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Nonhuman Subject and the Spatiotemporal Reimagination of the Borderlands in Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange*

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Abstract: In *Tropic of Orange* (1997), Karen Tei Yamashita uses literary imagination to challenge the settler-colonial discourse on space and time in the Americas. The influence of Latin American magical realism on Yamashita is most pronounced in the orange, a nonhuman object imbued with human agency. The orange magically initiates cross-border movements of people that disrupt the binaries of local/global, East/West, and North/South, challenging the unequal distribution of freedom of movement across the globe. In this paper, I engage with Wai-Chee Dimock’s concept of “deep time” to discuss the temporality of such border crossings. I propose that the cyclicity symbolized by the orange provides an alternative to linear settler-colonial management of spacetime.

Keywords: Asian American literature; magical realism; speculative fiction; borderlands



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Standing on the map of my political desires

I toast to a borderless future

(I raise my glass of wine toward the moon)

... (Gómez-Peña 1995)

–Guillermo Gómez-Peña, “Freefalling toward a Borderless Future”

Literary culture is a solvent that breaks down this numerical regime that allows nonstandard space and time to emerge (Dimock 2006, p. 123).

–Wai-Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents*

1. From Magical Realism to Speculative Fiction

In introducing a new edition of Karen Tei Yamashita’s novel *Tropic of Orange* (Yamashita [1997] 2017), Sesshu Foster writes “This is the ultimate book about Los Angeles because there’s no ultimate book about Los Angeles Displacement, dispossession, and dislocation continues these days under the guise of gentrification. These are stories that Hollywood can’t seem to imagine, because they’re actually happening” (Yamashita [1997] 2017, pp. xv–xvi). As Foster describes, Yamashita’s imagination produces a counter-hegemony that seeks to strip the global modernist city, Los Angeles, of its glamor and uncover the layered histories of “displacement, dispossession, and dislocation” (Yamashita [1997] 2017, p. xvi). Moreover, such narratives are told through a racially and socioeconomically diverse cast of characters, each of whom highlights different paths leading into and out of the city: Rafaela Cortes, a Mexican immigrant, who is temporarily keeping a summer house near Mazatlán with her son, Sol; Bobby Ngu, Rafaela’s husband, who is a Singaporean refugee with a Vietnamese name and the owner of a janitorial business in Koreatown; Emi, a Japanese American drawn to L.A. in pursuit of her career as a television producer; Buzzworm, a Black Vietnam War veteran and community organizer; Manzanar Murakami, a retired Japanese American surgeon, and a self-proclaimed conductor of freeways; Gabriel Balboa, a Chicano journalist who shares a connection with most of the characters; and Arcangel, a mysterious figure who appears as a Latino performance artist reminiscent of Guillermo Gómez-Peña.

Yet, what holds together this complex web of narratives is not a human but an orange, a nonhuman entity, which falls from a tree in Gabriel's orchard. The orange magically pulls the Tropic of Cancer up north as it rolls towards the U.S.-Mexico border and propels each character into action. Through a polyvocal narrative that revolves around a border-crossing supernatural orange, Yamashita destabilizes the epistemological and ontological boundaries between the real/imagined, past/future, North/South, and human/nonhuman. Accordingly, literary critics have sought to define the imaginative mode of Yamashita's writing. Ursula Heise describes it as a part of the "magical realist' turn" (Heise 2004, p. 132); Sherryl Vint uses the term "postcolonial sf" (Vint 2012, p. 402), which Nalo Hopkinson defines as "stories that take the meme of colonizing the natives, and from the perspective of the colonize, critique it, pervert it, fuck with it, with irony, with anger, with humor, and also with love and respect for the genre of science fiction that makes it possible to think about new ways of doing things" (Hopkinson 2004, p. 9). Although the specific terms used by critics vary, they commonly express how Yamashita's experimentation with genres allows her to imagine alternate futures for minoritized populations across the Americas. In this essay, I specifically use the term speculative fiction to place emphasis on the orange, a plant that decenters the focus on the human. Concerning speculative fiction and aesthetics, Natania Meeker argues: "The botanical particularity of plants can lead toward new speculative orientations, in its strangeness to the categories that organize our experience, and at the same time this particularity permits us to enter into affective contact with alien ways of organizing matter" (Meeker and Szabari 2019, p. 177). Therefore, I read the orange's presence as that which shifts the scale and orientation in our imagination and engagement with the world.

Furthermore, I focus on the boundary-disrupting characteristic of *Tropic of Orange*, emphasizing the kinships between various terms, including magical realism, science fiction, fantasy, and speculative fiction, rather than focusing on the oppositions. Through an emphasis on kinships, I aim to reclaim the genre of magical realism, which has at times been deployed within the publishing industry in North America to limit the marketing and reception of literature by ethnically minoritized writers, specifically those of Latin American descent. While acknowledging the enduring legacy of Latin American writers such as Carlos Fuentes, Gabriel García Márquez, and Mario Vargas Llosa, literary critic Tanya González cautions against associating U.S. Latinx literature exclusively with magical realist fictions of the 1960s, or "The Boom", as it was called. According to González, magical realism "implies an exoticism within the text as readers and other characters within the tale accept moments that evoke the marvelous or supernatural as part of the characters' cultural belief systems" (González 2012, p. 117). Yet, even when particular works by Latinx writers may be better understood in the contexts of other genres such as the gothic, she argues that "[t]he automatic link between US Latina/o fiction and magical realism influences the reading of bizarre, uncanny, and violent occurrences as natural, despite possible textual clues indicating otherwise" (González 2012, p. 120). She explains that this automatic linkage often suggests that Latinxs are perpetual foreigners with innate connections to Latin America regardless of each individual's citizenship or residency, a stereotype that has been applied to Asian Americans as well. Although the racial formations of Asian Americans and Latinxs cannot be equated with one another, I argue that it is vital to closely examine how both groups have been cast as aliens and divided into false binaries between apparently good/bad and legal/illegal immigrants. Through her speculative fictional text, Yamashita disrupts the artificial boundaries that have been naturalized and the violence they impose upon both humans and nonhumans.

To that end, I suggest approaching magical realism in Yamashita's novel first as a global and multigenerational literary phenomenon that continues to evolve, and second as a genre that can be situated under the supercategory of speculative fiction to afford a greater focus on the nonhuman subjects. Marek Oziwicz, for instance, explains that speculative fiction has "three historically located meanings: a subgenre of science fiction that deals with human rather than technological problems, a genre distinct from and opposite to science

fiction in its exclusive focus on possible futures, and a super category for all genres that deliberately depart from imitating ‘consensus reality’ of everyday experience” (Oziewicz 2017). Significantly, the third meaning affords autonomy to genres, including magical realism, which can be categorized under speculative fiction. Likewise, I focus on the speculative in the “magic” of “magical realism” to connect Yamashita to writers such as Gabriel García Márquez as well as to the next generation of writers such as Ken Liu and Anjali Sachdeva, whose works *The Paper Menagerie and Other Stories* (Liu 2016) and *All the Names They Used for God: Stories* (Sachdeva 2018) break down barriers between magical realism and other genres in new and exciting ways.

2. A Globe without Latitude and Longitude

Tropic of Orange is comprised of seven sections, corresponding with each day of the week, which further consist of chapters connected to each of the seven characters. The orange, which traverses this multilayered structure, is first described as a fruit from a tree that Gabriel has brought “from Riverside, California to his place near Mazatlán”, but which did not adapt well to the new environment due to climate change (p. 11). Although Gabriel plants the two trees where the Tropic of Cancer cuts through his summer house as a symbol for his return migration to the south of the U.S.-Mexico border, one of the trees dies, and the other fails to yield succulent fruits. In other words, “it was an orange that should not have been,” born out of Gabriel’s romanticized notion of his Mexico that is disconnected from the present (p. 11). Even so, Rafaela finds herself rooting for this lone orange that came out of season but became whole against all odds, and notices that it has extraordinary qualities despite its humble beginning. She observes, “when the baby orange appeared, it seemed to grasp that line as its parent, if a line could be a parent” (p. 12). When the orange disappears and resurfaces in an unexpected place, Rafaela recognizes it immediately tucked away in Arcangel’s suitcase, as she knows the orange as “the face of her child” (p. 153). In Rafaela’s eyes, the orange becomes an entity to empathize with.

The change in characters’ emotions and actions elicited by the orange blurs the line between human and nonhuman subjects negatively impacted by climate change brought on by extractive capitalism across the Americas. As Ronnie Zoe Hawkins points out, “the dualistic structures permeating western culture emphasize radical discontinuity between humans and nonhumans but receptive attention to nonhuman others discloses both continuity and difference prevailing between other forms of life and our own” (Hawkins 1998, p. 158). This belief in discontinuity results in humans being centered even in discussions of environmental degradation. Thus, like other ecofeminists such as Val Plumwood, Hawkins calls for a shift towards “a non-hierarchical concept of difference’ distinguishing self and other,” which positions humans on a continuum of biological beings including nonhuman others (Hawkins 1998, p. 158). In *Tropic of Orange*, Yamashita emphasizes such continuity between humans and nonhumans through the use of magic. Ben Holgate argues that magical realism and environmental literature, in particular, “share a transgressive nature that dismantles binaries, such as human and non-human, and animate and inanimate” (Holgate 2019, p. 3). In the novel, the orange holds onto the Tropic of Cancer as “if a line could be a parent” (p. 12), literalizing the ecological connection between all species that are often overlooked or purposefully obscured. When the orange falls from the tree of its own accord, pulling the strange line and everything with it towards the north, it challenges characters in the novel to confront those connections in their own ways. However, in order to fully understand this nonhuman subject’s function in the novel, we must trace its trajectory at both the structural and the textual level.

On a closer look, the orange appears as a microcosm of both the fictional and the real world represented in *Tropic of Orange*. The fruit takes the shape of a globe, a three-dimensional spherical map. As Jinqi Ling notes, it is a “miniature globe” that maps conditions of futurity that Yamashita imagines beyond the world circa 1997 (Ling 2012, p. 124). As the orange globe without latitude and longitude suggests, she posits a borderless future expressed in the epigraph, an excerpt from Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s poem “Freefalling

toward a Borderless Future." But why does she insist on using a map as a metaphor if she intends to erase its coordinates? To solve this paradox, we must examine other maps. In the beginning, Yamashita provides HyperContexts, a map that explains the novel's narrative structure with lines that divide characters, chapters, locations, and date/time. The lines that cut across, those elements, however, are not impermeable. Instead, they are porous and flexible borders that allow people, time, and space to slip through. Rachel Adams, for instance, compares the structures of *Tropic of Orange* and Thomas Pynchon's *Crying of Lot 49* and concludes that "formal difficulties [in Yamashita's novel] seem designed less to entrap both character and reader in a postmodern labyrinth than to evoke the dense networking of people and goods in an age of global interconnection" (Adams 2007, p. 253). HyperContexts, then, can be viewed differently from its labyrinthine postmodern predecessors. Instead, it reflects the structure of L.A. and what created the city and its suburban sprawl: "migrant and immigrant labor that created the initial grid [of railroads, harbors, and aqueducts] on which everything began to fill in" (p. 237). Thus, different maps in Yamashita's novel critique how the infrastructures remain visible while these histories of migration, labor, and displacements that create railroads and freeways are often obscured.

The spatial metaphor of the novel as a map is reinforced by Manzanar Murakami, whose name indexes the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II at the Manzanar War Relocation Center in California and other facilities. Manzanar's conducting is a witnessing act, as he visualizes the city of Los Angeles in two seemingly incompatible images of grid and bloodstream. He says that he "see[s] all of [the sounds in the city] at once, filter some, pick them out like transparent windows and place them even delicately and consecutively in a complex grid of pattern, spatial discernment, body politic" (p. 56). Interestingly, Manzanar, a former surgeon, feels that the city is "an organic living entity", more specifically, a heart (p. 37). In his eyes, the freeways appear as veins pumping blood into Los Angeles. He remarks that "the great flow of humanity [runs] below and beyond his feet in every direction, pumping and pulsating, that blood connection, the great heartbeat of a great city" (p. 35). From such a perspective, Manzanar is able to record the lives of the people who occupy the city's margins, such as "the daily hires hugging their knees on the backs of pickup trucks" and those unhoused like himself (p. 238).

In addition, Yamashita conjures up a musical map to highlight how time and space are not disparate but interconnected. This hybrid form depends on temporality and spatiality to represent the globalized society. Manzanar's aural as well as visual abilities thus emerge as vital, as he "sees and hears things nobody else can" (p. 157). When he conducts above the freeway system, he is able to create a "great theory of maps, musical maps, spread in visible and audible layers—each selected sometimes purposefully, sometimes at whim, to create the great mind of music" (p. 57). Each musical note represents both animate and inanimate beings that shape the city and its surroundings. In an interview conducted at the University of California at Berkeley, Yamashita said, "Formally, I tried to structure [*Tropic of Orange*] as a symphony, where movements or certain instruments come into play" (Gier and Tejada 1998). Just like Manzanar, Yamashita conducts the voices of her characters to create a symphony for a multicultural community spanning across borders. Her interview shows how she uses music to invite her readers to grapple with the complexity of various diasporic subjects and "hear different narrative voices, see different visions or points of view representing the City" (Gier and Tejada 1998). Symphony's polyphonic nature, therefore, serves as an apt metaphor for a polyvocal novel about Los Angeles. When a parade led by Arcangel and the orange clashes with "the coordinated might of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, the Coast and National Guards, federal, state, and local police forces of the most militaristic of nations" (p. 239), Manzanar continues to listen and bear witness to state-sanctioned violence and the cries of the victims and rebels.

Employing various maps instead of one to represent her fictional world, Yamashita further encourages multiple, non-aligning perspectives to emerge and avoids forming a totalizing discourse. Jinqi Ling, for instance, argues that by suggesting a map of the world "that is open to challenge or remapping," Yamashita "[agitates] the arbitrary topography,

and to engage the bodies and minds of characters in battles over reinforcement or elimination of settled colonial legacies and consequences" (Ling 2012, pp. 115–16). This openness leads back to the fundamental postcolonial project of this novel. She remaps contemporary globalization founded upon the violent legacy of overlapping colonialisms by "drawing [her] own imaginary line", which emerges as "a literal thread in the novel, one that follows the migration of an orange from the Tropic of Cancer toward L.A." (Vint 2012, p. 405). The geographic lines, such as the Tropic of Cancer and the U.S.–Mexico border, are no less imaginary than the magically drawn Tropic of Orange. Denaturalization of geopolitical borders weakens the justification for the material violence enacted on marginalized populations crossing the borders as undocumented migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers. Notably, the novel seeks to radically deterritorialize, even when it may require more violence and sacrifice.

3. Deep Time and Numerical Time

As the supernatural orange ripens, it radically shifts the temporal and spatial axes of its fictional world. Time in the *Tropic of Orange* begins to distort, and ceases to conform to the numerical scale. To analyze this phenomenon, I borrow the term "deep time" from Wai-Chee Dimock, which repudiates the "numerical time" or Newtonian time that has been accepted as the norm since the Age of Enlightenment. According to Dimock, numerical time is "an ontological given, a cosmic metric that dictates a fixed sequence of events against a fixed sequence of intervals" (Dimock 2006, p. 123). In contrast, deep time challenges the very notion of the universality and measurability of time, revealing how the lines that divide space, the seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, etc., are arbitrary divisions that are not self-evident. The term "deep time" could be misinterpreted as referring only to temporality. Yet, it is essential to note that rather than use a spatial metaphor to conceptualize time, Dimock uses a temporal metaphor to destabilize space, especially geopolitical boundaries made and policed by nation-states. Dimock argues that deep time represents a "denationalized space" (Dimock 2006, p. 28), which conforms "neither to a national chronology nor to a national map" (Dimock 2006, p. 123). As an analytical framework, deep time is inherently anti-colonial, as it exists on its spatiotemporal axes while at the same time restoring historicity to colonized spaces.

Deep time in *Tropic of Orange* further challenges the linearity of settler colonial time. The titles of seven chapters assigned to Rafaela—Midday, Morning, Daylight, Dusk, Dawn, and Nightfall—all indicate different times of the day. However, five minutes of Rafaela's time magically stretch out so that the "daylight" of Wednesday changes to "dusk" of Thursday. When Doña Maria remarks that "It's been less than five minutes," Rafaela contradicts her by saying, "No. It's been an eternity. I can't explain it. I really can't" (p. 148). Interestingly, the elongation does not affect the time experienced by other characters situated in different geographic locations. It only affects Rafaela and her personalized experience of time. This contradiction is made possible through the magic of the narrative. It disrupts the perception of time as "quantifiable, measurable . . . made up of segments that are exactly the same length, one segment coming after another in a single direction" (Dimock 2006, p. 123). Individualized and cyclical time in the novel resists universality and scrutinizes settler colonial world order.

With contrasting accounts given by various characters, it thus becomes difficult to determine whose narrative has the ultimate authority in the novel. As in Rafaela's case, "experienced through individual filters, time can take on any length and width, beginning and ending in odd places, with strange effulgence and conjunctions" (Dimock 2006, p. 129). Her emotional status can partially explain the reason Rafaela experiences the stretching of time, as she fears for Sol's safety with Doña Maria's son, the leader of the organ trafficking trade, currently seeking to kidnap a toddler. Yet, Rafaela expresses that it *has been* an eternity rather than if *felt* like one, refusing to reorient her experience to numerical, linear time. Whether Doña Maria is complicit in her son's criminal activities or not, she cannot speak for Rafaela, who is facing danger at that very moment. Thus, individual experiences,

especially those of the multiply marginalized subjects along the axes of race, gender, and class, are privileged over the universal experience the society imposes upon its members. Rafaela is heard instead of dismissed in a world altered by the orange.

On the other side of the border, Gabriel Balboa experiences an unusualness in the flow of time. "Something's wrong today," he observes, "I mean the length of the day. The weather. The light for god's sake. Time. It's got something to do with time. Place. Damn!" (p. 61). As in the case of Rafaela, there is a logical explanation for this phenomenon. Yamashita informs the readers that it is the day after the summer solstice, when the sun runs through the zodiac sign of Cancer. Therefore, it is reasonable for him to feel that the day has lengthened. Yet, another more compelling interpretation could be made, given the magical realist elements of the novel, namely, that Gabriel is finally becoming aware of time not as a static measurement but as a living, moving entity.

A Mexican American born within the U.S. who identifies as Chicano but is mired in the professionalism of the mainstream journalism industry, Gabriel has the first-world perspective that renders Mexico into a timeless place. He confesses that he had "a spontaneous, sudden passion for the acquisition of land, the sensation of a timeless vacation, the erotic tastes of chili pepper and salty breezes, and for México" (p. 5). Putting that desire into action, he purchases land in Mexico just north of Mazatlán to build his getaway home. Underneath this decision lies a more profound desire to find his long-lost roots, as he proudly claims that his grandfather "had fought with Pancho Villa and ended up in Los Angeles" (p. 5). However, Gabriel's idea of an authentic Mexican hacienda, "a kind of old style rancho, circa 1800, with rustic touches, thick adobe-like walls and beams, but with modern appliances," ironically comes from Anglo American magazines and catalogs (pp. 6–7). As a result, his summer house appears anachronistic and colonial to Rafaela and the neighbors. In pursuing a U.S.-centric understanding of authenticity, Gabriel dismisses the very ethnic heritage that he wishes to reconnect with and reveals how he, a third-generation Mexican immigrant, has internalized colonial ideologies. The task of making the house into more than just an idea is thus passed onto Rafaela, who has a less exoticized view of the historical past, as she first entered the U.S. as an undocumented immigrant. For her, Mexico is her recent past and present. While Rafaela comes to Mazatlán to escape from difficulties in her marriage with Bobby, it is a real rather than an imagined place for her.

Despite her critique of timelessness, Yamashita does not propose timeliness as an alternative. Gabriel's girlfriend Emi, a Japanese American woman and a television producer, exhibits a polar opposite relationship to time as a firm believer of timeliness. Her job as a producer in the competitive professional landscape of L.A. demands that she become hyper-skilled at dividing time down to minutes and seconds. Her supervisor tells her, "*Slash and burn to max five-minute segments. You're good at that. Live material—keep it short: three-minutes with cut-tos. Keep it moving!*" (p. 176). News and commercials lose monetary value when they are not broadcast in a timely manner. Therefore, Emi cannot understand why Gabriel, a journalist within a media industry like her, focuses on the past and not the present. She critiques his nostalgia, calling it *passé*. Emi says, "Gabe, you're then. I'm now. For a reporter, you oughta be more now" (p. 41). Moreover, she teases him by calling him "Prince of the Aztecs" (p. 21). While both Gabriel and Emi have jobs responsible for representing people in and around L.A., neither timelessness nor timeliness serves as an objective and ethical approach to community members' lived experiences.

To offer a viable third option, the novel lengthens in terms of minutes, hours, and days and deepens in time to reconnect with the historical past of people and the land. A confluence of the past and the present is proposed as the better alternative to timelessness or timeliness. Arcangel, a figure most explicitly written in the magical realist tradition, is a mythical man who embodies the history of Latin America: "Arcangel's performance is grotesque, freakish, yet Christ-like, accounting for 500 years of history in the Americas. He's also like Neruda, who, through his great poem, *Canto General*, expresses all of Latin America" (Gier and Tejada 1998). Therefore, Arcangel can provide insights that mostly realist characters such as Gabriel and Rafaela, who express disbelief in supernatural events

at times, cannot. Arcangel's body is the site on which numerical regime of time is broken down: "When he [removes] his clothing, he [reveals] weathered skin stretched like fragile paper over brittle bones, [revealing] the holes in the sides of his torso and the purple stain across his neck, the solid scars of tissue that padded both his feet" (pp. 46–47). By comparing his skin to paper, Yamashita renders him into a palimpsestic living record of history.

Arcangel radically disrupts the linearity of time and introduces the cyclical concept that reclaims Indigenous knowledge of Latin America. In his wrestling match with Supernafta, representing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and other capitalist relations between North and South America, Arcangel, a.k.a. El Gran Mojado, says, "There is no future or past. /You all know that I am a witness to this./There is only changing./What can this progress my challenger speaks of/really be?/You who live in the declining and abandoned places/of great cities, called barrios, ghettos, and favelas: /What is archaic? What is modern? We are both" (p. 260). By claiming that "there is no future or past", he challenges the linearity of settler colonial time. He exposes how racialized hierarchies during colonial periods are being repeated under global capitalism. He further presents a circular calendar, which is the direct influence of Mayan codices. He stands at the top of the steps with a calculator, "gesticulating and prophesying, his thin body a writhing mass of anguish and foreboding", to show that calculating time is not meaningful on its own (p. 49). Arcangel's performance of counting cycles of fifty-two years is not intended to prophesize an exact date for imminent disaster. He says, "By these calculations, doomsday could be predicted to be 2014, 2018, or 2022" (p. 49). The next doomsday might come depending on what each individual considers to be the first doom: Columbus's discovery of San Salvador, Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic in 1492, Jamaica in 1498, Trinidad and Venezuela in 1498, or Martinique in 1502. As Cathryn Josefina Merla-Watson and B. V. Olguín argue, for Indigenous people and people of color, "racial formation in the United States has been experienced as nothing less than apocalyptic or world-ending" as exemplified by doomsdays marked by the arrival of Spanish conquistadors and the establishment of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade (Merla-Watson and Olguín 2017, p. 13). Thus, Arcangel's body represents the experience of the colonized individuals' collective understanding of time and history.

The cyclical concept of time is crucial to decolonizing narratives about racialized immigrants. As Hande Tekdemir explains, magical realism fills in "the gap between real life and its representation in language", creating "a parallel between how the immigrants survive in the modern city and how the author . . . manages to give them voice in writing" (Tekdemir 2011, p. 42). Through the magic in her text, Yamashita celebrates "community over the individual" and counters "the realist novel tradition that tends to only represent Western reality" (Tekdemir 2011, p. 41). In the novel, Yamashita inserts a metacognitive moment by directly referencing Gabriel García Márquez and his short story "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings." In one of his performances, Arcangel sprouts wings like the old man in Marquez's story. Spectators notice that "[his] wings [don't] seem fake, [aren't] strapped on or glued to his back, but [are] growing there" (p. 48). However, Yamashita has the author himself witness Arcangel only to leave in haste when asked to explain the magic. When "someone [turns] to Garcia Marquez to ask the meaning of this", he disappears (p. 48). The author is not there to interpret the meaning. Therefore, the readers are encouraged to decipher Arcangel and his wings on their terms instead of relying on authorial intentions.

The deep time is also demonstrated by Buzzworm, a Black Vietnam War veteran. He dismisses the idea that there can be only one accurate representation of reality. Buzzworm remarks, "some representations of reality [are] present for your visual and aural gratification so as to tap what you thought you understood. It was a starting place but not an ending" (p. 25). Every member of the community passing by asks him, "Hey Buzz, what time's it'" as he is always spotted wearing more than one watch on his arms from his extensive collection of watches (p. 27). Yet, Buzzworm collects watches not for their

functional, aesthetic, or monetary values, but for the sentiments they hold. Each of the watches holds memories of their former owners, which he considers to be more valuable. Whereas Arcangel's physical body encapsulates the history of Latin America, Buzzworm's watches preserve histories, especially those that extend across the Pacific to Asia, including militarized encounters between the U.S. and Vietnam that Bobby experiences as well. In addition to being a community organizer, Buzzworm thus emerges as an oral historian.

4. Conclusions: Latin-Asian Imagination of the Future

The characters located at the south of the U.S.-Mexico border in the beginning of the novel eventually become entangled in *Tropic of the Orange* and bring the border up north so that Mazatlán, a periphery, merges with Los Angeles, the metropole. When Gabriel travels south to Mexico to save Rafaela, he realizes that there has been a shift in space and time. Previously, he had noticed how his plans for the getaway home seemed to gain spatial qualities: "the plans expanded, then diminished; swelled with possibility, then shrank with reality. It seemed that if he took one step forward, he would then take two backward" (p. 6). This time around, Gabriel witnesses the land surrounding his house shrinking before his eyes. He narrates, "I felt slightly nauseated, trying to calculate the mileage to my place. It made no sense. I should have another hour to travel" (p. 223). As disorienting as it may be for all involved, Yamashita suggests a possible path out of the continuing struggle over space and time. She demonstrates through the northward movement of the Tropic of Cancer that "the imaginary lines that have divided the world to the benefit of global capital may yet be remade into other configurations" (Vint 2012, p. 402). Here, magic is employed to speculate in the sense that it imagines other worlds into possibilities. Rafaela, for instance, questions the established racialized and gendered hierarchies, and is thus able to notice and bring the Tropic of Orange to life. Ling suggests that Rafaela's ability to visualize a nonexistent line is "an experience both shaped by and further contributing to her awareness of her own exploitation in the United States as a third world female immigrant laborer" (Ling 2012, p. 120). Her ability can be attributed to her family legacy, as she is the child of weavers and loom builders from Culiacán, Mexico. When she encounters the mysterious line, it is not a coincidence that she visualizes it as a kind of silken thread thinner than spider webs. Finally, her motherhood alerts her to the presence of the line. She follows her son, Sol, "who seem[s] to be following a path of his own" but turns out to be "tracing the path of a very thin but distinct shadow" (p. 13). Likewise, Rafaela nurtures the orange, projecting her unfulfilled potential onto the orange. The orange becomes Sol, whose name means "sun" in Spanish, as well as the solar energy that all living entities on the Earth relies upon.

The orange on its way north reaches the hands of Arcangel to gather a crowd of undocumented immigrants. Thousands of people follow Arcangel across the border to watch the wrestling match between El Gran Mojado and Supernafta. When the tie between the orange and the line is cut, the former becomes a more active agent, representing the migrants who cross and re-cross borders out of their own will or as a result of displacements caused by socioeconomic, political, and climate crises. This focus on border crossing enables a reading of *Tropic of Orange* as a hemispherical novel. The emergence of hemispheric studies reflects the change in the view of the United States "from a discrete entity into a porous network, with no tangible edges, its circumference being continually negotiated, its criss-crossing pathways continually modified by local input, local inflections" (Dimock and Buell 2007, p. 3). Moreover, the small geographic shifts triggered by the fall of the orange ultimately cause an earthquake in Los Angeles, subverting all prior notions of time and space. Just as a large crowd of immigrants follows Arcangel to the north of the border, Los Angeles experiences a seismic shift that bridges communities on both sides of the borders, thus providing a dramatic representation of how immigrants recreate Los Angeles and the United States in ways that the Hollywood and mainstream media fail to capture.

While *Tropic of Orange* places more narrative emphasis on the South–North migration, East–West migration is the other half of the coin in creating a new spatiotemporal axis.

Rafaela says that “In fact, she sensed that it continued farther in both directions, east and west, east across highway and west toward the ocean and beyond” (p. 13). It is important to note that the Tropic not only moves northward; it stretches to the East and West as well. Numerous Asian American literary critics have paid attention to how *Tropic of Orange* offers a “redefinition of multicultural American society and [Yamashita’s] vision of critical Asian American multicultural writing” by combining Pacific Rim studies with hemispheric studies (Chae 2008, p. 105). Rafaela’s husband Bobby Ngu, specifically, is a Pan-Asian figure who embodies East–West migration. He is a “Chinese from Singapore with a Vietnam name speaking like a Mexican living in Koreatown” (p. 15). Those who know Bobby find it difficult to pin him down to a singular ethnic stereotype, because he exhibits influences of various cultures. Rafaela, his wife, in realizing the multiplicity of Bobby’s identity, finally understands “what [he] always felt: this fear of losing what you love, of not feeling trust, this fear of being someplace unsafe by pretending for the sake of others that everything was okay” (p. 149). Bobby’s fear stems from uncertainty about one’s place in society; thus, he seeks to establish multiple senses of belonging.

In contrast, Emi, another Asian American character, actively chooses placelessness to avoid sexualized racism. She is described as “so distant from the Asian female stereotype—[that] it was questionable if she even had an identity” (p. 19). While Bobby faces the struggle of coming from too many places, she suffers from lacking a sense of belonging even though she was born in the U.S. Her upward social movement is achieved by embracing a kind of placelessness and proximity to whiteness. Yet, it is not without awareness, as she criticizes the white neoliberal multiculturalism she sees in Hiro’s Sushi restaurant. Emi tells Gabriel, “Here we all are, your multicultural mosaic” (p. 127). In a sarcastic tone, she describes the restaurant as “a true celebration of an international world” when she sees a white woman with decorative chopsticks in her hair (p. 129). This observation leads to Emi declaring, “I hate being multicultural” (p. 128); like Bobby, she manages to find a way to define her own identity, but fails to look beyond the supposedly multicultural society she is dissatisfied with. Unfortunately, she is not given a second chance, as she is sacrificed while covering the news of military forces firing shots at the unhoused people and the migrants.

The revelation that Manzanar is Emi’s grandfather presents yet another instance of how Asian diasporic subjects have been used to define national body politics in the U.S., oscillating between exclusion as yellow peril subjects during World War II and inclusion as model minorities. Although Manzanar is an elder who had been a surgeon, his homeless existence leads the Japanese American community to apologize “for this blight on their image as the Model Minority” (pp. 36–37). Yet, Yamashita questions whether the image of model minority is indeed better than that of yellow peril. This message becomes apparent when Manzanar is revealed to have quit his job as a surgeon because he faced ethical dilemmas while transplanting organs. Despite being ostracized from his community, Manzanar does not question whether his home is L.A.

Ultimately, *Tropic of Orange* speculates on another possibility for the U.S.–Mexico border and other boundaries. The orange takes the characters occupying different subject positions into the liminal space of borderlands, and transforms the kinds of futures that might be possible for them both individually and collectively. *Tropic of Orange*, through its nonhuman subject, creates nonstandard, non-linear, and cyclical spatiotemporal axes to accommodate those who inhabit the symbolic borderlands in their everyday moments. When Arcangel falls after his battle with Supernafta, Rafaela “peel[s] the orange and feed[s] the pieces to the enmascarado” (p. 267). While the orange does not revive Arcangel, it emancipates others by dissolving the borders between past/present, individual/collective, culture/nature, local/global, South/North, and East/West. It thus becomes the harbinger of the borderless future that both Yamashita and Gómez-Peña envision, and one that Sol, Bobby, and Rafaela’s son will inherit. While Doña Maria exoticizes Sol as a “true mixture”, he represents futurity not due to his multiracial identity but to the intercultural solidarities that emerge through the novel’s events (p. 7). Thus, with this borderland, Yamashita invites people on both sides of the borders and the Pacific Ocean to move beyond hierarchical ways

of distinguishing self and other, to let go of demarcating lines, and to imagine sustainable futures.

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