

Reframing Global/Local Poetics in the Post-Imperial Pacific: Meditations on 'Displacement,' Indigeneity, and Area Studies

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I. Displacing the US-Area Field Imaginary:

For 'displacement,' the OED tracks the quasi-materialist tangle of the English semantic record when it tells us that rulers, plants, waters, feelings of aggression, and day-laborers all can be *displaced*, that is, shifted, removed, deflected—in short, put out-of-place by some disruptive structural, biological, or tactical shift, as revealed in the OED's macro-instance of creative destruction from 1880, "the displacement of human labor ... through machinery" ("displacement"). Nowadays, with the more ethereal rise of *diaspora* discourse, *borderlands* paradigms, and *postcolonial* dissemination models of subjectivity into power across the professional US academy, *displacement* has become a virtually normative concept/tactic by which to talk of, track, and organize the makings of literature, knowledge, community, and culture. What Gayatri Spivak pedagogically embraces in her own transnational work as the "practical structure of deconstruction as reversal-displacement" ("Explanation and Culture: Marginalia" 377)¹ has had a far-reaching impact upon the disciplinary regimes, area formations, and the fast-coming-unglued "field imaginary" of the fast-globalizing 1990s.² The multi-sited editors of *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation & Postcolonial Perspectives* note that "rearticulated notions of exile and diaspora" have become so commonplace by now in Anglo-American postcolonial discourse that 'displacement' is registered not just as a specific effect of post-independence history but, much more free-floatingly, is being used "as a condition and a trope for cultural criticism itself" (Mufti 2).³

Working his way from the emergent and peripheral into the theory-dominant sector,⁴ Homi Bhabha can serve as a synecdochic instance for

this large-scale US shift to install outer-national frameworks valuing postcolonial displacement, as when he writes in “The World and the Home:”

Where the transmission of ‘national’ traditions was once the major theme of a world literature, perhaps we can now suggest that transnational histories of migrants, the colonized, or political refugees—these border and frontier conditions—may be the terrains of world literature. The center of such a study would neither be the ‘sovereignty’ of national cultures, nor the ‘universalism’ of human culture, but a focus on those ‘freak displacements.’ (449)

(The quoted term is Nadine Gordimer’s) emanating from postcolonial societies and reflected in its “unhomely” writing, Bhabha urges this “unhomely” mode of writing weird counter-English, even as he repetitively foregrounds the out-of-synch, off-center, and culturally doubled lives of postcolonial subjects not all quite situated (well-placed) like himself in the English Departments at Harvard, Chicago, and Oxford.⁵

As another global sign of this trans-disciplinary shift warping the field practices of the 1990s, diasporic discourse arose (as in the work of Paul Gilroy on the Black Atlantic and Stuart Hall on ex-imperial England et al.) to register disjunctive, multi-sited, and transnational modes reflecting what James Clifford calls “dwelling-in-displacement” that prior nation-centered models of assimilation, citizenship, ethnicity, and settlement could not account for. As Clifford registered the ‘displacing’ effect of this shift to register diasporas upon US and British cultural studies in his travelling-theory study *Routes*, “[d]iasporic language appears to be replacing, or at least supplementing, minority discourse” (254–55). Displacement, we might recall, in the more psychoanalytical mode of libidinal agonistics, can register the discursive shift of aggression away from a powerful father-figure towards one less powerful emerging figure, to masquerade retaliation or occlude dissent (Bullock 232). Resisting free-floating homologues of travelling as a de-nationalizing movement of “cosmopolitan” theories, peoples, and ideas, Timothy Brennan has urged the geo-materiality of this subliminal recognition upon post-

colonial studies: that “‘displacement,’ far from being neutral, is designed precisely to force readers to remember the involuntary travel of deportation, migrations, and war”(17).⁶

Diaspora discourse, arising in dominant contexts like those inside the globalizing empire for capital/liberty that is the present US hegemony, can help to diffuse the languages of a coalitional counter-minority and thus reflect a more supple containment strategy of civilizational empire. Ethnic citizens can now all too easily become recast as diasporics, with a double sense of “rooted” belonging to countries here/there, but at the same time they run the security “homelands” risk of being reframed as “un- or non-Americans, in a rehearsal of the logic of the Japanese internment”(Palumbo-Liu 122).⁷ Displacement discourse as such signifies not just the context-free sign of innovation, deconstruction, and difference, as we can begin to see here, but can be the agent itself of a field displacement and, more importantly, reflect the large-scale geo-material realignment of national power and a majority/minority management that needs to be distanced, placed in allegorical scarequotes as it were, and interrogated.

In this essay, I want to discuss three large-scale displacements taking place in the postcolonial Pacific: (a) ecological, (b) financial, and (c) semiotic, concentrating more on the latter in the context of the former two, but reading cultural texts rife with “displacement” within planetary and global/local contexts that implicate modes of semiotic displacement in the very material dynamics of ecological and financial imbalance, catastrophe, and unrest. I want thereby to challenge the limits of any too-loose or flexibly installed text-centered displacement models that are transforming the postcolonial field imaginaries of Asia/Pacific study in productive, if uneven, ways. Later, by way of a field-situated conclusion, I will focus upon two scholarly works from Asia-Pacific and Pacific American studies that help give ‘displacement’ contrasting registers and applications: Yunte Huang’s counter-orientalist study of textual mimicry and transcultural translation, *Transpacific Displacement: Intertextual Travel in Twentieth-Century American Literature* (2002) and Houston Wood’s more indigenous-centered study of rhetorical and political displacement, *Displacing Natives: The Rhetorical Production of*

Hawaii (1999). Both of these works are not just about displacement, they activate it as an organizing trope for organizing areas and knowledge frames. Mired in postcolonial newness and the lurch towards affirming diasporic doubleness, we still need a broader internationalist vision of external linkages and trans-area concepts than any pragmatic, merely national—or segregatively area-based vision of “displacement” will now provide.⁸

While Chicano and Latin American Subaltern studies are representative of interlocking geopolitical and discursive shifts, Asian American and US Pacific studies also reflected and impacted upon this field displacement and shift of focus, tools, interests, historical subjects, and bloc formations of the transnationalizing field-imaginary. As Arif Dirlik records in “The Asia-Pacific in Asian American Perspective”:

Asian American historiography, in recalling Asian Americans into the history of the United States, has made a significant contribution to US historiography by challenging its dominant paradigm of an expanding western frontier and showing that there was an eastern [transpacific] frontier as well, with a significant Asian presence on its outposts. (319)

Outlining a strategic and place-based regional imaginary as well as a global/local dialectical optic my own work has been affiliated to, Dirlik has urged that “the struggle of Asian Americans against homogenization into a hegemonic culture is paradigmatic of Asia-Pacific as space of cultural production” (325), a focus he soon supplemented with a shift towards indigenous and fourth-world concerns from Pacific sites that further challenged the hegemony of US assimilation models.⁹ Dirlik, more broadly, has opposed any glib concentration on diasporic models of transpacific cultural production with a turn towards the place-based and community-building focus that had marked Asian American studies at its origin and now drives many aspects of Pacific native cultural studies. This spatial turn, reflecting what Harry Harootunian has relentlessly critiqued as the “appeal to larger units, regions, transnationality, globalization, [and] hyperspace where the diasporic flows of people are said to move across what are misrecognized as ‘porous’ borders” never sought

(in my opinion) to lose sight of those “vast deterritorializing force[s] of capital and labor” nor the uneven developments, blasted allegories, and co-temporal “everydayness” of global modernity (“Some Thoughts”).¹⁰

Displacement remains a primary force driving global capitalism, as registered in our anxious transitioning to transnational or post-area field mappings, as when Fredric Jameson urges that “the extraordinary demographic displacements of mass migrant workers and of global tourists [are occurring] to a degree unparalleled in human history” (363). But if displacement confronts us as a widespread effect and new models of field-displacement study are receiving widespread currency, even after the border-guarding civilizational binaries that are returning with a vengeance post-9/11,¹¹ we need to ponder Cicero’s *cui bono* question: who or what is being displaced (“to whose advantage”)? As my opening OED semantics suggest, a range of subjects human and otherwise can be displaced, even more so given the rise of technologies of simulation and the multi-media of cross-border flow: signs, texts, peoples, laborers, islands, indigenous peoples, narratives, disciplinary fields all can be “displaced.” Needless to say, not all of these displacements are created equal in their historical emergence and geopolitical impact, nor should they all be given the same interpretive weight nor disciplinary efficacy and focus. Some modes of displacement do need to be studied and (in a Gramscian “organic” sense) connected to, whereas some (like those stressing the ever-reversible signs, ludic nihilism, and fungible borders of de-situated language-games) would be better subordinated or ignored.¹²

II. Mapping Indigenous Displacements in Tuvalu, Tonga, and Hawaii: Semiotic, Ecological, and Geo-material Entanglements

The global/local dialectics of the indigenous-entangled Pacific region go on working themselves out with hallucinatory consequences of displacement that dwarf the out-sized stage sets of *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001). At the same time that Tavalu Island is sinking into the Pacific Ocean due to various factors of global warming and planetary flow, for example, the tiny Polynesian government was granted the domain internet extension .tv that it later sold to a California media company for 50 million dollars. So if the global mediascape wryly empowers this ex-

British island site with internet royalties for the next twelve years, the global ecoscape brings its place-based existence as local culture to near vanishment and forces its 11,000 citizens to relocate their ‘ethnoscape’ lock-stock-and-barrel to New Zealand to survive (National Public Radio News). Tuvalu still exists as web site and global chat room and thus maintains a virtual transpacific existence to talk about its global-local plight in cyberspace, but its nine coral atolls go under water and its culture is set offshore. Geography and genealogy are fractured as such, Pacific islander identity forever cast into diaspora and motion. The displacement of Tuvalu has been a particular US concern since the unilateral Guano Acts of 1854 legalized the extra-territorial extraction of bird-shit for industrial and military uses in some seventy sites located in the Pacific, including Kiribati, Tuvalu, and the Cook Islands, a global feat that “presaged American colonial presence in the central and south Pacific” (Lal 239).¹³ Still, as I learned from the CIA publications fact-book now online as public culture, Tuvalu’s “transnational issues” are at this point tame, or at least becoming invisible, for under “Disputes—international,” Washington registers “none” (“Tuvalu”).

But “small countries” like these, as Edouard Glissant affirmed of island-nations like Martinique and its creative sur-Caribbean future, “are part of the disorientation of the world,” impacted and creolized into “contrastive poetics” as “part of a global process” (3) and concurrent global/local discourse.¹⁴ In a related context bespeaking narrative appropriation and virtualization via offshore poetics—a kind of semi-otic displacement—globally minded Hollywood producers go on planning to make a mega-budgeted biopic about the life of Native Hawaiian King Kamehameha I, which has become globally feasible with the rise of wrestling idol Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson from the Aloha State to star in its lead role like some taro-stomping Angelina Jolie. One of the film’s producers assured skeptics from Hawaii that “the goal of everyone in the project is to tell an epic story and hopefully capture it from a historically correct viewpoint” (*San Jose Mercury News*, June 28, 2002: A2). The de-worlded space of Native Hawaiians may still exist, to be sure, but the narrative resources and temporal arrangements of indigenous history, place, and myth can be altered to serve the genre needs and blockbuster

economies of global spectacle, with multicultural wrestlers playing the identity-angst of indigenous kings. Or worse.

The Pacific island of Tonga has fared no less perilously than Tuvalu in its recent attempt to globalize government revenues, amplified by selling passports to cash-ready Asians, especially those anxious over Hong Kong's reversion to China in 1997. Not Tonga's island land or cultural sovereignty but its investment dollars have disappeared into "a mysterious company that has now vanished," as BBC News put it in October 2001 ("Tonga's Jester Has Last Laugh").¹⁵ Tonga, here on this uneven global playing field, is an agent in its own financial displacement. The singular South Pacific kingdom launched a compensatory lawsuit in San Francisco, hoping to recover some of the \$26 million it had lost in investment schemes directed by Jesse Bogdonoff, a Bank of America employee turned court-jester who talked the Tongan king into investing his kingdom's low-interest checking account into his own Wellness Technologies along with an insurance-buyout company in Nevada called Millennium Asset Management and a dot.com start-up—since dot.gone into bankruptcy. Instead of investing to repair local highways in Tonga, the diasporic king (living in an up-scale San Francisco suburb in Silicon Valley near the Hearst family) played the internet frontier under the tutelage of his court jester and soon squandered the tiny ex-British kingdom's surplus budget in offshore speculation.

Thinking about filing a counter-suit for character assassination, our discredited US jester admitted that he has "people in Tonga calling for me to be thrown underground and cooked like a pig," and blamed the law suit not on residual primitivism but on rival factions in the postcolonial government and the loss on market forces (Quinn). Nothing of this failed globalization strategy bordering on opera bouffé or Pacific Rim disillusionment fatigue, would surprise the readers of Epeli Hau'ofa's *Tales of the Tikongs* (1983), who modeled Tiko's comic entrophy, development failures, and protestant-ethic working in reverse on his native Tonga where he had once served as the king's secretary. If the local can overthrow and comically reverse colonial and neocolonial schemes of ex-primitive appropriation in Hau'ofa's satirical fiction, global offshore powers can gobble up local capital and dismantle transpacific dreams of

global aggrandizement, as here under the management of an ebullient American businessman “who impressed the Tongan king so much that he issued a royal decree proclaiming him official court jester” (“Tonga’s Jester Has Last Laugh”).

Indigenous culture, plantation community, and outer-space aliens can all be made to co-exist in the hyperbolic Hollywood fantasy of a watercolor-drenched Hawaii, “with inflections pidgin-true enough for local audiences but suitable for the mass market” (Tsai C1).¹⁶ In Disney’s \$80 million global/local cartoon *Lilo and Stitch* (2002), a broken family of bad-mouthed and ex-bullying Hawaiian sisters capaciously learn to accommodate their cultural frame of hula dancing, surfing (“it’s the Hawaiian roller-coaster ride”), plate lunching, waitressing, and practicing “ohana” (“In ‘Ohana,’ nobody is left out, nobody gets forgotten” runs Nani’s refrain) to include a motley array of aliens and visitors. By the film’s tourist-friendly end, the extended Hawaiian family will move beyond charges of dysfunctionality to adopt a genetically mutated Elvis-loving blue dog from outer space who (like any colonist of extractive rapacity) is “built to destroy,” along with a black ex-CIA social worker, and a bounty-hunting couple from outer space (or is it the Soviet Union?) turned galavanting Aloha-shirted tourists. Science-fiction fantasies of genetic mutation fuse with an Ugly-Ducking fairytale plot and retro-atmospherics from *Dumbo* (1941) to create a backwater space of multicultural fusion and indigenous accommodation, as signaled by Tia Carrere (a Filipina actress from Hawaii of *Wayne’s World* (1992) fame who learned the song from her local aunt) singing Queen Liliuokalani’s mele “Aloha Oe” (good-bye) to Hawaii’s extended-family values.¹⁷

Disney’s writers and producers aimed through song, pidgin inflections, and plot to give “a real sense of authenticity” to the place-setting, and for *Honolulu Advertiser* writer Michael Tsai, they have succeeded with their “hand-drawn tale of Hawaiian keiki Lilo and hanai [adopted] extra-terrestrial Stitch true to eye, ear and spirit” (Tsai C1) of Hawaiian culture and local modes.¹⁸ If so, Hawaiian culture turns into pastiche, parody, joke, and myth; as story-consultant Malia Jones, a surfer and model from Hawaii, applauds the resulting global/local retro-fitted mix: “You can hardly see Hawaii on a globe it’s so tiny, but it’s also unique

and special. When you watch this film, you think, ‘How bizarre, but at the same time, how real’” (Tsai C1). Geography and genealogy are simulated, ex-primitive identity cast into mixture and fusion. The racial tensions of settler colonialism give way to the feel-good resolutions and off-beat sentiments of small-kid time cartoon: history is all in the post-colonial family, and much can be forgotten or papered over with sentimentality, pop-cultural kitsch, and song. (Elvis’s ties to Hawaii come from a prior tourist fantasy movie, *Blue Hawaii* (1961), and his lesser-known funding of the Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor.) This is what I am calling semiotic displacement, and the field imaginary of transnational cultural studies needs to contest its quasi-orientalist workings.

Nothing surprises much anymore in these semiotic distortions and intertextual ready-mades of global-local poetics and faux indigeneity: if a plantation-town eatery can be called Mulan Wok in *Lilo and Stitch*, this is less a sign of “local authenticity” or the film’s vaunted “Hawaiianess,” but signals the director-writer Chris Sander’s winking allusion to his prior work of Asia/Pacific animation and global spectacle, *Mulan* (1998). With Chinese myth ending up as a plate lunch in post-plantation Hawaii (even as Duke Kahanamoku ends up as a poster), we can only ratify Yunte Huang’s claim that “the journey of Mulan’s transpacific migration that leads to her ultimate Americanization is now complete.”¹⁹ The “infantilization” of Native Hawaiians has long worked along side white fantasies of Hawaiian sexuality and cultural excess to serve the growth of the post-plantation tourist industry. As Sally Engle Merry tracks this discourse of colonial ambivalence coming down from missionary-era anthropology: “Even as Hawaiians were denigrated as inferior, sensual, and lazy, their music, dance, crafts and foods were admired and appropriated for tourism” (Merry 130–31). “Extend[ing] the pleasure of the movie experience,” two interactive computer games were soon released by Disney Interactive Inc. to amplify the Hawaiian fantasy: in one, “Lilo & Stitch, Hawaiian Adventure,” children from six to eleven can track the storyline and “help Lilo tame Stitch and teach him the value of ‘Ohana’—the Hawaiian word for family”; in another, “Lilo & Stitch, Trouble in Paradise,” players zoom through spirit-haunted landscapes and act as the main characters, for “as Lilo, players

can bash objects and cast Voodoo spells” or as Stitch they can bash, spit, spin, or roll attack, play earthy Hawaiian role models or act out more complicated tasks like “keeping tourists happy at a luau” (Gudmundsen 2E.). *Lilo and Stitch* cannot be separated from the larger poetics of cultural tourism and its tactics of cosmo-multicultural appropriation befitting the postcolonial era. Another Hawaii-calls summer film, *Blue Crush* (2002) updates the sun-sex-and-savage sizzle fantasy of “going native” that drove *Gidget Goes Hawaiian* (1961) in post-feminist ways that suit the consumer culture of global surfing consumption, but the natives and locals remain sullen and hostile, crying “Hey, no use this beach, it kapu to the likes of you” to these incoming Californians who just want to conquer the North Shore waves, have some romantic fun, and get famous.

Such global productions increasingly send the local culture offshore and world-wide, resolving the tensions of imperial history and global imbalance into mongrel fantasy, soft spectacle, and present-serving myth. Given the reach and impact of an “increasingly globalized popular culture,” we have to wonder (with Paul Gilroy) if such works are not engaged in creating “racialized signs” of cultural difference and, with all the liberal goodwill of a corporate muticulturalism gone cosmopolitical, spreading “commodified exotica” under the myth of authenticity (13–21).²⁰ Solidarities evoked around blood or land, crucial to the sovereignty claims and ontology of native peoples in the Pacific, are superseded by the pop-culture community of Elvis Presley music, beach-going, and the pleasures of multicultural mixture.²¹ Full of a residual animism that settler colonialism has not fully displaced or marketed, the Hawaiian islands may be “the most superstitious place in the world” (or at least the United States) as ex-local Annie Nakao has written,²² tracing the impact of Japanese obake, or ghost stories, and uncanny hold of native Hawaiian lore (like the volcano goddess Pele) upon its residents (or driving the contradictions of a mixed-heritage novelist like John Dominis Holt in *Waimea Summer* [1975]). While economically remote or irrelevant to global production, the offshore Pacific (however alternative its vision of Oceania or place) has long served as such a testing space for global fantasy and the transnational reach of “Americanization” stories,

where nuclear weapons, imperial wars, contact phobias, cultural mutations, and (nowadays) the multicultural hyperbole of transnational community can work themselves out with romantic dreaminess, narrative immunity, and the (ridiculous) postcolonial sublimity of historical oblivion.²³ All of these large-scale transpacific displacements of the indigenous community—ecological, financial, semiotic and cultural—demand the scrutiny and resistance of de-orientalizing tactics, for the “uncanny” Pacific of transnational globalization remains haunted by historical injustice, social unevenness, and racial phobias coming back from the postcolonial future.²⁴

Looking back to John Houston’s close-to-war-propaganda film, *Across the Pacific* (1942), the Pacific was portrayed as a deceptively romantic, uncanny, and ultimately phobic space full of inscrutable oriental forces (and their subversive white allies) harbouring imperial designs and an array of anti-US forces as they gather around to undermine the US hegemony over the Panama Canal just before the attack on Pearl Harbor. A huge strategizing white man is a Japanese spy and double agent (played by Sydney Greenstreet, reciting haiku breathlessly and a karate expert) who is sickened by the weak-willed and drunken white rancher in Panama, where the Japanese hide the attack planes. Even an Asian American “nisei” character from California is shown to be part of the international takeover move by the Japanese axis—this all had to be decoded and stopped by the counter-espionage Humphrey Bogart character (and his hotel-owning Chinese ally), who thwarts the Japanese air attack just in time in a kind of lone-gun way, a stealthy and pragmatic, bit-by-bit way. Such works of cinema helped to provide the perceptual apparatus to reclaim, fantasize over, and integrate the Pacific as an American-dominated space, as Paul Virilio has written: “For the Americans, the abstractness of their recapture of the Pacific islands made ‘cinema direction’ a necessity—hence the importance of the camera crews committed to the [Pacific] campaign”(95).²⁵

“The Pacific is the white man’s ocean” (Brechin 230) as William Randolph Hearst proclaimed in response to the Pearl Harbor air attack.²⁶ Houston’s movie works to provide a geopolitical US rationale and, even more so, what Virilio calls the “perceptual arsenal” to keep

it this way. This phobic Pacific as space of peril and threat is recognizable in an array of war-era poems by Robinson Jeffers, as in “The Eye,” which shows an ocean full of blood, scum, and filth, and the “world-quarrel of westering / and eastering man, the bloody migrations, greed of power, clash of faiths” (170). Or in Robert Frost’s west-coast poem “Once By the Pacific,” where the ocean grows apocalyptic with yellow peril forces and God’s Jehovah-like wrath, inscribed in the transpacific sky and water: “The clouds were low and hairy in the skies, / Like locks blown forward in the gleam of eyes” (229). In his white-republic diatribe, *The Land of Gold: Reality versus Fiction* (1855), Hinton Rowan Helper portrayed this phobic version of the transpacific as a mongrelizing site of swarming immigrants like “the solemn Chinamen, tattooed [Pacific] islander, and slovenly Chilean” coming in across the ocean from alien sites of bad blood and cheap labor, thus creating a “copper Pacific” as threatening politically as the chattel slavery and miscengeneration of the Black Atlantic. “Our population was already too heterogeneous,” Helper writes of everyday life in the free-soil American state of California, “before the Chinese came; but now another adventitious ingredient has been added; and I should not wonder at all, if the copper of the Pacific yet becomes as great a subject of discord and dissension as the ebony of the Atlantic.”²⁷ Exclusion acts would soon be activated to try to keep this ever-coppering Pacific white, and US Pacific coastal states like California the exclusive domain of so-called “native” white labor.

Globalization discourse nowadays inscribes a very different transpacific, one full of motion and mixture and interconnection to Asia and the Pacific. This globalization discourse implies concurrence, to evoke Glissant again, and would push the liberalizing globe towards some utopic transnational fusion: recuperating an Asian origin of transpacific synthesis dreamed of by Whitman’s “Facing West from California’s Shores” (1860) when “the house of maternity” in Asian civilizations and wisdom-traditions would meet hard-headed European technologies, “the circle almost circled” (115), Columbus or Emerson settling down to meditate in Bombay. Globality achieved, image of wholeness and completion and fusion-culture. But Whitman-the-post-imperial-American is haunted by lack, incompleteness, something missing in the grand global

journey of translated-empire from Atlantic origins to Pacific telos: “(But where is what I started for so long ago? And why is it yet unfound?)” (116) as the poem ends on a note of cross-cultural failure. The seamlessness of globalization across the Pacific is threatened by a new-world order of anxieties, disrupted space-time coordinates, and everyday fears, and perhaps it is best to keep this war-era and Cold War-era Pacific of clashing imperialisms and racial antagonisms lurking in mind as we push to map an array of uncanny forces and emergent forms that give the lie to the end-of-history triumph in marketization.

III. Framing Displacements in the US Transpacific Field Imaginary

For Yunte Huang, working in the transnationalized field-imaginary of *Transpacific Displacement*, “displacement” is less a flow or removal of peoples or commodities, than a textual effect of American modernism/postmodernism, as meanings migrate, mimic, and transform both the objects of representation and the agents of intertextual creation. “Transpacific” is thus given a more affirmative intertextual meaning that defamiliarizes the orientalist vocabulary of East/West domineering exchange we have grown used to after Said, Miyoshi, Palumbo-Liu, Fabian et al. “Transpacific” becomes less a policed and nation-regulated “border” site of exclusion and containment than a fluid, trans-oceanic, borderless zone of textual crossing and cultural mixing. The new field imaginary of Asian/Asian/American studies cutting across area studies needs to attune itself to such intertextual dynamics and semiotic flows, but not exclusively so, to be sure. As Huang summarizes his key methodological turn:

What I call *transpacific displacement* is a historical process of textual migration of cultural meanings, meanings that include linguistic traits, poetics, philosophical ideas, myths, stories, and so on. And such displacement is driven in particular by the writers’ desire to appropriate, capture, mimic, parody, or revise the Other’s signifying practices in an effort to describe the Other. (3)

As if activating some Emersonian principle of textual-ontological surprise, meanings migrate in bi-directional and unpredictable ways. Texts become sites of appropriate mimicry and ethnographic approximation, part homage and part piracy. Translingual poetics become for Huang (following the experimental ethnography modes of Clifford, Greenblatt et al) a mode of travelling and doing minor or unofficial ethnography. The transpacific routes of meaning recall those of the transatlantic diaspora, but slavery or even the transnational horizon of Chinese/US labor needs and people flows (or blockages and exclusion acts) is never fully an issue here. But Far East tourism and aesthetic ethnography is, as we are dealing more with the language tactics and needs of the high-literary subject of modernism. Transpacific flow becomes centered around the Chinese-language influenced imagism of “data collectors/writer-at-home” (16), meaning ethnography teams like Earnest Fenellosa/Ezra Pound, Florence Ayscough/Amy Lowell, Percival Lowell/Amy Lowell and, later (more wondrously), the mock-pidgenization of John Yau via “further pidginizing Charlie Chan’s [pop orientalist] pidginization and doubly ventriloquizing Imagism’s ventriloquism” of the imagistic Orient (24).

In the context of the dominant US culture’s orientalism, on one extreme, and the postcolonial dismantling tactics of writers like John Yau and translators of Chinese experimental poetics like Jeffrey Twitchell and Ping Wang on the other, Yunte Huang can render an important discursive and situational contrast:

Imagism’s linguistic mimicry should, I submit, be understood in the context of American pop culture’s pidginization of Chinese [as in the Charley Chan fiction of Earl Der Biggers from the 1920s and 30s], and both the mimicry and pidgenization will be subject to counter-mocking in the work of Asian writers and Asian American writers such as Lin Yutang and John Yau. (115)

The damage done by US literary or pop cultural orientalism can be rectified, mocked, and overturned in the intertextual transformations and dialogues of later authors. A kind of linguistic idealism and ontol-

ogy of mutual dialogue haunts this study, as it does those transcultural models of cultural creativity that give “displacement” a text-centered aura and effect.

If the risk of Huang’s vision of Chinese/American transpacific displacement is a kind of renewed textualism and formalism, still, the focus on textual displacement allows us to see how texts are not just ideological or geopolitical effects but can become agents of dialogue and transformation. Huang’s cross-cultural and translational model would itself displace a more stable or over-determined vision of orientalist exchange that sees the Pacific as a one-way imperial route, a frontier of ever-expanding domination and sublation. Even the translation of US empire does not proceed evenly like that. Here, the Chinese language and various Chinese poetic modes become agents of global transformation and transculturation, altering American poetics and racial and cultural relationships in unstable and helpful ways.

With the rise of multilingual and disruptive agents of transpacific poetry like Thersa Cha or John Yau who can preserve modes of “foreignness” and cultural difference, in contrast to Maxine Hong Kingston, who is too monolingually American and normalizing in her language practices for Huang (see his chapter five), we can open the American literary canon and racial formation in trenchant new ways. As Huang concludes, on postcolonial grounds affirming mimetic uncanniness, we can have “a reconception of American literature in the context of transnationalism, a rewriting of its history as one rooted in transnationalism and committed to intercultural (transpacific, transatlantic, transcontinental) practices” (187). Second, we can open or transnationalize the canon towards a more trenchantly multilingual American literature, “acknowledging that the literature, as we know it, is a body of multilingual writings, consisting not only of works that have been and continue to be written in languages other than English but also of works that are inherently polyglot” (187).

Huang’s stress in this text-centered dynamic in *Transpacific Displacement* is upon the intercultural and transcultural dimension of cultural practices, as well as the multilingual and polyglot contexts of contact and creation. Geo-material conditions of coercion, radical inequality, con-

flict, even incommensurability of languages and codes should, however, not fall out of this new field-imaginary conception of the post-imperial “contact zone” (Pratt 69). Otherwise, this new transpacific is a utopic one that trails along with the uneven makings of transnational capitalism in the ex-imperial region of APEC, then and now. Textual displacement and translational concerns can only provide a necessary but not sufficient component of any transformed field imaginary in our diasporic moment, I would urge. Considered as a centre-periphery or global-local effect, “displacement” carries far more injurious geopolitical meanings, as I have tried to show through the “allegorical” evocation of comparative Asia/Pacific instances.²⁸

Displacement is given a far different range of geopolitical as well as textual meanings in Houston Wood’s study *Displacing Natives* (1999), which centres around the post-contact rhetorical displacement of Native Hawaiians in various dominant US cultural genres—contact narratives, sun, sand and sex movies, anti-conquest narratives of cultural redemption, a whole range of works. Interior Pacific works are seldom taken seriously in models and works of Asian American studies, but they should be, if we hope to hear the full challenge to diasporic and transpacific models by critical languages more attuned to indigenous struggles for sovereignty and decolonization from settler peoples and their narrative apparatus of land control, colonial disavowal, and semiotic domination. Fighting against this US “monorhetoric” of national, territorial, and semiotic displacement of the native with the foreign, Wood concentrates upon a whole “polyrhetoric” of Hawaiian nativism which ranges from self-ethnography to modes of internet sovereignty struggle, where ties to place and nation have received global/local resonance and renewed impact in cyberspace.

Displacing Natives is a splendid study, making indigenous Hawaii resonate with wit and concern, by tracking how the “rhetoric of demonization” was followed over the uneven and mutually entangled course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by an Anglo-American-centric “rhetoric of preservation” that, in both historical instances and rhetorical tropes, worked effectively to displace the Hawaiian Natives and their

prior local mythologies of place, indigenous community, and nation. The colorful Chapter Six on the Hollywood movies of “safe savagery” makes an important and lasting contribution to the tormented yet fanciful semiotics of imagining Hawaii in uneven global/local contexts of contact, colonization cum the tourist fantasy of what Fredric Jameson would call—miming the postmodernist logic of cultural commodification—“Disneyfication.” Wood’s book abides, and would be of value to all students of Hawaiian literature and culture, and to scholars of Pacific native cultural studies especially as well. When transnational cultural and postcolonial studies turn to work up the Pacific in transnational frames of geopolitical displacement and global impossibility, this fine book will be here waiting for understanding indigeneity as global/ local plight.²⁹

Displacement remains a rhetorical event and sign-sign translation, to be sure as we know after the linguistically austere poetics of Paul de Man et al., but the contexts and impacts in which this sign-shifting, removing, and deflecting of Hawaiian and Asian/Pacific voices and histories takes place needs ultimately to be understood in larger geopolitical contexts and the long material *durée* of America’s disavowed imperialism and postwar history of area-displacement. To open up a more transnationalized or de-colonized vision of Asia/Pacific or Asian American area studies right now and one that is not too exclusively focused on American ethnic frameworks, such geo-material concerns do need to be taken into account or the vision will be belated, frail, and irrelevant before it is even born. But as Bob Dylan wrote in homage to the grassroots American leftism of his protest folksong mentor, Woody Guthrie, “Hey, hey, Woody Guthrie, I wrote you this song / About the funny old world that’s a-comin along / Well, it looks like it’s dying and it’s hardly been born” (Dylan). This is what I would like still to affirm about inventing a more capacious, capable, decolonized, global yet critical vision of the Asia/Pacific field imaginary: *it looks like it’s dying, but its cultural poetics have hardly been born*. We cannot displace the geopolitics of the past until the injustices and imbalances have been recollected forward into the transnational future.

Notes

- 1 On tactics of feminist displacement overcoming the opposition of public and private knowledge-spaces.
- 2 In opening the space for “postnational” New Americanist work in a special issue of *boundary 2* devoted to transnational and minority-driven field transformations, Donald Pease had used the quasi-Lacanian term “field imaginary” by which “to designate a location for the disciplinary unconscious.... Here abides the field’s fundamental syntax—its tacit assumptions, convictions, primal words, and the charged relations binding them together” (Pease, “New Americanists: Revisionist Interventions into the Canon” 11–12). Professionalized into a given discipline and its fundamental syntax, a given scholar would achieve recognition through modes of identification as modeled in this field imaginary, which is by no means stable nor total in its power over the subject. A new “field imaginary” would produce altered fields and generate different disciplinary subjects more attuned to the post-cold war contradictions and needs for “transnational literacy” and minority or outer-national practices.
- 3 Mufti and Shohat call attention to Caren Kaplan’s *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (1996) as a representative text on theory-travel performing “an analysis and account of the role of ‘displacement’ in contemporary criticism” (Mufti 11).
- 4 See Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* 314. On the need for “greater transnational literacy” across the humanities, see Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* 399.
- 5 For situated area critiques of postcolonial displacement, see Loomba, 178–79 and Harootunian, *History’s Disquiet: Modernity, Cultural Practice, and the Question of Everyday Life* 50–51. Bhabha’s vision of postcolonial discourse is organized around an over-extended concept of “agential displacement” and the textually ludic contingencies of cultural and historical mixture (“hybridity”); displacement is thus not so much a trope as a structural condition. But as Aijaz Ahmad challenges:

History does not consist of perpetual migration, so that the universality of ‘displacement’ that Bhabha claims both as the general human condition and the desirable philosophical position is tenable neither as description of the world nor as generalized political possibility.... Most migrants tend to be poor and experience displacement not as cultural plenitude but as torment; what they seek is not displacement but, precisely, a *place* from where they may begin anew, with some sense of a stable future (14–16).

For Ahmad, this “place” of organic affiliation and existential situation is inside the anti-imperialist nationhood, global entanglement, and class formations of postcolonial India.

- 6 In a critique of “America Abroad” spreading neo-liberal terms and frames.
- 7 On the re-territorialization of ethnic identity, race, and national space.
- 8 On the shift from cold war area studies of Asia towards interdisciplinary and politically situated and global/local versions of the US/Asia geopolitics, see Cumings.
- 9 See also Hu deHart on the transnationalization of US ethnic Asian frames.
- 10 For a critique of this “spatial turn” and the appeal to chronotopes of “spatial-temporal relationship,” see Harootunian, “Some Thoughts on Comparability and the Space-Time Problem” and “Tracking the Dinosaur: Area Studies in a Time of ‘Globalism,’” in Harootunian, *History’s Disquiet* 25–58, on the need for a vision of “co-temporality” and the theoretical auto-critique of any bounded “area” like Japan, China, or the Pacific islands as such.
- 11 See Palumbo-Liu on the anti-minority US consequences.
- 12 For a hard-hitting critique of the irrelevance of much American Studies multicultural work and ethnic- and gender-based critiques to the state formation of US global hegemony, see Bove, 206–30. On the palpable insufficiency of using nation-based frames in the era of capitalist globalization and the will to neo-liberal empire, see also Pease, *The Futures of American Studies*.
- 13 This practice was not stopped until 1983 when the United States signed treaties with Pacific Island nations relinquishing rights to islands, key and rocks claimed under the Guano Act (Lal 239).
- 14 On his version of “contrastive poetics” as creolized global/local survival tactic, see Glissant, 173.
- 15 The article urged that Tonga’s King Taufaahau Tupou IV made this Bank of America account investment because the “government would only spend it on building roads.”
- 16 See Tsai for more on Disney’s quest to Hawaiianize and localize this tale originally slated to be set in Kansas.
- 17 “I’ve felt very free to inject some Hawaiianisms into the film,” the non-Hawaiian Carrere has remarked, merging indigenous Hawaiian into all-purpose localism, as signaled by her use of Pidgin English as sign of Hawaiianess (Tsai C1). Producer Clark Spencer similarly revealed that Jason Scott Lee (as David Kawena) and Carrere (playing big sister Nani) were cast into leading roles because “we wanted to get some Hawaiian voices in the film because (the film) takes place in Hawaii” (Tsai C1).
- 18 As Kamehameha Schools Chorus director Lynell Bright says (in the same article) in praise of the film’s two Hawaiian songs (which she conducted), “With these songs, the exposure to the Hawaiian language will be worldwide” (Tsai C1).
- 19 On Disney’s distortions of Fa Mulan into an icon of individual success and US pop feminism, see Huang, 162–63.
- 20 Gilroy is addressing the “planetary traffic in the imagery of blackness” (21), which in a Pacific context often shifts into a fantasy of indigenous and Asian otherness in American contact-zones of proximity, admiration, and mixture.

- 21 On tactics of native ontology and sovereignty emerging across the Pacific, see Smith.
- 22 Annie Nakao draws an ecological imperative: “But much of the island lore emanates [not just from immigrant Japanese but] from a native Hawaiian culture that respects its spiritual environment—not a bad way to live on the earth” (D12). If this is animistic myth, it offers some alternative stories for an ethos of place.
- 23 For a “Polyn-Asian”-based updating of “how island paradises are produced for global consumption,” see Harris, 68–85. “Consequently, the South Pacific has been colonized by Hollywood as a site of cultural rather than capital production, within which U.S. commercial ambitions can be phantasmatically reimagined and replayed” (Harris 76).
- 24 For a fine study of indigenous challenges and nativist strategies to challenge global tourism and its white mythologies and fantasy needs in the contemporary Pacific, see Lyons.
- 25 On the US war movies of John Houston, Anatole Litvak, and Frank Capra made in an era when Nazi-based German cinema (via Joseph Goebbels) sought to overcome “American super-productions” and undermine “the American perceptual arsenal” of world cinema, see Virilio, 9–10.
- 26 On the civilizational antagonism posited between a Euro-American oriented westcoast bonded to Greco-Roman grandeur and the perils of a modernizing Asia that Hearst and others propagated, see Brechin, 230.
- 27 The stereotypical racial sway of Helper’s work is quoted and discussed in Robert G. Lee, *Oriental: Asian Americans in Popular Cultures*, 49, 26.
- 28 On the move from a “synecdochical model” of political identity to an “allegorical” vision of geopolitical comparison as informing a transnationalized vision of cultural studies in a decentered or post-US frame, see Ross, 670–74.
- 29 For emerging diasporic-based work in US Pacific studies, see the forthcoming essay by April K. Henderson, “Makin’ Moves on Your Regional Imaginary: Hip Hopping the Discursive Fields of Ethnic Studies and Pacific Islands Studies” and the special issue of *Contemporary Pacific* devoted to forging a Native Pacific Cultural Studies working “On the Edge” (Teiאיwa 343–58) of area studies and across national and disciplinary borders.

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