What the Sea Portends: A Reconsideration of Contested Island Tropes

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Abstract: This paper argues for a shift in the focus of island-themed scholarship away from theories of islandness toward an engagement with psychologies of island experience. The former project has become mired in intractable dilemmas. The present paper pursues two linked lines of observation. First, it is maintained that integral to any coherent notion of islandness is a psychology that simultaneously assimilates containment with remoteness and isolation (the latter not to be equated with disconnectedness). In some of its manifestations this psychology is pathological in character, conducive to despair, cultural and economic stagnation, and a xenophobic conservatism. In others it is enabling, conducive to resilience, resourcefulness, cultural dynamism and a can-do economics. It may also make islands unusually relevant, rather than unimportant backwaters, in the search for workable modes of living on a small and fraught planet. Second, it is contended that, if there is enough in the notion of islandness to justify a coherent intellectual preoccupation called 'island studies', it must have to do with the element of the *sea*. Isolation, remoteness, containment – none of these psychological orientations, the qualities popularly held to characterize islands, will do – because these are all characteristics of certain real and imagined continental locations, and must, therefore, be psychological qualities evoked by some more primary condition. If there is something coherent to island studies beyond its status as a branch of biogeography or a minor tributary within literary studies, it must be that to be girt by sea creates distinctive island psychologies. Nevertheless, as globalizing processes burgeon, such a psychology becomes more precarious – containment, remoteness and a sense of apartness from the great human tides inevitably recede – and this is the real threat to a coherent sense of islandness (and, hence, 'island studies').

Keywords: island studies, isolation, boundaries, oceans, globalization

Introduction: the fraught status of island studies

Philip Conkling, founder of the Island Institute in Rockland, Maine, USA, has written: 'if the characteristics of islanders resonate through time and space, then certain qualities must transcend local culture. The result is something we define as islandness' (2007, p. 192). It is precisely this common thread – the commonality that Conkling assumes – that much recent island studies scholarship now calls into question.

I am with the sceptics, though reluctantly. The problem, it seems to me, is that 'the characteristics of islanders' seem *not* to 'resonate through time and space', with the consequence that theoretical faultlines have emerged within island studies that have proven utterly intractable. The reason for this lies in the bewildering diversity among the planet's

islands: a diversity, indeed, that renders each island radically particular. Most islands are archipelagic, perhaps having close relationships with neighbouring islands, as well as (usually) with larger landmasses nearby. But when it comes to comparison, it is apparent that even the nature and quality of these relationships is so specific that difference is heightened and perceived commonalities elude identification. Differing colonial histories reinforce this trend. So do geographical differences. Though few of the world's uncountably proliferant islands are genuinely 'oceanic', such islands throw up characteristics that have little in common with archipelagic islands.[1] And that is not an end to it. Larger islands differ significantly from smaller islands. Islands dominated by a mountainous hinterland may have little in common with low-lying sand or coral islands. Tropical islands differ dramatically from temperate or cold-climate islands. And I do not only wish to establish these as intractable differences on the ground – the construction of island representations faithfully reflects this stubborn proliferation. Noting that 'islands can be marshy, tidal, peninsular or bridged [whilst] yet others are caught somewhere between rocky outcrops or islets and serving alternatively as mainlands (for other islands) as well as continents', Williams notes that 'questions arising around matters of size and remoteness extend then to definitions of isolation, insularity and islandness', as well as 'the complexity of islands as they range between closure and openness, interiority and exteriority, singular fixity and diasporic multiplicity' (2012, p. 215).[2] Baldacchino also seems to concede the impossibility of formulating an authoritative definition of 'island' (2007, pp. 4-5), though he believes, nevertheless, that 'island(ers) have a sufficient commonality to warrant looking at them comparatively, justifying a systematic "island studies" perspective' (2005, p. 247; see also Baldacchino 2008 for a detailed consideration of the obstacles to epistemological coherence in island studies).

I have myself written on what I have called the 'intractable faultlines' within island studies (Hay, 2006; for a critical riposte to the arguments developed therein, see Fletcher 2011, though Fletcher does concur with the premise that the current state of island epistemology is parlous). In that paper, I make the case for a phenomenology of place, valorising island specificity and the construction of island meanings in the unique terms of emotional dialogue between the hard biophysicality of each island and the people who live, or regularly interact, with it (and each other). It is a view that seems close to the 'performative geography' that Fletcher champions; nevertheless, she retains an aversion to the 'identity politics' that a phenomenology of island place necessarily entails, because this is seen to impede 'any committed engagement with postcolonial studies' (2011, p. 21). I think that Fletcher – and much of the postcolonial epistemological paradigm – is mistaken in this, and I will return to it below. Here, though, I merely wish to make the point that my earlier views remain substantially unchanged, and the current paper seeks to extend them in profitable directions.

Recognizing that the pedagogic unfashionability of phenomenology renders it unlikely that the key argument in my earlier paper will prevail, but that scepticism grows concerning the prospects for achieving theoretical coherence within island studies, two ways forward are

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[1] By 'oceanic island', I wish to connote a dominant character of apartness from other landforms, such that, in terms of human experiential interchange, or 'hard' isolation in terms of natural biological interchange, separation from elsewhere is the island's primary qualitative principle. Of course, such islands may be legally and administratively constructed as archipelagos (as in the case of St. Helena, Tristan da Cunha and Ascension), but the existence of such 'archipelagos of jurisdictional convenience' hardly qualifies the primary character attribution connoted here.

[2] Lists of dualist constructions of island meanings abound in the literature. A good summation of these can be found in Stratford (2003, p. 495).

suggested. One, consistent with my preference for a grounded pedagogy, though not theoretically dependent upon it, is that it may be possible to find the theoretically transportable coherence that island studies requires within the *emotional terrain* of island engagement. (There may, then, be something after all to Conkling's observation cited in my opening paragraph.) The second is that, if there is enough substance to the notion of islandness to justify a coherent intellectual preoccupation called 'island studies', it must have to do with water, the element common to all islands, and, more specifically, the sea.[3] Kathleen Moore observes that 'an island can't be an island without the sea' (Martin, 2009, p. 357), which may seem to be stating the bleeding obvious, but sometimes the bleeding obvious needs to be said. Beer has noted that '"isle", in its earliest forms, derived from a word for water… In Old English, "land" was added to it to make a compound: "is-land": water-surrounded land. The idea of water is thus intrinsic to the word…' (1989, p. 16).

I came to this view some time ago. Thus, reflecting (in dialogue with Williams) on the apparently intractable problems with which attempts to construct a coherent theory of islands and islandness are beset, I mused that, 'if there *is* something to the realness of islands that can sustain an intellectual preoccupation called "island studies", it must… have to do with the element of the *sea*' (Williams and Hay, 2011, p. 11). But I found it difficult to move beyond that single raw insight. Then, in 2012, Phil Hayward published his paper, 'Aquapelagos and Aquapelagic Assemblages'. In his phrase, 'aquapelagic assemblages', Hayward seeks to 'emphasize the manner in which the aquatic spaces between and around groups of islands are utilized and navigated…' (2012a, p. 1). I did not agree with all that Hayward seemed to argue in this paper. In particular, his insistence that 'the manner in which the aquatic spaces between and around groups of islands are utilized and navigated in a manner that is fundamentally interconnected with and essential to social groups' habitation of land' (2012a, p. 1) seemed to deny to non-human entities and processes any agency in the relational constitution of such spaces; to privilege *homo faber* over a more primal island being. More recently, acknowledging deployment of 'somewhat fuzzy concepts of the social and – implicitly – putting a "hard" barrier between the social and non-human entities', and drawing upon Latour's 'actant-rhyzome ontology' (2005) and Bennett's 'political ecology of things' (2010), Hayward has brilliantly resolved this problem (to my mind), such that he now describes his project as one of exploring how 'aquapelagic spaces are one site in which… humans inhabit – and are causing and catalysing changes to – the wider environments of the planet, its oceans, its climate and biomass', whilst acknowledging that, nevertheless, 'those humans implicated into aquapelagic spaces are interacting with a diverse range of actants' (2012b, p. 2). In any event, by throwing focus back upon the land/sea interface, Hayward's original paper had, I thought, made a major contribution to the islands discourse. Of course, there have always been those who have seen this interface as central to the discourse. Beer has written: 'the concept "island" implies a particular and intense relationship of land and water' (2003, p. 271), whilst Baldacchino, responding to Hayward, writes: 'our nagging (and continental?) hesitation to

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[3] Saltwater islands have featured much more strongly within the island imaginary than freshwater islands, and island studies as a distinct focus of theoretical disquisition has developed almost entirely within an assumed context of saltwater geographies, possibly because freshwater islands tend either to be so thoroughly integrated within large urban agglomerations that their island characteristics have been effectively expunged (think Île de la Cité in Paris or Île de Montréal in Montreal), or, by contrast, they have not been permanent sites of significant human engagement or sites of island-unique species assemblages.

submit to the sea reduces our willingness and disposition to privilege maritimity, even in the case of island societies, where it presents itself as most self-evident' (2012a, p. 24).

This needs to be said, because the current 'party line' within island studies is to emphasize connectivity as the antonym of a bounded sensibility, and in this process the ocean is lost, reduced to one of two inadequate and opposed stereotypes: hard barrier, or highway to somewhere else. Hayward himself wrote in reaction to a paper in *Island Studies Journal,* in which Stratford, Baldacchino, MacMahon, Farbotko & Harwood (2011) seek to foreground archipelagic (or island to island) relationality, in the process of which the space between islands – the sea – is thoroughly backgrounded. Indeed, the authors (all but one of whom are, or were, my colleagues at the University of Tasmania) insist that, in current island scholarship, there is 'a clear focus on islands' singularity, unique histories and cultures, crafted and inscribed by the border between land and *sea*'; furthermore, this focus is 'somewhat overworked' (2011, p. 114). I strongly disagree with my colleagues' description of how things currently stand in island studies *as a statement of fact*. The theoretical status of the land/sea border is not 'somewhat overworked'. The opposite is the case – it is 'significantly underworked' – and, with Hayward, I hold the view that rectification of this deficiency is an imperative within the discourse. I also reject my colleagues' larger project. I argue *for* a 'clear focus on islands' singularity, unique histories and culture'. To do otherwise is to elide the theoretical intractability that plagues island pedagogy, and it is to lose sight of the irreducible particularity of real islands, with their internally complex and richly storied (if often ambiguously) is-ness. 'No matter how small the island', John Terrell correctly observes, 'each and every one is a place (tract, habitat, etc) of real variation and genuine diversity' (2004, p. 70). This being so, it is not those who explicate particularity who seek 'to reduce and manage complexity for convenience, benign indifference, or malevolent resolve' (Stratford et al: 2011, p. 114). Such a descriptor (exempting 'malicious resolve') more aptly fits those who over-theorize, and in the doing smear out real lives and real islands into the bland non-being of abstraction.

Islands real, islands abstracted, and the 'island effect'

In the inaugural issue of *Island Studies Journal,* I made a case for the explication of 'real' islands to remain the central concern of island studies (Hay, 2006). Stratford et al., in contrast, argue for deployment of the island as 'a model, rather than simply a site [of investigation]' (2011, p. 114).[4] I wish to resist this call for abstraction, arguing instead for that concern for the phenomenological ground of island particularity that I deem paramount. I made that call, back in 2007, because I did not want 'island', in the mainstream of island scholarship, to be relegated (yes, 'relegated') to the status of idea, concept, metaphor. It seemed to me, as it still does, that 'island studies' was in danger of being subsumed within a paradigm that can loosely be called 'postcolonial studies' – a paradigm that has, in effect, become the new 'party line' in island studies research.

The most forthright call for precisely this development has come from Lisa Fletcher (2011). Fletcher pitches her case as one from 'outside the tent'; claiming embattled minority status for her position, a claim that struck me as bizarre in light of the proliferation of writings on islands within postcolonial studies that have appeared in recent years. Caribbean-focused island scholarship, for instance, takes place almost exclusively within this paradigm. In

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[4] The quote is from Edmond and Smith (2003, p. 7), but Stratford et al. cite it approvingly.

Fletcher's view, by contrast, 'the commitment to "real islands"… runs through island studies', and this, the dominant paradigm as she sees it, 'risks missing the key fact that human encounters with physical space are always managed by our position in linguistic and cultural systems of representation' (2011, p. 19). I will, I know, be henceforth labelled as an enemy of postcolonial studies, and it is true that there are aspects of this epistemological paradigm that I oppose – I am about to survey these – but I am, nevertheless, much attracted to what transpires under the rubric of 'postcolonial studies'. Fletcher labels it 'exciting' (2011, p. 19), and she is right. It is vital that explication of ongoing colonial structures of dominance, and their tenacious and subtle buttresses, be foregrounded, and the focus within postcolonial studies upon the tenacity of colonial cultural processes is a welcome corrective to the stress on economic structures within the Marxism of the 1970s-80s (though I much preferred that paradigm's deployment of *neo*-colonialism, with its clear stress upon the *persistence* of patterns of dominance, to the *post*colonial identifier of today, given that the prefix 'post' strongly connotes a location within a discontinued past).[5]

But I cannot follow Fletcher into the position of extreme linguistic determinism enunciated in the quotation above. It is a truism that humans think with words and mediate all worldly interactions through a linguistic prism, but to view such interaction as 'managed' thereby – which I here assume to equate with 'controlled' or 'shaped by' – is to strip agency from the world itself, including the people within it. Meanings are shaped in dialogue between the conceptual/linguistic apparatus that people bring to bear upon their subject and the electric messaging of the phenomenon itself – a dialogic construction of what is, what was, and what is to come that seems very near the *performativity* that Fletcher advocates. Indeed, the later part of her paper, where she seeks to transcend 'unhelpful' dichotomies (such as reality / representation) seems somewhat at odds with her earlier hegemonic claim for linguistic primacy. As it happens, I agree with her that the reality/representation dualism is unhelpful. It is not even, in my view, a valid dichotomy, for representation is not to be set against reality, but is ever an attempt – doomed always to be partial at best – to communicate the interiority of some elusive reality (e.g. Ronström, 2013). What we must absolutely resist, in my view, is the impulse to privilege representation over reality. To do so is 'to turn "names into things"' (2003, p. 3), a tendency against which Gillis, from *within* the postcolonial paradigm, rightly cautions. It is to reify the symbolic and the disembodied and, in eliding the real lives of real people into abstractions, it is profoundly disempowering; a replication, indeed, of a postcolonial mindset.

I also think that much postcolonial theory needs to overcome its apparent reluctance to critique structures of globalization. Such a stricture applies almost exclusively to theorists of postcolonialism working within a linguistics or literary studies epistemological framework. This is emphatically not how it was for the founding contributors to the paradigm, of course – certainly not for such as Edward Said – but for many literary theorists within the postcolonial paradigm, global fluidity, with its flash, its dynamism, its restless cult of surface shift and effect, seems to promise some potent if formless potential for liberation. But the promise is illusory, the fluidity all a play of light upon surface. Look to the structures rather than the play, and it is clear that the technologies and economic compressions of global culture, global economy, remain the most potent vector for replicating extant patterns of colonial dominance. Edmond and Smith are within the culture-focused postcolonial paradigm, but they are critical of '… a familiar kind of postcolonial theory that celebrates migrancy, liminality and

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[5] Royle (2010) addresses this problem by opting to distinguish between 'postcolonial' and 'post-colonial'.

indeterminacy as intrinsically liberatory' (2003, p. 10). In fact, I will later defend the liberatory potential inherent within liminality, but, insofar as Edmond and Smith are pointing here to a sympathy within postcolonial studies for the inchoate flux (economic, cultural, ecological, demographic) that is the hallmark of a globalized world, they point to an important failing within much (not all) postcolonial studies. This reluctance to stand unambiguously against the inexorable impacts of globalization accounts for the aversion within some variants of postcolonial studies to the identity politics of place phenomenology[6] because such a politics assumes that a degree of constancy in the relationship between people and the ground they inhabit is desirable, portraying as pathological the unregulated flux of globalization, a flux that strips from people a potent basis for agency in the face of remote and faceless power structures that deny a capacity for social and individual autonomy. Global flux only hides the persistence of long-standing structures of dominance, and the psychological terrain it evokes is not liberating, but terrifyingly devoid of reference points; profoundly anomic.

Again, this is a pathology within literary studies/linguistics articulations of postcolonial theory. In its more mainstream variants, postcolonial theory embraces identity politics as a key locus of resistance to postcolonial tenacities, and the valorization of multivocality to which grounded, place-specific identities contribute significantly, is unambiguously embraced. This is why my own preferred approach to the study of islands is to explicate particularity rather than abstraction; to seek the especial in each island, or, to the extent that it might prove possible, each cluster of islands. I want to know about – and to represent, or have represented to me – real islands. Such representations are constructed in the dialogue, the dance, the *performativty,* that comes into play when humans, as individuals or in collectivities, engage with the physicality of islands, as well as each other. Though Fletcher is leery of the identity politics of place phenomenology, her own 'performative geographies' are deeply enmeshed within the pedagogy of place phenomenology, as Ian Maxwell has recently made clear in an application to island studies. In 'Performance Studies', he writes, 'a great deal of work has taken a lead from what phenomenologist Edward Casey (1997) refers to as "the primacy of place"', within which 'we live a radical continuity with our worlds.' This insight has been taken up in performance studies 'in order to understand how place and performance inter-animate, or are co-constitutive of meaning…' (2012, p. 23). Precisely my project – and also Hayward's. He moves seamlessly from Maxwell's account of the prominence of performativity within place philosophy to 'a thorough recognition of and engagement with specifics', in this case, the specifics of each 'differently constituted and temporally fluid' aquapelagic assemblage (Hayward, 2012b, p. 3).

Meanwhile, I seek a coherent explanation for identity construction on islands – and islands, it will be remembered, are characterized by an irreducible uniqueness. To progress this project, I must establish that there is something qualitatively distinct about life on islands (those bits of earth that are, in my country's national anthem, 'girt by sea') that sets them apart from metaphoric islands; those tracts of space to which we might apply Beer's 'island-idea' (1989, pp. 22-3), though I prefer to describe such spaces as characterized by an 'island effect'. DeLoughrey notes that *Webster's Dictionary* defines 'island' as referencing more than 'a small tract of land surrounded by water'; its meaning also includes '"something resembling an island especially in its *isolated or surrounded position"*' (2004, p. 301, emphasis in original). It is such usages to which I would ascribe the 'island effect' signifier, thereby distinguishing them from 'island'.

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[6] Fletcher is one who partakes of this aversion (2011, p. 21).

Many spatial configurations have attracted application of the metaphor, 'island'. It is also deployed as a descriptor for many social and psychological conditions. Gillis has written that '… islands of the mind continue to be extraordinarily valuable symbolic resources, a treasure trove of images through which the West understands itself and its relations with the larger world. Like all master metaphors, the island is capable of representing a multitude of things' (2004, p. 32). As we have seen, lists of the more prominent metaphoric deployments of 'island' abound within the literature. In due course, I will consider the most prominent of the geographical applications of the 'island effect' metaphor: desert oases, mountain fastnesses, urban ghettos.

An 'island effect' differs from the mother concept, 'island,' in this: its real-world referent is *not* 'girt by sea' but is 'islanded' by some other enveloping medium. 'Island effect' sites are, however, hard- and distinctly-edged, their borders constituting barriers that are not easily crossed, and such island signifiers as 'isolated', 'vulnerable', 'contained', and 'disconnected' are deemed applicable. If there is something to the island condition – the *real* island condition – something that establishes life on islands as qualitatively distinct from circumstances in which the 'island effect' applies but where the islanding medium is something other than water, such distinctiveness must have to do with the elemental nature of the selfsame sea. That is what I seek to explore in the remainder of this paper.

A boundaried sensibility: 'isolation' reconsidered

The ocean's very restlessness, the retreat-and-advance rhythm of its tides, moving the land-sea edge forward and back, accentuates the temporality and contingency of island boundaries.[7] As Quon astutely observes, 'the human mind seeks a definition that the ocean frustrates; feels ill-at-ease when confronted by featurelessness on such a scale' (2005, p. 1), and it may be anxiety on this account that hitherto induced island scholars to depict islands as tightly confined behind a 'hard' boundary.[8] As we have seen, we are now experiencing a reaction against that earlier tendency, and writings that seek to valorize connection, possibly even establishing it as *the* island condition, proliferate. Perhaps it *is* important to note that the extent to which island lives are now enmeshed in wider global networks is a comparatively recent development,

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[7] In this paper, I have used the terms 'sea' and 'ocean' as interchangeable, as we commonly do in our daily use of the terms. Strictly speaking, though, the two words are not synonymous, 'ocean' connoting the vastness of great geographical divisions, 'sea' connoting a slightly more circumscribed body of open water. Within semi-enclosed seas, in the Mediterranean for example, tidal variation may be somewhat less dramatic than elsewhere, though such conditions are exceptional rather than the global norm, and even when they do prevail, they merely qualify the 'restless' character of the sea. Classical Mediterranean literature, for example, is replete with descriptions of venturesome mariners beset by great and terrible turbulence whilst chancing the perilous sea.

[8] Stratford, for example, advancing the case for privileging an archipelagic island studies paradigm, argues that 'the idea of the archipelago suggests relations built on connection, assemblage, mobility and multiplicity' (2013, p. 3), which is to dismiss from the paradigm, by implication, such 'traditional' characteristics of island living as isolation and boundedness. Indeed, Stratford identifies a 'colonizing grammar of empire that rendered islands remote, isolated and backward' (2013, p. 4). Excepting 'backward', such attributions are not the products of an enduring postcolonial discourse, but grounded in primary psychologies of island living – anything but a 'colonizing grammar of empire'. They are not alternative states of mind to those listed by Stratford as characterizing an archipelagic paradigm, but cross-currents within the unsimplifiable complexity of islandness. In the same issue of the *Island Studies Journal*, for which Stratford served as guest editor, Brinklow provides a useful corrective, bracketing boundedness and isolation with connection and community (2013, p. 40).

constituting almost a sea-change in the nature of island life. That apart, the fact of island connectivity seems so self-evident as to hardly require demonstration. Poetic exemplification does it most succinctly. Here is 'Village Poet?' by Miles Campbell from Staffin, on Skye,

> Village poet, what village?
> Today I spoke with a man from Kyoto,
> perhaps an email will come from Wagga Wagga.
> There's a web of conversation
> Between Illinois and Mandalay,
> Between Portree and Parramatta.
> My grandmother, I'm sure,
> Was never out of Staffin.
> Now, Paris is just down the road (2011 [2002], p. 117).

Connectivity, then, is now a fact of island life. What I *do* contest, though, is its deployment as the antithesis of 'isolated'. Clark, for instance, writes: 'island metaphors abound. To the extent that they reinforce images of isolation, they are misleading, since all societies have crucial interactions with other societies' (2004, p. 287), whilst DeLoughrey's book, *Routes and Roots,* has, as its central theme, 'the myth of island isolation' this being a 'trope' constructed by 'European colonialism' that defies the 'tidalectic' relationships that flow island to island (2007, p. 2). Against this, I take the view that, in one crucial sense, 'isolation' is still *the* key defining characteristic of an island identity. Islanders are *not* isolated is the sense of being denied connection to the wider world. But they *are* isolated in the sense that the encircling sea constitutes an emphatic *perceptual* boundary; a clearly evident delimiter that is *experienced* as an edge of primary significance.[9] Conkling also identifies 'isolation' as *the* defining characteristic of islandness. 'Islandness', he writes, 'is a metaphysical sensation that derives from the heightened experience that accompanies physical isolation' (2007, p. 191). Yet he is writing from the Maine islands, and hardly any of the planet's innumerable islands could be *more* connected, *less* remote, than these. It is simply not the case, then, as Stratford *et al* contend, that to acknowledge the boundedness of islands is to establish an idea of islands 'as complete in and of themselves... insular unto themselves' (2011, p. 115). Nor is this 'merely' a matter of perception. The sea is a boundary that does call forth effort from islanders wishing to cross it. It is easy enough to transcend such a boundary virtually (via contemporary communication technologies), but to physically transcend it asks for something more from a person.

These factors endow islanders with a sense of being 'contained within' – which is not to be equated with 'imprisoned behind'. The sea is palpably there, and it insists to islanders that they are 'apart from'; 'separate from', supplying the phenomenological ground of island particularity (elaborated in Hay, 2003). 'By virtue of being surrounded by water', Brinklow (2012a, p. 145) observes in her study of selected fiction by Newfoundlander, Wayne Johnston,

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[9] I also wish to distinguish between 'isolated' and 'insular'. The latter term is freighted with more negativity than the former. Though in a tautological sense all islands and island existences must be 'insular', in its more common usage the word references a pathological *state of mind,* whereas 'isolated' tends to be more usually deployed as a neutral descriptor of a physical circumstance. Kenneth Olwig is one who finds 'insular' deeply offensive, arguing that the very term is an imposition from beyond, having 'no purchase among islanders' (K.R. Olwig, 2007, p. 178) and Baldacchino also notes the term's 'semantic baggage of... negativism' (2004, p. 272). I am willing to try to rehabilitate 'isolated'; but it is too late in the day to attempt a refurbishment of 'insular'.

and Cape Breton Islander, Alistair MacLeod, 'islanders will experience psychological and emotional boundedness'. 'Emotional boundedness', indeed, is 'a major theme in these authors' stories and novels' (2012, p. 133), such a sense of containment being so tenacious, Gillis notes, that it persists even when physical bounds are breached, for 'displaced islanders carry their "islescapes" with them wherever they go' (2004, p. 147).[10] Nor need this experience of 'emotional boundedness' be stultifying in any way. In extended – and separate – empirical projects with creative practitioners from a range of the planet's islands, Brinklow and MacKay found that, 'within the very physical and limiting boundary of an island, artists feel a freedom they don't feel elsewhere: the island forces them to go deeper into themselves, allows them to be more who they are, which in turn allows for endless possibility' (2013, p. 11).[11] It has been observed that 'isolation, once conceived of as enabling, has come to be thought of as disabling' (Edmond and Smith 2003, p. 8). It is surely time to retrieve the earlier, positive connotation of 'isolation'.

A bounded sensibility, then, provides islanders with an *island*-specific identity – a strong and enabling identity, moreover, that seems likely to prevail over an archipelagic identity.[12] 'We have taken the Island inside', writes David Weale of Prince Edward Island, and

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[10] This affirmation by Gillis of a tenacious island identity seems to directly contradict his same-page assertion, an assertion that blithely sweeps aside the entire import of place studies, that 'identity, once associated with location, has slipped its territorial moorings to become transnational' (2004, p. 147). I am aware, meanwhile, that, in my own too-ambitious paper, I have not accorded the notion of 'identity' the consideration it merits, especially as this is a paper that affirmatively foregrounds that very concept. In accordance with the phenomenological paradigm within which I work I deem there to be layers of identity, these becoming less potent, more diffuse, as they become more abstract and only tenuously sourced to on-ground experience. 'Nation', for example, is a particularly weak, and frequently pathological, informant of place identity. The perceptual strength of the island boundary, by contrast, conduces to the powerful and resilient identities that Gillis acknowledges.

[11] It may be, as Williams argues, that 'an island... establishes identity through the differentiation of otherness'. I am less convinced, however, that this is strongly conducive to a 'closing itself off in its own identity' (2012, p. 225). Others, too, have noted that island identities are constructed in perceptions of difference (for instance, Kennedy, 2012). Island identities may be tenacious, and may shift somewhat more slowly than do those of places in the mainstream of global change, where the physical infrastructure of place, and, hence, cultural and personal place meanings, may be obliterated overnight by random shifts of capital investiture, but there is an inevitable fluidity to island identities, too. And to be fair, Williams, noting the impingement within islands of 'forces of globalization', and drawing upon relevant insights from Derrida's thought, complicates his initial observation by noting 'the impossibility of attaining any insularity or closure around the various entities of subjectivity and conclusion [which] implies the necessary inverse in their openness to the other' (Willams, 2012, p. 226). Kennedy, too, argues, in the context of the Hebridean islands, that future developments will take islands in unpredictable directions, with considerably more heterogeneity emerging, and with essentialist stereotypes weakening; but one effect of this will be the creation of many more identity-reinforcing 'others'.

[12] I am aware that this requires additional argument, and intend to explore this contention in a later paper. I note, though, that the significance of archipelagic relations surfaced on the first day of the 2012 International Small Island Cultures Conference in Sydney, Cape Breton Island, and two presenters of papers exploring aspects of archipelagic islands, when pointedly asked from the floor, stated unambiguously that island to mainland relationships were markedly more significant than island to island relationships, notwithstanding that, for reasons of economic promotion and rationalization, governments were doing their best to foster inter-island identificatory and practical linkages (Burnett, 2012; Kennedy, 2012). The particularity of island identities may prevail over archipelagic identities even when islands are so close as to be within swimming distance! The archipelagic islands of the Furneaux Group, in Bass Strait between Tasmania and mainland Australia, are of pivotal cultural importance to Tasmania's Aboriginal people. Each year Aboriginal people move onto the smaller islands of the Furneaux Group for the 'muttonbird season', the harvesting of oil-rich chicks of the migratory short-tailed shearwater that breeds in burrows on Bass Strait islands and in a few coastal rookeries on Tasmania itself. I have stood on one of the most prominent of these islands, Big Dog, and looked across to Chappell Island, so close as to

'we have an island psyche, an island soul', all of which is made possible because 'the quintessential uniqueness of an island is its geographic distinctiveness' (1992, p. 93). It is interesting to note that Baldacchino, in *Island Enclaves,* acknowledges Weale's perspective approvingly, because it is Baldacchino who most strongly pushes the case for a perspective based upon island to island relationality. On the basis of the forgoing, however, I cannot agree with his observation that 'we really do *not* need a new concept to internalize the multiple ways in which the waters fold into island life; or the islands fold into ocean life; the archipelago still deftly clinches it' (2012a, p. 23). The concept 'archipelago' shifts the focus from island specificity to inter-island relationalities that, I suspect, empirical investigation will show to feature comparatively more tenuously in the construction of island meanings, perceptions and identities.[13] Insofar as Hayward's 'aquapelagic assemblage' is intended to 'emphasize the manner in which the aquatic spaces between and around groups of islands are utilized and navigated in a manner that is fundamentally interconnected with and essential to social groups' habitation of land' (2012a, p. 1) it does, I think, do much better.

The writings of Hau'ofa have been crucial in establishing the pre-eminence of the construct of the borderless island; the eternally connected archipelago. His famous characterization, 'a sea of islands', 'stresses the totality of their [islands'] relationships' (1993, p. 7), whilst those who travel between these islands are 'people of the sea', comfortably adapted to inter-island voyaging (1993, p. 8). His preferred term, 'Oceania',

> … connotes 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… Theirs was a large world in which peoples and cultures moved and mingled unhindered by boundaries… From one island to another they sailed to trade and to marry… (Hau'ofa, 1993, p. 8).

For Edmond and Smith, Hau'ofa's insights 'suggest a different kind of relation between island and sea, refuting the idea of islands as isolated outcrops of meaning in an immense oceanic void' (2003, p. 2). But this is to read Hau'ofa one-dimensionally – to ignore the nuance in his position. For reasons already adduced, islands *do* remain 'isolated outcrops of meaning', though not exclusively so, and not in 'an immense oceanic void'. Edmond and Smith seem subsequently to concede that this is so, noting correctly that Hau'ofa lays stress upon the island

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be potentially swimmable. Big Dog is full of tiger snakes, the venom of which is among the world's most potent. Across the water on Chappell, tiger snakes also abound. But Chappell Island's tiger snakes are a distinct subspecies, this particular fellow possessing a huge head, adapted, through evolutionary time, to swallow shearwater chicks (the chicks are actually larger than the parents). Tiger snakes will take to salt water, but through all its long sub-specific history, the Chappell Island tiger has never made it across to Big Dog Island. Of course, humans are rather more mobile than snakes, but this ecological difference is also culturally replicated. The identities of these adjacent islands are sharply differentiated in accordance with this sub-specific difference, a difference that is held more sharply than the islands' cultural commonalities as Aboriginal space, co-participating in the annual, culturally vital muttonbird harvest.

[13] Stratford et al. (2011, p. 123) do provide interesting counter evidence to my claim here, though I find their Tuvalu example more compelling than their Caribbean instance, for reasons I hope still to explore. Meanwhile, I commend to the reader Karen Olwig's persuasive empirical evidence of the Caribbean diaspora, in which 'the islands represented distinct sites of identification'. She notes that 'the Caribbean island of birth continued to be meaningful as a site of personal memories, substantive connections, and a place in which they still hoped to resettle' (2007, p. 272). When self-perception is under stress it appears to be the home island that supplies meaning rather than some nebulous pan-Caribbean sensibility.

'as a persisting point of origin for the migrant and the voyager – a homeland – and the way in which cultural identity is shown to survive such journeys, though not unmodified' (2003, p. 10). For Hau'ofa, Oceanic people moved over the ocean *from a secure base on a home island*. His is the oft-quoted phrase, 'routes and roots', but it does seem that the more this phrase gets used, the more determinedly those who use it overlook the implications of the 'roots' component. The sea is *not* simply a highway to elsewhere, and the local and the particular persist. Bonnemaison goes still further, taking a perspective, in the case of Melanesian peoples, that sits uncomfortably alongside Hau'ofa's. Out-travel was,

> carefully controlled by the group, which endowed it with a purpose… everything seems to indicate that in many island societies… such journeys were infrequent, although necessary at times. Primary to the definition of Melanesian identity is not mobility or journeys, but rootedness at the heart of a living space full of meaning and powers. The first reflex of Melanesians who, after long wanderings at sea, landed on hitherto uninhabited islands was to invest themselves culturally and physically in their newly discovered lands' (1985, p. 32).

Margaret Jolly is another who argues that Oceanic peoples have embodied a 'dialectical tension between movement and settlement' (2001, p. 419). Though she finds Hau'ofa's vision 'inspiring', it 'tends to celebrate a particular subject position, that of a "world traveller". It echoes the particularities of his own life history' (2001, p. 422). She sees a substantially negative side to contemporary 'voyaging/out migration', much of it being driven rather than freely chosen, and she wonders 'how far this is a compelling vision for *all* islanders' (2001, p. 422). At the other end of the spectrum, in many islands 'only the most highly educated and wealthy travel overseas. They are, unlike Tongans, Samoans, or Hawaiians, not much into "world travelling"' (2001, p. 425).

Even if we assume Hau'ofa has the better of this debate, the point remains, established by each of Hau'ofa, Bonnemaison and Jolly, that rootedness matters in Oceania and is celebrated, such that a culture of travel constitutes no threat to particularized identity. Kenneth Olwig makes a similar point more generally: islanders, he writes, spend more time beyond their island than someone from 'an Iowa cornfield… Islanders travel… without losing their intractable sense of identity, precisely because they have an island to anchor their journeys' (2007, p. 178).[14]

Finally, I have one additional difficulty with the characterization of the ocean as merely a conduit that links island to island. This is a matter to which I will return, so I will content myself here with merely registering the view that the passive attribution of conduit status to the ocean is to strip it of complexity and dynamism – to deny it agency. 'In such accounts', writes Maxwell, 'the sea itself figures as the in-between… rather than, perhaps, a place, or series of places in its own right' (2012, p. 22).

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[14] The component of Olwig's observation that generalises the extent to which islanders travel may be valid only at the crudest level. We have already noted that Jolly has questioned the extent to which a culture of out-travel applies broadly across the islands of the Pacific, and elsewhere it is apparent that the shifting tides of global trade and geopolitics will cut both ways, so that in some instances off-island travel may now occur less prominently than was once the case. Burnett (2012) notes this in the context of certain of the Hebridean islands, as has Lomanno (2012) in the context of the Canary Islands.

If a perception of sea-bound physical separation characterizes island identity construction, why are we so anxious to avoid acknowledging this as we strive to demonstrate that we are oh so connected? I have a theory, and it does us no credit. It is this: we are afraid that, unless we stress connection, we will be relegated to the irrelevance that has always been a strong component of the metaphoric treatment of islands by powerful cultural centralities.

Thus, Fletcher speaks of 'the very misconceptions of islands (insular bounded landscapes) which island scholars are working so hard to correct' (2011, p. 22). To the extent that we are 'working so hard' to this end, I think we are exceedingly misguided. The perception of islands as backwater irrelevances, insofar as it exists, is other peoples' problem and other peoples' misconception. I agree with poet, Kevin MacNeil, who writes of the Scottish islands that, if they are perceived in this way, 'this is because of the way their perception is mediated through dominant, often indifferent, centres of power' (2011, p. xxi). We who live on islands should not, ourselves, concede this demeaning stereotype, but that is what we do when we seek to defuse it by denying the very quality that establishes the island condition. A case might be made, instead, that, in a single, integrated planetary system, a world in which insidious structures of politico-economic power retreat to increasingly remote, unaccountable, and often unidentifiable locales within geographical centralities, it is from the outrigger parts of the planet, those that, because they are deemed to be of minimal import, are less effectively integrated into global processes, that resistance might most potently issue. Eric Clark has argued that 'the tendencies of globalization to level borders… entails… the expansion of homogeneity', in the form of extinction of species and 'cultural systems' (2004, p. 289), and 'to the extent islands underscore boundaries, island studies should provide an especially fruitful approach to the study of globalization processes and their consequences' (2004, p. 291). Islands, then, might become sites from which democratic agency is reclaimed, and from which strategies emanate for resisting the economic, cultural and ecological greying that our times portend. Liminality matters. Edges are ... well … edgy; sites of fecund possibility, of ferment, of becoming. 'The edge is the point at which the known can become the unknown, where everything can change, and can do so quite completely', writes MacNeil: 'the periphery is a place where opposites clash or converge, where creativity and danger are at their most alive' (2011, p. xxi). Thus, the geographic margins may be anything but marginal*ized* and the global significance of islands potentially lodges within their very liminality.

From a stable sense of home ground, *agency* can be reclaimed. Identity matters, then, and because identity matters, boundaries matter, for boundaries supply the contours of identity. The boundary that is the island edge is a permeable membrane – it serves as 'both barrier and bridge, container and conduit, wall and window' (Clark, 2004, p. 290; a similar observation is made by Baldacchino, 2007, p. 5), and the perceptual boundary takes its cue from the real island border – it, too, is a permeable membrane, permitting passage, denying passage.

What the sea portends

Boundaries *within* seas tend to be less sharply delineated than terrestrial boundaries, and this is as true of human-imposed demarcations as it is of ecotones. When one stands on the shore and looks upon the sea – as an islander often will – what does the eye see? It looks out, that eye, upon a plane – 'a flat, apparently undifferentiated surface' (Quon, 2005, p. 1) – which belies the ecological complexity of endlessly shifting submarine boundaries, as well as the unseeable complexity of the transmissions (and barriers to transmission) at the two most humanly

obvious boundaries, the porous membrane that regulates biophysical commerce between ocean and air, and the liminal zone that functions similarly for congress (and denials of congress) between land and sea. 'Even the boundaries that are apparent – the skin of the ocean, the interface with the land', writes Quon (2005, p. 1), 'are of a nature much misunderstood'. In fact, other than that of land/sea, the plethora of oceanic boundaries is almost entirely absent from most contemporary island studies discussion. This is largely a measure of our species prejudice, which has constructed a discourse narrowly bounded by the question of whether the sea walls us (humans, that is) in, or whether the ocean should rather be seen as a highway *over* which we travel to other (is)lands. For restless humans, that seems to be the only boundary that counts. But those who do venture below the surface of the sea, few of whom seem to exist among those who shape island discourses, are likely to find this dichotomized discourse irritatingly simplistic. Barry Lopez is one who, in poetic rather than scientific prose, hints at the greatly expanded possibilities for contemplation of human-ocean interaction when we also factor in edge effects *beneath* the surface of the sea. He writes of,

> … the mysterious surface, a wafer-thin realm where air bounds water, where light suddenly changes flux, ambient sound changes register, and the body passes through a membrane fraught with possibility or, coming the other way, with relief. When water closes over a diver's head, a feat that once had seemed implausible, to breathe underwater seems suddenly boundless with promise. There is often little indication at the undulating, reflective surface, the harrowing transition zone, of the vividness, the intricacy, the patterns unfurled below (1998, p. 27).[15]

There is far more to the boundary function of the ocean, then, than whether it facilitates or restrains human congress across its surface to other islands and mainlands. Seas are 'lived through as much as they traversed' (Maxwell, 2012, p. 20) and they are 'constituted in and through their specificities' (ibid., p. 22). To relegate the island-defining ocean to the one-dimensionality of 'natural gateway to the world' (K.F. Olwig, 2007, p. 261) or 'a means of navigation between islands' (Hayward, 2012a, p. 1; his is the phrase, but his actual position is richer and more nuanced) is not only simplistic in the extreme, it is also to *demean* the elemental ocean; to value at nought the incalculably complex networks of biophysical (and, yes, biocultural) exchange between land and sea, sea and air, and below the surface of the sea. It is also clear that consideration of the boundary complexities *within* the ocean establishes this medium – the island's geographical delimiter – as qualitatively distinct; a richer, more intricate boundary than those that hem in mountain fastnesses and urban ghettos, and, though there is also a biocultural complexity to sandy and stone desert wildernesses that belies the simplistic stereotypes that popularly apply thereto as well, it is also the case that this does not compare with the complexity that characterizes the elemental ocean. It is not unreasonable to expect the complexity and richness of the enveloping medium in the case of real islands to configure the island experience in qualitatively different ways to the experience within places categorized by an 'island effect'. This is likely to be so even when the impact functions sub-rationally. The unpatternable complexity of the encircling ocean is not universally articulated by island peoples, but they tend to intuit it better, in my experience, than most island studies scholars!

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[15] Another who considers the psychological effect of sub-surface engagement with oceans is Bachelard (1994 [1964], pp. 205-208).

It is a short distance from the observation that the ocean is a site of extraordinary richness and ecotonal complexity ('perhaps', in Maxwell's words, 'a series of places in its own right') to recognition that this is in large part due to the role of the ocean, and the inshore in particular, in the creation, sustenance, regulation and evolution of life on earth. Islands exist in daily immediacy with the off-shore processes that cradled life into being, and that nurture, fine-tune, and sustain it even now. This, rather than the 'highway to elsewhere' trope, constitutes the more persuasive case for characterising the sea as an enabling rather than confining border. As Quon argues, 'the boundaries that are apparent to the eye are less credible as boundaries than as media of rich dialectic exchange' (2005, p. 3). Thus it is that Weale, in interview, characterizes the ocean as 'a metaphor for the eternal', and later, 'there's something very ancestral about being near the shore. I still think we know deep down that that's home' (Brinklow 2012b, np), whilst more than half a century earlier the great scientist of the sea, Rachel Carson, had written: 'contemplating the teeming life of the shore, we have an uneasy sense of the communication of some universal truth that lies just beyond our grasp. The meaning haunts and ever eludes us, and in its very pursuit we approach the ultimate mystery of Life itself' (1955, p. 250). The sea, then, cradles life on earth, and in the process of this, Weale seems to be arguing, it is crucially implicate in the eventual emergence of species *homo sapiens.* In evocatively paraphrasing DeLoughrey's 2007 book, *Routes and Roots,* Baldacchino observes similarly: 'the ocean *inhabits* us: living things are made essentially of water; all living things emerged evolutionarily from the sea; we inhabit Planet Ocean, not Planet Earth; and what today is blood in our veins would have been seawater eons ago' (2012a, p. 25; see also Gillis, 2012). None of the other enclosing media in our chosen instances of the 'island effect' – the desert, the mountain cirque, the hostile urban encirclement – has this status. What remains uncertain is how the impact of this works its way through to the vernacular construction of island identities.

As a medium of unparalleled elemental complexity, two further aspects of the ambient ocean would seem to set it apart from the enclosing media of sites characterized by an 'island effect' and, thus, conduce to the structuring of qualitatively different senses and meanings for life on islands. The first of these stems from the *vastness* of the ocean, a condition that constructs an islander's sense of horizons differently from those of a citizen of a mountain fastness or an urban ghetto, though possibly not a dweller in a desert oasis. Of greater salience, though, is the mystique that the vastness of the ocean evokes. The ocean is endless and endlessly mysterious, and it both beckons and appals on this account. 'The sea is a field of miracles, a profusion of depths and mysteries', Winton writes, and 'it baffles and infuriates humans because we cannot… comprehensively understand it. We haven't even completely mapped it, let alone explored it' (1993, p. 35). Oceanic vastness and its accompanying mystique is not a characteristic to be found within surrogate islands. It *may be* a feature of the desert up to a point, but it does not characterize the hostile surrounds of an urban ghetto or the range that rings a remote mountain fastness about. Such vastness, with lines of sight often flowing unimpeded to the horizon, endows the sea with a particular form of mystique that also helps establish its 'boundary' status as expansively different from the 'prison wall' status of the beetling mountain range or the hostile urban pale. And there is a temporal dimension to the ocean's mystery – a dimension that taps into deep time, as we might expect in the case of the element that has cradled life, and gentled along, within the larger swirl of life on earth, our very own species.

Derek Walcott surely had something similar to this in mind when he wrote, in the opening stanza of 'The Sea Is History' (1992 [1986]), p. 364),

> Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,
> in that grey vault. The sea. The sea
> has locked them up. The sea is History.

That, then, is the first factor. The second is the ocean's inveterate restlessness. The surface of the sea ripples, waves, swirls, rages – and submarine motility manifests even more chaotically. In her influential book, *Routes and Roots,* Elizabeth DeLoughrey gives prominence to Kamau Brathwaite's theory of 'tidalectics', which she defines as 'a methodological tool that foregrounds how a dynamic model of geography can elucidate island history and cultural production, providing the framework for exploring the complex and shifting entanglement between sea and land, diaspora and indigeneity, routes and roots'. It is a dialectic 'invoking the continual movement and rhythm of the ocean' (2007, p. 2). DeLoughrey deploys Brathwaite's concept in the service of an agenda – to 'destabilize the myth of island isolation' (2007, p. 2) – that is quite opposed to my own, yet the stress on tidal flux suits my purposes, too. It may be possible to speak of the island-sea interface as one of 'geographical precision' (Weale, 1992, pp. 81-2) in a perceptual sense, but such precision is only an imposition of the mind. The tide is controlled, in a general way, by forces beyond the earth, but its manifestations are particular and regional, even local. Carson, many decades ago, observed thus,

> The tides present a striking paradox, and the essence of it is this: the force that sets them in motion is cosmic, lying wholly outside the earth and presumably acting impartially on all parts of the globe, but the nature of the tide at any particular place is a local matter with astonishing differences occurring within a very short geographic distance… The attractive force of the heavenly bodies sets the water in motion, but how, and how far, and how strongly… depend on such things as the slope of the bottom, the depth of a channel, or the width of a bay's entrance (1964 [1951], pp. 178-179).

The ocean's restlessness, its tidal rhythms, and the unpredictability in its local effects are matched by a perceived emotional restlessness among island peoples. Thus Gillis notes that 'islands evoke a greater range of emotions than any other land form… we feel extraordinarily free there, but also trapped' (2004, p. 3).

As an islanding medium, the peripatetic ocean stands in stark contrast to 'island effect' media. Barrier mountain ranges evince dramatic restlessness in the form of landslips and avalanches, but these occur intermittently, and do not equate to the constant restlessness of the sea. Urban structures also change, but again, a dweller in an urban ghetto is unlikely to experience the sense of flux in the ambient medium to which islanders are accustomed. Deserts, on the other hand, are also restless – perhaps the experience of dwellers in desert oases more closely resembles that of islanders in this respect.

I need to augment this point slightly. 'The sea', Winton writes, 'is the supreme metaphor for change' (1993, p. 88). In arguing that the inveterate restlessness of the sea sets it apart from other islanding media, am I not compromising my stated intent to privilege the real over the metaphoric? Here is Winton linking oceanic flux to metaphors for change, and this is where the vector of my argument also seems to lead. A resolution may be attained through consideration of Deleuze's short essay, 'Desert Islands'.[16] As we have seen, Deleuze would seem to epitomize – indeed, to stand at the head of – the school of thought for whom the *idea* of the island trumps its reality. But the impediment to the incorporation of Deleuze into linguistic postcolonial analysis is that, for Deleuze, islands are only accidentally human sites anyway. Their fundamental condition is to be unpeopled,

> that an island is deserted must appear *philosophically* normal to us. Humans cannot live, nor live in security, unless they assume that the active struggle between earth and water is over, or at least contained… humans can live on an island only by forgetting what an island represents. Islands are either from before or for after humankind (2004, p. 9).

In this passage, Deleuze foregrounds the island edge as the site of primary struggle. It is epic and elemental – yet it remains locked within human imagining. Williams notes that, for Deleuze, 'islands… are seen not so much as empirical phenomena for examination but as ideas opening onto thought… imaginary and mythological as much as real but above all as *creative irruptions*' (Williams, 2012, p. 218; emphasis added). The sea, for Winton, represents change and so too, for Deleuze, does the island (those 'creative irruptions'), a metaphoric deployment of 'island' that stands in contrast to traditional tropes of containment and fixity. 'Dreaming of islands', he writes, 'is dreaming of pulling away… beginning anew' (2004, p. 10). We have already seen that the assumed dichotomy between an island identity constructed in response to the perception of an emphatic border and islands as contained spaces and resistant to change is a false one. Islands are sites of change and island identities are, reflexively, not immutably fixed; they are always in process of becoming something else. Deleuze says so too, for the imagination and the real do not occupy discrete realms. Though the elemental state of the island is unpeopled, 'an island doesn't stop being deserted simply because it is inhabited' (2004, p. 10). It is clear that in this passage Deleuze is speaking about the real as much as the imagined; indeed, he goes on to observe that, when island-dwelling humans '… reduce themselves to the movement which prolongs and takes up the *élan* that produced the island', then 'geography and the imagination would be one' (2004, p. 11).

In this process of bringing the elemental and the imaginary dynamically together, the sea is crucially implicated. Deleuze likens the island to an egg incubated within the enveloping sea: 'the island is what the sea surrounds and what we travel around. It is like an egg… an egg of the sea' (2004, p. 11). The island as egg is, in Deleuze's essay, a metaphor for rebirth, for the post-catastrophic 'second origin' rather than first creation. It evokes Noah rather than Adam and Eve. And 'since the island is a second origin, it is entrusted to man and not to the gods. It is separate, separated by the massive expanse of the flood. Ocean and water embody a

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[16] This essay is among Deleuze's earliest writings; and, given the dynamic nature of his thought, it is possible that Deleuze himself would have, later, constructed this case somewhat differently.

principle of segregation...' (2004, pp. 13-14). The elemental struggle between earth and sea, islands remind us – though we would rather not be so reminded – goes ever on.[17]

That the elemental state of the island might be one devoid of people (not, in fact, my position) suggests another quality possessed by the sea that may differentiate it from 'island effect' encirclements. It is customarily the case that, on an island, one is never far from contact with the boisterous spring of natural process. One is potently aware of the ambient context within which life lodges. On an island, that context-for-life is dominated by the sea, proximity to which endows its dwellers with a heightened sense of biophysical immensity. For J. Edward Chamberlin, 'there is no wilderness like the sea, no domain – other than the sea – where humans are so completely alien, and where wonder holds us so close' (2010, np). He quotes Walcott to similar effect: 'the sea "does not have anything on it that is a memento of man"' (Chamberlin, 2010, np). This heightened awareness of elemental process may be configured as enabling or threatening, but it cannot be avoided. The very smell and taste of the island reinforce such awareness – and this becomes more pronounced the closer one is to the edge. Nevertheless, on this dimension differences between the sea and the encircling media of our 'island effect' geographies may not be substantial. Though the 'context-for-life' aspect will be absent, the elemental drama of towering mountains and encroaching sands are such that a barrier cirque and a desert are likely to function similarly (psychologically speaking), though a forbidding ambient urbanscape almost certainly would not.

The sea configures islands in at least one other important way; but it is a factor that crosscuts. Baldacchino points out that 'for many island jurisdictions, the sea remains the key economic resource' (2004b, p. 273). It is true that varieties of economic interaction with the sea may well be on the decline.[18] Many island shipbuilding industries, once culturally as well as economically important, have vanished, though the traffic is not all one way. For example, noting that Oceanic people probably originated in China, using sophisticated sailing and navigational technologies to move into the Pacific and onto the islands, and acknowledging Hau'ofa's emphasis on the subsequent long involvement of Oceanic peoples with inter-island travel, Jolly points to a vigorous revival in such techniques of ocean-going transport as canoe construction and navigation, and a renewed interest in those ancestral achievements (2001, p. 420). It seems probable, then, that the sea will continue to play a crucial role in island economies. And it is not only in economic matters that the sea 'gives' to islanders. Hau'ofa describes the Pacific peoples as 'ocean people', who are 'at home with the sea. They played in it as soon as they could walk steadily, they worked in it…' (1993, p. 8). People imbued with a deep maritime sensibility who find themselves absent from the sea for a protracted time often experience a fretful yearning. 'Something removed roars in the ears of this house', is the first line of Walcott's poem, 'Missing the Sea' (1992 [1986], p. 63). Many island people then – not all of course – are at ease with their geographical delineator, and in either case, the island condition is one into which the sea emotionally and sensorially insinuates.

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[17] In the fraught times in which we now live, we are most dramatically so reminded by island-threatening, climate change-sourced, sea level rise.

[18] A notable exception is island tourism (Baldacchino, 2006; 2012b; 2013), most of which is configured around opportunities proffered for maritime recreation.

Newfoundland seaman/poet, David L. Benson, conveys the sense of this in the title poem from his collection, *And We Were Sailors*,

> … the sea's rote,
> constant… like background music,
> a tune familiar, that will not die (2002, p. 77).

To the sea's economic centrality to islander lives, then, we need to add cultural and social as well.

Nevertheless, against the ocean's givingness must be set the omnipresent threat that it also poses. This may be psychological. Winton, a lover of ocean environments without peer, is nevertheless moved to observe: 'there are times when the size of the ocean and its overwhelming ambivalence becomes dispiriting… it's like a memory you are trying to avoid' (2003, p. 87). For one of the characters in Wayne Johnston's Newfoundland novel, *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams,* this aversion is even more dramatically expressed. He reflects on,

> … my virtual non-existence in comparison with the eternal sea-scheme of things. I never felt so forlorn, so desolate as I did looking out across the trackless, forever-changing surface of the sea, which, though it registered the passage of time, was suggestive of no beginning and no end, as purposeless, as pointless, as eternity (1999, p. 131).

And the sea threatens, of course, in more tangible ways. Tsunamis and sea surge, sea-level rise, wave erosion, hurricane and cyclone and storm: all these figure prominently in traditional island stories and contemporary island uncertainties and fears. The situation, it can be argued, is dire. We have forgotten the elementally contingent nature of coastlines, Gillis (2012) argues, and we have forgotten it to our peril.

On the index of bounty and threat, how do the 'island effect' boundaries fare? Not so well on the tangible aspects of the 'bounty' factor. Compared to the sea, mountains and deserts offer comparatively reduced economic prospects. Intangibly, though, mountains and deserts may similarly enrich the cultural and social existence of 'island effect' peoples, whilst those living in urban ghettos are not likely to register positively against either tangible or intangible bounty factors. And all three 'island effect' encirclements pose threats – possibly more so than the sea. Avalanche, landslip, snowstorm, windstorm, navigational hazard – all these preclude the construction of invariably positive boundary meanings in mountain fastnesses and desert oases. And, of course, the hinterland of the urban ghetto boundary is *defined* by threat.

We should not, then, blithely collapse the island condition into a metaphor transposable to any site characterized by remoteness, isolation and containment. Fundamental differences between the various boundary-setting media preclude a uniform island/island effect experience and limit the usefulness of the metaphor beyond the most rudimentary level. The medium of the desert would seem to offer most comparability with the circumstance of the real island, the urban ghetto hinterland not at all, and the mountain cirque somewhere between.

Can a boundaried sensibility survive in a borderless world?

I have explored the bounded sensibility of island engagement, and I have argued that the importance of the apparently hard-edged island limen to the construction of an island sensibility mandates explication of the elemental ocean, in all its complexity and nuance, as the key partner in the dance – the *performance* – that establishes island meanings. I have argued thus because, it seems to me, there is no apparent means by which the rubble that blocks the path to a coherent theory of islands and islandness can be cleared away. But it may be that the same incoherence that characterizes theory construction will also plague any attempt to establish coherence through psychologies of experiential engagement. Several impedimenta come to mind.

The first of these is island scale. The approach recommended here casts the matter of size, an issue of considerably currency within island studies right now (for example, Brinklow, 2011), even further into contention, for the identity-forging properties of the ambient ocean clearly diminish the further one is from the shoreline. For people living in the hinterlands of large islands, the ocean may cease to feature in identity construction entirely, and 'islandness' is likely to be an irrelevance for such people. Against this we might observe that, even on large islands, the tendency is for most of the population to live near the coast and, thus, in socially-mediated constructions of island place, the ocean is still likely to be the salient factor. Benitez-Rojo has written that 'the culture of the Caribbean, at least in its most distinctive aspect, is not terrestrial but aquatic, a sinuous culture where time unfolds irregularly' (1996, p. 11), and I cautiously conclude that such an observation might have a wider islands applicability. We could even reverse our line of thought, observing that the answer to the question, 'at what level of scale does an "island" become too vast to be considered an island?', might be: 'when the construction of island identity(ies) is/are no longer primarily dependent on engagement with the island edge'. But I am in danger here of falling into the evidentiary trap of circling back to a premise to 'prove' a conclusion.

A second potential problem for the case mounted here is that the bewildering variety of islands noted earlier might conduce to an equally bewildering variety of island psychologies, especially concerning engagements with the island edge and the ocean beyond the edge. I have argued that the ocean is never simply a highway to elsewhere, but is also an identity-forming boundary, and that this is so even in the work of Hau'ofa, whose writings have done most to popularize the notion of the ocean as a border-obliterating highway. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the extent to which an island border is opaque or porous will differ markedly from island to island; those on oceanic islands in particular seem likely to view the ocean/land interface in radically different ways to the denizens of archipelagic and offshore islands.

Because those who are attracted to island scholarship tend to be islophiles (significant exceptions are to be found in the ranks of Caribbean scholars), the tendency within island discourses is to construct islands in a positive way, though 'dark shadow' dualities are customarily posited (as we have seen), and were once accorded more currency than is now the case. Islanders are resilient, 'connected' (the word often used as ambiguously as I have here!), resourceful, contained, communal, polymath – and the suggestion that islands might be as much characterized by the darker dualisms is disapprobated. But many islands are ecologically, economically, socially and/or culturally dysfunctional – and we should not be surprised at this, given that emotional engagements with the surrounding sea similarly occupy positions at very different points on a positive/negative continuum. The sea is not, then, an unvaryingly positive

factor in island cultural construction. Baldacchino writes: 'the shoreline, with its shifting pattern, is a powerful draw, a source of psychological malaise, and often a keenly contested terrain [whilst t]he all-embracing sea… present[s] dangers that occasionally lead to loss of life…' (2005, p. 249). And for Winton 'the sea is like the desert in that it is quite rightly feared. The sea and the desert are both hungry, they have things to be getting on with so you do not go into them lightly. Never turn your back on the sea, my father told me…' (1993, p. 84).

The third challenge to the case mounted here is that posed by the globalizing of economics, communications and culture. It is a familiar truism that, in a globalized world, the significance of boundaries is considerably reduced, and with it, the strength of geographically-structured identities. We have already noted that the strengthening of place-specific identities, perhaps most effectively realisable upon islands, potentially provides an important locus of political resistance to the threats to cultural, economic and democratic agency that globalization portends. But it may be that the latter processes constitute an irresistible force, and that a sure consequence of this is that it will no longer matter where one calls home. Specifically, it will no longer matter if that home is on an island.

Global electronic media – not just the comprehensive reach of American cultural product, for that has been with us for a long time, but the social networking sites that have put people in easeful touch with each other around the globe – have undoubtedly diminished the strength and nature of traditional loci of personal and social identity. People are no longer meshed within definitive networks of local economic and cultural interchange – indeed, they no longer spend as much time as hitherto outside and interacting with an ambient biocultural environment. It seems clear that the revolution in global communications constitutes a significant threat to the sea/land nexus that, I have argued, is the key constituent within the construction of island identities. This is insidious, for the threat consists in its capacity to quietly make irrelevant those old physical constructors of meaning. In a de-centred world, one in which notions of centres and edges become meaningless, identity, too, becomes de-centred and multifold. Edmond and Smith comment upon the implications of this for the islands of Oceania and the Pacific Rim: 'the hybrid worlds of the Pacific and its Rim involve loss and displacement as well as new geographical cultural configurations. A multiplicity of identities can threaten identity itself' (2003, p. 10).[19] Nevertheless, we remain corporeal beings, and we can never entirely escape corporeal engagement with a corporeal locale. I retain, then, a modicum of confidence that a grounded island sensibility can survive the disembodied challenge presented by the revolution in global communications technologies.

The shift from sea to air as the main medium of on- and off-island transport may present an even more intractable threat to the case I have mounted here. In her 2007 paper discussing island migration, Karen Fog Olwig (2007, pp. 264-265) assumes departure by sea. But, excepting small islands without the economic or spatial capacity for an airstrip, most inward and outward movement of people today takes place by air; and, the more populous the island, the more this is likely to be the case. What import does this have for the thesis advanced here?

On the face of it, it portends much. It constitutes a direct and dramatic removal of the main nexus of islander/ocean interaction. Gillian Beer has done more than anyone else to establish the import of this. She writes,

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[19] It is for this reason that I cannot follow Depraetere (2008) into the idea of the planet configured as a single world archipelago. When everything is island, nothing is island.

it is the technology of the airplane which has most changed the island concept in our century. The island is no longer a fortress, defended by sea… The airplane has dislimned the tight boundaries of the shoreline (Beer, 1989, p. 21).

This is a more significant threat than electronic media communications (in my opinion) because the latter are abstract, whereas air travel *directly* undercuts the intrinsicality of the sea to the island condition. Nevertheless, says Beer, the island persists, and it persists because of, not despite, all that traffic of people. As remoteness is stripped away by the airplane, making mass tourism viable where it had not been, 'the commodification itself depends upon the unchanged survival of a long-standing idea of the island' (1989, p. 21). Gillis agrees: '…air travel hastened the eclipse of physical borders', though 'the erosion of physical barriers in no way diminished the appeal of the island' (2004, p. 145). It may be, though, that those who live on islands will not have their own 'long-standing idea of the island' reinforced through flood-tides of island tourism.

Conclusion

Intractable theoretical faultlines have called the credibility of island studies as a coherent intellectual endeavour critically into question. That was the premise from which I commenced this paper. I wondered whether greater trans-island commonality could be found in the grounded experiences of island living, and I had a sense that the common factor of the land/sea interface would prove to be the identity-constructing factor that would supply that coherence. The writing of this paper has been a genuine intellectual exploration: I began with a project and an intuition, and no firm sense of what might ensue. The outcome, I have to confess, has proven disappointing. I have certainly not demonstrated the validity of my admittedly loose hypothesis. But I think that, with all its dangling threads, there is promise here. It certainly seems to be the case that there is no common experience of the land/sea interface and no common meanings are bestowed upon the encircling, island-defining ocean. But the elemental qualities of the sea tend not to be shared by the enclosing media in the case of the prominent 'island effect' sites deployed here for comparative purposes. Its cultural effects might differ widely from island to island, but the sea remains the thing – the key factor in the construction of island identity – and its almost infinite biophysical (and cultural) richness is replicated in the complex particularity within island cultures.

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