While definitions of “transnationalism” remain contested, one relatively common thread among the various conceptual approaches involves an interrogation of the idea of universalism, the idea of there being only one true center of gravity. This involves a skepticism, as Naoki Sakai puts it, about Jürgen Habermas’s equation in The Theory of Communicative Action of the “claim to universality with our Occidental understanding of the world” (1984, 44), something that, in Sakai’s eyes, characterizes Habermas’s predominantly Eurocentric intellectual project (Sakai, 1998, 477). Pointing out how “the relationship between the West and the non-West seems to follow the old and familiar formula of master/slave” (ibid., 487), Sakai notes that until the late nineteenth century, “it was understandable and partially inevitable to conceive of history simply as the process of Westernization (Europeanization),” in which “the entire world was viewed from the top” (ibid., 488). The “top,” in this case, was of course Europe, and the rest of the world was supposed to acknowledge that continent’s historical sense of its own primacy, a position assumed in the twentieth century more by America. Harry Harootunian, whose particular interest is in Japan, writes cogently of how “one of the more remarkable but unobserved occurrences invariably effaced by area studies is the obvious fact that the peoples of the world outside of Euro-America have been forced to live lives comparatively by virtue of experiencing some form of colonization or subjection enforced by the specter of imperialism” (2005, 26). Harootunian’s understanding of how the Japanese in recent times “were compelled to live comparatively—life in double time—as a condition of their modern transformation” (ibid.) might be extended to the principles of transnationalism more generally, to which double perspectives, reflecting how “comparison always involves relations of power,” as Pheng Cheah puts it (2009, 531), are endemic. This is different in kind both from the radically decontextualized world of com-
parative literature in its more traditional forms, and also from the threat of homogeneity that Gayatri Spivak associates with globalization, whose financial apparatus involves “the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere” (2012, 338). Instead, transnationalism involves at the very least some kind of structural reciprocity, not merely adding to international influences that have had an impact on Europe and the United States or charting America’s role in the wider world, but rather challenging the categories that consolidated particular versions of national identity in the first place.

Werner Sollors referred back in 1998 to “an age of transnationalism” (1998, 3), one that he associated in a US institutional context with a gradual movement away from monolingualism under the pressure of greater visibility for diverse ethnic cultures, even though Sollors noted that the “blind spot of language is shared by the ‘conservative’ and ‘radical’ sides in the multiculturalism debate” (ibid., 5). Sollors’s point was that a simple incapacity on the part of scholars to read anything other than English had unduly stunted critical accounts of American literature, whose development has in fact since its earliest days been intertwined with an “impressive” range of different languages (ibid., 2). Since the time Sollors was writing, both the trauma of 9/11 and radical shifts in the world economy have rendered the position of the United States at the center of its own imaginary universe still more precarious. Judith Butler’s analysis of the “heightened vulnerability” (2006, xi) of the United States after 9/11, when both the literal and symbolic breach of its borders involved the crucial “loss of a certain horizon of experience, a certain sense of the world itself as a national entitlement” (ibid., 39), has been matched by hardheaded economic analyses from more conservative perspectives that corroborates what Butler calls this “decentering of First Worldism” (ibid., 8). According to Adam Garfinkle, a former speechwriter for both of George W. Bush’s secretaries of state, Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice, the twenty-first century will mark the first time in four hundred years that the globe has had a “normative environment” that is “non-Western,” and this is likely to have a profound impact on how American studies comes to be reconceived in transnational terms (2011, n.p.). Shadowed by the consolidation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, in the middle years of the twentieth century American studies operated as an intellectual field that extended American cultural influence into beleaguered Europe, beset as that continent then was by threats from a divided Germany and Warsaw Pact countries more generally. But in future decades, as President Barack Obama acknowledged during a trip to Australia in 2012, the strategic focus of the United States is likely to turn more toward Asia, for both military and economic reasons.

This in turn will position Australia in particular as a potential American
intermediary and ally against China, much as Britain was positioned against the Soviet Union in the 1950s. At the time of Obama’s Australian visit, the Washington Post quoted an anonymous source as saying that “Australia did not look all that important during the Cold War. But Australia looks much more important if your fascination is really with the Southeast Asia archipelago” (Uren 2012). This is not, of course, to advocate a simple replication of the old dynamics of Cold War American studies, organized as the field was around surreptitious government funding and the indirect influence of the Central Intelligence Agency, in a different geographical setting. But academic subjects are always interwoven in complex ways with a variety of theoretical and material infrastructures, and part of the remit of transnational American studies involves acknowledging how these political dynamics necessarily enter into the construction of the subject. Harootunian’s “double time” might thus be understood as a methodological as well as a contextual aspect of transnationalism: not only does this more materialistic kind of comparative approach juxtapose different national formations, but it also seeks to elucidate the messy terrain where abstract formulations intersect and collide with the more obdurate compulsions of political history. “History,” as Fredric Jameson reminds us, “is what hurts. It is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis,” for which it operates as “ground and untranscendable horizon” (1981, 102).

Such a sobering formulation carries particular relevance to transnational American studies, which has on occasions been hindered by a weightless utopian rhetoric, particularly in transpacific horizons that have not been as “untranscendable” as Jameson envisaged. It is, of course, easy enough to understand how such radically idealistic agendas have emerged, often as deliberately counterpointed critiques of U.S. imperialism. Paul Lyons, for example, punningly describes “American Pacifism” as forms of pacification or “structured ignorances” (2005, 10), in which US theories of “sexuality, masculinity, race, nation, or ecological movements” (ibid., 8) are simply imposed on the Pacific region without sufficient respect for native source materials, and in a way that is “damagingly unmindful of Oceanian epistemologies” (ibid., 9). Similarly, Yunte Huang reads nineteenth-century American authors such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Herman Melville, Mark Twain, and Henry Adams as “spokespersons for the nineteenth-century U.S. imperial vision” (2008, 7), arguing that they were concerned above all with imaginatively colonizing the Pacific as a natural extension, in transnational terms, of the westward domestic movement associated with Manifest Destiny. But, as Butler has remarked, to assume such a “single subject” of “US omnipotence” is to encode the kind of familiar political paranoia that “is fed by the fantasy of omnipotence” (2006, 9). US excursions across the Pa-
cific in the nineteenth century were complicated not only by encounters with native peoples but also by sporadic conflicts with the rival imperial power of Britain, which used its base in Australia to exert influence over large sections of Pacific island space. Melville in Typee chronicles not only issues of indigenous language but also the stand-off in the 1840s between Britain and America for control of the Sandwich Islands, now Hawaii, while the narrator of Melville’s subsequent novel, Omoo, chronicles how he spends time on an Australian whaling ship, the fictional Julia—mirroring the author’s adventures on an actual Australian whaler, the Lucy Ann, in 1842. The Julia is said to have been “fitted for a privateer out of a New England port during the War of 1812” before being “captured at sea by a British cruiser,” and at the time the narrative takes place, it is being “employed as a government packet in the Australian seas” ([1849] 1968, 9). The ship’s mixed provenance, moving from America to Australia via England, thus epitomizes the colonial métissage that structures Melville’s novel, enhancing the confusions that surround the very idea of national identity in Melville’s seafaring fiction. In this sense, Melville does not represent the Pacific Ocean as any kind of tabula rasa on which can be readily imposed the all-encompassing designs of US hegemony; instead, he superimposes turbulent Atlantic currents on Pacific waters to produce a more elusive mise-en-abîme, a space in which physical geography and political history do not entirely coincide with each other. The Pacific, according to this perspective, becomes an always already colonized expanse, where autochthonous cultures find themselves caught up in others’ struggles for power and dominion. The transpacific circuit has always been made up of imperial crosscurrents as well as aquatic flows and island domains, with these imperial pressures flowing back across the Pacific, from Britain’s settlement of Australia and New Zealand and from Germany’s involvement in New Guinea and Samoa. It is much too one-dimensional, in every sense of that word, to suggest that such imperializing narratives have only ever extended westward from California.

Arguing on principle against such impositions of external constraints on native peoples, the Tongan scholar Epeli Hau’ofa produced in 1993 a celebrated essay, “Our Sea of Islands,” in which he sought intellectually to justify an oceanic space “that had been boundless for ages before Captain Cook’s apotheosis” ([1993] 1999, 30). Hau’ofa argued against “derogatory and belittling views of indigenous cultures” (ibid., 28) imposed by a series of missionary and imperial forces, and he concluded optimistically that “we must not allow anyone to belittle us again and take away our freedom” (ibid., 37). Hau’ofa’s attempt to reclaim a romantic, mythological register for Oceania, one dominated by deterritorializing flows of water rather than the reified constructions of a land-based continent, has been influential in
Antipodean Transnationalism

the postmodern reinscription of Pacific island space as means of shattering what the University of Cyprus scholar Antonis Balasopoulos calls “the territorial cognitive map of imperial high modernity” (2008, 19). Balasopoulos links “postcolonial geopoetics” (ibid., 9) with what he calls an “islandness to come” (ibid., 23), a way of escaping “monological containment” through the geographical expropriation of “island form” (ibid., 23). Similarly, Elizabeth DeLoughrey undertakes a comparative study of Caribbean and Pacific islands to construct a “transoceanic imaginary” (2007, 37), extrapolating from the Pacific a sense of “our own location on a terraqueous globe, a watery planet that renders all landmasses into islands surrounded by sea” (ibid., 2). This version of “a tidalectic between land and sea” (ibid., 45) enables DeLoughrey to position the Pacific as a kind of pastoral space in which key political and ecological issues, such as nuclear fallout and environmental pollution, can be properly illuminated and clarified. While DeLoughrey carefully chronicles the ways in which “peoples of the sea” should be historicized (ibid., 26), there is still a predilection in her work and that of other California-based critics—Rob Wilson (2009) and Christopher Connery (1994 and 2012), for example—for using the Pacific as an exemplary or regenerative space. Arguing that “the rise in naturalized images of transoceanic diaspora derives from increased maritime territorialism” (2007, 30), DeLoughrey draws on Hau’ofa’s work to describe this ever-elusive sea as offering “new ways to destabilize natural and ethnic boundaries by drawing upon a transoceanic imaginary that reflects the origins of island cultures as well as their imbrications in the fluid trajectories of globalization” (ibid., 37). Connery, from his base in Santa Cruz, finds the whole agenda of transnationalism to be compliant with the ideologies of neoliberalism, associated in his mind with “symbolic analysts” (2012, 56) in the mold of Robert Reich, secretary of labor in the administration of President Bill Clinton, eager to transfer and exchange capital across national frontiers. In Connery’s eyes, Pacific studies should operate primarily as a form of resistance, a way of countering US hegemony by playing the neoliberal assumptions associated with “Pacific Rim discourse” (1994) off against alternative cultural vistas. For Connery, as for Whitman and Thoreau 150 years earlier, Asia functions as an apotheosized idea, a way of rendering corrupt landlocked regimes more open to a distant fluidity of spirit.

Connery also cites “Australian cultural studies” as an example of local resistance to American global hegemony (2012, 52), and it is true that this field as it emerged in Australia in the early 1990s defined itself, at least in part, in contrast to the kind of “neoliberal rhetoric” associated in the eyes of John Frow and Meaghan Morris with attempts on the part of Rupert Murdoch to fold Australia further into a US-based corporate culture (1993, vii). Over a
longer historical trajectory, however, antipodean transnationalism has always encompassed a much more extensive historical and geographical trajectory, involving pressures of British as well as American colonialism and the complications incumbent upon various forms of exchange between indigenous and white settler cultures. In 1989, *The Empire Writes Back*, a formative critical intervention in the field of postcolonial studies, was published by three Australian scholars—Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin—who sought to encompass within a postcolonial framework all countries whose literatures had characteristically “emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization,” while emphasizing “their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre” (2002, 2). In this configuration, which included the literatures of African and Caribbean countries as well as those of India, Australia, and New Zealand, Britain (rather than America) became the whipping boy for its attempt universally to impose “Eurocentric standards of judgment” (ibid., 7), and indeed the United States was defined as one of the countries falling under this postcolonial rubric since, despite “its current position of power, and the neo-colonizing role it has played . . . its relationship with the metropolitan centre as it evolved over the last two centuries has been paradigmatic for post-colonial literatures everywhere” (ibid., 2). However, the actual treatment of American literature in this book was nugatory, with the narratives of Charles Brockden Brown and James Fenimore Cooper being recognized only as “an important site of conflict within post-colonial literary cultures,” where “the desire of early American writers to compete on equal terms with their British counterparts clashed with the desire to repudiate borrowed models and follow an independent path” (ibid., 135).

Such a reductive binary opposition—between “borrowed models” on the one hand and an “independent path” on the other—does not speak aptly to the cultural complications framing the works of Brown, whose texts mediate German romanticism and American Federalist party politics in their attempts to repudiate the pastoral utopianism that he associated with Thomas Jefferson’s Republican party in the first decade of the nineteenth century. In his characteristically double-voiced narratives, Brown sought to chart new directions for American literature that were cognizant of their necessary overlap with the cultural freight of the British Empire. He wrote pamphlets addressing the recent British colonization of “New Holland,” as Australia was then called, while recommending that the new United States should abandon its exceptionalist and isolationist policy, grounded on Jefferson’s vision of the desirability of an “ocean of fire” between the United States and the rest of the world (Jefferson 1904, 287), and engage instead with the realpolitik of imperial affairs. Indeed, in Brown’s unfinished *Memoirs*...
of Carwin the Biloquist, written in 1798 as a sequel to his novel Wieland, the hero’s “perverse and pernicious curiosity” (1977, 251) leads him into the orbit of the radical visionary Ludloe, who is committed to the kind of “scheme of Utopian felicity” (ibid., 277) that became associated with Louis Antoine de Bougainville and other Pacific explorers of the eighteenth century. Since it is “plain” to Ludloe that “the nations of Europe were tending to greater depravity” (ibid.), he plans to look elsewhere to execute his “plan of colonization” (ibid., 278), and Carwin subsequently discovers in Ludloe’s atlas a mysterious hand-drawn chart that, from the latitude and longitude specified there, can readily be identified as a map of Australia. Although Carwin infers that Ludloe’s “geographical secret” had involved putting his “plans for civilization . . . into practice in some unvisited corner of the world” (ibid., 301), these precise spatial coordinates drag this hypothetical realm—utopia as “no place”—back into the land of the actual, where the bonds of British imperial authority hold sway. By February 1805, when this work was written (Cowie 1977, 336–37), these antipodean islands were no longer an empty space for the projection of transcendent visions, as Ludloe fondly imagines, but formed another part of the cyclic pattern of imperial time and space. As Hsuan Hsu observes, Memoirs of Carwin is thus “a fragment in which both the forgotten voice of the colonized” and the repressed fact of America’s continuation of Britain’s imperial policy “return with a vengeance” (2000, 154). Memoirs of Carwin thus actually foregrounds the geographical mise-en-abîme whereby British colonial developments in Australasia echo British colonial practices in Ireland and America, which were themselves echoed by the growth of an American empire in the 1790s. For all of the ways in which, as Nigel Leask says, the “late-eighteenth-century Atlantic imagination was thoroughly seduced by the utopian promise of a Pacific Terra Australis” (2000, 348), Brown was enough of a hardheaded Federalist skeptic to doubt that any new world, either in pastoral America or the more distant antipodes, might effectively position itself beyond the circumference of colonial power.

The point here is simply that Brown’s geographical materialism, encompassing as it does recent explorations in the South Pacific as well as the legacies of Europe, makes it impossible to resolve his narratives into the binary model of postcolonialism outlined by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin. Although Brown’s texts engage with colonialism, they do so in convoluted and multifaceted ways, where attitudes toward dominant powers carry psychological as well as political implications. The title of The Empire Writes Back was taken from an article written in 1982 by Salman Rushdie, “The Empire Writes back with a Vengeance,” which argued how “Anglo-Saxon attitudes” were being reinvigorated by “new literatures” beginning to man-
ifest themselves in the wake of British immigration policies of the 1950s and 1960s (1982). But Rushdie’s theme turned on a paradox rather than a simple opposition: noting how “Britain needs decolonising, too,” he argued for the rhetorical style of this new literature as being necessarily hybrid and “unwashed,” rather than any kind of pure phenomenon (ibid.). Indeed, the title of Rushdie’s piece was itself a punning play on George Lucas’s 1980 American epic film, Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back. Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin themselves acknowledged that “post-colonial culture is inevitably a hybridized phenomenon” (2002, 220), and, like Rushdie, they saw part of their impetus as involving a “counter-discursive” practice (ibid., 221) designed to unmask hegemonic assumptions and thus to destabilize the canonical constructions associated with them. But these Australian critics also expressed reservations, particularly in the book’s second (2002) edition, about how the term “postcolonial” had been “adopted by so many fields and in so many different ways that we are in danger of altogether losing sight of its actual provenance” (ibid., 194), a threat of vitiation the authors associated particularly with “metropolitan-based exponents such as Said, Bhabha and Spivak who have gained most attention in the rarefied air of high theory” (2002, 196). Said’s version of “Orientalism” (1978) was similarly critiqued by the Australian anthropologist Nicholas Thomas, who argued that such a notion of colonial discourse as “an enduring and self-authorizing set of ideas,” however valuable it might be in relation to “representations of Islam and the Middle East,” is “not helpful for the Pacific” (1997, 16–17). What we find here in general terms is a complicated situation, in which the more abstract dimensions of postcolonial theory collide with more grounded political aspects of regional geography.

As an extension of this Pacific praxis, the notion promoted by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin of the empire writing back might more usefully be recast in antipodean terms as the empire lying athwart. Positioned as it has always been at the intersection of competing imperial and indigenous interests, antipodean transnationalism is not easily resolved into any clearly unilateral or oppositional perspective. In this light, the conceptual matrix of transnationalism may speak more appositely than that of postcolonialism to the variegated, multidirectional nature of colonial legacies and crosscurrents. Kuan-Hsing Chen has promulgated the working hypothesis of “Asia as Method,” drawing on the “far-reaching psychic and cultural effects of colonialism” (2010, 121) to propose a decathedced resignification of the imperial imaginary, and it might be possible to suggest an analogous version of “Australia as method” that would work in similarly deterritorialized terms. Given the extensive history of US engagement with Taiwan since World War II, and arguing that the more amorphous process of “deimperialization is
theoretically a much wider movement” than the simpler possessive issue of “decolonization” (ibid., 6), Chen talks of the psychological difficulty contemporary Taiwanese have in engaging critically with the United States, since “being anti-American is like opposing ourselves” (ibid., 186). Along similar lines, we might suggest that both the dilemma and the challenge for antipodean transnationalism is to navigate among competing psychological and political positions, in a situation where mutual engagements of colonizer and colonized operate across a ubiquitous but amorphous force field in a state of constant transposition, rather than being confined to any kind of singular position susceptible of resolution within a conventional postcolonial or area studies framework.

One of the most valuable aspects of antipodean transnationalism in this regard is the way it effectively foregrounds the kinds of spatial power relations that are inherent, if customarily suppressed, in any kind of area studies dynamic. The most distinguished precursor of this theoretical approach in the second half of the twentieth century was the Australian art historian and cultural critic Bernard Smith, who explicitly used the word “trans-national” as early as 1986, in his foreword to Peter Fuller’s *The Australian Scapegoat*. Smith praised Fuller for being “the first person to grasp the trans-national implications of the Antipodean intervention of 1959” (1986, xiii), referring to the “Antipodean Manifesto” drafted by Smith and published as a foreword to the catalogue for the Antipodean Exhibition held in Melbourne in 1959. Smith was one of eight signatories to this manifesto, which claimed that “it is natural . . . we should see and experience nature differently in some degree from the artists of the northern hemisphere” (1976, 166). This intervention was not so much a justification of local or national culture per se; instead, it emphasized that the reception of art was always interwoven with power relations, testifying to what Peter Beilharz has called Smith’s fascination with “peripheral vision, and dual vision” (1997, 99), along with his “lifelong interest in unequal cultural exchange” (ibid., 94). This arose to some extent from his radical political affiliations: Smith was, of course, steeped in Marxist cultural theory, and he also participated in the debates about surrealism that flourished in Australian art circles during the 1940s. But this countersuggestible tendency was also rooted in his ethnic provenance: the illegitimate son of a young Irish immigrant woman, Smith was baptized a Roman Catholic and indeed specified at the end of his life that he wanted a Catholic funeral service, even while insisting that he would “die an atheist” (Palmer 2011). He frequently found himself at odds with the Anglo-Australian establishment, specifically expressing resentment in his autobiography “against the legitimate ones who ruled the world and taught you what you should do” (1984, 187). Yet such heterodox psychological im-
pulses also informed a more broadly based antipodean methodology, since Smith’s work sets itself deliberately to overthrow what he regarded as supine conventions, drawing intellectual sustenance from an antagonistic approach to hegemonic cultures of all kinds and from the intellectual pleasure of turning things around the other way. Many of his most famous works, notably *European Vision and the South Pacific*, take delight in juxtaposing apparently disparate categories and in complicating established hierarchies by suggesting ways in which top and bottom become mutually defining. In his preface to the second edition of this book, in fact, Smith claimed it was not so much about the “fatal impact of Europe on the Pacific” but “precisely the opposite: the impact of the Pacific upon Europe” (1985, vii).

Rather than being organized merely around geographical location or benign forms of open transaction, then, Smith’s version of the antipodean imaginary involves a circuit in which contrary impulses are held in tension while dominant and subordinate impulses are contained paradoxically, and sometimes pathologically, in the same spectrum. Indeed, it was the very lopsided nature of this antipodean matrix, and the heft of the institutional forces contributing to its consolidation, that fired Smith’s deliberately provocative scholarship. In a late work, *Modernism’s History*, Smith describes how as an “Australian art historian” he sees “Europe as my antipodes” since “antipodes is not a place but a relationship” (1998, 7). In this sense the antipodean or transnational dynamic becomes for him a more materialist, historicized version of international engagement, in which the emphasis is not on abstract global flows of either a financial or a watery nature, but on the unequal exchanges of money, power, and prestige across national and hemispheric borders. There have been subsequent challenges—by Margaret Jolly, Raewyn Connell (2007), and others—from a combative Australian perspective to the domination of social theory by those in what Jolly has called “the metropoles of Europe and North America” (2008, 75). However, the heterodox nature of Smith’s work remains unusual in the way it does not seek simply to justify the culture of the Southern Hemisphere in an oppositional spirit, but aspires more broadly to reinterpret Western traditions in the light of antipodean perspectives. In his recent work on “archipelagic diaspora,” the American critic Brian Russell Roberts develops his focus on “the planet’s material geography” (2013, 122) to project the idea of an antipodean imaginary in a similar kind of way, describing for instance “the East Indies and West Indies, Haiti and Tahiti, Caledonia and New Caledonia” as “antipodal island-spaces” (ibid., 144), while inferring from this term that “antipodal [is] . . . a site of unpresentable distance from the known world, and . . . a site of emancipatory inversion in relation to that world” (ibid., 128).
The other key area where antipodean transnationalism is contributing to a broader elucidation of Western culture’s planetary dimensions is in relation to the legacy of indigenous cultures. In *Trans-Indigenous*, Chadwick Allen productively aligns “purposeful indigenous juxtapositions” (2012, xx) of “Native North American, New Zealand Māori, Hawaiian, Indigenous Australian” cultures across a global compass (ibid., xvii). Specifically rejecting the proposition that the prefix “trans” involves simply recapitulating US power, while suggesting that through its commitment to “paradoxes of simultaneity, contradiction, coexistence” (ibid., xxxii) the hybrid term “Trans- could be the next *post-*” (ibid., xv), Allen goes on to consider ways in which the progressive nature of Māori art and race relations might open up the wider field of inquiry in a more enlightening way. He discusses, for example, the mixed-media sculpture *Whakamatunga* (Metamorphosis) by the Māori artist Fred Graham, installed as part of a transindigenous exhibit on Māori and Pacific Northwest Coast Art staged in Vancouver, Canada, in 2006, where the chameleonic variations of this sculpture drew on the whale’s iconic status in Māori culture to exemplify how, in Graham’s words, “the whale is a frequent traveller between the Northern and Southern Hemispheres. In my sculpture, as the whale crosses the equator it changes both in shape and in body design, from Northwest Coast Indian to Māori. Day changes to night” (quoted in Allen 2012, xxiv). If we place this alongside the famous representation of the whale in Melville’s *Moby-Dick* ([1851] 1987), it becomes easy enough to see how the latter has too often been circumscribed in US literary criticism either by abstract universalist typologies or by the localized concerns of domestic politics. By contrast, a broader understanding of how the whale functions in Māori lore as an epitome of transhemispheric transposition can potentially open a reader’s eyes to the self-consciously planetary dimensions of Melville’s oceanic epic, specifically the way it projects the white whale as an image of nature’s inverse, antipodean properties. Geoffrey Sanborn has showed how Melville drew heavily on George Lillie Craik’s *The New Zealanders* (1830) for his portrait of Queequeg, and how Melville revised *Moby-Dick* during its composition to take account of Craik’s representation of the magnanimous Māori chief Te Pehi Kupe, thereby making Queequeg less “the native of an unspecified south-western island” and more specifically “a Māori” (Sanborn 2011, 106), a tribe that by the 1830s was beginning to be described, according to Sanborn, “as the most impressive tribal people that Europeans had ever encountered” (ibid., 6). Huang describes *Moby-Dick* as “the first canonical American literary text dealing with the transpacific” (2008, 53), but the novel also deliberately displaces its focus from the Northern to the Southern Hemisphere, something equally important to both the path of the *Pequod*
and the construction of Melville’s novel. Anticipating the voyage around the Cape of Good Hope and across the Indian Ocean, Ishmael envisions “many long night-watches in the remotest waters, and beneath constellations never seen here at the north” (Melville [1851] 1987, 73).

Allen also describes how new technologies of aerial photography and computer modeling have helped elucidate the complex and elaborate patterns of Native American structures across North America, revealing that these Indian earthworks were constructed to mirror the trajectories of equinox, solstice, and other perceived patterns in the sky. This again evokes the notion of a “watery planet . . . an abstract model for our world conceived from the perspective of Oceania” (Allen 2012, 233), since the process of planetary rotation necessarily foregrounded by antipodean transnationalism—predicated as it is on a geography of cosmic distance—finds its correlative in the relationship of Native American settlements to celestial astronomy. This serves to detach the study of Native American culture from the more stifling ethnographic and anthropological typologies within which it was incarcerated throughout most of the twentieth century, and it reflects back in turn on the planetary dimensions that have always been implicit, if generally suppressed, in the field of American literature. By rotating its conceptual axis toward Oceania, in other words, the methodology of antipodean transnationalism not only illuminatingly juxtaposes Native American and Māori culture but also opens up Western culture more generally to the trajectory of planetary orbits. Insofar as the conceptualization of “indigenous philosophy . . . is a way of recasting contemporary thinking,” as Stephen Muecke argues (2004, 176), this is another example of the empire not so much writing back but lying athwart: rather than operating unilaterally or antithetically, the positional politics of antipodean transnationalism lie across the social dynamics of power in a crosswise, reversible direction.

Such structural reciprocity serves also to hollow out the metaphysics of authenticity with which the study of Australian Aboriginal culture, in particular, has been institutionally encumbered. Elizabeth Povinelli refers scathingly to “contemporary pageants of atonement” such as Australia’s National Sorry Day in May 1998 (2002, 43–44), commenting on how these became accommodated to a glossy, sentimentalized version of national reconciliation under the banner of liberal multiculturalism as a way of avoiding the harsher economic demands of social justice. While Nancy Munn has usefully commented from a legal perspective on how the boundaries (both spatial and legal) of Aboriginal and Euro-Australian customs diverge and overlap, creating in effect a “hybrid type of space” (1996, 449–50) where different national territories are superimposed on each other, one general characteristic of antipodean transnationalism is its refusal to apotheosize
Australian Aboriginal culture as a metaphysical end in itself—a refusal that creates a distance from the kind of “poetics of the sacred” or “wave of connection” that has featured heavily in anthropological approaches to indigenous cultures (Rose 2000, 287, 292). Smith, whose primary interest was in aesthetics rather than the more reified constructions of anthropology, focused in his critiques of Aboriginal culture on its ontologies of alienation, its structurally embedded forms of doubling, and its sites of political intersection with or crossing over more established domains. In his 1980 Boyer lectures for the Australian Broadcasting Commission, subsequently published as The Spectre of Truganini, Smith discussed Aboriginal culture in terms of how it had been repressed by white Australia, but his methodology was more Freudian—or “psycho-cultural,” as he put it (1980, 16)—than phenomenological, and his aim there was not so much to present any kind of authentic account, but rather to discuss how patterns of “cultural convergence” (ibid., 44) had induced white Australian artists to move away from “narrow Europeanism” (ibid., 51), in the poetry of Les Murray and the music of Peter Sculthorpe, for example. As in work on Native American culture, the risk here of appropriation is the price necessarily paid for engaging with the inherently alien dimensions of recuperative scholarship.

One of the paradoxes associated with the study of Australian Aboriginal culture is that its proposition of “deep time” for Australian history is such a recent event, arising, as Tom Griffiths notes, out of “the twin revolutions of professional archaeology and radiocarbon dating, both of which emerged in local practice in the 1950s and 60s” (2011, 20). Through this renewed legitimation of Aboriginal communities, the institutional ascription of a longue durée for Australian history—one predating by some 50,000 years the arrival of Captain James Cook in the 1770s—has consequently involved a back projection stemming from twentieth-century technological perspectives, just as the strange ambience of Sidney Nolan’s surrealist paintings of the Australian desert in the 1950s derived in part from his being the first painter to see these expansive landscapes from the air. Indeed, Nolan’s wife somewhat comically described how “Sidney gazed with his mouth open and his tongue pushed between his teeth, as he does when painting with the greatest intensity,” during an air trip across Australia in 1948 (quoted in Haynes 1998, 172). Nolan, who was born in Melbourne in 1917, first visited the United States on a Harkness Fellowship in 1958. Stephen Spender in Santa Barbara introduced him at that point to Robert Lowell’s Life Studies (1959), to which Nolan responded with various original drawings (Adams 1987, 141), and Nolan got to know Lowell well during the 1960s, contributing illustrations for Lowell’s 1967 book of poems, Near the Ocean. This volume consists of translations from Dante, Horace, Juvenal, and other
classical writers set alongside more typical Lowell poems evoking life in contemporary Boston. According to Lowell’s prefatory note to Near the Ocean: “The theme that connects my translations is Rome, the greatness and horror of her Empire. . . . How one jumps from Rome to the America of my own poems is something of a mystery to me. Perhaps the bridge is made by the brilliant drawings of Sidney Nolan. May my lines throw some light on his!” (1967, 9). Lowell’s choice of the word “lines” here is a deliberate pun, since Nolan’s illustrations are indeed line drawings, characteristic of the artist’s style in being, as Andrew Sayers observes, “non-figurative” and with a disarming “lightness of touch” (1989, 5), such that they delineate human figures cavorting in acts of fellatio, buggery, and various other ine-briated conjunctions in a deliberately sketchy manner. Oil paintings of such lecherous classical scenes would probably have seemed too heavy-handed and literal, but, by reducing the human form to its barest outline in a style both elemental and cartoonlike, Nolan captures a sense of both the frailty and the tenuous nature of corporeal desire, and indeed of human life in general.

Such frailties comprise a central theme of Lowell’s volume, as epitomized in his poem “The Vanity of Human Wishes,” described in its subtitle as “A Version of Juvenal’s Tenth Satire”:

Now only fevers warm the thinning blood,
diseases of all kinds lock hands and dance,
even their names escape you—let me list
the many lechers Oppia will love,
slow-coming Maura drain a day, how many
schoolboys Hamillus will crouch on, the partners
Hirrus will swindle, the sick men Themiston will kill
this autumn—I could more easily count
the villas bought up by the barber whose
razor once grated on my stiff young beard. . . .
One man has a sagging shoulder, one a hernia,
another has a softening hipbone, and another
has cataracts; another’s spoonfed; listen,
they yawn like baby swallows for their swill! (1967, 89–90)

Nolan’s sketch of the lines “how many / schoolboys Hamillus will crouch on” presents the copulating protagonists in a grotesque, inverted position (ibid., 91), and it is curiously reminiscent of his other drawings around this time, particularly the Ned Kelly sequence, that link the dehumanized protagonist to bleak late modernist landscapes: the figure of Kelly, for instance, is portrayed in an Australian desert framed by emaciated signs of crucifixes
and smoking chimneys redolent of Auschwitz (Sayers 1989, 8). This in turn is reminiscent of the crucifixion jest in Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, where one of the tramps, Vladimir, remarks that “one of the thieves was saved,” calmly observing: “It’s a reasonable percentage” (1965, 11). Nolan, in other words, picks up on and illuminates the more alien and modernist aspects of *Near the Ocean*, that more austere part of Lowell’s style that is too often obscured by his garrulous, colloquial domesticity. In an interview in which he discussed “The Vanity of Human Wishes,” Lowell drew attention to the way in which, in Samuel Johnson’s 1749 reworking of Juvenal’s poem, “the framework doesn’t quite fit,” since “eighteenth-century London wasn’t as awful as Juvenal’s Rome . . . and yet he’s forced to say that it was.” At the same time, Lowell recognizes how “off key” elements in Johnson’s “way of transforming the poem” lend it a particular mode of artistic innovation: “While I just try to give an accurate, eloquent photograph of the original, he did something much more avant-garde” (Carne-Ross 1968 1988, 138). Yet Nolan’s illustrations effectively foreground the idiom of displacement at work in these temporal shifts from Juvenal to Johnson and then to Lowell, restoring that etymological sense of translation as a carrying across, something that Lowell’s more down-to-earth “photograph” tended, for its own artistic reasons, to downplay. Commenting on this poem, Vereen Bell argued that the “difference between Juvenal’s formalized identity and Lowell’s is that the Lowell in the poems is implicated in the subject matter, cannot remain a displaced observer” (1983, 100); yet the Nolan sketches provide precisely the kind of alternative perspective that highlights the “displaced” aspects of Lowell’s inherently estranged, transnational position. Whereas Lowell’s poem emphasizes the quotidian stuff of human comedy, Nolan’s pictorial frame illustrates more abstract dimensions of corporeal embodiment and decomposition.

Moving thus between the familiar and the cosmic, between a confessional idiom and the toils of the *longue durée*, Lowell’s work traverses different spatial and temporal measures, evoking ways in which sex, power, and appetite lead inexorably to corruption and death. Lowell majored in classics at Kenyon College, and he proposes here a scenario in which the ancient world exposes the kind of knowledge of corruption to which the American Transcendentalists, Lowell’s Bostonian ancestors, were blind: “Do Rome and Carthage know what we deny?” he asks in the book’s last poem, “The Ruins of Time” (1967, 124). The very title of this collection, *Near the Ocean*, speaks to a sense of liminality that runs through these works: “For Theodore Roethke” describes Lowell’s fellow poet as “the ocean’s anchor” (ibid., 52) in the way he “honoured nature, / helpless, elemental creature” (ibid., 51), and *Near the Ocean* similarly positions itself as adjacent or “near” to the “ele-
mental” but not fully immersed within it, thereby giving the poet scope to play with a dialectic between human language and physical deliquescence.

Wai Chee Dimock has suggested that Lowell in these poems undertakes a “yoking together of ancient and modern history” (2006, 141), and that the poet gains an alternative angle on the politics of the Vietnam war by relating it to the trials and tribulations of first-century Rome. While this is true, it involves on Dimock’s part a reading outward from Vietnam to the more distant Roman analogy, whereas the Nolan illustrations serve to highlight more overtly the late modernist dimensions implicit in *Near the Ocean*: the uneasy link between twentieth-century America and elemental oceans or deserts, and the radically decontextualized association of human sexuality with the prospect of universal corruption, such as we see, albeit in more ascetic forms, in the narratives of Beckett or Franz Kafka. Though the inclusion of Nolan’s illustrations led some American literary critics to deride Lowell’s book as a pretentious coffee-table item on its first appearance in 1967 (Hamilton 1982, 348), it is arguable that Nolan’s drawings lend *Near the Ocean* a specifically antipodean inflection, since Lowell used a transnational dynamic to link not only Boston and ancient Rome but also the
United States and Australia. Nolan’s drawings speak to the kind of interest in deep time that he explored aesthetically in his Australian desert paintings of the 1940s and 1950s, and to which he also gave expression in his jacket illustrations, again in the barest line drawing form, for editions of various novels by Patrick White, including *The Tree of Man* ([1956] 1961) and *Voss* ([1957] 1960). White, who had a long and tempestuous friendship with Nolan, correlates in *The Tree of Man* the cycle of generations in a small Australian bush community with a sense of deep, elemental time: one of the characters wonders “if this town will still be here in a thousand years” (1961, 22), while White embeds his characters in the landscape to such an extent that we are told the Quigleys “could have been carved from wood” (ibid., 51). This is a late modernist, minimalist style given a specifically antipodean dimension, linking the remote nature of this bush community to a sense of metaphysical stasis, with the “slow time” of “hot summer days” (ibid., 104) conjuring up a planetary sphere where the “whole earth was in motion, a motion of wind and streaming trees, and he was in danger of being carried with it” (ibid., 47). Such atavistic proximity is precisely what we find in *Near the Ocean*, where Nolan’s drawings, transposing men into animals and generally inverting the human proprieties, realign American poetry with the sense of comic degradation and the demystification of liberal humanist sensibility under the force of a radically inhumane environment that developed in Australian modernism after World War II out of the country’s new technological engagement with the ancient spirit of the land.

In relation to American studies as transnational practice, then, it might be argued that it only ever works as a mode of practice, as a nuanced and necessarily detailed account of the complex issues associated with points of intersection between different national formations. Methodologically, it involves various forms of reciprocity and exchange, in which US culture becomes susceptible to the circulation of global forces rather than being merely their malign, all-powerful agent. The antipodean version of transnationalism, through its historical tendency (as in Smith’s work) to foreground power relations and the politics of geospatial position, is an apt measure of how such dynamics might work in the twenty-first century. The transnational turn in American studies has already produced a more finely calibrated account of the complicated place of the United States in the world, and to outline some of the frailties addressed by Lowell in *Near the Ocean*, under the influence of antipodean modernism, is to illuminate ways in which aspects of what Butler called “precarious life” (2006) that were symbolically magnified in US consciousness after 9/11 have, in fact, been
always already implicit in the field, from the nineteenth-century engagements of Brown with the British Empire and the passage of Melville’s white whale into the Southern Hemisphere. Whereas in the second half of the twentieth century the institutional parameters and voluble rhetoric of American exceptionalism kept the subject in a relatively sequestered state, the new conditions of precarious life in the twenty-first century—“America’s Pacific century,” as Obama’s Secretary of State Hillary Clinton rhetorically called it (2011)—are extending the horizons of the field not only geographically but also chronologically, with antipodean transnationalism producing new backward accounts of American studies across colonial time as well as across planetary space.

Notes

1. On comparative literature, Susan Stanford Friedman writes that “comparison decontextualizes: that is, it dehistoricizes and deterritorializes; it removes what are being compared from their local and geohistorical specificity” (2011, 754–55).

2. Jefferson expressed the wish that “there were an ocean of fire between us and the old world” in a letter to Elbridge Gerry, 13 May 1797 (1904, 287).


4. In addition to Smith, the manifesto was signed by Charles Blackman, Arthur Boyd, David Boyd, John Brack, Bob Dickerson, John Perceval, and Clifton Pugh.


Works Cited


