

**A Transpacific Aesthetic of Redress: Narrating Disability and Debilitation in *Em, Burning*
Vision, and *Dogs at the Perimeter***

by

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B.A. Hon., The University of British Columbia, 2020

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES
(English)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)

April 2024

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A Transpacific Aesthetic of Redress: Narrating Disability and Debilitation in Em, Burning Vision, and Dogs at the Perimeter

submitted by Olivia Lim in partial fulfilment of the requirements

the degree of Master of Arts

in English

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Abstract

This thesis attends to questions of redress and justice that arise from the ways American militarism in the transpacific endures in the body-mind as disability and debility. Focusing on the Cold War in Asia, including the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the legacy of the War in Vietnam, and the rise of the Khmer Rouge regime following the U.S. bombing of Cambodia, my research intervenes in liberal humanist juridical redress culture's pathologization of disability as an index of harm and expresses its critical limits in accounting for the long temporality and nebulous scope of debilitative violence. Mobilizing the theoretical apparatuses of critical disability studies, redress studies, critical refugee studies, and scholarship on the Cold War in Asia, I theorize a transpacific aesthetic of redress, a cripistemology of redress that develops from aesthetic forms that work to produce alternative fields of sensibility surrounding disability and debilitative violence, making perceivable the complex transpacific entanglements of survival, beauty, and harm in the afterlives of U.S. imperialism.

To articulate this epistemology of redress, I close read contemporary transnational literature that engages with histories of U.S. militarism in the transpacific. I consider how the formal qualities of these texts, particularly fragmentation and non-linear narrative, orient us towards frameworks of redress that emerge from recognizing U.S. imperialism's debilitative violence as a condition of possibility for disability, while still resisting the reduction of disability to a redressable harm. Chapter One examines the quantification of violence in Kim Thúy's novel *Em*, exploring critical ambivalences that express the entanglement of beauty and debilitation within the conflict's chemical legacy. Chapter Two reads Marie Clements's play *Burning Vision* for the slow violences of uranium that highlight the temporal limits of contemporary redress frameworks, turning to debilitation to theorize modes of contending with this unredressability.

Chapter Three analyzes the rhythms of debilitating time held within Madeleine Thien's novel *Dogs at the Perimeter* to conceptualize a theory of fugitive redress that unsettles state-based justice paradigms. Ultimately, I argue that a transpacific aesthetic of redress enables more capacious understandings of interconnection, disability, and debilitation that offers a radical reimagining of redress culture.

Lay Summary

This thesis examines questions of redress that arise from American transpacific militarism's disabling and debilitating violence. Focusing on the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Vietnam War, and the rise of the Khmer Rouge regime following the U.S. bombing of Cambodia, my research challenges contemporary justice paradigms that reduce disability to a measure of harm and critiques their ability to account for the long temporality of debilitation. I theorize a transpacific aesthetic of redress, a way of knowing that positions disability within a broader framework of harm, beauty, and survival. Using critical theories of disability, redress, critical refugee studies, and scholarship on the Cold War in Asia, I explore how Kim Thúy's *Em*, Marie Clements's *Burning Vision*, and Madeleine Thien's *Dogs at the Perimeter* articulate alternative imaginings of redress by making visible new modes of understanding relation, connection, and implication.

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Olivia Lim. An earlier version of Chapter Two was presented under the same title at Exhaust(ion), an annual conference organized by the University of Toronto Graduate English Association in 2022.

Chapter One features an image from Kim Thúy's *Em* (Random House Canada) by the artist Louis Boudreault. Permission has been granted, by the copyright holders, for use of this image in this thesis and in all copies to meet university requirements, including ProQuest/University Microfilms edition and other thesis/dissertation repositories and archives. Standard acknowledgement is included with the image.

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Acknowledgements

The completion of this project was made possible by the guidance of my thesis supervisor, Dr. Christine Kim. Thank you for helping me find language again and for meeting my uncertainties about writing and academia with such warm generosity and thoughtful insight. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Danielle Wong for her perceptive critical engagement and commitment to the potential of this project. This thesis owes much to your perspicacity and patience. Special thanks to Drs. Iyko Day and Christopher B. Patterson for providing such generative feedback on my draft and inspiring me to consider future trajectories and possibilities for this work.

I feel very fortunate to have been surrounded by many brilliant and caring teachers and mentors during my time at UBC. Much gratitude to Drs. Chris Lee, JP Catungal, Phanuel Antwi, Kimberly Bain, Laurie McNeill, and Laura Ishiguro for their words of encouragement and advice throughout the many ups and downs of graduate school.

To those whose creative works gave this project life, Kim Thúy, Marie Clements, and Madeline Thien, thank you for sharing your words and worlds with us all.

The Asian Canadian and Asian Migration Studies (ACAM) program at UBC has been a treasured presence throughout my undergraduate and graduate degrees. It has been a pleasure to work alongside and learn from fellow ACAM student staff, both past and present, who have reminded me of the strength of community care.

This project is supported in part by funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and the UBC Department of English Language and Literatures. My sincere thanks to the English Graduate Program Assistant Christie MacLeod for her kindness, invigorating reassurance, and administrative assistance throughout my degree.

I remain indebted to a community of friends and family whose collective care sustained the life of this project. With much love and gratitude, this thesis is dedicated to: Yann Kong, for your adventurous spirit, tremendous kindness, and friendship I can feel from across a continent. Elaina Nguyen, for your restorative camaraderie and sense of humour that ensures I am laughing as much as I am writing. amanda wan, for your warm-hearted wisdom and words that always return me to the beauty and power of language. Hannah Rubia, for sharing the chaotic joy of *tsismis* accompanied by meticulous critical analysis. Szu Shen, my honorary older sister, whose warmth always makes me feel at home. Brook Xiang, for your steadfast belief in my capability. Phebe M. Ferrer, for the sense of community you create and inspire. Leilan Wong, for your friendship and advice throughout university. Emily Law and Vanessa Lee, for graciously tiptoeing around the protracted progress of the “t” word. Lindsey Palmer and Jiejun Wu, for your company in times of grief and laughter. My parents, for their steadfast support of my education and for fostering my love of reading and writing. And, lastly, my siblings, for their encouragement, mischief, and general shenanigans that remind me of the richness of life.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Y-Dang Troeung, a beloved mentor, teacher, and friend, whose life-giving presence has been at the heart of this project since the earliest glimpses of its formation. Her constant presence in the pages that follow – whether in the form of her academic and creative works or many lessons in research, writing, and life so generously taught over the years – speaks to both the depth of her loss and the enduring legacy of her scholarship. This project is dedicated to all those who have shared in the collective grief of her passing, to those who continue to cherish her memory, and to those who keep company with the vibrant archive of creative and critical work she leaves behind.

for Y-Dang Troeung
& and for all the ways love returns to us

Introduction: On Disability, Debility, and Transpacific Redress Cultures

In *Landbridge*, a fragmented work of autotheory, Cambodian Canadian scholar Y-Dang Troeung speaks to the enduring perpetuality of war and its afterlife's resistance to temporal and geographical bounding, asking "when and where does the crisis of war begin and end" (285)? Writing from her and her family's experiences as Cambodian refugees and survivors of genocide, she describes war as "a concussive wave whose ripples never end, though they might go silent" (285). Troeung does not turn away from the pain of being made collateral damage in a "sacrifice zone" for a proxy war (285), under projects of U.S. imperialism that exist "'off the map' of the world's radar" (286). And yet, even in these spaces of debilitation, she notes that "people continue to do what they can to survive," finding life, resurgence, and even beauty amid the rubble (286).

I open with these words because they are traces of a beloved mentor whose guidance and scholarly work sustains and animates this project, even though she did not live to see the completion of this thesis. I open with them because this project is about how the crisis of war endures in the body-mind, finding form in disabilities and debilities that challenge the language and temporality of harm in juridical redress cultures. It is about the intimacies between militarism and disability and what it means to recognize injustice as a condition of possibility for disabled and debilitated ways of being. It is about how these forms of being cannot be reduced to the violence of their production and how thinking from disability and debility as positions of knowledge might orient us towards new frameworks of redress that exceed the ready-made language of pathologization or cure so often attached to disability.

Following Jasbir K. Puar, I understand disability and debility as distinct, yet closely related terms. Debilitation names populations' differential vulnerability to normalized or

expected impairment by attending to “how disabled bodies are solicited and manufactured” (Puar 67). My focus on militarism, particularly U.S. militarism via the Cold War in Asia, stems from war’s preeminent position as a mechanism of debilitation that produces disability by rendering entire populations available for injury. Disability marks a positionality on a spectrum of bodily capacity, while also signifying ways of knowing and being in the world that arise from the lived experiences of non-normative embodiments. The non-normativity of these body-minds results from ableism, a “system of assigning value to people’s bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normality, productivity, desirability, intelligence, excellence, and fitness” (Lewis). While disability is inscribed through ableism, I join scholars like Merri Lisa Johnson and Robert McRuer in understanding disability itself as a generative site of knowledge production that enables “cripistemologies” – ways of knowing the world that begin from the “critical, social, and personal position of disability” (134).

This thesis attends to transpacific redress cultures, historically and materially-situated frameworks for defining injury, and the ways that these redress cultures give meaning to disability and debility, to the ways war endures in the body-mind. Attempts to quantify the lingering violences of militarism and imperialism in the transpacific define what manifestations of disability and debilitation can and cannot be attributed to war or folded into its death toll. Under these logics of redress, disability often becomes a representation of damage, a site of ongoing harm that testifies to the extent and magnitude of violence that must be addressed and redressed. Put another way, the enmeshment of war and disability means that attempts to quantify the violence of militarism can instill the disabled body-mind with pathologized meaning. Juridical frameworks of transnational and transitional justice, along with the promises of restoration and repair that accompany them, dwell uneasily with the insights of critical

disability studies that value disability as a way of being and knowing the world. Intervening in the relation between redress discourse surrounding the legacies of U.S. imperialism and the pathologization of disability, my project offers a cripistemology that makes space for the complexities that emerge from refusing to collapse disability into a shorthand for violence against individual or collective life, even when efforts to seek redress in the wake of U.S. empire make the mobilization of disability as damage a seemingly expedient pathway towards juridical recourse. I ask, *what theories of redress might emerge from a refusal to reduce disability to a measure of injustice while still critiquing the role of U.S. imperialism in the production of disability through debilitative violence?* This resistance to reducing disability to a symbol of injustice exists alongside an acknowledgement of how the claiming of disability as testimony or identity remains vital in transnational efforts toward accountability and reparation for the violences of U.S. militarism, but remains cognizant of the limitations of liberal humanist, rights-based justice discourses. While intimacies between violence, disability, and debility can be found in many formations – for example, ecological injustices, life under neoliberal capitalism, or settler colonial structures of Indigenous dispossession – I focus specifically on the entanglement of U.S. militarism and disability during the Cold War in Asia and subsequent attempts to redress these imperial violences because of the outsized influence American empire has had in shaping the contemporary juridical landscape of justice and redress through experiments in transitional and transnational redress during the Cold War era.

To think through these problematics of redress and disability, I turn to three literary texts: Kim Thúy's *Em*, Marie Clements's *Burning Vision*, and Madeleine Thien's *Dogs at the Perimeter*. Collectively, these works raise questions of transnational justice by reflecting on the networks of disability and debilitation that extend outward from three crucial chapters in the

story of the Cold War in Asia, including the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the U.S. military's Operation Ranch Hand, which rained down toxic herbicides on Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, and the rise of the Khmer Rouge regime following the U.S. secret bombing of Cambodia. Drawing upon the theoretical apparatuses of critical disability theory, transpacific studies, critical refugee studies, and scholarship on the Cold War in Asia, I seek out alternative ways of conceptualizing redress that resist the pathologization of disability in transpacific redress cultures without reliance on liberal disability rights and inclusion narratives.

Towards this end, my thesis theorizes a *transpacific aesthetic of redress*, a cripistemology that thinks with disability as a way of knowing and being to produce accountings of harm, responsibility, and implication grounded in the material histories of debilitation in the transpacific that move beyond the limitations of state-based juridical redress structures. My use of aesthetic in this context is guided by Kandice Chuh's articulation of aesthetic inquiry's capacity to "provide entry into the apprehension of illiberal, uncommon sensibilities" as alternatives to liberal humanism (3). Mobilizing aesthetic inquiry, I examine how the formal qualities of my literary archive, particularly fragmentation and non-linear narrative, work to produce fields of sensibility surrounding the transpacific afterlife of U.S. militarism, which, through their narration of interconnected networks of disability and debilitation, offer a critique of liberal humanist redress cultures. At the same time, these fields of sensibility make perceivable alternative redress horizons by providing us with forms and language that are able to contend with the long temporality of debilitation and imagine the complex entanglements of survival, beauty, and violence.

Cold War Transpacific Militarism

This project contributes to scholarship on Cold War transpacific militarism by exploring how logics of (un)redress for sites of U.S. imperialism in Asia shape disability epistemologies. I use the term the “Cold War in Asia” to refer to the regional “hot wars” and conflicts that unfolded across the continent between 1945 to 1991. That said, I am conscious of how the echoes of these conflicts and the unredressability of their legacies of disability and debilitation continue into the present, exceeding attempts at temporal bounding. The Cold War, as Jodi Kim observes, “exceeds and outlives its historical eventness” because it is “not only a historical period, but also an epistemology and production of knowledge” (3). At the same time, it is vital to situate the Cold War within broader histories of militarism in the transpacific, since, as Lisa Yoneyama argues, “redress and adjudication cases emerging in the post-Cold War years cannot be grasped adequately without acknowledging the long history of political and social engagements with the post-World War II institutional architectures of transitional justice” (9). The term “Cold War” itself carries its own baggage as, in the popular imaginary, it typically evokes a “bipolar Manichaeic rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union,” rooted in the geopolitics and temporality of the Western hemisphere (J. Kim 4). Recognizing, then, that the Cold War in Asia is at once a misnomer and a theoretically-loaded term, my project attempts to move with and around its uneasy fit with the cluster of wars and conflicts in the Asia Pacific that are the subject of this thesis, while also recognizing the Cold War’s significance as an epistemological framework that guides and produces redress logics.

The epistemological apparatus of the Cold War produced many experiments in transitional and transnational justice, shaping what Yoneyama calls “redress cultures” – the logics of redress that establish “the parameters of what can be known as violence and whose

violence, on which bodies, can be addressed and redressed” (8). Responding to post-1990s redress discourse that saw renewed calls for justice for Japanese imperial violences, Yoneyama situates this resurgence within the longer history of transnational violence in the Asia Pacific and uses this occasion as an opportunity to examine the failures of transitional justice rooted in Cold War redress culture. Critiquing the centrality of the state in juridical frameworks, she emphasizes the plurality of redress cultures within national borders and how official state discourses of redress can exclude the injustices experienced by those who remain peripheral to the national body as unrecognized subjects of redress. Her argument is a reminder of the ways that the state, on subnational and supranational levels, functions to define harm and legitimate juridical claims.

Building on Yoneyama’s foundational study of Cold War redress in Asia, this thesis pauses on her definition of redress culture to examine how disability factors into defining what violence is and whose violence towards whom can be redressed. Who gets to determine what counts as violence or redress? How might conceptualizing disability and debility as more than damage enable critical questions about the grammars of violence and redressability entrenched in these cultures? In other words, I read disability and disabled ways of living and being as expressing a critical limit that exceeds the scope of contemporary juridical redress frameworks. Faced with such limitation, this project aims to seek out alternative redress imaginaries that resist the pathologization of disability, while still testifying to the extent of militarist violence amidst juridical cultures that often render American imperialism unredressable. Here, I find Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu’s work tracing the afterlife of chemical warfare in Vietnam a particularly helpful model in drawing out the complexity of lived realities of disability and debility amidst ongoing unredressability. Contending with this chemical afterlife is a process of reckoning with harms that cannot be clearly contained, known, or quantified. In response to this unknowability, Tu

reframes “damaged ecologies” as “landscapes of altered imagination where people continue to build lives” rather than “barren wastelands,” even as she calls us to remember that “the damage we inflict is not endlessly reparable” (20). As I will expand upon in Chapter One, this approach exemplifies a “salvage sensibility” that articulates a sense of redress that grapples with the impossibility of repair and holds the ambivalence of the pain and beauty of survival (Tu 20).

Questions of responsibility and accountability that seek to delineate and quantify harm give shape to calls for justice for those impacted by the violences of U.S. militarism, often through familiar state-sanctioned models of redress like the tribunal, the truth and reconciliation commission, or forms of reparation like monetary compensation. While this project reflects on what is lost in reducing disability to a quantification of harm, as I will elaborate on in the following chapters, I am also conscious of the ways that juridical actions emerging from sites of U.S. empire, like the Vietnam War, the U.S. bombing of Cambodia, and the atomic aftermaths of uranium’s extraction and weaponization, are ongoing or forestalled or, even when they have been deemed settled, remain incomplete and partial. This thesis attempts to problematize transnational and transitional redress’ handling of disability. At the same time, my intention is not to detract from the significance of what these juridical processes mean to those that have and continue to live with the legacies of loss and pain and the violence of being made collateral damage in U.S. imperial projects. I am reminded of Troeung’s account of witnessing the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) sentence the Khmer Rouge leader, Kaing Guek Eav. “While the ECCC verdicts have been meaningful for Cambodian people at individual and personal levels,” she writes, “it highlights a spectacular failure of post-1990s redress cultures that continues to be underwritten by universalist assumptions and uninterrogated questions about who ultimately benefits from transitional justice” (*Refugee Lifeworlds* xxvi).

Troeung's critique draws our attention to the ways redress cultures work to delimit the kinds of questions that can and cannot be asked of justice systems, while also expressing a critical ambivalence towards juridical appeals that informs the heart of this thesis.

Given that this project focuses on U.S. imperialism, it is worth noting that the three literary texts that form my primary archive are all written by Canadian authors. I approach these works through a transpacific framework because I am interested in what becomes of these narratives that all engage with U.S. militarism when they are refracted through an adjacent articulation of empire. In other words, what does writing from Canada, a different node in transpacific circuits of militarism, do? While often sidelined by the global prominence of the U.S., Canada has carved out its own imperialist niche, grounded in strategies of humanitarianism and benevolent imperialism. Situating Canada as part of a larger network of imperialisms brings to mind what Christine Kim and Helen Hok-Sze Leung call the "minor transpacific." Kim and Leung suggest that Canada, along with nations like Australia and Singapore, form a "minor transpacific network" that is "influenced by the imperialism imaginaries" of major empires like the United States and China as their "historic and contemporary relations to major powers continue to shape them" (Kim and Leung 14). Valuing the minor transpacific as a site of knowledge production "directs us away from national and imperial sites that have historically dominated the circuits of knowledge production and helps us foreground new perspectives and contexts" (*Refugee Lifeworlds* 25). Narratives from the minor transpacific cast the imperialism of major powers, specifically the U.S., in new lights through their intimate periphery to the heart of empire. This practice of reading also works against humanist and humanitarian discourse's disciplinary power through a refusal to limit the theorization of literary and cultural production to the lens of the nation-state.

Deimperializing Critical Disability Studies

Routing critical disability studies through the ongoing afterlives of Cold War transpacific militarism, this project strives to explore how contending with the intimacies between militarism, disability, and debility places pressure on our existing disability frameworks and allows their limitations to emerge in generative ways. Within critical disability studies, the social model of disability has emerged as the dominant theoretical framework for engaging the disabled body-mind. Under this model, disability is created by the norms and attitudes of a society, rather than a purely biological phenomenon. However, as Nirmala Erevelles observes, “disability studies scholars have critiqued the social model of disability for marking out a distinction between impairment and disability” that divides biological impairment from social disability (19). In response, Erevelles turns to a historical materialist approach that contextualizes the disabled body by situating it within a particular formation of political economy. This refiguring of the disabled body foregrounds historical and structural conditions that delineate the bodies that matter and the bodies that do not, exploring how “economic and social transformation that have occurred in the global context as affected by colonialism, postcolonialism, and neoliberalism” shape disability (Erevelles 20). Puar’s theorization of debilitation furthers this line of thinking as she explores how disability, debility, and capacity work together as forms of biopolitical control in order to demonstrate how structural factors influence populations’ likelihood of disablement. For Puar, debilitation “foregrounds the slow wearing down of populations instead of the event of becoming disabled” (xiii-xiv). Debilitation gives my project language to conceptualize injury beyond the individual, while also making room for the experiences of people who may feel that the term disabled does not accurately reflect their own relationship to their body-minds.

This thesis seeks to align with what Jina B. Kim calls “crip-of-color critique,” a way of parsing the co-constitutive relation of race and disability, racism and ableism as intersecting oppressions. Crip-of-color critique is “a critical methodology” that understands the state as “an apparatus of racialized disablement” and considers “the ableist reasoning and language underpinning the racialized distribution of violence” (J. B. Kim). Beginning from crip-of-color critique foregrounds the state’s enactment of disabling violences on the body-minds of those deemed expendable, while accounting for how systemic injustices like racism and ableism operate in tandem to bound and delineate disposability. In drawing our attention to the state’s production of disability, however, it is essential that crip-of-color critique does not stop short of illuminating global, transnational circuits of disability and debilitation. Continuing in the trajectory suggested by this critical methodology reveals how the workings of the disabling and debilitating state are not restricted to a national level and can unfold on a global scale.

Crucial interventions, like Ereveles, Puar, and Kim’s works, push critical disability studies to attend to larger structures of debilitation enacted through imperialism, colonialism, and militarism. Such interventions, which invite us to consider the state’s role in producing disability, become even more significant given the propensity to center the Global North in discussions of disability. As Troeung asserts, “there is a need to attend to the production of disability...in the Global South, where 80 percent of the world’s people with disabilities are located” (*Refugee Lifeworlds* 13). Similarly, Helen Meekosha critiques the field’s inability to contend with the Global North’s responsibility in creating disability in the Global South, arguing for “intellectual decolonisation” and the development of a “Southern disability studies” to “challenge some of the implicit values and concepts of northern theory” (678).

Building upon Meekosha's insights, I am wary of any suggestion that these systemic issues with critical disability studies can be addressed by simply folding the Global South into theories of disability centered on the Global North. To do so risks replicating the theoretical problematic of universalizing Western frames of reference through forms of epistemological imperialism that see the Global South as the perpetual case study for the theory of the Global North. In his influential work *Asia as Method*, Chen Kuan-Hsing points out the imperialism held within conditions of knowledge production, reminding us that "universalist assertions of theory are premature, for theory too must be deimperialized" (3). Thus, this thesis is cautious about reproducing Western theoretical hegemony in its examination of disability in the transpacific. Observing the tendency to reduce Cold War-era conflicts in Asia into "a meaningful lesson or cautionary tale for the present," Troeung expresses the need to contend with these wars on their "own terms" ("On Refugee Worldmaking" 8). Deimperializing critical disability studies requires reckoning with the afterlives of transpacific militarism on their own terms, even as the "trans" in transpacific reminds us that these formations of violence are part of an interconnected network.

Within this conversation, it is important to foreground my positionality as a scholar in the Global North, in Canada – a nation that has much to do with the production of disability in the Global South. Though my family traces our roots through the Global South, specifically China and the Philippines, I want to recognize that the asymmetrical power dynamic between North and South in academia matters. This project aspires towards an ethical practice Trinh T. Minh-ha names "speaking nearby" (Minh-ha qtd. N. Chen 87). To speak nearby is to speak in a way that "does not objectify, does not point to an object as if it is distant from the speaking subject or absent from the speaking place" while avoiding the "seizing or claiming" of the subject of its speech (Minh-ha qtd. N. Chen 87). Through a continuous process of reflection, this thesis strives

to care for the stories and histories held within the following chapters, while not suggesting that they depend upon the care of academics in the Global North.

With this in mind, this project resists the uncritical imposition of neoliberal disability pride and inclusion frameworks onto the Global South. Here, Erevelles's poignant question on what it means to theorize disability "as possibility rather than a limit" comes to mind: "How is disability celebrated if its very existence is inextricably linked to the violence of social/economic conditions of capitalism" (17)? And, I would add, under the related conditions of colonialism and imperialism? Pride-based frameworks that celebrate disability as an identity that can be recuperated into a national body fail to capture the conditions of disability's production in the Global South. Furthermore, one need not look further than disability's fraught history with personhood to reflect on both the power and danger of inclusion rhetoric for disability in liberal humanist frameworks. As Eli Clare argues, "personhood is used all too often as a weapon" since the inclusion of some is always predicated on the exclusion of others (30). These critiques of pride and personhood rhetoric that trouble disability as an identity category draw from the foundational insights of queer and Black feminist scholars like Cathy J. Cohen, who asserts the need for "intersectional analysis that recognizes how numerous systems of oppression interact to regulate and police the lives of most people" (441). Dwelling in the tension between disability as pathology and disability as pride, this thesis works to find alternative disability epistemologies that move towards new horizons of redress while being accountable to the lived realities of injustice that resist oversimplification. While these horizons may never fully arrive, their position on the cusp of imaginability is a generative invitation to re-examine and complicate the role of redress in contemporary justice paradigms, enabling a productive sense of disidentification through the continual failures of the current redress landscape of state-based appeals.

Chapter Outline

Though differing in genre as well as temporal and geographic scope, the three literary texts at the core of this project speak to U.S. imperialism across related nodes of empire. In conversation with each text, I ask, what alternative horizons of redress do they invite us to imagine as they articulate assemblages of disability and debility that are entangled with militarism, but cannot merely be reduced to measures of harm?

Chapter One develops my theorization of a transpacific aesthetic of redress in conversation with the fragmented form of Kim Thúy's *Em*. I argue that attending to the novel's transpacific aesthetic offers an alternate model for articulating harm that challenges juridical redress frameworks, which constrain the intelligibility of the disabled refugee body-mind to an index of violence. Chapter Two engages Marie Clements's *Burning Vision*, attending to the play's articulation of endemic temporalities of debilitation that reveal the limitations of redress-based promises of remedy and reparation. I read Clements's play as unfolding a politics of (un)redressability that requires us to reckon with the parameters of debility through the endemic cancers that follow in the wake of uranium and cannot be recognized as violence under the bounds of state redress cultures. Chapter Three turns to Madeleine Thien's *Dogs at the Perimeter* to examine how the sense of debilitating time present within the text develops a sense of interconnection that allows the long violences of debility to emerge in a transpacific field of sensibility. I consider what possibilities for redress might be found in the text's articulation of fugitivity and its unsettling of biomedical and humanitarian frameworks of repair. Lastly, my thesis closes with a Coda grappling with life and survival amidst unredressability and reflecting on this project's global resonances across other sites of debility and militarism.

Chapter One: A Transpacific Aesthetic of Redress: Disability and the Quantification of Harm in Kim Thúy's *Em*

The novel *Em* by Vietnamese Canadian author Kim Thúy unfolds a fragmented history that weaves together short vignettes in an attempt to glimpse the many stories of love, violence, beauty, and death that flow through the Vietnam War and its afterlife. Throughout the text, Thúy ruminates on the challenge of shaping these narrative fragments into something that resembles a truth, if only “partially” and “incompletely” (Thúy 1). Taking up this self-reflexive impulse, one vignette from the novel stages an exchange between the author and the French Canadian artist Louis Boudreault, where they discuss his contribution to Thúy’s novel in the form of a painting, which becomes a central metatextual touchpoint for the themes and structure of the text (Thúy 144-145).¹ In the untitled artwork, the word “em” appears in bold, lowercase serif letters at the top left of the image with thread-like lines tethering the letters to what looks to be a cardboard box in the lower right corner (see fig. 1.1). While these tendrils of thread – evocative of a root structure or neural network – promise an interconnection between “em” and the box, they also wander their way across the painting, coming together and apart, and ending abruptly in a seeming resistance to a teleology of connection. Some threads cluster and twine together to suggest the possibility of a tangle, but never fully cohere into the certainty and commitment of a knot. It is in this sense that Boudreault’s painting reflects the aesthetics of *Em*’s ephemeral network structure that strives to bring “all these threads without knots without ties to trace the lifeline of the abandoned” (Thúy 144).

¹ Boudreault’s painting is the cover image for the original French edition of the novel. It is included in the translated English edition alongside the fragment titled “Truths without end.”

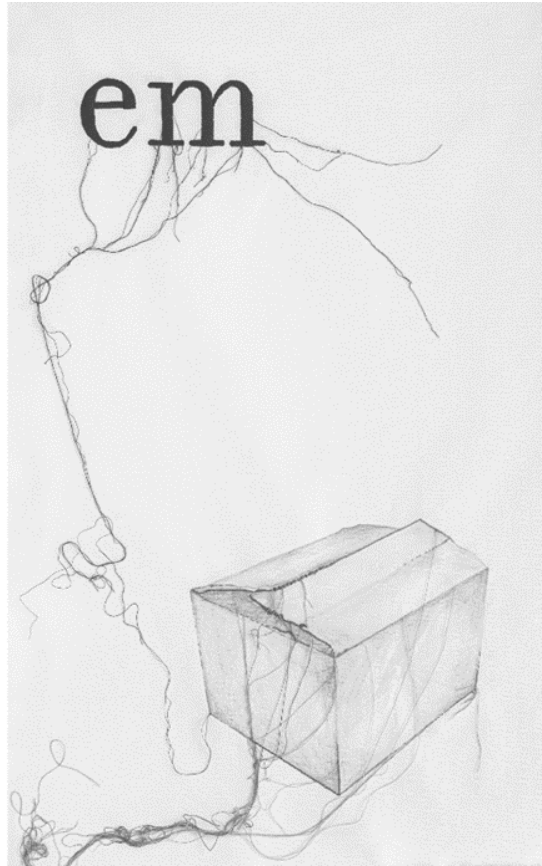


Fig. 1.1 Louis Boudreault, *Untitled*, painting, 2020, from *Em* by Kim Thúy (126).²

One such lifeline that *Em* traces runs through the box in Boudreault's painting, which references Chick Harrity's famous 1973 photograph of a baby Vietnamese girl asleep in a box next to a young boy on the streets of Saigon (Power). While humanitarian discourses attached to the war often reduce this image to an idiom of violence, Thúy's engagement with the photo evokes its subtle interweaving of love and abandonment, the comingling of the "good [that] steals in and edges its way right into the cracks of evil" (Thúy 1).³ The painting places this story of the boy, the girl, and the box in tenuous relation with "em" – a word that, as *Em*'s epigraph

² Louis Boudreault, image from *Em* by Kim Thúy. Copyright © 2020 by Louis Boudreault. Reprinted with the permission of the artist.

³ Describing the visual archive of the Vietnam War, Thy Phu recounts how photography played a crucial role in shaping the dominant narrative of the conflict, with the "visual record of the war produced by the Western press" overlooking the "subtleties" of "mixed emotions" or the banalities of everyday life amid the war in favour of images of spectacularized violence (10). For more on the role of photography, see Thy Phu's *Warring Visions*.

asserts, names both a Vietnamese term of endearment and a homonym for *aime*, the imperative form of “to love” in French. Bridging “em” and the box, the painting develops a politics of interconnection, reminding its audience of the coexistence of “human misery at the lowest level” with “so much love and so much care” (Troeng and Thúy). At the same time, this linkage foregrounds that *Em*’s networking together of histories and stories is an intentional epistemological act, one which requires careful attention to the implications of tracing these lines between love and violence and the ways that these connective threads can elude or escape such forms of meaning making.

I begin with Boudreault’s painting for *Em* because its articulation of interrelation and critical ambivalence offers crucial insight into what I develop throughout this chapter as a transpacific aesthetic of redress. This concept strives to reframe the way we understand forms of debilitating relation and implication across events, places, and communities, even as those forms of connection elude straightforward quantification and delimitation. It seeks to find modes of narrating the complexity of connection that challenge the reduction of disability to a redressable harm and demonstrate that existing juridical models for redress do not effectively account for the long temporality of violence. Within *Em*, the formal qualities of the novel work to produce a particular sensibility of the Vietnam War and its afterlife that sketches out a transpacific network of beauty and debilitation through attention to the conflict’s chemical legacy. In this sense, the novel’s aesthetic offers a critique of juridical redress culture by narrating the contingent and, at times, uneasy nuances surrounding the quantification of harm.

This chapter reads this transpacific aesthetic against the terrain of redress culture that emerged out of American empire during the Cold War era. In *Cold War Ruins*, Lisa Yoneyama addresses the “transpacific arrangement of Cold War justice” (8) and describes how leveraging

“the ‘good war’ master narrative” in the Asia Pacific enabled the United States to override local justice frameworks in favour of an Americanized justice that allowed and continues to allow the U.S. to define the meaning of histories of violence and justice in the region (21). In theorizing a transpacific aesthetic of redress, I attempt to grapple with the tendency to oversimplify disability as an index of harm done to the refugee in contemporary redress discourses surrounding the Vietnam War, especially within what Thuy Linh Nguyen Tu calls the “chemical afterlife of Vietnam,” a recognition of the “chemically altered world” exemplified in Agent Orange and other forms of dioxin exposure (14). Drawing on critical refugee and critical disability studies, I ask, how does redress for this chemical afterlife move beyond reifying disability as damage towards non-state-centric justice frameworks that value disabled body-minds and experiences, while still contextualizing refugee debilitation within protracted histories of militarism and imperialism? I argue that attending to *Em*’s narration of debilitation offers an alternate model for articulating injury that challenges juridical redress frameworks and their epistemologies of refugee disability, allowing for critical ambivalences that make space for the intimacy of beauty and violence and for webs of implication that reconfigure approaches to quantifying and delimiting harm.

Through its attention to the Vietnam War and redress, this project contributes to existing scholarship on the legacies of U.S. militarism and Cold War formations in Asia (see J. Kim; Phu; Troeung; Tu; Watson; L. Wong; Yoneyama). In particular, it builds upon Tu’s examination of the chemical legacy of the Vietnam War and the experiments in skin, often backed directly or indirectly by the U.S. military, that informed chemical warfare in the conflict by considering what insights critical disability studies might offer this line of inquiry. Heeding critical disability scholar Susan Schweik caution that “there is plenty more to say to – and to hear from – disabled

people in Vietnam than the story of toxic effect,” this project is committed to rejecting narratives that spectacularize the disabled body-mind as an “archive of monstrosity” (66). As processes of historical and transnational redress for the Vietnam War are still unfolding, it is vital to attend to how attempts to seek redress for U.S. violences in Southeast Asia have the potential to create a legal and discursive terrain that perpetuates the pathologization of disability and enacts further epistemological violence on the disabled refugee subject.

Quantifying Harm: A Transpacific Aesthetic of Redress

In essence, the plot of *Em* is what Saidiya Hartman calls a “critical fabulation” (11), a narrative imagining of the unanswered questions that linger in the archive, in the past and future of the two children in Harrity’s photograph.⁴ Blending history and fiction, the novel crafts a multigenerational “ephemeral family” around Hồng and Louis that stretches in a transpacific tangle from the colonial rubber plantations of French Indochina through the Vietnam War to the contemporary Vietnamese diaspora (Thúy 68). It follows an expansive cast of characters, drawing out their relation and imbrication under these unfolding histories. Refusing a singular, linear story, it opts instead to move from thread to thread, lifeline to lifeline, in a mode of storytelling the foregrounds transpacific interconnection even as it makes visible the details and imaginings that continue to elude the narrative.

On a formal level, *Em* is comprised of a series of fragments that rarely exceed a couple pages in length. Sections tracing the lifelines of Hồng and Louis’s kinship are interspersed with an archive of authorial asides, historical commentary, unexpected coincidences, and encyclopedia-like entries on topics that intersect with the narrative’s histories of violence and care. The text shifts between scales of narration, from the personal to the geopolitical, making

⁴ In an interview, Thúy notes that, while the girl in the photo was adopted by an American family, she was unable to find of record of the boy’s story in her research. *Em* reflects her attempts to “pay homage to this boy” (Power).

visible webs of connection and context that prevent any one fragment from eclipsing the others. Thus, while the novel conveys the debilitating violence of the Vietnam War, these accounts of violence are always held in conversation with multiple accountings and perspectives, enabling a narrative that traffics in ambivalences, able to capaciously house contradictory ideas, implications, and affects to find the “love [that] flirts with abandonment” (Thúy 1). These characteristics form the foundation of the novel’s transpacific aesthetic of redress.

The novel opens with a confession of narrative limitation grounded in the realization that authorial “imagination would never be able to grasp the whole reality” of the “stories of foreseeable madness, unimagined love, or everyday heroism” held within the text (Thúy 2, 3). In lieu of this “whole truth,” Thúy promises her readers “a certain ordering of the emotions, along with feelings whose disarray cannot be denied” (3). I propose that it is this work of ordering alongside an acknowledgement of narrative complexity that forms the primary basis for the novel’s transpacific aesthetic of redress and its central intervention in conversations surrounding the quantification of harm and disability that circulate in the afterlife of U.S. militarism in Vietnam. Conceiving of the transpacific as a network form, my understanding of this concept draws inspiration from Patrick Jagoda’s discussion of network aesthetics as a metaphor for contemporary interconnected life. For Jagoda, a network is a structure of links and nodes that traces a “limit concept” which “exceeds rational description or mapping” (3). In the response to such unmappability, they consider the network aesthetic’s ability to attune us to a “field of sensibility in which certain ways of being or particular lives [...] might only be distantly detectable or wholly unrecognizable” because of a network’s configuration of relation (18-19).

Thinking with the network’s capacity to make (im)perceivable through structure, I envision a transpacific aesthetic as one such field of sensibility grounded in the specific material

histories of the transpacific that functions as a “heuristic of multidirectional traffic, flows, and currents” (*Refugee Lifeworlds* 24). This network aesthetic provides language and form for tracing what Yén Lê Espiritu, Lisa Lowe, and Lisa Yoneyama term “transpacific entanglements,” the ways that “U.S. empire and militarism in Asia and the Pacific Island have been critical, yet underrecognized, parts of the genealogy of the contemporary condition of U.S. neoliberalism” (175). Bringing *Em*’s transpacific structure into the realm of critical refugee and critical disability studies, I find this framing generative because it orients us to consider ways of being that structures of redress can and cannot apprehend within the field of sensibility that results from its linking together of cause and effect, of harm and reparation. By this I mean that redress is, on one level, an act of networking together different histories and stories to make sensible particular formations of harm against particular bodies.

The quantification of harm is not a neutral process; it is shaped by specific logics of injury that play a central role in influencing epistemologies of refugee disability. For example, visible, immediate injury is often legible as harm in ways that other manifestations of bodily potential and pain are not. Such enumerations of violence can shape how we come to know disability and its meaning within histories of debilitation. Speaking to the lack of recognition for Vietnamese deaths in accountings of the Vietnam War, Yén Lê Espiritu reflects on what constitutes a “grievable life” by observing the dehumanization of Vietnamese refugee lives and the failure to attend to their loss (19). This is the same construction of value that *Em* critiques in the divergence in body counts attributed to the Vietnam War – namely, the presence of “only round figures on one side and exact ones on the other” (Thúy 138). I am interested in how redress’ discourses of disability and harm become caught up in this production of the grievable life and loss. It feels quite difficult to insist on the value of imperfection and the non-normative

body-mind when such experiences stem from structures of war, violence, and militarism. Here, Thúy's careful attention to the visceral violences of the Vietnam War, such as the Mỹ Lai massacre, that attest to the pain and trauma of being made an ungrievable life come to mind (36-39). At the same time, the oversimplification of disability to a measure of loss or redressable harm risks perpetuating further violence against disabled refugee life by counting such bodies only in terms of their debilitation. Taking up these logics of loss, I wish to intervene in the reduction of disability to a form of redressable harm against a liberal humanist subject – a theory of harm that depends upon a “liberal notion of wounding” premised upon a normative white embodiment that is perpetually foreclosed to the disabled refugee of colour (Weheliye 14).

In her attention to the transnational redress discourses that cluster around the figure of the comfort woman, Laura Kang considers how these “particular modes of documenting...violation and violability...foreclose other terms and conditions for making ‘Asian women’ intelligible” beyond these discursive and juridical contexts (16). Building on Kang's assertion, I propose that the discourse of refugee disability as damage possesses a similar function in logics of redress. This discourse amplifies the narrative of the damaged refugee subject by discursively extracting this node of experience from other contexts and ways of understanding the body-mind that might foster capacious ambivalences towards disability. Gada Mahrouse's examination of the inspirational “super-refugee” highlights this phenomenon of extraction by teasing out the ableist narratives that essentialize the refugee as damaged and perpetuate their need to “overcome” disability “(174). In a similar manner, Fiona B. Ngô's analysis of the psychosomatic blindness of Cambodian refugee women in the U.S. demonstrates the state's biomedical surveillance apparatus' inability to perceive the disabled refugee beyond a “perpetual need” for rehabilitation (112). Taken together, these critiques point us towards the violences of cure logic that

underscores redress' framing of refugee disability as injury. As Mimi T. Nguyen argues, the liberal state claims to rehabilitate the refugee by offering them the "gift of freedom," which includes the chance for "the subject of freedom to resemble or 'catch up to' the modern observer" (17). Reading this gift in relation to disabled refugee experiences, the gift of freedom evokes parallels with the same temporalities of restoration that delineate disability as a redressable harm that must be overcome by the refugee. All these examples emphasize how equating disability and harm can limit the intelligibility of the refugee.

To return to the threads of Boudreault's painting, it is *Em*'s ability to play with the complex (and at times uncomfortable) interconnections and implications between different narrative truths, to perceive these stories as part of a larger context of debilitation and survival, that allows the text to cultivate ambivalent attitudes towards violence and disability that walk a careful line of nuance. I read the novel as embodying a field of sensibility that makes disabled refugee bodies simultaneously sensible in, under, and beyond logics of violence under U.S. militarism. Thúy recounts her process of striving for this balance as a fraught effort of weaving together narrative threads: "I erased thousands of words in blocks, in paragraphs, in sentences, so as not to underscore some, to highlight others too boldly, and in the end to betray the delicate balance that maintains us in love. And in life" (127-8). *Em*'s transpacific aesthetic of redress relies upon and makes space for this delicate tension that reads beauty and suffering together without allowing one to subsume the other.

Narrating Disability and Debility: Operation Ranch Hand

If *Em*'s form delineates a transpacific field of sensibility, what kind of narration of disability and debility does this aesthetic enable? One of the foremost coordinates in the constellation of militarist violence and disability *Em* engages is the legacy of Operation Ranch

Hand. Run by the U.S. military during the Vietnam War, Operation Ranch Hand was a herbicidal warfare program that poured “20,000,000 gallons of defoliants and herbicides” over parts of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia (Thúy 133). Known as the Rainbow Herbicides, these toxic defoliants – amongst them the infamous Agent Orange – attempted to destroy the foliage that camouflaged the Viet Cong and the agricultural food sources that sustained them. The biochemical ramifications of this indiscriminate herbicidal warfare, waged without regard for collateral damage, continue to linger, stretching far beyond the official end of the conflict in 1975. Scholarship on this chemical legacy problematizes the portrayal of disability and debility within postwar narratives of humanitarian recovery that reduce disabled subjects to “the very emblems of ecocide” (Schweik 67). As Natalia Duong asserts, there is a need for “an alternate network tracing the transnational circulation of Agent Orange outside economies of forgiveness that seek only to identify a clear perpetrator and victim” (408).

In the fragment “Rainbow,” Thúy quantifies the debilitating impacts of Operation Ranch Hand in a simple bullet point list that instructs its reader to imagine “24 percent of Vietnamese territory sprayed with these rainbow colours; 3,000,000 humans beings poisoned and at least 9,000,000 near and dear to them in mourning; 1,000,000 congenital malformations as proof of human genius” (Thúy 134). While *Em* foregrounds these statistics in an attempt to express the extent of chemical violence, what is particularly significant about Thúy’s account is its ability to intertwine biopolitical debilitation with the value and beauty of human life lived in the interstices of such destruction. Insisting on this entanglement, she reminds us of how “humans resisted and survived, accepting the presence of these poisons that are now part and parcel of what they are” (134). The critical ambivalence held within this affective acceptance opens up an epistemology of disability that does not strive to elide the violences of U.S. militarism, nor seek solace in the

promise of a cure for the debilitated body. Instead, this epistemology recognizes how these dioxins “have formed and deformed in their image,” shaping bodies, experiences, and identities in ways that both accept and exceed this biochemical legacy (Thúy 134).

By weaving the legacies of Operation Ranch Hand and the lifelines that run through its chemical afterlife, *Em* foregrounds how the process of shifting redress’ epistemologies of disability beyond an indexical relation to harm requires the ability to oscillate between scales of disability experience. These scales range from the biopolitical debilitation of whole populations – what Jasbir K. Puar refers to as the “slow wearing down” of disposable communities and bodies (xiii) – to the plurality of individualized experiences of disabled life under such conditions of debilitation. On one hand, understanding disability in the context of debilitation and the larger histories of militarism that mark entire populations as disposable is essential because it prevents delineations of refugee disability from locating harm in the individual body-mind – a framing that furthers reductive narratives of the refugee as a physically and psychically damaged subject. On the other, valuing disabled body-minds and ways of being in the world cautions us against collapsing disability into a simple reflection of debilitation’s toll on the body. Thúy’s representation of Operation Ranch Hand takes up the difficult work of being accountable to “the connections between disability, chronic illness, and injustice while also holding on to the inherent value of disabled and chronically ill people” (Clare 62). Against the backdrop of this dual imperative, a transpacific aesthetic of redress makes space to recognize how these different scales of disability can exist simultaneously as different threads of experience that inform and complicate each other without presuming their interchangeability.

Writing on the U.S. military’s use of chemicals in Vietnam, Tu argues for the need to attend to Vietnam’s “biochemical inheritance” while refusing the totalization of damage to body

and environment (15). The language of inheritance Tu evokes surfaces the vexed role of temporality in redress' discourses of disability and damage. The temporalities of debilitation and disability under the violence of war or the creeping exhaustion of chronic illness are unpredictable. Those affected by the Rainbow Herbicides might "die now or fifteen or twenty years later, from liver cancer, heart disease, or melanoma" (Thúy 135). Taking advantage of these uncertain temporalities, the U.S. government's continued denial of responsibility for the aftermath of Operation Ranch Hand in Southeast Asia depends upon manufactured reasonable doubt that obfuscates any violences that do not fit dominant models for quantifying harm. In this context of what historian Edwin A. Martini calls "the politics of uncertainty" (8), it is productive to consider how contemporary legal redress frameworks enshrine certain modes of direct causal relation that make certain forms of debilitation more difficult to trace under the expansive temporalities of slow violence. Once again, the capacious possibilities held within a transpacific aesthetic of redress present an alternative mode of quantifying harm in the uncertain shadows of this biochemical legacy.

Perhaps the most overt manifestation of the novel's intervention in these redress narratives lies in Thúy's portrayal of Tâm's cancer. Tâm is the daughter of Alexandre, a French colonial plantation owner, and Mai, a Vietnamese plantation labourer. She is the biological mother of Hồng and, later on, the adoptive mother of Louis. In her childhood, Tâm is witness to the violence of Operation Ranch Hand, watching "leaves falling from the plantation trees as if autumn had crept between the season of heat and of monsoons" (Thúy 133). The American evacuation of Saigon brings her to Guam and then Canada, where she opens a nail salon in Montreal. Tâm eventually dies from cancer, the legacy of "the rainbow rain of herbicides that fell during her childhood. And perhaps also from nail polish, according to her oncologist" (Thúy

122). Thúy's accounting of Tâm's chronic illness is multidirectional, connecting her cancer to both the Rainbow Herbicides and her time spent labouring in proximity to nail polish. By intertwining these disparate spatialities, *Em* employs a transpacific scope that works to undo the perception that people in the West can imagine themselves as far removed from sites of toxicity that only exist over "there." In this sense, the text evokes Mel Y. Chen's salient insights surrounding the 2007 American lead panic that point out how much of the narrativization of lead as a threat to the national body of America relies on the assumption that "these environmental toxins were supposed to be 'there' but were found 'here'" (165).

Alongside these permeable geographies, temporality also figures prominently in the description of Tâm's cancer. *Em* blurs the lines between past and present chemical exposures on both sides of the Pacific, suggesting that they cannot be meaningfully separated out from each other. And how could they be? There is a fundamental uncertainty always present in debilitation's unknowability, in the inability to determine exact cause and effect or to quantify impact and delimit scope. Attending to the narration of Tâm's cancer reveals the need to be conscious of illness or disability's capacity to expand and exceed the temporal constraints of a debilitating event. Routing stories such as Tâm's through a transpacific aesthetic of redress allows the entanglements surrounding the quantification of toxic harm to emerge through an imaginative capacity that lends itself to tracing the latency of historical and ongoing injury. In this way, such a framework envisions a quantification of harm that foregrounds slow temporalities and interconnection beyond straightforward causality.

However, while *Em* presents the nail salon as a continuation of the chemical afterlife of Vietnam, this story of toxicity and debility cannot be separated out from the beauty, ethics of care, and community that also flow through the space of the nail salon. A fragment titled "Nail

Polish” is dedicated entirely to the history of nail adornment and the seemingly endless names for every shade of polish imaginable, a “palette of colours...augmented with hundreds of nuances” (Thúy 111). The vivid colours and descriptions present in this passage offer a parallel to the Rainbow Herbicides and the orange, green, pink, purple, white, and blue coloured bands that designated each barrel of herbicide according to type (Thúy 135). The names of the polishes – “Butterfly Kisses for pink cotton candy” or “Mad Women for audacious raspberry velvet” (Thúy 112) – echo the rainbow of herbicides with “liquid pink as flowers, white as nonchalance, purple as purple hearts, green as leaves under the monsoon rains, and blue as the boundless sky” (Thúy 137). Connecting these two scenes as part of the same transpacific arc grapples with how beauty and debilitation continue to dwell side by side. It is nail polish, too, that enables pathways towards community to emerge in the aftermath of war. Tâm opens her salon in Montreal upon receiving advice from another member of the diasporic community. And, in turn, “as soon as Tâm was able to do so, she offered financial help to those of her employees who wanted to open their own salons” (Thúy 115). The creeping tragedy of Tâm’s cancer sits alongside this sense of community, reciprocity, and survival as a lifeworld is rebuilt under conditions of debilitation.

The novel offers, to borrow from Tu, a “salvage sensibility” that is attentive to what can be reclaimed as love amid the violence of war (20). Tu reminds us that “damaged ecologies are not barren wastelands – sites to leave behind and mourn – but landscapes of altered imaginations where people continue to build lives” (20). Her engagement with these imaginative landscapes emphasizes the generative potential of disabled worldmaking in the long temporal afterlives of debilitation. Such a salvage sensibility resonates with Clare’s framing of disability as a kind of brilliant imperfection that recognizes the realities of life with disability, while rejecting the reduction of disability to “a medical problem lodged in individual body-minds, which need to be

treated or cured” (8). What is particularly generative, then, about a transpacific aesthetic of redress is its ability to make space for these ambivalences that intervene in redress’ epistemologies of disability by seeking to salvage, without needing to cure or restore the disabled body to a mythic originary whole or frame compensation as a means to symbolically repair the non-normative body-mind.

An Unravelling

Through careful attention to the lifelines of the abandoned, *Em* develops a transpacific aesthetic of redress that refuses to simply reinscribe disability as an embodiment of violence. The text, moving fragment by fragment, works to unravel the dominant overarching geopolitical and historical narratives of the Vietnam War by attending to the narrative threads that extend beyond this framework’s field of sensibility. The novel foregrounds this process by dedicating its attention to glimpses of “the existence of simple human beings, the ones waiting [...] for the arrival of a baby or the ripening of a mango or, on a school bench, the announcement of a grade” (Thúy 147). A section dedicated to the global geopolitics of the Cold War, to the “bipolar Manichaeian rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union” (J. Kim 4), the hegemonic historical and epistemological framework that tends to subsume all other accounts of U.S. war in Southeast Asia, appears only at the end of the text. There, it functions as almost an afterthought to the stories of refugee life amid disability and debilitation that have come before.

Em collects these fragmented stories and entwines them into a transpacific aesthetic that is as capacious as it is unfinished. As Thúy writes, “If I knew how to end a conversation, if I could distinguish true truths, personal truths from instinctive truths, I would have disentangled the threads for you before tying them up or arranging them so that the story of this book would be clear between us” (Thúy 127). Drawing inspiration from Boudreault’s painting, Thúy narrates

the limitations of the novel's project of interconnection, as well as the limitations of a transpacific aesthetic of redress. Attuning to critical ambivalences that resist epistemologies of disability as damage make it difficult to disentangle the threads, even as it makes their mutual entanglement more legible. Accounting for this networked structure in redress does not make the process of redress any less difficult or less painful – if anything, it introduces further complication. And yet, it is in this complication that we find a way to route disability through debilitation while holding onto the value of the disabled refugee body-mind.

From this vantage point, *Em*'s approach to quantifying injury is a generative site to begin theorizing ways of unmooring redress from ableist accountings of disability. While I hope thinking in terms of transpacific forms will allow us to move towards alternative, non-state-centric models of justice and accountability, I am conscious of the many threads that may escape this reading. The politics of interconnection that Boudreault's painting and *Em*'s formal and narrative structure surface affirm the constraints of network imaginaries and our inability to "grasp the whole reality" of the legacies of disability and debilitation that extend outward from the Vietnam War (Thúy 2). We are left to wonder how redress' accounting of harm "would have been different had love been considered in the calculations, the strategies, the equations, and above all the battles" (Thúy 139). While this inability to imagine fully might be perceived as a site of epistemological failure, I wish to suggest that attending to what remains "unanchored, impermanent, and free" is a generative and grounding practice that reminds us of the ways disabled refugee lives always exceed attempts to enumerate or delineate their meaning (Thúy 129). A transpacific aesthetic of redress, through its attention to failures to know and imagine, is one way to begin grappling with epistemologies of disability that seek to reduce disabled refugee experiences to an index of harm.

Chapter Two: “feel it in your bones”: The Cripistemologies of Redress and Debility in Marie Clements’s *Burning Vision*

On May 27, 2016, U.S. President Barack Obama visited Hiroshima Memorial Peace Park, where he delivered an address reflecting on the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Speaking seventy-one years later, his remarks positioned this “terrible force unleashed in a not so distant past” within an ahistorical rhetoric of common humanity, orientated towards “a future in which Hiroshima and Nagasaki are known not as the dawn of atomic warfare, but as the start of our own moral awakening” (Obama). While the international legal and political stakes surrounding the presidential visit make avoidance of any accountability for American actions unsurprising, it is worth pausing on Obama’s rhetoric of moral awakening. This language promises to turn atomic violence into a lesson, a moment of spectacularized rupture in the fabric of collective moral and technological advancement that serves as a cautionary tale against the evils of war. At the same time, the moral framing of the universal lesson eschews questions of responsibility that circulate in the aftermath of nuclear violence in favour of an appeal to a global inflection point that becomes the galvanizing impetus for “our moral imagination” (Obama).

In its efforts to situate nuclear violence firmly in the past, Obama’s speech evokes a fundamental temporal premise of transitional justice. Transitional justice, one model for approaching questions of redress following events like mass death or conflict, strives to “find a way to move on [...] and secure these events in the past” in order to facilitate a society’s transition to liberal democracy (Hayner 3-4). Writing on the development of transitional redress in relation to the post-Cold War in Asia, Jini Kim Watson observes the “directional” nature of this justice paradigm and its reliance on a clear demarcation between past and present that relegates violence to the past in definitional opposition to the “now” of the present (158). I am

interested in how this directional temporality, which attempts to freeze violence in the past as a moment of rupture that then becomes a catalyst for a society's transition, delimits the kind of violences redress frameworks can grapple with. Scholar of nuclear memory Katherine Lawless articulates such limitation when she observes that Obama's moral framing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as universal lessons "obscures the slow violence of nuclear energy regimes by reducing nuclearity to the moment of explosion," arguing for the need to "represent the everyday violence of nuclearity characterized by uranium extraction and related forms of exploitation without reducing them to the spectacular violence of Hiroshima" (47).⁵ Similarly, Iyko Day asserts that "global pleas for nuclear disarmament and 'No More Hiroshimas' altogether elide the existence of Japan's many nuclear reactors while overlooking the sixty-seven nuclear tests conducted on the Marshall Islands over a twelve-year period, the largest of which was equivalent to a thousand Hiroshima-sized bombs" (259).

This chapter asserts that, despite attempts to narrativize atomic violence as a spectacular relic of a proximate but discrete past, such radioactive violences survive into the present and resurface in ways that challenge our understandings of redress. What does redress become when violence occupies the endemic temporality of debilitation? What recourse remains when injury resides in a perpetual unfolding of debility, especially since such perpetuality resists redress with its promises of remedy, restoration, and reparation? Analyzing Marie Clements's play *Burning Vision*, this chapter examines how violences of nuclearity that manifest in the slow temporality of debilitation exceed the scope of existing logics of redress. Focusing on the play's fragmented, non-linear form, embodied imagery, soundscape, and sense of time and space, I explore how

⁵The concept of "slow violence" comes from the ecocritic Rob Nixon. Reflecting on the kinds of harm created by environmental crises, Nixon uses this term to describe "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not view as violence at all" (2). For more, see *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* by Rob Nixon.

these aesthetic and formal qualities further my conception of a transpacific aesthetic of redress as a mode of narrating or making sensible interconnected sites of disability and debilitation in the transpacific. I build upon this concept, not just as a style of narration or a particular geography, but as a structure that produces its own sets of knowledge about the nature of disability, debilitation, and redress by making visible histories and pathways of connection that we would otherwise not perceive, thereby working against the siloing of sites of atomic history through emphasis on relation and implication.

Burning Vision attends to the *longue durée* of debility in the wake of uranium's transnational histories of extraction and weaponization in the transpacific. Across four movements, the play moves between four locations, from the mining of radioactive pitchblende on the Indigenous lands of the Sahtu Dene in Port Radium, Northwest Territories, following the ore's journey as it is refined in Port Hope, Ontario, transported via ship to New Mexico, and sold by Canada to the U.S. military to produce the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Staging the entangled stories of the many lives that intersect with this radioactive history, the nonlinear structure of *Burning Vision* surfaces a complex web of knowing and unknowing interrelations that grapple with problematics of responsibility, complicity, and implication within the lingering violence of radiation. The Dene, one community in this deadly chain of labour, were never made aware of the uranium's ultimate purpose. Becoming collateral damage under the compounding forces of settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and the military-industrial complex, they also did not receive proper information regarding the dangers of radioactive material as it "contaminated their waters, lands, and population to an unknown extent," despite the danger being "well known to both the American and Canadian governments" at the time (van Wyck 39). *Burning Vision* evokes questions of redress by making visible the

debilitating impacts of uranium that extend from the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the mining of uranium on the Indigenous lands of the Sahtu Dene. What would it look like to conceptualize redress across these sites of atomic violence? How does responsibility function within this radioactive chain of implication? What does the seeming impossibility of redress reveal about epistemologies of violence, debility, and disability?

Tracing the transpacific histories of disposability held within *Burning Vision*, I argue that Clements's play offers a politics of redress that requires us to reckon with the parameters of debility – including the bodies and temporalities it occupies, as well as what can and cannot be recognized as debility under the frameworks of settler colonial capital and militarism – that conspire to produce a “regime of unredressability” (Yoneyama 14). The play requires its audience to contend with unredressability, how existing logics of redress, like transitional justice, fail to account for the long temporality of radioactive violences that can often only be glimpsed obliquely through the networking together of geographically or temporally disparate, yet interconnected events. Approaching the text from both a redress studies and critical disability studies perspective reveals the slow violences of the long-term effects of radiation, such as the cancers and chronic illnesses linked to uranium mining and the atomic bombings, that fall outside the scope of redress. I propose that Clements's text offers a transpacific aesthetic of redress that makes perceivable disabled ways of knowing the body – like embodied (un)knowing, interdependence, and crip time – that, in turn, makes sensible modes of living with debility and unredressability that move beyond transitional redress' reductive temporality.

On Debility: The Everyday Violence of Radiation

Reading *Burning Vision* in terms of debility demonstrates the need to move away from the potentially individualizing concept of disability in order to explicate the extent of radiation's

violence. For Jasbir K. Puar, debility “foregrounds the slow wearing down of populations instead of the event of becoming disabled” (xiii). She argues that debility is “endemic, perhaps even normative, to disenfranchised communities,” forming a “banal feature of quotidian existence that is already definitive of the precarity of that existence” (16). In conversations about collective justice, such a shift from disability to debility is necessary because it foregrounds the uneven exposure to conditions of debilitation that produce disability on a systemic level by rendering entire populations disposable, rather than focusing on an individual claim to deficit or deficiency in a body-mind presumed to be whole by default. Furthermore, the very temporality of nuclear violence requires a concept that can think with the accumulation of slow violence, beyond the individual life, through generations, across time. Debility also helps to situate the Dene’s experiences within a broader pattern of atomic violence in the Pacific sustained by logics of settler colonialism and racialization. Reading through debility demonstrates how these logics were used to justify and sustain the displacement and endangerment of Indigenous communities in the Pacific by turning islands into nuclear testing sites.⁶ The rationale of “acceptable” loss made manifest in debilitation is not an unintentional or exceptional side effect, but a requirement for the proliferation of imperialism via Indigenous dispossession.

The endemic quality of debility recalls the ubiquitous presence and lingering legacy of uranium in Clements’s work: “uranium is like shrapnel...like deadly particles of energy that never die” (102). Thinking through the legacy of this shrapnel requires reckoning with all the ways it continues to emerge from histories of mining, commodification, and weaponization,

⁶In “bikinis and others/pacific n/oceans,” Teresia K. Teaiwa examines the history of nuclear testing in the Pacific Ocean, focusing on the story of Bikini Atoll. The logic of debilitation that marks racialized, Indigenous life as disposable appears clearly in the United States’ choice to use the island for nuclear testing: “the population of Bikini in 1946 was between 166 and 170 people – small enough to be relocated with relative ease; an ultimately, Bikini – and the Marshall Island in general – were at least five hundred miles from all the sea and air routes, distant enough that ensuing radioactive contamination would not endanger “heavily populated areas” (Teaiwa 89).

often in the form of chronic diseases like cancer. The asymmetries of biopower, which empower American and Canadian militarism in the transpacific to render entire populations collateral damage, clarify the dramatic disjunction between community testimonies of endemic debilitation and official state discourses of redress that quantify the impacts of uranium in radically divergent terms. Commissioned by Canada's Ministry of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the 2005 *Canada-Déline Uranium Table – Final Report* asserts that its findings “do not indicate a significantly increased risk of radiation-induced cancer in the [Dene] community” (73), and signals its considerable disdain for the Dene's embodied knowledge and lived experiences by noting a “profound and pervasive fear of radiation and a tendency to blame any and all health problems on the mine and the legacy of the mining” in the community (63). These erasures are further enabled by narratives of nuclear memory that locate harm solely within the spectacle and temporality of the nuclear explosion. The continued refusal to account for the full extent of debility stemming from uranium renders whole sections of what historian Peter van Wyck describes as the “highway of the atom” beyond the purview of redress, prompting additional questions regarding how debility even becomes legible as a redressable violence (6).

Frameworks of redress are contingent upon epistemologies of what constitutes violence against which subjects and spaces. This dynamic becomes evident in the ways that temporality shapes the recognition of violence. Returning to the opening anecdote of this chapter that reflects on collapsing nuclear violence to the moment of explosion, we can see how nuclear memory creates its own epistemology of violence that excludes the slow everyday violences of radiation from being recognized as harm. In the temporality of U.S. militarism, the violence of the bombings ends with the “voices of the hibakusha” who will “no longer be with us to bear witness” (Obama). Yet, even within this narrow window of temporality where U.S. militarism

becomes legible as violence, recognition is still limited because of American empire's hegemonic role in defining postwar justice. As Yoneyama argues, "U.S. ascendancy to power in the postwar world critically hinged on the Americanization of justice as it sought to settle memories of the U.S. war against Japan" (19). This dynamic is reflected in Clements's play when the character Round Rose, a fictionalized version of Japanese American radio personality Iva Toguri, remarks, "Americans are Americans and everybody else is sorry" (Clements 90). Round Rose's speech testifies to both American hegemony and to the ineffectual ubiquity of "sorry" held within the material histories of state redress the play references, including the Canadian government's 1988 apology to WWII Japanese Canadian internees. It is a reminder of how the terms of reference dictating the discursive terrain of redress remain unstable and shift from context to context.

If redress is predicated upon what can be known as violence, then redress requires a reckoning with naturalized violences of debility, with what can and cannot be understood or recognized as debilitation because of the Americanization of justice, the temporality of nuclear memory, or narratives of acceptable collateral damage. Redress, especially transitional justice, relies on a linear temporality that promises to fix or remedy injustices of the past by facilitating a transition to or restoration of a liberal democratic society. Embedded in this framework is a refraction of the logic of cure, critiqued by critical disability scholars as perpetuating narratives of the mythical healthy body by assessing brokenness and promising a return to wholeness and health (Clare 14). Implicating redress, a process of seeking justice, in the complexities of cure is an uncomfortable but productive suggestion, since it draws out the ableist discourses of remedy that fail to account for the endemic realities of debility and what it is to live with debility and

chronic disease. As Eli Clare concludes, “cure promises us so much, but it will never give us justice” (184).

Redress and critical disability theory hold different epistemologies of violence and debility that occupy a generative, but often vexed relation, even as both frameworks question what can be known as violence, on which bodies, and under what circumstances. Being critical of the terms of redress culture requires reflecting on how redress frequently centers on the “need to restore the presupposed wholeness to the injured bodies” (Yoneyama 14). Beginning from a premise of wholeness, from the assumption of the originary healthy body, eclipses the gradations of experience held within debility. This concept of wholeness reveals an “entitled hope and expectation for a certain longevity” (Puar 12), ignoring the realities of endemic debility that render it exceptional rather than normative in marginalized communities. Reading redress in terms of cripistemologies requires reckoning with the “crisis ordinariness” of debility (*Cruel Optimism* 10).

There is a danger, too, in bringing redress and critical disability theory together, of replicating ableist rationales that conflate redress with the elimination of disability or render disability a symbolic manifestation of injustice in a rush to legitimize the magnitude of harm. Here, I am cautioned by Clare’s reminder that “in a world saturated with ableism, it’s difficult to acknowledge the connections between disability, chronic illness, and injustice while also holding on to the inherent value of disabled and chronically ill people” (62). I offer this point not to minimize accountability or suffering, but to consider how to value living with disability in ways that do not minimize personhood or replicate abstracting violences of turning chronic disease into an emblem of evil. Moving with the complexity held within remedy and redress enables us to seek out alternative modes of being in relation that account for the realities of living with

debility, to turn to those lived realities, rather than away from them, and to find cripistemologies of being in spaces of unredressability located in aesthetic forms that make new understandings of connection and implication perceivable.

Embodied (Un)Knowing: Becoming Delicate Bodies

To “feel it in your bones” is an intuition grounded in embodied knowledge. It is an imperfect way of naming what cannot be made certain logically, but nevertheless is still known in some capacity. For critical disability scholars Merri Lisa Johnson and Robert McRuer, this expression is a cripistemology of living with disability that grasps the inevitability of “it’s always something,” even though the what, when, and where of that something remain unknown (127). In *Burning Vision*, this recurring idiom accumulates layers of meaning, indexing a range of contexts from a prospector’s anticipation of discovery, a kinship bond with a life cut short by an atomic explosion, and the onset of a miner’s radiation poisoning (Clements 13, 39, 97). As the effects of radiation exposure gradually reveal themselves throughout the play, “feeling it in your bones” catalogues a creeping sense of unease despite industry and state promises of “no harm” (Clements 95). This embodied knowing becomes devastatingly literal under the knowledge that radiation poisoning targets the body’s bone marrow, compromising the immune system, and crumbling bone to dust with sufficient repeated exposure (Perkins 81-2). Reflecting on the implications surrounding this turn to embodied feeling – both as a valuing of cripistemologies of disability experience and as an indicator of debilitation – I examine how embodied knowing challenges redress cultures framing of what counts as violence against which bodies.

Burning Vision has no straightforward plot, instead opting to intertwine fragments of the transpacific journey of uranium, shifting between four quadrants on a circular stage – each representing a different geographic node in the radioactive circuit – to overlay place, time, and

identity in generative ways. Through this staging, Clements draws out the links between multiple configurations of radioactive violence, the body's fragility, and its resilience, making sensible a transpacific pathway of implication that traces a collective story of debilitation and survival. The character Rose, a young Métis woman who works at her father's Hudson's Bay Store and then as a cook on one of the vessels transporting uranium ore, positions herself on a spectrum of fragility relative to her environment and labour: "a delicate thing like myself shouldn't be carrying a fifty-pound sack, but that's what happens when you are me [...] It's hard to be delicate in the North. Here it is better to be practical; you'll live longer" (Clements 14). Immediately, the text foregrounds the body's capacity as relative to its ability to labour under certain expectations and environments – in this case, the slow temporality of uranium exposure driven by the military-industrial complex. But how do bodies come to know themselves as delicate?

While all bodies may be delicate to some degree, propounding upon universal fragility – a version of the ostensibly equalizing "we all become disabled if we live long enough" – obscures the reality that "what counts as a disability is already over determined by 'white fragility' on one side and the racialization of bodies that are expected to endure pain, suffering, and injury on the other" (Puar xiv). The ability to be delicate hinges on racialization; and racialized expectations of resilience, like being "practical," suggest that rhetorics of fragility elide the impacts of living under slow violence by attempting to shift the discursive context from debility into singular (dis)ability. Adding further nuance to this point, James Kyung-Jin Lee reminds us of how different racialized embodiments are perceived as having different relationships to pain and illness, with the model minority Asian body being "premised on a futurity and imagination of a body that is healthy, not ill" (8). *Burning Vision* plays with these racialized expectations, upsetting the idea of stable racial identifiers with strategic double casting

that involves actors playing both Indigenous and Japanese characters. This casting allows the play to demonstrate the significance of the body's interpellation into a racialized and racializing spectrum of fragility and survival.

Clements explores how the narrative of the delicate Indigenous body works in conjunction with expectations of resilience that demonstrate the normalization of debilitation in transpacific circuits of Canadian and American militarism. Resilience, in this context, becomes an indication of a body's ability to know violence and a requirement for survival. In a scene between Fat Man, an American bomb test dummy living on a New Mexico nuclear testing site, and his adopted Indigenous son, Little Boy – both named for the U.S. atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki – the play reminds the audience of the settler colonial narratives surrounding Indigenous capacity for survival. On a set resembling a 1950s living room, the two characters watch TV as a swarm of cockroaches appear on the nature channel. Fat Man declares, “You can’t beat a bug or an Indian...if a big bomb were to come down on us right now, they’d be the only thing left” (Clements 73). He speaks as a test dummy, as an object intended to know violence and quantify its impact as a human proxy. And, yet, in his imagined nuclear scenario, it is Indigenous bodies that mark a super/subhuman standard of measurement that far surpasses the expected resilience of the proxy white American body. In addition to evoking colonial projects of erasure, this moment surfaces expectations surrounding what can be known as violence against Indigenous bodies through emphasis on differential capacity for survival under radiation. Survival becomes a marker of the Indigenous body's ability to live and labour in proximity to uranium, even as the play foregrounds the debilitating effects of this deadly intimacy.

For the Dene, life and livelihood become inseparable from “working for the white man” since participating in the chain of labour surrounding uranium “is the only job in these parts”

(Clements 59, 60). Refusing to leave debilitation in the realm of abstraction, *Burning Vision* grounds this slow violence in an omnipresent black dust, the radioactive remnant of uranium's extraction. Rose describes the ubiquity of the dust as it seeps into all facets of life lived in proximity to the uranium ore: "The wind's blowing it everywhere. The kids are playin' in sandboxes of it, the caribou are eating it off the plants, and we're drinkin' the water where they bury it. Besides everybody's wearin' it these days, so I guess there's no harm if a bit gets in my dough (Clements 94). Under the debilitation of radiation, the work of living itself becomes a form of dirty work as the black dust "settle[s] over everything" (Clements 110), creeping into the social reproductive labours that sustain life in the community. The black dust, infiltrating the labour of living, traces a version of what Lauren Berlant terms "slow death," a "condition of being worn out by the activity of reproducing life" ("Slow Death" 759). In this sense, the play gestures to slow death as a form of collateral damage under transpacific militarism, portraying what it is to live under conditions of disposability that mark the body's capacity for debilitation.

Collectively, these narratives of fragility and resilience intervene in the body's ability to know itself and violence against itself through embodied epistemologies. However, the same constraints that foreclose this form of knowing are the very same conditions that necessitate a return to this embodied epistemology of feeling. The Widow, an older Dene woman who mourns the loss of her ore-carrier husband, narrates the workings of capital that produce the climate of lies driving this return to embodied knowing: "The money rock will make anybody say anything so long as they can keep taking it out of our ground and, if everybody is making money, it doesn't matter about the people" (Clements 95). These circumstances of deceit and dismissal position the legacy of uranium in a lineage of negating lived experiences of slow environmental violence through "reducing [...] knowledge and experience to 'paranoia'" (Shadaan 72). When

surrounded by “liar language” (Clements 107), embracing embodied knowing offers a generative, if limited, pathway through navigating the *longue durée* of life under debility. Limited because “feeling it in your bones” is a speculative act, occupying an uneasy relationship to the body where the body cannot be fully known. In locating the body as a site of knowing, it is essential to also recognize the body as a space of unknowability – a tension mirrored in the racial double casting of the play. It is precisely this ability to negotiate the body as a space of uncertainty that makes “feeling it” a vital cripistemology under the perpetual temporality of debility and the over-determination of what counts as debilitation under Americanized justice and redress cultures.

Crip Time Collisions: Interdependences of Histories and Bodies

Scholars and critics such as Rita Wong, Larissa Lai, and Malissa Phung have highlighted Clements’s emphasis on interconnection across intercultural and transpacific linkages to explore the potentiality of Asian-Indigenous solidarities (R. Wong; Lai; Phung). Sophie McCall, in her examination of the play’s politics of reconciliation, argues that “in order for reconciliation to function differently from amnesia, it must begin with a recognition of interrelationships, as well as with an acknowledgment of how benefits and privileges are accrued for one group at the expense of another” (247). Although not explicitly named, McCall’s reference to the hierarchization of lives hearkens back to the calculations of disposability that engender debility. This is the calculus that attempts to justify the extraction of radium on the lands of the Dene with the promise to “cure the world of cancer,” while replicating the very conditions of precarity that produce this chronic illness (Clements 25).

Engaging with the transpacific webs of connection Clements text traces, I attend to both the interdependencies that structure the violences of nuclearity and the interdependencies that

might point us towards new theories of relation and redress rooted in cripistemologies.

Beginning from the play's transpacific aesthetic of redress, I suggest, allows us to grasp the simultaneous beauty and ugliness of interdependence in ways that position this relationality as a practice of survival in its own right, rather than merely a stepping stone to an idealized future of transitional justice. Take, for example, the scene in *Burning Vision* where a Japanese fisherman, Koji, has a vision of being carried on his grandmother's back (19-21). The moment accumulates interwoven affects of tenderness, vulnerability, and shame as Koji protests, "Put me down; I am too heavy. Obachan! I am a man and you are an old woman" (Clements 20). Here, Koji narrates the duality of interdependence as experienced by many in the disability community. My thinking on interdependence here is indebted to disability activist Mia Mingus's theorization of intimacy as a mode of disability justice. Mingus writes,

Engaging in building any kind of interdependence will always be a risk, for everyone involved; and the risk will always be greater for those who are more oppressed and have less access to privilege [...] *it does not always feel revolutionary or enjoyable.* (Mingus)

Interdependence, from a critical disability perspective, involves vulnerabilities that produce uncomfortable affects. In unearthing and colliding interwoven histories of radiation, *Burning Vision* gives form to a cripistemology of interdependence, holding on to the beautiful and ugly registers of implication across bodies and histories in uranium's shadow.

Approaching *Burning Vision* from a critical disability perspective orients us to consider the full weight of this relationality between bodies, communities, and histories. An exchange between Rose and Koji in "Waterways: Movement Three" reveals how embracing the interdependence of bodies offers a mode of being in relation that enables us to perceive the endemic temporalities of debility and what it means to find interrelation in and under ongoing

violences that exceed logics of redress. Brought together by the collapsing of space-time, Rose, a Métis woman, and Koji, a Japanese fisherman who “transforms himself to the other side of the world” just before the atomic bomb detonates (Clements 2), represent the land of uranium’s origins and its final deadly purpose. Their meeting stages the process of feeling out the intimacies of bodies and histories in order to contend with the ugly interdependencies of war, cancer, and uranium (Clements 82-3). As the world of the play accelerates around them with air-raid alarms and emergency radio broadcasts, Rose and Koji stand together “merging their voices and bodies” as their intimacy works to uncover the impossibility of redress under endemic debility (Clements 89). Rose asks, “Where does war start? Does it keep going until it ends in us and, when it does, where does it live (Clements 84)? To which Koji replies, “Where does it have to live to survive” (Clements 85)? Speaking through shared breath, Rose and Koji embody the temporality of violence and its ability to transfer intergenerationally, to survive on in the bodies of a community long after it ends in the original bodies first affected by violence. Together, they assert the impossibility of quantifying this debilitation, finding its unredressability together in the knowledge of their connection through radiation.

Burning Vision’s metaphysical logic collapses distinct time, space, and identity to produce conversations and collisions that take up the aesthetic and epistemological work of connecting siloed histories of debility and militarism. Robin C. Whittaker and Reina Green both explicate how the play’s constructions of time and space facilitate its political and historical project of drawing together communities across geographical and temporal distance (Whittaker; Green). Expanding upon their analysis of temporality, I approach the text’s non-linearity and disjunctive relationship to time as a methodology for engaging uncomfortable modes of interdependence, suggesting that the narrative structure offers a form of crip time. As Ellen

Samuels asserts, “Crip time is time travel. Disability and illness have the power to extract us from linear, progressive time with its normative life stages and cast us into a wormhole of backward and forward acceleration, jerky stops and starts, tedious intervals and abrupt endings” (Samuels). It is precisely this sense of crip time that enables Koji to move between time and space after the “atomic detonation” that anticipates his “death discovery” in Japan, “disappearing from his world into the darkness in-between as he begins his journey” to eventually “land in his new world” where he meets Rose (Clements 28, 49, 78). Undisciplining time from normative linearity and leaning into crip time enables Clements to play with the paradoxical and temporally wobbly structure of the text, and to demonstrate how practices of recognizing interdependence require non-normative relation to time. Crippling time makes the pathways of interconnected debility perceivable, even as the experience of being in crip time is disorienting. This cripistemology, living in the play’s temporality, becomes a way of perceiving and being in the world that opens up the possibilities of connections between interdependencies of debility.

While the analytic of crip time creates an aesthetic structure that allows the play to stage conversations of interdependence, Clements avoids offering this cripistemology as a reductive solution that amends prior harms. Instead, she orients her audience to consider what cannot be undone even by the imaginative frameworks of crip time. The character of the Radium Painter, a representation of the factory workers who developed radiation poisoning working with radioactive paint, reinforces the impossibility of undoing the violence that uranium radiates out into the world. Arriving at the site of the uranium mines, the Radium Painter strives to return her deadly secret, her embodied knowledge of radiation’s effects on the body back to the earth from whence it came: “I just wanted to know if I could give it back. If I could leave it here underground so that no one would have to know what I know” (Clements 62). Although the

Radium Painter and the Miner work together to bury her paintbox and her knowledge, the Miner's naïve reassurance that "every secret that begins here, ends here" (Clements 63) becomes a cruel comfort as the audience sees the slow wearing out of the painter's body unfold in the closing moments of the play (Clements 108). While the playfulness of crip time enables the audience to contextualize debilitation through transpacific intimacies, *Burning Vision* emphasizes the limits of these imagined chronologies under the realities of slow violence.

Keeping Time: The Temporal Realities of Debility

Even as Clements's text attunes to how radioactive violence survives the moment of the explosion and lingers, resurfacing in new ways that become sensible within transpacific aesthetic structures, the text recognizes that there are limitations surrounding this restructuring of nuclear memory. If these violences remain unredressable, what is left for those living and dying in proximity to uranium? To think through this question, I turn to the soundscape of the closing movement in *Burning Vision* to feel out life under this temporality of disposability.

"Radar Echoes: Movement Four" opens with "the sound of worlds and hearts beating, truths colliding, and the tunnel of internal time digging deeper" (93). This is the sound of the countdown, intertwining the clicking of the Geiger counter (100), the ticking of the clock (101), and the heartbeat of the child in Rose's womb (100). Marking these intertwined beats, the soundscape unfolds as an amalgamation of these three measures, most explicitly referencing the atomic bomb countdown as they collectively foreshadow the horizon of an approaching event with unease. In particular, the play suggests a foreboding relationship between the fetal heartbeat and the sound of the Geiger counter. Throughout the movement, the clicks of the counter grow louder and louder as it nears the pregnant Rose, with its clicking becoming more aggressive as the radiation levels it detects escalate (Clements 102). The heartbeat and the clicks of the counter

become more and more inextricable. Not only does the increasing speed of the clicks imply a paralleling rhythm of fetal heart rate distress, but the audience must also confront the logic of debility subtending the clicks and beats and rendering them inversely proportional. As exposure to radiation increases, the child's finite number of heartbeats decreases as the radiation shortens life and takes its toll upon the body. Although Rose tries to reassure her baby – "It's okay, baby. I'll protect you. I look delicate but I'm strong" (Clements 108) – the violence the Geiger counter represents becomes explicit when it collides with her pregnant belly and Rose looks "to the sky in horror" as "the sound of the bomb falls downward" and "a huge light whites out their world into blackness" (Clements 110). The temporal and geographical overlays of this scene bring together the radiation exposure among the Dene and the atomic bombs dropped on Japan, intertwining these death tolls of militarism and debilitation, returning us to the lingering temporality of violence and its ability to live on in bodies marked by disposability. In effect, the scene demonstrates that the radioactive violence continues to echo across time and place, moving from one generation to the next. This extended temporality interrupts the timeline of violence dictated by transitional redress, forcing audiences to rethink the boundaries of nuclear harm.

When contemplating the terminal realities of the body under frameworks of redress, the next generation often becomes a symbol of hope for a more just future. While it is tempting to mobilize Rose and her baby in such a hopeful gesture, the grim reality of ongoing radiation exposure makes this idealism ring hollow. In the concluding moments of the play, the audience learns that Koji the Grandson has survived, despite the death of his mother Rose, and is being raised by the Widow. The Widow describes him as "tough like hope" (Clements 113), once again returning us to the narratives of capacity indexed by fragility and resilience that respond to the demands of environment and labour on the body. Toughness, while offering the optimism of

survival, reflects the slow violence that necessitates this way of knowing the body in the world. The endemic nature of radiation effects on the Dene community, too, caution against the urge to celebrate Koji the Grandson's survival. Living with debility recognizes that life and the work of redress take place under these conditions of unknown possibility. In this sense, *Burning Vision* advocates for situating redress, not only within the *longue durée* of violence under militarism, but also within the temporality of debility and ideas of slow justice that do not conform to the logic of the cure inherent in redress culture.

The importance of reckoning with debilitation and what can be known as debilitation on which bodies remains essential to forging alternative frameworks of redress that do not fail to account for the endemic nature of debility, or simply replicate the rationale of redress as remedy. Cripistemologies grounded in the play's transpacific aesthetic of redress, like embodied knowing, interdependence, and crip time, offer pathways towards shifting the parameters of redress to contend with life under ongoing violence, because they are orientated towards survival rather than an assumption of recovery. However, in turning to cripistemologies, I remain wary of perpetuating the "marshaling" of the "wounded body for productive purposes" as yet another "index of neoliberalism's logic of value extraction" (Lee 21). Embracing cripistemologies requires recognizing the limitations of this form of knowledge, what remains unknown, even as the process of feeling out the realistic, and often ugly, possibilities and constraints surrounding life under unredressability remain ongoing. The presence of the Geiger counter in the play's soundscape is an explicit critique of the liberal, rational, and scientific discourses that demand such knowability through measurement. *Burning Vision* advocates for encountering crip knowledges as they are among lived realities of debility and life with disability and chronic illness – a grounding that is imperative since it moves the violences of militarism out of the

discursively abstract realm and makes them concrete, if not always quantifiable. It is in this capacity that *Burning Vision*, by staging the unfolding labour of bringing together the interdependencies of uranium's pasts, presents, and futures under crip time, demonstrates the embodied epistemology's ability to feel out sites of intervention in the larger landscapes of redress. Nuclear violences remain ongoing and cannot ever be known as complete or certain, but we can begin to feel out alternative structures of redress that attend to knowing under debility and the feelings in our bones.

Chapter Three: Debilitative Time and Transpacific Reunions: Alternative Redress Horizons in Madeleine Thien's *Dogs at the Perimeter*

In the aftermath of the Cold War in Cambodia, questions of redress for the violences of U.S. militarism and the Khmer Rouge regime linger, circulating as part of what Y-Dang Troeung calls “Cambodia’s still-unreconciled juridical imaginary” (“Witnessing” 151). How to account for the 2.7 million tons of bombs the U.S. military dropped on Cambodia, a neutral country regarded as a secret “sideshow” to the war in Vietnam?⁷ For the subsequent rise of the Khmer Rouge regime and a genocide that killed nearly two million between 1975 and 1979? Juridical efforts towards redress have primarily found form in The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), a hybrid national-international tribunal established as a joint initiative between the United Nations and the Cambodian government from 2003 to 2022. As Cathy J. Schlund-Vials observes, the ECCC’s mandate was “an arguably impossible multilateral charge: to render comprehensible a contested genocide past, to make feasible a reconciled present, and to provide justice for not only 1.7 million dead but for the almost five million survivors of the [Khmer Rouge] regime” (16). Delivering a total of three convictions over its entire tenure, the ECCC has been widely criticized for issues of corruption and lack of transparency. Critics note that the tribunal was undercut by its narrow scope, which was limited to prosecuting senior leaders of the Khmer Rouge for crimes committed between 1975 and 1979, thereby leaving any consideration of international actors or events beyond this timeline outside its purview. These constraints, coupled with the continued dominance of the U.S. in dictating the terms of global redress culture and the memory of the Cold War in Cambodia, allow America’s involvement in

⁷For more on the U.S. bombing of Cambodia during the Vietnam War, please see Owens and Kiernan, “Bombs Over Cambodia.” The authors note that “Cambodia may be the most heavily bombed country in history” (67).

the conflict to remain a “site of impermissible reckoning and unredressed injury” (*Refugee Lifeworlds* xxvi).

Amidst these ongoing conditions of unredressability perpetuated, sustained, or even created by juridical mechanisms of transitional and transnational redress, my project turns to literature to seek out alternative redress horizons for the narration of harm and culpability in the afterlife of the Cold War in Asia. Much of this thesis thus far has focused on conceptualizing a transpacific aesthetic of redress as a formulation that reconfigures our approach to the quantification of harm by seeking out ways to network together the events, places, and people impacted by U.S. militarism in the transpacific that account for the long temporality of violence amid ongoing conditions of unredressability. This rethinking of relation, responsibility, and implication is made possible through sites of cultural production that stand alongside and in contrast to contemporary juridical modes of seeking redress in the aftermath of violence, including justice formations such as the truth and reconciliation commission, the international tribunal, or national juridical systems, which often do not have the language or form to consider the sustained temporality and nebulous scope of debility in their assessment of injury.

With this context in mind, this chapter attends to the geographies and temporalities of debilitation that flow through Madeleine Thien’s *Dogs at the Perimeter* – a novel that moves between Cambodia and Canada, cutting across past and present, to unfold the history and legacy of the Khmer Rouge regime. I am interested in the theories of justice and redress that might emerge from Thien’s narrativization of the transpacific aftermath of the Cold War in Cambodia. In particular, how does the novel’s engagement with debilitation and the ideas of repair and recovery held within the concept of reunion orient us towards alternative redress frameworks that offer new language for contending with unredressability? Reading *Dogs at the Perimeter* as an

intervention in the dominant juridical imaginary surrounding Cambodia, I propose that the novel's narrative structure and representations of debility create a sense of temporality that opens up new modes of articulating connection, relation, and implication by undoing linear time. I suggest these radical forms of interconnection enable scenes of reunion that reject totalizing, positivist readings of historical justice, unsettling redress from the confines of state-based juridical paradigms by embracing refugee epistemologies of fugitivity. Fugitivity, here, articulates a condition of unsettledness that grapples with "ways of being in but not of the nation-state and its "official" history" (Vang 6). My analysis of the novel follows the work of Troeung, who urges us to consider how literature like *Dogs at the Perimeter* "serves as a rich site for mediating difficult questions about justice in the aftermath of genocide" ("Witnessing" 151) and Guy Beauregard, who observes that the novel "opens up space for us to rethink the critical language we need to read difficult histories across the North and the South, even as such language remains persistently out of reach" (169).

Unravelling Temporality: "time [...] held, twisted, cut wide open"

Dogs at the Perimeter unfolds the intertwined stories of Janie and Hiroji, mapping how the Cold War in Cambodia shapes their lives across a series of non-linear fragments. Janie is a Cambodian refugee, now living and working in Montreal as an electrophysiologist as she struggles with the debilitating, ongoing psychological and emotional burden of her and her family's experiences under the Khmer Rouge regime, the toll of her own survival, and the weight of racism and dislocation from growing up in Canada as a separated, orphaned child. Hiroji, a Japanese Canadian neurologist, is Janie's friend and colleague at the fictional Brain Research Centre in Montreal. Displaced by war, his family fled Japan and migrated to Canada in the aftermath of the U.S. firebombing of Tokyo during the Second World War. In November of

2005, Hiroji suddenly departs for Southeast Asia without explanation, and Janie sets out to discover the reason behind his abrupt disappearance, gradually uncovering the story of his long-lost brother James in the process. James, as the reader learns, was a medical doctor, a Red Cross volunteer in Cambodia, who vanished after being captured by the Khmer Rouge. Following these three entangled lives through narrative present and past, the novel offers glimpses into life, death, and survival during the years known as “Pol Pot time” in Cambodia, when between 1975 and 1979 “almost two million of the country’s estimated seven million people had perished from hard labor, disease, starvation, execution, and ‘disappearances’” (Um 2).

These omnipresent histories press down upon Janie, the main narrator of the text, driving her into a “numb melancholy,” wracked by speechlessness, visions, hauntings, and disassociation (Thien 53). As her “broken world finally [falls] apart,” her symptoms escalate to the point where she is unable to protect her son Kiri from herself during episodes of psychological distress (Thien 153). Yet, the novel does more than rehearse the literary and scientific trope of the “depressed Cambodia refugee.” While her condition is never directly named or diagnosed, her cluster of symptoms evokes what Troeung calls the “critical hermeneutic” of “refugee aphasia” (*Refugee Lifeworlds* 138). For Troeung, this includes the “full lexical range of the word aphasia (such as speechlessness, impermissible speech, difficulty speaking, language loss, and silence)” but also moves “beyond the *disability* of medical aphasia to touch on aphasia’s social and cultural dimensions” (*Refugee Lifeworlds* 138). Following Troeung’s insight into the need to position Janie’s psychological unravelling in relation to both the biomedical and what *exceeds* the biomedical, the portrait of Janie that Thien constructs brings to mind Jasbir K. Puar’s theorization of the biopolitics of debilitation, a formulation that “shifts from positing disability as a collective experience (of aging, of inevitable frailty and illness) to nuancing that observation

through attention to populations and their differential and uneven precarity” (72). *Dogs at the Perimeter* speaks to the pain and grief of debility, of carrying the memories of a genocide rendered minor in the world’s eyes, of being rendered as disposable, collateral damage under the logics of U.S imperialism.

Approaching debilitation in *Dogs at the Perimeter* as its own temporal and narrative structure unsettles redress frameworks by revealing alternative possibilities for understanding interconnection and implication that rethink the story of American imperialism in the transpacific. Thien’s narrative works through debilitation to cultivate a particular temporal aesthetic, one that remains grounded in the destabilizing, lived realities of debility, while also forging new modes of understanding interrelation. The non-linearity of the text operates across two registers that inform each other; it is both a structural narrative choice and a condition of Janie’s narration that emerges from her unravelling. The reader eventually learns that Janie has held multiple names and identities over the course of her survival, going by Mei during Pol Pot time and, prior to that, an unknown name that is never revealed to the reader. In a section titled “Mei” in reference to one of these previous lives, she takes a morning walk through the streets of Montreal. Suddenly, the “smell [of] coffee from a nearby bakery” and “air raid sirens” blend together as Janie/Mei (re)lives memories of the Khmer Rouge offensive (Thien 64). The past erupts into the present, muddling the line between Janie and Mei as the narrative voice blurs and shifts: “Someone says my Canadian name. *Janie*. Another woman turns and waves. I am standing in Montreal, on a white winter day, beneath unfamiliar buildings. I look everywhere for Janie” (64). As time seems to unravel around Janie/Mei, the disassociation present in the passage enables a temporality that intermingles and overlays past and present, Montreal and Phnom Penh. In the next fragment, the scene shifts as this psychological episode summons Janie and the

reader back through time and across the Pacific as she narrates the capture of Phnom Penh by the Khmer Rouge in April of 1975. Temporal and geographical shifts of this nature run throughout the novel, structuring Janie's life and the narrative through what Beauregard describes as "interwoven temporalities" (172).

I am not the first to observe the non-normative body-mind's often vexed relationship to temporality. Elsewhere in this thesis I have taken up Ellen Samuel's formation of "crip time" as a disability epistemology that provides a way of knowing the body-mind against a backdrop of biomedical dismissal and state denial. However, if "crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds" (Kafer qtd. Samuels), what mode of time emerges from Janie's madness? From the "memory at the edges of [...] consciousness" or the "ghosts [that can] never be put to rest (Thien 37, 53)? Crip time, while a generative concept, does not seem to adequately account for the socio-historical context behind Janie's debilitation, her experiences of survival under the violence of the Khmer Rouge that structure her life and narration. To extend Samuel's clock metaphor, what happens when the clock is smashed under conditions where "normal" time could never endure? I propose that we can think of the temporal aesthetic, the sense, feeling, and structure of time, in *Dogs at the Perimeter* as a form of *debilitative time* that is unmoored from linearity, pulling Janie and the reader through time as the present and past collapse onto each other. This sense of debilitative time emerges from a body-mind that lives with and carries the violence of being marked as disposable under the logics of U.S. militarism. It is the weight of multiple lives lived on borrowed time, selves reinvented and stolen back from war by those who were never supposed to survive, and a fracturing from "too many selves" that can "no longer fit together" (Thien 139).

Writing through the nonlinearity of debilitating time enables *Dogs at the Perimeter* to position the Cold War in Cambodia within a transpacific web of relation. The forms of debilitating time held in Janie's flashbacks, the ghosts that surface into the present, and the memories that always linger erode the separability of geography and temporality. Although the novel devotes substantial attention to Pol Pot time, particularly through Janie's account of life in Khmer Rouge labour camps in the section titled "Rithy," it positions these experiences within a broader context of interrelated violences and histories of the Cold War in the transpacific, refusing to spectacularize the violence of the Khmer Rouge as an isolated incident. Not only does the novel address other sites of U.S. militarism in the Asia Pacific, including Vietnam, Laos, and Japan, but it also emphasizes how these histories and other forms of related oppression, like anti-Asian racism, continue to structure Janie and Hiroji's lives in Canada. The text "holds together, even as it pulls apart, different times and spaces, ambitiously cutting across the cityscape of Montreal, the west coast of Canada, Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos, folding in memories of Japan and glimpses of characters living in diaspora in France and the US" (Beauregard 172). This disorienting sense of the novel's scope and structure is perhaps best reflected in Thien's own words: "you can follow the trail but you can't know in which direction you are headed, down to the end, or reversing, forever, to the beginning" (215). Although the lack of separability can be unsettling at times, undoing linear time and reading across geographies enables new forms of orientation towards these histories of militarism to emerge.

The novel's engagement with collapsing the separability of linear time becomes explicit in one exchange between Hiroji and Janie in which they discuss the Italian philosopher Giulio Camillo and his concept of the memory theatre. An epistemological construct, a memory theatre is "a room filled with ornaments and images, inside a structure that [Camillo] believed echoed

the layout of the universe. Standing in this room, one could be simultaneously in the present and within the timelines of the past” (Thien 147). Hiroji’s description of this epistemological and temporal structure of simultaneity resonates with Janie, who has been searching for a way to live with her experiences of debilitation that are painful, but, at the same time, carry with them other memories and lifeworlds that exceed the totalization of violence. Drawing connections to a similar metaphor shared with Janie by her friend Bopha during her work in a children’s labour camp, Janie immediately recognizes the possibilities of the metaphor and its capacity to “[hold] the things I needed to keep but that I could not live with” (Thien 147). Here, Janie articulates a generative possibility that arises from such an epistemological metaphor as a way to live with her debility that does not mistake ideas of repair or cure for resolution. The memory theatre reflects debilitating time while also creating new opportunities for interconnection.

As Troeung observes, the novel’s network form “reinforces the globality of the Cold War in Cambodia as a geopolitical formation, wherein the ‘there’ of Cambodia is always connected with the ‘here’ of the West in a web of Cold War relations, both debilitating and connective” (*Refugee Lifeworlds* 152). Attuning to such radical interconnection is what allows us to trace and comprehend ways of living and being within debilitation that challenge the temporalities and language of contemporary juridical imaginaries surrounding Cambodia. Positioning the story of Janie and her family, a story of the Cold War in Cambodia, through a radically interconnected temporality enables Thien’s text to surface complicated questions regarding the ways in which aesthetics and narration work to create particular understandings of relation that in turn inform matters of culpability and redress.

The stakes of Thien’s transpacific project become abundantly clear when we consider the impact of what Viet Thanh Nguyen terms “just memory.” Arguing that “all wars are fought

twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory,” Nguyen advocates for a “complex ethics of memory...that strives to remember one’s own and others, while at the same time drawing attention to the life cycle of memories and their industrial production, how they are fashioned and forgotten, how they evolve and change” (V. Nguyen 12). Thien’s novel emerges in the midst of Cambodia’s unresolved juridical imaginary, where battles over memory, over the story of Pol Pot time and American imperialism in the transpacific are still ongoing between the U.S. and Cambodia.⁸ This process is made even more crucial by what Cathy J. Schlund-Vials describes as “Cambodian syndrome,” a “transnational set of amnesiac politics” that “contains politicized and selective processes of remembering the genocidal past” (13). These amnesiac politics, which work to selectively obfuscate U.S. and Khmer Rouge culpability, continue to manifest, for example, in the legal debate over the usage of the term “genocide” in reference to events within Cambodia between 1975 and 1979. While, as of 2018, the ECCC acknowledges that a genocide took place in Cambodia, it limits the victims of this crime to ethnic minorities within Cambodia, excluding ethnic Khmers through a definitional absurdity. Attending to this space of contested history is a reminder of how the story of the Cold War in Cambodia is still being constructed, fought over, and rewritten on national and transnational levels.

Transpacific Reunions and Fugitive Redress

In the face of these sites of impermissible reckoning entrenched in judicial structures, what alternatives for redress are there? In what follows, I examine what the concept of fugitivity

⁸ This battle over memory continues to manifest in debate surrounding Cambodia’s approximately \$500 million USD debt to the United States. As Y-Dang Troeung writes, “In the early 1970s, the U.S. bombing of Cambodia devastated the country’s civilian and agricultural infrastructure and contributed to a massive food shortage that paved the way for the United State to then step in with a loan to the Lon Nol government (installed by the United States through a coup) in the form of agricultural commodities” (*Refugee Lifeworlds* 105). She goes on to note that demand for repayment “works to silence the argument voiced by many Cambodians that *it is the United States that owes a debt to Cambodia*, not the inverse” (*Refugee Lifeworlds* 105).

can offer our understandings of redress and how it might trouble ideas of repair and recovery held within biomedical and humanitarian frameworks. My conceptualization of fugitivity in this context is guided by Hmong critical refugee studies scholar Ma Vang's theorization of "Hmong fugitivity" that emerges from Hmong epistemologies. Vang writes, "Hmong fugitivity suggests the permanence of running for the refugee, even in refuge, such that the figure unsettles the nation-state, democracy, and liberal empire as well as knowledge formation. It expands on the pattern of unsettledness to assert that knowledge and history are unfixed and are unsettling for national history and modern state-centered epistemology" (14). Fugitivity is a position of knowledge that makes unsettledness its own vantage point.⁹ Beginning from unsettledness shifts justice away from and critiques state-based juridical frameworks of redress, creating openings for other forms of renewal that are stolen back against the conditions of disposability engendered by the biopolitics of debilitation. It gives us language for redress as a slow process of accumulation that relies on what can be stolen and carried through multiple lives, rather than a singular juridical event. However, this radical form of redress only becomes possible when we move away from the narratives that position the Cold War in Cambodia as an isolated aberration in the story of U.S. empire in the transpacific, and – as the lifeworld of relation between Janie, Hiroji, and James suggests – shift towards radical interconnection that traces the resonances between sites of imperialism through collective networks of relation.

⁹ My use of fugitivity draws heavily from an intellectual genealogy of Black and Indigenous critical thought, grounded in material histories of fugitive experience and positionalities that include, but are not limited to, enslaved resistance, marronage, and bodies and politics that exceed or challenge the colonial nation-state's authority. For Black feminist scholar Tina Campt, fugitives are "those who leave, run away, are forced out, or seek refuge elsewhere" (87). The "fugitive's impact registers [...] in those moments when she or he is indistinguishable from the norm through a capacity to undermine its clarity and legitimacy" (Campt 87). Kahnawà:ke Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson's work on Indigenous sovereignty also illustrates fugitivity's potential through a politics of refusal that produces "a willful distancing from state-driven forms of recognition and sociability" (16).

The broader transpacific currents of *Dogs at the Perimeter* come into focus through Thien's inclusion of Hiroji's plotline and his search for his brother James, as well as fragments of James's own story told from his point of view. After completing his medical residency in Vancouver in 1971, James leaves for Southeast Asia to volunteer as a doctor with the International Red Cross. Arriving in Saigon, he is immediately immersed into "the mayhem of the Vietnam War" as "Nixon's bombs were falling on Cambodia" (Thien 18). In 1972, he travels to Phnom Penh during Cambodia's brutal civil war, volunteering in the refugee camps filled by the "thousands crawling into the city with missing limbs and missing children, people mutilated by the Khmer Rouge or bombed into hysteria by the Americans" (Thien 177). When his letters home suddenly cease in 1975, his family loses all knowledge of his whereabouts, and a few months later Cambodia is cut off from the outside world when the Khmer Rouge defeat the American-backed Lon Nol government.

Readers of the novel are often surprised by the amount of attention Thien dedicates to the tale of these two Japanese brothers, including their family's experiences during the firebombing of Tokyo, their migration to the West Coast of Canada, their individual disappearances, and eventual reunion, given the text's concern with the Khmer Rouge. However, positioning the Cold War in Cambodia in relation to other sites of U.S. militarism in the transpacific enables the text to think critically about the expectations of closure – and the impossibility of such closure – attached to ideas of redress in ways that recall Vang's conception of fugitivity. The novel grapples with redress, recovery, and repair through two mirroring scenes of reunion between Hiroji and different versions of his brother James, unfolding expressions and subversions of reconciliation and recovery as alternatives to juridical and state-based discourses of redress.

Dogs at the Perimeter is a text structured around disappearances, from the opening fragment detailing Hiroji vanishing into a freezing Montreal night, to the ongoing search for the missing James, to the countless friends and family Janie has lost to bombing, war, genocide, and displacement. The text is saturated with the unsettled momentum of fugitivity. On a formal level, this sense of mobility and alterity manifests in the novel's fragmentation and non-linear narrative that moves characters and plotlines in and out of the reader's field of sensibility. Beginning from disappearances creates an atmosphere of anticipation that invites readers to hope for the prospect of reunion, with its promises of recovery, even as the novel equally foregrounds the improbable odds of such reunion amid such horrific violence and loss. While there are scenes of reunion that remain impossible – Janie and her deceased brother Sopham being a primary example – Thien's text offers two such scenes between Hiroji and his brother James. Shifting away from the international and national scales of redress that constitute Cambodia's unresolved juridical imaginary, I turn my attention to the personal scenes of reunion depicted in the novel that represent a more intimate scale of rebuilding relation for two key reasons. The first is a recognition of the limitations of state-based juridical apparatuses. In other words, the inherent problematic with demanding redress of or through the state's juridical frameworks is that it essentially requires asking a moral question of a legal entity. The second is a deliberate intention to decenter the state within redress frameworks and instead think from the perspective of fugitivity – again, in the words of Vang, to be “in but not of the nation-state” (6). This intention stems from Lisa Yoneyama's insight into the “inability of the State to fully represent its own subjects,” especially those who “have had to struggle against their own governments and official policies” to “assert their right to reparations” (6).

The first reunion the text explores takes place in the early 2000s, between Hiroji and an older Japanese man, who “was his brother” but “could not be his brother” (Thien 43). Running into each other on a Montreal street, the “shock of recognition” is unmistakable even as it accompanies an acknowledgement of impossibility (Thien 43). While the man, who answers to the name James, is undeniably familiar, Hiroji “can’t seem to remember how [they] met” (Thien 45). Through their conversation, he pieces together the man’s identity and their shared history from almost thirty years ago. The man is Hiroji’s former medical patient, who suffered from a brain injury and amnesia following an anonymous attack where “someone had whacked him hard at the back of the head, so violently that his brains had crushed up against the front part of his skull” (Thien 48). Waking up with no memories, the man had wandered on to the railing of a bridge in an attempted suicide. The scene of reunion is unsettled by debilitation and a current of anti-Asian racism as the man’s dual identity as both Hiroji’s brother and not his brother coexist on top of each other. Debility, the man’s amnesia, is what makes the scene of reunion between the (not) brothers imaginable, but it also subverts the possibility of closure by inviting readers to contend with an unknowability.

The second reunion of *Dogs at the Perimeter*, while perhaps more “real” than its counterpart, equally refuses easy resolution. In a section narrated from James’s point of view, the reader learns what befell him in the months and years after the Khmer Rouge victory in 1975. On a trip from Phnom Penh to Neak Luong for the Red Cross, he is captured and imprisoned by the Khmer Rouge, who assumed he was a Chinese-Khmer working for the Lon Nol government and their American allies. In order to survive his captivity, he adopted the identity, Kwan, gifted to him by a Khmer Rouge cadre named Chorn. Existing within the deathworld of Pol Pot time gradually renders Kwan mute until “he can’t speak” and “has never spoken” (Thien 212). In the

early 2000s, following James's trail with the help of a Cambodian fixer who makes "a living digging up the dead," Hiroji learns that his brother has been living in northern Laos in the city of Luang Prabang (Thien 243).

The sense of catharsis born from the brothers finding each other is complicated by the weight of debilitation and their disillusionment with the promises of recovery and repair held within ideologies of humanitarianism, nationalism, and biomedical regimes. The scene of reunion is protracted, unfolding in awkward fragments, in fits and starts suffused with a sense of disjunction. A fragment where Hiroji recounts the disjointedness of the brothers' meeting after Janie arrives in Luang Prabang (Thien 169-171) lingers in suspension as the text shifts time and place to another chapter narrating James/Kwan's debilitating experiences under Pol Pot time. When the novel later returns to the brothers' meeting, it picks up their story earlier on in the timeline of their reunion, narrating Hiroji's arrival in Laos and his initial encounter with his brother (Thien 246-250). Working through suspension and fragmentation, the form of the text conjures the temporality of debilitative time to convey the chasm of experience that lies between the brothers and the ways that debilitative violence interrupts and structures their reunion. Face to face at last with a brother who "did not seem to need or want him," Hiroji feels disorientated (Thien 170). Biomedical language, so present throughout the novel in the fragmented case files, seems to desert him as he fumbles for a way to comprehend the enormity of what James has experienced and rationalize his brother's choices of willful forgetting. In the face of James's silence, Hiroji is left "choking" with "no words" (Thien 248). When the brothers eventually speak, their conversation is a record of absences, of the death of their mother and the loss of James's son Dararith, that testifies to what "couldn't be found" or repaired (Thien 249). Like Hiroji, James too must reckon with the impossibility of recovering what has been lost between

the brothers. His character articulates a complex relationship to the reparative impulse of the humanitarian industrial complex and disillusionment with such promises. Motivated by his experiences witnessing the destructive violence of the firebombing of Tokyo as a child, James is mobilized as a humanitarian agent, aiming to facilitate recovery and repair in a related site of U.S. militarism. Although the novel refuses to easily assign blame, James's own skepticism around his role as a humanitarian volunteer "living off the fat of the land" in a "city about to fall" emerges in his awareness of the sense of futility surrounding his work (Thien 177, 176). He is "a noble Red Cross doctor healing children who will be pushed to the front lines tomorrow, boys who, day by day, are learning to revel in their worst tendencies" (Thien 178). The moment of reunion reveals that James – and his initial belief in reparative projects of humanitarianism – no longer exists. For Kwan, "It's no use being upset. What's done is done" (Thien 248). It is in this sense that the brothers' reunion crystalizes the limits of humanitarian and biomedical discourses when it comes to promises of recovery.

Writing on the danger of binary oppositions, Vietnamese filmmaker and scholar Trinh T. Minh-ha cautions us against "the net of positivist thinking whose impetus is to supply answers at all costs, thereby limiting both theory and practice to a process of totalization" (31). Heeding Minh-ha's warning, I read the climate of unredressability and irresolution that lingers at the novel's conclusion as a subversion of the positivist totalization of history. Reading into these fugitive feelings, what might redress learn from these disaffected subjects, disjunctive forms, and their refusal of positivist totalization? In the closing moments of *Dogs at the Perimeter*, Janie speculates on the limits of human survival and recovery after witnessing the reunion of Hiroji and James: "How many lives can we live? I wonder. How many can we steal back and piece together? I cannot measure how much Hiroji and James have given me, in trust, in friendship"

(Thien 253). The questions Janie raises have no easy answers, offering no closure or end to the process of survival and renewal. However, alongside the immeasurability of harm, she introduces another kind of immeasurability rooted in her relationship with Hiroji and James. This immeasurability is life giving, recalling Troeung's concept of 'refugee lifeworlds' that "strives to reactivate and reanimate refugee ways of knowing and being" in "the continually negotiated space of loss and survival, injury and joy, accommodation and refusal" (*Refugee Lifeworlds* 10). These lifeworlds make space to "steal back and piece together" fragments of lives as an accumulation of fugitive knowledge. Janie expresses the painstaking – but perhaps sometimes joyous – work of an alternative redress process based in fugitivity, which will always elude the scope and power of state-sanctioned juridical imaginaries.

Thinking with what it means to exist within this unsettledness, I turn to Y-Dang Troeung's collective memoir *Landbridge* and her nuanced rendering of the complexities held within Cambodia's juridical imaginary. Reflecting on what it means to witness the conviction of a Khmer Rouge leader by the ECCC in 2014 as a Cambodian refugee, Troeung writes, "I cannot cry enough tears for the closure that this trial does not bring. But what it does bring, the acknowledgement of our history, the evidence of our collective memories, I continue to carry" (*Landbridge* 183). The sense of movement, of carrying, present within Troeung's reflection recalls the condition of fugitivity. It offers a recognition of the impact of juridical processes, while gesturing to the fragmented and contingent forms of recovery enabled by such a process. As Cambodia's juridical imaginary remains unreconciled, fugitive redress models a way to live with this unending. Offering the closure of non-closure, it unsettles our existing frameworks of redress, providing a flexible mode of thinking that can move through the intricacies of debilitating time, across different geographies and temporalities of transpacific reunions, towards

alternative redress horizons that challenge the limits of the juridical models that dominant contemporary redress culture.

Coda

A current of grief subtends this thesis, conditions its possibility, threatens to suffocate it, and carries it towards completion. Midway through the writing of this project, my supervisor and beloved mentor Dr. Y-Dang Troeung passed away due to pancreatic cancer on November 27, 2022. Her ubiquitous presence throughout the preceding pages testifies to how much this project owes to her brilliant scholarship and the space she created for her students. Her absence leaves behind an emptiness, and it feels like all the words, all the language in the world will not fill it.

Her death cuts close to the heart of this project. This thesis contemplates the debilitation that stems from U.S. militarism in the transpacific. It is concerned with endemic chronic diseases like cancer and what it means for entire communities to be rendered disposable in imperialist logics of violence and extraction. In Y-Dang's own words, it is a reminder that "war lives on within our bodies as well as our memories" and that survivors of war are "living on stolen time" where every moment of survival is "a moment we are beating the odds" (*Landbridge* 126). My project is concerned with forms of loss, and with that loss comes grief. It has been my way of mourning the dead, of staying present in death's wake through the quotidian practice of writing.

In the early days of developing this project, I remember meeting with Y-Dang to discuss my thesis proposal. As we spoke on the phone, she encouraged me to use my conclusion to play with the conventions of academic writing and to explore my own experiences and relationship to my work. I don't think either of us anticipated that it would be personal in this particular way, but this memory and others have been precious gifts in the months since her passing.

When writing becomes an act of grief, speculating on the theories of justice and redress that might arrive amidst debilitation's consuming wake feels all at once poignant, impossible,

and necessary. I begin this Coda by recognizing the material and emotional conditions surrounding this project in an effort to acknowledge the multitude of ways that they give shape to my theorization of debilitation and disability. Furthermore, I name them because they return me to Nirmala Erevelles's vital question for the field of critical disability studies: "How does one theorize the disabled body as if it exists outside the specific historical conditions that constitute its material reality" (12)? This thesis dwells on material histories of war, conflict, and militarism routed through the Cold War in Asia that necessitate knowing certain body-minds' differential precarity in the world. It posits that, while the disabled and debilitated body-mind cannot be separated out from the violent terms that constitute the conditions of our possibility, approaching debility as an epistemological position enables the mapping of new narratives of interconnection that offer pathways towards radical refigurations of redress discourse.

While questions of redress and justice animate this project, the texts and sites of the Cold War in Asia that I take up are marked by the impossibility of repair and the kind of losses that cannot ever be undone. In these contexts, the "after" in aftermath becomes more of an enduring echo of permanent war, a reminder that the long shadow of debility ensures the death tolls of a conflict are never static, and less a marker that bounds a discrete event. Engaging these enduring aftermaths, this project grapples with the problematic Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarsinha raises in their writing on survivorhood that confronts the limitations of recovery. Piepzna-Samarsinha asks, "What if some things aren't fixable? What if some things really never will be the same – and that might not be great, but it might be okay" (144)?

Chapter One of this thesis began with an inquiry into the quantification of harm in the aftermath of war, seeking out ways to rethink this element of the redress process without reducing disabled and debilitated life to measures of violence. In response, I theorized a

transpacific aesthetic of redress in conversation with the formal and narrative structure of *Em*, asking what kind of framing of debility and disability this aesthetic opens up. Reading Thúy alongside Tu's conception of the chemical afterlife of the Vietnam War, I proposed that the novel offers a model for articulating harm that relies upon critical ambivalences to express the enmeshment of violence and debilitation with the lifeworlds of survival and love carved out amid the conflict's chemical legacy. The enduring biochemical traces of Operation Ranch Hand and Tâm's cancer illustrate the intricacies of this complex negotiation that thinks across geographies and temporalities of militarism in the transpacific.

Chapter Two considered how a transpacific aesthetic of redress might make the slow violences of nuclearity perceivable. *Burning Vision* examines the lingering afterlives of uranium's extraction and weaponization to draw out the long temporality of endemic debilitation. I have sought to explore how the enduring nature of debility – primarily appearing in the form of cancer – challenges the scope of existing frameworks of redress because these quotidian, ongoing violences cannot be contained to a discrete event. I suggested that tracing relations of debility throughout the play enables understandings of implication that think with the webs of connection created by U.S. militarism in the transpacific. I concluded by drawing out three cripistemologies from the text, asking how embodied (un)knowing, interdependence, and crip time might gesture at ways of contending with unredressability that grow out of approaching debilitation as a position of knowledge.

Chapter 3 endeavoured to illustrate the kind of analysis reading through a transpacific aesthetic of redress enables. Engaging with *Dogs at the Perimeter* as a narrative that is structured through this aesthetic form, I examined how the geographies and temporalities of debilitation that flow through Thien's retelling of the Cold War in Cambodia drive us to seek out new

language for contending with the climate of unredressability present within Cambodia's still-unfolding juridical imaginary. I argued that the jarring rhythm of debilitating time that structures the narrative and Janie's life creates a network of radical interconnection that positions Cambodia within a larger context of U.S. militarism. Tracing scenes of transpacific reunion between Hiroji and James, this chapter concluded by exploring what a theory of redress grounded in the subversion and mobility of fugitivity might offer. Borrowing from Ma Vang's theorization of fugitivity, this section attempted to unsettle the language we have for articulating redress claims within state paradigms of justice.

Throughout this thesis, I have turned to literary and cultural works like *Em*, *Burning Vision*, and *Dogs at the Perimeter* in an effort to rethink approaches to redress in the aftermath of war that extend beyond state-based juridical frameworks and their reliance on Americanized justice entrenched in liberal humanism. These texts not only demonstrate the need for such alternative imaginings of justice but also actively do the work of thinking across histories, geographies, and temporalities, using their formal and narrative qualities as literature to make visible new ways of understanding relation, connection, and implication. This work of complicating manifests in fragmented and non-linear narratives that trace transpacific arcs, cutting across time and space to tell a more fulsome story of debility's long temporality. These arcs can be found in Tâm's cancer that blurs the lines between the "here" and "there" in the chemical afterlife of war; the webs of implication and contamination surrounding the radioactive violences of uranium mining and warfare that crisscross the Pacific in a deadly exchange; and, the ways the debilitation of war lives on in the body-mind of Janie.

While this project has focused on Cold War transpacific militarism, the debilitating and disabling structures and practices of biopolitical and necropolitical violence addressed in this

thesis resonate globally across sites of imperialism and colonialism. They are active and ongoing, working to mark entire communities and populations as disposable. Writing on Israel's colonial occupation of Palestine, Jasbir K. Puar asserts, "Becoming disabled is not a before-and-after event but an ongoing navigation with quotidian forms of blockage that draw populations in and out of debilitating and capacitating experiences" (161). She continues, "Efforts to claim disability as an empowered identity and to address ableism in Palestine will continue to be thwarted until the main source of producing debilitation – the occupation – is ended" (161). Puar's words are a vital call to recognize that disabled and debilitated life cannot be separated out from their conditions of possibility or understood as a static, isolated form of identity. Trying to look at disability or debilitation on their "own terms" requires a recognition of how these terms of existence are directly tied, produced, or sustained by forces of oppression.

And yet, there are forms of knowledge, being, and relation that exceed the logics of violence held within the realities of disability and debility's production. These are the contours of life, survival, and joy. As Troeung writes, "The aftermaths of war and displacement are a lifelong process of finding the shape of living and healing. Knowledge of sources of living, and the means to stay silent, make life in blocked passages habitable, viable, and sometimes even beautiful" (*Landbridge* 258). These sources of living continue to arrive in the enduring aftermath of transpacific militarism, finding form in the ethics of care that emerge from a recognition of the impossibility of repair and the embodied knowledge of differential vulnerability and precarity. They are the moments of "stolen time" that have sustained the labour of this project and guided it into the world amidst the grief of loss and the enduring presence of debilitation (*Landbridge* 126).

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