

**“... some distance to go”:  
A Critical Survey of Island Studies**

In April 2007, *Geographical Review* published a special issue with the theme of “islandness.” In their introduction guest editors John R. Gillis and David Lowenthal situate the publication within the burgeoning interdisciplinary field of “island studies,” but acknowledge the indeterminacy of the banner: “In encompassing a range of experience and feeling that transcends the academic, we join a growing number of aficionados whose collective insights, detailed by Godfrey Baldacchino, enlighten and enliven island studies worldwide. But we all have *some distance to go*” (4, my emphasis). Baldacchino is Canada Research Chair in Island Studies at the University of Prince Edward Island and founding editor of the on-line *Island Studies Journal (ISJ)* launched in 2006. He has done more work than any other scholar to establish and promote “island studies” as a legitimate field of academic teaching and research. The most recent issue of *ISJ* (in which my own work is published) includes two essays which seek to stimulate further discussion and debate about the scope and significance of “island studies”: Christian Depraetere’s “The Challenge of Nissology” (published in two parts) and Baldacchino’s own “Studying Islands: On Whose Terms? Some Epistemological and Methodological Challenges to the Pursuit of Island Studies.” Baldacchino points out that extending the debate about the status and aims of island studies involves grappling with “sparse literature” (37); he notes, in particular, the contributions of Grant McCall and Peter Hay to mapping the field and charting its objectives. Baldacchino hopes his essay will “help to refine the current state of ‘island studies,’ while energizing and provoking a now overdue discussion about its foundational assumptions” (38).

The debut issue of *Shima: The International Journal of Research into Island Cultures*, launched in 2007, also points to the need for more rigorous and sustained scrutiny of the “foundational assumptions” of the organised study of islands. The editorial states: “Over the past two decades islands have been subject to an increasing amount of research and, to a lesser extent, theorisation.” This article seeks to address this imbalance by attempting a critical survey of island studies scholarship; in particular it focuses on ideas about literature which hold sway in the field and, I think, undermine claims to genuine and generous interdisciplinarity. I am especially interested in comparing the efforts of key island studies

proponents to formulate statements of purpose for themselves and their colleagues. This paper is not offered as a comprehensive evaluation, but rather seeks to make a broad point about the importance of self-reflection in any emergent branch of learning. When, for instance, does academic writing about islands qualify as "island studies"? While this question did not guide my thinking in the writing of this article, I hope that some of the arguments I pose here prompt others to address such issues.

In his review of the first island studies textbook *A World of Islands*, edited by Baldacchino, Jerome L. McElroy writes, "The compendium offers something for island studies scholars of every persuasion" (304). But there is no chapter about the cultural production (art, literature, film, media) of (or about) islands. Instead, the subsection headings—"Island Spaces and Identities," "Island Life," "Island Development"—situate island studies firmly within the social sciences, principally geography. Depraetere's claims of inclusivity in his recent work are similarly misleading. His attempt to build "a general theoretical foundation that could be shared by all 'island studies' students and researchers, irrespective of their thematic focus" expressly excludes the humanities: "The present suggestions are no more than a premise for future systematic research, leading hopefully to an acceptance of nissology as a *hard science*: reliant on experimental, empirical, quantifiable data, or on the scientific method and its focus on accuracy and objectivity" ("The Challenge of Nissology ... Part I" 8). The focus of my brief critical survey is the affiliation of international scholars who publish research under the designation "island studies," including, among others, Baldacchino, Depraetere, McCall, Hay, John Connell, and Stephen Royle. There is a fairly clear distinction between this group of academics and the postcolonial literary scholars and historians who regularly write about islands, but rarely, if ever, label their own work "island studies": Gillian Beer, Greg Dening, Rod Edmond, Vanessa Smith, and Elizabeth DeLoughrey.

As it stands, "island studies" scholarship is undermined by an untheorised distinction between the relative value of "geography" and "literature"; this opposition is, in part, sustained by the deployment of a series of interrelated hierarchical pairs (physical/cultural, reality/romance, actual/virtual, fact/fiction, materiality/metaphor, image/word) in discussions of the physicality and culture of islands. I argue that while the major contributors to island studies have been very attentive to the binary oppositions which structure popular discourses about islands, they have

been less alert to the dichotomies which organise their own thinking. If the project of island studies is to maintain its dynamism and interest, it needs to take up Baldacchino's call to make time and space for a more critical metadiscourse about its scope and objectives. This paper concludes by proposing a concept of "performative geographies" as an approach to studying the island as a space of cultural production which privileges neither geography or literature (in their narrow senses) but insists on their interconnection. The interpretive potential of this term flows, in part, from the insistence of theories of performativity on the force of language (in its broadest sense) to produce the reality it purports to describe. From the perspective of performativity theory "reality" and "representation" become like two sides of a sheet of paper; it is impossible to separate them. In these terms, the commitment to "real islands" which runs through island studies risks missing the key fact that human encounters with physical space are always already managed by our position in linguistic and cultural systems of representation.

To state my argument boldly: "island studies" in its current formulation and practice is driven by habits of thinking which impede interdisciplinary research—especially between the social sciences and the humanities—and scupper possibilities for open and productive dialogue with fields with common interests and concerns, most notably postcolonial studies. My strong sense is that efforts to gain a foothold for island studies in the inherently competitive environment of university research, while impressive if assessed in terms of output, have produced a quasi-interdisciplinary field which risks becoming too inward-looking and too self-interested to look beyond its own recently marked borders. This is exemplified by the relative lack of citations of the work of postcolonialists listed above in island studies forums. This is not to say that their research is *never* cited, but rather to point out that the borders of this burgeoning (and exciting) field are currently less permeable than the rhetoric of interdisciplinarity suggests.

Baldacchino acknowledges the institutional impediments to genuine interdisciplinarity: "observers and critics often suffer from the strictures imposed by the academic disciplines that fashioned their training, perspectives, discourses, and career paths and possibly rendered these observers and critics knowledgeable about *some* island matters but totally oblivious of others" ("Islands as Novelty Sites" 167). This special issue of *nlr* appears at a crucial time in the field's short history: the establishment

of the *ISJ* in 2006 and, to a lesser extent, *Shima* in 2007, have enhanced the status of island studies as a recognisable area of study for a growing pool of researchers. To use Baldacchino's terms, the weak point in the *epistemology* and *methodology* of island studies since its emergence in the early 1990s has been (and continues to be) in its attempts to reconcile a commitment to studying the facts of islands and island life with an interest in their representation; in short, island studies still has "some distance to go" in developing theories and approaches for analysis of the island as a space of (or in) cultural production.

### Scoping the Field: What is the Proper Object of Island Studies?

Island studies has invested, as it should, considerable energy in defining the term "island" and charting its various usages. Addressing the question "What is an island?" is clearly a foundational task for researchers who situate their work in this burgeoning field; it modulates into the critical question "What is the proper object of island studies research?" However, my comparison of responses to these intertwined questions by the most prolific island studies scholars reveals some habits of thinking which this article hopes to move beyond. To date, the collective effort to mark out the boundaries of the field have been driven by two contradictory impulses, which I call the "essentialising/generalising opposition." On the one hand, island studies frequently insists on the particularity of islands. Scholars such as McCall, Royle, and Baldacchino labour to demonstrate the distinctiveness of islands—to name their "essence." They agree that one objective of island studies must be to articulate the fundamental difference of islands from other geographical and social formations. McCall seeks to "comprehend [islands'] *true nature*" ("Nissology: A Debate" my emphasis); for Royle "Two factors that make islands *special* are isolation and boundedness" (11 my emphasis); Baldacchino insists "each and every island is, by definition, *unique*" ("Editorial Introduction" 269 my emphasis; see also "Coming of Age" 278 and *A World of Islands* 14). The essentialising impulse propels another powerful binary in the discourse: the opposition of islander and non-islander perspectives, which I critique below.

On the other hand (and often at the same time) contributors to island studies frequently use "island" as an elastic term (and site) with the capacity to encompass the world—perhaps because of an understandable desire to advocate the relevance and value of their research. The generalising

impulse often draws on that ubiquitous pair local/global. Gillis and Lowenthal write,

Islandness has taken on a whole new meaning today, since distinctions between islands and continents, once taken for granted, have become muted or dubious. In our time, when people are connected more electronically than territorially, the entire world is becoming archipelagic, with islands appearing everywhere, inland as well as offshore. Cities are 'heat islands'; rural areas are 'islands of tranquility.' Islandness is no longer associated only with waterbound places. The planet itself is now perceived as Earth island. ... In this global age, every man and woman is an islander, but by the same token we are all part of the main. (iii)

Depraetere's two-part essay in the latest issue of *ISJ* offers an extreme example of the generalist paradigm. He argues that the work of "nissology" should be anchored by the concept of a "world archipelago": "A general nissological envisioning of the physical setting of the world archipelago clearly shows that islands are the rule rather than the exception, with specific effects of islandness due to marginality, isolation and narrowness considered at various and embedded scales, including on continents" (4). As Depraetere's recent work shows, attempts to universalise the island are also, of course, evidence of a shared wish to keep the field of "island studies" open, to avoid "islanding" research. Nevertheless the intractable incoherence generated by the essentialising/generalising opposition is perhaps the major hindrance to the establishment of new theoretical frameworks for considering the island as a site of cultural production. Most importantly, the obdurate attachment of key island studies proponents to what Chris Bongie calls "cultural insiderism" (20)—despite a common rhetoric of "connectedness"—is the main impediment to any committed engagement with postcolonial studies.

The model of identity politics which undergirds discussions about the scope and purpose of island studies is exemplified by McCall's attempts in the mid-1990s to brand the area "nissology." McCall remains one of the most frequently cited academics in the literature. As the editors of *Shima* observe in the journal's first issue, "While the appellation has not established itself as a standard one for the field, his call for continuing debate and reflective analysis amongst island researchers remains a significant one." This is certainly the case; however, McCall also introduced a statement of purpose for the field which forestalls rather than fosters open debate and

honest reflection: "... the study of islands on their own terms." For McCall, prevailing negative misconceptions about island geography, society, and culture, together with the "lack of an organized body of knowledge suitable for islands" ("Nissology: A Proposal" 2), made imperative the establishment of an academic field which would produce scholarship about islands *and* speak up for the interests of island populations: "I propose the concept of 'Nissology,' the study of islands on their own terms; the open and free inquiry into island-ness; and the promotion of international cooperation and networking among islands" (2).

The essentialising/generalising opposition described above sets in motion another troublesome binary—the "insider/outsider opposition." McCall's advocacy of "nissology" was motivated, in part, by his frustration with the "continental view of islands" (2). He writes "Continental dwellers have always sought to control and possess islands and the very word conjures romantic ideals, the simple life and almost mythological charm. Continentals covet islands" ("Nissology: A Debate"). For McCall the "continental" island fantasy ("islophilia") runs alongside negative perceptions of islands as prisons and islanders as backward, small-minded ("insularophobia"). He argues "one must take islands as they are and not impose continental notions on them." There is a surprising level of comfort with this simple self/other binary in island studies forums (see also Hay; Lowenthal; Nunn; Olwig; Péron). A number of commentators, most notably Baldacchino, have pointed out the inflexibility of this oppositional model and raised concerns about the difficulties it poses for analysis of the positions between the extremes of mainlander and islander—in simple terms, binary thinking misses the complexities of liminality, hybridity, and migration which blur the distinction between island and non-island spaces and peoples. Further, the prevailing dichotomies I have described reinforce the very misconceptions of islands (insular bounded landscapes) which island studies scholars are working so hard to correct.

Baldacchino acknowledges that the "insider/outsider distinction does not work all that well when it comes to islands, where hybridity is the norm" ("Studying Islands" 37), but has struggled to articulate a clear alternative to valorising the point-of-view of the islander. He is ambivalent about McCall's maxim not because it reinforces the insider/outsider distinction, but because he wonders if defining the field as "the study of islands on their own terms" allows the interpretive point of view to shuttle back and forth between its two poles:

Grant McCall, and following Christian Depraetere, defined *nissology* as the study of islands on their own terms. The concluding phrase—"on their own terms"—suggests a process of empowerment, a reclaiming of island histories and cultures, particularly for those island people who have endured decades of colonialism. After all, "[C]ontinentals covet islands," McCall reminds us, while "[i]slanders themselves and their way of seeing things is not much appreciated." It may be, therefore, time for a change, also in the interests of political correctness. And yet, the opening segment of that same definition—"the study of islands"—marks an uncomfortable relationship, intimating that the process of inquiry may still be directed by outside forces, although presumably more well-meaning ones. 'Island studies' is explained not as a pursuit *by* islands/islanders, or *with* them, not even *for* them, but *of* them. (37)

While he does not say so directly, Baldacchino is ultimately indecisive about whether geographical determinism is a political imperative for the future of island societies and cultures, or a hindrance to research which investigates the increasing "disconnect between subject and physical geography" (39)—in short, should island studies prioritize a local or global worldview? As I understand his argument, articulated across a series of articles about the interdiscipline of island studies, Baldacchino wants to keep both of these positions in play: "An island is a nervous duality: it confronts us as a juxtaposition and confluence of the understanding of local *and* global realities, of interior *and* exterior references of meaning, of having *roots* at home while also deploying *routes* away from home. An island *is* a world; yet an island *engages* the world" ("Islands: Objects" 248). To take up Baldacchino's own descriptor, this is a nervous stance which may stall debate.

#### **The Island and the Book<sup>1</sup>: The Problem of Literature in Island Studies**

I am convinced that much of the anxiety I detect in debates about the best way to think and write about islands stems from an underlying distrust of literature. The interrelated oppositions outlined above—essentialising/generalising and insider/outsider—gain some of their persuasive power from an implicit agreement that studying the *real* world is a more meaningful and important pursuit than inquiry into the *imagined* world, and further that it is possible to have a privileged understanding of the real world. Literature is frequently characterised as the field of falsehoods,

misinformation and fancy which is responsible for creating and circulating (utopian and dystopian) stereotypes of islands. While island studies academics with backgrounds in the discipline of geography commonly turn to literary texts for examples to illustrate their broader points, they are rarely the focus of analysis. One exception is Connell's essay "Island Dreaming: The Contemplation of Polynesian Paradise." The explicit focus of this paper is the impact of imagination on actual places, but a hierarchy which values geography over literature is Connell's implicit compass. He reads a diverse range of poems and novels (including Lord Byron's *The Island*, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, R.M. Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* and Herman Melville's *Typee*) as "imperialist dream texts" (563) which impose a fictional vision over the actuality of the Pacific. Connell draws too neat a distinction between the artificiality of European projections and the actuality of islands: "Western dreaming situates islands as distant places, places of escape and otherness—utopian spaces that are the opposite of lived experience ..." (574).

There is a strong, if unspoken, view throughout island studies that literature is conservative, whereas geography is oriented to the future. That is to say, the general assumption of island studies scholars who turn to novels, poems, and plays for their examples seems to be that literature closes down meaning, whereas, in seeking to describe reality, geography opens the pathway to a fuller appreciation of places, peoples, and their imbrication. The interpretive methodology of Royle's book *A Geography of Islands: Small Island Insularity* is guided by precisely this assumption. He begins his first chapter, "Islands: Dreams and Realities," with a straightforward description of islands. For Royle, "despite ... wide distribution and variations,"

islands everywhere are subject to the impact of a common range of constraints imposed because of their very insularity. Such constraints—remoteness, smallness (absolute and/or relative), isolation, peripherality, etc.—can also affect, singly or together, certain mainland areas, but they are more notable in their effect on the bounded landmasses that are islands. (1)

Royle describes the opening chapter as "a general introduction to the study of islands." While he aims to show how the "thought or the concept of islands has informed literary, artistic, scientific and popular culture," the study of the representation of islands is not Royle's primary objective. Instead the goal of his discussion is to clear the decks, so to speak, for a

return to a more proper and responsible task: "The chapter then returns to the real world ... —small island life is often at some remove from any expression of the island of dreams" (1). While I do not want to take the "extreme position" described by Depraetere, and argue that "there is no such thing as an island, but only figurative and metaphorical representations and mental schema" ("The Challenge of Nissology ... Part II" 30), I am just as resistant to the idea that we can make neat distinctions between representations and reality.

Royle's claim that the "romance" of islands will "be matched against realities throughout the book" (11) is rhetorically similar to the statements by other island studies scholars that islands are important objects for study because they are more than "merely" literary or metaphorical sites (e.g. Aldrich and Connell 31). Hay is emphatic that island studies must not allow an interest in literary islands to distract from the "stuff of *real* geographical entities" (21). Conversely, literary scholars who write about islands often reverse this rhetoric. Dorothy F. Lane expresses the hope that her comparative study of the literature of the Caribbean and New Zealand will inspire others "to take up and examine the island motif, especially since the island is not *merely* a geographical reality but emerges as a primary expression of coloniality—and therefore of postcoloniality—in many areas" (4). Whichever term is dominant, the deployment of a geography/literature binary and associated oppositions in studies of islands is an endemic problem.

In his polemical piece "A Phenomenology of Islands," Hay writes that cultural and literary studies scholars "exhibit an understandable tendency to see the reality of islands as of less interest and import than the 'virtual' status of the island as metaphor" (26).<sup>2</sup> Hay's article raises the question whether the work of studying islands brings the interests of phenomenology alongside those of philology; the problem seems to be that these approaches tend to compete with, rather than enrich, each other. Similarly, in their introduction to a special islands issue of the *Journal of Historical Geography*, Klaus Dodds and Royle write "At the very least, one would need to distinguish between literal and metaphorical understandings of islands" (489). What are the implications for island studies if one accepts that pursuing such a distinction is an ultimately fruitless exercise? Hay speculates: "The metaphoric deployment of 'island' is, in fact, so enduring, all-pervading and commonplace that a case could reasonably be made for it as *the* central metaphor within western discourse" (26; see also Baldacchino, "Studying

Islands" 40). The tone of this idea is resolutely negative. Baldacchino articulates the concern Hay gestures towards: "The richness of literary and cultural islanding could be so obtrusive and pervasive that it could actually threaten and dismiss the physicality of islands as 'real lived-in places'" (44). This rendering of literature as a threat to islands takes off from a belief in the possibility of non-mediated experience of place. To the contrary, I contend scholarship can only ever apprehend the meaning of place through language. The physicality of islands is ultimately inseparable from their textual topography. Hay is open about his ambivalence about the value of text-based disciplines to island studies: "In fact, within island studies, the very question of the island as metaphor is problematic. Is 'islandness' to do with a generalizable condition of physical isolation or a state of personal disconnection (a robust and tenaciously familiar metaphor and literary trope)? Or is it to do with the stuff of *real* geographical entities that more or less accord with one of those contested definitions of an island as a physical reality?" (21). Such questions obstruct the productive exchange of ideas between disciplines. Island studies has the potential to spearhead the development of fresh vocabularies for theorising the imbrication of the literary and the geographical: a concept of "performative geographies" is a promising beginning.

#### Re-thinking the Island as a Space of Cultural Production: Towards a Theory of "Performative Geographies"

How might a theory of "performative geographies" provide a solution to the impasse the first section of this paper finds in the binary thinking of island studies? The concept of performativity has a long and complex history across diverse academic disciplines, which it is beyond the scope of this article to explore.<sup>7</sup> A useful starting point for developing a theory of "performative geographies" for use in the study of islands is to consider together dictionary definitions of the component terms. The *Oxford English Dictionary* cuts through the obscurantist guff which academics have papered around the adjective "performative": "Of or relating to performance; (*Linguistics* and *Philos.*) designating or relating to an utterance that effects an action by being spoken or by means of which the speaker performs a particular act." The core insight which the term performative helps to articulate is that those aspects of human culture which purport to describe social and material reality in fact create the vectors by which we navigate and comprehend that reality. The first definition of the

noun "geography" emphasises the *descriptive* aims of the subject: "I.a. The science which has for its object the description of the earth's surface, treating its form and physical features, its natural and political divisions, the climate, productions, population, etc., of the various countries."<sup>4</sup> Of course, the arguments a theory of performative geographies help to generate are not entirely novel to island studies: contributors to the field are very conscious of the ability of descriptions of islands (written, spoken, visual etc.) to determine the ways we make sense of place. However, as I have argued above, there is a strong tendency in island studies to conceive of this process of meaning making as one of imposition; in these terms, the reality of the earth's surface is burdened by the products of culture. In contrast, approaching the study of islands from the perspective of performative geographies foregrounds an appreciation of the dynamic and mutually constitutive relationship between places and the ways in which they are depicted.

Judith Butler offers the most succinct and open academic definition of performativity as "that aspect of discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names" (112). A theory of performative geographies in island studies, then, would begin with the presumption that the meaning of islands is not so much apprehended as produced through language. This is an approach to thinking about islands that refuses to conceive of their meaning as fixed or stable: "That language itself can be productive of reality is a primary ground of antiessentialist inquiry" (Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling* 5). An implicit understanding of the performative effect of the toponym informs island studies' preoccupation with the question: "What is an island?" There is an inherent optimism in theories of performativity which should appeal to island studies researchers weary of the ubiquity of habits of thinking which too frequently place islands on a sliding scale between the extremes of paradise and prison. Conventions of description gain their force—their facility to make meaning—through their incessant citation. At the same time, the potential for change in habits of naming and thinking also resides in the capacity for citations to subvert conventions. Theories of performativity refuse to accept meanings as given. This approach to studying the island is not just about annexing its meaning or enhancing its legibility, but acknowledges the island as a live site in the production and reproduction of countless competing meanings legible from countless, often competing, perspectives.

While the concept of performativity originated in the work of British

ordinary language philosopher J.L. Austin and the study of speech acts, theorists now recognise a performative dimension in all manner of cultural fields including literature, but also extending to the diverse rituals and practices of everyday life. To this point I have emphasised the ways in which a theory of performative geographies can enhance our understanding of the linguistic and cultural processes by which descriptions of islands are generative of "reality." But performative geographies has promise also as an analytical tool for examining human behaviours and activities in island spaces. In the context of island studies we might ask, for instance, how do the conventions of topographical classification and mapping generate islander and non-islander experience of the places they purport to describe? Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argue that quantifying the force of an individual performative act involves a "disimpaction" of the scene of the act (8). They conceive of the performative as an interaction between human subjects in a spatial context. The notion of performative geographies grants greater ontological significance to the space where the act takes place. This approach makes place a dynamic player in any account of island life; it refuses, from the outset, any possibility that islands are backdrops to or containers for human action. To advocate the value of performativity theory to the study of islands is, to some extent, to make a fairly simple point: our engagement with the world is always discursively managed and textually mediated. More complexly, islands are performative spaces to the extent that they provide heightened examples of the impact of geography on subjective and social knowledge and experience; for islanders and non-islanders alike, they function as *stages* for the affirmation of the meaning and the value of human life. In the preface to *Mapping the Subject* Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift write, "Since the 1960s geographers have been aware of the importance of people's subjectivity in directing their spatial behaviour" (xx). The idea of performative geographies shares this insight, but reverses it by insisting on the impact of space on subjectivity and society.

The prevalence in island studies of discussions of the denotative capacity and connotative force of the term "island" reveals, I think, baseline insecurity about the current and future status of island studies. In part, this insecurity explains the reluctance I detect in island studies to spend too much time thinking closely about the literary life of islands. In his book, *Islands and Exiles: The Creole Identities of Post/Colonial Literature*, Chris Bongie shows the extent to which postcolonial conceptions of identity are

both hampered and energised by the powerful topos of the island. Bongie stands out, I think, as a literary critic who resists the literary prejudice exemplified by Diana Loxley's "world as text, text as world" formulation. For Loxley, "To read the natural world, to decipher its codes is also to achieve an annexation of its meaning and this is the primary significance of the supreme legibility of the literary island" (8). Conversely, for Bongie, the island always remains illegible to some degree, and thus open to new readings. He explains,

The island is a figure that can and must be read in more than one way: on the one hand, as the absolutely particular, a space complete unto itself and thus an ideal metaphor for a traditionally conceived, unified and unitary, identity; on the other, as a fragment, a part of some greater whole from which it is in exile and to which it must be related—in an act of (never completed) completion that is always also, as it were, an ex-isle, a loss of the particular. The island is thus the site of a double identity—closed and open—... (18)

For Bongie, focus on the island signifies a politicised return to the local in an increasingly chaotic globalised world. He is cautious in his endorsement of such a move and insists that turning back to the island as a vital identificatory site is helpful only "if the identity to which it gives us access remains just that: a role, whose essentially *performative* and fictive nature we have responsibly kept in sight" (22 my emphasis). Might a theory of performative geographies also open new avenues for thought in examining island identities?

It goes without saying that for a researcher to nominate their work as island studies is to construct for themselves a personal and professional identity. I continue to be surprised by the regularity with which publications in the field include statements about the writer's passion for islands. As Bongie argues, "A preoccupation with the self is inseparable from an anxiety about the possible destruction ... of that self" (21). I wonder if this shared commitment to (love of) islands is both the field's strength *and* its weakness. For Depraetere and Arthur L. Dahl "Defining an island or the state of 'islandness,' is never straightforward, though this is fundamentally a question of isolation, whether of land isolated by water, or of one entity being separated from others" (57). Baldachino is uncomfortable about the matter-of-fact emphasis on "isolation" in conventional definitions of "island"; he insists that highlighting isolation (or "insularity") obscures the importance of links between islands and between islands and mainlands:

"Islands are not islands, in the sense that they are not closed unto themselves" ("The Coming of Age" 272). For critics such as Baldacchino, Hay, and Depraetere, the connections between islands are multi-stranded: geographical, political, historical, and cultural. The problem is that mapping these many routes of communication and exchange is a task beyond the reach of any single academic discipline; more crucially, acknowledging the interleaving of geographical topoi with the products of literature (and indeed other creative forms) might short-circuit traces of insularity in the make-up of island studies:

... If insular thinking is at the heart of traditional identity politics, the relational politics that emerges out of the cross-culturalizing dynamics of the creolization process put this insularity into question ... We live in a hybridized world of transcultural, transnational relations in which every island (ethnicity, nation, and the like) is but a fragment of the whole that is always already in the process of transforming the particular into something other than its (original, essential) self. (Bongie 18)

This paper has only begun to imagine the scope and value of a theory of performative geographies as it could be used in island studies. The benefits of this approach are potentially manifold: it begins with an acknowledgement of the mutually constructive relationship of descriptions of islands (in multiple media) and their material and social reality; it provides a fresh conceptual model for considering islands as productive of individual and social identity; and, perhaps most importantly, it insists that islands are always already places in process. The task of island studies is thus not a finite one; hopefully, a theory of performative geographies goes some of the way towards alleviating some of the concerns about disciplinary integrity and longevity which have delimited debates in the field.

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#### Notes

- 1 Dorothy F. Lane uses the title "The Island and the Book" for the prologue to her monograph *The Island as a Site of Resistance*.
- 2 I offer a brief critique of Hay's take on the relationship between literature and geography in my article "Reading the News: Pitcairn Island at the Beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."
- 3 For a historical overview of theories of performativity, see my *Historical Romance Fiction: Heterosexuality and Performativity*,

- especially Chapters 1 and 2.
- 4 A more detailed explication of the potential of this term might also consider the relevance of the *OED*'s second usage: "1b. The study of a subject in its geographical aspects." The term "performative geography" resonates in additional ways if approached through this definition, or indeed through the other senses of the noun listed by the *OED*.

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### Utopia, Dystopia, and Caribbean Heterotopia: Writing/Reading the Small Island

This essay explores the concepts utopia, dystopia, and heterotopia in relation to literary representations of Barbados, a small coral island of 166 square miles, located east of the archipelago which separates the western edge of the Atlantic Ocean from the Caribbean Sea.<sup>1</sup> Barbados was first a plantation economy whose profits from sugar were made by exploiting slave labor. Colonialists often imagined it as a utopia for themselves—for slaves and those who fought colonialism and racism, it was a dystopic place. While Karl Mannheim argues that "[t]he attempt to escape...utopian distortions is, in the last analysis, a quest for reality" (98), so, however, is the attempt to escape a dystopian vision. Generally speaking, writers of Barbadian birth or origin have avoided depicting the island in either utopian or dystopian terms. Instead they imagine a diversity of responses. This might be described using Michel Foucault's heterotopia, which he theorised is the containment of all "real sites" within a culture, "simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (3). This presents a refutation of the superficial coherence of both models of utopia and dystopia.

Yet Caribbean writers have made their own complex models for thinking through Caribbean culture. Antonio Benítez-Rojo recommends that postindustrial society begin to "reread" the Caribbean in ways that permit the revelation of the region's "own textuality" (2). That textuality is complex, expressing a multiplicity of identities, as Wilson Harris has long argued.<sup>2</sup> Harris speaks of multiple layers of survivals ("shards") of historical and cultural ancestry, existing just under the surface of speech or writing. They may not be beneficial; he compares contemporary addictions (alcohol, drugs, violence etc.) to ancient addictions (the example of Aztec subservience to ritual conformity) (181). Thus Foucault's heterotopia must be understood in Caribbean space as having elements which are starkly opposed and ethically quite different: colonial, anticolonial, racist, antiracist, utopian, and dystopian. Reading these together does not make them dissolve into one.<sup>3</sup> A Caribbean heterotopia is rather a space where both real and imagined social and political elements are experienced together, in a complex dialogue.

Writing the small island has very often been political, a major tool for establishing and disseminating colonialist and tourist ideas of the small island as a blank space on which to impose fantasies, and a way to oppose