Laura Daniel Buchholz*

Reconstructing *LOST*: Connecting storyworld geography to narrative comprehension in online Wiki communities

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Abstract: This paper examines how viewers of the ABC television show *Lost* collaboratively reconstructed the geography of the fictional island at the center of the show's plot through an online encyclopedic wiki, *Wikia's Lostpedia*. Examining participant activity on the wiki site over the course of the show's six-year run reveals how narrative audiences initially processed information about the story-world space as well as how those audiences revised their ideas and assumptions as the serialized story progressed. Here I use "The Island" page's revision history to trace the means by which participants negotiated and organized the information concerning where the island was located in the "real world." Secondly, I move to approaches used in locating and organizing landmarks. Finally, I address the ways in which participants synthesized this information into the creation of their own maps and the problems they encountered in doing so.

Keywords: *Lost*, *Lostpedia*, narrative space, narrative geography, storyworlds, Wiki, Wiki communities

On September 22, 2004 the American Broadcasting Network premiered a new television series simply entitled, *Lost*. Documenting the experiences of a diverse group of survivors from Oceanic Airlines flight 815, which crashes on a remote island at the opening of the first episode, the show ran for 6 seasons, reaching its much anticipated conclusion on May 23rd, 2010. At the time it was heralded by fans and critics alike for its innovative storytelling, as each character's past (and later future) unfolded before the audience through narrative turns propelled by the episode's focalization through a different character each week and the integration of flashbacks with the present in parallel stories. Indeed, it was the complexity of the characters, struggling to understand their own identity – *who they were* – that often superseded the more plot-driven ostensive question of *where they were*. Even so, the show engaged much of its fan community in a quest

*Corresponding author: Laura Daniel Buchholz, Old Dominion University,
E-Mail: lbuchhol@odu.edu

to solve that very question: *Where were they?* Solving this mystery (and the many others that were intricately woven into that question) generated a wealth of discussion among viewers that quickly found a home on the internet on sites like the fan wiki *Lostpedia*. As Frank Rose described, “*LOST* was television for the hive mind” (Rose 2011: 146).

In the mid-2000’s *Lost* seemed to be the pinnacle of the kind of serialized television Jason Mittell has labeled “Complex TV” (2015). According to Mittell, serialized shows such as *Lost* “convert many viewers to amateur narratologists” as audiences employ strategies, often collectively, to solve narrative mysteries between episodes (Mittell 2006: 38). Much of the “forensic fandom” Mittell analyzes in his work is predicated on the weekly space between episodes that provide audiences time to think, discuss, reconfigure and speculate (2015). But while narrative complexity still drives seriality today and the weekly episode is by no means extinct, the time between episodes for audiences is often both virtually erased and exponentially expanded by the rise of streaming services such as *Netflix*, *Hulu*, and *Amazon* which have fundamentally changed the way audiences often consume television today. These services actively encourage viewers to “binge” entire seasons and series, seamlessly moving from one episode to the next, skipping opening and closing credits, and “dumping” an entire season of new episodes at one time for immediate consumption. Conversely, the production time necessary to generate “seasons” as opposed to episodes elongates the time audiences must wait in the in-between, such that “tune in next week” is now often “tune in next year.”

As the production and consumption of serialized television continues to evolve, *Lost* can now be viewed as less a harbinger of the future of television and more as a cultural product of its time, affording audience discussions online that left a unique digital footprint. Sites such as the encyclopedic wiki *Lostpedia* display and preserve the way audiences configured and reconfigured narrative worlds in real-time, as each installment aired. In addition, all changes in the wiki are archived in the wiki’s history and “Talk” pages used by contributors to discuss specific issues of what belonged on these web pages are also preserved. Therefore, I argue here that examining the formation of this wiki can inform our understanding of how audiences at the time used the geography of the *Lost* storyworld as a specific organizing principle in comprehending the overall narrative structure of the show. Because *Lost*’s narrative structure foregrounds geography and mapping, intertwining its narrative space with its narrative progression in unique ways, viewers were repeatedly challenged to configure and reconfigure its narrative space over the course of the show. Looking back at this wiki allows us to observe how many of the theoretical approaches to decoding and comprehending narrative space and its rhetorical functions are enacted and synthesized by real online participants.

What sets a wiki apart from other forms of internet discussion is the fact that the explicit purpose of a wiki is to textually reconstruct the content of a narrative for online access and reference through the use of collaborative knowledge. Thus, as Paul Booth has suggested, fan-generated wikis present an adaptation of the original storyworld, constructed over time as a response to the original serialized show in a digital form (Booth 2009). This digital text then serves as an alternative mode by which contributors and lurkers (those who read the site but do not contribute to its content) engage with the same narrative world.

In using wiki participation as a form of reception data, however, it is important to acknowledge that internet-created wiki products and fan discussion boards in general should not be equated with an exact or *true* reflection of individual cognitive configurations. As Andrea Lang points out, “what readers report about their experience of a text cannot be conflated with their actual experience of the narrative in a simple way” (Lang 2010: 377). Because wiki participation is a type of public act of performance we cannot assume an individual participant’s authenticity absolutely. Audience reception and acts of configuration are presented in the wiki alongside other acts of participation that includes various levels of play and also sabotage. But though this kind of activity must be filtered in examining online sites for our purposes here, it does not negate the usefulness of observing how participants establish problem solving methods in the overt project of cataloguing and reconstructing every aspect of the storyworld.

Discussion of a wiki devoted to *Lost* specifically is also helpful in understanding the role of geography in narrative because no “official” or canonical fully annotated map of the fictional island was ever provided by the show’s creators and producers, leaving fans to synthesize incomplete ideas about the space of the island constantly and enhancing the feeling of disorientation throughout much of the series. While some maps did appear at times through the course of the series and a topographical map of the island was included in the final DVD box set, it remained essentially blank, refusing to label the whereabouts of any of the key landmarks that became so important to the island’s narrative. The fact that a fully annotated map is absent from the official *Lost* canon is very significant and provides a unique opportunity to study how viewers who participated on the Wiki dealt with this absence.

In what follows, I examine the process and strategies displayed on the wiki that participants used in reconstructing the *Lost* Island. First, I examine the wiki page devoted to a description of the island itself. Here I use “The Island” page’s revision history to trace the means by which participants negotiated and organized the information concerning where the island was located in the “real world”. Secondly, I move to approaches used in locating and organizing land-

marks on the island that served to reconstitute the island's own narrative history. Finally, I address the ways in which participants synthesized this information into the creation of their own maps and the problems they encountered in doing so. Though these are only a few of many places in which the narrative space of the storyworld is addressed by participants on the wiki, these examples demonstrate a variety of processes through which participants engaged in constructing a collective model of the narrative space of this storyworld. Indeed, these “amateur narratologists” engage, unknowingly perhaps, in a convergence of structural, cognitive, rhetorical, and antimimetic narrative approaches as they utilize their own hierarchy of evidence, logic and experience to pose questions and support their claims. This coexistence of theory and practice yields a picture of how different theoretical approaches to narrative space function and become present in the wiki discourse; perhaps more importantly, it displays how these approaches interact and are synthesized in the context of an audience's desire to reassemble the narrative world.

1 Locating the island

On December 29, 2005, a *Lostpedia* page entitled “The Island” was first added to the wiki. It consisted of only a short stub which read “a place of mystery and wonder/ everyone here gets a fresh start, a clean slate ... tabula rasa.” Since that time, the history archive records over 1,400 intermediate revisions by more than 100 users.¹ The content of the original stub indicates that its author was more interested in what the island “is” as opposed to mapping the island's location or geography. This concern expands over the following months, as participants developed subsections on the page, organizing information into categories including “Theories”, “Previous History” and “Location”. While the theory section of the wiki page provided a space for participants to post ideas about what the island was and the rules that governed its behavior, attempts to understand the island's spatial configurations figured prominently in the early stages of the wiki in both the “Location” and “Previous History” sections, reflecting concerns about mapping the space itself.

On April 15 2006 at 22:39 user *PatrickLacey* posted the first reference to the possible location of the island:

¹ This statistic and all other references to the current state of the wiki reflect its content as of March 10, 2018. All references to wiki page revisions prior to this date are cited in parenthesis with the timestamp, month, day, and year chronicled in the history.

If the latitude and longitude coordinates 4.815' N, 162.342' W are used, the location is in the South Pacific, very close to the projected flight path of a plane flying from Sydney International Airport to Los Angeles International Airport.

This location contradicts what the pilot said about being one thousand miles off course, because this one more like one hundred fifty. However, if the distance is viewed as the distance between the point 6 hours in whereradio contact was lost (close to 3250 miles in on a 7280 mile flight) and the coordinates, it is closer to nine hundred, a much more realistic distance away².

Here, the participant supports his deduction through citation of direct evidence from the show's dialogue by referring to the pilot's statements. At the same time, the participant postulates that the ubiquitous series of "numbers" that appear throughout the show in different contexts and multiple episodes (4, 8, 15, 16, 23, 42) could be coordinates for the island's location. He then supports his theory further by posting a visual in which he diagrams and color-codes possible routes of the fictitious flight.

This theory goes unanswered until a month later, when another participant questions *PatrickLacey's* positioning of the island using "the numbers". User *LOST-Salaris* questions how a much smaller aircraft, the wreckage of which is discovered on the island during the first season of the show, could get so far out to sea to ultimately crash on the island. This participant argues, "The distance from Nigeria [the supposed point of origin for the plane] to Fiji is 11000 miles (18000km). It's unlikely that the plane made fuel stops or crashed on the island long after it departed from Nigeria because the shot brother and the gunned down partner of Eko are still on the plane" (12:24 May 17 2006). The previous participant never answers this objection. Rather, both the initial theory of the flight plan, and the second user's question and objections are displayed together on the page in a list of bullet points.

By June of 2006 other possibilities of finding the island in real-world space were added while the original theory concerning the numbers was again challenged. For example, participants such as *Fateit* and *Philjohn* go so far as to add links to *Google Maps* that show the exact location of where "the numbers" lead if used as coordinates (*Fateit* 19:35 May 25 2006). These possible locations are weighed and measured against information revealed at other points in the narrative by stranded characters who did not come to the island on the central oceanic flight. *Me Marco* writes:

² Unless indicated with brackets or ellipses, all quotations from the history archive are verbatim, preserving spelling errors, typos, etc. that were sometimes corrected at a later date on the site, sometimes not.

The theory of the location of the island being 4.815' N, 162.342' W ie. “the numbers” is now debunked. Desmond said he was heading due west at 9 knots and should have made Fiji in less than a week. That would put the island somewhere due east of Fiji at a maximum distance of 1500 nautical miles. Somewhere southwest of Bora Bora. Or roughly the location of Hawaii if you mirror it around the equator. (21:40 May 2006).

In response, other participants synthesize the information in order to maintain the original hypothesis. For example, *Kk6yb* writes:

Desmond believes the island is a week east of Fiji at 9 knots. That's about 1500 nautical miles (2880km, 1740mi) east of Fiji (at 18.06°S / 178.30°E), which would place the island at about 18.06°S / 154.633°W (or perhaps further west) ... This is about 350 miles from Tahiti. Danielle Rousseau said they were 3 days out of Tahiti when they wrecked on the island, which would mean they traveled at about 5 knots, which is plausible. (4:05 June 1 2006)

Throughout the summer of 2006, each hypothesis was added to the list of bullet points on the “Location” section of the island page with little erasure, though individual participants would sometimes edit or tweak their comment; more often than not these revisions concerned typos and grammar rather than the original argument. Thus, for a considerable period of time, the wiki reconstruction displays multiple possibilities that while counterfactual to each other are nevertheless simultaneously maintained.

In an important move that reflects a change in practices on the wiki as a whole, on November 19, 2006, the entirety of the “Location” section was deleted from the “Island” page and moved to a newly created “Theories” page. As a result, participants who wished to continue such speculation were redirected to this separate page. The move signaled the growing concern by wiki participants, demonstrated throughout the wiki, that only information that was confirmed by the show's content, or in some cases the show's creators, could be reported as “factual” on the designated “official” page. All information that was not verifiable needed to be marked as speculative and relegated to its own digital space so that the lines of demarcation between the two could be clear to readers. In other words, no longer were counterfactual worlds allowed to coexist side by side. Discussions related to defining what was “canon” on other parts of the wiki reveal the concern to separate speculation from the verified, in part to maintain the credibility of the site and in part to aid both participants and readers in discerning what information could be relied on as proof for other theories.³

³ See “*Lostpedia*: Canon” page and corresponding “Talk” page for more on this debate and how participants dealt with sorting what was true in the storyworld from speculation.

However, the deleted “Location” section of “The Island” page was re-added on November 14, 2007, demonstrating that participants continued to want some orienting information about the island’s whereabouts on this main island page. *LOST-HUNTER61* adds:

The exact location of the Island is a great mysterie. The pilot said that the plane had lost radio contact before the crash and had changed course toward Fiji. They were, in his reckoning, 1000 miles off course. (“Pilot, Part 1”). Desmond believed the island a week east of Fiji at 9 knots. (“Live Together Die Alone, Part 1”). This fits with Rousseau’s statement that she was 3 days out of Tahiti when she wrecked on the island (“Solitary”). Most fan-theories place the island in the South Pacific as well, although a minority would rather place it in the Indian Ocean. (08:07)

Though this post is later refined by the correction of spelling errors etc., the participant strategically adds much of the information previously posted and subsequently erased in a more nuanced and qualified way. Quotes from characters are carefully cited according to episode, while at the same time synthesized without giving any direct conclusions. Moreover, fan theories are summarized in terms of a majority versus a minority, but again without a definitive position. Speculation then continued off and on until the show’s plotting established at the end of the fourth season that the island could, in fact, be moved.⁴ This revelation made the previous discussions rather irrelevant, as real-world rules were clearly no longer at play. As a result, the focus of the section shifted to discuss the possibilities of when the island might have been moved in the past, by whom, and how the movement could be explained.

What then can we glean from this abbreviated narrative of the activity of the participants focused on this one question of locating the fictional island? First, from a cognitive and linguistic perspective, participants clearly demonstrate deictic entrance into the storyworld in order to play along. Their language displays Marie-Laure Ryan’s contention that audiences suspend notions of the real world in order to play “as if the actual world of the textual universe were *the* actual world” (Ryan 1991: 23). This type of speculative play between participants is a manifestation of a deictic shift, where, as David Herman also argues, entry into the storyworld requires “a shift in deictic centers, whereby narrators prompt their interlocutors to relocate from the *HERE* and *NOW* of the act of narration to other space-time coordinates,” namely those of the narrative storyworld (Herman 2004: 271). Though Herman’s analysis concentrates on identifying the textual cues that trigger such a shift in an audience, the Wiki allows us to observe this

⁴ Benjamin Linus moves the island in “There’s no place like home, Part 2” ep. 4.13.

shift in the participants' own utterances as strategies to appropriate and re-center the narrative for themselves.

Additionally, the desire for specific coordinates, the use of Google satellite maps, and the implications of possible flight paths and fuel ranges all indicate that participants dealt with the challenge of locating an imaginary place by using real-world rules. This reflects Brian Richardson's argument that "The space of fiction is also the site where mimetic and antimimetic impulses are often engaged in a dialectical interaction" (Herman et al. 2012: 103). This mimetic/antimimetic dialectic is observable in the fan reconstruction as participants simultaneously try to make sense of the island's location using real-world information, while at the same time accepting that real world rules do not always apply. The attempt at reconciling the real-world with the fictional is also evidence of how wiki participants regularly used what Ryan has also previously identified as "the principle of minimal departure" (1991: 51). Participants are observed applying real-world physical rules to their analysis, and only deviate into the imaginative or impossible realm when the text signals those possibilities. Even so, participants seem unalarmed by the cognitive dissonance inherent in seeking objective truth about a fictional world.

This counterfactual dialectic is even more evident during the time where contradictory theories coexisted on the same page, simply listed in a bullet-form format one after the other. It is precisely this discord that bothered editors and motivated their attempt to "clean up" the site by later evoking the canon policy to justify the physical separation (via the inception of a separate theories page) of what is "known" about the world from what could be possible. However, before this separation takes place in the wiki's revision, the page essentially demonstrates conflicting "possible worlds" of the same storyworld, without any overt indication of interpretive preference. Thus, the wiki page reflects multiple configurations that are not easily reconciled, and moreover, the display of these configurations side by side illustrates how possible worlds are utilized in the creation of storyworlds by recipients as they maintain contingent and contradictory constructions of the same world at the same time.

Rhetorical approaches to defining the island are also evident in this progression of participation, as character testimonies are cited as reliable evidence, and some characters are judged more reliable than others. Participants establish credibility for their claims through direct quotation of the dialogue in the show. In the posts discussed above the participants make such statements as "Desmond said." "Desmond believes," "Rousseau said," "The pilot said" etc. Participants then engage in various means of reconciling these statements with what is perceived possible according to real-world logic. By doing so, they assume that the statements of the characters are in fact reliable. Nonetheless, as the nuanced

comment “Desmond believes” indicates, they also show awareness that self-reporting of the characters may be reliable only to a point. Thus, in reconciling statements, participants have to make judgments about which characters can be believed and to what extent. In practice their strategies enact their own version of Ryan’s minimal departure principle in concert with making rhetorical judgments of reliability.⁵ Thus participants establish a system in which characters are assumed to be providing reliable information unless the text explicitly marks that they are lying or mistaken.

By tracing participant responses to this one question of where the Island could be located in the real world we can observe a synthesis of many narratological theoretical practices. Participants display systems of sorting and synthesizing evidence, both filling in gaps as they go, while also noting new gaps as they become evident and developing a hierarchy or reliability. At the same time the wiki displays the way in which contradictory explanations are maintained, though at time anxiously so.

2 Landmarks: History as space

It is significant that in defining the island’s spatial configuration, the first line of “The Island” page immediately situates the island’s space in time, referring to its history of inhabitants for over 2000 years. This history is reflected in the multiple man-made landmarks that populate the island and are gradually revealed throughout the show’s plot progression. During March of 2007 the “The Island” page was targeted by the editors of the wiki for what was termed an “Article Attack.” Participants during this time contributed to significant revisions to both the content of the page and its layout and structure. For example, “History” and “Geography” sections that were recently added to the page were expanded over the course of one week. Most significantly, on March 14, 2007 *Santa* added a section entitled “Locations” (09:19). Unlike its predecessor with a similar name, discussed above, this section no longer sought to provide information on the islands possible coordinates, but rather focused on collecting information about various locations on the island that continued to be revealed in the narrative. At first, one participant simply added seven hyperlinks to other pages on the wiki that dealt with each individual place.

⁵ James Phelan (2007) outlines the role of rhetorical judgments as part of a narrative audience’s experience of narrative.

During the same time period, participants worked to better define different “geographical zones” observable on the island, such as the coastline, the jungle, the hills, cliffs, mountains, and fields. In a revision on March 14 2007 *LOSTHUNTER61* added the first descriptions to this list of zones giving some context to each place within the narrative space of the island. For example, under “Fields” the participant writes “such as where Shannon translated the signal and where Hurley and Charlie rode in the Dharma van” (10:56) to give readers narrative context to significant scenes that took place in this same space.

On March 15, 2007 *Puppyfury* was the first participant to fill in the locations section beyond simply adding links to specific pages.

Locations on the Island have been shaped both by the actions of the DHARMA Initiative as well as other various influences, be they human or supernatural.

Many of the key locations on the island, however, are geologically derived or based. Other locations were created by the Losties in response to certain events. For these locations, the level of mystery that surrounds them is minimal. In the order in which they are introduced, they are the following: the Camp, the Graveyard, the Caves, the Golf Course, the Waterfall, the Garden, the Cove, the Tiger Pit, the Church, the Sweat lodge, and Eko’s grave.

Other locations attributable to the DHARMA Initiative and the Others incorporate a moderate level of mythology. It is possible to speculate the origins of these locations, such that its level of mystery on the island is elevated above the geographical and Losties-made locations, but not unsurpassed on the island. These locations are the following, in the order in which they are introduced: the Radio Tower, Hatch, the Swan, the Arrow, the Staff, the ?, the Pearl, the Barracks, Pala Ferry, the Decoy Village, the Door, the Capsule Dump, the Hydra Island, the Hydra, the Quarry, and Alex’s Hideout, the Flame (20:32).

By making distinctions between the locations which are natural to the island versus those that are man-made, and then further distinguishing locations based on who was the primary agent in the locations existence (Losties, Dharma, Others etc.) this participant creates a grid that other participants use to organize the continued expansion of content. More specifically, this section, once only a list of hyperlinks of independent locations, evolved into a site of synthesis between the geography and the history of the island, sorting not only the order in which the sites are discovered by the characters, but also re-creating a chronology of the point of origin of each site and identifying the site’s position relative to other known landmarks on the island.

As a result, participants can be observed using grids that remarkably mirror Gabriel Zoran’s theorized horizontal levels of spatial conceptualization (1981). They begin with a single “spatial unit” (such as the camp), and then establish what Zoran terms “spatial complexes” as units are set into relation with each other as they triangulate other landmarks to that same location; this then creates what Zoran calls a “field of vision” that configures these units into a collective

whole of the island that registers a temporal progression of the narrative.⁶ For example, users attempted to judge the overall size of the island based upon the representation of time characters spent in traveling from one location to another. In a separate revision under the same “Geography” section, *Puppyfury* writes:

The size of the Island has not yet been determined. Its diameter has been shown to be a several days’ walk, as demonstrated by the Tailies, traveling to join the midsection survivors, and by Kate and Sawyer, returning from the Hydra Island. With the revelation of the Hydra Island, it is now likely that none of the Lostaways have entirely circumnavigated the Island so far. Based on these facts: the Island is larger than 20 miles in one dimension, but exactly how much larger is as yet impossible to judge. (8:08 March 15 2007)

Here, as the location section of “The Island” page is revised, participants engage in this act of piecing together a topography of the island based on the trajectories of the characters’ travel, despite the fact that all the television medium can actually represent is characters walking, with possible references in the dialogue to description and the time spent travelling.

It is precisely connecting the spatial with the temporal that allows the participants to make sense of both as each landmark holds a temporal and spatial significance simultaneously. This is demonstrated by the fact that the expansion of the “Locations” section bleeds into the expansion of the island’s “History” section, connecting the spatial structure to the temporal and thus creating narrative out of geography. For example, the list of “Crash Sites” synthesizes the history and the geography of the island. The *Black Rock* wreckage (an early nineteenth-century slave ship) found in the jungle is used as a point of orientation in both space and time. Participants use the apparent time in which characters travel from the camp to the ship wreckage to scale distance and direction, while at the same time utilize the presence of the ship to trace the historical past of the island, documenting the presence of nineteenth-century slave runners on the island at one time. In another instance, on the *Lostpedia* page titled “The Statue of Taweret,” the remains of an ancient statue, consisting in the show’s present of only a four-toed foot, are noted as positioned “within view” of the Orchid station (2018). These deductions by participants again show that in order to make sense of the individual sites, places must be set in relation to each other spatially as well as temporally. This mapping of landmarks helps the participants not only in the overall reconstruction of the island in space but also in that of the narrative plot.

⁶ Zoran’s approach draws on Bakhtin’s notion of the chronotope and suggests that spatial configuration is always made temporal in narrative. See his article for the full typology he develops in this regard.

3 Map making

As early as June of 2006 *Sauron18* posted on the “Island talk” page “We really need an image of the most important thing on the show. What do you suggest? One of those ocean shots? Pictures of Rousseau’s maps? Rousseau’s maps redone by fans (more clearly)? Or a combination?” (16:17 June 04 2006). It is interesting that the participant sees a visual of the island as “the most important thing” relative to the many characters and plot. Nevertheless, finding consensus as to what image to use quickly becomes controversial for wiki participants. In trying to map the island fans were confronted with both too many possibilities and too few means of verification.

The “Rousseau’s map” *Sauron18* mentions above refers to a document sketched by a character in the show, a French castaway named Danielle Rousseau who was stranded on the island years before the Oceanic crash. In the plot development, one of the main Oceanic survivors steals this map and uses it to explore the island. Fans utilized this map by capturing screen shots from the episode.⁷ The map reveals the basic shape of the island but remains problematic for many reasons. Not only is it difficult to read because of legibility and angle of the shots, the annotations all originally appeared in French. However, at a *Comicon* convention in 2009 this map was reproduced, transcribed into English, publicly displayed for fans and later auctioned. This image is now the first that appears on “The Island” page to date (below the advertisement) and was often used as the basis for many of the fan-maps to follow.

A second important map emerged during season two. In the episode “Lock-down” a map appears in lights on a blast door, only for a few seconds, to the character John Locke. Similar to the Rousseau map, fans were quick to capture and reproduce what was only shown for seconds in the episode. In this case the “map” was a series of almost indecipherable drawings and notations that immediately became a puzzle for fans to solve. Despite the initial fervor to decode it, however, the blast door map left more questions than answers as it too failed to provide the scaled rendering of the locations of the Dharma stations on the island fans so desperately wanted. As one participant comments under “Accuracy of maps” on the “Fan Maps” page, “The blast door map has ... basically been shown to be totally inaccurate. It is impossible to trust any part of it. All of the older maps that use it are really wrong now.”

Even with the controversy, participants continued to utilize the blast door map for spatial orienting purposes. For example, in the first map to be posted to a

⁷ Sayid Jarrah steals this map in “Solitary” ep. 1.9.

“Fan Map” page, the wiki author labels it as follows: “Lost island created from the screencaps of rousseau’s maps and the blas[t]door map fitted over to illustrate the possible positions of the stations” (*Redacejr* 2 18:05 October 28 2006). Here, the map-maker attempted to reconcile what was known about the island from Rousseau’s map with the blastdoor map of the Dharma stations by superimposing one map on the other.

As similar maps were added and the numbers and variations grew with new information revealed on the show, debate about their validity and the appropriateness of their inclusion in the wiki escalated on the talk page. While most participants indicated they were comfortable with posting screenshots of maps that appeared as props in the show, when these images were combined to produce ostensibly “more complete” models of the island, objections followed. *Captain Insano* sums up the collective angst on the talk page stating quite simply “we don’t even know if those are right” (Fan maps talk: 05:51 October 29 2006). Put simply, the maps gave an appearance of authority that could not be verified.

To make matters more complicated, though most of the fan made maps utilized only a few basic templates described above, many of the maps posted diverged from one another significantly in the precise configuration of locations and no two were identical. This lack of uniformity proved quite disturbing to wiki editors. Instead of providing participants with a clearer perspective, each discrepancy uncomfortably highlighted how much could not be reconciled.

This problem should not be surprising, however. Marie-Laure Ryan has previously studied consistency in mapping narrative space in literary narrative. Her study asked high school students to draw the fictional world in García Márquez’s *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* after the class engaged in a study of the story. In her experiment, not only were no two student maps alike, the disparity among them was enormous. Thus, though a consensus could be reached at times about which maps were in error, there was no sense in which one map prevailed as correct in Ryan’s study, because many of them were within the realm of what was possible in interpreting the storyworld’s spatial configuration. Though contradictory, each interpretation was still supported with evidence from the text and hence all existed as possible versions of the same storyworld space.

But while individual readers might well be content with their own vision of a storyworld’s spatial structure, the assumption demonstrated by wiki participants was far less tolerant precisely because it displayed variance when users were desperately seeking cohesion. Whereas the renderings created by Ryan’s subjects remained individual interpretations, the act of displaying interpretations together, as users did here on the wiki, created anxiety and provided little means to reckon with difference outside of an “authoritative” answer from the show’s creators that never came. What is equally interesting is that while fans argued

vehemently over where, for example, the submarine dock could or couldn't be located, to little avail, they were just as unwilling to give up the project of figuring it out. This leads me to suggest that while maps representing configurations between individuals may be difficult to reconcile here, it is the drive participants display to make such configurations that is of higher importance in actual comprehension. In other words, the act of trying to figure out where that dock was located was far more important than any ultimate determination.

Conclusion

Rather than verifying any one theory of narrative spatial construction, what this brief analysis of participant activity on this wiki demonstrates is that the collective reconstruction of storyworld space draws upon multiple strategies simultaneously and demonstrates synthesis on a collaborative scale that is not always reconcilable. What is presented here is only a snapshot of the observable activity that addresses the physical space of the Island. Even so, these examples illustrate the enormous potential that utilizing analyses of internet activity such as this wiki has for our understanding of how audiences reconstruct storyworlds. Not only do these examples bring more evidence to bear on the need to see story-space as intertwined with narrative time, reading audiences' activity in concert with the variety of approaches to narrative space also allows us to identify how such approaches are practically utilized in communal efforts. Finally, we can observe through this analysis how the Wiki format exposes the contingent and contradictory ways in which its participants oriented the storyworld's space. While we as audiences may be willing to cognitively hold discordant possible versions of spatial orientation in narrative and, indeed, need to configure these in comprehending the story, the act of definitively inscribing that conception, as we see in the wiki map activity, forces us, uncomfortably so, to reckon with those alternatives and seek resolution. This analysis shows above all else how participants hold subjective parameters of cognitive dissonance they continually have to negotiate both individually and collectively.

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