

# INTRODUCTION – 17(1)

[DOI: 10.21463/shima.195]

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This issue of *Shima* consolidates research on a number of areas explored in previous theme and general issues. Articles 1, 6 and 7 arose from a call for papers on “The island as ‘watery land’: water-land interfaces in island discourses, experiences and practices: Ecocritical, political and cultural perspectives”. This call was initiated in the context of on-going research within the DFG (German Research Foundation) funded Island Studies Network: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Island Exchanges, Environments, and Perceptions. Etymologically, island means ‘watery land’, going back to Old English – ‘of or pertaining to water’, ‘watery’, and land (OED, 2022). Linguistically, then, islands transgress the binary opposition between land and water. Rather than just being land surrounded by water, they are themselves characterised by water. Island Studies has long emphasised the close connection between terrestrial and aquatic spaces and in recent decades has turned to the study of the multifarious interrelations between islands and water, for instance with the concept of aquapelago, which conceives (some) archipelagic areas as “an intermeshed and interactive marine/land environment” (Hayward, 2012, p.5). Islands’ watery or ecotonal character (Gillis, 2014) shapes human behaviour on the edge of two ecosystems. The opposition between land and water, however, remains a dominant discursive pattern and is connected to other distinctions playing a fundamental role in Western discourses (Moser, 2005, pp. 408-409): the contrast between structured and amorphous space, order and chaos, the human world and its other. Focussing on islands as ‘watery lands’ and on related socio-cultural contexts muddies such seemingly clear-cut distinctions and highlights different perspectives on nature and culture, not as dichotomy but as inseparably intertwined. Developing such non-dichotomous viewpoints and strengthening their influence within hegemonic discourses and practices has become increasingly urgent in times of accelerated environmental destruction and anthropogenic climate change. A non-hierarchical, anti-instrumentalising view of the relationship between humans and nature

could help to create a much-needed alternative to the logic of capitalist exploitation, colonisation, and extractivism.

When analysing island imaginaries, two opposing tendencies can be observed: the continuation of a view of the island as a space to be appropriated and as territory enclosed by water, but also diverse approaches to islands as watery lands of connection and interaction rather than domination.

In 'Ruminating on seaweed: An annotated photo-essay', Jon Shaw reflects on sheep living at the land-water interface of North Ronaldsay in the Orkney archipelago of Scotland. Applying the film philosophy of Pierre Creton, Shaw observes the seaweed-eating island sheep as "guides" to inhabiting liminal space. In an environment where the tide constantly provides food, the sea is experienced as interwoven with the land. The practice of "inhabiting difference" thus exposes land-water dichotomies as ephemeral and constructed. The format of the photo-essay with its intriguing text-image combinations aesthetically corresponds to its exploration of difference and interconnection.

In their article 'Reimagining the Juan Fernández Islands', Elizabeth Chant and Natalia Gándara Chacana explore how the advent of cruise tourism and its advertising contributed to an imaginary which obscured the islanders' aquapelagic society in favour of a pronounced binary of land and sea. The connection with Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe* served to market the islands as a destination for wealthy cruise travellers, reproducing colonial imaginaries. Moreover, the representation of the islands as botanical laboratories led to an overconsumption of the endemic terrestrial flora and fauna. While cruise tourism also incorporated the Juan Fernández Islands into a global network of travel and exchange, Chile's own marketing campaign in the context of its Pacific agenda further exoticised the archipelago as a paradisiac outpost. Only recently have environmental and social discourses embraced the archipelago's ecotonal character at the interface of land and sea.

Sean Dettman's article 'Our island fortress and the sea' puts the role of the sea at the centre of its analysis. He asks how the notion of 'Deep England' and the narratives around the country's historic land-sea relationship mattered for its wartime propaganda of the 'Island Fortress'. Dettman finds that besides the narrative of a rural shire identity, Britain's wartime culture was indeed strongly influenced by the role of its island geography and maritime element. In wartime, the sea was seen as a natural barrier protecting against invasion, one that represents strength and an advantage compared to continental powers. Hence, wartime propaganda stressed the island identity and historical experiences of defending the island against invasions from across the Channel. Moreover, the article demonstrates how the country's relationship with the sea strengthened the island's national identity.

Focusing on water-land interfaces from different disciplines, as Shaw, Chant & Gándara Chacana and Dettman have done in this issue, exposes how much island life and island conceptions are defined by plants (such as seaweed), animals (such as sheep or lobsters) and people (both welcome or unwelcome) entering via the island's liminal zones and inhabiting them. By contrast, focussing on the terrestrial boundedness of islands, two further articles explore the issue of abandonment, which has become an increasingly marked tendency over the last century, related to phenomena such as rural-urban drift (with regard to migration from small islands to larger ones or to continental mainlands) and/or aging population profiles and related reductions in local birth rates. James X. Morris' article provides discussion and extensive photo documentation of Xiji Yu island, off

the west coast of Taiwan, and identifies the manner in which the re-wilding of the island has resulted in ruination, variously disassembling and modifying buildings and creating a new heritage landscape in the process. His meditations, based on fieldwork conducted in 2017, with the data being subsequently archived and analysed in detail, seek to understand the nature of transitional *processes* (with the emphasis on the latter as an unfolding phenomenon – i.e. as the island progressively becoming ruined and re-wilded rather than having arrived at a new fixed state after a relatively short period of abandonment). Complementing this work, Gang Hong examines the *mediascapes* of abandoned Chinese islands – i.e. the nature of their representation within audio-visual travelogues – identifying the lure of such abandoned places to contemporary audio-visual producers/bloggers and arguing for a critical interrogation of the perceived affectivity of such locales that can lead to more sophisticated appraisal of these.

Peter Hargreaves and Peter Goggin provide very different characterisations of spaces *within* islands, the nature of demarcations of such spaces and the differential perceptions of infra-island identity that result. Hargreaves details the highly distinct nature of parishes in Jersey, in the (British) Channel Islands. His study demonstrates the manner in which these parishes are indicated by various forms of public signage that have delineated space and micro-socio-cultural differences across a small (120 square kilometre) island over an extended historical period. Goggin's case study, of the Fairylands area of Bermuda, also addresses issues of spatial identity and demarcation within a small (54 square kilometre) island territory but in this case, one of a modern settlement whose name and related marketing (commencing in the late 1800s) reflected a desire to promote the area as tranquil and upmarket (and, thereby, desirable). Both of the authors' studies are informed by their extended periods of residence on the islands in question and convey nuanced senses of island identity and spatial differentiation.

Addressing the distinctive nature of a unitary island space, Adam Grydehøj, Seon-Pil Kim and Ping Su examine the tensions between the autonomous governance of islands, in this case Jeju, to the south of the Korean peninsula, and the creation of exceptional economic statuses for them (in this case as a special economic zone). Their detailed study reveals the extent to which indigenous autonomy has been compromised by national government agendas. Addressing an island that has achieved a substantial degree of autonomy that has not been significantly compromised by its status as a tax haven within a national context, Gary N. Wilson and Catriona Mackie examine indigenous language policy within the British Crown dependency of the Isle of Man. Their study examines the workings of the Isle of Man's Select Committee on the use of Manx Gaelic and the nature and outcomes of its attempts to revitalise Manx language use. Examining another, very different, type of cultural re-affirmation in a sub-national territory, Francesc Fusté-Forné & Jonatan Leer examine the food scene in the Faroe Islands' capital, Tórshavn, and the city's marketing as a culinary destination. Their study illustrates the manner in which traditional Faroese food has been "balanced" with more generic international flavors in order to satisfy tourists' needs.

The final section of this issue (articles 11-14) continues the journal's address to aspects of mermaids in folklore, fine arts and media-lore (as manifest in two previous theme issues of the journal 15[2] and 12[2]) and reflects the continuing interest of a diverse range of scholars in these topics. Bois' article on mermaids in Jersey and Channel Islands folklore reflects his sustained research on the topic over forty years on the island he was born and raised on and outlines the manner in which mermaid folklore shades into related themes that have been promoted in various ways within tourism discourse. Rose contributes to the

exploration of mermaid themes in western fine art previously explored by Butkus, Fleury and Raoulx (2018), with regard to the work of Adolf Lalyre; by Isabel Luta (2018), with regard to John Waterhouse; by Han Tran (2018) with regard to Arnold Böcklin and by Philip Hayward (2021) with regard to Venetian art history. Her article analyses a trio of works by late 1800s/early 1900s British painter Evelyn De Morgan inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's seminal story 'Little Mermaid'. Her study of De Morgan's paintings shows how the artist interpreted the theme to address women's rights and the concept of 'spiritual evolution' derived from the work of Swedish theologian Emanuel Swedenborg. Focussing on a more profane topic, Sarah Allison untangles the processes of citation and misreading that have resulted in Starbucks' famous split tailed mermaid logo being persistently mischaracterised as a Melusine, leading to a retrospective assumption of that figure as a split-tailed mermaid (rather than serpentine one, as in the original story). Noveliss' contribution – the text, audio recording and music video of his composition *Fear of a Black mermaid* – responds to the social media furore around the announcement of African-American performer Halle Bailey being cast to play the titular role in Disney's 2023 live remake of their 1989 animation feature *The Little Mermaid*. Through lyrics, musical framing and a black and white video collage, Noveliss identifies the roots of the controversy in a racist colonisation of the fantasy worlds of western media discourse.

Completing the issue, Guillermo Gil's feature review of Beatriz Llenín Figueroa's *Affect, archive, archipelago: Puerto Rico's sovereign Caribbean lives* (2022) continues the discussion of aspects of Puerto Rico's subjugation by the United States and its rights to sovereignty that have been advanced previously in the journal by Garriga-López (2019) and by Figueroa (2020). The journal welcomes further discussions on decolonialisation in various contexts – including discourse and the overall projects of Island Studies and Blue Humanities.

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