DELIGHTS AND DANGERS: THE PURSUIT OF THE OCEANIC IN *THELMA & LOUISE* AND *LOST*

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ABSTRACT

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The oceanic is a sensation of unity, eternal connectedness, and oneness with the universe. The sensation can manifest itself in a variety of ways, and it is a pervasive one which has affected many people throughout the ages; however, while the desire for this sensation and evidence of its existence are vast, it often goes unnoticed.

In this paper, I explore the oceanic sensation in two contemporary visual texts: the film *Thelma & Louise* and the television show *Lost*. An understanding of the oceanic contributes valuable insights into the meaning, historical significance, and popular appeal of these two works, and, in turn, the use of the oceanic in these works can contribute to a greater understanding of the oceanic sensation itself and to its presence in contemporary texts.

Hopefully, this work will inspire a greater awareness of the oceanic sensation. By recognizing the sensation in our aesthetic works, we will be able to more readily identify the oceanic in all areas of life. Thereby, we can bring recognition to the oceanic in society in order to incorporate the oceanic's positive transcendental qualities and guard against its potential harm.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE OCEANIC

In the early 1900s, while studying and living with the native people on a primitive and remote South Sea island far from his own home and the society he knew, anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski experienced a sensation of "'letting [himself] dissolve in the landscape,' 'moments when you merge with objective reality—true nirvana'" (cited in Torgovnick 3-4). As this sensation came over him, Malinowski felt an erosion of his sense of self as he experienced what he felt as his fusion with both the land and people around him. Preconceived notions of these "Trobriand islanders as 'animals'" (Torgovnick 3) and all of his learned social conventions began to dissolve as Malinowski started to feel himself becoming one with these people, and, indeed, all people. Marianna Torgovnick describes Malinowski's experience "as a dissolution of subject-object divisions so radical that one experiences the sensation of merging with the universe" (5). Torgovnick says that Malinowski called this sensation "the nirvana impulse and other thinkers of his day called [it] the oceanic" (5).

The oceanic is a feeling of oneness with the universe which can manifest itself in a variety of ways. This sensation is a pervasive one which has affected many people throughout the ages; however, while the desire for this sensation and evidence of its existence are vast, it often goes unnoticed. In this work, I intend to explore the theme of the oceanic sensation in two contemporary visual texts: the film *Thelma & Louise* and the television show *Lost*. An understanding of the oceanic contributes valuable insights into the meaning, historical significance, and popular appeal of these two works, and, in turn, the use of the oceanic in

these works can contribute to a greater understanding of the oceanic sensation itself and to its presence in contemporary texts.

As my basis for identifying and understanding the oceanic sensation, I draw from the correspondence of Romain Rolland and Sigmund Freud, Romain Rolland's *The Life of Ramakrishna*, and Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*. In addition, the three full length works on the oceanic sensation since Rolland and Freud, J.M. Masson's *The Oceanic Feeling*, W.B. Parsons's *The Enigma of The Oceanic Feeling*, and Marianna Torgovnick's *Primitive Passions*, as well as several other works which allude to a sensation resembling the oceanic while not recognizing it as such, ground my understanding of this complex and mystical sensation, and I will introduce these works along with an introduction to the oceanic sensation in the following paragraphs.

The term "the oceanic" gained recognition after Sigmund Freud discussed the concept in his *Civilization and Its Discontents*; however, it was the philosopher and historian Romain Rolland who brought Freud's attention to the concept. Rolland was a fervent student of Eastern mysticism, and his "model [for the oceanic sensation] was the life of Ramakrishna, in which the Hindu saint describes himself several times as being like salt dissolved in the great ocean of the universe" (Torgovnick 11). In *The Life of Ramakrishna*, Rolland describes one particular instance in which Ramakrishna experienced this kind of merging:

> One day when he was sitting in the room of a friend, a rich Hindu, he saw on the wall a picture representing the Madonna and Child. The figures became alive. Then the expected came to pass according to the inevitable order of the spirit; the holy visions came close to him and entered into him so that his whole being was impregnated with them. This time the inflowing…covered his entire soul, breaking down all barriers. (50)

Ramakrishna frequently experienced these incidents of merging: merging with figures in pictures, merging with the Divine Mother Kali, merging with nature. Since this merging succeeds in "breaking down all barriers" (Rolland 50), Ramakrishna is able to attain the sensations of eternity and unity with the universe as he merges with figures who came hundreds of years before him. Rolland admired Ramakrishna because he believed that Ramakrishna "more fully than any other man not only conceived, but realized in himself the total Unity of this river of God, open to all rivers and all streams" (Rolland xiv). Ramakrishna's ability to embody the oceanic sensation and its sense of eternity and unity is what drew Rolland, who himself experienced the oceanic sensation, to study and write about the saint.

While Rolland was in the midst of his studies on Hindu mysticism and the oceanic for his biography of Ramakrishna, Freud sent him a copy of his work, *The Future of an Illusion*, which dealt with religion. After reading *The Future of an Illusion*, Rolland wrote to Freud:

> I would have liked to see you doing an analysis of *spontaneous religious sentiment* or, more exactly, of religious *feeling*, which is wholly different from *religions* in the strict sense of the word, and much more durable.
>
> What I mean is: totally independent of all dogma, all credo, all Church organization, all Sacred Books, all hope in a personal survival, etc., the simple and direct fact of *the feeling of the "eternal"* (which can very well not be eternal, but simply without perceptible limits, and like the oceanic, as it were). (Parsons 173)

Rolland's criticism of Freud's theories on religion centered around Freud's lack of recognition of the oceanic sensation. According to Parsons, "Rolland thought true religion arose from the mystical experience of oneness with the world (*la sensation oceanique*)" (4). This "true source of religious sentiments…is a feeling which [Rolland] would like to call a sensation of 'eternity', a

feeling as of something limitless, unbounded—as it were, 'oceanic'" (Freud 10). In Rolland's opinion, humans' desire for a sense of eternity and connectedness is what draws them to religions, which often offer the promise of eternal life and connection with a greater power. However, "One may, [Rolland] thinks, rightly call oneself religious on the ground of this oceanic feeling alone, even if one rejects every belief and every illusion" (Freud 11). Rolland equates "religion" with these feelings of eternity and unity, but he believes that even if these desires do not manifest into an adherence to an organized religion, one can still experience these same "religious" feelings of eternity and connectedness with the oceanic.

The oceanic with its "source of…religious energy" (Freud 11) is a sensation which has been present in writings throughout history. In her article, "What is the Oceanic?," Caroline Rooney links the oceanic sensation to other influential writers and thinkers of the past:

> Regarding Rolland's position, it is worth mentioning at the outset, to indicate that it cannot be simply dismissed as a form of non-scientific or aberrant irrationality, that it is very similar to Albert Einstein's. Like Rolland, Einstein testifies to having a persistent religious sense, whilst both men firmly reject the notion of a personal god and institutionalized religion. For both, [Benedict de] Spinoza is an important point of reference. In "Religion and Science," Einstein speaks, like Rolland, of a "cosmic religious feeling" defined in Spinozist terms as the recognition of "the sublimity and marvellous order which reveal themselves both in nature and in the world of thought." (Rooney 20)

While Einstein and Spinoza do not specifically mention the oceanic sensation by name, it is clear that they were discussing the same type of feelings of eternity and connectedness that the oceanic brings about. Marcel Proust, in addition, experiences a similar sensation. He "speaks of seemingly insignificant events—the taste of a bun soaked in tea, the gazing at some church

spires, the sight of a few trees, the stumbling over some paving stones—that became the occasions for a sudden, momentary, and wholly unexpected glimpse of an eternal self" (Parsons 142). Aldous Huxley and William James both encountered oceanic feelings, as well, although theirs occurred under the influence of drugs. Huxley, while taking mescalin, felt an intense merging with the universe as he experienced the sensation of being one with the legs of a chair and seeing a vase of flowers through the eyes of Adam and Eve. Of looking at the chair, Huxley said, "I spent several minutes—or was it several centuries?—not merely gazing at those bamboo legs, but actually *being* them—or rather being myself in them; or, to be still more accurate (for 'I' was not involved in the case, nor in a certain sense were 'they') being my Not-self in the Not-self which was the chair" (22), and of the vase of flowers, he said, "I was not looking now at an unusual flower arrangement. I was seeing what Adam had seen on the morning of his creation—the miracle, moment by moment, of naked existence" (17). In Huxley's case, as well as in the cases of Malinowski, Ramakrishna, and Proust, the distinctions between self and Other have been broken down; the men have the strong sensation of becoming one with the universe. In this amalgamation, they feel that they have merged with the world around them and attained the sensation of eternal connectedness.

While Spinoza, Einstein, and Proust, among others, had already written of sensations similar to the oceanic, the term "the oceanic" did not gain recognition until it was explored by Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. The oceanic came to be discussed in that work because Freud, a man of logic and science, was perplexed by the claims Rolland made in his letter about the mystical oceanic sensation. Freud wrote back to Rolland, "your remarks about a feeling you describe as 'oceanic' have left me no peace" (Parsons 174), showing that even Freud's psyche is deeply affected by the oceanic sensation. He goes on to say, "It happens that in a new work which lies before me still uncompleted [*Civilization and Its Discontents*] I am

making a starting point of this remark; I mention this 'oceanic' feeling and am trying to interpret it from the point of view of our psychology" (Parsons 174). However, in a subsequent letter, he warns Rolland, "please don't expect from it any evaluation of the 'oceanic' feeling; I am experimenting only with an analytical version of it" (Parsons 175). Although Freud says that he does not recognize the oceanic within himself, he does not deny its existence or its value. Freud rationalizes the oceanic by equating it to his concept of the ego. He says, "originally the ego includes everything…the ideational contents appropriate to it would be precisely those of limitlessness and of a bond with the universe—the same ideas with which my friend [Rolland] elucidated the 'oceanic' feeling" (15). He goes on to consider whether the oceanic might be a regression to an infantile state before the child is able to distinguish between itself and its surroundings. While some of his theories on the oceanic are quite insightful, Freud finds that "It is not easy to deal scientifically with feelings" (Freud 11) and largely abandons his discussion of the oceanic after the first section of *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

Although Freud says that he does not recognize the oceanic within himself, "Rolland believed that the experience of dissolved boundaries and the interpenetration of the self with the cosmos is a universal experience" (Torgovnick 11), and in his letters to Freud, Rolland wrote that the oceanic was a sensation which "is common to thousands (millions) of men actually existing" (Parsons 173). It is clear from the examples of Ramakrishna, Malinowski, Einstein, Spinoza, Proust, and Huxley that Rolland is not alone in his experience of the oceanic, and that it, indeed, is common to numerous people. While these examples show that evidence of the oceanic sensation is present in writings throughout history, few, however, actually address the topic of the oceanic. Since Freud's discussion of the oceanic in his *Civilization and Its Discontents* was published in 1930, there have been only three major works on the oceanic

sensation, J. Moussaieff Masson's *The Oceanic Feeling*, William B. Parsons's *The Enigma of the Oceanic Feeling*, and Marianna Torgovnick's *Primitive Passions*.

Both Masson and Parsons attempt to take up the conversation of the oceanic where Freud left off. Masson, a psychoanalyst, views the oceanic from the same scientific angle as Freud, but while Freud seems to admire his friend Rolland's ability to experience the oceanic, Masson is extremely hostile toward the sensation and its "hysterical outpourings of mystical and religious fanaticism" (Masson ix). His views will thus provide an illuminating counterpoint to the other works and my own views. Parsons, also a psychoanalyst who tries to view the oceanic in the same vein as Freud, is not as hostile toward the oceanic as Masson and also not as puzzled by the oceanic as Freud. He makes many astute links between the oceanic and other studies on mysticism and illuminates two different types of oceanic experiences which apply to the two works I will analyze. Marianna Torgovnick's *Primitive Passions*, on the other hand, focuses on the connection between the oceanic and primitivism. Her connections between merging with the universe and idealizing a more "primitive" way of life will help explain the characters in *Thelma & Louise* and *Lost*'s attainment of the oceanic. All three of these works in some way inform the theme of the oceanic in *Thelma & Louise* and *Lost* and help identify and analyze different aspects of the use of the oceanic sensation.

However, while Masson and Parsons continue a psychoanalytic evaluation of the oceanic sensation, and Torgovnick explores the connection between the oceanic and primitivism, "relatively less explored is the oceanic's widespread aesthetic and literary significance" (Rooney 19) even though evidence of the oceanic is common in popular culture. Studying the oceanic through the lens of *Thelma & Louise* and *Lost* will be valuable because, as Rooney says, it is "useful to consider the oceanic in terms of a poetics and an ethics" (19).

Furthermore, she states that using visual works to study the oceanic is important because of their resemblance to the oceanic:

> the oceanic feeling is about an affective state of being that is the most *conscious*, fully aware, fully alert or awake one possible (as opposed to an unconscious or conceptual state), and this state is expressed more exactly in poetic and musical ways than in rational and conceptual forms…[Aesthetic works] may offer alternative, more flexible ways of approaching the lures and lore of the oceanic. (27)

Indeed, because the visual imagery in the mediums of film and television operates at a more somatic level than purely verbal discourses, it allows one the opportunity to experience the oceanic sensation at a visceral level, along with the characters. We can more easily connect to their complex emotional journeys and mystical experiences by seeing them occur, rather than by having them described, and we can experience along with them the feeling of merging with the universe that characterizes the oceanic.

What it looks like to "merge with the universe" might vary from person to person, but, in both of these works, the characters attain the sensation of such a merging and what I argue is portrayed as a more meaningful existence through the achievement of it. Their enlightening and empowering journeys can be seen as embodiments of a primordial pattern of seeking an intense and deep connectedness with the universe. While the characters in both of these works did not intentionally go in search of the oceanic, their circumstances drove them away from their own society and into conditions favorable to the attainment of the oceanic. While they experience joy, enlightenment, and a newfound connectedness, some are also taken to the savage depths of despair, violence, and suicide. However, these brave adventurers who have everything they know taken from them ultimately end up fulfilled by their achievement of the

oceanic. Overlooking the oceanic and not exploring or studying its presence in our society and popular culture does a disservice to a world in which “the urge to transcend self-conscious selfhood is…a principal appetite of the soul” (Huxley 67).

CHAPTER 2

ACHIEVING THE OCEANIC SENSATION

In both *Thelma & Louise* and *Lost*, the characters are forced out of their familiar and comfortable routines in their own societies and thrust into new existences in environments very different than the ones they are used to. Although the characters go through periods of being frightened by this change, they eventually begin to appreciate their newfound freedoms and begin to sense the oceanic. The decisions the women make on their journey in *Thelma & Louise* and their shifts in attitude can be explained by the oceanic sensation. Ultimately, their iconic leap into the Grand Canyon displays their achievement of the oceanic, demonstrating their overwhelming feeling of having attained an eternal connection to the universe. Likewise, many of the strange occurrences on the island in *Lost* can be explained by the oceanic sensation. From the various instances of people becoming other people, to the survivors who merge with the island and each other, to the time traveling and shifts in consciousness, to Jacob and the light and how it all ends, these oddities show the prevalence of the oceanic in the series. The characters' ultimate achievement of the oceanic sensation is demonstrated in Jack's sacrifice of himself to preserve the island's light and in the characters' experience in reuniting and remembering their island lives. Understanding the oceanic sensation sheds new light on *Thelma & Louise* and *Lost* and allows the viewer to more fully comprehend the characters' actions in these works.

While many people will never experience the oceanic sensation and will be perfectly content not doing so, Thelma, Louise, and Jack are depicted in ways that prime them to accept the oceanic. The characters were all extremely unhappy in their lives, and their discontent makes them more receptive to the oceanic sensation once they are thrust into new surroundings that are favorable to the achievement of the oceanic. Einstein says, "Everything

that the human race has done and thought is concerned with the satisfaction of deeply felt needs and the assuagement of pain. One has to keep this constantly in mind if one wishes to understand spiritual movements and their development" (24). It is important to note these characters' backstories in order to understand why they eventually come to see the oceanic as a desirable alternative to life in their societies.

When the viewer is first introduced to Thelma and Louise in the suburban Arkansas neighborhood where they live, their dissatisfaction is apparent. Louise is unfulfilled and restricted by her job as a waitress in a diner while Thelma is a housewife with little independence or control over her own life. Margaret Carlson says, "*Thelma & Louise* sends the message that little ground has been won. For these two women, feminism never happened. Thelma and Louise are so trapped that the only way for them to get away for more than two days is to go on the lam" (1). The women realize the injustice in their oppression, and they seek more fulfilling lives. However, while they know that they are lacking something, they do not know where to find the cure. Additionally, both are in unsatisfying relationships; Louise is dating a musician who is constantly on the road and out of touch with her, and Thelma is married to a cruel and philandering husband. They are desperately trying to attain deep connections with their significant others, but their efforts are to no avail. Their inability to achieve the type of meaning and connectedness they desire in their lives leaves them lost and lonely.

Jack and the other characters from *Lost* are also depicted as having unhappy lives before fate brings them to the island. Jack is plagued by insecurity, regret, and bitterness. Issues surrounding his divorce and his extremely complicated relationship with his recently deceased father torture Jack, and he has serious insecurities and feelings of despair. Moreover, Jack must also contend with guilt that his actions against his father drove the elder Shephard to Australia and, ultimately, to his untimely death. The title of the series, *Lost*, "describes the state

of the passengers of Oceanic Flight 815 when they crash land on the island and how they struggle to be found – not in the physical sense, as they first think, but in the deepest personal sense" ("Australia is the Key to the Whole Game"). When Jacob explains to the survivors why he brought them to the island, Sawyer asks, "What makes you think you can mess with my life? I was doing just fine 'til you dragged my ass to this damn rock." Jacob responds, "No, you weren't. None of you were. I didn't pluck any of you out of a happy existence. You were all flawed. I chose you because you were like me. You were all alone. You were all looking for something that you couldn't find out there. I chose you because you needed this place as much as it needed you" ("The End" 32:21). Jack and the other characters had little meaning in their lives before crashing onto the island; they had no purpose, connection, or sense of eternity. The element Jacob says they are "looking for" but "couldn't find" off the island is the oceanic. Jack has been trying to attain an inner peace through work and alcohol, and other characters have sought the same through revenge, drugs, running away, or undertaking difficult tasks to prove themselves. However, they are unsuccessful in attaining any semblance of this inner peace until they crash onto the island. Therefore, once Jack and the survivors in *Lost* are forced out of their own societies and their normal lives, their discontent causes them to be more willing to succumb to the oceanic sensation than someone who is already completely fulfilled in his or her life would be.

While Thelma, Louise, and Jack are looking for something that they cannot find in their everyday lives, they do not actually go out in search of the oceanic. Not having been out on the open road and away from their own society without their husbands, families, or boyfriends present, Thelma and Louise did not know that "a love affair with the land…[can be] an alternative or supplement to family attachments" (Torgovnick 63). When talking about women she studied who, after personal tragedies, journeyed to Africa and eventually found the oceanic

there, Torgovnick says, “had death and devastation not entered their lives, these women might have remained under a man’s shadow” (63). The looks that Thelma and Louise give each other after asking each other why they do not leave their significant others show that they were resigned to live “under a man’s shadow” had the unforeseen circumstances on their trip not forced them out of their routines. The *Lost* characters likewise did not set out with the intention of attaining the oceanic. In an explicit reference to the oceanic sensation, the airline the passengers were flying on when they crashed is named “Oceanic.” This overt reference to the oceanic sensation, together with the fact that the plane has crashed, suggests the abrupt and forced nature of the journey toward the oceanic that these characters have just embarked on. The characters’ unhappiness has primed them to accept the oceanic, but it is only through their forced journey away from their own societies that they are able to eventually attain the sensation.

Once the characters are forced from their own societies, though, they find themselves in locations favorable to the achievement of the oceanic. The area that Thelma and Louise travel through, and which is featured so prominently in the first shot of *Thelma & Louise*, is a stark contrast to the community Thelma and Louise are from, and the choice to begin the film with the images of this landscape and the representations of merging rather than beginning with shots of the women themselves or the neighborhood where their journey starts foreshadows the importance of this area to the women’s stories. Throughout Thelma and Louise’s journey, they will go far from their own society, into director Ridley Scott’s “surrealistic reinvention of the West—one third desert, one-third industrial wasteland, one-third unzoned strip development” (Schickel 5). While the areas they travel through do not lack society (as evidenced by the “industrial wasteland” and “unzoned strip development,” in addition to the man-made highways they travel down and gas stations and motels that they utilize), being forced out of their habitual

social contexts allows the characters to shift their focus away from their own social worries and preoccupations. In his discussion of humans' discontent with society, Freud proposes the notion that "what we call our civilization is largely responsible for our misery, and that we should be much happier if we gave it up and returned to primitive[1] conditions" (38).[2] While Freud does not say that he necessarily believes this himself, the claim that civilization causes our discontents and primitive ways of life cause happiness does support the notion that certain functions of society may prevent our attainment of positive elements of the oceanic. Therefore, it is important that Thelma and Louise at least escape their own society and enter a more natural space. Film reviewer Janet Maslin says, "Adrian Biddle's glorious cinematography…gives a physical dimension to the film's underlying thought that life can be richer than one may have previously realized" (1). In contrast to the oppressed and lonely lives the women had been living, this new landscape they find themselves in, with its gorgeous scenery, breath-taking sunsets, and lack of familiar social oppression, certainly does represent a more peaceful, unified existence. Therese Lichtenstein, too, says, "The sweeping desert landscape and the highway, dotted with steaming and glistening trucks and oil pumps…are bathed in a soft, golden light that covers everything visible, intensifying the atmospheric mix of nature and culture and

[1] Freud acknowledges that the determination of "primitive conditions" is flawed. He says, "In consequence of insufficient observation and a mistaken view of their manners and customs, they appeared to Europeans to be leading a simple, happy life with few wants, a life such as was unattainable by their visitors with their superior civilization. Later experience has corrected some of those judgments. In many cases the observers had wrongly attributed to the absence of complicated cultural demands what was in fact due to the bounty of nature and the ease with which the major human needs were satisfied" (39). Freud is correct in warning that the determination of something as "primitive" is unsound. I am not claiming to place a label of "primitive" onto any particular cultures or peoples. Rather, I am dealing with characters leaving their own societies and therefore being able to shed some of their social burdens and responsibilities.

[2] Freud calls this notion "astonishing" and acknowledges the contradiction in this sentiment because "it is a certain fact that all the things with which we seek to protect ourselves against the threats that emanate from the sources of suffering are part of that very civilization" (38).

suggesting a strange, hyperreal space in which almost anything seems possible" (488). What this landscape makes possible is the attainment of the oceanic sensation. This setting allows Thelma and Louise to depart from their own society and create a new existence for themselves.

The *Lost* characters, too, open their stories in an island landscape very different from the areas where they previously lived. After the crash, Jack awakens in a jungle, and we see that the plane has crashed on an island when Jack encounters the rest of the survivors on the beach. "Jungle and forest seem to make up most of the interior of the island" ("The Island"), and although the survivors will later discover parts of the island developed by the Dharma Initiative, they spend the majority of their time (and all of their formative early time on the island) in these undeveloped, natural spaces. With only minimal luxuries of civilization from the plane's cargo, they are forced to form a new, primitive way of life after the crash, building their own shelters, catching their own food, and finding sources of water. Sharon Kaye says, "*Lost* speaks to our deepest fear: the fear of being cut off from everything we know and love, left to fend for ourselves in a strange land. This fear is a philosophical fear because it speaks to the human condition. It forces us to confront profound questions about ourselves and the world" (3). These "profound questions" include the uncertainty that arises over whether our lives in society are the only possible form of reality or whether an experience like the oceanic sensation is also real.

That question is enhanced by the location the characters find themselves in. In addition to serving the function of separating the survivors from their social neuroses and providing a beautiful landscape for them to merge with, the island also presents unique properties which act to break up the characters' perceptions of reality; for example, "A huge, menacing 'monster' suddenly snatches survivors. Anomalous animals, such as polar bears, attack without warning" (Porter 28), and inexplicable changes from day to night and in the weather occur. In the first episode, as the survivors are getting used to their new and strange surroundings, Charlie asks,

“Is this normal? Day turning to night, end of the world type weather?” (“Pilot Part 1” 28:27). The question of what is normal frequently appears in the show, and the concept of reality is a theme which runs through the entire series. The occurrences on the island are so at odds with the realities they had known in their previous ways of life that they are forced to reconsider everything they had previously believed. A new level of consciousness is opened to them through being forced to accept a reality which they would have previously considered impossible. It is obvious that these stories will take the characters far from their own societies and put them in locales and situations very different from the civilizations they are used to. “Places help make people who they are” (Porter 233), and this change of location allows the characters to move away from their social frustrations and realities and begin to merge with each other and their new surroundings.

Evidence that Thelma and Louise are merging with their new surroundings is immediately apparent. The first scene of *Thelma & Louise*, a panning shot of the desert that Thelma and Louise drive through, has the viewers looking out over an expansive, seemingly endless landscape. Thus, a sensation of eternity is produced as the desert encompasses the viewer’s entire scope of vision and creates the feeling of standing on the precipice of a landscape that continues on endlessly. Then, the shot pans to a dusty, dirt road which leads straight into this area, inviting Thelma and Louise to journey into the depths of eternity and experience the boundless sense of the oceanic. Finally, as the shot begins to take the viewer slightly down that dirt road, the film goes from black and white to color, representing the enlightenment that awaits Thelma and Louise down the road on their journey. Jay Carr says that the film’s “big, bold panoramic images mythify the themes it taps with surprising potency” (C1). The vast, beautiful, peaceful landscape represents the eternal and peaceful existence that the women had been missing. It also serves to prompt the oceanic sensation in the women.

Rolland took from Spinoza the idea that nature was a vital part of the oceanic sensation. He advises:

> "Unite oneself, consciously, with all nature." For Rolland, then, Nature was not an abstract, amoral entity. On the contrary, it was a "living presence," the fundamental matrix through which all beings were interconnected. As he later put it, "at bottom each mind and what is convenient to call nature share the same reality, have the same origin, are the issue of the same cosmic energy." (Parsons 94)

Before having his beliefs about nature and the oceanic sensation confirmed and solidified by Spinoza, Rolland himself, in his youth, had oceanic experiences through contact with nature. Now, Thelma and Louise are beginning to experience nature in the same way Rolland and Spinoza did, and they are beginning to sense the oceanic.

As they travel further from their own society and closer to their attainment of the oceanic, the women also become progressively much more natural looking. Although they packed meticulously for their trip and dolled themselves up with makeup and fancy hair-dos, they have now thrown their makeup out the car window, abandoned the scarves covering their heads and are letting their hair flow freely, and are not spending time concerned about their appearance and the way others view them. This change in their appearance demonstrates a shift in their attitudes. Lichtenstein says, "Internal psychic transformations are mirrored by physical changes in their clothing and makeup" (1), and Maslin notes that one can detect "The film's sense of freedom and excitement, as…the women exult in feeling the wind in their hair" (1). In the Blu-ray commentary, Susan Sarandon, who plays Louise, says of one of the first scenes where they are on the road, "You notice both of our hair is becoming more natural as we get loose. We had it calculated." (34:55). This new representation of the women as more natural

demonstrates the disintegration of their individual and socially defined selves and the beginnings of their merging with the land.

In addition, the way the women prepared their look for the film also displays a merging with the land. In the Blu-ray commentary, Geena Davis, who plays Thelma, says, “We’d get dressed in the morning and then roll around in the parking lot and get ourselves all filthy before we started” (35:41). By adhering the dirt to their skin and making it a part of their characters, they appear more natural and more unified with the land around them. Screenwriter Callie Khouri says, “That’s one of the things I was happiest with about this whole thing. You know, when we talked about it in the beginning, I said I’d love to see them become more and more natural but more and more beautiful as it goes on, and you did. By the end, you’re just these mythical looking creatures, unadorned” (34:31). Khouri’s description of Thelma and Louise as “mythical looking creatures” is particularly important. She indicates their transformation from what they had been, fully-formed and functioning human members of society, to something different and elusive, expressing the nature of their new sense of being, which is hard to define and is out of the ordinary.

The *Lost* survivors, too, quickly demonstrate merging with each other and their surroundings. In the first scene, once Jack joins the chaos surrounding the wreckage, he instantly shows flashes of merging with the other survivors. Jack goes to the aid of many survivors who need medical help, rushing from the side of one to another. In doing this, he demonstrates an eerie ability to sense who needs his help and where they are, often rushing past chaos to reach his next patient, as if he were merged with the other person and able to sense he or she needed his help. In addition, as Jack barks out instructions to Hurley and begins to rush off to his next patient, Hurley yells out asking Jack’s name. Jack pauses, turns, and the shot focuses in on him and the music stops as Jack yells back, “Jack” (“Pilot Part 1”

5:42). The importance of Jack as a character and the importance of Jack's name are shown by this dramatic pause highlighting the reveal of our protagonist's name. Assigning the main character such an everyman name foreshadows his eventual merging with others during the series.

In the days following the crash, fear and hostility toward one another are rampant. However, Hurley calls for unity and tells the other survivors, "We're all in this together" ("Pilot Part 2" 9:22), and Jack says, "Every man for himself is not gonna work…If we can't live together, we're gonna die alone" ("White Rabbit" 39:05). Rolland believes that unity is a vital part of the oceanic sensation and that the joy found in the oceanic cannot be achieved without it. He says that it is imperative to "Unite with others and try to unite them with one another—for everything that tends to unite them is good" (Parsons 94). Jack is constantly trying to unite the group of survivors, and although he does this partly for the purpose of survival, his efforts to unite the survivors are vital to the group's achievement of the oceanic sensation. By the end of the third episode of the series, after Jack's encouragement to come together, the final shots of the episode blend images of the ocean with images of the characters, representing the characters' merging with each other and the land as they begin to unify and accept their life on the island.

Furthermore, there are numerous instances of people seeing dead people or people becoming other people on the island, an indication of the breaking down of habitual divisions between people and realms such as living and dead or past and present. Jack sees his recently deceased father, Christian, and Christian also eventually appears to the other characters, as well. Kate also sees a horse from her past on the island. Furthermore, characters sometimes take the form of other people. Sawyer, at one point, takes the form of a man Kate killed in the past. Even "The Others" who the survivors so fear and hate eventually do not seem so "Other."

After having to join forces with “The Others” to protect themselves, and after the time travel forces some of the survivors to blend in to the society of “The Others,” they all become one unified group. Sawyer, who was one of the characters most isolated originally, eventually calls “The Others,” “my people” (“Jughead” 39:06). Just as Malinowski merged with the Trobriand Islanders and no longer saw the differences keeping them apart, Sawyer and the survivors are merging with one another and with “The Others.” Perceptions of difference between selves are breaking down, allowing the oceanic experiencer to perceive instead the similar essences of the people, no matter whether those people are alive or dead, present or not.

Moreover, after desperately trying to find ways off the island, once the “Oceanic Six” return home, they find that they actually want to go back to the island. Jack, especially, has found that he has a sense of having merged with the island and feels at a loss once he is back in his old society. In *Lost’s Buried Treasures*, it is pointed out that “One of the castaways’ most important early questions is ‘Where are we?’ quickly followed by ‘How do we go home?’ The answers have shifted during the first three seasons—after approximately one hundred days on the island(s), ‘home’ may not be an ideal destination” (Porter 237). Although the “Oceanic Six” are able to go back to their old lives, reconnect with their families, and go back to their old jobs, “the juxtaposition of the Southern California metropolis with the previous scene’s remote tropical island makes the city seem strange and foreign” (Porter 238). The survivors no longer fit in to their society. Their moniker, the Oceanic Six, even displays their permanent connection to the oceanic sensation they found on the island. They go to great lengths to return to the island, and Jack says, “I’ve been flyin’ a lot…because I want it to crash, Kate. I don’t care about anybody else on board. Every little bump we hit or turbulence, I actually close my eyes and I pray that I can get back…We made a mistake. We were not supposed to leave. We have to go back” (“Through the Looking Glass Part 2” 40:17). Once back, Jack says, “I came back because I was

supposed to" ("Whatever Happened, Happened" 32:17). His oceanic sensation has created an eternal connection between him and the island, and he feels merged with it. Parsons explains that one type of oceanic experience involves "the expansion of self to include all of Nature within oneself" (Parsons 142). Jack is demonstrating that the island is within him. He feels, from inside himself, the pull of the island calling him back. The island has become a part of him that he cannot divest himself of.

Once the characters begin to display signs of merging with the land and each other, the filmmakers' use of another characteristic of the oceanic becomes obvious, as well. As Thelma and Louise start to become unconcerned with their appearance, Louise even gives away her watch. The shedding of the watch symbolizes a lack of concern over time, a common theme in experiences of the oceanic. Of his oceanic experience, Huxley says, "along with indifference to space there went an even more complete indifference to time…I could, of course, have looked at my watch; but my watch, I knew, was in another universe. My actual experience had been, was still, of an indefinite duration or alternatively of a perpetual present made up of one continually changing apocalypse" (21). Once Huxley is able to break free from the arbitrary distinctions creating separation between him and the universe, he is able to feel the sense of eternity, which also makes him feel that time is of no consequence. Time separates us from this sense of eternity by creating separation and division within our lives, differentiating our human-clock measured existence from the eternal existence of the cosmically oriented oceanic. In addition, time is constantly counting down to an end—the end of a minute, a week, a year, a century. Marking the passing of years and adding to our ages creates a constant sense of counting down the days until our deaths. One scene, which was cut from the film, addresses the characters' concern with time. In the scene, "each [character] confides what she fears the most (for Thelma, growing old with a husband who doesn't love her; for Louise, growing old alone)"

(Simpson). This fear of growing old displays their lack of a sensation of eternity. Rather than enjoying a belief that they will forever remain connected to the universe, they feel as if their time on earth is ticking away and that they are wasting those remaining moments. Moreover, they fear having to spend those remaining moments alone. This scene shows that Thelma and Louise were concerned with time in their previous lives in their society. Time should still be a major concern to the women once they embark on their getaway because they need to keep ahead of law enforcement to escape to Mexico. So, the fact that Louise is becoming unconcerned with time is important. Her interests are moving away from preservation of the self she had known in society and toward the establishment of her oceanic sensation. Brian Johnson says, "as the narrative stretches into the open space of Scott's epic visuals and Hans Zimmer's snaky score, time expands. There's less talk, more feeling. Luxuriating in the moment, the women seem to take charge of the movie, drinking in the moment until they're gazing at each other on the edge of oblivion, dusty and sunburnt and more beautiful than ever" (80).

Time is also extremely important in *Lost* as numerous variations on time are encountered through the show's six seasons. While the characters initially show a concern for time (counting how many days they have been on the island), they eventually come to find that the concept of time on the island might not be the same as what their understanding of time was in their societies. In the episode "The Constant," when Jack and Juliette become concerned about how long it is taking for Sayid and Desmond to reach the boat via helicopter, Daniel tells them, "your perception of how long your friends have been gone- it's not necessarily how long they've actually been gone" (4:47). At the same time, Desmond's consciousness has started to jump between the present and his past. One moment, he will be in the helicopter with Sayid, and the next, he will be in Scotland in the military, an experience which happened in his past. However, he is not reliving past experiences, but is rather taking an active role in them. When

he jumps to the past, he is aware of what was just happening in the present and is able to participate in his past life. Therefore, both experiences become his present. Rooney supports the veracity of an eternal present with an example from quantum physics:

> In quantum physics, in its approach to the real, the odd thing is that wave and particle do potentially occupy the same space until subjected to temporal measurements which only then establish a non-synchronous either/or. In this way the oceanic energy could be said to be a "to be," a question of a sense of potentiality of the real in physics. Thus, we could think of the oceanic as prior to temporal determination, hence the sense of the eternal or timeless that Rolland, and others, raise. Freud's reading of the oceanic [as a past experience or a type of memory from our infantile state] contrarily subjects it to an ineluctable temporal and melancholic logic of ruins, decay, erosion, and loss, that is, a logic at odds with the experiential accounts of that which is never surpassed, impossible to fall out of. (22)

The sense of eternity is a vital component of the oceanic, and Rooney confirms the idea that "temporal determination," or designations of time through language, restricts that ability to experience the oceanic. These unusual experiences of time in *Lost* allow the characters to comprehend a non-linear perception of time and thus allow for their acceptance of the characteristic of eternity which is so vital to the oceanic sensation.

As the characters become unconcerned with time and go farther on their journey toward experiencing the oceanic, the more their attitudes begin to change. They become more content with their situation and with themselves. In regard to *Thelma & Louise*, Lichtenstein says, "The farther away from the established law and reified consciousness of their former lives that Thelma and Louise move, the more fun they seem to have. Ironically, their 'criminal' behavior

allows them feelings of self-respect and self-confidence for the first time in their lives, and they make choices based on those feelings of empowerment" (488-9). The women are enjoying being out in the world on their own, away from husbands, families, and society. They are finally in charge of their own lives rather than being pushed around or dictated to by society. Moreover, they have stopped worrying so much about the crime they committed in the past and the consequences it will have for them in the future. They simply enjoy their present journey. Thelma comments, "I always wanted to travel. I just never got the opportunity" (1:30:32). This statement can be seen as humorously and darkly ironic, but it also points toward a certain insouciance that characterizes the women's growing experience of the oceanic.

Once the women are forced into this new way of life in this new area, they take advantage of it. At several points during the journey, they even appear to be carefree as they sing and dance along to the radio in their car. The Temptations' "The Way You Do The Things You Do" is one of the songs that they do this to. In it, the lyrics proclaim, "well you could have been anything that you wanted to," a motto which the women seem to be taking to heart. Thelma, who was shy and reserved at the onset of the film, has now embraced her freedom and relinquished her social inhibitions. She enjoys flirting and sleeping with the hitchhiker, J.D., and she proclaims, "I'm just a wild woman!" (52:14), and says she found "the call of the wild" (1:16:35) after her successful and exhilarating robbery of the convenience store. Thelma and Louise are blossoming now that they are unhampered by all of the things that had been oppressing them in their former lives. This new way of life that has been forced upon them no longer seems daunting but, rather, desirable.

Society had repressed Thelma and Louise's abilities to establish meaningful connections with the universe, the land, and even other human beings. Now, their self-confidence and their sense of purpose have flourished. Thelma puts this newfound peace into

words when she says, “I feel awake…wide awake. I don’t remember ever feelin’ this awake. You know what I mean? Everything looks different. You feel like that too? Like you’ve got something to look forward to” (1:47:52). Clearly, there is nothing in the normal realm of society for them to look forward to. They are being charged with murder and will most likely be imprisoned. At the very least, they will be taken in by the police and forced to endure some very unpleasant questions and accusations. What Thelma is looking forward to is her newfound sense of eternity and her realization that she is powerful and can establish connections to something other than her husband. Close up shots of the women’s smiling, contented faces reveal that they are at peace in their connection to the land. The women no longer seem to be trying to run from the authorities and escape to Mexico; they seem to be enjoying a leisurely journey through a beautiful area. At one point, Louise even stops and gets out of the car to watch the sun rise over the mountains. Since leaving all of their material connections, they are finding new spiritual connections. Away from the oppression they had previously faced, they feel at peace in nature.

The women are experiencing things that they did not even know were possible, and they do not want to give up this sensation and go back to society. As Thelma and Louise’s journey is coming to an end, Thelma worries that Louise will make a deal with the police and return home. She says, “Something’s crossed over in me, and I can’t go back. I mean, I just couldn’t live” (1:46:31). Louise responds, “I know. I know what you mean” and the pair are resolved not to give up their oceanic sense and return to their previous lives under any condition. In the Blu-ray commentary, Khouri says, “This is my favorite moment in the entire movie. This moment right here is just so completely who she is now. The transformation is complete for both of them” (1:46:28). Both women are now experiencing the oceanic sensation. Maslin adds, “Their transformation, particularly in its final stages, gives the film its rich sense of

openness and possibility even as the net around Thelma and Louise closes more tightly" (1). This change takes Thelma and Louise from oppressed, socialized beings to transcendent oceanic experiencers. It no longer matters to Thelma and Louise that the law has caught up with them or that there is nowhere left to run; they are now part of a larger cosmic whole which they cannot be separated from.

In *Lost*, Jack refuses to give up the island and his connection to it, just as Thelma and Louise refuse to go back to society and be removed from their oceanic experience. As it becomes clear that other people are planning to destroy the island, Jack resolves to stay and protect it. While some of the other survivors attempt to escape, Jack says, "I'm gonna take you to the plane, but I'm not getting on it. I'm sorry, Kate. I'm not meant to go" ("The Candidate" 11:54). He feels that he cannot leave this place he is so connected to, as he would not have the same sense of fulfillment without it. After Jacob explains that one of them will have to take over as protector of the island, Jack says, "I'll do it. This is why I'm here. This is what I'm supposed to do." Jacob wants to be sure that Jack is truly merged with the island and asks, "Is that a question, Jack?" When Jack, in his certainty about his connection to the island, answers, "No," Jacob responds, "Good." ("What They Died For" 32:21). In order to merge Jack with himself, Jacob performs a ritual at the stream. Jacob cups the water in his hands, then rubs it on himself, then fills Jack's cup. "Drink this," Jacob tells Jack. Jack drinks, and Jacob says, "Now you're like me" ("What They Died For" 34:01). This symbolic merging of Jacob and Jack displays the ever-expanding sense of unity Jack has come to attain with his experience of the oceanic sensation. Not only is Jack now the same as Jacob, he is one with the island.

The climax of *Thelma & Louise* is the women's suicide, their ultimate adherence to their belief in the oceanic. Freud calls the oceanic "a sensation of 'eternity,' a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded" (Rooney 1). By the end of their journey, the world has become

unbounded to Thelma and Louise. The edge of the cliff is not a boundary. Physical death in the pit of the Grand Canyon cannot end their connection to the eternal universe. In Louise's last conversation with the police investigator, he tells her that they need to decide if they want to come out of this dead or alive. Louise responds, "You know, certain words and phrases just keep drifting through my mind, things like incarceration, cavity search, death by electrocution, life imprisonment, shit like that. You know what I'm saying? So, do I want to come out alive? I don't know. I think we're gonna have to think about that" (1:44:23). Thelma and Louise do not consider it truly living to go back to a life where they would be persecuted and forced to endure even more oppression. Not only is there the real possibility of them being executed and physically dying at the hands of society, there is also the definite realization that their newfound sense of freedom and their spirits will be killed. The women seem to have been at the happiest and most content point in their lives during their journey, despite the fact that they were being hunted by the law. Louise is determined not to give in to society and go back. Even once they are cornered on the edge of the Grand Canyon by an army of police and FBI officers, Louise determines that she will go out fighting. She starts preparing her gun, even though her effort will be futile since dozens of officers' guns are already trained on her. Instead, Thelma suggests, "let's not get caught…let's keep going." She nods toward the canyon and says, "Go" (2:04:18). Louise turns to her not with surprise or fear, but with a smile and a glimmer of excitement. The women look at each other with a sense of contentment, and they share a loving kiss before clasping each other's hands, hitting the accelerator, and flying over the cliff. The shot freezes on the screen with the car in mid-air and fades out as triumphant, rejoiceful music plays.

Freezing the frame on the car in mid-air suggests that their journey continues. The viewer does not see the car fall into the Grand Canyon and crash, and, therefore, there is a sense that the women live on. Lichtenstein shares this feeling:

> The tale is so fabulous, we don't really believe that Thelma and Louise actually die. This act must be understood metaphorically, as a strong refusal of woman's subordinate and subjugated positions. Their bizarre leap of faith, in which suicide becomes an absurdly redemptive act, is indicative of the way in which film disrupts conventional categories of meaning. This crisis of categories undermines the boundaries in which power structures operate. Not only does the unbelievable here become believable, but common and predictable meanings somehow become altered. (491)

One would not think that a story in which the beloved main characters commit suicide in the end could be perceived as triumphant. Normally this would evoke feelings of sadness, disappointment, and pity. In the Blu-ray commentary, Sarandon shared her concern over what note the ending would strike:

> My only real concern was how did you have people leap into an abyss and not make it a downer…it is kind of a Hollywood moment that you can have those kind of endings and have it kind of romanticized as opposed to just being bleak, and so how did you put it in a framework that would be heroic enough? How did you work it to that point that that was a credible ending and at the same time uplifting as opposed to being just really depressing?" (2:04:33).

The women's attainment of the oceanic and the skillful use of the stop-action frame to suspend their car in mid-air over the canyon disrupts the viewer's "conventional categories of meaning" (Lichtenstein 491) and creates the impression that the suicide is triumphant. Meaning, for the viewer, has been turned upside down in this film, just as Thelma and Louise's understanding of the meaning of life is turned upside down during their journey.

By the end of their journey, Thelma and Louise have a completely different understanding of what it means to live. It seems to be a paradox that Thelma says that she "just couldn't live" if they went back to society, yet is content killing herself by driving into the Grand Canyon. However, for Thelma and Louise, their physical deaths in the pit of the Grand Canyon cannot kill their oceanic sense, which they thus affirm in an eternal moment that defies the continuance of lives in time. Their "leap of faith" (Lichtenstein 491) demonstrates their triumph over their own lives and over society rather than their defeat. Their final act "is liberating. It is somehow exhilarating to see them soaring in the air in the film's final stop-action frame…it is an existential leap into the void" (Lichtenstein 491). In experiencing the oceanic, they perceive no limits and no end to their sense of eternity. Freud says that the oceanic experiencer feels as if he or she "'cannot fall out of this world.' That is to say, it is a feeling of an indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole" (11-12). Thelma and Louise believe that they "'cannot fall out of this world.'" They trust that their oceanic sensation will continue and that their physical deaths will not end this connection they have to the greater cosmic universe.

In an alternate version of the ending included on the Blu-ray Disc, after the car plunges into the Grand Canyon to B.B. King's lyrics "better not look down, if you want to keep on flyin'," the women's car is seen speeding down the dusty, dirt road from the opening scene of the film. They were invited to take that road to the oceanic in the beginning, and in the end, they have accepted. The oceanic sense that they were able to achieve through their journey has allowed them to entirely change their lives. They are no longer subject to social oppression and do not have to suffer through unfulfilling lives. They escape society's hold over them and continue on a great adventure. Their optimism even in the face of certain death is affirmed in this non-realistic ending, which suggests to the viewer that there is eternal life outside of the physical life as defined by society.

Jack, too, demonstrates an adherence to the oceanic in the finale of *Lost*. In the final few episodes, a light in the center of the island is revealed, and it is vital to the island and, possibly, all of mankind. When Jacob and the Man in Black's mother shows them the light, she tells them, "This is the reason we're here" ("Across the Sea" 12:36) and that they must protect the light. She describes the light as "the warmest brightest light you've ever seen or felt," and says that "a little bit of this very same light is inside of every man" ("Across the Sea" 13:08). The filmmakers' choice to portray the source of the island's transcendental qualities as a light seems to reflect the oceanic-enabling light psychoanalyst John Rickman spoke of in his study of the Quaker religion. Rickman says, "the 'Inner Light'…enables the individual to become confluent with 'the ocean of divine love' which fills the universe" (Simmonds 133), and Simmonds connects Rickman's study to the oceanic sensation. The "Inner Light" in Rickman's study seems to be what connects people and provides transcendence, and every man having this same light inside of him in *Lost* harkens back to all men's common essences which are apparent during the oceanic experience. This light on the island is a metaphor for that which allows the island's inhabitants to experience the oceanic sensation; it is a tool to simplify the underlying causes of the oceanic sensation, functioning to allow for the unique properties experienced during the oceanic to occur. For example, the time travel and shifts in consciousness which are representative of the oceanic sensation are made possible by a wheel which requires the power of the light to work. Coming into too close of contact with this light also turns the Man in Black into the black smoke monster, separating him from his physical body and a normal life in society and displaying an out of body experience consistent with the unique realities of the oceanic experience ("Across the Sea" 39:15). Just as being overcome by the oceanic leads to Thelma and Louise's suicides, being overcome by the light ends the Man in Black's time in society. The light functions to make all of these oceanic qualities possible.

Once Jack takes over the role of protector of the island from Jacob, he becomes protector of the light, as well. Since he has become the protector of the light, he sacrifices himself for the survival of the island by killing the smoke monster and turning the light back on. The light and its presence on the island represent the oceanic enlightenment each character received there, and Jack's willingness to sacrifice himself for the island also suggests his adherence to the oceanic. When Hurley tries to talk Jack out of the actions which will lead to his death and tells him that he needs to stay and protect the island, Jack says, "I'm not [committing suicide]. This is the way it has to happen. This is what I'm supposed to do" ("The End" 1:14:36). Jack believes that he is doing what the island needs him to do and feels as if he is playing his part in the island's eternal existence. Philosopher Samuel Scheffler views the afterlife as the "trust that *others* will continue to live after us" (Scheffler). While Jack knows that he will die, his sense of oceanic eternity is facilitated by the knowledge that the island and his friends will live on, and that he will live on through his connection to them. Scheffler explains:

> the assumption that others will live on is more important to us than the belief that we will survive our own deaths…our activities belong to an ongoing temporal chain of human lives and generations… if there isn't an afterlife in my sense, that really would diminish the point and value and meaning of what we're doing. The nice thing about my kind of afterlife is that we're actually in a position to take steps to make it more likely that human beings will survive long into the future. (Scheffler)

Jack's actions display this trust in the fact that the island will live on, and in addition to merging with the island and its eternity, he merges with Hurley before sacrificing himself. He performs the same ritual with Hurley that Jacob performed with him, asking Hurley to drink from the stream and then proclaiming, "Now, you're like me" ("The End" 1:16:43). This merging ensures

that Jack himself, the protector of the island, will live on in Hurley as he protects the light. After merging with Hurley and securing the island's future, Jack dies, like Thelma and Louise, not with fear or sadness or anger, but with a close up shot showing his smiling face, confident and content in his oceanic sensation.

The characters in the flash-sideways world of *Lost* also experience the oceanic. Parsons describes an oceanic sensation involving the revelation of "another 'self' aside from the ego. One momentarily apprehends a self outside time, apart from one's ordinary conscious everyday 'ego,' which is felt to be deeper and more 'real'" (142). In the flash-sideways, the characters are living normal lives in society. They have families, jobs, and are seemingly well-adjusted to society. They even seem to have better lives than they had prior to the crash; all of their issues from their previous lives in society have been resolved. For example, Jack has a good relationship with this family, Hurley's bad luck has turned into good luck, and Locke does not have father issues. However, these flash-sideways characters do not recall their counterparts' lives on the island. When Desmond begins to reconnect the characters to one another, they are suddenly able to sense this other self. Their memories of their lives that happened on the island are still within them; they just had not been able to access those memories before. Rolland "advocated conceptualizing mystical modes of knowing in terms of innate, untapped potentials existing in a religious subconscious" (Parsons 9). These memories remain in the characters' subconscious; they just needed the oceanic sensation to allow them access to these normally inaccessible areas of the mind. Freud discusses how it could be possible for these characters to regain their island memories:

> Since we overcame the error of supposing that the forgetting we are familiar with signified a destruction of the memory-trace—that is, its annihilation—we have been inclined to take the opposite view, that in mental life nothing which

> has once been formed can perish—that everything is somehow preserved and that in suitable circumstances (when, for instance, regression goes back far enough) it can once more be brought to light. (16-17)

In addition to the flash-sideways lives the characters are living, the experiences on the island also happened, as evidenced by Jack's father telling him, "You're real. Everything that's ever happened to you is real. All those people in the church, they're all real too" ("The End" 1:38:06). While what humans normally experience is a "measly trickle of the kind of consciousness which will help us to stay alive on the surface of this particular planet" (Huxley 23), the oceanic "is as near, I take it, as a finite mind can ever come to 'perceiving everything that is happening everywhere in the universe'" (Huxley 26). The characters attain the oceanic as they remember their island experiences, merging past, present, and future in addition to merging their flash-sideways lives in society with their island lives. The strong draw of the oceanic sensation is also apparent from the fact that even though these flash-sideways characters are leading lives without issues, they choose to go back to their oceanic journeys with the rest of the survivors.

However, this submission to the oceanic also represents the end of Thelma, Louise, Jack, and the rest of the *Lost* characters' abilities to live normal lives in society, and, furthermore, leads to their deaths. Thus, their submission to the oceanic is by no means unproblematic, even as it is affirmed in the moments of their deaths which are portrayed on screen as triumphant. If we are to understand it and its cultural manifestations fully, the presence of the oceanic in these texts needs to be complexified to include these serious problems, which I will discuss in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

PROBLEMS WITH THE OCEANIC

Although Thelma, Louise, Jack, and the other *Lost* characters seem to find an inner peace through the oceanic sensation, many negative effects of the oceanic can be seen, as well, suggesting both the power and the danger of the phenomenon. As the characters leave behind their families and societies and attain the oceanic sensation in their new surroundings, they experience a fresh sense of enlightenment and self-confidence, but are also prone to harmful side effects, as well. Madness, fear of merging, barbarism, and, finally, suicide are dangers of the oceanic sensation which the filmmakers make apparent in these works.

The experience of the oceanic is so at odds with our normal lives in society, that the sensation can give the impression of or make one feel as if they are going mad. This descent into madness is what makes both the experiencer fear the oceanic sensation and makes the outside observer hostile toward the experience. Masson, who certainly is hostile toward the sensation, says that while reading stories dealing with oceanic experiences, he became troubled by "so many bizarre tales and ideas that seemed incomprehensible and removed from the concerns of everyday life" (ix), and Einstein, too, suggests that the oceanic is "remote…from the immediate realities of life" (68). When one sees him or herself as merged with all the universe, it is hard to reconcile that sensation with the need to be an autonomous, socialized being in one's society. During Huxley's oceanic experience, he is besieged by this fear:

> I found myself all at once on the brink of panic. This, I suddenly felt, was going too far. Too far, even though the going was into intenser beauty, deeper significance. The fear, as I analyze it in retrospect, was of being overwhelmed, of disintegrating under a pressure of reality greater than a mind, accustomed to living most of the time in a cosy world of symbols, could possibly bear. The

> literature of religious experience abounds in references to the pains and terrors overwhelming those who have come, too suddenly, face to face with some manifestation of the *Mysterium tremendum*. In theological language, this fear is due to the incompatibility between man's egotism and the divine purity, between man's self-aggravated separateness and the infinity of God. (Huxley 55)

The "terrors overwhelming those" are certainly shown in *Lost* as Hurley is driven mad by not being able to reconcile the concept of seeing and speaking with dead people with what is accepted as a reality in society. He still retains his oceanic connection to the survivors he merged with on the island, and he begins to see and talk to Charlie even though Charlie is dead. This frightens him, and he eventually begs to be put back into the mental hospital. When Charlie continues to appear to Hurley even at the mental hospital, Hurley says, "I may be in the mental hospital, but I know you're dead, and I'm not having an imaginary conversation with you." Charlie responds, "I am dead, but I'm also here" ("The Beginning of the End" 29:27). Charlie's appearance is possible through the oceanic sensation, but is not something that is considered real in our everyday lives in society. Modern society's accepted realities are contradictory to the realities of the oceanic sensation, and the mental conflict of not knowing what is real or which feeling to adhere to is too much to bear for many. In fact, when Desmond's consciousness begins to shift, one scene shows the viewers a rat, Eloise, whose consciousness also shifts. After the rat's experience of having her consciousness sent to the future and then returning to the present, she dies. Daniel hypothesizes, "I think Eloise's brain short-circuited. The jumps between the present and the future, she eventually couldn't tell which was which" ("The Constant" 26:33). The departure from one's accepted version of reality can overwhelm the oceanic experiencer, and Eloise was overwhelmed to the point of death.

Although Desmond does not die from his experience, he does go into a state of catatonia during his shifts in consciousness. He will be conscious and able to act normally in one time period, but unresponsive in the other. Ramakrishna reportedly experienced catatonia on numerous occasions, and Rolland describes one instance in particular in his biography of him:

> After the departure of Tota Puri towards the end of 1865 Ramakrishna remained for more than six months within the magic circle, the circle of fire, and prolonged his identity with the Absolute until the limit of physical endurance had been reached. For six months, if such a statement is credible, he remained in a state of cataleptic ecstasy, recalling the description given of the fakirs of old—the body, deserted by the spirit like an empty house, given over to destructive forces. If it had not been for a nephew, who watched over the masterless body and nourished its forces, he would have died. (45)

Rolland admits that these accounts will probably anger some of his readers and prevent them from giving merit to Ramakrishna's actions. Ramakrishna, too, experiences regret over these instances, realizing what effect they could have had on him were he not lucky enough to have someone taking care of him. Since Desmond's shifts in consciousness never last more than a few hours, he does not seem to be in any danger of dying from neglecting his body or basic needs; however, Daniel does tell him, "I would be careful crossing the street if I were you" ("The Constant" 26:01). These shifts in consciousness certainly take Desmond out of the normal realm of human experience, and he is not able to reconcile the past and present experiences which are simultaneously occurring.

Thelma and Louise never experience catatonia, but many of *Thelma & Louise*'s critics claim that "the film takes up the women's flight from…sanity" (Mason 11) and that the women's

actions are “divorced from logic” (Cantwell). While Thelma and Louise certainly make some questionable choices and break the law a number of times, most of their actions spring from necessity rather than madness. The robbery of the convenience store was due to their need for money, and locking the police officer in his car was necessary for the women to escape. The murder of the rapist, while not necessary by any means, was an unfortunate, unpremeditated reaction which Louise seems to regret. Blowing up the tanker truck was, I will admit, one act in which the women do show a hint of madness, abandoning all concern for the safety of the trucker, themselves, the area around them, and the ecological ramifications, not to mention that it will draw the attention of the authorities they are trying to escape. Thelma also seems to be coming unhinged at one point when she begins laughing and reenacting the murder they committed (1:34:32). Finally, their willful, joyous attitudes toward driving into the canyon to their deaths certainly show a level of madness brought on by the oceanic.

Because the oceanic is so at odds with the normal human experience and because the potential is there for one to go mad, people are justifiably afraid to allow themselves to merge with the cosmos. During their journey, Thelma and Louise have one foot in the oceanic and one foot out of it, fluctuating between the oceanic sensation they are beginning to attain and wanting to go back to society. An example of the women straddling the line between the oceanic and society is seen in the fact that although Thelma and Louise are running from the law, Louise calls and talks to the police investigator several times. She has been showing signs of merging and seems to be enjoying the experience, but calling the police investigator shows that she is questioning whether to continue her oceanic journey or return to society. At one point, the police investigator tells Louise, “You’re still with us though. You’re somewhere on the face of the Earth.” She responds, “Well we’re not in the middle of nowhere, but we can see it from here” (1:43:40). Masson equates the ocean with “nothingness” (70), and believes the yearning for the

oceanic to be one not which seeks connection with all, but one which wishes to dissociate itself from all. The fact that Louise says they are close to "the middle of nowhere" resembles this journey to nothingness which Masson so fears and which the women seem to be questioning. Her admission that they can see "the middle of nowhere…from here" suggests that Louise senses they are approaching a point of no return; they are close to complete adherence to the oceanic, and they fear what will happen if they allow themselves to fully merge with the universe.

The characters in *Lost* also show considerable fear of the strange oceanic circumstances brought on by the island. Many of the characters believe they are going crazy after experiencing instances of merging. After Jack sees his father standing in the water, he tells John, "I think I'm goin' crazy" ("White Rabbit" 28:00), and in a later episode, John, who normally embraces the supernatural elements on the island, says, "If Jack thinks I've lost it, I can't blame him really. Then again, five hours ago, I was pulled into a hole by what appeared to be a column of black smoke. Did you see it, Kate? [She nods.] Then I guess we're both crazy. Wonder what Jack thinks he saw" ("Man of Science, Man of Faith" 12:21). In addition, a whole episode is dedicated to Kate's backstory interspersed with numerous occurrences on the island that diverge from her accepted version of reality, causing her to become unbalanced. At one point, she sees a horse from her past running into the jungle, and Sawyer temporarily becomes Wayne, the man she killed. She tells Sayid, "I'm going crazy," and he responds, "I saw Walt in the jungle just before Shannon was shot. Does that make me crazy?" ("What Kate Did" 23:01). Jack, John, Kate, and Sayid know that the things they are seeing should not be occurring based on their understanding of reality. They are literally losing their grip on reality as they have known it because reality is now changing for them as a result of their habitual individualities dissolving in the oceanic, as evidenced by the abolition of the normal senses of time and space, which

cause them to see people from the past or to be transported to a different place. However, it is difficult to grasp an experience that embodies a concept you have been socialized to believe is impossible, so the characters understandably believe they are going crazy and fear what else will happen to them. The characters desperately try to find a way to get off the island and go back home to their societies where things can go back to normal.

According to Torgovnick, reluctance toward allowing oneself to be completely immersed in the oceanic is common. Torgovnick herself "was tantalized by the way in which men like Malinowski repressed some of their strongest positive feelings for…the oceanic" (5). The men Torgovnick studied were interested in the oceanic sensation, but they feared losing their sense of normalcy. Merging with nature and experiencing the oceanic are at odds with modern society which "has tended to scant some vital human emotions and sensations of relatedness and interdependence...These sensations include effacement of the self and the intuition of profound connections between humans and land, humans and animals, [and] humans and minerals" (Torgovnick 4)[3]. Once a person allows him or herself to "dissolve in the landscape" (Torgovnick 3), he or she is no longer an ordinary citizen of society. Merging with nature means letting go of the essential tenants that society holds dear, relinquishing your superiority as a human being, and accepting that you are part of something larger. Society's laws, monetary and value systems, hierarchies, and codes of conduct and ethics have no place in the oceanic, and people who do not adhere to all of these things have no place in society. Therefore, when feelings of the oceanic came over him, "Malinowski gave himself a good shake, checked to make sure he was not developing fever, and plunged back with determination into his data and abstract theory. He wanted to get back to his intellectual work and shrugged off as a forbidden desire the

[3] The connection between humans and other forms of life has become a growing topic of study in recent years in the fields of animal studies, ecology, and environmental justice.

impulse towards merging" (Torgovnick 4). Even Ramakrishna, who seemed to cherish transcendental experiences, was sometimes afraid of merging:

> On the threshold of his deepest ecstasies, he prayed to the Mother as She was drawing him to Herself: "Oh Mother, let me remain in contact with men! Do not make me a dried up ascetic!" And the Mother, as She threw him back to the shores of life from the depths of the Ocean, replied…"Stay on the threshold of relative consciousness for the love of humanity!" (Rolland 53)

If Thelma, Louise, Jack, and the other *Lost* characters make the decision to diverge from their society's laws and codes and accept the oceanic, they know that there is no going back. They will never again be able to happily live normal lives in society. They, like Malinowski and Ramakrishna, are frightened by the idea of leaving behind everything they know and becoming a citizen of the universe rather than a citizen of society.

Ultimately, Thelma, Louise, and Jack decide to adhere to the oceanic, and they give up their lives for the sensation. While they may have lived on in their minds or in the alternate and eternal universe of the oceanic, in human society, they perished. The viewer sees Thelma and Louise suspended over the Grand Canyon, living on triumphantly for eternity after they take their final leap off the cliff. However, in concrete reality, Thelma and Louise's car would have descended, and the policemen and federal agents watching this scene would have seen the car go tumbling into the canyon in a fiery crash and, ultimately, confronted two dead bodies. In a letter to the editor in *The New York Times* regarding Mary Cantwell's article, Regina Doody-Vermilya lambasts the film's portrayal of the women's suicide in *Thelma & Louise*:

> [Cantwell's] interpretation of the joint suicide of the two women as "triumphant" is as naively romantic and dangerous as the portrayal of this tragedy at the movie's end. When Thelma and Louise drive their car off a cliff, the screen

> becomes surreal and beatific, in short, a cartoon in which they are smiling and driving into the heavens. It is this sanitized portrayal that has led other female writers to applaud this film as a depiction of a feminist victory. Too bad the director didn't have the camera pan to the bottom of the cliff, where the mangled and lifeless remains of these once vital and resourceful women lie among the wreckage, because that would have more honestly conveyed the tragic waste of life and potential that sexual abuse and harassment can precipitate. (E14)

Doody-Vermilya is pointing out the discrepancy between the realities of human life in society and the oceanic's sensations of eternity and transcendence. A similar discrepancy occurs on *Lost* when, while Jack and the other *Lost* characters are living on in their flash-sideways existence, Jack is on the island dying, and it is revealed once they all reunite that they are all, indeed, deceased. Elizabeth Schneider says, "the message here is that 'self-assertion and awakening lead to death'" (Schickel 6).

While Thelma, Louise, and Jack seemed content in their decisions to commit suicide and seemed assured that their physical deaths would not impede their eternal connectedness to the universe, their deaths obviously eliminate them from society and the normal realm of human experience. This occurrence is what Freud feared about the oceanic sensation:

> Such desires are often identified in Western thinking with what Freud called the "pre-Oedipal" or "oceanic" stages of human development, by which he meant fetal, infantile, or what he saw as "regressive" states in which individuals do not perceive the boundaries of the self and the inevitability of subject-object relations. When he articulated some of society's deepest fears about this kind of pan-individual thinking, Freud saw it as connected to the "death wish," the

> desire of animate beings to return to "the inorganic condition from which life arose"—a condition similar to what science today calls entropy and Eastern religions call nirvana and the Tao. (Torgovnick 15)

Freud was right to worry that the oceanic sensation would put the experiencer at odds with fruitful human development and experience in society. When the sensation of eternity is so permanently instilled in the oceanic experiencer, the fear of death is lost. Parsons says, "One feels immortal, death becomes a 'laughable impossibility'" (142). Thelma, Louise, and Jack do not believe that their physical deaths are impossible; in fact, Jack makes it perfectly clear to both Hurley and Kate that he is going to die. However, he does feel immortal in the sense that the island will live on and that he will be a part of its eternity, just as Thelma and Louise feel that their eternal connection to the universe cannot be broken. Therefore, none of them show fear in the face of their certain deaths, and they go to those deaths willingly and happily, which terrifies viewers who have been socialized to fear death.

Not only does the oceanic have dire consequences for the individual experiencer, but dangerous results could arise from that person's social interactions, as well. Violent tendencies sometimes accompany one's sudden freedom, and they do in the cases of Thelma, Louise, and the *Lost* characters. In addition to Thelma and Louise's experience of an oceanic connection with nature and the universe, they also murder a man, rob a store at gunpoint, pull a gun on a police officer and lock him in the trunk of his car, and blow up a tanker truck. The *Lost* characters' actions, too, support the notion that their separation from society leads to savagery. After fighting with Sawyer, Jack says, "I'm gonna kill him." Kate asks, "So what's stopping you?" Jack responds, "We're not savages, Kate. Not yet" ("Confidence Man" 9:14). Jack's inclusion of "Not yet" shows that he feels an urge toward savagery and violence due to his new surroundings. Anna Lucia also echoes this sentiment when she is keeping a man she suspects

to be an "Other" locked in a cage. When Goodwin says, "We should let him go. We're not savages," Anna Lucia replies, "If I were a savage, I would have cut off his finger already. That's tomorrow" ("The Other 48 Days" 28:17). Clearly, Thelma, Louise, and the *Lost* characters' newfound freedom is torn between violent tendencies and the peaceful harmony usually associated with the oceanic. Torgovnick, whose work focuses on primitivism, addresses "a comprehensive psychology of Western fascination with the primitive[4], which can express itself in a variety of ways: negatively- for example, as fear of the primitive or as a detour into violence; and positively—as admiration for the primitive, conceived to be the conduit of spiritual emotions" (7). Torgovnick is discussing the effects of one's departure from society, and she claims that this openness allows one to go either into the oceanic or into violence. Thelma, Louise, and the *Lost* characters' transgression of society and its rules and confinements allows them to experience both of these sensations. The violence depicted on *Lost* is mostly a result of fear, a need to defend oneself from unknown or opposing forces, rather than the violence being incited for sadistic pleasure. However, the characters do see that they are able to have these types of violent reactions without the normal consequences that would accompany them in society. Thelma and Louise, who up to this point had been oppressed and not allowed to act on any of their feelings of adventure and lawlessness, become carried away. They see that they are able to get away with a crime, and it makes them feel powerful. Therefore, they continue to commit more. Once the women get away after Thelma incapacitates the police officer, she says, "I know it's crazy, but I just feel like I got a knack for this shit" (1:41:14). Thelma clearly enjoys

[4] While there are many issues with the term "primitive," which I acknowledge and accept, Torgovnick's *Primitive Passions* is a major work on the oceanic sensation, and it revolves around the connection between the oceanic and the primitive. I must include Torgovnick's argument here, but I will define the primitive for my paper's purposes as an existence outside of one's own society in a place that is depicted as closer to unoccupied nature and which lacks the modern world's technology.

their rule breaking, and it is every bit as much a part of her enjoyment of her new life as is her sense of the oceanic.

However, it is important to understand that violence and the oceanic are two very separate manifestations of the freedom these characters found outside of society. On the one hand, their freedom allowed them to appreciate nature, experience the sensation of merging with the universe, and attain a peace and self-confidence they had not previously known. On the other hand, their freedom allowed them to enjoy being outlaws and breaking society's laws and rules without worrying about the consequences. Their violence is not an effect of the oceanic, nor do I believe that the two can occur in one person at the same time. Indeed, while the characters vacillate between the two emotions, their crimes, in fact, never occur in moments where they are portrayed as being merged with the cosmos. The two are only associated through their similar statuses as materializations of this new freedom they are allowed. Torgovnick explains how living outside the bounds of society and, therefore, society's laws, can sometimes create an air of violence:

> even at its most idyllic, Western fascination with the primitive retains a dangerous edge. Perhaps because the correspondences between bodies and things are never complete or permanent, fascination with the primitive can detour, and sometimes has detoured, into violence…The impulses behind Western fascination with the primitive are explosive and hot. (9)

Torgovnick's assessment of the primitive detouring into violence because of impermanent correspondences puts this violent manifestation at odds with the oceanic. The oceanic is dependent on permanent correspondences with the universe and therefore most essentially results in a sense of peace with the world, not in a manifestation of violent tendencies.

However, Torgovnick herself confuses primitivism, violence, and the oceanic. In *Primitive Passions*, she says that after World War II when there was a renewed interest in the oceanic due to the effects of the war, the concept was marred by its association with violence:

> the idea of the primitive as a source of renovating power was complicated and problematized by its appropriation in Nazi rhetoric of the 'Fold,' 'Blood,' and 'Land'—a cruel undertow that was itself a form of primitivism and oceanic thought. Nazi rituals, like the infamous rallies at Nuremberg—with their torches, chants, and wheeling configurations of bodies—seemed to represent a return to barbarism, the primitive, and the oceanic, albeit in a warped, demonic form. To some extent, the oceanic has never lost the taint of Nazism, which seemed to validate the fear that it was a phenomenon inimical to the humanist democratic spirit, one that erodes the integrity of the individual self. (12)

Torgovnick is right that the oceanic "erodes the integrity of the individual self," but she fails to show how that erosion of the self contributed to the terrible acts of the Nazis. In the oceanic, erosion of the self leads to a merging with others. Merging and becoming one with all others in the universe is completely at odds with the Nazi's intentions of creating unity by ridding the world of all Others. This unity they desired was not a merging or acceptance of all else, it was an eradication of all who they designated as Other. Torgovnick's evidence, as well as the evidence in Klaus Theweleit's *Male Fantasies*, vol. I, *Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, which Torgovnick cites as her inspiration for this discussion, only makes connections between the Nazis' actions and ideas of primitive barbarism, not the oceanic. However, Torgovnick groups the oceanic together with primitivism and barbarism in her assessment even though the oceanic does not play a part in this violence. Associating the oceanic with these unrelated negative consequences is problematic because it discourages the desire for and the study of the

oceanic, and these false associations, combined with the real dangers of the primitive, quite probably contribute to the fact that the oceanic is not more prevalent in scholarship or in society.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Most analyses or explorations of the oceanic sensation revolve around Freud's discussion of the oceanic in the few short pages of his introduction to *Civilization and Its Discontents*. However, while that work "has formed the basis for the common understanding of" the oceanic sensation, Parsons suggests that Freud's work, along with Freud and Rolland's correspondence on the oceanic, was "a thoroughly interesting but largely unfinished conversation" (4). This "unfinished conversation" has not been taken much further since Freud's publication in 1930. The oceanic still lacks universal recognition, and even though evidence of the oceanic sensation is present in our everyday lives, it is not often noticed.

This lack of universal recognition seems to be due in large part to the difficulty of defining or categorizing the sensation, an issue Freud struggled mightily with during his correspondence with Rolland and in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Even the essay by Caroline Rooney titled "What is the Oceanic?," has a difficult time specifying what the oceanic is:

> Is there such a thing as *the* oceanic? Can we just say (the) oceanic is? The oceanic is … as movement, yet it does nothing, goes nowhere. It is being as a verb. The oceanic is to be.
>
> The oceanic is not to come. The oceanic is not the event of an arrival. It is the desire to be as only the desire to be. It is the desiring to live as only a desiring to live. It is a desire for no thing other than being the desire that it is, a desire that wishes to go on desiring: to be. This wants to be left and allowed. So this essay can but be an interruption of the oceanic, a non-miraculous parting of the sea. (19)

Rooney's description of the oceanic gives us no definite terms to label the oceanic with and no way to identify this "being as a verb" which she discusses. Her comments are fluid, poetic, and mystical, which are appropriate for the oceanic, but they do not help us to understand rationally where this desire comes from or how it is experienced. As Freud says, "It is not easy to deal scientifically with feelings. One can attempt to describe their physiological signs. Where this is not possible—and I am afraid that the oceanic feeling too will defy this kind of characterization—nothing remains but to fall back on the ideational content which is most readily associated with the feeling" (11). Freud laments the inability to deal in definite terms with the oceanic. As he sees this experience as nothing more than a feeling, he has difficulty understanding the oceanic without being able to place it in a scientific context. However, in Oskar Pfister's correspondence with Freud about *The Future of an Illusion*, he reminds Freud, "a man who sticks rigidly to the data is like a heart specialist who ignores the organism as a whole and its invisible laws, divisions of function, etc. Thus I have to find a place for the unconscious in mental life as a whole, and for the latter in society, the universe, and its trans-empirical realities" (cited in Parsons 114-115).

There is clearly a place for the oceanic sensation in our lives, as its presence in our popular works indicates, and the task of characterizing the oceanic is made simpler by viewing the sensation through these aesthetic works. However, due to the lack of recognition of the oceanic, the sensation has largely gone unexplored in *Thelma & Louise* and *Lost*. The evidence of its existence was there, but viewers did not know how to label or identify with this sensation. In fact, many viewers and critics were perplexed or even angered by the oceanic elements which they did not understand in *Thelma & Louise* and *Lost*. The range and intensity of these reactions point to both the presence and the power of the oceanic in the individual's subconscious.

When *Thelma & Louise* was released, it garnered an abundance of virulent backlash. In the Blu-ray commentary, Davis states, "There was quite a reaction…It was wild. There was editorial after editorial and just big discussions about it and whether it was a good thing or a bad thing" (1:27:09). She even marvels that they "were on the cover of *Time Magazine* within a week" (1:47:35). Critics decried the movie's violence, its portrayal of men, and its glorification of suicide, criticisms which seemed hypocritical when compared to male outlaw movies of the same nature which did not receive the same scrutiny. One example of an impassioned negative response to the film is this:

> What the film says about women is appalling, backward, and unliberated. In fact, plenty of women critics have described their disgust with *Thelma & Louise* in print. It's a disturbing picture. But "disturbing" here does not equal "profound." The film elevates the baser emotions and celebrates destruction as freedom. Though it very clearly carries the freight of feminist issues, it characterizes its two women- over the course of the movie- as childish, stupid, violently reactive, amoral, easily manipulated, emotional, led by their sex drive instead of their intellect, self-destructive, and, worst of all, as permanent victims- unwilling and unable to act creatively (let alone ethically) in adverse circumstances. (Mason 11)

Those are some harsh comments for a film whose body count and sexual encounters pale in comparison to most films of the day. So, what else could be behind this outrage? Sarandon addresses the outcry over *Thelma & Louise* in the Blu-ray commentary, positing, "I think people just couldn't figure out what disturbed them. You know, there was just something…They couldn't get into it, but they just kept leaping to other lame reasons why they were disturbed" (1:28:03). What viewers were actually reacting to was the oceanic sensation. This unknown

and, to some, unrecognizable element driving the characters' actions confused and frightened some of *Thelma & Louise*'s viewers. The depiction of this sensation which was so at odds with the viewers' own lives in their societies was unsettling and disturbing.

Lost did not receive the same initial backlash that *Thelma & Louise* received, but as questions continued to pile up about what was happening on this mysterious island with no discernible explanation for the mysterious occurrences of the show, viewers often became frustrated. Ratings dipped over the course of its six seasons, but many returned in the end to find out the answers to *Lost*'s mysteries. Over the years, numerous speculations arose about what was happening on the island, such as "a scientific experiment opened a mystical Pandora's Box," "the show depicts characters in purgatory," "the show occurs within a dreamstate or hallucination," or "the island is an ongoing social experiment" ("Fan Theories"). However, the series finale, which did not exactly conform to any of the viewer theories nor contain a shocking twist, left many even more confused and let down. Viewers' inability to recognize the oceanic as the driving force behind the story in *Lost* prevented them from understanding the intricacies of the characters' journeys.

However, not all viewers were upset by the oceanic elements in *Thelma & Louise* and *Lost*. Both works enjoyed large contingencies of viewers with extremely positive reactions to the works, as well. About the event celebrating the 20th anniversary of *Thelma & Louise*'s release, Schneller says:

> The crowd who paid to watch its stars reminisce at Roy Thompson Hall- about 90 percent women, most of them middle-aged- streamed in two by two, for every Thelma, a Louise, and the air practically fizzed with excitement. They could parrot every line, they laughed uproariously at every behind-the-scenes tale, and when the time came for audience questions, they lined up at the

> microphone 10 deep. With rabid enthusiasm, they proclaimed it: This movie changed their lives. (1)

Viewers felt a strong emotional connection to Thelma and Louise and their journey. Davis even recalls, “The reaction was so extraordinary, women on the street were grabbing my lapels to tell me what it meant to them” (Schneller 1). These viewers, who had experienced their own sensations of merging with the characters and the film, were reacting to the oceanic sensation. The women’s journey represented a sense of eternity and unity that captivated these viewers, and they were drawn to the oceanic sensation even if they did not know that it was the oceanic they were reacting to.

Although the mystical aspects of *Lost* were overwhelming for some, they were clearly a draw for others. *Lost* enjoyed critical praise and massive audiences. Viewers were intrigued by the mysterious island and the survivors’ interaction with it and tuned in to see how these mysteries would be explained. Sander Lee says that Lost “has spawned an unprecedented reaction from its devoted fans, a reaction which includes message boards, podcasts, online ‘experiences,’ and even novels supposedly written by fictional characters (*Bad Twin* by Gary Troup)” (63). Viewers also created websites, books, magazines, conventions, and alternate reality games in response to the show, and viewership as well as viewer interaction was rabid. Porter explains:

> All fandoms, at some level, actively engage with the source text of their fandom. What makes *Lost* fans different is that they have formed a discourse community or knowledge network – a group of individuals devoting time and effort into discussing, analyzing, and investigating their favorite series as though it were a distinct discipline of study. (171)

In fact, Porter even found that "the average amount of time [*Lost* fans] spent on *Lost* activity [per week] was eleven hours" (170). Even now, three years after the show's end, viewers are still contributing to message boards about the show. Aspects of the show as well as the outside fan interaction allowed viewers to merge with the characters in *Lost* just as they did with the characters in *Thelma & Louise*. Porter says, "No series has inspired fans more than *Lost*, and no television show has done more to actively feed their appetites and respond to their passions," (158) and, additionally, "*Lost*'s creators and writers have given fans an interactive environment that draws on multiple levels of audience participation, enticing viewers to decipher the hidden clues and secret symbols that might lend insight into the complicated mythology of the series" (159). Viewers became invested in the characters' journeys, and they enjoyed watching their beloved characters achieve transcendence through the oceanic sensation.

These conflicting feelings about *Thelma & Louise* and *Lost* mirror the conflicting feelings toward the oceanic sensation in our society. Schickel discusses the passionate response to these works:

> Consciously or not, these films tend to serve as expressions of the values or confusions jangling around in their society, or occasionally as springboards for earnest discussions of them. At a time when moral discourse has been reduced to the size of a sound bite and rapid social change has everyone on edge, the messages conveyed in even the most frolicking of these movies stir peculiar passions. Such films often have an astonishing afterlife, not only in popular memory but as artifacts that vividly define their times. (2)

Thelma & Louise and *Lost* certainly express the confused feelings surrounding the oceanic, with both sides unsure of why they are having the type of passionate response, positive or negative, that they are having, and they also clearly open up discussions (although the lack of recognition

of the oceanic usually prevents those discussions from focusing on the sensation itself). In addition, both do enjoy the "astonishing afterlife" Schickel mentions. A large contingency of *Lost* fans are still actively studying, writing about, and discussing the show, contributing to *Lost* publications and events. *Thelma & Louise* fans, too, still pay homage to the film by road tripping to the Grand Canyon, and many attended the film's 20th anniversary celebrations. There is even a *Thelma & Louise* website where women can find like-minded women to join them on road trips. Khouri explains *Thelma & Louise*'s durability by saying, "I managed to tap into an archetypal story…It's been told over and over I've since found out. So, I think in that way it is its own thing and it hangs in there because it's one of those…stories that human beings respond to" (1:27:30). The enduring popularity and meaningfulness of these works to so many people display the deeply imbedded passions aroused by the oceanic sensation.

People who had a positive reaction to these works connected with these stories because of a desire for transcendental, mind-expanding experiences. Huxley explains:

> To be shaken out of the ruts of ordinary perception, to be shown for a few timeless hours the outer and the inner world, not as they appear to an animal obsessed with survival or to a human being obsessed with words and notions, but as they are apprehended, directly and unconditionally, by Mind at Large—this is an experience of inestimable value to everyone and especially to the intellectual" (73).

Viewers of *Thelma & Louise* and *Lost* were able to witness something that they normally do not get to experience in their everyday lives. There was a sense that these characters were portraying something more, something transcendental, something we are not normally privy to experiencing, and the sensation was intriguing.

However, the negative reactions and the problems with the oceanic presented in the two works also indicate the dangers of the oceanic sensation. Viewers were certainly right in being cautious about oceanic merging since it was portrayed as leading to the characters' deaths. However, they are an extreme example of the overwhelming sense of the oceanic. Harry Guntrip warns that "we cannot dismiss everything because it *can* be neurotic." He says that doing so would put us "on dangerous ground, for there are also neurotic forms of politics, of art, of marriage" (Simmonds 134). The frightening aspects of the oceanic in *Thelma & Louise* and *Lost*, while troubling, are hyperbolized forms of the sensation. Khouri says that films are "a place to hang fantasy and to make certain aspects of yourself larger or more real" (1:38:47), and Barbara Bunker says, "drama is supposed to make things larger than life so you get the point" (Schickel 3). These extreme examples of the oceanic are designed to draw attention to this oft-ignored sensation and to provide a "brand of escapism [which] offers transcendence, not instruction" (Maslin 2).

Obviously, there are examples of full-fledged submissions to the oceanic sensation leading to death, suicide, or catatonia, but there are milder forms of the oceanic, as well. In the first chapter, I provided evidence of many prominent and influential thinkers (Proust, Huxley, Rolland) experiencing the oceanic. These men were able to have oceanic experiences without those experiences leading them to death, suicide, or catatonia; moreover, these men were also well-respected, significant thinkers of their time, not people who were considered outliers of society or psychotic. Rolland, in particular, told Freud that he was never without the oceanic sensation, yet he was an extremely important writer who was even awarded the Nobel Prize. He wrote to Freud, "As for me, since birth I have taken part in both the intuitive and the critical natures, I do not suffer from a conflict between their opposing tendencies, and I can adapt myself very well to at once 'seeing, believing, and doubting'" (Parsons 176). Rolland was able to

balance the transcendental nature of the oceanic sensation with society's norms and regulations. In doing so, he displayed what Parsons calls "mysticism as process":

> mysticism as process shifts the emphasis from mystical experience per se to mystical encounters set in the broader context of a life. Without denigrating the importance of singular epiphanies or deep meditative intuitions about the nature of self and reality, the criteria for evaluation and comparison moves from analysis of the characteristics of mystical experiences as such to how such encounters are linked to the cultivation of a specific set of dispositions, capacities, virtues, and states of consciousness. This general point finds specificity in the diverse ways in which mystical authors have subsumed mystical experiences and meditative insights under the broader umbrella of the spiritual "path." (7)

Parsons's concept of "mysticism as process" along with the examples of the lives of Rolland, Proust, and Huxley demonstrate that there is the possibility to incorporate the oceanic sensation into one's life without detrimental effects.

The actions these characters took are not the only ways to achieve the oceanic sensation nor are these the only situations in which one would find evidence of the oceanic. Huxley claims, "Most people, most of the time, know only what comes through the reducing valve and is consecrated as genuinely real by the local language. Certain persons, however, seem to be born with a kind of by-pass that circumvents the reducing valve" (24). Huxley is asserting that some people are born with the ability to achieve the oceanic sensation through no special actions or circumstances of their own doing. Freud attributes the oceanic to the continuation of one's primary narcissistic form of consciousness in childhood, and he, too,

seems to suggest that some people might achieve the oceanic through the retention of this form of consciousness through no action of their own:

> If we may assume that there are many people in whose mental life this primary ego-feeling has persisted to a greater or lesser degree, it would exist in them side by side with the narrower and more sharply demarcated ego-feeling of maturity, like a kind of counterpart to it. In that case, the ideational contents appropriate to it would be precisely those of limitlessness and of a bond with the universe—the same ideas with which my friend elucidated the "oceanic" feeling (66-68).

According to Huxley and Freud, the oceanic could be a natural and satisfactorily integrated state of being for some people. However, Huxley also likens the oceanic sensation to the feelings of schizophrenics, and Masson, too, equates the oceanic to mania.

Lacking the extreme circumstances of Thelma, Louise, or the *Lost* characters, the natural oceanic ability of some, or a form of psychological illness, many thinkers claim that it is still possible to achieve the oceanic through simple actions one can take oneself. Huxley says:

> Temporary by-passes may be acquired either spontaneously, or as the result of deliberate "spiritual exercises," or through hypnosis, or by means of drugs. Through these permanent or temporary by-passes there flows, not indeed the perception "of everything that is happening everywhere in the universe" (for the by-pass does not abolish the reducing valve, which still excludes the total content of Mind at Large), but something more than, and above all something different from, the carefully selected utilitarian material which our narrowed, individual minds regard as a complete, or at least sufficient, picture of reality. (24)

While drug use is not a route that should necessarily be advocated, Huxley himself achieved the oceanic through the use of drugs, as did William James. Huston Smith, too, has dedicated a great deal of research to drugs' spiritual effects. Huxley, however, claims that adrenochrome, "a product of the decomposition of adrenalin, can produce many of the symptoms observed in mescalin intoxication. But adrenochrome probably occurs spontaneously in the human body. In other words, each one of us may be capable of manufacturing a chemical, minute doses of which are known to cause profound changes in consciousness" (11). And, indeed, the spontaneous oceanic feelings Proust and Rolland encountered by doing nothing more than tasting a tea-soaked bun or walking through a field seem to have been brought about by something within themselves. This, again, is evidence that some might be able to naturally achieve the oceanic. In addition, Rolland wrote to Freud about the transcendental powers of yoga, and Rolland himself used yoga to attain the oceanic sensation. Huxley also references "Art and religion, carnivals and saturnalia, dancing and listening to oratory" as practices which "have served, in H.G. Well's phrase, as Doors in the Wall" (64). Freud even suggests that psychoanalysis is similar to the expansion of the mind experienced in the oceanic. He says, "it may be admitted that the therapeutic efforts of psycho-analysis have chosen a similar line of approach. Its intention is, indeed, to strengthen the ego, to make it more independent of the superego, to widen its field of perception and enlarge its organization, so that it can appropriate fresh portions of the id" (cited in Simmonds 132). Such fresh portions of the id would include the oceanic. Finally, Huxley advocates for more pathways to the oceanic to be opened, and says, "Some of these other, better doors will be social and technological in nature, others religious or psychological, others dietic, educational, athletic." (64). The ability to achieve the oceanic could be derived from a wide variety of experiences, but the key factor is recognizing its presence in these occurrences.

Clearly, evidence of the oceanic is all around us in our everyday lives, so discussion of the oceanic should not be reserved for the field of psychoanalysis and examinations of *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Hopefully, through a greater awareness of the oceanic and a demonstration of how to recognize it in our aesthetic works, we will be able to more readily identify the oceanic in all areas of life. Thereby, we can bring recognition to the oceanic in society in order to incorporate the oceanic's positive transcendental qualities and guard against its potential harm.

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