



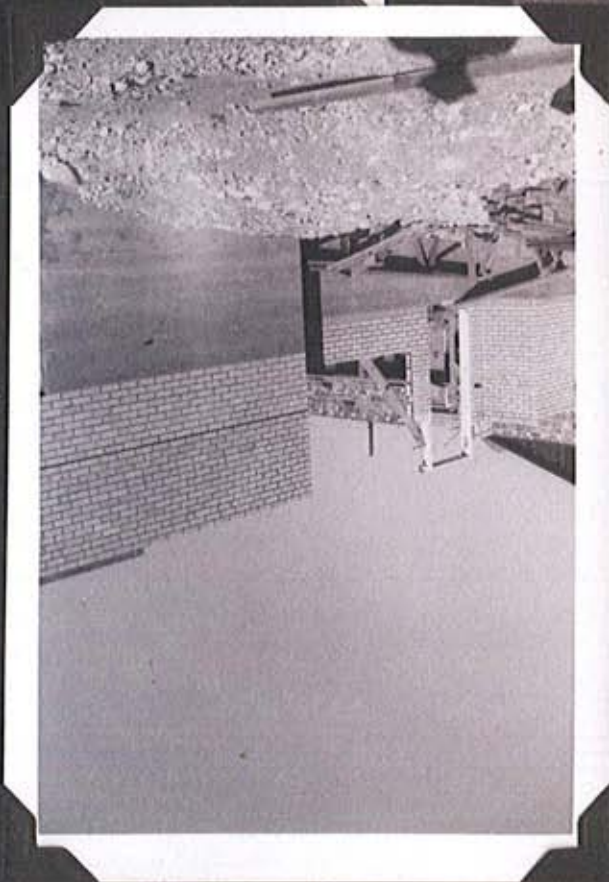
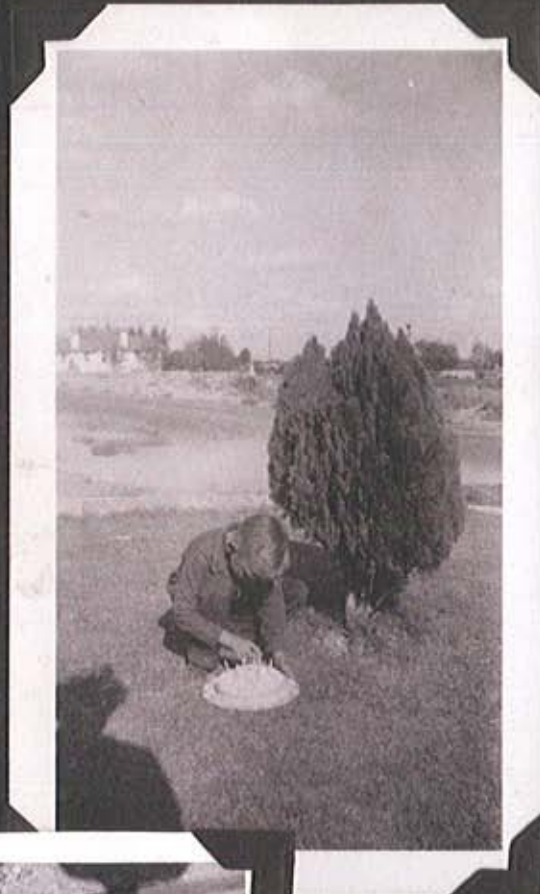
A Dot and A Line

images _ gaye chan

text _ nandita sharma with gaye chan

● CHINA

China, the tableware, is named after the Qin dynasty that ruled the 'Middle Kingdom' from 221 to 207 BC. Europeans called it China, after the commodity they wanted to trade.



● AFRICA

According to one theory the name is derived from the Phoenician word, *Afryqah*, which denoted a 'colony'. This referred to the Phoenician colony in northern Africa of the 12th century AD.

PHILIPPINES

In 1543, Spanish explorer Ruy López de Villalobos landed on the island that is now Mindanao. He named it and the other surrounding islands *Filipina* to glorify the future King of Spain, Philip II (1527-1598).

EUROPE

European was the identity taken by those people from far-west Asia to distinguish themselves from the people they colonized. The idea of Europe as a specific geographical site, a 'continent', came afterwards.



There once were two roads with two men travelling on them. The first road is in Texas, a place once called Mexico and before that the home of the Coahuiltecan. On this road, a brown 'Mexican' man moves north as the US border moves south. On this road he is pulled over for drinking and driving. He has no papers to prove that he should be on this road. He is arrested, shackled, thrown into a detention center. He is deported to the place now called Mexico. He is separated from his livelihood and family who lives in the place now called the United States.

The second road is in a place now called Maine, once called Wabanaki. On this road a white 'American' man is pulled over for drinking and driving. He has a US driver's license and is fined \$150 dollars. This man moves south, with the US border, to Texas. With his papers and his family's money, he purchases land and title. With his papers he makes his fortune. With his papers George W. Bush becomes the president of the place now called the United States. He is reunited with his family in the place now called Washington, D.C., once called Accomack.

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Martin
Heidegger

Cartography and photography are two major forms of representing reality in the modern age. The modern cartographer maps land and sea from 'god's' eye view, at once naturalizing and prioritizing seeing from a distance. The photographer with his monocular vision, inverting one-point perspective, stands at its vanishing point. 'Detached' and 'neutral', the cartographer and photographer vanish from their images, presenting views as though no one made them, or rather, were made without self-interest.

With each map and photograph, like a set of instructions, we are trained how to see: what to see and what not to see. With each map and photograph, we are more convinced of the 'truth' of their representation, so much so that they supplant our memory of ourselves and knowledge of others. Like the two stories of the two roads, lines get drawn across previously nonexistent boundaries, allocating difference between people, demarcating states of belonging, regulating mobilities. Through these lines, we become frozen in a particular time and space. Instead of recognizing fluidity and connectivity, our identities and lived realities come to be seen as fixed dots on one side or another of territorial claims.

Who benefits from these dots and lines? From their beginnings both cartography and photography have been inextricably linked to the globalization of capitalist colonization. The invention of the chronometer in 1761 by John Harrison, the tool that allowed for the calculation of longitudes, transformed the globe into a grid that could be claimed from afar. The "conquest of the world as picture," noted by Heidegger, made it that much easier to 'see' land and people as mere raw material. While early maps were guides on how to traverse land and sea, their modern counterparts became charts for colonial expansion. John Urry points out that through the technology of photography, developed a century later, "sites became sights" to be surveyed by those with the force to claim the 'new worlds' captured by their lens.

Official maps and photographs have served rulers well by colonizing our imagination of land and identity. The power of these imposed boundaries relies on our collective forgetfulness that there are other ways of seeing and being. In *A Dot and A Line*, Gaye Chan draws our attention to the very process of border making.

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• AUSTRALIA

Named after a fancy. Europeans widely believed that a southern continent must exist in order to balance the land in the Northern Hemisphere. It was provisionally named *Terra Australis Incognita* — the undiscovered southern land.

A Dot and A Line. An absurd performance,
on nonsensical border making,
on forgetting and remembering.

Along the walls of the gallery is an endless collection of amateur snapshots attached to blackened open folio pages from an old atlas. In every snapshot the photographer has accidentally included her/his shadow in the foreground. Vague silhouettes — here a hat, there a dress — recall the photographers' corporeality. More clearly evident are what they wanted to remember — here a baby, there a vacation. The snapshots are paired two to each atlas page, north south, matched by seemingly nothing more than the width of the shadows at the pictures' edge. Shapes emerge through the paired shadows, hovering darkly in the center of each image. The subjects of the paired snapshots are forced together but are always apart. Since one is always above the other the unequal terms of this union shapes all subsequent relationships between them. The two come to be mutually constitutive. The Self becomes inseparable from Other, so much so that the Othered, even in their resistance, often imitate those who rule over them and leave the necessity of lines unquestioned.

In the center of the room, housed in display cases, lay the same number of pieces of paper as paired photographs on the wall. On each paper a map — here a town, there a road. Geography around the globe cut out as with a jig-saw using the paired shadow-shapes as templates. Some of the maps are of currently contested areas — borders between the First and the Third Worlds (El Paso, Texas/Juarez, Mexico), occupied territories (Israel/Palestine) and claimed states (New Zealand/Aotearoa). Others may have been once or may be again.



By superimposing an arguably meaningless system onto another system of representation, *A Dot and A Line* destabilizes the authority of commonly accepted political, social, and cultural boundaries. It reminds us of what was not ever supposed to be seen — that every photo and every map is nothing more or less than a picture made by those with the power to shape the world in their image. Each is a repository of their aspirations and of those who accept their supposed self-evidentiary qualities. In *A Dot and A Line*, Chan shows us that the most significant border crossing is not when we simply step over the line to be part of the other side but when we refuse to acknowledge its very legitimacy.

Nandita Sharma with Gaye Chan, 2003

TEXAS •

In 1690 a Spanish monk named Damian was greeted on arrival with cries of "Tehas! Tehas!" meaning friend. Damian mistook this greeting as the name of the Assinaes people saying it and called the place Texas.



This brochure is produced on the occasion of the exhibition *A Dot and A Line: A New Project by Gaye Chan* at the Honolulu Academy of Arts, July 3 — September 7, 2003.

Honolulu Academy of Arts
900 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96814
808-532-8700
www.honoluluacademy.org

list of work in *A Dot and A Line*
dimensions in inches (h x w)
found photographs on
screenprinted atlas folio pages
19.25 x 11
digital inkjet on onion skin paper
11 x 8.5

Gaye Chan is Professor of Photography at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Chan has been exhibiting her work since 1979 and has had recent solo exhibitions at venues such as Houston Center for Photography, YYZ (Toronto), Artspeak (Vancouver), Gallery 4A (Sydney), SF Camerawork (San Francisco) and The Contemporary Museum (Honolulu).

Nandita Sharma is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada and an activist involved in transnational networks of No Borders movements.

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