

Borderwaters: Archipelagic Geometries between Indonesia and the United States

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In the introduction to the 2017 volume *Archipelagic American Studies*, Michelle Ann Stephens and I at a certain point discuss the United States's long-term and contiguous situation in relation to the Indonesian archipelago, which was known as the Dutch East Indies before the Second World War and which after the war emerged as the Republic of Indonesia.¹ As we point out, to many observers the Indonesian archipelago may seem to lie quite far away from the United States, but the United States bordered this archipelago for most of the twentieth century: first via the Philippines prior to World War II, and then through the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands after the war and into the 1990s, when Palau (the part of the Trust Territory that bordered Indonesia) became an independent country in free association with the United States.² As we explain: "In noting this blind spot concerning the US–Indonesian borderwaters, we are much less concerned with geography (simply recovering a watery border) than we are with metageography, or interrogating the geographical assumptions that have made the borderwaters illegible ... among American studies scholars" even during a moment of Americanist transnationalism that has been deeply interested in borders and borderlands. This invisibility of the borderwaters, we suggest, depends on "the received metageographical assumption regarding the American hemisphere and the United States in particular ... [as] fundamentally continental spaces."³

Since collaborating with Stephens to edit and introduce *Archipelagic American Studies*, I have continued to think through the metageographical aspects of the archipelagic Americanist category of the borderwaters, finding a useful point of entry in José E. Limón's classic borderlands study, *American Encounters: Greater Mexico, the United States, and the Erotics of Culture* (1998).⁴ In this study's introduction, Limón recalls growing up "between Mexico and the United States in the border town of Laredo" (2). Because he lived north of the Rio Grande, he was among the "mexicanos de

este lado [Mexicans from this side],” while those who lived south of the river were “*mexicanos del otro lado* [Mexicans from the other side]” (2). Mexican children of the two sides played by the river, where “one might ... go across from either side—wading or on a ... raft” (2). Limón continues: “So there we would play, between Mexico and the United States, in the early 1950s, and sometimes sit together on a makeshift raft and fish and swim in commonality and difference—our Huck to their Jim But ... all of us Mexican children recognized other differences, as did Huck and Jim, between the realm of the raft—the in between—and the shores on either side” (2–3). This metaphor—in which *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* becomes the hinge for a comparison between Limón’s Rio Grande and Twain’s Mississippi—can do much more than advance water-space as offering a hiatus from the material and epistemic violence of an imaginary land-oriented border.

Rather, Limón’s metaphor is critically productive in ways that exceed those he may have anticipated. Consider, for instance, that Twain’s commentary on the Mississippi underscores the way in which water moves borders.⁵ In his 1883 memoir, *Life on the Mississippi*, Twain reports on how “a freak of the river ... has sorely perplexed the laws of men.”⁶ At the riverine border between Arkansas and Mississippi, the Arkansas charter claimed territory “to the centre of the river”—a most unstable line,” while Mississippi “claimed ‘to the channel’—another shifty and unstable line.”⁷ Eventually, the river “threw [a] big island out of Arkansas, and yet not *within* Mississippi,” creating an “exceedingly valuable island of four thousand acres” that “pay[s] taxes to neither, owing allegiance to neither.”⁸ Twain’s stories of the Mississippi—combined with the case of, say, El Chamizal and Cordova Island along the Rio Grande’s El Paso/Ciudad Juárez border—are reminders of the way in which nonhuman sovereignties inherent in land–water shoreline dynamics may intertwine themselves in unexpected ways with human-scaled political sovereignties encoded in notions of *este lado* and *el otro lado*.⁹ Just as urgently, we should read Limón’s metaphor in conjunction with the archipelagic thought that permits Huck, in a famous scene in Twain’s famous novel, to recognize one night in the fog that he has not crashed into either of the continental *lados* but has crashed into an island (a node within a riverine archipelago that sprawls out into the Gulf of Mexico).¹⁰ Thus we are directed to look toward the borderwaters, toward the oceanic and archipelagic spaces that form an assemblage within which rivers, and all the branching capillaries of their watersheds, function as participants.

Though often obscured by the overtly landed quality of the borderlands framework, the impulse to look toward the waters has been persistent among border/borderlands scholars even as it awaits fuller theorization. Discussions of the borderlands have fairly dripped with the oceanic and archipelagic. Recall that the foundational Greater Mexico and borderlands theorist Américo Paredes opens his poetry collection *Between Two Worlds* with a poem titled “The Rio Grande” (1934), which addresses the river and follows its “swirls and counter-currents” until “at last your dying waters, / Will release their hold on me, / And my soul will sleep forever / By the margin of the



Figure 1. The fence at Border Field State Park. Photograph by Tony Webster, 2014. Available at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/diversej/16034498211/in/photostream/>. Creative Commons License (CC BY-SA 2.0), <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/legalcode>.

sea.”¹¹ Or recall that Gloria Anzaldúa prefaces the first chapter of *Borderlands/La Frontera* with a poem set in Border Field State Park, showcasing the US–Mexico border fence running up out of the Pacific: “the steel curtain— / chainlink fence crowned with rolled barbed wire— / rippling from the sea where Tijuana touches San Diego” (see Figure 1).¹² She states: “*Miro el mar atacar / la cerca en Border Field Park / con sus buchones de agua*” (I watch the sea attack / the fence in Border Field Park / with its watery swells).¹³ Anzaldúa avers: “The sea cannot be fenced, / *el mar* [the sea] does not stop at borders.”¹⁴

Elsewhere, the career of Renato Rosaldo has placed US southwestern borderlands theory in dialogue with the archipelagic states of Indonesia and the Philippines, while José David Saldívar’s foundational *The Dialectics of Our America* (1991) was already pointing toward an island-trope borderlands “school of Caliban,” and his more recent *Trans-Americanity* (2012) leavens “land-based” arenas with “intercultural contact zones” that “are notably oceanic.”¹⁵ Within other iterations of borders/borderlands approaches, we have seen Andrew Lipman’s discussions of the “American coast” in terms of a “landless borderland,” and Walter D. Mignolo’s description of a “border gnosis” that complements Anzaldúa’s borderlands with the image of the Barbadian poet and intellectual Edward Kamau Brathwaite seeking Caribbean ways of knowing by “skipping a pebble on the ocean.”¹⁶

I follow these oceanic and archipelagic impulses in describing a borderwaters framework, a metageographical framework that helps make visible the United States's numerous water borders today, as well as the US–Indonesian borderwaters that Stephens and I have mentioned in *Archipelagic American Studies*. Generally speaking, the borderland has been evoked and imagined as encompassing the organic and landed affective processes of human culture as it undergoes the seemingly natural processes of contesting, mourning, and grappling with the melancholia evoked by a border that is superimposed by a state apparatus. As John Alba Cutler described in 2017: “Borders are historical creations, however naturalized they may have become by cartographic practices or nationalist discourses,” and although “borders appear as lines on a map, having no mass or volume, the history of borders often creates *borderlands*.”¹⁷ To describe this border/borderlands complex in other terms: the one-dimensional border and its epiphenomenal borderlands depend on a governmentally imposed Euclidean edict (a line) regarding spatial perception, and this governmentally imposed mode of spatial perception is attended by a seemingly organic cultural recoiling and set of contestations growing out of cultural currents that (analogous to Anzaldúa’s fence-attacking ocean) exceed and direct their energies against the state’s superimposed Euclidean geometry/geography.¹⁸ In complement and contradistinction, I would frame a significant component of the notion of borderwaters as interlinked with governmentality’s engagement in and with modes of *non-Euclidean* spatial perception, in which the state’s imagination of borders has not been the evocation of, in Anzaldúa’s terms, an “unnatural boundary” but has rather been a partial function of the geological and hydrological—indeed I could hazard the term *natural*—aqueous and terraqueous materialities and processes to which governmentality has tended to affix water-based and water-dependent borders.¹⁹ These water-dependent and natural-cultural borders (with their attendant notions of human sovereignty) become epiphenomenal to an arena of borderwaters where nonhuman actants (currents, waves, shorelines, and nonhuman animals) play roles in establishing how human borders will attain perception.²⁰ Thus nature-fixed and nature-fluxed borders stand apart from the idealized one-dimensional line that is the borderlands’ initiating conceit. As state imaginations have innovated aqueous and terraqueous notions of the border by burrowing into and engaging with arenas of nature that are better described in terms of non-Euclidean geometries (such as fractal and Indigenous geometries), the borders themselves have exceeded Euclidean geography, and their attendant borderwaters have become places where humans interact with humans on terms set partially by nonhuman and non-Euclidean spatial models. These borderwaters would of course include the oceans (on the surface, suspended in blue depths, and on benthic ground) but also the farthest reaching of minute rills and capillaries that fractally branch into—and indeed shape—the very surfaces and edges of land-based watersheds ranging from asphalt served by storm drains to jagged and mountainous continental divides.



Figure 2. Lithograph of Covarrubias's mural *Native Means of Transportation in the Pacific Area*, one of six large murals on display in Pacific House during the Golden Gate International Exposition of 1939 to 1940. Image source: American Geographical Society Library Digital Map Collection, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. Republished with permission of the copyright holder, María Elena Rico Covarrubias.

In describing some of the borderwaters that have constituted what I think of as the archipelagic states of America (a phrase I am using to refer to noncontinental territories of the United States of America), I turn toward the oceanic and archipelagic work of the Greater Mexican visual artist Miguel Covarrubias, whose midcentury representations of Indonesia and the United States's Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands help me contextualize and theorize state, Indigenous, and nonhuman cultures as they have converged and diverged across non-Euclidean modes of imagining boundaries, nonboundaries, and spatial area on a terraqueous planet. Covarrubias was born in Mexico City in 1904 and relocated to New York City in 1924 where he emerged as a major figure and force in US visual culture. As a denizen of New York for about fifteen years before returning permanently to Mexico in 1940, he exhibited artwork in various galleries and published illustrations in magazines including *Vanity Fair*, *Time*, *Life*, *The New Yorker*, *Fortune*, and *Vogue*. During this time he also circulated among figures of the Harlem Renaissance, illustrating Langston Hughes's poetry collection *The Weary Blues* (1926) and Zora Neale Hurston's folklore collection *Mules and Men* (1935), as well as publishing his own Harlem-oriented

collection, *Negro Drawings* (1927).²¹ Through these and many other cultural and intellectual involvements in the United States, Covarrubias emerged, according to Limón, as a figure who importantly “shaped modernist culture between the United States and ... ‘Greater Mexico’ in the first half of the twentieth century.”²² And yet he was also a student of the culture of the Indonesian island of Bali and the broader Pacific, living in Bali twice (from late 1930 to mid-1931, and, two years later, from late 1933 to about mid-1934) and writing and illustrating *Island of Bali* (1937), a popular anthropological volume that has remained a touchstone in the study of Bali and has become “his most famous work.”²³ Within a few months of *Island of Bali*’s publication, he was invited to create a series of murals for the Golden Gate International Exposition (1939–1940) in San Francisco. These murals were illustrated maps that brought attention to the peoples, economies, ecosystems, visual arts, architectural styles, and means of transportation of the Pacific world (see *Figure 2* above).²⁴

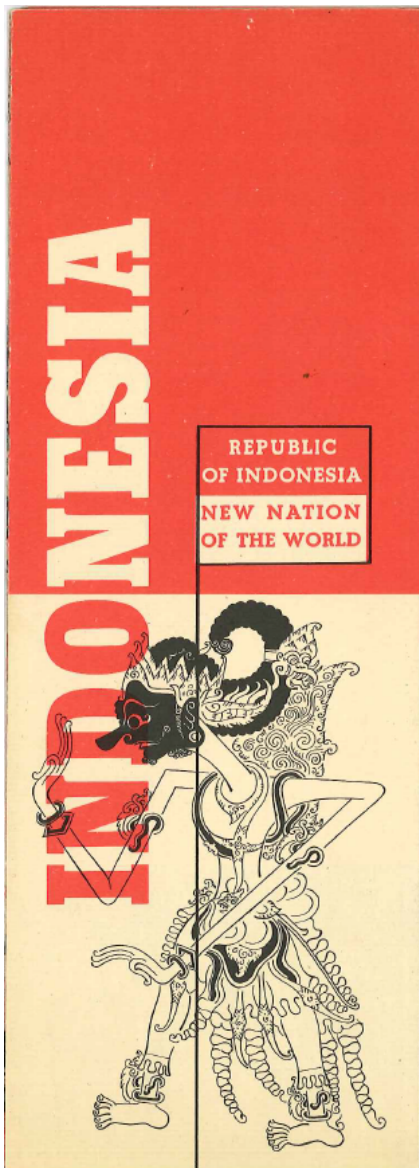


Figure 3. Front cover of *Republic of Indonesia: New Nation of the World*, a pamphlet illustrated by Miguel Covarrubias and published by the Information Office of the Republic of Indonesia in New York City. Image source: Adriana and Tom Williams Collection of Miguel Covarrubias, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin. Republished with permission of the copyright holder, María Elena Rico Covarrubias.

Covarrubias's larger suite of visual images and written statements point toward modes of geographical/geometrical theorizing and territorialization that bring into dialogue actants ranging from plastic producers to Laysan albatrosses, from sea slugs to nuclear testing, and from coral reefs to postcolonial and global governmentalities. However, in this essay I want to focus on two specific instances of Covarrubias's archipelagic visualizations, as they surface in a pamphlet he designed in the early 1950s for the Information Office of the Republic of Indonesia (located in New York City) (see Figure 3), as well as in a map of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands that he published in *Life* magazine in 1949 (see Figure 5). On one level, I understand Covarrubias's visualizations as instances of archipelagic theorizing in and of themselves, but more importantly within this essay his images are metonymic of, in ways that are not necessarily causally linked with, major streams of governmental theorizing that emerged during the twentieth century in tandem with what I am discussing as the borderwaters.

In Covarrubias's illustrated pamphlet, the Indonesian Information Office explained: "The 78 million citizens of the Republic of Indonesia live on a chain of three thousand islands extending for more than three thousand miles, from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Indonesia's islands have a land area of ... about one quarter the area of [the] continental United States."²⁵ The pamphlet's statistics on the size of Indonesia's territory (specifically marking its land area as a quarter the size of the United States) are notably indebted to a land-oriented view of national territory that the nation-state, via Dutch colonizers, had inherited from the landlocked notion implied by the Latin *territorium* in which *terra* is a specific reference to land.²⁶

Juridically, this inheritance was based on the Netherlands's *Territoriale Zee en Maritieme Kringen Ordonnantie 1939* (Territorial Sea and Maritime Districts Ordinance 1939), which took "Netherlands Indies territory" to encompass the land, namely "islands ... or parts of islands," while making only modest provisions for a territorialized sea: the "*Netherlands Indies territorial sea*" referred to "the sea area extending ... seaward to a distance of three nautical miles from the low-water [i.e., low-tide] mark of the islands, or parts of islands."²⁷ Otherwise, sea space between the Dutch East Indies islands was "open sea ... where foreign vessels ... could sail freely."²⁸ In issuing this ordinance, the Netherlands was reaffirming the substance of a Western international norm which "generally conceded that jurisdiction over a belt of water along the coast 1 marine league (about 3^{1/2} statute miles) wide, measured from the low-water line, may be ... claimed" as "territorial waters," with the Hague Tribunal in September 1910 pointing to the traditional stance that "the 3 marine miles are to be measured following the sinuosities of the coast."²⁹

In affixing three-mile water-based borders to the very "sinuosities" of the coastline, the international norm had waded into questions that were geometrically grotesque. Consider the conundrum as recounted in one early twentieth-century argument: "Take your pair of compasses with a pencil at one end of them and proceed to draw a line of that sort; you will find the most intricate convolutions crossing one another, and that the whole thing, in fact, is impossible to carry out."³⁰ Here, rather

than borderlands becoming epiphenomenal to land-based Euclidean borders, the water-based borders became epiphenomenal to the phenomenon of the coastline, which mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot has taken as the locus classicus of non-Euclidean *fractal geometry*, a mode of geometry that measures not Euclidean lines but “shapes they had to call *grainy, hydralike, in between, pimply, pocky, ramified, seaweedy, strange, tangled, tortuous, wiggly, wispy, wrinkled, and the like*” (see Figure 4).³¹

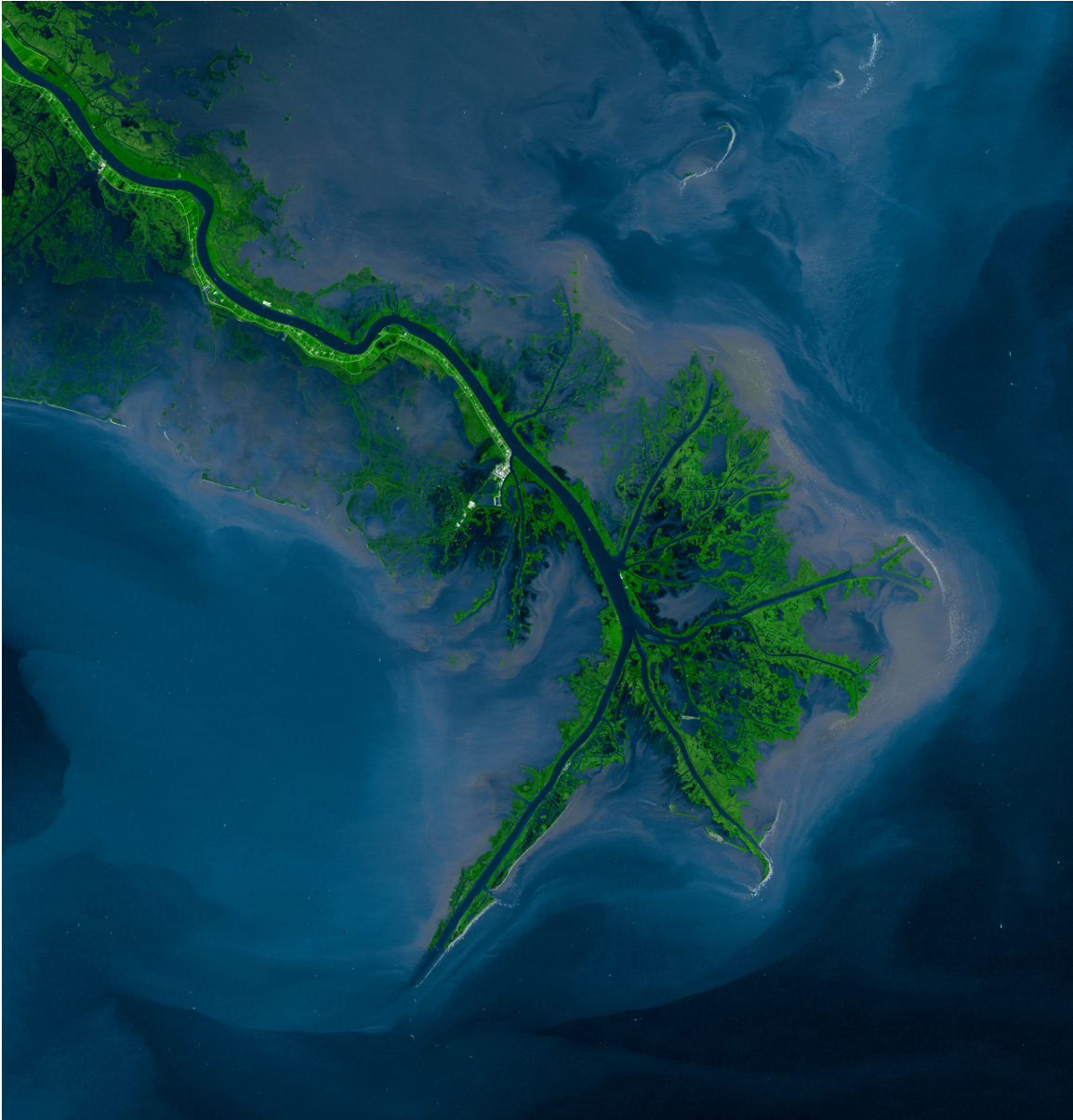


Figure 4. This image of the complex Gulf of Mexico shoreline produced by the Mississippi River Delta illustrates the difficulty of using a sinuous coast as the baseline for projecting a border three miles out into the ocean. NASA image created by Jesse Allen, using data provided by the University of Maryland’s Global Land Cover Facility. Originally published October 7, 2007. Image source: <https://visibleearth.nasa.gov/images/8103/mississippi-river-delta>.

Within this fractal frame, the border itself (sea-based and coastline-set) is far from Anzaldúa’s model of a simple border-as-dividing-line and has come to resemble her epiphenomenal notion of the borderland, “a vague and undetermined place. ... in a constant state of transition.”³² Certainly this is the case as waves, tides, and currents are constantly remaking the fractal coastline to which the sea-based border is anchored.



Figure 5. Covarrubias’s map of Indonesia, from *Republic of Indonesia: New Nation of the World*. In the lower left-hand corner, the larger map showcases a smaller map, a visual representation that resonates with a 1955 discussion that took place between the two novelists Richard Wright and Mochtar Lubis. Image source: Adriana and Tom Williams Collection of Miguel Covarrubias, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin. Republished with permission of the copyright holder, María Elena Rico Covarrubias.

Although the Indonesian Information Office’s text affirms the Euro-American border epistemology of the coastline, Covarrubias’s illustrations posit an alternative epistemology of watery geometry or ways of measuring the earth. The pamphlet’s larger foldout map harbors an inset map—clearly a size comparison—that has Indonesia’s islands nearly surrounded by a set of borders that generally range far from the islands’ shorelines, visually if implicitly situating the vast border-circumscribed waters as part of Indonesia (see Figure 5). Set within these borders, which happen to assume the size and shape of the continental United States, these waters advance a terraqueous vision of Indonesia that is not a quarter the size of the United States but is roughly equal to it in area. While it is not known whether Covarrubias’s size comparison was intended to suggest that vast water surfaces might hypothetically be encompassed by national borders, it is clear that his visual image aligns with the archipelagic vision of Mochtar Lubis, an Indonesian novelist who hosted the US writer Richard Wright during his three-week visit to Indonesia for the 1955 Asian-African Conference held in Bandung. During this visit Wright asked: “And how large in area is the space covered by these islands?”³³ Mochtar gave an answer that was distinct from

the land-oriented text within the Information Office's pamphlet but that very much resembled Covarrubias's accompanying inset map. Referring to Indonesia's territory as encompassing both land- and ocean-space, Mochtar answered, "[r]oughly, it is the size of the United States."³⁴ Mochtar was measuring Indonesian territory not by the Euclidean border nor by the coastline's fractal border but by the archipelagic geometry of the Indigenous Indonesian term *tanah air*, literally translated as *water-land*, but which I would translate as a space that attains the affective resonances of a homeland (indeed, *homeland* is a standard translation for *tanah air*) but which is deterritorialized and exists as a land–water assemblage. Indeed, Covarrubias's visual representation of ocean-space among islands converged with a centerpiece within postcolonial Indonesia's notion of *Wawasan Nusantara* (often translated as "Archipelagic Outlook"), which takes the sea "tidak lagi sebagai pemisah, tetapi sebagai penghubung," or not as a divider but as something that links.³⁵

This Archipelagic Outlook attained force of law, internationally in Indonesia's eyes, in 1957 when it issued what has come to be known as the Djuanda Declaration, announcing that "the Government declares all waters around, between and those connecting the islands as included in the State of Indonesia, ... under the indisputable sovereignty of Indonesia."³⁶ These "internal waters" (a term asserting a topological analogy between the seas amid Indonesia's islands and the shoreward rivers and lakes that exist within land-oriented countries) were circumscribed by "the line connecting the outermost points of the islands of the State of Indonesia," and beyond that line Indonesia claimed a "territorial sea" with a "breadth of ... 12 miles" rather than three miles.³⁷ The interest in circumscribing Indonesian *tanah air* with a set of Euclidean borders (called archipelagic baselines) was rationalized, in part, by an awareness within Indonesia not only of the security risks inherent in permitting foreign vessels unrestricted access to Indonesia's internal waters but also by concerns related to an awareness of the fractal messiness and complications of a border that is an aqueous projection of not just one sinuous coastline surrounding one island but of such a projection repeating approximately fifteen thousand times (the pamphlet's figure of three thousand islands takes into account only the inhabited islands of the Indonesian archipelago). As stated by one figure in Indonesia's fight for international recognition of its *Wawasan Nusantara*, adopting archipelagic baselines would convert a country whose borders were a function of a "coast ... more than three times that of the equator" into a country whose borders were "shortened [in] length ... and greatly simplified [in] measurement."³⁸ The Indonesia that Covarrubias represented in the Information Office's pamphlet was on the cusp of emerging as an archipelagic nation—rejecting the West's notion of a three-mile fractal and seaward boundary, attuning itself instead to an Indigenous geometrical stance regarding *tanah air* that took oceanic space amid islands as topologically identical to internal waters of land-based watersheds, and finding a way for this Indigenous geometrical stance to interface with the international world by innovating the Euclidean archipelagic baseline.³⁹

Covarrubias's map of the TTPI is the lead illustration for a April 25, 1949 *Life* magazine article titled "The Trust Territory: Its 2,130 Islands Form a New U.S. Domain in the Pacific," which announces that the TTPI is "a great sweep of islands running west and north across three million square miles of ocean between Pearl Harbor and the Philippines Although they are officially held in trust for the United Nations, they have been declared a strategic area in the custody of the U.S. and it can close them to other nations at will. They are not the property of the U.S., but for practical purposes they form a new 'American empire' in the Pacific."⁴¹ Contemporary with this popular article in *Life* was the more technical explanation offered by Eugene F. Bogan, a former US Naval officer who during World War II had established and administered the US military government in part of the region that would become the TTPI. Bogan explained that on 2 April 1947 the United Nations Security Council "approved a trusteeship agreement designating the United States as the administering authority for these ... island areas," a territory which "represents a great zone of thousands of small islands scattered over 5,000,000 square miles of sea."⁴² Describing the inhabitants as "part of the American family," Bogan remarked that the TTPI was "in a *de facto* (but not a *de jure*) sense ... as much a part of the United States as Puerto Rico or the Virgin Islands."⁴³ (The hedging on the TTPI as "part of the United States" hinged on the fact that the United States officially considered the TTPI to be "beyond [US] borders" but nonetheless, and paradoxically, considered it to be a "territory of the United States" because it was under US "jurisdiction" via a mandate from the United Nations).⁴⁴

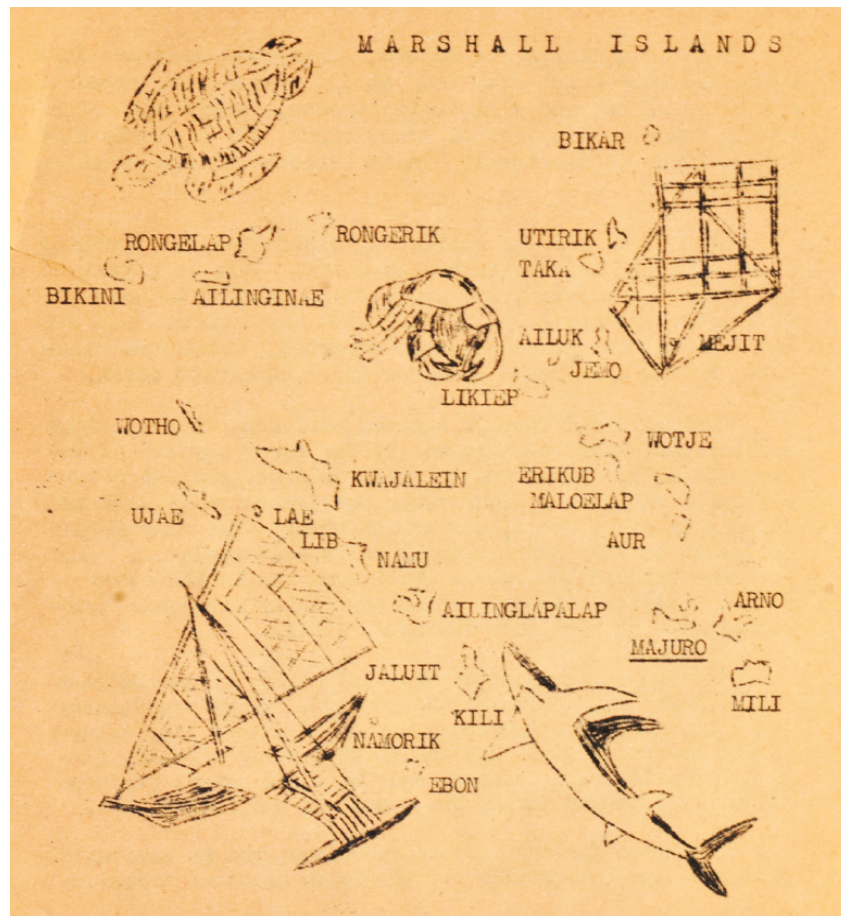
Covarrubias's map situates these islands of the US-American family to the south of Japan and to the north of the Solomons and New Guinea, with the TTPI's southwestern district of Palau mingling in the water with Indonesia's easternmost claims, including claims to the western half of the island of New Guinea. Indeed, Covarrubias's illustration has a presumably Palauan "native carving" standing in the water with its base in Indonesia's tanah air.⁴⁵ Another noteworthy aspect of Covarrubias's representation of the TTPI is the 1949 illustration's position as what might be considered the middle panel within a triptych of illustrations that unfolded over the course of more than a decade. The 1949 illustration offers iconic representations of a turtle (above Bikini), a shark (north of the Solomons), and a coconut crab (amid the waters of the Marshall Islands and Gilbert Islands). Each of these images had appeared a decade earlier in his mural *The Fauna and Flora of the Pacific*, which Covarrubias prepared in 1939 for the Golden Gate International Exposition at San Francisco, with the turtle migrating from the waters off of Mexico, and the shark moving to Micronesia from the waters of central Polynesia, while the coconut crab moved from an iconically rendered atoll of central Polynesia.⁴⁶

And then in 1950, Covarrubias's images appeared again, this time copied from the *Life* illustration by an anonymous and less accomplished hand, in a US Naval Civil Administration pamphlet provided to US personnel and dependents stationed in the TTPI's Marshall Islands district (see Figure 7).⁴⁷ In this 1950 rendering, the turtle has

remained largely stationary; meanwhile, the coconut crab has moved from the southern Marshall Islands to the waters of the northern Marshalls. Elsewhere, the shark has moved from immediately north of the Solomons to the waters amid the southern Marshall Islands. Here, in contemplating the movement that unfolds across a Covarrubias triptych whose final panel was commandeered by the US Navy for its own purposes, we find something of a natural-cultural allegory. As these temporally shifting representations of multispecies actants move across mapped regions, they may remind us of certain freedoms of navigation exhibited by living sea life (whether as individual organisms or as species), an ability to circulate that bespeaks a set of multispecies sovereignties which can exist apart from (or increasingly as embattled pockets within) human-scaled ethnogeographies and nation state-scaled geometries of sovereignty. Like Anzaldúa's waves pounding against the fence, the circulating turtle, the coconut crab, and the shark seem to offer a natural logic for the cultural logic that has enshrined the notion of *mare liberum*, or freedom of the seas, as if the United States were merely following the edict of nature when it protested Indonesia's efforts at territorializing the waters of tanah air via the 1957 Djuanda Delcaration.⁴⁸

Indeed, the US dedication to freedom of the seas, which disproportionately benefits nations with strong navies and robust maritime resources, produced an exceedingly strange geometry of the border vis-à-vis the TTPI. On one hand, as the US

Figure 7. Map from the 1950 pamphlet *Roster of Officers, Enlisted Men, Civilians and Dependents*, published by the US Navy Civil Administration, Marshall Islands Unit; the turtle, shark, coconut crab, stick chart, and outrigger canoe are roughly copied from Covarrubias's 1949 illustration for *Life*.



Navy affirmed in 1952, the US geometrical stance with regard to ocean borders was deeply traditional: “The United States has always been one of the world’s foremost advocates of freedom of the seas Because of this the Navy has always advocated the 3-mile limit of territorial waters delimited in such way that the outer limits thereof closely follow the sinuositities [sic] of the coast line The time-honored position of the Navy is that the greater the freedom and range of its warships and aircraft, the better protected are the security interests of the United States.”⁴⁹ The United States had been careful to maintain this stance when it took the Philippines from Spain, with the 1898 treaty designating a latitude- and longitude-based box of ocean space and specifically claiming not the enclosed ocean but rather “the islands lying within the ... line.”⁵⁰ Half a century later, in the wake of World War II, the United States continued to proceed with care and legerdemain on the subject, as President Harry S. Truman in 1945 issued a proclamation laying US claim to the submerged lands of “the continental shelf off the coasts of the United States of America,” declaring US “jurisdiction over the natural resources of the subsoil and sea bed ... since the continental shelf may be regarded as an extension of the land-mass of the coast nation and thus naturally appurtenant to it.” But Truman nonetheless affirmed that in spite of this US claim to jurisdiction over the adjacent sea floor, “the character as high seas of the waters above the continental shelf and the right to their free and unimpeded navigation are in no way ... affected.”⁵¹

At the same time, as part of the spoils of World War II, the United States took control of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, which, as had been the case with the former US territory of the Philippines, involved a set of islands within a latitude- and longitude-based box of ocean space.⁵² In its 1948 report to the United Nations on the TTPI, the US Navy included a map with the ocean-based lines that marked the boundaries of the Trust Territory and stated that it “covers an area of some 3 million square miles in the western Pacific Ocean north of the equator.”⁵³ Yet shortly thereafter, the US Navy issued a 1950 report to the United Nations that was more consistent with US dedication to *mare liberum*, if at the same time dabbling in the geometrically nonsensical. On one hand, the map continued to assert that the TTPI covered an “OCEAN AREA [OF] APPROX 3,000,000 SQ MILES,” but the map also stated that “LINES INDICATE TERRITORIAL AREA ... AND ARE NOT TO BE INTERPRETED AS BOUNDARIES.”⁵⁴ These twin assertions—affirming that the territory indeed encompassed approximately three million square miles of ocean but denying the area’s circumscribing lines as boundaries—became a staple of US figurations of the TTPI through the 1970s.⁵⁵ The twin assertions were absurd within the realm of Euclidean geometry. How can a figure’s “area” be calculated if the very lines used in making said calculations are disavowed as the figure’s boundaries?⁵⁶

This was a disavowal of boundaries, but strangely not of the area encompassed by the nonboundary lines, a non-Euclidean geometrical stance that evoked a *de facto* ocean territory of three million square miles while, in a *de jure* way, seeking consistency with the three-mile rule. Of the three-mile rule's relation to the TTPI, an Assistant Legal Adviser to the US State Department had stated: "It would seem that, with possible minor exceptions, the territorial waters of islands however situated comprise a band three miles wide around each individual island. Thus the treatment of islands and groups of islands, with respect to territorial waters, is approximately the same as the treatment of large land masses such as continents."⁵⁷ The legal adviser's proviso ("with possible minor exceptions"), might be thought of mathematically *vis-à-vis* Deleuze's set theory-inspired discussion of sets, *the whole*, and *Relation*:

If one had to define the whole, it would be defined by Relation The whole and the 'wholes' must not be confused with sets. Sets are closed, and everything which is closed is artificially closed The whole is not a closed set, but on the contrary [is] that by virtue of which the set is never absolutely closed, never completely sheltered, that which keeps it open somewhere as if by the finest thread which attaches it to the rest of the universe.⁵⁸

The proviso became the finest thread that opens the set of the three-mile bands to the much larger set of the three million square miles of ocean territory. Meanwhile, even as the nonboundary status of the lines seeks reconciliation with the three-mile bands, that same nonboundary status—evoking the outer limits specifically as *nonboundaries*—becomes the finest thread linking the three-million-square-mile set to what Édouard Glissant (inspired by such Deleuzian discussions as the one quoted above) figured as the "unfenced archipelago of the world totality."⁵⁹

Resembling but terraqueously replotting and reurning Anzaldúa's fence-attacking ocean, this unfenced archipelago of the world totality is a whole within which an archipelagic United States and an archipelagic Indonesia become subsets, illustrated by Covarrubias as commingling and overlapping in the borderwaters, where Indonesia's Indigenous geometry of tanah air and the United States's geometrically absurd aquaterritorial Euclidean/nonEuclidean backflips grate against each other. Here, it is not the peopled "landscape and its topography" against governmentality's border "magic of Euclidean geometry," to borrow a dichotomy and some phraseology from Amitav Ghosh.⁶⁰ It is not governmental culture (the borderline) against human nature (the borderland). It is, rather, a set of assembling, disassembling, and reassembling nature-cultures of human and watershed, shoreline and governmentality, tide and international law, coral reef and military, continental divide and oceanic basin. Within these borderwaters—which are as geopolitically asymmetrical as they are capacious in geographical and geopolitical breadth—a human-flung stone might skip across the sea and call forth an archipelago, in Brathwaite's image, or, in Epeli Hau'ofa's

vision, an archipelagic “sea of islands” might supplant the image of “islands in a far sea” purveyed by “those who hail from continents.”⁶¹

In speaking of “those who hail from continents,” Hau‘ofa was critiquing continentalist thought, which during the past several years has seemed increasingly inadequate—for its drive toward monolithic synthesis, for its isolationist tendencies, for its constructedness.⁶² In response to such inadequacies, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her book *Other Asias*, has called for “a new continentalism” that narrates the “continent [as] plural,” as multiple rather than monolithic within itself, consistent with, say, Rachel Adams’s work on a North American borderlands of “continental divides.”⁶³ Meanwhile, other work—by Wai Chee Dimock, Lisa Lowe, and Ranjan Ghosh and J. Hillis Miller—has responded to the continent’s inadequacies by moving toward what might be called *multicontinent studies*, breaking from the cloistered quality of the single-continent model in favor of thinking through other continents, of thinking across continents, of tracing the intimacies of many continents.⁶⁴

Occasionally the intellectual energy of multicontinent studies may even impose a landed template on the ocean; indeed, arenas of study that seem nominally oceanic—those that go by such terms as transatlantic or transpacific—may often in practice denominate a mode of multicontinent studies, as the oceans become metaphors for cultural linkages among Europe and Africa and America and Asia, offering an intercontinentalized view that, to borrow a phrase from the geographer Philip E. Steinberg, “never gets wet.”⁶⁵ Within transnational American studies, such approaches have been the province of a universalized borderlands paradigm, with the borderland emerging as emblematic of the transnational approach, joining many lands at the risk of papering over many waters.⁶⁶ A borderwaters framework, meanwhile, assumes another approach to the continent’s inadequacies—not the intracontinentalizing or intercontinentalizing of the transnational Americanist borderlands, but a planetary decontinentalizing, a “skepticism regarding continental presumptions to uniquely *mainland* status, combined with a dedication to the project of reimagining insular, oceanic, and archipelagic spaces as *mainlands* and *mainwaters*, crucial spaces, participants, nodes, and networks within planetary history.”⁶⁷ Here we see the geo-ontologically plural, terraqueous, amphibious: islands and oceans, archipelagic assemblages and tanah air, fractal shorelines and waves, tides and sea spume, and seagull squawks that hover over islands that are the pinhead peaks of underwater mountains.⁶⁸

Notes

¹ Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens, “Archipelagic American Studies: Decontinentalizing the Study of American Culture,” in *Archipelagic American Studies*, ed. Roberts and Stephens (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 1–54.

² Roberts and Stephens, “Archipelagic American Studies,” 8.

³ Roberts and Stephens, “Archipelagic American Studies,” 9.

⁴ José E. Limón, *American Encounters: Greater Mexico, the United States, and the Erotics of Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998).

⁵ Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (New York: Harper, 1883; repr., New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1901).

⁶ Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*, 253.

⁷ Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*, 253.

⁸ Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*, 253.

⁹ Nathan Friedman, "Political Props: Territorial Performance and the Chamizal Dispute," *MAS Context* 27 (Fall 2015): 168–85; "50 Years Ago, a Fluid Border Made the U.S. 1 Square Mile Smaller," *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio, 25 September 2014, <https://www.npr.org/2014/09/25/350885341/50-years-ago-a-fluid-border-made-the-u-s-1-square-mile-smaller>.

¹⁰ Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, ed. Victor Fischer and Lin Salamo (1885; repr. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 100.

¹¹ Américo Paredes, "The Rio Grande" (1934), in *Between Two Worlds* (Houston: Arte Público Press, 1991), 15–16.

¹² Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 2.

¹³ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 2.

¹⁴ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 3.

¹⁵ Renato Rosaldo, *Culture & Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989); Renato Rosaldo, "Introduction: The Borders of Belonging," in *Cultural Citizenship in Island Southeast Asia: Nation and Belonging in the Hinterlands*, ed. Rosaldo (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 1–15; José David Saldívar, *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 123–48; José David Saldívar, *Trans-Americanity: Subaltern Modernities, Global Coloniality, and the Cultures of Greater Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), xxvii.

¹⁶ Andrew Lipman, *The Saltwater Frontier: Indians and the Contest for the American Coast* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 85–124; Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 11, 4.

¹⁷ John Alba Cutler, "Borders and Borderland Literature," in *The Cambridge Companion to Transnational American Literature*, ed. Yogita Goyal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 158. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁸ For references to perceptions of borders as Euclidean and one-dimensional lines, see Alexandra Minna Stern, “Nationalism on the Line: Masculinity, Race, and the Creation of the U.S. Border Patrol, 1910–1940,” in *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.–Mexico Borderlands History*, ed. Samuel Truett and Elliot Young (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 314; Patricia Merivale, “Audible Palimpsests: Coetzee’s Kafka,” in *Critical Perspectives on J. M. Coetzee*, ed. Graham Huggan and Stephen Watson (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 159; Sterling Evans, preface to *The Borderlands of the American and Canadian Wests: Essays on Regional History of the Forty-ninth Parallel*, ed. Evans (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2006), xviii; and Patricia L. Price, *Dry Place: Landscapes of Belonging and Exclusion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 118–19.

¹⁹ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 3.

²⁰ On “nature-culture,” see Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 1–12, 103–110.

²¹ For a concise biographical timeline on Covarrubias, see Luis Alberto de la Garza C., “A Covarrubias Chronology,” in Adriana Williams and Yu-Chee Chong, *Covarrubias in Bali* (Singapore: Éditions Didier Millet, 2005), 110–13. See also Adriana Williams, *Covarrubias in Bali*, ed. Doris Ober (Austin: University of Texas, 1994).

²² José E. Limón, “Greater Mexico, Modernism, and New York: Miguel Covarrubias and José Limón,” in *The Covarrubias Circle: Nickolas Muray’s Collection of Twentieth-Century Mexican Art*, gen. ed. Kurt Heinzelman, art curator Peter Mears (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 83.

²³ Adrian Vickers, foreword to *Island of Bali* (Singapore: Periplus Editions, 2008), xix. The dates of Covarrubias’s time in Bali are gleaned from Williams and Chong, *Covarrubias in Bali*, 10–37.

²⁴ Nancy C. Lutkehaus, “Miguel Covarrubias and the Pageant of the Pacific: The Golden Gate International Exposition and the Idea of the Transpacific, 1939–1940,” in *Transpacific Studies: Framing an Emerging Field*, ed. Janet Hoskins and Viet Thanh Nguyen (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2014), 116–17. On Covarrubias’s invitation to participate in the exposition, see Williams, *Covarrubias*, 100–01.

²⁵ *Republic of Indonesia: New Nation of the World* (undated), manuscript box 4 (uncatalogued “ephemera”), Adriana and Tom Williams Collection of Miguel Covarrubias, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin. Based on the pamphlet’s content, it was likely published in 1951, which is the publication date provided in Alfonso de Maria y Campos Castelló, ed., *Covarrubias: Esplendor del Pacífico* (Mexico City: Conaculta, 2006), 33.

²⁶ See “territory n.1” and “terra,” *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, June 2017 (Oxford University Press).

- ²⁷ “Territorial Sea and Maritime Districts Ordinance 1939,” trans. the Secretariat of the United Nations, in *Laws and Regulations on the Regime of the Territorial Sea*, United Nations Legislative Series, ST/LEG/SER.B/6 (New York: United Nations, 1957), 194.
- ²⁸ St. Munadjat Danusaputro, “Wawasan Nusantara and the International Sea System,” *Indonesian Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (1974): 62.
- ²⁹ Franklin K. van Zandt, *Boundaries of the United States and the Several States*, Geological Survey Bulletin 1212 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1966), 67.
- ³⁰ Alaskan Boundary Tribunal, *Proceedings of the Alaskan Boundary Tribunal*, Vol. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1904), 218–19.
- ³¹ Benoit Mandelbrot, *The Fractal Geometry of Nature*, updated and augmented ed. (New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1982/2006), 5.
- ³² Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 3.
- ³³ Richard Wright, *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference (1956)*, in *Black Power: Three Books from Exile*, by Wright, introduction by Cornel West (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 505.
- ³⁴ Wright, *The Color Curtain*, 505.
- ³⁵ Wahyu Widodo, Budi Anwari, and Maryanto, *Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan: Pengantar Teori* (Yogyakarta, Indonesia: Andi, 2015), 175.
- ³⁶ H. Djuanda, “Announcement of the Government on the Territorial Waters of the State of the Republic of Indonesia” (1957), Appendix I of Danusaputro, “Wawasan Nusantara and the International Sea System,” 86.
- ³⁷ Djuanda, “Announcement of the Government on the Territorial Waters,” 86.
- ³⁸ Danusaputro, “Wawasan Nusantara,” 85.
- ³⁹ As the Malaysian geographer Zaharah binti Haji Mahmud has written of the concept of tanah air, “the *air* in the term *tanah air* refers in equal parts to the maritime waters of the oceans and inland seas and the waters of the major river systems that drain into them in perpetuity,” ranging from the sea and up into the rivers’ “extensive network of tributary valleys,” “alluvial hollows and pockets,” and “rice fields.” See Zaharah binti Haji Mahmud, “The Malay Concept of *Tanah Air*: The Geographer’s Perspective,” in *Memory and Knowledge of the Sea in Southeast Asia*, ed. Danny Wong Tze Ken, Institute of Ocean and Earth Sciences Monograph No. 3 (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya, 2008), 6 and 11.
- ⁴⁰ Roberts and Stephens, “Archipelagic American Studies,” 8.
- ⁴¹ The simplified and iconic images in Covarrubias’s maps tended to repeat, as is seen for instance with the coconut crab in figures 5, 7, and 8. In this way, they are consistent with the definition of a “stereotype” as it developed in the printing trade: a plate containing a

stock image that can be used to avoid the work of creating a new image. In Covarrubias's representations of humans on maps—whether in *Island of Bali*, in his murals for the Golden Gate International Exposition, in the Indonesian Information Office pamphlet, or in this 1949 illustration for *Life*—his images are also simplified and iconic and hence easily repeatable, providing a look at how an older usage of “stereotype” has melded into the common usage today. On this point, it is worth noting that Covarrubias's illustrations of Harlem in the 1920s and 1930s elicited discomfort from figures such as W. E. B. Du Bois but admiration from writers including Zora Neale Hurston. See Marlon Ross, *Manning the Race: Reforming Black Men in the Jim Crow Era* (New York: NYU Press, 2004), 143; and Carla Kaplan, ed., *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 327. Miguel Covarrubias, untitled map of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, in “The Trust Territory: Its 2,130 Islands Form a New U.S. Dominion in the Pacific,” *Life* 25 April 1949: 96.

⁴² Eugene F. Bogan, “Government of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* vol. 267 (Jan. 1950): 164. The discrepancy between *Life*'s figure of three million square miles and Bogan's figure of five million square miles stems from Bogan's inclusion of the Bonin Islands (which also transferred from Japan to the United States after World War II) in the TTPI.

⁴³ Bogan, “Government of the Trust Territory,” 174, 165.

⁴⁴ van Zandt, *Boundaries of the United States*, 64, 34, 66.

⁴⁵ Quotation taken from the key to Covarrubias's illustration in “The Trust Territory,” 97.

⁴⁶ On Covarrubias's work on this mural as well as five others for the Golden Gate International Exposition, see Miguel Covarrubias, *Pageant of the Pacific* (San Francisco: Pacific House, 1940).

⁴⁷ US Naval Civil Administration Unit, Marshall Islands, *Roster of Officers, Enlisted Men, Civilians and Dependents* (Majuro, Marshall Islands, 1 August 1950). Thanks to Roger Knight for sharing photographs of this entire pamphlet, held in a personal collection of his father's papers.

⁴⁸ D. P. O'Connell, “Mid-Ocean Archipelagos in International Law,” *British Yearbook of International Law* 45 (1971): 39.

⁴⁹ *Investigation and Study of the Seaward Boundaries of the United States: Report of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs Pursuant to H. Res. 676, 82d Cong., Authorizing an Investigation and Study of the Seaward Boundaries of the United States* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1953), 18.

⁵⁰ Quoted in United States Bureau of the Census, *Census of the Philippine Islands Taken Under the Direction of the Philippine Commission in the Year 1903*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1905), 49.

⁵¹ Harry S. Truman, “Policy of the United States with Respect to the Natural Resources of the Subsoil and Sea Bed of the Continental Shelf” (Proclamation 2667, 28 Sept. 1945), in *Submerged Lands: Hearings before the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, United States Senate, Eighty-Second Congress, First Session on S. J. Res. 20* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1951), 496.

⁵² Navy Department, *Information on the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, Transmitted by the United States to the Secretary-General of the United Nations Pursuant to Article 88 of the Charter* (Washington, DC: Navy Department, 1948), 1.

⁵³ Navy Department, *Information on the Trust Territory*, 1.

⁵⁴ Department of the Navy, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, *Report on the Administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands for the Period July 1, 1949 to June 30, 1950, Transmitted by the United States to the United Nations Pursuant to Article 88 of the Charter of the United Nations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1950), VI.

⁵⁵ For other maps of the TTPI that use similar language, see Dorothy E. Richard, *United States Naval Administration for the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands*, vol. 3 (Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, 1957), front map; Norman Meller with the assistance of Terza Meller, *The Congress of Micronesia: Development of the Legislative Process in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1969), 12–13; Donald F. McHenry, *Micronesia: Trust Betrayed, Altruism vs Self Interest in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1975), front map; *Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (U.S.): Administrative Divisions* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1974).

⁵⁶ As stated in Euclid’s definitions 13 and 14: “A boundary is that which is an extremity of anything,” and “a figure is that which is contained by any boundary or boundaries”; Euclid, *Euclid’s Elements*, trans. Thomas L. Heath (Ann Arbor, MI: Green Lion Press, 2007), 1.

⁵⁷ O’Connell, “Mid-Ocean Archipelagos in International Law,” 45.

⁵⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 10. On Deleuze and set theory, see Simon B. Duffy, *Deleuze and the History of Mathematics: In Defense of the “New”* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 155–59.

⁵⁹ Édouard Glissant, “The Unforeseeable Diversity of the World,” trans. Haun Saussy, in *Beyond Dichotomies: Histories, Identities, Cultures, and the Challenge of Globalization* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 292.

⁶⁰ Amitav Ghosh, “Four Corners,” *Granta* 26 (1 May 1989), <https://granta.com/four-corners/>.

⁶¹ E. L. Brathwaite, “Caribbean Theme: A Calypso,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 4, no. 3–4 (1956): 246; Epeli Hau‘ofa, “Our Sea of Islands,” in *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of*

Islands, eds. Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu, and Epeli Hau'ofa (Suva, Fiji: University of the South Pacific/Beake House, 1993), 6–7.

⁶² Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Édouard Glissant, *Philosophie de la Relation: Poésie en étendue* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), 45.

⁶³ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Other Asias* (Singapore: Blackwell, 2008), 213, 214; Rachel Adams, *Continental Divides: Remapping the Cultures of North America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

⁶⁴ Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* (Princeton, CT: Princeton University Press, 2006); Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 2015; Ranjan Ghosh and J. Hillis Miller, *Thinking Literature Across Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

⁶⁵ Philip E. Steinberg, “Of Other Seas: Metaphors and Materialities in Maritime Regions,” *Atlantic Studies* 10, no. 2 (2013): 158.

⁶⁶ For a moment of foundational joining between Americanist transnationalism and the borderlands paradigm particularly as advanced by Anzaldúa, see Shelley Fisher Fishkin, “Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies—Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004,” *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (March 2005): 17–57.

⁶⁷ Roberts and Stephens, “Archipelagic American Studies,” 14.

⁶⁸ On seagull squawks and islands as pinhead peaks of underwater mountains, I draw on the Cuban theorist Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, 2nd ed., trans. James E. Maraniss (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 2, and the Māori poet Vernice Wineera, “This Island,” in *Into the Luminous Tide: Pacific Poems*, compiled by Jay Fox (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 2009), 4.

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