



## **EX-ISLES: ISLANDS THAT DISAPPEARED**

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**Abstract:** *Phantom islands are falsely mapped islands that turned out non-existent. This paper examines the histories and the etymologies of the names of Bermeja, Hy Brasil, and Sandy Island. Appearing cartographically since 1539, Bermeja's 'undiscovery' blocked Mexico's ownership of an oil-rich section of the Gulf of Mexico. Hy Brasil appeared first in 1330 maps and became falsely associated with Irish mythology. Sandy Island, near New Caledonia, was officially 'unfound' most recently in 2012, but existed on maps since 1908. This paper also examines the residential cruise liner The World, a manmade floating 'island' challenging our notion of place. Though not 'real', these islands exist as hope – Bermeja, a hope for power, Hy Brasil, a hope for a divine land, and Sandy Island and The World, a hope for the unknown. In a largely known, familiar world, discovery is not exploring the new, but revisiting the old; not uncovering what we do not know, but undiscovering what we do.*

**Key Words:** phantom islands, Historical Cartography, *Bermeja, Hy Brasil, Sandy Island*



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Can a place be defined by its non-existence? Paradoxically, yes – when it exists as a figment of imagination, legend, human error, conspiracy, and, sometimes, pure, unexplainable mystery. These ghost places can range from streets to towns, and even to entire islands.

Phantom islands are islands that were officially charted and recorded on maps, fully believed to be real, but that turned out to be non-existent. In this paper, the histories of three phantom islands are investigated – *Bermeja*, off the coast of Mexico, *Hy Brasil*, west of Ireland in the Atlantic Ocean, and *Sandy Island*, near New Caledonia – as well as the etymology of their names. Collecting and elaborating information about these islands holistically from various sources, this study discusses the historical context and background surrounding the islands and comments on the possible explanations for their false mapping. It also describes the consequences of their un-discovery and analyses the etymologies of their names, including their evolution and variation. Finally, the paper provides a brief description of the luxury residential cruise liner *The World*, to compare different notions of *place*, and to illustrate the fundamental human desire to explore the unlikely and to uncover the unknown.

## 2. MAPS AND THE WORLD REPRESENTATION

Maps are visual representations of how humans understand the world. Products of social groups, they reflect existing powers and beliefs. In the *Atlas of Improbable Places*, Elborough examines some of the world's most unlikely and beguiling places. Referencing the well-known Italian writer Italo Calvino, Elborough writes that maps “presuppose the idea of a narrative because they are conceived on the basis of a journey, an odyssey”<sup>1</sup>. In other words, every place on a map has an underlying story to tell<sup>2</sup>. Maps do not just illustrate the world; they also describe it. Yet, the relationship between maps and the cartographers producing them goes both ways: people create maps based on existing knowledge and beliefs, but also the maps create new beliefs<sup>3</sup>. Some lands are added to maps as a result of ancient myths and historical legends, while others arise from tales that have been spun in modern times. No matter the context in which the places are conceived, these lands forge “flows of belief”<sup>4</sup>. And, regardless of whether these newly constructed beliefs are founded or not, whether they are borne of certain fact or illusionary fiction, they are certainly real to the believers<sup>5</sup>.

Thus, maps are simultaneously “predictive and descriptive, [...] proactive and reactive”<sup>6</sup>. They communicate known information while building new content. Maps can falsify our beliefs, nurture our creativity, and encourage novel imaginations. With the power to establish authority for small communities and entire countries alike, maps also have the capacity for both power elevation and degradation. In short, the maps

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<sup>1</sup> Elborough, (2016), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Elborough, (2016), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Harwood, (2006), p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> Eco, (2013), p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Harwood, (2006), p. 7.

created to describe the world are also robust tools to alter it<sup>7</sup>. Maps are nothing without places – real or imaginary ones. Legendary lands, wild spaces, and remarkable places are subjects of timeless human intrigue. People’s fascination with the notion of *place* and the allure of geography are as far-reaching and as ancient as geography itself<sup>8</sup>. *Place* is a fundamental part of *Man*, an essential concept impossible to be divorced from being human<sup>9</sup>. Many basic human needs and motivations are inextricably tied to *place* – needs such as mobility, liberty, and escape<sup>10</sup>. After all, without any notion of place, of borders, and of boundaries, how can a man conceive the notion of being free? Is escape possible if there is nowhere to run away from?

*Place* is often thought of as something physical and material, a purely spatial and real construct, but this concept is evidently more complex and multi-dimensional. Humans endow *place* with special meanings that vary from one individual to the next<sup>11</sup>. There are stories behind every place, and some localities are not ‘physical places’ at all, but exist only in the minds of the believers who, thus, sustain their abstract, fragile existence. In *The Book of Legendary Lands*, Eco discusses a multitude of fascinating places. These include lands that really did exist, but are shrouded in mystery, lands that are thought to have enjoyed a purely “spiritual” existence, others that existed only in religion, lands that clearly do not exist today, but that may have existed once, and destinations borne out of false documentation, whether intentional or accidental<sup>12</sup>. Humans always hunger for *place* and all that comes with it – exploration, adventure, and mystery. People want to journey to remote destinations and uncover mythical places because they are seized by a need to discover a strange world, or, at least, a world they want to believe is stranger than they know it to be. Chinese-American geographer Yi-Fu Tuan coined a special term to describe our innate love of place – *topophilia*, of which *topo-* is from Ancient Greek *τόπος* (*tópos*), meaning ‘place’<sup>13</sup>, and *-philia*, is an Ancient Greek word (*φιλία*, *philia*) for ‘love’<sup>14</sup>. *Place* in general is deeply captivating and alluring, but, in particular, there is something compellingly irresistible about a special type of place – islands. In his memoirs of life on the Greek islands of Corfù and Rhodes, Lawrence Durrell defines the notion of *islomania*, which he claims is ‘an unclassified medical disease’. He describes it as an uncommon spiritual affliction of people who are profoundly and helplessly drawn to islands: “The mere knowledge that they are on an island, a little world surrounded by the sea, fills them with an indescribable intoxication”<sup>15</sup>.

Combining humans’ insatiable hunger for the mysterious unknown and their innate love of *place*, especially islands, we arrive at the focus of this paper – phantom islands. These are islands that were found on maps for centuries, but that were ultimately found to be non-existent. These islands, labeled on historical maps with “E.D.”, for “Existence Doubtful”, are not uncommon. The British Royal Navy, for example, cleared at least 123 such falsely recorded islands in 1875 – and that was from the North Pacific alone. Despite existing only on maps, these islands can be very

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<sup>7</sup> Harwood, (2006), pp. 7-9.

<sup>8</sup> Bonnett, (2014), p. xi.

<sup>9</sup> Bonnett, (2014), p. xiii.

<sup>10</sup> Bonnett, (2014), p. 251.

<sup>11</sup> Kajihara, Chiang & Tomimatsu, (2012), p. 346.

<sup>12</sup> Eco, (2013), pp. 8-9.

<sup>13</sup> Mavromatidis, (2012), p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> Kajihara, Chiang & Tomimatsu, (2012), p. 346.

<sup>15</sup> Durrell, (1960), p. 11.

tenacious, with some surviving from map to map well into the nineteenth century<sup>16</sup>. There are a variety of reasons why these phantom islands were drawn into maps, roughly falling into two categories: error and imagination<sup>17</sup>. Human error causes sailors and seafarers to mistake mirages, low clouds, rock formations, and other misleading visual phenomena for land. Imprecise navigational and charting equipment can also deceive seamen. These, thus, result in the creation of phantom islands<sup>18</sup>. Sometimes, the ‘mistake’ is not an error at all, but a deliberate imaginative construct. Phantom islands may also emerge from purposeful deception by those with specific reasons to invent an entire island – cartographers guarding themselves from copyright traps or creative writers whose fantastic tales of adventure claim to have discovered new and exciting lands<sup>19</sup>.

Over time, with modernization and globalization, technological advancements and other improvements in navigation and mapping have slowly, but surely, uncovered the world’s secret places and mysterious destinations, including debunking the mythical existence of some phantom islands. Our *topophilia*, thus, faces an unusual threat: our own modern technology. This may have the potential to degrade the allure and enchantment places can have on *Man*. No longer do explorers have mysteries to solve – in fact, no longer do we even have explorers. Instead, we have comprehensive navigational databases, free and accessible maps on our computers and phones, and satellites circling our planet to tell us exactly where we are and what is around us<sup>20</sup>. As more and more data and details are discovered and documented about the furthest reaches of our planet, little is left unknown or unusual. The result is a world that feels “flatter”, a world today that is not quite as extraordinary, not quite as thrilling, as it was for those before us<sup>21</sup>. To put it simply, but crudely, globalization is making places feel ‘too familiar’, and our world is becoming ‘all-discovered’. On the flipside, this does not necessarily mean that technology and globalization will definitely ruin discovery for humankind and starve human beings’ love of place. Elborough holds a more optimistic view of the effect globalization has on feeding our *topophilia*. He claims that Earth is still varied and interesting because “our appetite for the unusual and the out of the ordinary has, if anything, only been heightened by new technology [...], changing the kinds of places we find intriguing, beautiful, or worthy of cursory investigation”<sup>22</sup>. Perhaps humans are no longer as obsessed with discovering *new* lands as in the past, but they are moving towards ‘un-discovering’ *old* ones, old ‘phantoms’. Bonnett claims we desperately need “geographical re-enchantment”<sup>23</sup> in today’s modern world; perhaps, this re-enchantment comprises a reconceptualization of our idea of ‘discovery’.

In *The Phantom Atlas*, Brooke-Hitching writes that no matter how assured humans are of their own geographical knowledge about their planet, there will always be something else to discover. Or, rather, there will always be something else to be *un*-discovered – some phantom “hiding in plain sight [...] masquerading as fact, enjoying

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<sup>16</sup> Brooke-Hitching, (2016), p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Brooke-Hitching, (2016), pp. 9-10.

<sup>19</sup> Brooke-Hitching, (2016), p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 136.

<sup>21</sup> Elborough, (2016), p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> Elborough, (2016), p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> Bonnett (2014), p. xi.



its quiet nonexistence, just waiting to be undiscovered”<sup>24</sup>. He is optimistic about the perpetuation of *discovery* through *un-discovery*. Tallack shares a similar sentiment in her book on phantom islands, *The Un-Discovered Islands*: even if humans have ‘exhausted’ the unknown islands, there may still be ex-isles surviving on maps and in minds, phantom islands living on a borrowed time before they are un-discovered<sup>25</sup>.

### 3. BERMEJA

#### 3.1. The Birth of Bermeja



**Figure 1.** El Yucatán e Islas Adyacentes in the Islario General de todas las Islas del Mundo (1539) by Alonso de Santa Cruz. Bermeja is shown circled in the upper portion  
(Source: BBC Mundo 2009)

The 80 square-kilometer island of *Bermeja* made its first appearance in 1539. It was marked out in Alonso de Santa Cruz’s 1539 map *El Yucatán e Islas Adyacentes* in the *Islario General de todas las Islas del Mundo* (Figure 1), in which it is also briefly described:

<sup>24</sup> Brooke-Hitching, (2016), p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 136.

“...y por el mismo viento y por veynte lenguas esta otra (isla) dicha la Bermeja por parecer de lexos de la tal color...”<sup>26</sup>

“...and by the same wind by twenty leagues is another (island) called Bermeja, as it appears to be of such a colour...”

The *bermeja* coloration described refers to a reddish hue deriving from the Spanish *bermejo*, meaning ‘red’. The change in word-final *-a* to *-o* is due to gender agreement: an island (*isla*) is feminine and, thus, described as *bermeja* with the feminine *-a* suffix, while an islet (*islote*) is masculine and, therefore, described as *bermejo* with the masculine *-o* suffix.

A year after its first cartographical appearance in his *Espejo de navegantes*, Alonso de Chaves similarly noted the island’s “blondish or reddish” coloration, but took it one step further in also identifying the precise location of *Bermeja*<sup>27</sup>:

“Desde punta Estéril hasta cabo Redondo o la Desconocida va la costa casi toda al oeste, hay de camino 70 leguas; hace la costa un poco de arco hacia el norte. En este paraje son los Alacranes, e islas de Arenas y Bermeja. Corren las aguas en toda esta costa al oeste”.

“*Bermeja*, isla en término del Yucatán, está en 23° grados (de latitud norte). Está al oeste cuarta al noroeste de cabo de San Antón, dista 14 leguas. Está al oeste-noroeste de los Alacranes, dista 55 leguas. Está al nordeste cuarta al este de Villa Rica, dista 118 leguas. Esta es una isleta pequeña y que de lejos se ve bermeja”<sup>28</sup>

“From *Point Estéril* to *Round Cape* or *The Unknown*, the coast is almost entirely to the west, there are 70 leagues; the coast arcs a bit to the north. In this place are the *Alacranes*, and the islands of *Arenas* and *Bermeja*. All the waters along this coast run to the west.”

“*Bermeja*, an island in the Yucatan term, is at 23° degrees (north latitude). It is to the west quarter to the northwest of the *Cape of San Antón*, 14 leagues away. It is to the west-northwest of the *Alacranes*, 55 leagues away. It is to the northeastern quarter to the east of *Villa Rica*, 118 leagues away. This is a small island and looks red from a distance.”

For the next few hundred years, *Bermeja* would remain on maps. A 2009 study by the BBC found its name sometimes spelled with a “v”, as in Catalan. It was recorded as *Vermeja* in Abraham Ortelius’ world map in 1564 (Figure 2) and as an islet called *Vermejo* in the *Imperial Mexican Atlas* of 1794<sup>29</sup>, (Figure 3). Yet, despite the lack of official sightings, the slight variation on its name was the only thing disputed about it – *Bermeja* continued to be drawn in approximately the same location and shape for centuries more<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> Reprinted in Santa Cruz, (1918), p. 518.

<sup>27</sup> Brooke-Hitching, (2016), p. 38.

<sup>28</sup> *Espejo de navegantes* by Alonso de Chaves, (1540), qtd. in Méndez & Garduño, (2009), *passim*.

<sup>29</sup> BBC Mundo, (2009).

<sup>30</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 131.



**Figure 2.** Abraham Ortelius' world map, 1564, showing Bermeja spelled as Vermeja (Source: BBC Mundo 2009)



**Figure 3.** Bermeja appearing as an islet called Vermejo in the Imperial Mexican Atlas of 1794 (Source: BBC Mundo 2009)



### 3.2. *Bermeja's 'Un-Discovery'*

However, expeditions by the Spanish army in 1775 and by captain Ciriaco de Ceballos in 1789 failed to locate *Bermeja*<sup>31</sup>. In the nineteenth century, serious doubts surrounding the island existence began to surface. In 1885, the United States Hydrographic Office's *The Navigation of the Caribbean Sea* dismissed the island existence as "more than doubtful", due to the inability of several navy officials to find *Bermeja* in searches conducted earlier in the century<sup>32</sup>. The British, too, appeared to have written off the curious red island, as shown in British maps reporting that it had mysteriously sunk into the sea and was, thus, no more<sup>33</sup>. In the words of Tallack: "The rest of the world, it seemed, had long considered *Bermeja* to be lost. Only its owners had failed to notice"<sup>34</sup>. Indeed, *Bermeja's* last appearance was on a Mexican map – the *Geographic Atlas of the Mexican Republic* in 1921<sup>35</sup>.

The island was mostly forgotten until 1997, when Mexico and the United States started negotiations regarding a treaty to determine their maritime borders in the Gulf of Mexico<sup>36</sup>. The debate had been brought up previously in 1970, but no consensus had been reached<sup>37</sup>. According to marine law, a country can claim nautical sovereignty over waters up to 200 nautical miles from its coast – this becomes the country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). In the Gulf of Mexico, which lies between the United States in the north and Mexico in the south, two areas fell outside of both Mexico's and the United States' EEZs. These, thus, became unclaimed, international waters known as the *Hoyos de Dona*, the *Donut Holes*<sup>38</sup>.

The ownership of the *Donut Holes* might not have been as hotly disputed had the Gulf of Mexico not been rich in oil reserves, an important source of economic wealth for both countries. In a bid to determine who had control over these waters, ancient maps were brought out and *Bermeja* was discovered to be the northernmost Mexican land to the area of contention<sup>39</sup>. *Bermeja* was, therefore, Mexico's best chance to claim ownership of the international waters. Thus, in 1997 Mexico deployed a vessel to prove the existence of *Bermeja*, but no sign of any island in the charted location was found. Although in 2000 Mexico signed the treaty it had been negotiating with the US, another attempt to find *Bermeja* was made in 2009, this time by a team of expert researchers from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). Despite searches by both sea and air, no trace of the island could be found<sup>40</sup>. In fact, based on analysis of the ocean floor, the team from UNAM concluded that there had not been an island at the given coordinates for more than 5300 years<sup>41</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> Cuen, (2009), *passim*.

<sup>32</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 131.

<sup>33</sup> Brooke-Hitching, (2016), p. 38.

<sup>34</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 131.

<sup>35</sup> Brooke-Hitching, (2016), p. 38.

<sup>36</sup> Brooke-Hitching, (2016), p. 39.

<sup>37</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 130.

<sup>38</sup> Brooke-Hitching, (2016), p. 38.

<sup>39</sup> BBC Mundo, (2009).

<sup>40</sup> Brooke-Hitching, (2016), p. 40.

<sup>41</sup> Méndez & Garduño, (2009), *passim*.



### 3.3. *Bermeja Today*

Explanations for *Bermeja*'s 'disappearance' have ranged from blaming natural geophysical phenomena, such as earthquakes and climate change, to conspiracy theories involving the United States' Central Intelligence Agency sending the island into oblivion with dynamite. Theories of collusion and corruption on the part of President Zedillo with American oil firms were fuelled also by the sudden death of the only Senator who had opposed him, *Bermeja* proponent José Angel Conchello<sup>42</sup>. His mysterious death in 1998, in the midst of ongoing negotiations, was attributed to "mechanical failure" resulting in a car accident<sup>43</sup>.

Some attribute the island vanishing to simple cartographical mistakes carried forward erroneously in the maps of past centuries. Others, such as the President of the Mexican Geographical Society, Julio Zamora, theorize that *Bermeja* was an imaginary island purposely charted incorrectly in the Gulf of Mexico in some sixteenth and seventeenth century maps to dissuade enemies from traversing these waters, which were routes of navigational interest<sup>44</sup>.

However, the jury is still out on whether the island ever existed. The Director of UNAM's Institute of Geography, Dr Irasema Alcántara, stated in a 2009 interview given to the BBC that following the analysis of various historical accounts in which the island was described in great, precise detail, they believe the island is real. It probably just exists in a different location from the coordinates that have been searched<sup>45</sup>. In Mexico, especially, people still hold out for *Bermeja*'s discovery – perhaps not the same size, shape or location, but Mexico's ancient missing island all the same, a treasure lost at sea. And as life goes on, possibly nothing more than a memory lost with time.

## 4. HY BRASIL

### 4.1. *Historical Cartography*

*Hy Brasil* was a phantom island located on maps in the North Atlantic Ocean and strongly associated with Irish mythology and folklore. Legends and myths play an important role in the island longevity – unlike most phantom islands whose existence grew increasingly doubted over time, the notion of *Hy Brasil* and its exact coordinates only grew more and more specific<sup>46</sup>. It was first mapped by cartographer Angelino Dulcert in 1325<sup>47</sup>, as the island *insula de monotonis*, later changed into *insula de brazil* in 1339<sup>48</sup>, a round island located to the west of Ireland<sup>49</sup> (Figure 4). It survived on maps for over 500 years and, although reports claimed to have found the isle, these have

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<sup>42</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 132.

<sup>43</sup> Breglia, (2013), p. 248.

<sup>44</sup> Brooke-Hitching, (2016), p. 41.

<sup>45</sup> Cuen, (2009), *passim*.

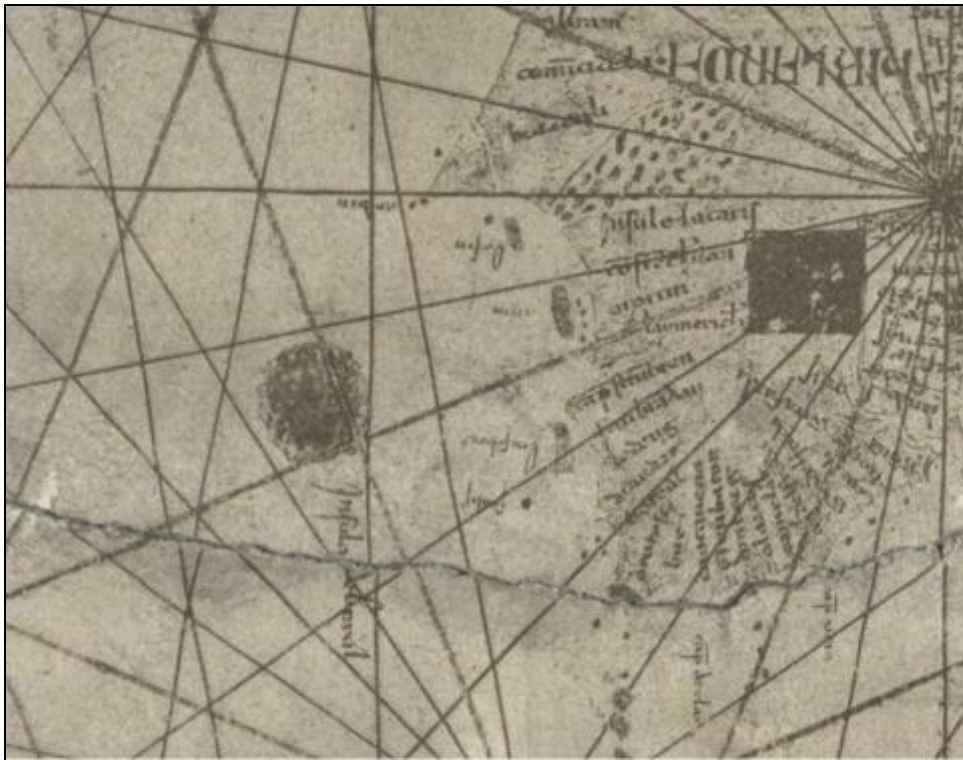
<sup>46</sup> Brooke-Hitching, (2016), p. 132.

<sup>47</sup> Westropp, (1912), p. 240; Babcock, (1922), p. 51.

<sup>48</sup> Brooke-Hitching, (2016), p. 132.

<sup>49</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 56.

slipped into legend, and expeditions to find the island have always returned unsuccessful<sup>50</sup> (Figure 5&6).



**Figure 4.** An 1890 facsimile of Dulcert's 1339 chart.  
The island appears as a circular land mass, insula de Brazil  
(Source: Norman B. Leventhal Map Center, Boston Public Library)

How did an imaginary island come to be plotted on maps, in the first place? Some theorize there really was an island, but that it sank<sup>51</sup>, but it seems more likely that it was born out of cartographic error. Even from the onset, *Hy Brasil* was drawn with dots and other geometric patterns to set the island apart from other islands that were explored, charted, and known in greater detail. These markings suggest uncertainty of its location and even doubt of its existence right from the beginning<sup>52</sup>. By the late eighteenth century, seamen and cartographers grew certain the island did not exist. Yet, *Hy Brasil* stayed on maps, described as an imaginary island<sup>53</sup>. Although it was charted in generally the same position, the island shrank over time and was eventually 'reduced' to just *Brasil Rock*. It made its last cartographic appearance late into the nineteenth century, with some scholars tracing its last appearance to 1865<sup>54</sup> and others even later, to 1873<sup>55</sup>, marking over 500 years since its first mapping.

<sup>50</sup> Brooke-Hitching, (2016), p. 131.

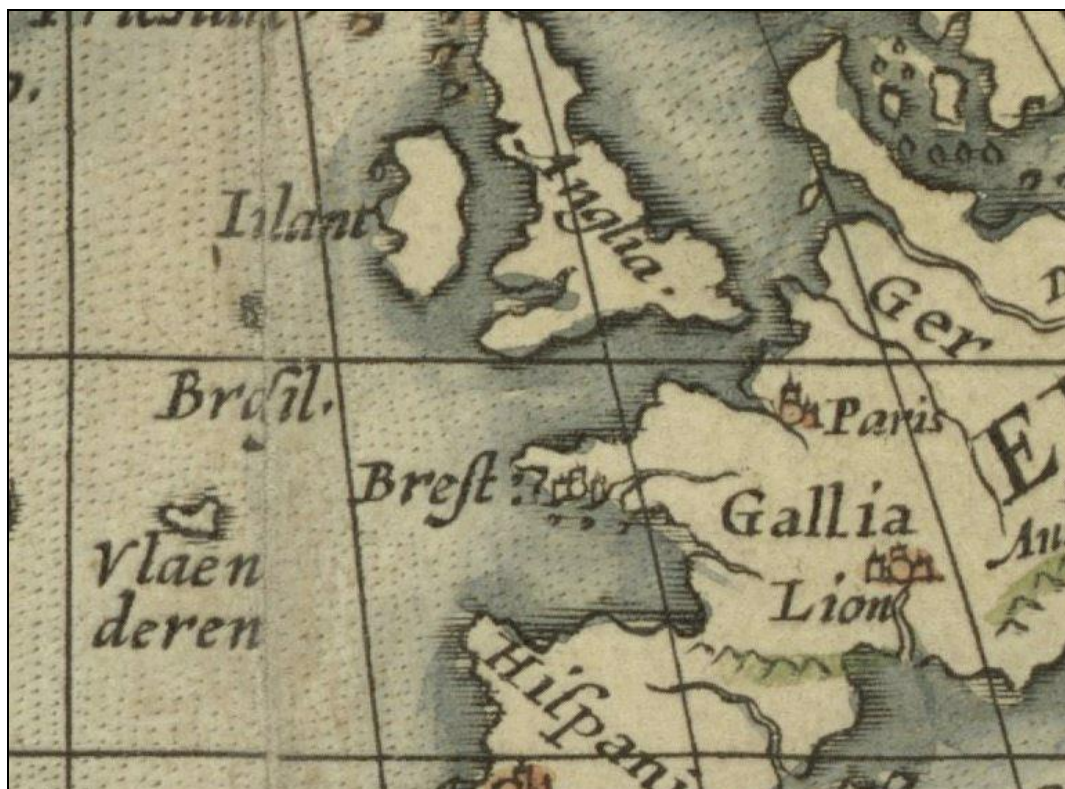
<sup>51</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 9.

<sup>52</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 12.

<sup>53</sup> Boston Public Library, (2016).

<sup>54</sup> Westropp, (1912), p. 246.

<sup>55</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 21.



**Figure 5.** Abraham Ortelius' *Typus Orbis Terrarum*, the first modern world atlas, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* or *Theater of the World* (1570)  
(Source: Norman B. Leventhal Map Center, Boston Public Library)





**Figure 6.** John Green’s 1753 Chart of the Atlantic Ocean, naming the island Imaginary Isle of O Brazil  
(Source: Norman B. Leventhal Map Center, Boston Public Library)

#### 4.2. Other Brasil Islands

The cartographic history of *Hy Brasil* begins not with a discussion about *Brasil Island* (singular), but about *Brasil Islands* (plural). The same name was conferred on islands of differing shape, size, and location such that a single map could show up to three different *Brasil Islands* at the same time<sup>56</sup>. Consistency was lacking even in the spelling of the name, with at least thirteen variants: *Brasilia*, *Bresilia*, *Prislia*, *Prislli*,

<sup>56</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 25.



*Brasielie, Brazili, Brasil, Brassil, Brazil, Brazill, Brazile, Presillg, and Brasi*. The islands in the Atlantic that were given one of these variant names remained on maps until the late nineteenth century<sup>57</sup>. The island we are discussing is the *Brasil Island* that was charted off the west coast of Ireland. The other *Brasil Islands* shared its name by chance<sup>58</sup>, such as *Brasil Island* in the Azores, which earliest known cartographic appearance is in maps by the Pizzigani Brothers in 1367<sup>59</sup>. The isle also appears as an island called *Brazir* among several islands off Spain's coast in a 1385 Solerio map<sup>60</sup>. Some scholars regard this Azores island as the very phantom island that is the subject of this section<sup>61</sup>, but this island is, in fact, a separate entity. The *Brasil Island* of the Azores is a real island, and lost its denomination and its 'status' as '*Brasil Island*' simply due to renaming. Today, indeed, it is called *Terceira*, with just one prominent headland called *Mount Brazil* paying homage to its origins<sup>62</sup>.

A more prominent island to share the name *Brasil Island* was an island charted west of Brittany, which had many widely different names at different points in time: *Maida, Asmada, Mam, Man, de-Man, Jonzele, Vlaenderen, and Ventura*. In fact, in its relatively long lifespan from the Pizzigani Brothers' fourteenth century chart<sup>63</sup> to a Rand McNally's map in 1906<sup>64</sup>, it was only known as *Brasil Island* for a brief period in the fourteenth and early fifteenth century. Actually, *Mayda*, or *Man*, is a more appropriate referent for the island<sup>65</sup>. In any case, *Mayda* was most likely simply mistaken for another island, such as the Irish *Brasil Island*<sup>66</sup>, Cape Cod, or even America<sup>67</sup>. Finally, also a *Brasil Island* in American waters, east of Newfoundland, existed. This island was viewed as entirely separate and distinct and, instead of being confused with the Irish *Brasil Island*, enjoyed a coexistence with it<sup>68</sup>. Even though the American *Brasil Island* appeared later than the other *Brasil Islands* and had a relatively short lifespan from 1480 to 1598 (Figure 7), traces of this imaginary island live on today in *Brazil Rock*, Nova Scotia, and *Brazil Shoal*, New Brunswick<sup>69</sup>.

### 4.3. Etymology

The *Hy Brasil* this paper is focused on made its first appearance on maps in 1325, but its name far predates its 'un-discovery'. Babcock suggests two etymological possibilities for Ireland's *Brasil Island*, of which the more important and likely one is that the word *Brasil* has Gaelic origins. Since ancient times in Ireland, *Brasil* (with some variants) has been a common personal name, at least from the fifth century AD. Irish Saint Breacan was born *Bresal*. The name also appears as *Brazil* in sixteenth/seventeenth century poet Thomas Campbell's poem *O'Connor's Child*, and as

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<sup>57</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 4.

<sup>58</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 56.

<sup>59</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 22.

<sup>60</sup> Westropp, (1912), p. 241.

<sup>61</sup> Brooke-Hitching, (2016), p. 130.

<sup>62</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 24.

<sup>63</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 25.

<sup>64</sup> Hamilton-Paterson, (2007).

<sup>65</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 26.

<sup>66</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 27.

<sup>67</sup> Hamilton-Paterson, (2007), *passim*.

<sup>68</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 27.

<sup>69</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 28.

*Breasail* in Irish librarian James Hardiman's *History of Galway* (1820) as the name of a pagan demigod<sup>70</sup>. Whichever variant, Babcock asserts it comprises the Gaelic syllables *breas* and *ail*, both of which connote praise and respect for the bearer of the name, be the bearer a man or an island<sup>71</sup>. The other line of thought regarding the etymological origin of *brasil* is inherent in the valuable, fiery red dye called *brasil* that was popular in the early Middle Ages<sup>72</sup>, extracted from the logwood tree of *brazilwood*. In Portuguese, the *brazilwood* tree is *pau-brasil*, describing its color to be red like a glowing ember<sup>73</sup>. Babcock also identifies variants from other languages that all relate to fire, which itself is usually conceptualized as red in color:

- French *braise* (a cooking method, *braise* in English);
- Portuguese *braza* ('hot coal');
- Portuguese *braseiro* (*brazier*, a coal heater);
- Spanish *brasero* (*brazier*, a coal heater);
- Italian *braciere* (*brazier*, a coal heater)<sup>74</sup>.

The prized *brazil* red dye is not only the likely source for the etymologies for all the *Brasil Islands*<sup>75</sup>, with its variants derived from Middle Latin<sup>76</sup>, but it also probably explains the etymological origin of the name of *Brasil*, the South American country<sup>77</sup>. Curiously, a characteristic geographical feature of *Hy Brasil* in many maps is its circular shape with a body of water, possibly a 'river channel', cutting it across<sup>78</sup>. This bears an uncannily strong resemblance to the flag of the modern South American country *Brazil*, which Westropp asserts is differentiated in speech from the mythical *Brazil Island* by stressing the second syllable for the continent and first syllable for the island<sup>79</sup>. However, getting back to the Irish *Brasil Island* that is of central interest for this paper, the aforementioned etymology cannot explain how the Irish isle got its name – the logwood tree does not grow where Ireland is located<sup>80</sup>. A possible and more plausible explanation is that the toponym is connected with the *Ui Breasail* tribe of northeastern Ireland<sup>81</sup>. However, the Italian geographer Revelli affirms that the name comes from a Genoese word. The word *brasile* and its variants are cognate with *brazi*, which is the plural of *braze*, a Genoese term for the hot coal or embers that burn red from fire<sup>82</sup>. This postulation is supported further by the fact that *Brasile* exists as a place in Genoa even till today, and the first cartographers who placed the Irish *Brasil Island* on the map were Genoese or received their training from the Genoese school of cartography<sup>83</sup>. Angelino

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<sup>70</sup> Babcock, (1922), p. 51.

<sup>71</sup> Babcock, (1922), p. 52.

<sup>72</sup> Babcock, (1922), p. 51; Freitag, (2013), p. 13.

<sup>73</sup> Brooke-Hitching, (2016), p. 131.

<sup>74</sup> Babcock, (1922), p. 52.

<sup>75</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 261.

<sup>76</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 13.

<sup>77</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 15.

<sup>78</sup> Brooke-Hitching, (2016), p. 130.

<sup>79</sup> Westropp, (1912), p. 240.

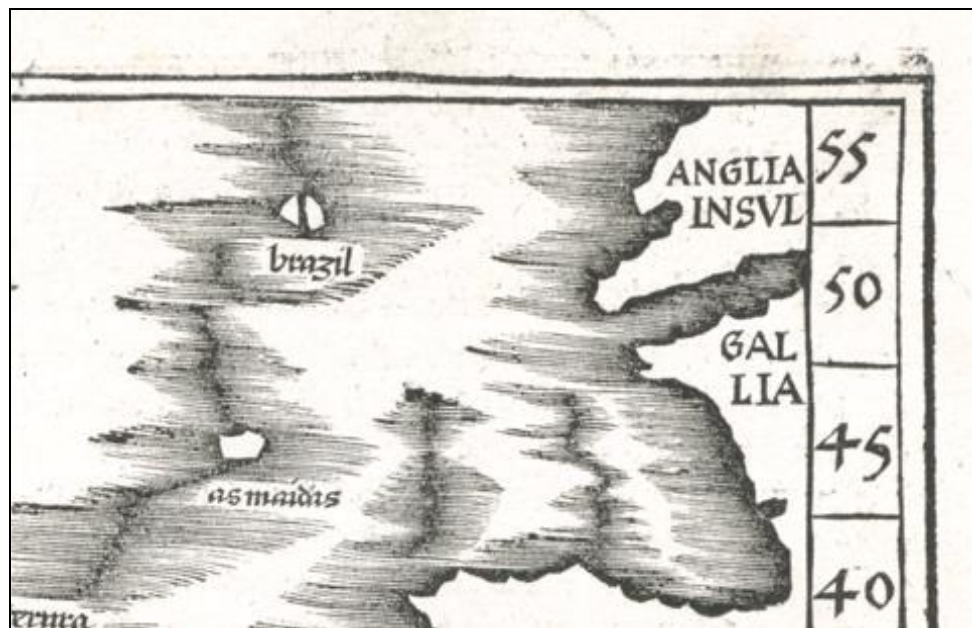
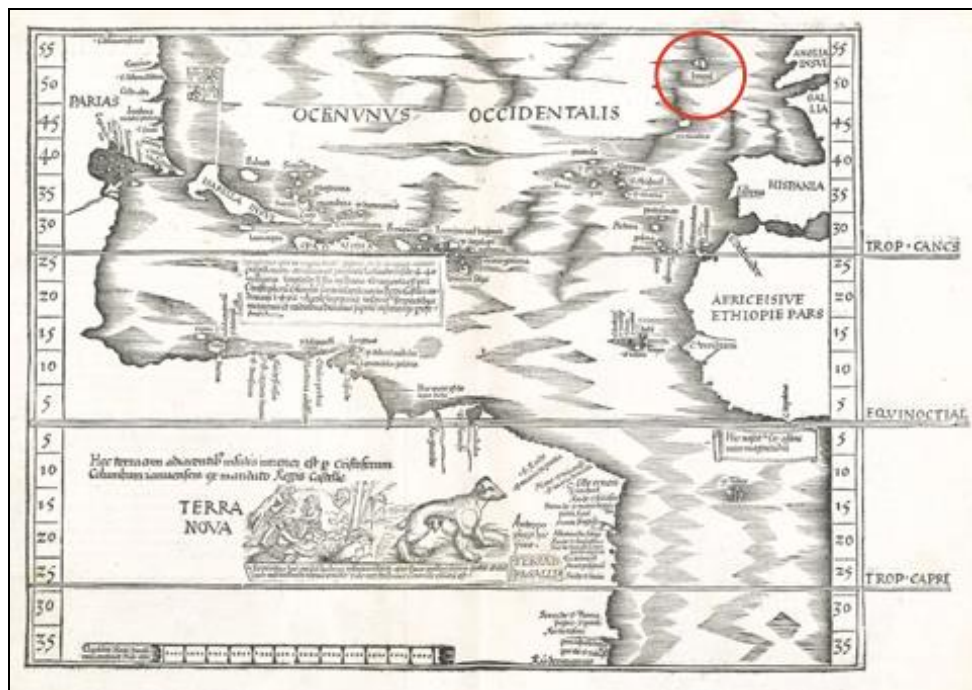
<sup>80</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 15.

<sup>81</sup> Brooke-Hitching, (2016), p. 130.

<sup>82</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 14.

<sup>83</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 15.

Dulcert himself, whose 1325 portolan chart shows the earliest known appearance of *Brasil Island* on maps, was Genoese<sup>84</sup>.



**Figure 7.** Claudius Ptolemy’s *Oceani occidentalis seu terre nove tabula* from 1525, showing the island with a channel running through it  
(Source: Norman B. Leventhal Map Center, Boston Public Library)

<sup>84</sup> Westropp, (1912), p. 240.

In its earliest appearances on maps in the fourteenth century, *Hy Brasil* was referenced as three words: *insula de brazile*, *ilha do brasil*, or other variants. In the latter, *do* contracts the preposition *de* and the article *o*. Although around this time toponyms began to be shortened by the removal of words such as ‘mountain’ or ‘river’ that appeared at the start of the names, cartographers tended to retain the article *o*. Thus, *ilha do brasil* was shortened to simply *O’Brasil*, or other similar variations<sup>85</sup>. This reduced form of the name was used almost exclusively from the early seventeenth century onward<sup>86</sup>. According to Freitag, from this trimmed form, *O’Brasil* was Gaelicized. It was received so positively in Ireland that it was integrated into traditional Irish lore, acquiring an Irish identity and Irish roots that, though ‘fabricated’, were met favorably by geographers, writers, and poets from not just Ireland, but also England, America, and Australia. The Gaelicization of the name began when William Beauford purposely referenced the island as *Hy Brasail* in the early 1780s, while writing about Ireland’s ancient geographic profile<sup>87</sup>. This spelling of the name is the Hiberno-English variant for *Í Breasil* or *Uí Bhreasail*, which is indicative of Gaelic origins. In rendering *O’Brasile* as *Hy Brasail*, Beauford changed the *O* into *Hy* on the basis of the interchangeability of these two sounds in Irish. As a result, numerous Irish places that began with an English *O* sound were transcribed as *Hy*. However, in changing the *O* to *Hy*, Beauford did not account for the fact that the *O* has its origins as the Romance definite article and not as an Irish word or morpheme<sup>88</sup>.

#### 4.4. Entry Into Irish Lore

Given its welcomed entry into Irish mythology, it is no wonder that some explain *Hy Brasil*’s name in Irish tradition. One proposal is that its name is derived from a historical figure called *Breasail*<sup>89</sup>. In Irish, *Í* or *Uí* have traditionally been used as prefixes before a family ancestor’s name, such that *Í Breasil* or *Uí Bhreasail* might mean ‘land or descendants of *Breasail*’. Since *Breasail* and its variants constituted a fairly common personal Irish name, numerous figures in Irish history were deliberated over as possible personages to explain the island Irish origin. Though ultimately untrue, this was a tempting notion to pursue<sup>90</sup>.

Another suggestion was that the name had origins from *bres*, an Old Irish word that denotes ‘beauty’ or ‘strength’<sup>91</sup>, and has connotations of admiration<sup>92</sup>. Many fantastic attempts were made to explain the island Gaelic roots, even though the Old Irish dictionary records *bre(a)sal* as either borrowed from English or originating from Latin *bresilum*. Whichever the case, the dictionary asserts that it refers to the red dye employed to mark sheep. Those making conjectures about the island name’s etymology, however, were inclined to elevate the meaning of the toponym to titles of blessedness, holiness, prestige, and fortune, such as:

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<sup>85</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 216.

<sup>86</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 217.

<sup>87</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 215.

<sup>88</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 216.

<sup>89</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 56.

<sup>90</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 217.

<sup>91</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 56.

<sup>92</sup> Babcock, (1922), p. 52.



- *I* or *Hy* ('island') + *brath* ('for ever') + *Saophal* ('life') = 'isle of everlasting life', or 'isle of the Blest';
- *O* ('island') + *breas* ('king', 'royal') + *il* ('god') = 'the Royal Island';
- *Hy* ('island') + *bress* ('good fortune', 'prosperity') = Fortunate Isle<sup>93</sup>.

According to Freitag, Beauford not only pioneered the Gaelicization of the island name, but is also responsible for its entry into Gaelic tradition as the "paradise of the pagan Irish", a designation he attributed to it unfoundedly. Despite receiving criticism for inaccuracy, his Gaelic rendition of the name and its origin were republished in 1797 and even discussed in an academic lecture to the Royal Irish Academy in 1824. This lecture reiterated the already existing belief of *Hy Brasail* as being the one site where Celtic practices and values were truly preserved, an essential core of pure Irishness<sup>94</sup>. At the same time, this idea was propagated in paintings<sup>95</sup>, music<sup>96</sup>, and fiction, appearing in Irish literature as a motif of Ireland's golden past traditions and shaping an elegant conceptualization of Ireland's rich Gaelic heritage and history<sup>97</sup>. *Hy Brasil* has also been identified as Saint Brendan's destination. The association between the Saint and the island grew until by the end of the nineteenth century, and even the *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society* stated that Saint Brendan went searching for *Hy Brasil* in the sixth century "according to tradition"<sup>98</sup>. The island has also been ascribed a holy divinity – the ancient Irish conceptualized heaven as far out in the Western Atlantic sea, best known by the name *Tír na nóg*, 'Land of Youth'<sup>99</sup>, and it is asserted that *I-Brazil* was one of the names given to this sacred land. Perhaps, this 'sanctity' is why the island is also reputed to be enigmatically difficult to see, veiled by a thick fog, only showing itself to a small chosen group of people every seven years<sup>100</sup> – visible, but always still impossible to be reached<sup>101</sup>. During this time, the island would surface from the Atlantic just long enough for its King to hold court, after which it would vanish once more into the ocean depths. This, its conceptualization as a paradise on earth, and the existence of its blessed inhabitants immune to sickness and the passage of time<sup>102</sup>, are reasons *Hy Brasil* is regarded as a Celtic *Atlantis*<sup>103</sup>.

#### 4.5. Disputed Origins

Despite all its associated Irish legend and lore, there was never any mention of *Hy Brasil* or any variant neither in any of the oldest Irish myths nor in the earliest Irish Literature. Yet, the island connection with Irish mythology was never called into question, much less the existence of the island, in the first place<sup>104</sup>. With this in mind,

<sup>93</sup> Freitag, (2013), pp. 217-18.

<sup>94</sup> Freitag, (2013), pp. 219-20.

<sup>95</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 246.

<sup>96</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 248.

<sup>97</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 227.

<sup>98</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 128.

<sup>99</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 89.

<sup>100</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 58.

<sup>101</sup> Evans, (2012), *passim*.

<sup>102</sup> Boston Public Library, (2016).

<sup>103</sup> Brooke-Hitching, (2016), p. 131.

<sup>104</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 96.

and acknowledging that our expertise on Celtic religion and mythology is scant and limited mainly to Classical Literature and Archaeology<sup>105</sup>, Freitag concludes that this lack of appearance in old Irish mythology means an ancient Irish belief in *Hy Brasil* should not be considered at all<sup>106</sup>. Curiously, although there is no evidence *Hy Brasil* has anything to do with Irish tradition<sup>107</sup>, a surprising amount of Irish legends and mythology has become associated with the island. The name *Brasil* may not have been unique to it, but the extraordinary Irish isle truly is one of a kind. Instead of being born out of myth and, then, cartographically recorded, *Hy Brasil*'s creation happened 'in reverse': appearing on maps first, it then entered Irish Literature, myth, and folklore as a cornerstone of Ireland's romantic, golden past<sup>108</sup>. Although the myth started to be debunked during the second half of the late twentieth century, in the public eye *Hy Brasil* lives on<sup>109</sup>. Even today, while *Hy Brasil* is preferred amongst English speakers, Irish speakers often use the Gaelic terms *Í Breasil* or *Uí Bhreasail* for the island<sup>110</sup>.

Yet still the question remains: how did *Hy Brasil* end up charted on maps, in the first place? It might have been simply a trick of the eye – Ireland's western coast is adorned with a significant number of rocks rising from the sea, and these could have been mistaken for what was believed to be *Hy Brasil*<sup>111</sup>. However, this suggestion is merely speculative; the truth is that it may never be known for certain the origins of this elusive, legendary isle<sup>112</sup>.

## 5. SANDY ISLAND

On 9 April 2013, four Australian scientists published an obituary in *Eos*, the American Geophysical Union's weekly Earth Science Journal. Unusual as this act in itself may seem, what was most puzzling was the subject of the text. For the real question was not *who* had died, but *what* – an entire island.

### 5.1. Historical Cartography

Previously believed to be roughly the size of Manhattan, *Sandy Island* is the world's most recent example of an 'un-found' island. Its first cartographic appearance was in 1908 (Figure 8), when a British admiralty chart plotted an island about 500km northwest off New Caledonia. This was *Sandy Island*, first reported in 1876 by a whaling ship called *Velocity*<sup>113</sup>. Little is known about how *Sandy Island* acquired its name, but one straightforward possibility is simply that it was named that way for its sandy appearance. The island had been drawn with a dotted outline, indicating potential

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<sup>105</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 90.

<sup>106</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 105.

<sup>107</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 60.

<sup>108</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 59.

<sup>109</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 263.

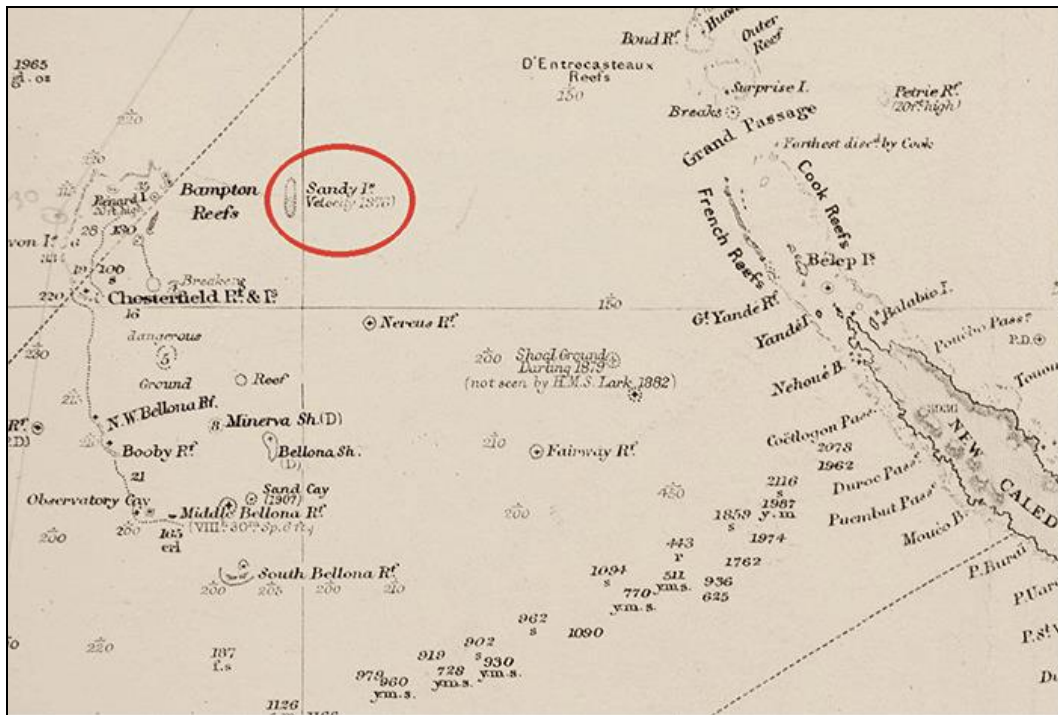
<sup>110</sup> Freitag, (2013), p. 216.

<sup>111</sup> Boston Public Library, (2016).

<sup>112</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 59.

<sup>113</sup> Seton, Williams, Zahirovic, & Micklethwaite, (2013), p. 141.

danger, uncertainty, and the need to explore the island further<sup>114</sup>. Nevertheless, with this first published appearance, *Sandy Island* had become “officially legitimised”<sup>115</sup>.



**Figure 8.** The 1908 British chart showing *Sandy Island*, noting its reported sighting by *Velocity* in 1876 (Source: Auckland War Memorial Museum<sup>116</sup>)

Although it was occasionally left out of some maps, *Sandy Island* remained in roughly the same shape, size, and location for around 100 years<sup>117</sup>. It was not until 1974 that the French Hydrographic Service deleted it from their hydrographic maps due to their inability to find an island or detect any shallow reef below the ocean surface<sup>118</sup>. In 1982, also the American military omitted the island from their Defence charts<sup>119</sup>, with the Australian Hydrographic Service following suit in 1985 by removing *Sandy Island* from their national hydrographic charts<sup>120</sup>. Yet, the phantom island lived on. Despite having been ‘un-discovered’ several times already by different official bodies<sup>121</sup>, *Sandy Island* endured into the twenty-first century. It continued to appear on global coastline charts such as the World Vector Shoreline Database (WVS), a free and readily accessible data source used by such a large proportion of the international scientific community that it has become a standard coastline database. The use of this database in various researches meant that the errors in the WVS were carried over<sup>122</sup>, propagating

<sup>114</sup> Bonnett, (2014), p. 3.

<sup>115</sup> Dossey, (2015), p. 239.

<sup>116</sup> Meylan, (2012), *passim*.

<sup>117</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 135.

<sup>118</sup> Seton et al., (2013), p. 141.

<sup>119</sup> Dossey, (2015), p. 239.

<sup>120</sup> Seton et al., (2013), pp. 141-2.

<sup>121</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 136.

<sup>122</sup> Seton et al., (2013), p. 142.

the false existence of the island into several educational and research institutions all over the world<sup>123</sup>.

## 5.2. *Death of an Island*

In 2000, radio enthusiasts on a *DXpedition*, a competition to travel to a remote site from which they were to transmit a message<sup>124</sup>, were making their way to the *Chesterfield Islands* located to the west of *Sandy Island*. The competitors reported there was no sign of the charted island they saw on their maps, but not in front of them. However, their assertions about the missing isle were not taken seriously<sup>125</sup>. It was not until 22 November 2012, when Australian oceanographers surveying the Coral Sea's sea floor and plate tectonics found no trace of an island there, that the world took notice<sup>126</sup>. The story of the island 'un-discovery' was first published online on the *Sydney Morning Herald's* online site, going viral in the ensuing days and becoming the website's most read story in 2012<sup>127</sup>. Even though debunking phantom islands is not a new phenomenon, it is a little known one, and *Sandy Island* attained an almost celebrity-like status. It was the world's most famous 'fake island' to date, and was called names such as "the island in the mind" and "the land not ahoy"<sup>128</sup>; it was "the Pacific island that never was"<sup>129</sup>.

After this global revelation, the removal of *Sandy Island* from navigational charts was rapid. Google deleted it from their Google Earth database on 26 November 2012 (Figure 9 & 10), just a few days after the island's "un-discovery"<sup>130</sup>. National Geographic reacted just as speedily, announcing its removal from their maps by the end of the month<sup>131</sup>. Other publishers quickly followed suit. Shortly after *Sandy Island's* 'un-discovery', scientists began scrambling to investigate how this 15-mile-long, 3-mile-wide stretch of land could be nothing more than a mistake. Data from the General Bathymetric Chart of the Oceans showed a one-meter elevation where *Sandy Island* was believed to be, and data aggregated from satellite images revealed a lack of sea temperatures, which suggested the presence of a land mass<sup>132</sup>. As it turns out, however, also this material was borne of blunder – the digitization of the hard copy maps, which themselves were already subject to human error, was an imperfect process<sup>133</sup>. In their obituary for *Sandy Island* published in 2013, the Australian scientists who had made the 'un-discovery' of *Sandy Island* official explained that low chlorophyll alpha concentrations, as determined from satellite data, imply an absence of any biological signature in the area. Furthermore, the lack of direct volcanic activity in the region eliminates the possibility of the presence of some volcanic islands 100 years in the past, now sunken. On their research vessel *Southern Surveyor*, during their 2012 expedition, these same scientists recorded an ocean depth of no less than 1400m where *Sandy*

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<sup>123</sup> Dossey, (2015), p. 239.

<sup>124</sup> Chirgwin, (2012), *passim*.

<sup>125</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 136.

<sup>126</sup> Dossey, (2015), p. 239.

<sup>127</sup> Seton et al., (2013), p. 142.

<sup>128</sup> Dossey, (2015), p. 239.

<sup>129</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 134.

<sup>130</sup> Bonnett, (2014), p. 5.

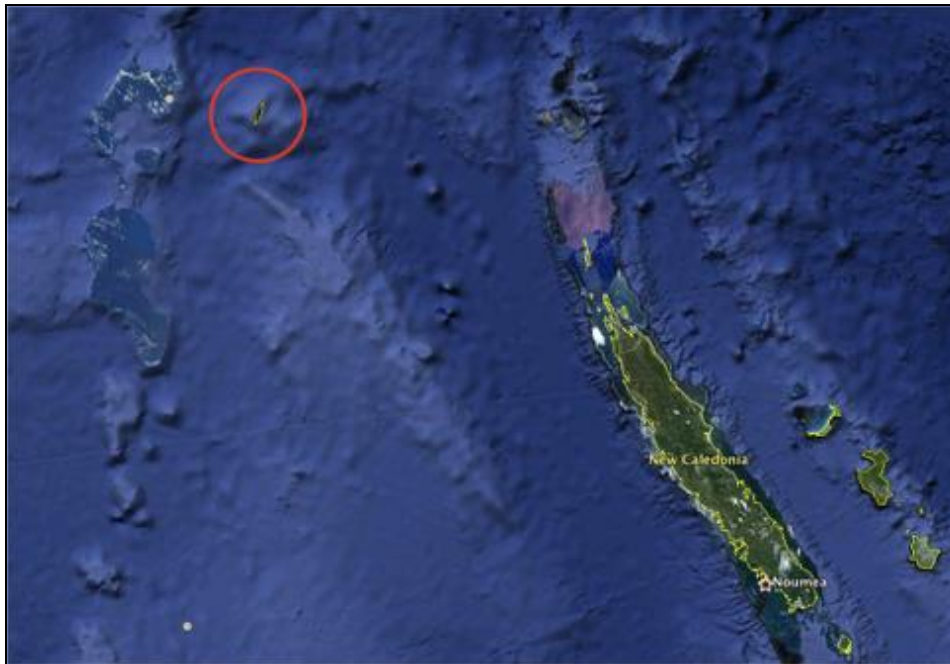
<sup>131</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 136.

<sup>132</sup> Dossey, (2015), p. 239.

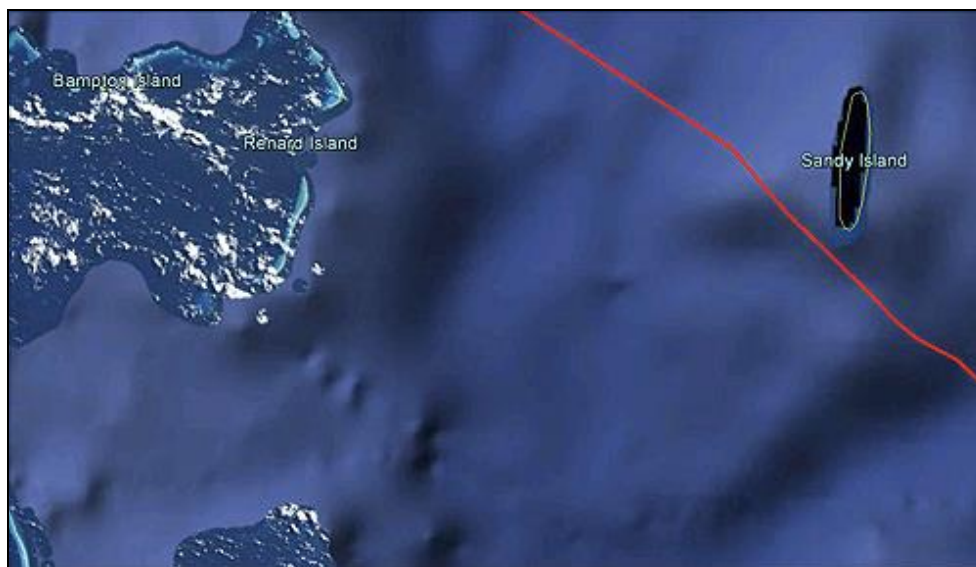
<sup>133</sup> Seton et al., (2013), p. 142; Dossey, (2015), p. 239.



*Island* was supposed to be. Evidently, the island had not sunk – it had simply never existed<sup>134</sup>.



**Figure 9.** *Sandy Island*, northwest of New Caledonia, outlined in yellow on Google Earth in 2012  
(Source: *National Geographic*<sup>135</sup>)



**Figure 10.** Another view of *Sandy Island* on Google Earth in 2012  
(Source: *University of Sydney*)

<sup>134</sup> Seton et al., (2013), p. 142.

<sup>135</sup> Valdes, (2012), *passim*.

### 5.3. What Did Velocity See In 1876?

The non-existence of *Sandy Island* may now be an established and accepted fact, but the mystery of what the original ‘discoverers’ of the island saw in 1876 remains. Something must have been there to have made them believe there was an island in the Coral Sea. There is, of course the possibility that the *Velocity* crew had simply made a mistake in recording – perhaps they had indeed seen a real island, but had noted down its coordinates wrongly. Alternatively, perhaps the crew had been describing a rough area of sea with turbulent waves instead of an island, and their writings had been misunderstood<sup>136</sup>. Some even postulate that cartographic publishers had purposely included the error to avoid copyright infringements<sup>137</sup>. These are, however, merely vague options.

One of the most plausible and more accepted suggestions is that the mariners saw a large pumice sea raft. This theory gains weight due to the fact that *Sandy Island* was supposedly located on a “pumice raft superhighway” created by wind and sea currents in the region<sup>138</sup>. Pumice rafts refer to lava that has been ejected into the sea from an underwater volcano and that has cooled rapidly, sealing in bubbles of gas in the rock that make the entire raft light enough to float on water<sup>139</sup>. ‘Raft’ may be a misleading term, because these buoyant bodies can be enormous – for example, a 2012 eruption from the Havre volcano near New Zealand resulted in a 463-kilometer-long, 55-kilometer-wide pumice raft. Considering that *Sandy Island* was reported to be 25-kilometer-long and 5-kilometer-wide, it is possible the ‘island’ spotted in 1876 was not a ‘sandy’ island, after all, but one of cooled, solidified floating lava<sup>140</sup>.

## 6. THE WORLD

This paper, thus far, has discussed three phantom islands, ghost places most probably borne out of human error at sea or cartographical inaccuracies passed down on maps for centuries. But what if humankind purposely created a physical island of their dreams? This penultimate section will challenge the notions of *phantom islands* and *place* by presenting an atypical example – *The World*. “At what point does a ship get so big that it is no longer merely a means of transport but a real place?”<sup>141</sup> Bonnett asks. Boasting 12 decks, weighing 43,500 tonnes, and reaching a length of almost 200m<sup>142</sup>, *The World* is “the largest privately owned residential ship on earth”<sup>143</sup>. It traverses the globe continuously, bringing its passengers to all sorts of travel destinations right outside their doorstep. From studios to three-bedroom apartments<sup>144</sup>, the colossal ocean liner holds 165 luxury spaces<sup>145</sup>. Its passengers are designated as ‘residents’ or ‘guests’

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<sup>136</sup> Dossey, (2015), p. 240.

<sup>137</sup> Valdes, (2012), *passim*.

<sup>138</sup> Seton et al., (2013), pp. 142-3.

<sup>139</sup> Dossey, (2015), pp. 239-40.

<sup>140</sup> Seton et al., (2013), pp. 142-3.

<sup>141</sup> Bonnett, (2014), p. 221.

<sup>142</sup> Atkinson & Blandy, (2009), p. 93.

<sup>143</sup> Hudson & Hudson, (2017), p. 94.

<sup>144</sup> Spence, (2017), p. 115.

<sup>145</sup> Atkinson & Blandy, (2009), p. 93.

depending on if they purchase or rent a space respectively<sup>146</sup>. Each unit sells for US\$2-15 million<sup>147</sup>, while less extravagant guest suites may be rented at \$1300-4500 for two per night<sup>148</sup>. However, both rental and purchase of a unit are not easy processes – all 165 apartments were snapped up within 4 years of launching<sup>149</sup>, and units now are only available when, or if, one of *The World's* millionaire residents, each with a net worth of at least \$10 million, chooses to sell. Even then, potential buyers are subject to a strict vetting process before they are granted the privilege of coming on board and joining the exclusive residential community of *The World*<sup>150</sup>.

Life on *The World* is a life of luxury. With 250 crew and only 150-200 residents and guests on average, the staff of *The World* outnumbers its occupants. This promotes prompt and focused attention in the provision of catering, laundry, concierge, and room service. Equipped with state-of-the-art facilities and offering a wide range of onboard services, *The World* allows residents and guests to enjoy fine dining restaurants, swimming pools, a business center, a full-sized tennis court, a fully-equipped gym, a spa and wellness center, a golf driving range, a library, and a casino<sup>151</sup>. *The World* is, essentially, a “floating condominium”<sup>152</sup> or a “condo cruise liner”<sup>153</sup>. Its privileged residents and guests, whose identities are heavily and securely protected and kept anonymous, foot a yearly sustenance and maintenance fee<sup>154</sup> to enjoy everything they need for a fulfilling life and home at sea. What is most appealing about the private residential ship, however, is not the ship itself, but where it takes people. Travelling the globe all year round<sup>155</sup>, *The World* takes residents and guests on an extensive non-stop travel itinerary, and each exciting place is a new stop-point at which residents disembark and explore. Each exotic port and far-out destination is just one of many along a never-ending journey of discovery. From its launch in 2002, *The World* has visited over 1200 ports and navigated through more than 641,000 nautical miles<sup>156</sup>. In 2017, *The World* broke a world record when it reached the Bay of Whales in the Ross Sea – the furthest south travelled by any vessel, much less a 644-foot residential luxury cruise ship<sup>157</sup>. In 2018, the vessel took its passengers to Miami, the Caribbean, the Cape Verde Islands, the Mediterranean, the remote Svalbard Archipelago in European waters, and the volcanic islands of Ascension and St. Helena in the Atlantic Ocean. In 2019, the ship will reach localities in Africa, Sri Lanka, Iceland, Greenland, and Hong Kong, including an expedition to Madagascar and a rare journey along the Northwest Passage<sup>158</sup>. For passengers of *The World*, their affluence is unbounded not just in terms of monetary riches, but also by free mobility. *The World's* ‘residents’, contrary to the connotations of the word, are not bound to any place of residency. After disembarking and diving into a new stop-point to explore, passengers return to *The World*. As the ship

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<sup>146</sup> Atkinson & Blandy, (2009), p. 100.

<sup>147</sup> Afacan, (2017), *passim*.

<sup>148</sup> Atkinson & Blandy, (2009), p. 100.

<sup>149</sup> Marsh, (2017), *passim*.

<sup>150</sup> Marsh, (2017), *passim*.

<sup>151</sup> Atkinson & Blandy, (2009), pp. 100-1.

<sup>152</sup> Afacan, (2017), *passim*.

<sup>153</sup> Marsh, (2017), *passim*.

<sup>154</sup> Spence, (2017), p. 115; Bonnett, (2014), p. 221.

<sup>155</sup> Spence, (2017), p. 115.

<sup>156</sup> Marsh, (2017), *passim*.

<sup>157</sup> Afacan, (2017), *passim*.

<sup>158</sup> The World Residences at Sea, (n.d.).

sets sail again, they resume their wellness programmes or indulge in fine dining, and, within a few days, wake up to a new destination, a new experience and new adventure waiting to happen. This exclusive group on board *The World* can break away and escape from the problems and frustrations of typical city dwelling<sup>159</sup>. They comprise an *élite* tier who are at once liberated from a rigid residence, but still well connected to the networks, technology, goods, and services that such infrastructure would normally provide on land<sup>160</sup>. Residents are grounded while afloat; without feeling unwelcome isolation and disconnect, they luxuriate in exclusivity and *élite* separation from the rest of the globe. *The World* makes possible the fusion of two seemingly irreconcilable desires<sup>161</sup> – “buying temporary access to a range of exclusive, serviced and secure locations while being able to move between them in privileged seclusion”<sup>162</sup>. *The World* could not have a more apt name – it truly gives its residents the world. There is no final destination, only transitory stopping points littered throughout the vast planet Earth. *The World* makes life on board a never-ending journey of exotic lands and far-flung places, where every destination is a novel experience and everyday a new adventure.

Yet, Bonnett writes of the artificiality of the supposedly privileged life on board of *The World*, explaining that what is fundamentally still a form of transport will never be able to foster a community nor a home. Neither the tennis court nor the library on board of *The World* are inherently special. These, and all other similar facilities, become luxurious by being the only one of such facilities available out at sea in remote corners of the globe<sup>163</sup> – the normal is, thus, turned novel by location, place, and circumstance. Bonnett concludes: “Such vessels can only ever offer transitory and labored simulacra of what ordinary places achieve effortlessly”<sup>164</sup>. Like the other phantom islands in this paper, *The World* challenges our notion of *place*. This is a ship that allows one to cruise the world without ever leaving home<sup>165</sup>. The luxury cruise liner has been described as a “flow of place”<sup>166</sup>, treating *place* as a fluid concept rather than a firmly anchored designator. It has also been called a “placeless city”<sup>167</sup>, removing all sense of locale altogether. We now return to the question posed at the beginning of this section: “At what point does a ship get so big that it is no longer merely a means of transport but a real place?”<sup>168</sup>. For *The World*, it is not its size, but its mobility that gives it “placelessness”. Bonnett distinguishes *place* from *space*, the latter being a more broad and dynamic term emphasizing fluidity and freedom of movement that *place* does not permit<sup>169</sup>. Perhaps *The World*, *Bermeja*, *Hy Brasil*, and *Sandy Island* all belong in this category – existing as not *places*, but *spaces*.

Unlike phantom islands, however, what sets *The World* apart is the fact that it was created intentionally. Why would people build a fake ‘place’ for themselves? Perhaps we need to approach the issue from a different perspective. Perhaps *The World*, *Bermeja*, *Hy Brasil*, and *Sandy Island* are not *places* or even *spaces* at all, but simply

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<sup>159</sup> Atkinson & Blandy, (2009), p. 96.

<sup>160</sup> Atkinson & Blandy, (2009), p. 94.

<sup>161</sup> Bonnett, (2014), p. 222.

<sup>162</sup> Atkinson & Blandy, (2009), p. 97.

<sup>163</sup> Bonnett, (2014), p. 224.

<sup>164</sup> Bonnett, (2014), p. 225.

<sup>165</sup> Fulcher & Scott, (2011), p. 510.

<sup>166</sup> Atkinson & Blandy, (2009), p. 94.

<sup>167</sup> Fulcher & Scott, (2011), p. 510.

<sup>168</sup> Bonnett, (2014), p. 221.

<sup>169</sup> Bonnett, (2014), p. xii.



abstract culminations of a persistent hunger for discovery set deep within human nature. And, since humans have debunked and ‘lost’ most, if not all, of the world’s phantom isles, they created *The World* to try to give a whole new ‘world’ to themselves. Thus, the deep concept carried by *The World* is not one of ‘physical place’ at all, but of discovery, travel, mystery, and adventure. It is a manmade floating ‘island’ metaphor, a dream brought to life because of *Man*’s love for unknown places.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

Tallack writes: “*Hy Brasil* is a phantom, a fiction, a myth and a mistake. It is all of these things, and in the end it is nothing”<sup>170</sup>. This paper disagrees. Phantom islands may not be real physical entities, but they exist, perhaps, as hope. *Bermeja* is a hope for power to a growing republic, and *Hy Brasil* a hope for a divine land, a Celtic Elysium, a Land of Youth. But the more recent examples, *Sandy Island* and *The World*, are testament to the most interesting kind of hope, especially in today’s modernized and globalized world – a hope for the unknown. *Sandy Island* and *The World* speak of a hope for discovery, for more phantom islands, for uncharted mystery waiting to be uncovered. Bonnett echoes this sentiment, in a passage about the exploration of geography and mystery, and its relation to a new concept of discovery:

“When the world has been fully codified and collated, when ambivalences and ambiguities have been so sponged away that we know exactly and objectively where everything is and what it is called, a sense of loss arises. The claim to completeness causes us to mourn the possibility of exploration and muse endlessly on the hope of novelty and escape. It is within this context that the unnamed and discarded places – both far away and those that we pass by every day – take on a romantic aura. In a fully discovered world exploration does not stop; it just has to be reinvented.”<sup>171</sup>

Imagination and curiosity are powerful drivers and creators of *place* and *space*. Writing about the ancient Greek explorer Pytheas and the mythical island of *Thule*, Tallack explains that the legacy of his journey was not the finding of the island, but the construction of a space<sup>172</sup>. In this paper, *space* and *place* are conceptualized as not just physical entities, but also as elements of the human psyche. Islands, in a looser sense of the word, are spaces created by humankind – be it in a physical sense as is the case for *The World*, or in people’s imaginative minds<sup>173</sup>, as was the case for *Bermeja*, *Hy Brasil*, and *Sandy Island*. Humans surround these islands with mystery and novelty that turns them from fleeting figments of imagination into enigmatic bodies that last for centuries on maps and in “the cartography of the mind”<sup>174</sup>. It is humans who create islands; thus, Fischer refutes the claim that no man is an island, in fact concluding quite the opposite: “Every man is an island”<sup>175</sup>.

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<sup>170</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 59.

<sup>171</sup> Bonnett, (2014), p. xiv.

<sup>172</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 36.

<sup>173</sup> Fischer, (2012), pp. 277-8.

<sup>174</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 36.

<sup>175</sup> Fischer, (2012), p. 7.

It is human nature to be curious, to want to know everything, to uncover every mystery, and to expunge every uncertainty in the hope that in so doing, we might find ourselves in a world stranger than we think it is<sup>176</sup>. But today, with tremendous technological advances and navigational leaps forward, so much is already known about the world. Humankind is faced with a sense of loss at the termination of mystery<sup>177</sup>. But just like how we created our islands, now when there appears to be nothing left to discover, this is when we must remake our idea of discovery<sup>178</sup>. It isn't just about exploring the new – it's also about revisiting the old. It isn't just about uncovering what we don't know – it's also about un-discovering what we do.

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<sup>176</sup> Bonnett, (2014), p. xvi.

<sup>177</sup> Tallack, (2016), p. 36; Bonnett, (2014), p. xiv.

<sup>178</sup> Bonnett, (2014), p. xiv.

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