

“Finding” Guam: Distant Epistemologies and Cartographic Pedagogies

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...the more ambitious the project, the greater must the distance be.
-- Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature,” *New Left Review* (57)

On some maps, Guam doesn't exist; I point to an empty space in the Pacific and say, 'I'm from here.' On some maps, Guam is a small, unnamed island; I say, 'I'm from this unnamed place.'
-- Craig Santos Perez, *from Unincorporated Territory [hacha]* (7)

I was going to the worst place in the world and I didn't even know it yet. Weeks away and hundreds of miles up a river that snaked through the war like a main circuit cable plugged straight into Kurtz.
-- Captain Benjamin Willard (Martin Sheen), *Apocalypse Now* (1979)

If, as Edward Said asserts, imperialism “means thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on, and owned by others,” then Guam becomes a particularly evocative site upon which to map the past contours of centuries-old European colonialism and chart the sweeping oceanic geographies of contemporary American imperialism (7). Since the so-termed 1521 “discovery” of the island by Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan, Guam (as indigenous-space-turned-colonial-place) has witnessed the sixteenth-century rise and late nineteenth-century fall of the Spanish empire; it has analogously been intimately involved in twentieth-century global conflict and twenty-first century international strife.¹ Between 1898 and 1941, as per the Treaty of Paris that ended the Spanish-American War (1898), Guam was transformed into far-flung U.S. satellite and American military way station. Like its insular counterparts Puerto Rico and the Philippines, the Micronesian island ceased to be a Spanish colony and instead began a multi-decade existence as a territorial spoil of war. Almost four decades later, during World War II, the 209-square-mile territory was the troubled setting for Japanese occupation (which commenced on December 8, 1941, the day after the now infamous Pearl Harbor attack) and celebrated recipient of ostensible U.S. liberation (in July 1944).² Last, but certainly not least, Guam figured keenly in the Cold War (1947-1989) as a key military installation in the Pacific (a fueling base for American B-29s and B-52s) and remains relevant to the ongoing War on Terror (2001–present) as a central, ever-expanding command site.

Set against these colonial pasts, situated adjacent to more recent imperial coordinates, and considered alongside an economic context in which the territory's second largest source of revenue (after tourism) involves the U.S. armed forces, it is thus not surprising that Guam's present-day territorial motto is “Where America's Day

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Begins.” Incontrovertibly, this slogan—which uses a place-based, interrogative adverb (“where”) in conjunction with a temporally-specific orientation (“begins”)—implicitly brings to light outermost U.S. geopolitical boundaries and explicitly underscores vastly differential Pacific Rim time zones (emblemized by the fourteen hour time difference between New York City and Guam). Located roughly 3,957 miles west of Hawaii and situated 900 miles north of the equator, this consideration of Guam’s multi-sited “beginnings” as a matter of course encompasses the territorial limits of the contemporary U.S. nation-state; such starting points simultaneously encapsulate centuries-old allusions to Portugal, Spain, and Britain as expansive “empire[s] on which the sun never sets.” Reminiscent of Said’s classification of imperial projects vis-à-vis aforementioned distance, *a priori* ownership (expressly in terms of the island’s indigenous Chamorro population), and state-sanctioned control (e.g., U.S. modes of insular governance), Guam represents not only the commencement of “America’s day”; its history also speaks to the beginning of overseas U.S. imperialism (specifically at the turn-of-the-twentieth century). As important, Guam’s continued resonance as significant military base in the global War on Terror renders visible the geopolitical beginnings and ends of American empire.

In the face of such historical contexts, present-day actualities, and militarized coordinates, it is the degree to which the territory’s connection to the U.S. nation-state is paradoxically *forgotten* and the extent to which U.S. imperialism is *disremembered* that underwrites this essay’s overall focus on distant epistemologies, cartographic pedagogies, and Asian Americanist critique. Indubitably, such “far away” knowledges utilize a colonial/neocolonial didacticism embedded in maps and at the forefront of map-making. Likewise noteworthy, the use of “cartographic” as adjective for strategic teaching accesses the interdisciplinary foundations of an imaginative yet nevertheless vexed field. To elucidate, cartography (as mixed-media intellectual endeavor) brings together geography (e.g., the study of oceans, nations, and territories), geoscience (inclusive of distinct earthly/maritime formations), and aesthetics (especially the artistic representation of ideologically-conceived, planetary space). As martial territory and military U.S. colony, Guam’s historical and geopolitical significances—apparent in its constant use as a base for American war-making in Asia—lay bare a more extensive effacing narrative that is part and parcel of twentieth (and twenty-first) century U.S. imperialism.

Indeed, as the opening epigraphs by Chamorro poet/activist Craig Santos Perez and *Apocalypse Now*’s fictional protagonist Benjamin Willard accentuate, U.S. imperialism as distinct political project is frequently obscured, often unclear, and consistently covert, particularly within the euphemistic context of (tacit) American exceptionalism. Such national “uniqueness,” grounded in wholesale claims of civic tolerance and incomplete declarations of righteous statecraft, distressingly eschews quite true allegations of (neo)colonization in favor of less-than-honest assessments that privilege democratic virtue (in the case of Guam, territorial assimilation) or engagements shrouded in muddled objective (e.g., illicit U.S. interventions and contradictory American foreign policy campaigns). Accordingly, Perez’s place-based answer to the question of origins (e.g., “Where are you from?”), set against a backdrop of cartographic ghostliness, provocatively confirms the role distance plays in the making of U.S. imperialism while at the same time unmasking the absented registers of American empire.³ Whereas Perez’s response is decidedly fixed to Guam as problematically hidden U.S. territory and misremembered home island, Willard’s journey—originally conveyed in terms of weeks and comprehended vis-à-vis hundreds

of miles—is tied to the largely uncharted sites of the American War in Viet Nam that, notwithstanding the protagonist’s initial uncertainty, represent “the worst place in the world.”

Despite overt differences between Perez’s autobiographical response and Willard’s fictional cinematic account (via genre, perspective, and intent), both excerpts (to varying degrees and divergent ends) are unavoidably linked vis-à-vis cartographic concerns about imperial location. Such colonially-driven settings, along with their multivalent significations, are (as this essay argues) rendered readily discernible and made critically visible through the “ambitious” lens of Franco Moretti’s epigraphic notion of “distant reading.” To briefly recapitulate, Moretti’s original premise pivots on the quantification of literature through a mathematical analysis of language (i.e., assessments which take seriously the repetition of particular words, the prevalence of specific phrases, and the multiple allusions to distinct themes). As politicized methodology and politically engaged literary theory, “distant reading” concurrently builds upon Immanuel Wallerstein’s conceptualization of an interrelated “world-system,” an economically-driven, market-based global imaginary marked by connected, competitive, and exploitative capitalist exchanges and values. This systems-oriented analysis is keenly relevant with regard to deconstructing U.S. imperialism (generally) and American militarization (categorically): to wit, the very notion of an identifiable yet overwhelming “military-industrial complex” overtly underscores—at the level of hyphenated nomenclature—the ways in which U.S. war-making is a complicated economic system comprised of domestic initiatives, corporate concerns, and foreign policy agendas.

As far-ranging optic and wide-scope analytic, Moretti’s epistemological frame—efficaciously predicated on the juxtaposition of seemingly disconnected texts as a means of comprehending systems of power and global circuits of articulation—presages this essay’s expanded consideration of a “distanced” interpretive strategy that unveils and remaps Guam’s vexed connection to U.S. militarization and war-making vis-à-vis the American War in Viet Nam. Accessing Moretti’s above-placed assertion that “the more ambitious the project, the greater the distance must be” and revising this capacious claim to fit the cartographic expansiveness of U.S. imperialism in the Pacific and Southeast Asia, I argue that distant reading productively engenders an anti-colonial pedagogical practice that fruitfully intersects with the oft-acknowledged tenets of resistance and Asian Americanist critique. Such a critique, as Lisa Lowe avers, highlights the incongruities inherent in American imperialism and potently militates against amnesiac claims of U.S. exceptionalism.⁴ A foundational discourse and oft-used rubric within Asian American literary studies, Lowe’s characterization of a diagnosable “Asian Americanist critique,” which encompasses the degree to which such cultural production “tirelessly reckons” with the past, correspondingly makes visible the extent to which politically-inflected categories such as “alien noncitizen,” “racial enemy,” and “colonized national” are problematically fixed to “distinct yet continuous formations in genealogy of the racialization of Asian Americans” (8). As so-classified “perpetual foreigners” and so-categorized “model minorities,” Asian Americans, and by ineluctable yet qualified extension, indigenous Pacific Islanders such as the Chamorro, are firsthand witnesses to state-sanctioned war, relocation, exclusion, disenfranchisement, and probationary inclusion; such bodies correspondingly “displace,” as Lowe potently avers, “the fiction of reconciliation [and] disrupt the myth of [U.S.] national identity by revealing its gaps and fissures” (9).

To emphasize these linkages and, in a more local vein, directly engage the focus of this special issue (distinctively in terms of popular visual culture and Asian American literary studies), I first explore the possibilities inherent in “distant reading” to re-envision the political connections and reframe the ideological relationships between seemingly incongruous texts. In particular, I consider the ways in which the problematical “ambitious project” that is U.S. imperialism is most aptly deconstructed by an analogously capacious analysis which brings into conversation multivalent histories (as they converge on the American War in Viet Nam), multiple disciplinary fields (such as Pacific Islander studies and Southeast Asian American Studies) and diverse texts (e.g., poetry, film, and political speech). To further highlight the potential of distant reading as an anti-imperial pedagogical frame, I begin with and consistently return to Guam (as artistic, political, and militarized site). As significant points of reference, I turn to two Chamorro writers—Helen Perez and Craig Santos Perez—in order to map Guam’s past/present militarization and indefatigable negotiation with multiple iterations of U.S. imperialism, specifically with regard to the American War in Viet Nam and in terms of turn-of-the-twenty-first century foreign policy.

As a critical pedagogical counterpoint to these distanced re-imaginings, I subsequently provide a “surface analysis” of Coppola’s Academy Award-winning *Apocalypse Now* to reveal the film’s knotty near-sighted logistics, uncover the expansive amnesic registers of U.S. militarization, and reconsider the very real legacies of collateral damage. To elaborate, this mode of analysis—which carries coherences with (and supplements this consideration of) Moretti’s distant-based analytic—takes solemnly what, according to Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, one “can learn from surfaces” that are “superficial and deceptive” (4). Proportionately, surfaced approaches allow one to move beyond “reading...ghosts as presences, not absences, and lets ghosts be ghosts, instead of saying what they are ghosts of” (13). Key to this consideration of *Apocalypse Now* is an examination of how the film’s (albeit uneven) success lies in its revelation of the ghostly *presences* of U.S. troops outside the auspices of a *contained* Cold War narrative.

Ghostly presences, and their militarized coherences, foreshadow the final portion of this essay, which revisits the issue of “geography” in Perez’s chapbook, *from Unincorporated Territory*. This return to Guam and Perez’s work accesses the disparate, interdisciplinary logics embedded in distant reading (as epitomized by the island’s implicit connection to the American War in Viet Nam) alongside “plain-in-sight” rubrics of surface analysis (which encapsulates Guam’s contemporary militarization). Set against this blended interpretative backdrop, I argue for the multidimensional alternatives embedded in a fused Pacific Islander/Southeast Asian American Studies critique. I maintain that this amalgamated, occupation-oriented analytic—which marries full-scale epistemology to critical pedagogy—brings into clear focus an emphatically “indissoluble” relationship between Pacific island colonization, American militarism in Southeast Asia, and U.S. neocolonialism in Asia.

“Help Me Find Guam”: Distant Reading, and Pacific Islander/Asian American Studies

One day in our geography class, my teacher taped several maps on the wall and asked each of us to stand in front of the class and mark where our parents and grandparents were born. I tried to remember everything my mom told me about Guam. I only remembered that she told me it would be hard to find on a map unless I looked very closely and carefully, because it was so small. She said it’s

in the Pacific Ocean, and its a tiny dot on the map, and find the Philippine Islands first because it's not far from there....

I knelt down so I could see better and found the Philippine Islands. I still couldn't find Guam and started crying because everyone was waiting their turn, and I was taking so long. I only saw a cluster of islands called "Micronesian Islands," but my mom never mentioned those islands to me. I looked at my teacher and said, "Please help me find Guam."

-- Helen Perez, "Bittersweet Memories," *Chamoru Childhood*, 2011.

As Paul Lai succinctly summarizes and astutely maintains, "Guam's presence within the American political terrain troubles the logic of an American hemisphere since the great expanse of the Pacific Ocean separates the island from North America's west coast." This absent presence, linked to an incongruous matter of geography (e.g., as an island formation outside the U.S. mainland), is reiterated in its aforementioned legal status as an "unincorporated U.S. territory." Accordingly, these geographic erasures and juridical exceptions reconfirm Guam's problematic cartographic exclusion: as Lai subsequently reminds, "Guam's motto...ironically reminds us that many Americans do not recognize Guam as a territory of the Union and that Guam is almost always absent on maps of the United States" (2). *Apropos* such non-recognition vis-à-vis dominant U.S. cartographies, Helen Perez's childhood recollection (in the above passage) occurs within the far-away confines of a geography class in Virginia during the 1960s. Inadvertently yet provocatively, the setting for these "bittersweet memories" (Virginia) signals a *locus classicus* with regard to the racialized formation of the U.S. nation in the early seventeenth century (e.g., the 1607 founding of the Jamestown colony and the 1619 importation of enslaved African Americans to it). In a more purposeful vein, Perez's remembrance is—by way of setting—fixed to a recognized pedagogical place (the classroom) and imperial educational space (the geography class). Shifting from physical locale to historic temporality, "Bittersweet Memories" as non-fictional account takes place in a Jim Crow state during the tumult of mid-twentieth-century civil rights movement.

Focused on cartographic sightlessness and redolent of Craig Santos Perez's "from-based" response, integral to Perez's vexed recollection is her inability to find the home location of her mother and grandparents.⁵ Indeed, this familial place is, as Perez recalls, distressingly indiscernible from a "cluster of islands" that carries an unfamiliar, state-dictated designation for the author (e.g., the "Micronesian Islands"). Acknowledging the affective power of Perez's coming-of-age reminiscence, it is this uncanny negotiation with "proximity" (via the Pacific Ocean and the Philippines) along with the author's desperate final statement—"Please help me find Guam"—that (albeit unintentionally) coheres most with a conceptualization of distant reading. To reiterate and expand, such a mode of analysis rejects the disciplinary tendency in literary studies to focus on specific works and particular authors in favor of a more expansive approach which, as Moretti stresses, considers "units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems" (57). In so doing, Moretti moves the focus from contained text to larger ideological imaginary: this particular gesticulation enables a concurrent shift from a "national historiography" at the forefront of contemporary literary studies (e.g., the division of the field into British, American, and other state-oriented canons) to multiple cause/effect relationships that undergird

world history and circumscribe global cultural production. As Moretti concisely characterizes, “national literature [is] for the people who see trees; world literature [is] for those who see waves” (68).⁶

While Moretti’s quantity-driven articulation is immediately fixed to the seemingly impossible task of categorizing and classifying the enormity and heterogeneity of world literature, as a multi-national, multi-sited humanities-marked enclave, his criticism of close reading as myopic methodology on one level resonates with Perez’s inability to locate her home island (particularly within a U.S. context). On another level, the distinction between those “who see trees” (close readers) and others “who see waves” (distance-oriented scholars) literally and figuratively encapsulates Guam’s “insular problem” as a distinctly oceanic U.S. site in the Pacific. Most significant, the practice of “seeing trees” relies on a narrowed perspective whereas the act of observing waves suggests a more nuanced ability to assess global movements and vast spaces. As Moretti critically maintains,

The United States is the country of close reading, so I don’t expect this idea [of distant reading] to be particularly popular. But the trouble with close reading (in all of its incarnations, from new criticism to deconstruction) is that it necessarily depends on an extremely small canon....you invest so much in individual texts *only* if you think very few of them matter. (57)

If the United States is indeed a “country of close reading,” then as a consequence American literary studies is problematically restrained (following Moretti’s line of argument) by an epistemological narrowness that reiterates the amnesiac parameters of nationalism, exceptionalism, and imperialism. Continuing with Moretti’s “sighted” analogy, to engage a singular close reading is inherently near-sighted insofar as this type of evaluation privileges the near while disavowing and dismissing the far. To be sure, this near-sightedness and “so much” investment in “individual texts” is evident in university / college curricula which insists on strict historical periodization (for instance, “American Literature, 1865 – present”) and canonicity (for example, courses focused exclusively on Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, John Milton, Jane Austen, or Mark Twain).

With regard to Perez’s account, this limitation is in related fashion cartographically evident via an absent and unfamiliar nomenclature rooted in an imperialist reading of space. This dominant interpretation of emptiness, as Lai observes, is consistent with a longer history of colonial westward expansion and settlement. To elaborate, while “maps and legends visually show how places are positioned with respect to each other from a bird’s-eye-view that assumes an omniscient and disinterested position,” these visual artifacts as point of fact “encode histories and politics into the texture of their pages and are far from offering a perfect representation of the world” (15). Correspondingly, what is revealed in Perez’s inability to “find Guam” is on the one hand a profound geographic forgetfulness that obscures the territory’s position as U.S. island mass; on the other hand, this mapped erasure instantiates what Lai subsequently and usefully terms a “discontiguous” interpretation of the U.S. imperial project; such a notion

plays off of the descriptive phrase ‘contiguous United States,’ commonly referring to the lower forty-eight states in the middle of the North American continent, which seemingly form a solid and uninterrupted expanse...the phrase

‘Discontiguous States of America’ reminds us of the imperial topography of the United States [by] highlighting Native American reservation spaces within the boundaries of the contiguous states, offshore territories in the Caribbean and Pacific oceans (including Guantanamo Bay, Cuba) and the two outlying states of Alaska and Hawai’i. (3)

Conjuring an undeniable American “imperial topography,” the notion of “discontiguity” as applied to Guam and other “offshore territories” operates as a synonym for distant reading insofar as such an approach militates against an alleged cartographic uniformity (via continent) and destabilizes established contours of U.S. historiography (as fixed to mainland politics). By relocating Guam from the margins of oceanic expanse to the heart of U.S. empire, Lai articulates—à la Moretti’s critique of national literature—a mode of literary criticism that destabilizes the primacy of nation-state by instantiating the centrality of the individual territory.

Taken together, Moretti’s “distant reading” and Lai’s “discontiguous” evaluation, which implicitly and explicitly converge on Guam as imperial outpost and colonized site, intersect with the inside/ outside, exclusionary/ inclusionary, and foreign/ assimilated inquiries at the forefront of Asian American studies and Asian Americanist critique. To quickly surmise and summarize, if intrinsic to Asian Americanist critique is the concomitant contemplation of non-incorporation (via legal gaps) and non-reconciliation (by way of historic fissures), then Guam as aforementioned *unincorporated territory* proves a fitting geopolitical site upon which to cartographically chart the failures of U.S. exceptionalism through the schema of American imperialism. While “fundamental rights apply as a matter of law” (as per the juridical definition of “unincorporated territory”), “other constitutional rights are not available,” rendering the island’s inhabitants (e.g., the indigenous Chamorro) likewise moored from “the [American] myth of national identity.”⁷ Moreover, whereas the “myth of national identity” is immediately apparent in domestic citizenship assessments and inclusions, it is perhaps most evident during moments of state-authorized conflict abroad, which are time and again fixed to a sense of democratic virtue notwithstanding the very real sorrows of imperial war. This turn from domestic characterization to foreign engagement is, as the next section brings to light, emblemized by the American War in Viet Nam, which lays bare not only the amnesic and but also mathematically sublime dimensions of past/ present U.S. militarism.

To elaborate and expand, Guam’s Anderson Air Force Base, located in close proximity to Agafo Gumas, remains largely disremembered from the American War in Viet Nam notwithstanding its use as a B-52 fueling/ launching station during the contested conflict. Indeed, if Guam’s present-day motto is “Where America’s Day Begins,” then its mid-century slogan could, with slight revision, be “Where the American War in Viet Nam commences.” The primary military setting for “Operation Linebacker II,” an intense bombing campaign of (then) North Vietnam, Anderson Air Force Base served as chief beginning coordinate for a total of 729 sorties involving 150 B-52s over an eleven-day period. It was also the principle starting point for illegal bombing runs and illicit flight missions over Laos and Cambodia. Staggeringly, Thailand’s U-Tapao field and Anderson Air Force Base contained, between 1969 and 1973, an estimated fifty percent of the military’s bombing force and was home to seventy-five percent of all combat crews. Not only was Anderson Air Force Base a “beginning” U.S. imperial coordinate; it would—after the so-named “Fall of Saigon”

(April 30, 1975) —serve as a main landing site for thousands of Vietnamese refugees (under the overly-optimistic auspices of “Operation New Life”).

Such Vietnam War-era resonances, which potently collapse the geographical/geopolitical spaces between Pacific Islander territory and Southeast Asian conflict, are undeniably layered with regard to past histories of American colonization and more recent accounts of U.S. militarization. While Guam’s specific connection to the American War in Viet Nam is one made visible through a distanced reading (which quantifies the island’s impact on Southeast Asian region vis-à-vis bombing campaigns), and whereas its connection to Asian American studies is most immediately manifest via Southeast Asian refugees, its function as contradictory occupied site remains—within the dominant U.S. imagination—elusive. To more fully understand Guam, and to better comprehend the troublingly “ambitious” scope of the American War in Viet Nam, one must accordingly and concurrently consider two fields that, notwithstanding an interrelated, interconnected military history, remain largely disparate and distinct: Pacific Islander studies and Southeast Asian American studies.⁸

While scholars have rightly highlighted parallels between disastrous Native policy (at home) and collateral campaigns abroad (in Vietnam), what remains under-explored are the connective histories and comparative experiences between indigenous and refugee, particularly through the optic of U.S. war-making and militarization. This argument, which emerges from a concerted desire to remember American imperialism and critique the current state of U.S. military affairs, takes seriously (as a significant premise) Yen Le Espiritu’s call for a “critical refugee studies” by focusing on the multifaceted ways in which American “war,” to draw upon Chris Hedges, is an overwhelming force that brings various disenfranchisements and bodies “into being.”⁹ As Hsuan L. Hsu productively contends and significantly evokes, “the history of Pacific Island colonization is inextricable from the history of U.S. neocolonialism in Asia, and the differential racializations of ‘Asiatics’ and ‘Pacific Islanders’ within the U.S. cultural imaginary emerge from the consolidation of U.S. hegemony through the ‘Asia–Pacific’ region” (282). Such consolidations, buried within the problematic imaginary of *Apocalypse Now* and situated at the forefront of Craig Santos Perez’s *from Unincorporated Territory*, underscore a longstanding relationship between indigenous subject, refugee body, and colonized territory that is part and parcel of past/present U.S. foreign policy, particularly with regard to westerly militarized campaigns across the North American continent and into the Pacific.

(Re)Membering the American War in Vietnam: U.S. Empire and Distant Epistemologies

While the Vietnam War’s prominence as a highly “memorialized event” is readily revealed through frequent anti-war protests, a dizzying visual archive, and numerous veteran testimonials, its less acknowledged status as *global* conflict underscores a proportional forgetfulness with regard to expansive geopolitical vistas, multifaceted contours, and diverse demographic impacts. Drawing on a surface analysis, such tensions between remembering and forgetting are quite readily apparent in Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979), which was filmed “on location” in the Philippines. While a seemingly odd example given its status as a Hollywood wartime spectacle, Coppola’s film unintentionally previews and provokingly indexes—by way of plot and setting—the type of work done in both Southeast Asian American and Pacific Islander

studies, which indefatigably charts the full extent of the Cold War and *longue durée* imperialism via narratives that begin and end with “collateral damage.” Suggestive of secondary harm and reminiscent of ancillary impairment, “collateral damage” obscures the actual price of imperial war-making while obfuscating, in strategic amnesic fashion, its lasting cost.

Equally important, “collateral damage” paradoxically disguises and reveals the aims of a war that was consistently marked by excess and was correspondingly in line with prevailing U.S. liberalism. As cultural critic Mimi Thi Nguyen compellingly argues in *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages*:

Though liberalism names war as excessive and external to sociality, a violent event believed to happen “out there,” liberal war avows an exception. War perpetuates deliberate violence that it claims is incidental to its exercise of power to free others from a named enemy who is in their midst (giving rise to the computational concept of *collateral damage*). (20)

As per the parameters of a “liberal war” text, *Apocalypse Now* is, from the outset, invested in naming the exceptional case of a rogue operative and “out there” mission as a way to characterize and make visible the multivalent excesses of war. These militarized dissipations, as a closer examination makes clear, lay bare not only the “computational concept” of collateral damage but render visible its concomitantly forgotten sites.

Expressly, Willard (played by Martin Sheen) obsessively traces the covert movements of Special Forces Colonel Walter E. Kurtz. Set during the Vietnam War, *Apocalypse Now* opens with rumors that Kurtz (portrayed by Marlon Brando) has reportedly gone insane while on military assignment with the Montagnards, an indigenous minority from the country’s Central Highland region. As Willard’s search for the rogue Kurtz progresses in a northerly direction up the fictional Nung River, the U.S. Army captain becomes both witness to and active participant in multiple military maneuvers and morally ambiguous acts, including large-scale napalm attacks, localized skirmishes with armed North Vietnamese combatants, and brutal assaults against unarmed Southeast Asian civilians.¹⁰ Accessing Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899) and *Lord Jim* (1900), with excerpts from Michael Herr’s *Dispatches* (1977), and inspired by Werner Herzog’s *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972), *Apocalypse Now* featured John Milius’s script, which Coppola described as “a comedy and a terrifying psychological horror story.”¹¹ Notwithstanding a contradictory collision of incompatible genres and conflicting registers, *Apocalypse Now*—in terms of plot, characterization, and motif—strikes a decidedly familiar tone apropos other Hollywood accounts of the Vietnam War.



Figure 1: The militarized spectacle of “collateral damage” in *Apocalypse Now*. Publicity Still.

Like Michael Cimino’s *The Deer Hunter* (1978), Oliver Stone’s *Platoon* (1986), Stanley Kubrick’s *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), and Brian De Palma’s *Casualties of War* (1989), *Apocalypse Now*—as blended comedy / horror narrative—strategically uses lush jungle landscapes and isolated encampments as primary backdrops for rampant drug use, militarized depravity, failed U.S. foreign policy, and American soldier remorse.¹² Aside from similar settings and thematic coherences, *Apocalypse Now* is contradistinguished from other Vietnam War films by way of Kurtz’s aforementioned clandestine “out of country” mission, a complicated narrative which evocatively haunts both soldier protagonist and wartime plot. Accordingly, a foreboding movement *out of* Vietnam occupies two thirds of the film, emblemized by repeated images of boats and increasingly remote way stations (Figure 1).

The remaining third of *Apocalypse Now* is set in and near Kurtz’s Cambodian compound, wherein gruesome shots of decapitated bodies collide into close-ups of hero and protagonist (Figures 2, 3, and 4). Kurtz’s ominous presence in Cambodia, which prefigures Willard’s uncannily picturesque journey from Saigon to indeterminate Southeast Asian countryside, along with spectacular scenes of violence (i.e., collateral damage), militate against nationally bound assessments of the war, rendering cinematically palpable the political realities of a *multinational* conflict. Set against a Cold War *realpolitik* marked by international expansiveness then, the movie’s final destination point—in Kurtz’s far-flung Kampuchean outpost—correspondingly accentuates a significant yet often disremembered geopolitical fact.



Figure 2: Kurtz's Cambodian outpost in *Apocalypse Now*. The juxtaposition of clothed U.S. troops, less adorned "natives," and Filipino extras reinforces the film's transnational and multinational collapses of space. Film Crew Outtake.

In sum, the film's Cambodian locale (along with its deployment of Southeast Asian environmental tropes) provocatively underscores—at a surface level—the degree to which the principle nomenclature of the conflict as the *Vietnam War* is concomitantly inaccurate, incomplete, and amnesic. Unintentionally, *Apocalypse Now's* circuitous plot—which unravels as it reveals the numerous fronts in the Vietnam War—productively renders visible multiple sites of war and previews a manifold set of post-war legacies, epitomized most urgently by the movement of millions across borders, nation-states, continents, and oceans. Indeed, as suggested by the film's primary plot, the conflict's geopolitical coordinates encompassed not only headquarters in South Vietnam but also Thai/U.S. air bases, naval way stations in the Philippines, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) outposts in Laos, clandestine Cambodian bivouacs, Pacific Island refueling sites (e.g., in Hawai'i and Guam), and East Asian garrisons (in Japan and South Korea). It was from these less remembered sites that illegal U.S. bombing campaigns in Cambodia were, despite the nation's declared neutrality, waged from 1969 to 1973. It was also from such places that the CIA planned, coordinated, and executed the "secret war in Laos" (1953-1975), a historical fact that mimetically rescripts Kurtz's original mission in Cambodia: American operatives and General Vang Pao recruited and trained the indigenous Hmong population to combat the North Vietnamese Army and the communist Pathet Lao. Taken together, such military

installations and militarized campaigns confirm the extent to which the Vietnam War was, as previously mentioned, an incontrovertibly *uncontained* Cold War conflict.

The employment of indigenous populations during the conflict, coupled with its geopolitical expansiveness, render visible the multivalent intersections between critical area studies, Southeast Asian American studies, and global indigenous studies. As important, the tactical use of Guam and the Philippines—as significant militarized contact zones during the American War in Vietnam—underscores another linkage between Pacific Islander studies and Southeast Asian American studies. These comparative interlocutions on the one hand cohere with Moretti’s aforementioned notion of “distant reading,” which has of late gained traction vis-à-vis a turn to digital humanities. Notwithstanding its oft-debated resonance within a world marked by data mining and coding, Moretti’s notion of “distance” as “a condition of knowledge” that “allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text” is perhaps an increasingly useful frame upon which to instantiate a critique of both neoliberalism and neocolonialism. On the other hand, if central to “distant reading” is the degree to which it militates against narrowed or amnesic evaluations of texts or events, then the ability to access multiple fields simultaneously engenders new ways of not only “seeing” U.S. imperialism but alternative sites for resistance (57).



Figures 3 and 4: Close-up shots of Kurtz (Marlon Brando) and Willard (Martin Sheen). The absence of U.S. military and the use of face paint troublingly conflate the imperial soldier with the alleged indigenous body. Publicity Stills.

Conclusion: Towards Further Uprisings

Set against such sights and sites, which correspond to various coordinates at play during the American War in Viet Nam, Craig Santos Perez’s *from unincorporated territory [hacha]* provides a resistive corrective emblemized by a multivalent anti-imperial critique. On the one hand, Perez’s island-oriented collection in inexhaustible fashion reckons with the past a multilingual layering of Spanish, English, and Chamorro words. On the other hand, *from unincorporated territory*—as Perez himself indicates—substantively begins with the vexed logics of the American War in Viet Nam; this particular conflict operates as a fulcrum upon which to evaluate Guam’s past/present position vis-à-vis U.S. imperialism in the Pacific and in Asia. In an online interview about the project, Perez accesses a particular Vietnam War-era poem to reveal the resistive basis for his multivolume collection. According to Perez:

The history of Guam, often submerged in the American consciousness, emerges momentarily in Robert Duncan's "Uprising: Passages 25" (Bending the Bow, 1968). The poem begins: Now Johnson would go up to join the great simulacra of men, / Hitler and Stalin, to work his fame / with planes roaring out from Guam over Asia/ All America became a sea of toiling men / stirred at his will, which would be a bloated thing,/ drawing from the underbelly of the nation / such blood and dreams ("Small Press Spotlight")

Perez's accessing of Vietnam via Robert Duncan's shorthand treatment of Guam productively underscores the interrelationship of both Pacific Island site and Southeast Asian nation; after all, Duncan's poem gestures to a long history reading of militarized imperialism (inclusive of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Adolph Hitler, and Stalin) and military expansion ("from Guam over Asia"). Even so, it is the direct mention of Guam and Asia—in conjunction with war-making—that implicitly brings to light the relevance of Pacific Islander studies as a space to consider settler colonialism and Southeast Asian American studies as a place to evaluate the collateral cost of "such blood and dreams."

Whereas Duncan's poem implies this relationality, Perez's accompanying commentary renders explicit this interconnectedness. Indeed, as intertextual referent, Duncan's poem catalogues Guam's involvement in the war while obfuscating its status as a colonized territory; in so doing, "Uprising: Passage 25" replicates the imperial amnesias embedded in Guam's past/present history as militarized way-station and lays bare the anti-imperial work "to be done" in *from Unincorporated Territory*. As Perez tactically recounts, "Throughout history, Guam has been occupied (and thus defined) by its 'strategic position' in the Pacific." This characterization of strategic status, as has previously been established, necessarily involves a long history of multiple colonizations and imperialisms wherein the island has, according to Perez, operated as a "stopping port for the Spanish Galleon trade route between Acapulco and Manila," been categorized an unincorporated territory under U.S. rule, functioned as "an important stepping stone for Japan's imperial army...during World War II," and as the so-termed 'tip of America's military spear in Asia' in the postwar era ("Small Press Spotlight"). By emphasizing Guam's militarized "strategic position" as a combat site while accessing an anti-war poem, Perez renders critical the need to engage a "distant reading" of U.S. imperialism while maintaining a "surface reading" of the silences at the forefront of such state-formations.

Such negotiations—between distanced nature of U.S. imperialism and the surface deployment of American militarism—are by no means limited to the Cold War past embodied by the American War in Viet Nam. Rather, Perez's distanced reading of Guam's colonization and militarization underscores the Janus-faced contours at the forefront of *from Unincorporated Territory's* revolutionary agenda, which "emerges from this history." In particular, *from Unincorporated Territory [hacha]* is the first book-length excerpt of what Perez envisions as a "projected twelve-book project" that "aims to provide a strategic position for Guam to emerge from imperial 'reduccion(s)' into further uprisings of meaning...I hope 'Guam' (the word itself) become a strategic site to resist what [Walt] Whitman called the 'deformed democracy' of America" ("Small Press Spotlight"). These "further uprisings of meaning" not only attend to what has been misremembered vis-à-vis the island's occupied past; such rebellions are rendered more urgent at the turn of the twenty-first century. Let us not overlook or forget that the U.S.

military is presently responsible for 29% of Guam's land use; the island's economy is largely dependent on the Department of Defense (which serves as the second largest industry outside tourism); and, in 2009, President Barack Obama signed H.R. 2647, which granted the U.S. military \$734 million to fund the construction of military facilities in Guam. The planned build-up will, according to Defense Department projections, bring 41,194 new residents to Guam by 2016; in 2000, the census reported 154,000 residents ("H.R. 2647"). Set against such further expansions, Perez's poetic call to arms via a tactical repositioning of Guam not as perpetually militarized space but rather a potentially revolutionary place signals the powerful critique inherent in a *distanced* and necessarily *expansive* interpretation of U.S. empire.

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¹ The Chamorro name for Guam is "Guahan."

² Since 1944, Guam has, without interruption, remained an "unincorporated territory." Such a status, according to Valerie Solar Woodward, contributes to the island's relative marginalization. As Woodward characterizes, Guam "is a colony of a nation that disavows its colonial nature; and the statutory nature of its status and citizenship means that the U.S. citizenship of its people is contingent on Congress and does not have the full protection of the Constitution like the residents of the fifty states...[such a frame] adds up to an in-between status for the natives of Guam" (69). During the Japanese occupation (1941-1944), the island was renamed "Omiya-jima" (Holy Shrine Island).

³ To be sure, Perez's *from Unincorporated Territory [hacha]* is very much a layered, anti-colonial, anti-imperial text. Such a sense is evident in the chapbook's title (which, as Valerie Solar Woodward observes, uses the Spanish word for "axe" –hacha) and its cover, which features five red lines set against a white background. Traversing from the cover's bottom portion, these lines increasingly become more wavy. To clarify, as Woodward astutely notes: "The graphic [on the cover] is a series of thick red lines superimposed on a white background clearly meant to represent the stripes in the U.S. flag. The stripes are not smooth, however. Midway through the horizontal stripes a disturbance begins, and next to the bump is the title....which refers to the legal status of Guam and its people. But more than that, Guam is the bump in the otherwise smooth narrative of American

incorporation of diverse peoples under its flag, and Perez’s poetry is meant to slash its way through, much as an axe slashes its way through a closed door” (79).

⁵ It should be noted that Helen Perez is in fact Craig Santos Perez’s mother.

⁶ This idea of “waves” productively resonates with Craig Santos Perez’s project with regard to the cover (specifically its undulating lines) and what Lai categorizes as an orthographic reading of *from Unincorporated Territory* via the poet’s use of brackets, blank spaces, and tildes (~), which mimetically reflect cultural/political elisions (brackets), vast expanse (blank spaces) and oceanic currents (tildes) (10).

⁷ Between 1901 and 1905, the United States Supreme Court decided on a number of cases involving newly acquired territories vis-à-vis the Spanish-American War (1898). Known as the “Insular Cases,” these decisions (as Allan Isaac notes) established administrative parameters involving “unincorporated territories” such as Guam.

⁸ To be sure, there are certain political considerations that have historically militated against a dialogic consideration of indigenous studies (as Ethnic Studies, U.S.-focused field) and Southeast Asian American Studies (as Asian American studies subfield). One must necessarily attend to significant differences with regard to native/indigenous, settler/colonial, and refugee/migrant subjectivities. There is also the more geographically-specific issue of Guam within the larger rubric of Pacific Islander studies; as Lai notes, “the continuing absence of Guam in conceptualizations of the Asia-Pacific, the Pacific Rim, the American Lake, or Asian Pacific Islanders (where Native Hawaiians often dominate the discussion) belies the importance of the island for the American military in the Pacific” (3). In proposing this mixed use of multiple subfields and sites of inquiry, I do not want to elide or dismiss the very real histories that undergird particular boundary formations; nevertheless, this dialogic approach would potentially enable the revelation of new approaches and reconsideration of what constitutes an Asian/Pacific Islander/American archive.

⁹ See Yen Le Espiritu’s *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)*. The second allusion is to Chris Hedges’s *War is a Force that Brings Us Meaning*.

¹⁰ Within the film, the “Nung River” is a stand-in for the Mekong River.

¹¹ See Peter Cowie’s *Coppola: A Biography*.

¹² Roddy Bogawa’s short, eight-minute film, *The Imagined, The Longed-For, The Conquered, and the Sublime* ((1995) is very much in cinematic dialogue with the types of jungle scenes and war-driven imaginaries that characterize Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now*. Bogawa’s film, comprised of an assemblage of tropical landscapes, uses scenes from *Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket*, *Hamburger Hill*, *84 Charlie Mopic*, *The Deer Hunter* and, provocatively, *Apocalypse Now* in a manner that disorients a sense of “true” space vis-à-vis the American War in Viet Nam.