

WORKSHOP

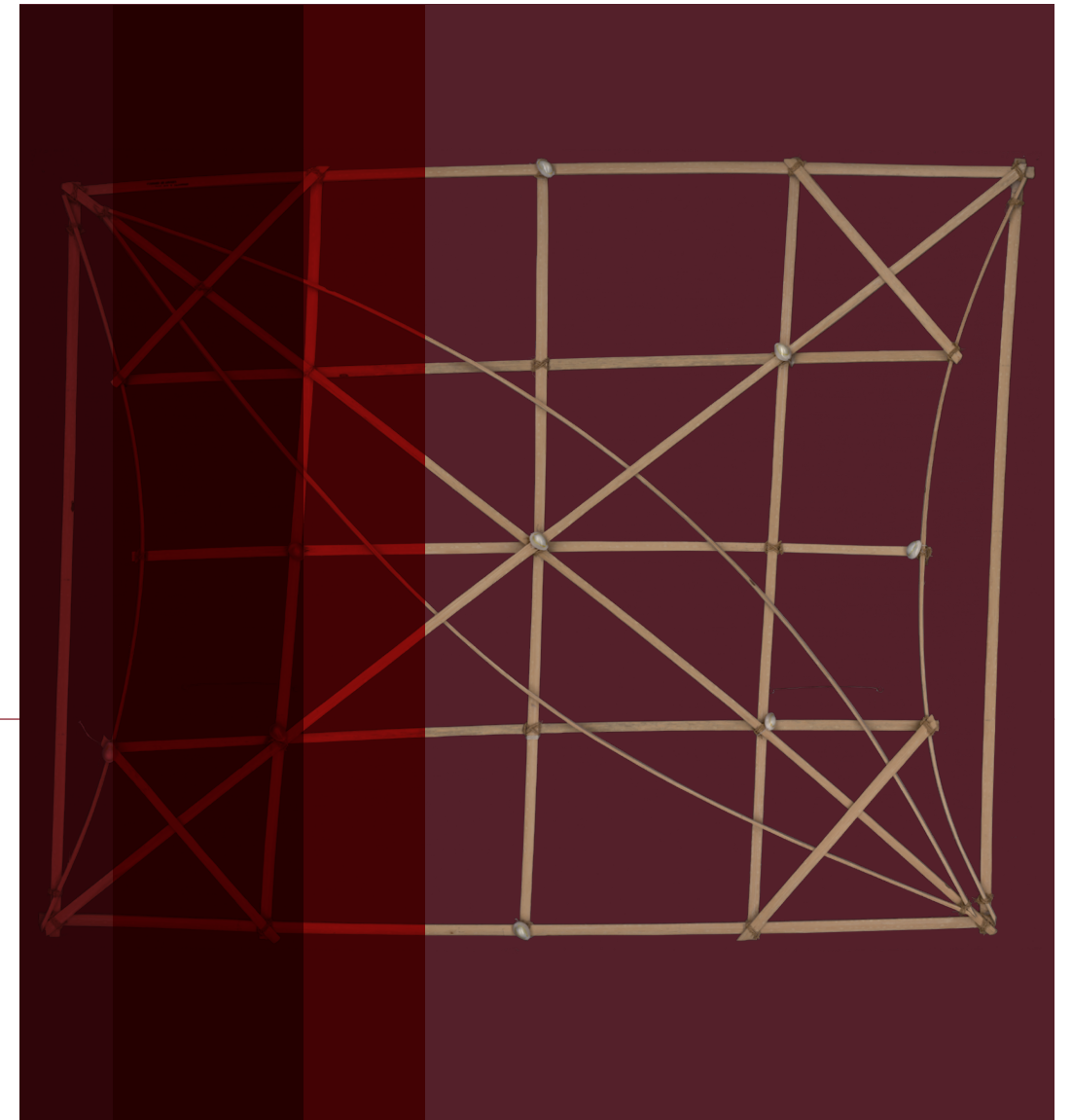
Archipelagic Imperial Spaces and Mobilities

MARCH 30 – APRIL 1, 2022

Leipzig *and online*

Venue:

SFB 1199 • Strohsackpassage
Nikolaistr. 6–10 / 5th floor • 04109 Leipzig



ARCHIPELAGIC IMPERIAL SPACES AND MOBILITIES

2nd International Workshop

The second workshop under the heading of «Archipelagic Imperial Spaces and Mobilities» continues to bring together international scholars from the fields of Archipelagic Studies, Island Studies and Mobility Studies. Its goal is to discuss our papers and findings across disciplinary border in preparation for a special issue of the Journal of Transnational American Studies (JTAS). Mobility has been central to the real and imaginative construction of the United States from its beginnings. From the mid-1800s onward, the nation's continental gaze shifted towards a «terraqueous triumphalism» that dissolved global distances with imperial projects in the Caribbean and Asian-Pacific, thus creating what Lanny Thompson called an «imperial archipelago.»¹ While many colonial spaces such as Hawai'i and the Philippines are actual archipelagoes, the field of archipelagic American Studies approaches its eponymous topic as a blend of physical and cultural geographies, proposing that «the archipelago emerges as neither strictly natural nor as wholly cultural but always as at the intersection of the Earth's materiality and humans' penchant for metaphoricity.»²

Thinking archipelagically therefore becomes both a metaphor and theoretical lens for accessing the multiple dimensions of what Elizabeth DeLoughrey calls

the «transoceanic imaginary.»³ In the words of island studies scholar Elaine Stratford, «thinking with the archipelago may reveal multiple emancipatory narratives that enunciate exceptions to colonizing grammars of empire that rendered islands remote, isolated and backward.»⁴ Archipelagic approaches thus evoke epistemic disruptions of global conditions and a renegotiation of conventional cultural vocabularies that revolve around centrality and peripherality, identity, history, geography, and mobility.

Building upon the spatial turn's insistence on the social construction of space, transnational American Studies has decentered the topic of mobility from the nationstate, rethinking it as «socially produced motion»⁵ embedded in a «web of connections» among cross-cultural and cross-border practices.⁶ This new mobility research «sets out to critique dominant scripts of American mobility articulated in cultural forms from sub- and transnational perspectives and from gender-, race-, and class-critical angle.»⁷ It traces (im)mobilities as part of human and cultural geographies, for instance as part of diasporas, border regimes and borderlands,⁸ migration flows, regimes of mass incarceration, the racial politics of movement,⁹ or alongside asymmetrical constellations of contagion or panic.¹⁰ Other current research explores the scope of «minor mobilities.»¹¹

- 1 Thompson, Lanny. *Imperial Archipelago: Representation and Rule in the Insular Territories under U.S. Domination after 1898*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010.
- 2 Roberts, Brian Russell and Michelle Ann Stephens (eds.), *Archipelagic American Studies: Decontinentalizing the Study of American Culture*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2017, p. 7.
- 3 DeLoughrey, Elizabeth M., *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007, p. 4.
- 4 Stratford, Elaine, «The Idea of the Archipelago: Contemplating Island Relations,» *Island Studies Journal* 8 (2013) 1, pp. 3–8; 4.

Exploring the intersections of archipelagicity, mobility, and American imperialism promises to illuminate dimensions of (im)mobility and imperialism / colonialism in a framework that goes beyond conventional perspectives by assuming a healthy «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.»¹²

The workshop asks:

1. How does archipelagic thinking or «thinking with the archipelago» shape the production of knowledge?
2. Can concepts such as archipelagicity, insularity, and peripherality help in the exploration of continuities between the southern US and the Caribbean, particularly concerning colonial violence, racial hierarchies, and differential mobilities?
3. How do mobilities challenge spatial formats that are based on principles of territoriality, most notably concepts of region, nation-state, and empire?
4. What new spatial imaginations emerge from archipelagic epistemes and mobility practices?

- 5 Cresswell, Tim, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2006, p. 3.
- 6 See e.g., Dirlik, Arif, *What is in a Rim? Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998; Fishkin, Shelley Fisher, «Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies», *American Quarterly* 57 (2005) 1, pp. 17-57; Greenblatt, Stephen (ed.), *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- 7 See <https://mobilecultures.univie.ac.at/docfunds/>.
- 8 Anzaldúa, Gloria, *Borderlands: La Frontera*, San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987.
- 9 Sheller, Mimi, *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in the Age of Extremes*, London: Verso, 2018.
- 10 Kunow, Rüdiger, «American Studies as Mobility Studies: Some Terms and Constellations», in: Fluck, Winfried, Donald E. Pease, and John Carlos Rowe (eds.), *Re-Framing the Transnational Turn in American Studies*, Lebanon: Dartmouth College Press, 2011, pp. 245-64.
- 11 See <https://emma.org>.
- 12 Roberts / Stephens (eds.), *Archipelagic American Studies*, p.14.

PROGRAM

Day 1 • Wednesday, March 30

4–4:30 pm Welcome and coffee

4:30–5:15 pm Kick-off Discussion

**Framing our JTAS Special Issue:
Transnational, Archipelagic, and Mobility Studies**

5:15–7:15 pm

Session 1

Brian Russell Roberts:

Archipelagic Translation: Translating in the Presence of
Every Language in the World

Commentary: **Nicole Waller**

Mimi Sheller and Andrew R. Martin:

«Kaleidoscopic Combinations»: Forging Bonds and Imperial
Adventure through Musical Mobilities across the Caribbean
Archipelago

Commentary: **Barbara Gföllner and Sigrid Thomsen**

7:30 pm

Dinner (self-pay)

All times are Central European
Summer Time (CEST), which is UTC +1.
International participants may want to
use a time conversion utility.

Day 2 • Thursday, March 31

10 am–12 pm

Session 2

Steffen Wöll:

Unmasking Maps, Unmaking Empire: Towards an Archipelagic Cartography

Commentary: **Jens Temmen**

Short coffee break (10 min.)

Jonathan Pugh:

The Americas: A Relational or Abyssal Geography?
(Transcript of conversation with Barbara Gföllner)

12–2 pm

Lunch break

2–5:30 pm

Session 3

Barbara Gföllner and Sigrid Thomsen:

«Near Enough to Smell and Far Enough to Desire»:
Archipelagos of Desire in Canisia Lubrin's *Voodoo Hypothesis* and Dionne Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here*

Commentary: **Jonathan Pugh**

Gabriele Pizarz-Ramirez:

Narrating the Isthmus: (Im)Mobilities and Archipelagic Identities in Texts about the Panama Canal

Commentary: **Brian Russell Roberts**

4–4:30 pm

Coffee break

**Alexandra Ganser and Jens Temmen
(with Clemens Rettenbacher):**

An Archipelagic Reading of Outer Space

Commentary: **Mimi Sheller**

7 pm

Dinner

Day 3 • Friday, April 1

10–11 am

Session 4

Nicole Waller:

Layered Maps: Black Geographies and Archipelagic
(Im)mobility

Commentary: **Alexandra Ganser**

11 am–12 pm

Final Discussion and Further Planning

Moderation: **Steffen Wöll**

12 pm

Lunch buffet (on-site)

ABSTRACTS

Introduction: Archipelagic Studies and Mobility Studies

*Gabriele Pizarz-Ramirez, Alexandra Ganzer, Steffen Wöll,
Barbara Gföllner*

In this introduction, we discuss the intersections between the fields of Archipelagic Studies and Mobility Studies and explain the significance of employing both perspectives together for understanding the relationship between mainlands and islands as well as for the study of imperialism and decoloniality.

Archipelagic Thinking: The Insular, the Archipelago, and the Borderwaters

Michelle Ann Stephens and Brian Russell Roberts

In this conversation, Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens explore key tropes and themes that are important to engage and update when thinking about <Archipelagic Spaces and (Im)Mobilities.> These are archipelagic thinking, archipelagic space, imperial mobilities, the intersections between archipelagic and mobilities studies, the complications of mainland / island, as well as <minor> traditions. They discuss how these are variously implicated in the generation of ontology, epistemology, research, and forms of praxis. Moreover, they both deconstruct and expand upon the notion of the insular and the island itself as historical, discursive, ontological, and epistemological objects. They moreover discuss watery borders and borderwaters as natural-cultural keys to an archipelagic mobility studies. This conversation was part of the exploratory workshop that took place in Leipzig and online in July 2021. The conversation has been recorded and will be transcribed for the journal.

An Archipelagic Reading of Outer Space

Alexandra Ganzer and Jens Temmen

Starting from the fact that the International Outer Space Treaty (Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies / UNOOSA, 1967) has been modeled on the international law of the seas, this article mainly inquires into the epistemic potentialities of thinking outer space archipelagically. By reversing center/periphery structurations in line with both archipelagic discourses and philosophical theorizations of outer space by Hannah Arendt, Jacques Lacan, and Günter Anders, which we will briefly discuss in an introductory theoretical section, the article suggests a much-needed cultural critique regarding the current transformation in economics, science and culture of celestial bodies such as the moon and Mars into desirable territories of imagination, capitalization, exploitation, and imperialism. An archipelagically conceived cosmos, we propose, opens up a critique of the process of outer-space territorialization based on insights from postcolonial studies, posthuman studies and techno-critical commentary (e.g., by Lewis Mumford). As a continuation of imperial mobilities, outer space escapisms that become increasingly real demonstrate the need for an outside (or, ever new frontiers) for capitalism to continue this system of ecological exploitation on Earth.

In the first part of our contribution, we will perform an archipelagically informed critical close reading of said Treaty and its foundational transoceanic imaginary. Employing the insights from this close reading, the second part focuses on two cultural products—Andy Weir’s novel *The Martian* and the TV series *For*

All Mankind—and the ways in which they depict Mars and Earth’s moon respectively as spaces that re-affirm and renew the imperial desire to stake a claim in an outer space that, as regulated by the UNOOSA, seems to escape regular hierarchies of terrestrial national territory. We argue that reading these texts through an archipelagic lens reveals that articulating a claim to outer space first requires coming to terms with outer space’s vexed territoriality.

«Near Enough to Smell and Far Enough to Desire»:
Archipelagos of Desire in Canisia Lubrin's *Voodoo Hypothesis*
and Dionne Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here*
Barbara Gföllner and Sigrid Thomsen

A focus on archipelagos not only serves to decenter the (continental) land-mass but also views islands and the sea as both meaningful and entangled. This paper will look at two literary works that draw such archipelagic interconnections between the Caribbean and Canada, thereby (re)creating maps of histories of im/mobilities that stretch into the present as well as into the future. Putting Dionne Brand's 1996 novel *In Another Place, Not Here* in conversation with Canisia Lubrin's 2017 poetry collection *Voodoo Hypothesis* opens up ways to explore archipelagic spaces informed by lived and imagined im/mobilities in different literary genres, namely poetry and prose. «Archipelagraphy,» which Elizabeth DeLoughrey describes as «a cartography of archipelagoes that maps the complex ebb and flow of immigration, arrival, and island settlement» (2001, 23), can be used as a methodology for reading the selected texts (see Redd 2017) as creating emancipatory poetics that offer new ways of thinking through belonging and relations against the backdrop of fraught and complex histories of im/mobility. Both works tackle the im/mobilizations of colonization and its reverberations in memories, landscapes, society, and the body, and, in entangling these strands, arguably map archipelagos of longing and desire.

Lubrin's *Voodoo Hypothesis* challenges colonial constructions of space and the body that created binary divisions, using subversive cartographies as a

poetic structuring device to destabilize dichotomies of center and periphery, island and mainland. When the speaker of Lubrin's poem «Aftershocks» states «What we long for / is hard to explain» (10), her archipelagic poems can be seen as an effort to make the multidirectionality of this longing, as well as the profound ways in which it has been shaped by colonialism, visible. In Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here*, meanwhile, archipelagicity figures in how the characters dream of going away while in Trinidad and how they remember the Caribbean while in Toronto, wherein the Caribbean and Canada, the land and the sea, jostle against each other, with the «other» place often «near enough to smell and far enough to desire» (Brand, 21).

The characters, then, are located in an archipelago, where other locales, other «islands,» are close enough to be perpetually entangled in the characters' perception but far apart enough to make the gaps between them palpably, and urgently, felt.

Beyond this archipelagicity rooted in the geographic context of Trinidad and Canada, however, the novel opens up a plethora of other archipelagoes, which we frame as archipelagos of desire. This framing encompasses not only the desire for another place and the desire for the sea (as well as arguably related desires, like Verlia's desire to liquefy), but also a desire for home and belonging, for revolution, for sexual and romantic communion. All of these desires are archipelagic in that they are fragmented and interwoven; they are part of not a whole but of something which resists being a whole, much like an archipelago resists being subsumed into one category. Reading Brand's novel and Lubrin's poetry collection as archipelagic, then, makes visible myriad connections between two parts of the American archipelago while offering a rich and novel way of grasping both the act of desiring and of what is being desired.

On the one hand, bringing these two works together proves fruitful because of their shared interest in diasporic belonging and the power relations that have created uneven mobilities (Sheller 2018) and that link the Caribbean to North America. On the other hand, reading these two texts alongside each other reveals relational poetics, particularly in Lubrin's collection, which is heavily influenced by Dionne Brand's writing and, in her poem «Aftershocks,» directly refers to *In Another Place, Not Here*. Such intertextual references further add to the archipelagic connections that propel the reader outside the text towards a relational reading practice.

Works Cited

Brand, Dionne. *In Another Place, Not Here*. Grove Press, 1996. DeLoughrey, Elizabeth M. «The litany of islands, the rosary of archipelagoes: Caribbean and Pacific archipelagraphy.» *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 32.1 (2001): 21-51.

Lubrin, Canisia. *Voodoo Hypothesis*. Buckrider Books, 2017.

Redd, Dani. «Towards an Archipelagraphic Literary Methodology: Reading the Archipelago in Julieta Campos' *The Fear of Losing Eurydice*.» *Island Studies Journal*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2017, pp. 303-316.

Sheller, Mimi. *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in the Age of Extremes*. Verso, 2018.

Narrating the Isthmus: (Im)Mobilities and Archipelagic Identities in Texts about the Panama Canal

Gabriele Pizarz-Ramirez

My project uses an archipelagic lens to explore narratives of mobility surrounding the Panama Canal zone. The Isthmus of Panama emerged as an archipelago of volcanic islands before a land bridge formed between North and South America, changing global climate and enabling plant and animal migration between the two continents. In the early 20th century, the various projects of creating an interoceanic route culminated in the territorialization project of the Panama Canal that created «geographies of rationalization and optimization» and was organized around the colonization of land and ocean spaces. Canal construction was tied to the imperial expansion to the Caribbean and the Pacific, making the isthmus a crucial link in what Lanny Thompson has described as the imperial archipelago, i.e., the overseas territories that came under US dominion after 1898 such as Cuba, Guam, Hawaii, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico. Geo-strategically envisioned as «one of the great highways of the world» by Marine strategist and US Navy Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, the canal was crucial in opening America's way to global power. Its construction drew almost 150,000 labor migrants to Panama, creating a population that reflected a vernacular cosmopolitanism—based on day-to-day experience—that, in Ifeoma Nwankwo's words, is «fundamental to archipelagic identity.»

I aim to address the different and contradictory discourses of mobility surrounding the canal, with a specific angle on the hydro-colonial structures

that dominated its completion and usage. For this purpose, I will explore texts that dramatize the canal as a site of progress and tourist mobility, specifically Willis J. Abbot's *Panama and the Canal in Picture and Prose* (1913) as well as texts that focus on the (im)mobilities of those who built the canal, Eric Walrond's *Tropic Death* (1926), the bilingual prose-poetry history of Black West Indians in Panama *An Old Woman Remembers* (1995) by Carlos E. Russell, as well as Melva Lowe de Goodin's play *De / From Barbados a / to Panamá* (1999). Looking at the canal zone and these texts through an archipelagic lens questions conventional spatial patterns that framed the canal as a site invigorated and ordered by US-bound forces of modernity, instead bringing into view the metageography between Panama and the Caribbean islands (where most of the workers came from), the mobilities between these spaces, and the ocean as a site for the imperial uses of water.

Willis J. Abbot, a US journalist, in his travel narrative projects images of tropicity and backwardness onto the canal zone, staging it as yet another Caribbean place in need of modernization and positing Panama as static backdrops for «the most gigantic engineering undertaking since the dawn of time». In Eric Walrond's collection of stories the zone emerges as a site of variously scaled (im)mobilities and as a spectral wasteland destroyed by the canal building process as the text evokes the ghosts of the various colonial endeavors in the region. Carlos E. Russell's *An Old Woman Remembers* as well as Melva Lowe de Goodin's *De / From Barbados a / to Panamá* are tributes to the Panamanian West-Indian canal workers that maintain an archipelagic view of Panama against the nationalist vision of a mestizo Panama that excludes West Indians.

Archipelagic Translation: Translating in the Presence of Every Language in the World

Brian Russell Roberts

This article relies on the Martinican philosopher Édouard Glissant as a jumping-off point for thinking about translation, mobility, and archipelagic thinking as intertwined categories. In his *Introduction à une Poétique du Divers* (1996; English translation, 2020), Glissant foregrounds the trope of mobility in describing the project of translation. Referring to translation as «one of the most important arts of the future,» he explains that translation «is an art of the flight [fugue] from one language to another.» Translation enacts «the very passage [...] from one language to another.» Translation is «a vertiginous art of salutary wanderings [...] progressively writing itself into the multiplicity of our world.» He continues, now linking this highly mobile vision of translation with archipelagic thought: «Translation is therefore one of the most important kinds of this new archipelagic thinking» (27).

What might we make of this nexus, this mutually constitutive relation, or even this coextensive quality among mobility, translation, and archipelagic thinking? If translation is a type of archipelagic thinking, then it behooves us to examine Glissant's definition of the archipelagic thought as conveyed in the same essay. Whereas «continental thought» or «systematic thought» «has failed to account for the generalized non-system of the world's cultures,» we see «another form of thought [...] developing, more intuitive, more fragile, threatened, but in tune with the chaos-world and its unpredictability [...] stemming from a vision of the poetics and the imagination of the world.» Glissant

calls «this thought <archipelagic>, that is non-systemic, inductive thought that explores the unexpected in the world-totality» (26). According to Glissant, «the translator can establish a relation between two languages [...] only in the presence of all the [other languages of the world], their powerful presence in his imagination, even if he does not know any of them» (27).

Glissant's tripartite complex of translation, mobility, and archipelagic thought converges with—and yet promises to further flesh out—Rüdiger Kunow's discussion of the field of American studies vis-à-vis mobility. In discussing the practice of «citation» as a hallmark facet of an Americanist mobility studies, Kunow suggests that citation gives rise to «inter- and poly-lingualism,» as «languages have [...] come into contact with... other languages.» In fact, it is here that Kunow's notion of citation converges with *translation*, though he does not use the term itself: «Citation is a Janus-faced process: it is transgressive, taking a given element out of its [...] context, but it is also conservative [...] because it [...] remains beholden to the original which it displaces» (252). What would happen if we replaced some of Kunow's commentary on citation with some of Glissant's commentary on mobile and archipelagic translation? We would see that «taking a given element out of its... context» becomes archipelagic translation's «beautiful relinquishing» of the source text, while citation's beholden quality vis-à-vis the original becomes archipelagic translation's means of «recompose[ing] the world's landscape» (29).

In contemplating archipelagic translation's place in Americanist mobility studies, I conclude with two archipelagic/translational exempla: the question of translating the Indonesian orangutan's language in Edgar Allan Poe's 1841 story «Murders on the Rue Morgue,» and, reciprocally, the way translation is translated in a twentieth-century Indonesian translation of Poe's story.

Works Cited

Glissant, Édouard. 2020. *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*. Trans. Celia Britton. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Kunow, Rüdiger. 2011. «American Studies as Mobility Studies: Some Terms and Constellations.» In *Re-Framing the Transnational Turn in American Studies*, edited by Winfried Fluck, Donald E. Pease, and John Carlos Rowe, 245-64. Lebanon: Dartmouth College Press.

«Kaleidoscopic Combinations»: Forging Bonds and Imperial Adventure through Musical Mobilities across the Caribbean Archipelago

Mimi Sheller and Andrew R. Martin

Music and dance are some of the greatest enticements of travel to the Caribbean region, imagined as a kaleidoscopic archipelago of multiple sounds, powerful rhythms and inviting styles of dance. Such cultural tourism, though, is deeply entwined with American empire and its transoceanic mobilities. Along with co-author Dr. Andrew R. Martin (Professor of Music at Inver Hills College), we have recently come across a souvenir program for the first Caribbean Festival, which was held in Puerto Rico in 1952, sponsored by the Caribbean Tourism Association. The two-day festival brought together musicians and dance troupes from Antigua, Trinidad, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Surinam, Curacao, the Virgin Islands, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Grenada, and Haiti.

The program of dancers, parades, and puppet theater offered a kind of tour through the archipelago, introducing each country through its <folkloric> music and dance. It also was linked with the second annual Caribbean Exhibition of Painting in San Juan, part of an emerging international market for Caribbean art building on the success of the Centre d'Art in Haiti.

What the program does not say, however, is that in the 1950s the Aluminum Corporation of America (Alcoa) was heavily promoting its business via 16-day tourist cruises through the region where it also mined bauxite. Alcoa hired leading graphic artist James Bingham to depict the musical performances

of each island in the archipelago for its advertising campaigns, while sending top sound recording producer Emory Cook to capture the music of the region, probably during the Festival. These records and images were then cross-marketed with Alcoa's tourism advertising campaigns, just as Caribbean music was hitting the American mainstream. The company also sponsored the Caribbean Arts Festival in the 1950s, collecting the prize-winning Caribbean paintings for its collection and advertisements.

In many way, Alcoa was spreading American Empire through cultural promotion of Caribbean arts, music recordings, and cultural tourism—all of which were themed around tourist access to the «kaleidoscopic» island archipelago. The festival, recordings, and cultural tourism were premised on mobilities both as simulacra of <discovery> of the diversity of Caribbean cultures (consciously echoing past imperial adventures), and as embodied in the mobilities of dance itself, through learning new rhythms and moves. As the program puts it:

More and more elements of the West Indies are becoming a part of the music and dance of all other countries. Thousands dance to the Cuban Rhumba, all are intrigued by the enchanting Calypso, and lately the Mambo [has] taken the imagination of the dancing public. The drums of Haiti are common knowledge and the Voodoo tales have brought out the adventurer in the soul of many. In more subdued forms, the primitive rhythms and art patterns have crept into our everyday life to a much greater extent than we realize. — Caribbean Festival program, 1952 (San Juan, Puerto Rico)

Building on Mimi Sheller's prior work on the book *Aluminum Dreams* (MIT Press 2014), and co-production of the film *Fly Me to the Moon* (Esther Figueroa, 2019) about the bauxite and aluminum industry, plus Martin's expertise in

Caribbean music, this paper will offer a close reading of the Caribbean Festival program, along with the sound recordings that Cook produced for Alcoa, and the illustrations by Bingham. We will examine Alcoa as an empire-building company, promoting archipelagic travel through the Caribbean, and its modalities of tourism promotion and music recording that let tourists bring a little bit of the islands home with them. We will also consider the travel of the musicians and performers themselves, and the connections of imperial production and consumption that were built musically across the archipelago.

Works Cited

Figuroa, Esther. *Fly Me to the Moon: On Planet Earth Everything is Connected*. 2019. Sheller, Mimi. *Aluminum Dreams: The Making of Light Modernity*. MIT Press, 2014.

Unmasking Maps, Unmaking Narratives: Towards an Archipelagic Cartography *Steffen Wöll*

Found on cave walls in present-day France, some of the earliest known maps do not partition the surface of the earth but show constellations of the night sky. While we know little about the people who made them, we feel that they, much like us, looked beyond landlocked bordering for meaning and connections. On a basic level, maps are arrangements of symbols into systems of meaning. They are acts of poiesis through which people bring something into being that did not exist before, creating interfaces between epistemes / ideologies and human desires to observe and control space. As powerful human artifacts, maps (re)connect temporally and spatially distant experiences, hence underlining Doreen Massey's concept of place as «the ever-changing outcome of complex sets of relations.» Acknowledging that mapped spaces are constructed not just of sight but also of memories, affect, sound, and tactile experience, this paper uses an archipelagic and mobility studies lens to explore how «alternative» mapmaking practices unravel the homogenization of spatial imaginations under conditions of imperialism and globalization. Concretely, the paper suggests that maps and other cultural artifacts work as an epistemic archipelago of counter-discourses to imperial mapmaking traditions through their emphasis on connectivity, interstices, mobilities, memories, flows, and polysemic knowledges.

Since the Columbian and subsequent «discoveries» of the New World, the Antillean expression «*fukú americanus*» denotes what Junot Díaz in *The Brief*

Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao translated as «the Curse and the Doom of the New World.» Historically, this *fukú* was visualized most strikingly in a flood of maps that outlined both the curse and course of empires alongside (is)lands, resources, ethnic boundaries, and the routes on which to most effectively navigate and exploit them. Early modern mapmaking postulated cartographic reason and a mathematical view of the world, undergirded by a cultural imaginary that bifurcated the globe into terrestrial (Euroamerican / Atlantic) and liquid (Oceanic / Pacific) hemispheres. The nineteenth century's accelerating imperialist projects of the United States saw maps no longer merely as navigational tools or decorative objects but also as didactic utilities that mediated, encoded, and reified national core narratives of historical cohesion, geopolitical power, and racial hierarchies. While educational systems continue to approach maps and atlases as visual data sets that impart order, security, and stability, the absence of clear boundaries—for instance in maps illustrating the westward expansion of the US—has become equally beneficial to agendas of nation and empire building by engendering an imperialistic dialog between the archipelagic insularity of borderlands and the monolith of an intercontinental nation within a North American mainland.

The goal of this paper is to operationalize paradigms from archipelagic and mobility studies in an effort of bringing to light spatial practices, imaginations, and traditions that question the authority of imperialist visual vocabularies. This will be done through case studies and close readings of sources such as Micronesian navigational charts made from sticks and seashells, mnemonic Congolese Lukasa remembrance boards, or maps of Pacific archipelagoes by Tahitian Polynesian navigator Tupaia. I will also discuss maps that instrumentalize accepted conventions to express social critique, for example William Bunge's «Where Commuters Run Over Black Children on the Pointes-Down-

town Track» (1971). Investigating these alternative ways of mapping gives access to practices and knowledges that may appear fragmentary or insular but represent archipelagoes of interconnected and highly mobile resistances to monolithic «western» styles of allocating and commodifying space.

Layered Maps: Black Geographies and Archipelagic (Im)mobility

Nicole Waller

My project attempts to connect scholarship in Black Geographies, mobility studies, and African American literature with this call to draw out the oceanic and archipelagic in African American texts. I am particularly interested in the ways in which ship and island spaces figure both as sites of immobilization and mobility in African American writing—a classic <Black Atlantic> concern. However, I focus specifically on the ways in which these ship and island spaces are employed to redraw the continental map of the US as an archipelagic space enabling Black mobility. What my project seeks to contribute is a reading of the archipelagic not primarily in the tension between the bounded and the relational, but in the tension between immobility / incarceration and mobility, a central theme of African American literature. This tension, as I want to show, is often the beginning of a transformative process of spacemaking that leaves the national map intact but adds another layer. The narratives I look at produce such double-layered maps of the US—one national, one archipelagic—interposed upon each other. They must be deciphered on two planes, one that traces Black incarceration and immobilization, and one that seeks to enable movement.

In their introduction to *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods argue that Black people in North America are frequently relegated to the «elsewhere» of official national maps (3). One of their metaphors for envisioning the existence of Black people in geographical space is the ocean, which carries with it connotations of the Middle Passage,

enslavement, and death. However, McKittrick and Woods also evoke the ocean as a space which fully exists on official maps but has an underwater topography that is frequently unmapped and unknown. «This tension,» they write, «between the mapped and the unknown, reconfigures knowledge, suggesting that places, experiences, histories, and people that <no one knows> do exist, *within our present geographic order*» (4). Building both on the work of McKittrick and Woods and Tiffany Lethabo King's conception of *The Black Shoals*, I trace such double mappings in African American literary works. These works, as I want to show, negotiate both an imperial national map that serves to enslave, incarcerate, and immobilize Black people, and another layer conceived as—albeit ambivalently connoted and fragile—*island and ocean spaces that enable the protagonists not only to move, but to set adrift the upper layer.*

So far, I will draw on examples from Ta-Nehisi Coates' 2019 novel *The Water Dancer* and Victor LaValle's 2017 novel *The Changeling*. The nineteenth-century landscape of *The Water Dancer* maps a continental US that contains, both in its Northern and Southern parts, sites of surveillance and terror for the Black protagonists. As the protagonist Hiram develops the power to magically traverse space (and take people with him into relative safety) under the tutelage of a character resembling Harriet Tubman, the continental map is redrawn by a new form of the underground railroad. Harriet describes this form of teleportation as «Conduction» but adds that it necessitates the presence of water. In her explanation, it is a way of linking islands (280).

The Water Dancer thus creates two maps: one of a continental United States that contains a Southern plantation landscape and a Northern landscape of seeming but treacherous freedom, and an archipelagic one created by Hiram and Harriet's hypermobility, which remaps the continent as islands to

be bridged in commemoration of the transatlantic escape of first-generation enslaved Africans' magical capabilities or returning across the sea. In Victor Lavalle's 2017 novel *The Changeling*, the immobilizing map of surveillance and the hidden map of mobility also seem to exist in the same space, but on different planes, and the spaces of mobility can only be detected by a few (Black) persons, most of them female. Navigating in the waters of New York's East River, the protagonist Apollo detects a community of runaway women and their children living in freedom on an island just beside Rikers Island, a prison site. This <other> island has so far escaped mapping and detection, and despite its eventual destruction by forces of white supremacy, it functions as an insurgent site that triggers Apollo's remapping of the land around him in a way that evokes national allegory and fractures national coherence.

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The Americas: A Relational or Abyssal Geography? *Conversation: Barbara Gföllner and Jonathan Pugh*

This interview between Barbara Gföllner and Jonathan Pugh explores archipelagic thinking, transnational American Studies, islandness and recent debates in critical Black Studies. Notably, it works by drawing out two distinct ways, or analytical approaches, in which American Studies can be taken beyond understandings of the nation-state as a fixed and bounded object. Both seek to move beyond modern frameworks of reasoning, a linear telos of progress, fixed grids of space and time, which are widely argued to have supported American exceptionalism. The first, more common analytical approach, can be situated within the broader <relational> and <ontological> turns that have swept across the social sciences and humanities in recent decades, involving turns towards such tropes as assemblages, networks, flows, mobilities, post- and more-than-human approaches. The second analytical approach is, what Pugh (in his current research with David Chandler) calls abyssal thought. It has yet to emerge as prominently in debate, but poses a significant challenge to the relational and ontological turns. Central, for abyssal work is how, as we learn from Du Bois, Fanon and Césaire, the world cannot be separated out from the violence that forged the anti-black modernist ontology of <human as subject> and <world as object>.

For abyssal work, however, the task is not to rework the subject of modernity in terms of relational ontologies and epistemologies, but rather one of refusal, of undoing the world. This interview explores how the abyssal project is thus anti-ontological and non-relational; negating and holding in «suspension» (Harney and Moten, 2021: 158) the violence of modern / ontological world-making.

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Archipelagic Imperial Spaces and Mobilities

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