final scene with Prospero not one of power, but one of conspicuous impasse and resignation for both parties. The words Prospero has taught Caliban can no longer hold Caliban captive. Caliban walks off the stage, presumably to try and adapt the language he has been taught and put it to better use.

Like Edouard Glissant (1997; 2005) who came after him, Walcott stresses a newness to the Caribbean that is not delivered in the terms of cutting edge capitalism, but rather from the sense of Adamic renewal associated with renaming the world (see Llenín-Figueroa, 2012). This renaming takes many forms through the island movement. In Barbados where I work, the Barbados Landship is a social welfare and dance institution that emerged in the nineteenth century. To reduce it to a combination of influences from the British Navy and African drum beats—that is, to reduce Caribbean culture to a caricatured ‘melting pot’—is, however, to do injustice to the dynamic form. A cruel colonial legacy demands that the Caribbean be more than just baroque. It rather demands what Walcott (1974, p. 13) calls the search for “self-annihilation, to beginning again.” The Landship, Carnival, and Caribbean religion demonstrate clearly that this beginning does take place by means of the island movement, although it may be too slow for many. The important pre-political point here is not to reduce the dynamic form of the archipelago to a mere imitation of something else, and instead to open up spaces of possibility for it to emerge with its own terms. The transformation and adaptation of colonial language through Caribbean patois is one further obvious illustration of this idea. The evolution of patois through island chains demonstrates a dire if often unconscious need to grasp life on one’s own terms: for example, to grasp the beauty of the Caribbean in a language that is not borrowed from others.

It might be tempting at this point to make a connection to Benítez-Rojo’s (1996) notion of the ‘repeating island’, but I feel that this idea is problematic. Too easily it suggests shared island experiences repeating across the chain. While the Caribbean has shared many experiences, indeed is bound by one overarching and archipelago experience called slavery, Walcott’s way of conceptualizing inheritance accents the contingency of the form more effectively than does Benítez-Rojo. The real force of the Caribbean island archipelago movement is a metamorphosis that emphasises invention and creation.

Although in many ways their positions are indeed adversarial, the work of Kamau Brathwaite (1988; 1999) can briefly be invoked to illustrate the metamorphic qualities of the island archipelago. In a wonderful phrase, Brathwaite has famously called the movement “tidalectic” rather than dialectical. What Brathwaite (1999) means by tidalectic is that the island movement is not cyclical; rather, like the tide, it emphasizes the changing nature of material, cultural and psychological island processes. These do not return the archipelago to the same state every night, but instead stress the sometimes slow and subtle processes of adaptation, transformation and change. Tidalectic currents often work by throwing received truths into question, bringing about moments of impasse and states of suspension, while at the same time creating something new. As Brathwaite (1999, p. 34) writes, tidalectic forces come “from one continent/continuum, touching another, and then receding (‘reading’) from the

island(s) into the perhaps creative chaos of the(ir) future...”. Tidalectics is not about either/or binaries, but both territorial and deterritorialized forces working in conjunction with each other at the same time. As Stratford et al. (2011, p. 124) say:

islands *qua* archipelagos invite us to recover a history and a practice of what Brathwaite called tidalectics; of tossings, across and between seas, of people, things, processes and affects: “technologies for un-islanding” (Pugliese, 2011: 148). ‘Middle Passages’ become cognitive spaces in their own right, redolent with meaning; points and platforms of observation and not just spaces of flows.

One could be tempted to argue here that those who think with the archipelago did not need to wait for the sea change that brought about the spatial turn in western academia, because many are themselves the product of a sea-change called the Middle Passage (DeLoughrey, 2007). This theme is central to work by Wilson Harris (1995), to which I now turn.

Harris makes the point that middle passages are *cognitive* spaces explicit through his discussion of the arrival of the ‘limbo’ through the Caribbean archipelago. Harris traces the limbo back to the slave ships where there was so little space that the slaves contorted themselves into human spiders. For Harris, however, the limbo is a place where one is lost between to other places; it is a gateway or threshold to a new world, itself characterized by dislocation and change. The limbo is an archetypal symbol of “sea-change” (Harris, 1995, p. 379), metamorphosis and creativity associated with Caribbean culture. It illustrates how the island archipelago is the product of an inventive movement that transfigures inheritances into something new. Harris (ibid.) says that waves of Caribbean people over the centuries have possessed the limbo’s “stamp of the spider metamorphosis.” What Harris is doing here in alluding to the ‘spider’ is combining the spider-like contortions of slaves on ships, the spider’s shedding of old skin amounting to the shedding of old identities, and the spinning of the web, so that being in limbo represents a movement that reveals how, through the island archipelago, the origins of language and culture can only be found reconstructed and transformed.

All of the foregoing amounts to one thing: the Caribbean archipelago is a movement that refuses to concede to history. It is a place of Adamic renewal against tragic overdetermination. Its Middle Passage is one of metamorphosis. In what has become a famous passage from *The muse of history*, Walcott (1998, p. 64) closes in a way that is worth quoting at some length for the light it sheds upon how we can think with the Caribbean archipelago:

I say to the ancestor who sold me, and to the ancestor who bought me, I have no father, I want no such father, although I can understand you, black ghost, white ghost, when you both whisper ‘history,’ for if I attempt to forgive you both I am falling into your idea of history which justifies and explains and expiates, and it is not mine to forgive, my memory cannot summon any filial love, since your features are anonymous and erased and I have no wish and no power to pardon ... I give the strange and bitter and yet ennobling thanks for the monumental groaning and soldering of two great worlds, like the halves of a fruit seamed by its own bitter juice, that exiled from your own Edens you have placed me in the wonder of another, and that was my inheritance and your gift.

Although they do not explicitly consider the trope of metamorphosis, I nevertheless think that it does connect in interesting ways to the concept of the archipelago being developed by Stratford et al. (2011). There is, for example, perhaps something of it hidden within the paradigm case of Tuvalu that Stratford et al. highlight to illustrate their thinking about the archipelago. What the example of Tuvalu demonstrates for me, as in the work of Walcott above, is not that History hegemonizes space, but that the slow formation of a language eventually goes beyond colonial mimicry; a language that has something of the force of revelation as it has invented names for things and created its own culture. It is worth quoting Stratford et al. (2011, p. 123) at some length to draw out my point:

Tuvalu is inherently archipelagic. Its origins are uncertain, but it seems probable that the word ‘Tuvalu’ gained significance only after contact with non-Oceanic peoples. *Tu* means ‘to stand’ and *valu* means ‘eight’. The name Tuvalu draws on an identity based on shared senses of competition and cooperation between and among the communities of eight of nine islands in the archipelago—all except one being traditionally inhabited. The word may have found its initial spark of existence at the insistence of Donald Kennedy, an administrator, teacher and amateur anthropologist from New Zealand who lived in Tuvalu, then called the Ellice Islands, between two world wars. A possibly pivotal event is recounted (Paalo, 1981): when Kennedy insisted that a group of boys assisting him to conduct fieldwork should sit together and discuss a meaningful indigenous name for the Ellice Islands. ‘Tuvalu’ is what they agreed on. The name Atu Tuvalu—cluster of eight—was considered ‘native’ only a few decades later (Roberts, 1958). However, that the word Tuvalu is a recent creation is in dispute. Some record the name for Tuvalu before European contact as Te Atu Tuvalu—archipelago of eight, or eight standing together—suggesting a long-standing collective identity (Connell, 1980). Either way, it is a word that reflects the importance of the eight *fenua* that comprise this archipelagic state: a term denoting an island, its communities, and how community life is enacted in place and made mobile across places (*also* Farbotko, 2010a, 2010b). Whatever the origins of the word Tuvalu, it was legally and popularly recognized and cemented with the declaration of independence from Britain: October 1, 1978.

Such an example demonstrates the importance of what Walcott says when he encourages us to look upon post-colonial island languages “as a living element” rather than reductive forms of enslavement (Walcott, 1998, p. 62). It shows that the underlying current of the island archipelago is metamorphosis. Of course, as Stratford et al. write, it is difficult to see such island movements if the dominant tropes remain those of the static territorial form.

For me, therefore, to study the archipelago formation is to expose the originality of a movement that is all too easily lost through diversions that reduce it to mere expressions or mimicry of something else. This is *not* to suggest a return to the island tropes of singularity, but instead to emphasize Walcott’s theme of metamorphosis associated with the island-chain archipelago. Through the island movement, Walcott underscores what he calls the struggle and “elation” of the “elemental” naming of the New World; being inhabited by presences and not chained to the past (Walcott, 1998, p. 37); this is, for me, what it is to study an island archipelago movement.

Conclusion

This paper has briefly considered what it could mean to think with the archipelago and to foreground island movements rather than the binaries mainland/island and the static form. It takes its cue from an excellent paper published in this journal in 2011 by Stratford, Baldacchino, McMahon, Farbotko and Harwood entitled *Envisioning the archipelago*. Thinking with the archipelago has, to date, not been a central concern of the social sciences or humanities. The legacy of powerful philosophical traditions that constitute place and space in the narrow terms of predefined territorial boundaries and borders has perhaps been too overwhelming. But as this paper has explained, in many ways we do live in a world of archipelagos. The Caribbean and the Philippines are more obvious examples, but so are Canada and Australia, composed of thousands of island-island movements.

This paper has firstly considered how thinking with the archipelago reflects and contributes in important ways to an increasingly prominent concern of the contemporary social sciences and humanities; namely, the 'spatial turn'. Thinking with the archipelago and the spatial turn both seek to denaturalize space so that it is more than a mere backcloth for political or ethical debate. Instead, highlighting ontologies such as assemblages, networks and mobilities, draws out the importance of spatial nuances, differences and connectivities, rather than adhering to that absurd cry 'History', associated with such grand narratives as progress, development and colonialism.

My second and related interest in thinking with the archipelago focused upon the post-colonial island movements of the Caribbean. I do not claim that what I have said is necessarily relevant to other islands, and other islanders; that is for further consideration at another time. As well as emphasizing multiple spatial trajectories, cumulative tossings and comings together, my argument has been that the Caribbean island movement foregrounds a trope of metamorphosis. This matter is not simply one of the Caribbean gone baroque: it is a dire, if at times unconscious, need to respond to the cruel legacies of colonialism; to rename and rediscover the Caribbean anew. Thinking with the archipelago stresses the emergence of the dynamic form. This insight is brought out particularly well in the work of Derek Walcott, which shows how the underlying force of the island current is not mimicry, as famously claimed by authors like Naipaul (2012) and Bhabha (1994), but rather a creative transfiguration of inheritances into something new. Rocks, trees and rivers in the Caribbean do not 'mimic' those in Africa or England. The absurdity of the idea of mimicry is revealed when we say that a forest in Jamaica mimics a forest in Africa. Once the idea has been revealed as absurd, we are left with the more useful question: how do Caribbean people struggle with and against the language that they have inherited, and is this language up to the task of effectively naming and renaming the New World that they inhabit? This was the point of my earlier engagement with *The Tempest*, Caliban and Prospero.

By developing the conceptual tools of the archipelago, island studies scholars, including Stratford et al. (2011), are generating a framework that will be particularly appealing to those of us who are already receptive to tropes of transfiguration rather than repetition, who find binaries and dichotomies too cut and dry, and for whom cross-currents and sea-changes are more appropriate tropes than those of periphery/ centre, mainland/island. The concept of the archipelago gives us another reason why we should not only think about, but with, islands.

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