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## Across currents: Connections between Atlantic and (Trans)Pacific studies

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Current (geo)political and economic developments, as well as the ongoing transpacific flow of people, ideas, and goods have triggered a surge of interest in the Pacific as a region, an object of academic study, as well as a source of important political, scholarly, and artistic work by Pacific Islanders themselves. Scholarly work in the humanities has been especially marked by the attempt to bring the Pacific region, as well as Pacific studies as a field, into a critical relation with other areas of study – such as Atlantic, oceanic, and archipelagic studies. This approach offers considerable potential, but also a number of pitfalls.

Promoting a conversation between Pacific studies and other fields of research runs the danger of reducing the former to a merely relational existence. Further, there is a risk of repeating Euro-American imperial discourses, which have subjected the Pacific as a region and its inhabitants to various projections and desires ever since James Cook’s voyages to and mappings of the Pacific. In contrast, Tongan scholar Eveli Hau’ofa in his powerful essay “Our Sea of Islands” urged for a re-examination of the Pacific, not through the lens of western epistemologies and as an object of colonial desire, but rather as a space in its own right, with its islands and communities continuously shaped and connected – not isolated – by the oceans surrounding them. According to Hau’ofa, Pacific Islander identities are simultaneously characterized and linked by the rootedness of their island homes and the fluidity of the oceans, facilitating a multitude of multidirectional exchanges predating and transcending European migration into the region.<sup>1</sup> His conceptualization of “Oceania” steers attention to myths, legends, narratives, and (oral) traditions of Pacific Islanders as a source for framing Pacific Islander identities, and since its publication has offered an important point of departure for scholarly and political work reconsidering the Pacific on its own terms.

Despite the fact that questions of colonialism and empire, dispossession and sovereignty, migration and identity can be regarded as transoceanic phenomena, and historical developments remain entangled across oceans, scholars in Pacific studies have warned that the Pacific and its history are distinct from the Atlantic World and cannot be

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subsumed or reduced to the same concepts.<sup>2</sup> Historian David Igler points out multiple differences between Atlantic and Pacific worlds:

Numerous factors distinguish these two ocean worlds, not the least of which are timing (the Atlantic's "Columbian exchange" was in full swing by the mid-1600s); scale (the Pacific is far larger than the Atlantic and more difficult to imagine as *one* oceanic world); large demographic shifts (such as transatlantic migrations, the majority of which were comprised of enslaved Africans); contact with indigenous populations (most Pacific groups remained buffered from sustained contact until the late 1700s); and the nature of global commerce (market capitalism hit parts of the Pacific within decades of contact).<sup>3</sup>

The vastness of the Pacific might account for the diversity of peoples and histories within the Pacific region, which many scholars regard as a challenge for the conceptualization of a Pacific World – a circumstance that has led historian Matt Matsuda to call for the plurality of Pacific worlds shaped by what he calls "trans-localism."<sup>4</sup> Although the Atlantic and the Pacific have both been shaped by voluntary and forced migration, paying attention to the specific contexts and circumstances of these migratory movements is, of course, crucial. Migrations into the Pacific date back 50,000 years when humans settled Australia, and "[t]he movement of Austronesian speakers across the islands of the Pacific is one of the great human migrations of the past 5,000 years."<sup>5</sup> The transpacific migration of Asians has been a considerable factor in the historical development of the Pacific region: from the late sixteenth century onwards, the Chinese, for example, were important agents in the history of Spanish Manila as well as Batavia and other Dutch-ruled cities in Southeast Asia. In the 1750s, Chinese migration to other destinations in Southeast Asia increased.<sup>6</sup> During the gold rush in the United States, the Chinese participated in large numbers in transpacific migration, and today Chinese immigration to North America remains high.<sup>7</sup> The transpacific, in this sense, "has come to express the ways that different Asian, Pacific Island, and American cultures and communities mutually shape one another as they circulate throughout the region."<sup>8</sup>

From a transpacific perspective, these groups have been confronted with a distinctive set of historical and political developments, namely the militarization and nuclearization of the Pacific.<sup>9</sup> For Setsu Shigematsu and Keith L. Camacho, the militarization of the Pacific must be regarded as an "extension of colonialism" which has played a crucial role in the history of Asian and Pacific Islanders across the region.<sup>10</sup> Closely related to the militarization of the Pacific is the notion of the "nuclear Pacific," a term Erin Suzuki borrows from Jonathan Weisgall.<sup>11</sup> Nuclear testing has not only created another wave of displacement in the Pacific, it also ultimately led to the development of an ecological consciousness in the region.<sup>12</sup> The recent threat of climate change and specifically the rising waters of the Pacific Ocean can only serve to intensify these ecological concerns.

In spite of these specificities, this collection of essays argues for the benefits of an exchange between scholars in Atlantic studies and (trans)Pacific studies. In this regard, Paul Lyons and Ty P. Kāwika Tengan's discussion of a productive relationship between Native Pacific studies and American studies in their introduction to a special issue of *American Quarterly* titled "Pacific Currents," offers valuable arguments for the kind of relationship envisioned in our collection.<sup>13</sup> Borrowing from Lyons and Tengan, the essays collected here argue that bringing the Pacific and the Atlantic into a productive relation is not so much about finding ways to juxtapose the two fields, or host the one in the

other, but rather about what the meeting spaces of the two potentially reveal.<sup>14</sup> The exploration of these intersections is therefore not intended to give currency to the field of Pacific studies only through its relation to Atlantic studies, nor does it advocate an exchange between the two solely on the basis of a productive and shared critique of American studies or the American empire. Instead, this study follows in the footsteps of scholars engaged in a transpacific studies approach to the Pacific, for example, Rob Wilson, Denise Cruz, Steven Yao, John Carlos Rowe, and Arif Dirlik. Instead of regarding Atlantic studies as a rival to its Pacific counterpart, these scholars privilege the common reference points and shared interests of Atlantic and (trans)Pacific studies, while nonetheless pointing out crucial contextual differences between the two fields.

Particularly the work of Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy's writings on the "Black Atlantic" have been cited as necessary points of departure for understanding the conditions of diaspora and the routes of imperialism in the Pacific. It seems to be no coincidence, then, that Epeli Hau'ofa's essay "Our Sea of Islands" cites the poem "The Sea is History" by the Caribbean poet Derek Walcott.<sup>15</sup> Given Walcott's influential role both for Caribbean studies and Atlantic studies, citing his poem – which steers attention to the sea as a material and symbolic site of history, only navigable in non-linear movements – gestures toward the potential of an invigorating and inspiring, as well as very necessary exchange between Atlantic and (trans)Pacific studies and the two oceans at the center of their attention.<sup>16</sup>

In a similar fashion, Rob Wilson suggests in *Reimagining the American Pacific* that the triangulated spaces of Paul Gilroy's "Black Atlantic" and his own conception of a transnational "Asia/Pacific" both highlight the impossibility of building a white national identity predicated on "retrospective narratives of monolingual/monoracial unity."<sup>17</sup> Sharing Wilson's notion of a triangulated network in the Pacific, Janet Hoskins and Viet Thanh Nguyen propose, in their introduction to *Transpacific Studies: Framing an Emerging Field*, that any approach to the field of Pacific studies must be geared toward investigating the triangulated relationship between "Asia," "America," and the "Pacific" simultaneously, thereby embedding past imperial projections of the Pacific within a network of alternate narratives of conquest, commerce, conversion, and collaboration.<sup>18</sup> By thus framing the Pacific as a transpacific contact zone between Asia, America, and the Pacific Islands, Hoskins and Nguyen highlight that the "Pacific" as a trope exceeds the geographic limits of the ocean itself and thereby questions the notion of national territorialities and identities.<sup>19</sup> Dirlik and Rowe have respectively argued that when considering this complex nature of the Pacific as a criss-crossing network of exchange – which includes various Euro-American imperial narratives and post-colonial counternarratives – the notion of a triangulated relationship is a crucial point of departure. This triangulation enables a theorizing of the Pacific, which aims at framing the region for the purpose of analysis, without buying into the imperial construction of the Pacific as a geographically and discursively demarcated territory.<sup>20</sup> In this vein and arguing from a postcolonial perspective, Nguyen and Hoskins indicate that the Atlantic and the Pacific are linked by "Afro-Asian intersections," in the counterhegemonic efforts of groups of African and Asian descent in the twentieth century.<sup>21</sup>

The shared subject of the critique of U.S. nationalism, colonialism, and imperialism in Atlantic and Pacific studies is reflected in Nicole Waller's and Amy Kaplan's work on Guantánamo Bay. In "Terra Incognita," Waller investigates the legal discourse of the Guantánamo Bay detention center and how it aims to contain the fluidity of movement and traffic in the Atlantic world in the twentieth century, in order to safeguard and demarcate U.S. national borders.<sup>22</sup> Reading

Waller's work together with Kaplan's essay "Where is Guantánamo?" reveals that the legal discourse that shaped the Guantánamo Bay detention center can be traced back to the military campaign that brought the territory into U.S. possession in the first place: the Spanish-American War of 1898.<sup>23</sup> Their work clarifies, then, that the very same military campaign that rationalized the incorporation and legal configuration of extra-continental territories in the Atlantic is also the very campaign that crucially shaped the strategies and discourses of U.S. Pacific imperialism.<sup>24</sup> Through this, Waller and Kaplan point both to a historical connection between the Atlantic and the Pacific and its tangible and invigorating impact on Atlantic studies, as well as the shared subject of the imperial legal discourse of territorial incorporation. By highlighting the potential affinities of Atlantic studies and Pacific studies in a critique of U.S. imperialism – including its fixation on westward expansion that relegates the Atlantic and the Pacific into two distinct and disconnected historical phases and geographical spaces – they set the tone for the work of scholars interested in the ways in which the Atlantic and the Pacific simultaneously have been and continue to be relevant spaces of negotiation of U.S. imperialism, postcolonial discourses, and political efforts.

Focusing particularly on the ocean and its accompanying discourses as a shared subject matter and site of negotiation of both Atlantic and Pacific studies, scholars like Philip E. Steinberg, William Boelhower, and John Carlos Rowe have emphasized that both Atlantic and transpacific studies profit from a joint discussion of the notion of "oceanic discourse" that Hau'ofa has promoted. In "Transpacific Studies," Rowe suggests that borrowing "oceanic discourse" from Atlantic studies contributes to theorizing the Pacific region not as an isolated geographic region but rather as a contact zone marked by a series of flows and circulations.<sup>25</sup> Atlantic studies' oceanic discourse recognizes the shared perspectives of insular Pacific communities and the imperial narratives that have shaped the region, without pigeonholing them into the binaries of colonizer and colonized.<sup>26</sup> Steinberg employs a comparative reading of approaches to oceanic discourses in both transpacific and Atlantic studies, to elaborate on the potential, but also the pitfalls of theorizing the ocean.<sup>27</sup> Steinberg's critique of the current research in oceanic studies which reads the ocean region as "a series of (terrestrial) points linked by connections, not the actual (oceanic) space of connections," draws on the work by Dirlik and Gilroy, thus implicitly highlighting the productivity of exchanging ideas and theories between the fields of Atlantic studies and (trans)Pacific studies.<sup>28</sup> Working at the intersection of these two approaches, Steinberg puts the actual material space of the ocean at the center of oceanic discourse.

The materiality of the world's oceans and the impact of human activity on maritime ecologies – particularly through globalized economic networks and routes of trade – is a central concern of current ecocritical debates across all disciplines. In the introduction to their anthology *Postcolonial Green*, editors Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt draw attention to how these ecocritical issues increasingly intersect with the agendas of postcolonial movements and campaigns.<sup>29</sup> By emphasizing the transnational trajectories of both globalized economies, as well as of postcolonial and environmental movements, their intersectional approach remaps the globe in ways that run counter to traditional divisions of oceanic spaces which rely on nationalized border regimes. In this sense, a comparative reading of Atlantic and Pacific studies with an emphasis of transnational affinities is inspired by and aims to contribute to such an ecocritical approach.

An analysis of the overlaps and incongruities between Atlantic studies and (trans)Pacific studies necessarily enters into a productive relationship with what Brian Russel Roberts

and Michelle Ann Stephens have termed “Archipelagic American studies.”<sup>30</sup> This emerging field is invested in refocusing American studies from a continental fixation toward an inclusion of oceanic, water, and island spaces in considerations of U.S. identity, nationhood, and territory.<sup>31</sup> Geared toward decentering the North American continent – which still is a linchpin of U.S. national identity and a crucial metaphor for legitimizing United States’ imperial and neo-imperial campaigns in the oceanic and island spaces of the Pacific, the Atlantic, and the Caribbean – an archipelagic approach builds on and reciprocates with research on the two oceanic spaces surrounding the continent.

In spite of these already numerous points of departure for exploring connections between Atlantic and Pacific studies that the aforementioned scholars (and many others) have carved out in their work – questions of diaspora and mobility, oceanic discourses, indigeneity, (post)colonial legacies, and imperialist histories – a systematic analysis of the reciprocities and incongruities between the two fields and their subjects of study has yet to be conducted. This volume contributes to such an analysis. It explores connections and reciprocities between Atlantic studies and a transpacific approach to Pacific studies, including the potential discursive, topical, and historical overlaps of the two fields, and carves out mutual concerns and theoretical affinities, but also divergent approaches and differences. It examines how both Atlantic and (trans)Pacific Studies are part of global currents, overlapping in topics, approaches, discourses, and goals, without glossing over fundamental differences that characterize the individual fields. Directed at scholars with a background in (trans)Pacific and/or Atlantic studies, or working at the intersection of the two, this project attempts to stimulate mutual exchange between the two fields, to intensify their impact within the current transnational focus of literary and cultural studies, to encourage the questioning of well-mapped paths of inquiry, and to outline new theoretical approaches and concepts productive for both fields.

With its long tradition of publishing cutting-edge research in the field of Atlantic studies, but also an interest in challenging the notion of the Atlantic world as an enclosed space, *Atlantic Studies: Global Currents* continues to offer a productive and inspiring venue for interrogating conceptions of the Atlantic. Accordingly, the direction of this collection was inspired by the journal’s orientation as much as by our own background as scholars in the field of American studies. While the fields of trans(Pacific) studies and Atlantic studies are necessarily interdisciplinary, this collection mostly reflects our own interests as well as the expertise of the European, American, and Pacific Islander contributors, many of whom examine how concepts and observations from the field of the Atlantic could be used productively in a Pacific context. Despite this trajectory, we believe that their contributions also enter into conversation with the ideas of Pacific scholars and can ultimately make us rethink the Atlantic. The Pacific voices we have included in this volume are meant to further encourage this conversation and exchange across currents.

As bodies of waters and spaces of scattered islands, the Atlantic and the Pacific can be conceptualized both in terms of island and oceanic discourses. In her seminal book *Routes and Roots* Elizabeth DeLoughrey, for example, has productively used Kamau Brathwaite’s concept of “tidalectics” to describe a transoceanic imaginary of Caribbean and Pacific islands, and Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s concept of the “Repeating Island” in the Caribbean might lend itself to islands in the Pacific. In his contribution “‘O Carib Isle!’ or ‘Scattered Moluccas?’ Édouard Glissant’s Pacific Relation,” John Carlos Rowe continues this tradition

of oceanic comparatism in his analysis of one of the foremost Caribbean scholars and his work on the Pacific, that is, the Federated States of Micronesia, in relation to the Caribbean. Rowe's interrogation into how Édouard Glissant's "philosophy and poetics of relation might produce a *politics* of relation between the Pacific, Caribbean, and Atlantic worlds" also urges scholars to remain attentive to the "differential realities" specific to the regions. In "Crosscurrents (Three Poems)," Chamorro poet and scholar Craig Santos Perez also highlights oceanic affinities across the globe. His poetry negotiates islands and oceans as metaphors, but also as material sites of political and cultural struggle, and focuses on the Pacific Islanders' perspective connected to these sites. His work explores still virulent imperialist discourses of continentality and globalization, and thus exemplifies how scholarly and poetic work cannot and should not be divorced in many Pacific contexts.

Parallels between the Pacific and the Atlantic have often been drawn on the basis of historical developments that have shaped both oceanic spaces. Among these are discourses of discovery and exploration, colonialism and empire, migration and exploitation. In "The motions of the oceans: Circulation, displacement, expansion, and Carlos Bulosan's *America is in the Heart*," Steven Yao distinguishes three specific "oceanic motions" that define the narrative of the Atlantic world: *circulation/commerce*, *displacement/diaspora*, and *expansion/empire*. Yao argues that these dyads can also be productive for our understanding of the transpacific. Examining Carlos Bulosan's autobiographical narrative, *America is in the Heart*, a central text in Asian American studies, Yao demonstrates both the usefulness of Atlantic concepts for the transpacific, but also the distinctiveness of the transpacific as shaped by the cultural and literary contributions of the Asian diaspora.

As a concept, the Black Atlantic has fundamentally shaped the field of Atlantic studies and is one of the central transatlantic narratives. It comes as no surprise that the concept of the Black Atlantic has been one of the most productive for the study of the Pacific. Recent publications try to excavate a Black Pacific that has been represented in and created by African American narratives or consider the relevance of the African diaspora and their struggle in the Atlantic for the people in the Pacific.<sup>32</sup> Following this trajectory, Pilar Cuder-Domínguez and Alexandra Ganser examine the importance of the Black Atlantic for our understanding of the Pacific's past and present. Pilar Cuder-Domínguez's article "A mari usque ad mare: Wayde Compton's British Columbian Afroperiphery" argues that the author's work can be read in terms of a long neglected Black Pacific, which exhibits both continuities with and differences from the Black (Canadian) Atlantic. Constituting a contact zone between black Canadian and other historical groups, Compton's Black Pacific exemplifies the simultaneously regional and global formation of the transpacific. Alexandra Ganser's "From the Black Atlantic to the bleak Pacific: Re-reading 'Benito Cereno'" employs the trope of piracy to direct attention to the Pacific dimension of Herman Melville's novella.<sup>33</sup> Interrogating the significance of Black Atlantic histories and epistemologies for the Pacific, Ganser argues that the extension of the slave trade into the Pacific foreshadows what she calls the "bleak Pacific" emerging in the context of U.S. imperial expansion into the Pacific.

The critical analysis of discourses of imperialism in the Pacific (U.S. imperialism among them) presents us with another important current within transpacific studies. Juliane Braun's contribution "'Strange Beasts of the Sea': Captain Cook, the sea otter and the creation of a transoceanic American Empire" also follows this line of interrogation. Her study



explores how Cook's voyages in search of the Northwest Passage became the starting point for an increased interest in the Pacific and its economic resources. Tracing the discourses surrounding the recording and dissemination of new knowledge about the Pacific's sea otter, Braun's contribution sheds light on how the academic fixation on the early United States as either a continental and/or Atlantic nation glosses over ways in which the United States has always related itself to bodies of water beyond the Atlantic, making it a transoceanic empire since its very inception.

Kariann Akemi Yokota has pointed out that "Westerners in the early modern period worked tirelessly to establish connections between these two aquatic systems [Atlantic and Pacific]. ... Yet, curiously, academics have separated these geographic regions into disparate fields of inquiry."<sup>34</sup> Our two concluding contributions reexamine these geological, geographic, and discursive connections and disconnections. In "Connecting Atlantic and Pacific: Theorizing the Arctic," Nicole Waller, pointing both to the past and the future, analyzes the complicated role of the Arctic as a space of transit between the Atlantic and the Pacific via the Northwest Passage, and simultaneously as a space of sovereignty and territory in its own right. Due to the prospect of a climate change-induced year-round ice-free Northwest Passage, and the consequent renewed encroachment of Inuit sovereignty, the Arctic, as a "new" ocean between Atlantic and Pacific, offers the potential of a productive reciprocal theorization of both the Arctic and of the oceans it dis/connects. However, such theorizations, Waller cautions, should always keep in sight the political ramifications for indigenous sovereignty struggles in the region. William Boelhower's study "Framing a new ocean genealogy: The case of Venetian cartography in the early modern period" essentially expands the contemporary notion of the interconnectedness of oceanic spaces, by reaching back into the past, to sixteenth-century Venetian cartography. The modes of mapping the sea at the time reveal an understanding of oceans and islands as an interconnected oceanic world – echoing Epele Hau'ofa's notion of the ocean as a "sea of islands," which is connecting rather than separating peoples and regions. Cutting right to the heart of the argument of this volume, then, Boelhower's contribution posits that Venetian chartmakers offer "an ideal and epistemologically rich starting point for an inclusive and interconnected history of multiple oceanic worlds."

These contributions exemplify the multiple connections between the Atlantic and the Pacific and the respective scholarly fields. Many of the essays use Atlantic concepts to describe the Pacific – and demonstrate that this endeavor can be productive for our understanding of the transpacific. Some papers trace imperialist routes from the Atlantic world to the Pacific, and others stress the oceanic connectedness of the Pacific and the Atlantic. While the space of the volume quite naturally limits the scope of its content, we do believe these attempts at rereading the oceans can facilitate further debate and encourage scholars to explore, for example, how Asian and indigenous concepts from the Pacific can contribute to our understanding of the Atlantic world; how narratives of militarization, nuclearization, and ecology reflect on the Atlantic past and present; and how scholars and perspectives from other fields and/or non-anglophone traditions can promote this exchange.

In "Crossing oceans: An afterword," Keith Camacho revisits the main themes and trajectories of this project and its contributions to underline the innovative potential of an exchange between the Atlantic and the Pacific. Gesturing toward the scholarly and literary

work that has created a space favorable for this reciprocal exploration of these two oceans and disciplines, Camacho urges us to seize the opportunities that such a space offers to envision additional avenues of collaboration. To Camacho, therefore, this collection of essays and the debates it fosters are an important and necessary point of departure toward an intensified exchange between the Atlantic and the Pacific that necessarily has to go beyond the academy, and needs to include scholars, artists, activists, and politicians alike.

## Notes

1. Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," 7–8.
2. See Yokota, "Transatlantic and Transpacific Connections"; Armitage and Bashford, "Introduction," 9–10.
3. Iglar, *The Great Ocean*, 10.
4. Iglar, *The Great Ocean*; Matsuda, *Pacific Worlds*, 5 (italics in original).
5. McKeown, "Movement," 145.
6. Reid, "Introduction," xxi–xxii, xxiii–xxiv.
7. McKeown, "Movement," 151, 163.
8. Suzuki, "Transpacific," 352.
9. See Suzuki, "Transpacific," 357; see Teaiwa, "Reflections on Militourism"; see DeLoughrey, "Heliotropes: Solar Ecologies and Pacific Radiations."
10. Shigematsu and Camacho, "Introduction: Militarized Currents," xv.
11. Suzuki, "Transpacific," 360.
12. See Suzuki, "Transpacific," 360; in her study, Suzuki refers to Elizabeth DeLoughrey in "The Myth of Isolates," which deals extensively with the issues of ecology, ecocriticism, and colonialism in the Pacific.
13. See Lyons and Tengan, "Introduction: Pacific Currents."
14. See *Ibid.*, 548.
15. See Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands," x.
16. See Birkle and Waller, "Introduction," 5.
17. Wilson, *Reimagining the American Pacific*, 5.
18. Nguyen and Hoskins, "Introduction: Transpacific Studies," 2–3.
19. See *Ibid.*, 2–3, 26.
20. See Dirlík, *What is in a Rim?*, 15; see Rowe, "Transpacific Studies," 137.
21. Nguyen and Hoskins, "Introduction: Transpacific Studies," 8.
22. Waller, "Terra Incognita," 364.
23. *Ibid.*, 362.
24. See Kaplan, *Anarchy of Empire* and Kaplan, "Where is Guantánamo?"
25. Rowe, "Transpacific Studies," 137.
26. *Ibid.*; see also Boelhower, "I'll Teach you How to Flow."
27. Steinberg, "Of other Seas," 156–157.
28. *Ibid.*, 157–158.
29. See Roos and Hunt, "Introduction," 2–3.
30. See Roberts and Williams, *Archipelagic American Studies*.
31. *Ibid.*, 2, 7.
32. See Taketani, *The Black Pacific Narrative*; see Shilliam, *The Black Pacific*.
33. Yunte Huang begins his seminal book *Transpacific Imaginations* with an anecdote on Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, pointing out that, just like "Benito Cereno," the novel is often read as a tale set in the Atlantic. Both Ganser's and Huang's analyses of Melville's work compellingly demonstrate that revisiting canonical texts like Melville's from a transpacific angle, reveals (dis)continuities of Atlantic and Pacific imaginations, which have been overlooked, underestimated, or undertheorized in the past.
34. Yokota, "Transatlantic and Transpacific Connections," 205.

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