

Article

# How Karen Tei Yamashita Literalizes Feminist Subversion: Extreme Domesticity, Space-Off Reversals, and Virtual Resistances in *Tropic of Orange*

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**Abstract:** In *Tropic of Orange* (1997), Karen Tei Yamashita builds an expansive narrative on the premise that the Tropic of Cancer shifts mysteriously from its actual latitude, barely north of Mazatlán, México, to that of L.A.'s latitude: from 23.43692° north of the Equator to 34.0522° N. By doing so, Yamashita literally takes that which is “south of the border” and repositions it in a hub of neoliberal hegemony; that is, she takes what is below (“sub-”) and puts it on top (“-vert”). I read such a literal and magically realistic move as an allegorical template that guides the novel in its entirety, but more specifically, in its repositioning of women from their spaces of relegation to spaces animated by their resistances to such relegation; from spaces of dependency to spaces characterized by feminine influence. This essay examines three strategies through which feminist subversions may be accomplished according to Yamashita’s textual template: The first follows Susan Fraiman’s theory of *Extreme Domesticity* (Fraiman 2017) as it tracks how subservient spaces of home and household can become sites of nonconformity; the second takes its cue from the cinematic strategies of “space-off” and “reversal” as examples of how marginal or negative spaces can be leveraged against the male gaze (c.f. José Rodríguez Herrera’s analysis of Sarah Polley’s film adaptation of Alice Munro’s “The Bear Came Over The Mountain,” Herrera 2013); and the third engages my own notion of a spatial virtuality (“that which is present without being local,” Munro 2014) as a mode of resistance that culminates, ultimately, in “a condition of literature,” that is to say, a condition in which *Tropic of Orange* refers to the conditions of its own making instead of referring to the conditions that create it (ibid.). My tripartite method thus highlights and celebrates the domestic, cinematic, and technological spaces of Yamashita’s writing, respectively, just as it articulates how these spaces might also be read as subversively feminist and feminizing. But it also meditates formally and contextually, as *Tropic of Orange*’s condition of literature implies, a sort of ablated feminist narratology, even as it works toward feminist narratological ends.

**Keywords:** Karen Tei Yamashita; feminist subversion; modes of resistance; affect; neoliberalism; individualism; representationalism; domesticity; spatial virtuality; Latin American literature; Asian American literature; global Anglophone

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Ideology isn’t just in your head. It’s in the shape of a Coke bottle.

—Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought*

Now we have to investigate how the virtual can put pressure on the borders of the possible, and thus touch on the real.

—Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*

## 1. Introduction: Going Beyond

To read Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* (Yamashita 1997) as a novel that "responds to neoliberalism," as does Rachel Greenwald Smith in *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism* (Smith 2015, p. 24), is to illuminate the conditions that give rise to it; to read it as responding to these neoliberal conditions "in ways that go beyond" (ibid., emphasis added), as Smith also does, is to join scholars ranging from Caroline Rody to Rachel Adams in noticing that *going beyond* means that, as a response, *Tropic of Orange* doubts neoliberalism's foundational premises. Yamashita's work is thus recognized as not only exceeding, but even as challenging the reality of which it is inextricably a part. But how, specifically, might a novel's doubts concerning hegemonic premises "go beyond"? For Adams (2007), Yamashita demonstrates that social critique remains a possibility for novelists grappling with the millennial forces of globalization and hyperconnectivity, even if the critical consensus is that the work of writers like Jonathan Franzen suggests otherwise.<sup>1</sup> For Rody (2004), Yamashita's renderings of multiplicity exceed representation and spill into a performative mode such that her thematics are formally enacted. Similarly, for Smith, the "politics" of *Tropic of Orange* "extend to its form, calling into question the core neoliberal assumption that the individual is affectively responsible for herself" (p. 24). Each scholar's articulation of the novel's going-beyond indicates a degree of resistance—either to the conditions spawning novelistic response in the first place (Adams), or to hegemonic assumptions subtending those conditions (Rody and Smith). By suggesting that *Tropic of Orange* goes beyond both representationalism and individualism, Rody and Smith bring to light the possibility that Yamashita's novel actively and *affectively* undoes the subjectivizing forces of neoliberalism that Adams claims is being critiqued.

As an affective undoing of neoliberalism's individualist and representationalist premises, *Tropic of Orange* opens pockets of counterhegemonic space, zones of resistance that overlap with each other while also infiltrating the logic of Empire<sup>2</sup> like a virus, gradually disabling neoliberalist tenets from within. I slide, here, into the idiom of ecological thinking, as espoused by Timothy Morton (2010, p. 19) in order to highlight that radical interconnectivity is as much an ontological fact pertaining to narrative textuality as it is a feature of globalization.<sup>3</sup> Whereas neoliberalism leverages hyperconnectivity for individualistic ends, *Tropic of Orange* (and similarly-minded<sup>4</sup> works of literature) foreground it precisely in order to expose just how ecologically imbricated are the putative individual subjects of Empire—with each other, but also with *everything else* (that is, *the world*); rather than discrete agents acting independently of external forces, human beings are contingent entities, inseparable from the

<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Green (2005) is a notable exception to this critical consensus insofar as he celebrates Franzen's *The Corrections* (Franzen 2001) as "the invention of a position between class identity and cultural authority" (p. 103). This is no small invention. If "the major achievement" of *Tropic of Orange* "is . . . affective," as Smith has it (p. 22), then the achievement of *The Corrections* (which, importantly, is also affective) demands that Franzen also be attended to as potentially going beyond in his own way, according to his inventive lights.

<sup>2</sup> I use Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (2000) for its specific articulation of contemporary neoliberalist logic, which is entirely immanent: "When we say that political theory must deal with ontology, we mean first of all that politics cannot be constructed from the outside. [ . . . ] There is no external logical machine that constitutes it. The most natural thing in the world is that the world appears to be politically united, that the market is global, and that power is organized through this universality" (p. 354). The pure immanence that leads Hardt and Negri toward ontology leads them also toward affective virtualities as modes of resistance; my agreement accounts for my occasional use of "Empire" as a texturizing sobriquet for an otherwise bland "neoliberalism." Below, in "A Condition of Literature in the Guise of Impersonal Form," I draw from the work of Ruth Hsu, who makes a similar decision, evident from a subheading in one of her article's subsections, "Longitudes and Latitudes: The Cartography of Empire" (pp. 84–87), as do other theorists ranging from Robin Blyn to Mitchum Huehls.

<sup>3</sup> I have adapted Morton's viral simile for ecological thinking to my own notion of a feminist subversion whose logical conclusions reach well beyond the hegemony of patriarchy and into the broader neoliberalist assumptions upon which patriarchy depends: "Like a virus, the ecological thought infects other systems of thinking and alters them from within, gradually disabling the incompatible ones. The infection has only just begun" (p. 19).

<sup>4</sup> Here is another matter to take literally: the mind of a novel. C.f. Bruce Kawin's *The Mind of the Novel* (Kawin 1982) and my extension of his thinking in "The Mind of *Then We Came To The End*: A Transmental Approach to Contemporary Metafiction" (Frank 2017) and "Literary Neutrinos and the Hot Dark Matters of Doctorow's *City of God*" (Frank 2020). Contrast the (trans)mentality of a novel with the extramentality of narrative in Ridvan Askin (c.f. footnote 7): though our approaches may seem antithetical, they both validate a narrative ontology.

contexts and conditions from which they spring. Like novels, people respond inevitably to conditions; not only do people respond, but they *are responses* to contingent circumstances.<sup>5</sup> Recognizing the deterministic inflections of response, whether textual or human, is what makes affect so attractive: it presents a causal mechanism that empowers the conditioned, whether textual or human, to become conditioning, to be conditioners. Contingency need not mean hard determinism, thanks to affect, but neither can it be allowed to blossom into a fantasy of pure, unadulterated will.

This disallowance against pure will highlights *contingency* as perhaps the one thing in this essay that is *not* steeped in ideology (I cannot make out its shapes, nor can I account for any intentionality behind it) but in extramental reality, and it explains my appreciation for and affinity with Smith's reading of *Tropic of Orange*, which runs from her virtuoso unpacking of Yamashita's "impersonal form"<sup>6</sup> to her injunction to make the Mortonian leap "from the impersonal to the ecological" (pp. 24–25). Smith brackets Yamashita's political contents (those which extend to form) while attending to a realist conception of how contemporary narrative fiction operates. My priority here is to explicate some of the things that Smith's keenest insights imply regarding the conditioning capacities of the contemporary global Anglophone novel. Namely, I want to articulate the agential nature of Yamashita's text.

To do so, I offer a reading of *Tropic of Orange* in which feminist resistance to the patriarchal aspects of neoliberalism is the effect of three specific techniques. The first follows Susan Fraiman's theory of *Extreme Domesticity* (Fraiman 2017) as it tracks how subservient spaces of home and household become sites of nonconformity; the second takes its cue from the cinematic strategies of "space-off" and "reversal" as examples of how marginal or negative spaces are leveraged against the male gaze; and the third engages my own notion of a spatial virtuality as a mode of resistance that culminates, ultimately, in "a condition of literature," that is to say, a condition in which *Tropic of Orange* refers to the conditions of its own making instead of referring to the conditions that create it (Frank 2014). My tripartite method thus highlights and celebrates the domestic, cinematic, and technological spaces of Yamashita's writing, respectively, just as it articulates how these spaces might also be read as subversively feminist and feminizing.

For these strategies to culminate in an articulation of the agential nature of the novel, they must be situated both as entanglements (though they may sometimes appear discrete, or "unintegrated") and as literalizations (though they may sometimes appear figurative, or "unreal"). So, how are the three strategies in the question linked? Extreme domesticity and space-off share overtly feminist motivations, while space-off and spatial virtuality make explicit use of nonlocality. One common denominator, then, is spatial, while another—by nudging the overt feminism from one side of the spectrum to the other—is feminist. Indeed, a feminist fulcrum arises between space-off and spatial virtuality in symmetry with the first one that is already established between extreme domesticity and space-off. Similarly, a spatial fulcrum insinuates itself between extreme domesticity and space-off with neoliberalism's annihilation any sort of meaningful "outside" (see below). Moreover, all three strategies offer a specific treatment of hegemonic gazes, and all three are subversive in their specificity. But perhaps the least intuitive commonality (and thus my most helpful contribution) is the way in which extreme domesticity integrates with virtuality once neoliberalism is distinguished from its

<sup>5</sup> For further discussion on the difficulty of "representing contingent humans," see the first chapter of Mitchum Huehls's *After Critique* (Huehls 2016), entitled "Turning to Presence: The Contingent Persons of Human Rights Literature" (pp. 42–46).

<sup>6</sup> Smith is among those who, unlike Green (c.f. footnote 1), reads Franzen's *The Corrections* as symptomatic of "a focus on the individual as a discrete actor [...] so paramount" that the novel "neglects to engage with the contingency, context, and indeterminacy that tends to accompany emotional relationships" (p. 10). What is at issue for Smith is the *locus* of the affect (i.e., her concern is *spatial*) and the prevailing assumption that affect resides in "the personal," that is, in individuals. So for Smith, it is not that *The Corrections* fails to be affective, nor that its affect is misplaced, but that its placement actually manifests as "highly scripted within prevailing economic narratives" (ibid.). Personal form is thus tied to hegemony; impersonal form undercuts hegemony by managing an affect that *does* engage with contingency, context, and indeterminacy. Elsewhere, in archives less novelistic, Smith's impersonal form might go by the moniker of something like "networked affect" (c.f. *Networked Affect*, Hillis et al. 2015).

precursor, liberalism, on the grounds that Empire's effacement of private and public, of inside and outside, of here and there, of local and global, of place and non-place,<sup>7</sup> has meant that the

liberal notion of the public, the place outside where we act in the presence of others, has been both universalized (because we are always now under the gaze of others, monitored by safety cameras) and sublimated or de-actualized in the virtual spaces of the spectacle. The end of the outside is the end of liberal politics (Hardt and Negri 2000, pp. 188–89).

At issue, then, is not just that feminism is spatially savvy (though it is that), or that we can traverse an archipelago of bright and shiny theoretical concepts that textually accrete from Yamashita's novel (though we are, in fact, able). Nor do I clamor against Empire's overriding logic from a position of privilege for the style points that I might score (though my neoliberalist subjectivity is conveniently assuaged). I am motivated, rather, by the notion that a *universalized* gaze is also a *sublimated or de-actualized* gaze in the virtual spaces of the spectacle, and that such a notion manifests coherently in a serious, strategic fiction invested in conditioning contemporary conditions. In other words, parts one and three of this essay are not somehow made compatible by dint of far-fetched intellectual acrobatics. Instead, they are part and parcel of each other in a way that can only be the case if and when the neoliberal variants of individualism and representationalism are taken seriously as decompartmentalized and entirely immanent features of Empire.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Hardt and Negri draw upon Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (Debord 1994) as a prescient analysis of the shift from liberalism to neoliberalism according to the observation that, "in imperial society the spectacle is a virtual place, or more accurately, a *non-place* of politics" (p. 188, emphasis in original). This emphasis on *non-place*, however, does not account for Marc Augé's "non-place" as symptomatic of "supermodernity." Augé theorizes "the real non-places of supermodernity—the ones we inhabit when we are driving down the motorway, wandering through the supermarket or sitting in an airport lounge waiting for the next flight to London or Marseille" (Augé 1995, p. 96). Perhaps it is this *reality* of Augé's non-place that severs it from the virtuality of Hardt and Negri's Debord-driven non-place, but, if so, then I mean to insist on virtuality's reality according to its presence, which I have already decoupled from locality (Frank 2014), and which I now decouple from physicality (but *not* the materiality with which it is often confused) toward the end of this essay.

<sup>8</sup> Against the charge that what I am calling ideologies of neoliberalism, which may here seem rather interchangeable with, or not clearly distinguished from, ideologies of *liberalism* (especially as articulated by Lisa Lowe (2015) and other recent critics of the colonial/imperial roots of liberal ideology), I want to highlight the work that the prefix *neo-* does when it precedes *liberalism* (or the work that a capital *E* accomplishes in *empire*), which sounds pedantic until you consider Lowe's insistence that her "argument about the coloniality of Western liberalism, and the elision of its essential imbrication in colonialism and empire, extends even to current critical social theory discussions of neoliberalism, which tend to periodize the 'newness' of the present by identifying a developmental shift from liberalism to neoliberalism, and moreover, by universalizing this shift across all global spaces. While theorists of neoliberalism, whether inspired by Marx, Weber, or Foucault, have observed the defining feature of neoliberalism to be the generalization of the market logic of exchange to all spheres of human life, this important observation still requires further refinement in relation to colonialism" (p. 66, fn 54). Fascinatingly, Lowe at no point discounts the "important observation" that she accredits as the basis of neoliberal theory; in fact, in this same extended footnote, she mentions the observation as being important, leading to important work (such as that of Wendy Brown), and her not wanting to deny its importance. Neither does she want to re-periodize or un-periodize. Neither does she give any indication that she sees an incompatibility between historicism and presentism, and presumably she agrees with Lowell Duckert's injunction to view "historicism and presentism as allies rather than enemies" (Duckert 2017, p. 211). Yet the prolonged footnote also registers how this important insight of neoliberal theory constitutes "the elision of the longer history of colonization in ways that reiterate the Eurocentric blindness of liberal political philosophy," that "the colonized world is mentioned in these discussions as if their history begins with the International Monetary Fund and World Bank," that "there is a 'forgetting' of *colonial difference* in the accounts of neoliberalism," that these theorists engage in "mourning Western liberal democracy as the only form for imagining 'the political,'" that they "universalize[] the future of politics across the globe . . . subsuming the histories of decolonization" everywhere. To the rescue come several less blinkered theorists who begin "discussions that conceive neoliberalism as imbricated in coloniality" (note that *neoliberalism conceived as imbricated in coloniality* begins with the acknowledged and helpful fact that *neoliberalism is conceived* at all). Lowe's corrective essentially buttresses against a straw-man quibble that theorists of neoliberalism overlook the realities of slavery and human commodification in earlier periods, a move that allows her to show her superiority while hijacking their important insight. At once contemptuous and polite, Lowe leverages neoliberal discourse within the context of her own periodized scholarship without admitting that it is a later period that *presents the occasion for a certain kind of thinking* (ultimately, it amounts to the ecological thinking of interconnection); prima facie, this kind of thinking appears as (and is being accused by Lowe as being) pure contextualist accounting (i.e., a response to conditions), but the conditions of such thinking's emergence in no way preclude its applications elsewhere. Indeed, this seems to be Lowe's very point. Kudos to her for aspiring to a theoretical version of a condition of literature. Beyond that, her bemoaning of the universalization of colonial difference and the concomitant possibilities accorded to the global south as dictated by the theoretical hegemony of the global north means that she is behaving in exactly the way that neoliberal theory predicts that she will behave, which is that she pursue a

Synoptically, we see that Yamashita is wholly absorbed by the dynamics through which liberalism's compartmentalization breaks down and bleed into each other, as she builds her expansive narrative on the premise that the Tropic of Cancer shifts mysteriously from its actual latitude, barely north of Mazatlán, México, to that of L.A.'s latitude: from 23.43692° north of the Equator to 34.0522° N. By doing so, she entangles and literalizes in a single stroke: Yamashita takes that which is "south of the border" and repositions it in a hub of neoliberal hegemony; that is, she takes what is below ("sub-") and tangles it up with that which is on top ("-vert"). I read such a literal and magically realistic move as an allegorical template that guides the novel in its entirety, but more specifically, in its repositioning of women from their spaces of relegation to spaces animated by their resistances to such relegation; from spaces of dependency to spaces characterized by feminine influence.

Similarly, I hope to show, as I work through each strategy in turn, how ideologies that take individualism and representationalism as their means toward neoliberalist ends are flawed ideologies. Because individualism is a mistaken view of reality, *representations of individuals transmit mistakes*; because representationalism depends on individualism (and because it denies agency to anything other than individual human beings), *representations of individuals transmit mistakes*. A resistance against neoliberalism is a resistance against individualism is a resistance against representationalism. On the other hand, resistance against neoliberalism is not entirely anti-everything. *Tropic of Orange*, for instance, is pro-literalization so that it can be pro-entanglement, which allows it to be pro-feminist by way of a pro-indeterminacy so democratizingly impartial that it can be pro-social justice, in keeping with the pro-ethical reality of its own making. Though Smith claims that *Tropic of Orange* does not seek "to place the domestic domain over the urgencies of the political" (Smith 2015, p. 23), I intend to demonstrate, via Fraiman, that it is precisely the impossibility—now, in an era of neoliberalism—of prying the domestic from the political (the private from the public, the inside from the outside, the local from the global) that allows us to get from the private, particular spaces of homes to the political, global space of Empire.<sup>9</sup> The rest follows accordingly.

## 2. Homemaking by the Unsheltered on L.A.'s Harbor Freeway

*Shelter* is a necessary verb.

—Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert (Cohen and Duckert 2017),

"Introduction: Welcome to the Whirled" in *Veer Ecology*

Perhaps the most obvious connecting of ideological dots that traces the path from domesticity to individualism begins with their pairing in Gillian Brown's *Domestic Individualism* (Brown 1990). Prior to citing Brown's work, however, Fraiman introduces her own *Extreme Domesticity* with the curious observation that domesticity, "subtly and surprisingly," tends to be read as a formulation of "essentially the same traditional views" by conformists to hegemonic norms and nonconformists alike (p. 3). Fraiman's "goal . . . is to sever domesticity from the usual right-wing pieties and the usual left derision," and her strategy to that end is to read domesticity through filters that extremize or marginalize it by sifting out its conformist elements (pp. 3–5). The shrewdness of this strategy lies in its ability to "unbundl[e] 'house' and 'women' from 'conformity'" without unpairing the first two terms; hence a filter that sifts conformity (p. 3). Thus, domesticity may still afford opportunities for dissent even as it retains its predominantly feminine qualities, and Fraiman provides a lens through

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politics of difference that actually plays into the service of Empire, making Lowe herself biopolitically complicit (Hardt and Negri 2000, pp. 139–43), cruelly optimistic (à la Lauren Berlant's Cruel Optimism, Berlant 2011), and politically defunct (pace Walter Benn Michaels in *The Shape of the Signifier*, Michaels 2004)—all things that she would not be under a regime of liberalism.

<sup>9</sup> Rachel Harvey's notion of "the persistence of the particular in the global" deftly articulates a logic behind this trajectory from entirely different contexts (Harvey 2014, pp. 182–205).

which to view how a condition that is overwhelmingly read as normative and subjectivizing might instead be trans-ed into the extremizing effects of affective performance.

Such is the case in *Tropic of Orange*, where Rafaela Cortes manages a Mexican renovation project for an L.A.-based journalist (Gabriel) on her terms, where Buzzworm enacts a sort of feminine masculinity in his management of an old house inherited from his grandmother, and where a “new millennial homelessness,” to borrow Fraiman’s phrase (Fraiman 2017, p. 4, *passim*) manifests in spectacular fashion as L.A.’s homeless population occupies and domesticizes thousands of abandoned vehicles as a result of two disastrous traffic accidents on L.A.’s Harbor Freeway. Of these figures, I concentrate my focus here on the homeless masses (by way of their iconic avatar)—*not* because I view Rafaela or Buzzworm’s roles to be less important (I don’t), but because I see them acting as tributaries feeding into a logically extreme current, dubbed “domesticity in extremis” by Fraiman. Vital as these tributaries are, they culminate in something bigger. When Gabriel, for instance, glimpses Rafaela’s finished renovation product, sees “the starched lace curtains billow in the window,” has “the impression that the house was filled with sunflowers—living and painted—and lace—tablecloths, doilies, bedspreads, pillows, sheets, and curtains—all woven in a sunny tapestry about the house,” and wonders, “Had she had me in mind as she dressed the house?” (p. 228), his correct “guess” that Rafaela indeed had something *else* in mind undoubtedly constitutes his apprehension of her “view from the margins,” which we might translate, in liberal parlance, as her view from non-political (or private/inside) space. However, Rafaela’s domestic view, and her response to the contingencies that marginalize it from the public center (a center which, under liberalism, is an “outside” center), find amplified and distributed expression in the homeless. Likewise, when Buzzworm’s stewardship of his grandmother’s house leads him to ruminate on the house’s location (“Was it his territory?” (p. 81)), and when these ruminations lead him to question cartographic representation (“If someone could put down all the layers of the real map, maybe he could get the picture” (*ibid.*)), his conclusion that the house must be on “the big map. Or maybe just the next map. The one with the layers you can’t even imagine” (p. 82) is a conclusion that heads in the direction of a complexly layered network of material presence<sup>10</sup> that defies apprehension and occludes visibility, but which also calls daringly upon imagination. Though Buzzworm himself finds it impossible to imagine “the big map,” replete with its many mattering layers, his awareness of its theoretical existence opens space for the figure who not only apprehends and/or imagines it, but who *conducts* it: one Manzanar Murakami.

Yamashita introduces Manzanar in media res. In our first glimpse of him, Manzanar comes into focus while conducting the tear-inducing beauty of “the third movement,” the sounds of whooshing vehicles in a “traffic window” (which is “a window of opportunity where a traveler might cruise between the congested clumps of aggravated rush-hour traffic”) from his “concrete podium,” an overpass (p. 34). Later we find that his orchestral ensemble extends well beyond the traffic patterns of the greater Los Angeles metropolis and that what he conducts is nothing less than the layers of the big map—or maps, plural, as we shall see—that Buzzworm intuits as fully (if idealistically) representative of spatial, physical, and socioeconomic realities. Passing the baton of focalization to Manzanar, Buzzworm’s theoretical awareness crystallizes: “*There are maps and there are maps and there are maps . . . for each of these maps, there was a layer of music, a clef, an instrument, a musical instruction, a change of measure, a coda*” (pp. 56–57, *emphasis in original*). The point here is not to diagram the correspondence between layers of cartography and music but to make explicit that Manzanar’s scores involve a coordination of a “complexity of layers” that “should drown an ordinary person” (p. 57)—and here again, I am less interested in the sheer magnitude of Manzanar’s coordination than the fact that it is so all-inclusive: “it was all there” (*ibid.*). In other words, we’re not talking about a really huge number of things; we’re talking about everything *without* exclusion, marginalization, or hierarchical preference stemming from public/private, outside/inside designations. The homeless

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<sup>10</sup> I deconstruct “material presence” in my final section below; it serves here as a starting point.

population is a part of everything, it is itself a layer, and Manzanar is as well attuned to it as to, say, “the cascades of poisonous effluents surging from rain-washed streets into the Santa Monica Bay” (ibid.), to name just one item randomly from Yamashita’s extensive cataloguing.

Manzanar-as-conductor, as part of but also discerning of everything, simultaneously in and out, is thus strangely meta-mapped: his coordinates align with the layer that is the homeless population even as he calibrates this alignment from a distance. He is surely homeless, if living on the streets is a fair description of homelessness, but “[t]o say that Manzanar Murakami was homeless was as absurd as the work he chose to do. No one was more at home in L.A. than this man” (p. 36). Manzanar pulls the inside out and registers its eligibility for inclusion as he *domesticates* the city and its streets. He adds beauty by way of musical composition that is wholly inclusive, harmonizing and synthesizing anything and everything with panache as he finds space even for marginalia on his many maps, which he arranges “delicately and consecutively in a complex grid of pattern, spatial discernment, body politic” (p. 56). From within this complex grid of pattern, a new symphony lends itself to Manzanar’s care when “the monstrous semi pulling 40,000 pounds of liquid propane under pressure” (p. 55) crashes within an hour of another semi along the same stretch of interstate, sending up walls of fire that seal off both ends of the road. The result is that the motorists caught between the two wrecked semis are forced to abandon their vehicles while, at the same time, the fire encroaches upon a homeless-inhabited slope adjacent to the freeway, forcing the slope’s denizens onto the freeway in search of shelter:

Even [Manzanar], who knew the dense hidden community living on the no-man’s land of public property, was surprised by the numbers of people who descended the slopes. Men, women, and children, their dogs and even cats, bedding, and caches of cans and bottles in great green garbage sacks and shopping carts moved into public view, sidling along the lines of abandoned cars, gawking into windows and kicking tires, remarking on the models, ages, and colors, as if at a great used car dealership (pp. 120–21).

From here, the spectacle of the homeless making their shelters in the abandoned cars takes over. Manzanar conducts frantically: “Sweat poured from his brow, spattered from the tips of his white mane” (p. 123). The narration catalogues the variety of cars-as-shelters available to choose from and lists them off in order of priority and preference; CNN captures it all with unbroken, realtime coverage, allowing those who left their cars behind to witness the makeshift homemaking of the unsheltered. The fact that a situation too dire, too *extreme* to be deemed acceptable for car owners is at one and the same time the only situation available to another category of people, is brought into sharp relief. Importantly, this situation, along with the usually invisible, unmapped homeless population, is precisely what “moved into public view.” The homeless call the neoliberal bluff that private and public space have become politically indistinguishable by adding the gigantic asterisk that qualifies such indistinguishability as pertaining only to those exempt from Agamben’s notion of “bare life”: “Manzanar pressed on through the spectacle that the present circumstances would soon become, the chatter of silly and profound commentary, the cruel jokes, and the utterly violent assumption underlying everything: that the homeless were expendable . . . ” (p. 123).<sup>11</sup>

It is precisely “the utterly violent assumptions underlying everything” that motivates this essay. The assumption that the homeless are expendable is bound up with assumptions about the spaces of women and minorities, which are in turn are bound up in the individualist and representationalist assumptions so essential to neoliberalism’s operations. What happens when these assumptions are disrupted? In the case of the homeless finding shelter, however temporarily, in the fire-encircled stretch of highway at the edge of no-man’s land, domesticity emerges as a condition created, constructed, brought into a context uninvested in this undercutting, off-kilter version of it that eschews conformity

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<sup>11</sup> In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Agamben 1998), Giorgio Agamben problematizes the neoliberal universalization of ins and outs by identifying an out that is never permitted in, even as, for the non-marginalized, Hardt and Negri’s description of such universalization operates ideologically and hegemonically.

with the simple assertion that the even the homeless might be reasonably competent homemakers. Such a simple assertion withstands Mitchum Huehls's seemingly antithetical assertion that the homeless occupation "is not a radical revolution or a violent overthrowing of the established order; the homeless do not erect a communitarian utopia or viciously critique private property" (Huehls 2016, pp. 74–75). But extreme domesticity need not be "violent," "vicious," or even "utopian" in order to subvert conformist/masculine notions of private space, and *Tropic of Orange* presents this assertion from multiple perspectives. Buzzworm relays to Gabriel that the homeless are "living in abandoned luxury cars, creating a community out of a traffic jam" (pp. 155–56). Later, he hears a snippet from KPFK's *The Car Show* in which it is reported that "a homeless mother and her child are living in" the caller's '64 Impala (p. 215). The caller to the show, at first wary that this homeless mother and child might "screw up the upholstery" realizes that they "might actually take care of [his car] for [him]" (ibid.). Indeed, Buzzworm, ever in touch with and advocating for the homeless community, "knew the car and the mother. She was storing baby food and diapers under the trunk hood painted with calla lilies" (ibid.). Shortly thereafter, touring the scene himself with a pied-piper kind of following, Buzzworm encounters a black man who considers his

"occupation" of a '78 Pontiac to be "a short term one. [He's] just borrowing it. But [he] want[s] the man or woman who owns it to know that [he's] made considerable home improvements. Washed it good. Waxed it. Spiffed up the insides. There's not a speck of dirt. Made it downright homey inside." Sure enough: photos sat on the dash on either side of an arrangement of California poppies and the Bible; stuffed bear in the back window, decorative hanky over the steering wheel (p. 217).

A perhaps surprising level of cleanliness shows up in both the Impala and the Pontiac, whose short-term tenants take from these cars a modicum of safety and add to them a touch of beauty. These aspects are not lost on Buzzworm's "entourage," one of whom remarks,

"Actually, I'm surprised to see how clean it is down here."

So another brother popped in, "We got regular trash pickup once a day. Bottles, cans, and plastic already separated."

And another, "We carted the outhouses from the construction work and distributed them at regular intervals, but we could use more. We're gonna be needing running water and a sewage system." (pp. 217–18).

Of course, Fraiman theorizes these features of domesticity according to her ethnographic and nonfictional palette, and she is "willing to claim safety, cleanliness, and beauty as generalizable goods—values not specific to the wealthier classes. A safe, pretty apartment [or an abandoned car, as the case may be] is not, per se, complicit with the dominant culture" (pp. 170–71). Indeed, "[d]omestic life is shown to have its own demands for labor and creativity, its own rewards of discovery and pleasure" (p. 174). Though *Tropic of Orange* parts company in important ways with Fraiman's selected texts, it nevertheless does what those works do to the extent that it "tell[s] us a good deal about contemporary understandings of shelter and its lack" by "adding to [her] archive of extreme domesticities" (p. 159). For there is no doubt that safety, cleanliness, and beauty are the products of homeless labor and creativity, that rewards of discovery and pleasure are just as present for Yamashita's homeless masses as they are for Jonathan Kozol, Ann Nietzsche, Lars Eighner, Marc Singer, and Samuel R. Delaney, among others, as Fraiman reads them in her exploration of alternative modes of homemaking by the unsheltered.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Note that the generalizability of domestic "goods" and "products"—safety, cleanliness, beauty, etc.—and the fact that they are represented as manageable through a universalized market logic of "demand" and "labor" indicate the degree to which

Transitioning now from extreme domesticity to Yamashita's other strategies of feminist subversion, Fraiman's descriptions of extreme domesticity as an affective condition that keeps her subjects "shielded from the gaze" (insofar as *privacy* and *storage* pertain to domestic situations), and also as a constructed *intimacy* through which domesticity's "open, networked nature" surfaces (pp. 165–66, respectively) are worth emphasizing. Shelter from the gaze, for instance, is what Yamashita's homeless population foregoes as it moves front and center to the public view, but it is what Rafaela acquires, as we are about to see, when she steps out of a cinematic male gaze. Similarly, if the homeless forfeit privacy as they gain physical shelter, a condition of literature forfeits the intimacy of a personal form as it acquires the open, networked, and fully affective nature of an impersonal form.

### 3. Rafaela Spaces-Off, Reverses the Male Gaze, and Then . . . *She Eats a Man*

This temporary entanglement may lead to an open sky / Ah you're looking for the perfect pardon /  
But there ain't gonna be any man anymore . . .  
—Dispatch (2017), Windylike

Though Fraiman's domesticity in extremis is brought by *Tropic of Orange* into the public view, the homeless occupation of the novel's center stage constitutes a view that is only central for those who do the viewing of the homeless; the viewing that the homeless do remains marginalized. Theirs is, after all, "a view from the margins." So even though they step directly into the hegemonic spotlight, Manzanar and company actually share an affinity with Rafaela as she steps into cinematic space-off, "a term designating those spaces that have been discarded or left out of the frame" (Herrera 2013, p. 116). José Rodríguez Herrera here draws from terminology pioneered by Teresa de Lauretis (1984), whose "new insights into the nature of cinema as an apparatus of social representation" culminate in a formalistic conceit:

Our ways of imagining women in terms of gender, as de Lauretis shows, are greatly determined by a successive series of cinematic representations of women, close-ups of their faces and bodies amongst them, and their concomitant effects upon us as viewers. This happens because every single frame is laden with meaning-effects and invested with ideology (Herrera 2013, p. 115; emphasis added).

I emphasize this last sentence of Herrera's paraphrase of de Lauretis as a way of both shifting into a filmic idiom and of recalling Timothy Morton's aphorism that "[i]deology isn't just in your head. It's in the shape of a Coke bottle" (Morton 2010, p. 10). The idea is to think of Yamashita's novel in terms of ideology-invested frames that push against the determinism of the dominant culture. Objectors will note that a novel is not a film and suggest that Yamashita's ideological investments should not be analyzed according to cinema-specific criticism; such an objection intensifies in light of my Mortonian suggestion that formalistic specificity bespeaks ideological specificity. I will reply that Yamashita has done just about everything she can to ensure that her oeuvre is read as cinematically as it is literarily—which, by the way, is not just a way of justifying cinematic reads of her novels but rather a fact about the ideologically informed shape of her novels. In other words, Yamashita's work says: don't just read each "frame" for its ideology, as Herrera via de Lauretis calls for in reference to another artist working in another medium. Instead, read each novel as *visually* as you would a serial telenovela (e.g., *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*) (Yamashita 2017), a stage drama (e.g., *I Hotel*) (Yamashita 2010), or a feature film (e.g., *Tropic of Orange*), and therefore do so in such a way that the contours of the choice of making a visual spectacle into a novel can be ideologically traced.<sup>13</sup>

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domesticity expresses neoliberalism, since private space is now managed like the commercial public; both are articulated by the same idiom.

<sup>13</sup> Theodore Ziolkowski observes that postmodern works of subversive resistance "are so closely related that we cannot hide complacently behind the arbitrary walls of self-contained disciplines: poetics inevitably gives way to general aesthetics,

Herrera brilliantly applies de Lauretis's notion of space-off as an avant-garde reaction to the tendency in classical and commercial cinema to "rather conspicuously" (de Lauretis 1984, p. 116) delete (or normalize) "those spaces that have been discarded or left out of the frame" to Sarah Polley's film adaptation of Alice Munro's short story "The Bear Came Over the Mountain" (Munro 1999). The film, entitled *Away From Her* (Iron et al. 2007), is interpreted by Herrera to be Polley's feminist interpretation of Munro—this, according to Polley's strategic use of the space-off device hinted at in the film's title. For Herrera, Polley's space-off strategy resists "the specular-image of the male gaze," as originally theorized by Laura Mulvey (1975); the resistance, in turn, enacts a "reversal" such that the woman, by stepping into the discarded, out-of-frame space, literally switches places with the gazing male, whose own space is reversed from a position of subjectively objectifying the woman to a position of being objectified by the woman as a restored subject, replete with her own agential gaze.

In Herrera's reckoning, Polley's execution of the space-off in *Away From Her* is usually as simple as those instances in which the female lead steps out of the frame, out of view of the camera, and thus outside the "framework of [the male's] representations" (p. 116).<sup>14</sup> From there, Herrera unpacks the symbolic ramifications of the various reversals that each space-off precipitates. As an admirer of Munro's original story, Polley's adaptation of it, and Herrera's theoretical analysis of the adaptation, I had naturally developed a habit of identifying this strategy of feminist subversion in broader contexts. Hence my reaction to Rafaela's negotiation of the spotlight in *Tropic of Orange*:

*Rafaela stepped away from the man's stare* (p. 63, emphasis added).

In this moment, Rafaela enacts the space-off strategy in the most literal, straightforward manner: she exits the parameters framing the narrative. The man staring is Señor Rodríguez, a day laborer working for Rafaela as she in turn works for L.A.-based journalist, Gabriel. In this scene, Rodríguez stares "darkly, accusingly" (ibid.) at Rafaela on account of his disorientation, itself the result of Mazatlán's new latitudinal characteristics ever since an enchanted orange, unwittingly exported, takes the Tropic of Orange—*literally*—with it to L.A., with the result that L.A. acquires tropical characteristics while Mazatlán's geography behaves as if it were in fact 10.61528° north of itself (more on the geographical shift below; suffice it to say, for now, that the novel's magical realism is disorienting, as Rodríguez's misogynistically expressed confusion attests). Señor Rodríguez is worried that these new geographic behaviors, including a new topographical curvature that interferes with the straightness of the property's mended fence, could cost him his job. He looks to Rafaela "as if the source of his confusion were no longer a vision he had been observing through the drizzling rain" (ibid.); this is the moment in which Rafaela spaces-off by stepping away from his stare.

By spacing-off here, Rafaela kickstarts the merging of the novel's literalities with its allegorical template. When she sidesteps accusation, she allows the real culprit (namely, a transient Tropic of Cancer) to come into view so that we witness the consequences of the literal movement of an imaginary line. One might ask: how can the movement of something imaginary also be literal? The Tropic of Cancer is of course a real thing, which we imagine, in representative terms, as a cartographic stripe. This stripe is real in its own way: it has its own ontology apart from that which it represents.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, that which it represents is also, separately, real. The realness of various geographic conditions, such as the amount of daylight hours or the curvature of the earth at that particular latitude, is as ontologically distinct as its representation. The upshot is that, in imagining a cluster of geographic conditions as a perfectly straight line that wraps around a globe, Yamashita's movement of the Tropic

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considerations of the novel move easily to the film, while the new poetry often has more in common with contemporary music and art than with the poetry of the past" (Ziolkowski 1969, p. 113; qtd. in Hutcheon 1988, p. 9)

<sup>14</sup> Variations of this technique populate the postmodern landscape. Linda Hutcheon notes that "much postmodern dance, for instance, contests theatrical space by moving out into the street" (Hutcheon 1988, p. 9).

<sup>15</sup> Ridvan Askin explores textual ontologies as extramental phenomena in *Narrative and Becoming* (Askin 2016); to cite him here is to take him beyond himself, such that the "textuality" of cartographic representation extends to narrative mode (i.e., the Tropic of Cancer is a narrative).

of Cancer strains the hegemonic integrity of what Herrera calls “the framework of representations”: not only does that which is framed-in *as* representation exit the spotlight *as such*, but representation *as framing device* also begins to dissolve, and the spotlight flickers out.

In subverting Rodriguez’s stare, Rafaela not only escapes a male gaze but also reverses it, so that it is Rodriguez in Rafaela’s line of sight. Having dismissed him for the day,

Rafaela watched Rodriguez hurry off, a small sack of his belongings on his back. She saw him pause near the brick foundation of the fence that he had been working on in the morning and then run off in agitation. She smiled to herself. Rodriguez reminded her of Bobby in that he was so conscientious, so proud about his work (p. 64).

Unquestionably, Rafaela turns the tables here on Rodriguez. It is important to remember that this sequence opens with *him* staring, darkly and accusingly, at *her*—he was “the bearer of the look,” to recall Mulvey’s language. In the wake of Rafaela’s space-off, however, she assumes the gaze, and Rodriguez becomes encoded with Mulvey’s now-canonical “to-be-looked-at-ness.” Not only that, but the reversal’s gravity is strong enough to pull the hypermasculine Bobby (Rafaela’s temporarily estranged husband) into its orbit, without Bobby even being present in the scene (we might say that he is now present without being local, a possibility that will make more sense in light of my third and final section). Now we have two men as objects of Rafaela’s physical and mental gazes, respectively, all as a result of her having “stepped away from the man’s stare.”

By stepping out of Señor Rodriguez’s frame, Rafaela steps out of his framework of representation, upsetting his worldview. A visibly agitated Rodriguez copes with a new reality that, while prefigured by Rafaela’s space-off, also has to do, somehow, with the confusion that had him frustrated in the first place, the geographic oddity messing up his handiwork. The Tropic of Cancer’s northward migration and Rafaela’s subversive strategy are linked by form, for the shape of reversal is precisely their commonality and each expands over the course of the novel’s narration.

Shortly after reversing gaze on Rodriguez, Rafaela collects a package of faucets from a hotel manager who allows shipments of Gabriel’s household goods to be delivered to his mailroom for Rafaela’s safe-keeping. The manager, ever curious about the contents of Rafaela’s received packages, urges her to open it in his presence. When she capitulates, “[t]he shiny chrome [of the pair of faucets] reflected the manager’s gaze” (p. 68). Why not Rafaela’s gaze? Or, better, why not focalize the visuality of this reflection through Rafaela’s perspective in a perfectly symmetrical reversal—and in symmetry with her focalized vision of Rodriguez? The way that this scene works, visually, is to foreground the manager’s gaze, albeit as a reflection. Third-person, objective narration matters here. The point is not that someone is held by the gaze so much as that the gaze itself is held, and thereby made explicit: the manager’s gaze ceases to be an assumptive framework of representation—a *de facto*, hegemonic narrative mode—and instead becomes spotlighted as a representation distinct from the conditions that it would re-present. In this small moment, the gaze isn’t doing the looking but is being looked at; the gaze itself is objectified rather than objectifying. Elsewhere, gazes have bearers, and they afford those bearers voyeurism and/or fetishism; here, the gaze is stripped of its bearer (even a subversive, female bearer) in order to denaturalize and reify it, which is also to strip it of agency (at least according to neoliberalist logic). Whatever voyeurism or fetishism that follows belongs now to the reader alone and not to Rafaela or to any other character.

What we have, then, is Rafaela initiating reversal by way of a stark, cinematic space-off, which begins a progression that not only runs parallel to the novel’s geographic reversal but which also runs parallel to the movement from a personal to an impersonal formalism: Rafaela’s affect exceeds her character. As mentioned, much of this excess is the stuff of a condition of literature and will be duly attended to. Meanwhile, just as the homeless finding shelter in the abandoned cars on the Harbor Freeway offers a sort of logical extreme to *Extreme Domesticity*, so too do we get the logical extreme of Rafaela’s space-off when she, in self-defense, *eats a man*. Embroiled in an attempt to thwart the activities of a cartel that harvests and traffics children’s organs (yes, plot thickens quickly in a

Yamashita novel), Rafaela finds herself kidnapped by “the villain” in her attempt to protect her son, Sol. The villain abducts Rafaela by forcing her into his Jaguar—significantly, she is forced “into the body of the Jaguar” (p. 186, emphasis added). When we pick back up with this strand of plot, eight chapters later,

The villain pressed Rafaela’s elbow into the small of her back and jerked her head by the hair. The sound of her screams traveled south but not north. He jammed her into the leather cavern of the black Jaguar—suddenly a great yawning universe in the night. Spring upon her writhing body, he clawed her throat and pawed her breasts, tearing her soft skin. Her writhing twisted her body into muscular serpent—sinuous and suddenly powerful. She thrashed at him with vicious fangs—ripping his ears, gouging his neck, drawing blood. He screamed but returned snarling, pounced, eyes bloody with terror, claws and teeth, flashing knives, ripped into the armored scales of her tensile body. Her mouth gaped a torch of fire, scorching his black fur. Two tremendous beasts wailed and groaned, momentarily stunned by their transformations, yet poised for war (p. 220).

Following these opening lines of chapter 38, which I quote at length to do justice to the sense of the carnivorous animalism that permeates the narration, a catalogue of gruesome historical injustices scrolls in sequence, like a montage, across the novel’s “screen.” The montage leads into a brief paragraph that begins and ends “their horrific dance with death” and which concludes with “blood and semen commingling among shredded serpent and feline remains” (p. 221). The “transformations” that Rafaela and the villain undergo as they fight to the death are at once extremely difficult to take literally but also troublesome to dismiss as “merely” figurative: the villain seems to have become his own car, which itself seems to have become a literalized version of its trademark branding; he has “black fur” and leaves “feline remains.” Likewise, Rafaela becomes a soft-skinned yet viciously-fanged snake. In whatever way we read their fight, there is no denying what the narrative would have us take at face value: that, in the aftermath, Rafaela comes to, naked and alone. “She pushed out a chunk of something fibrous between her teeth with her tongue and was horrified to see a wad of black fur emerge and shift along the dirt like scattering feathers” (p. 221). This is how Gabriel, to whom she later says, “I ate him” (p. 225), finds her. However metaphorically we may be tempted to read the fight scene, “black fur” becomes *diegetically* significant *after* the fight scene’s stylized cinematography concludes.

I take this showdown between Rafaela and the villain as part and parcel of Yamashita’s magical realism (heavy on the magic), and further, that “blood and semen,” “shredded serpent and feline remains,” “black fur,” “something fibrous,” and “the crumpled leaf of a human ear” (p. 222) all lend themselves to an interpretation whereby the fight is storyworld-real and that it includes a rape (or attempted rape) by the villain. While I cannot account for the lack of a car upon Rafaela’s waking (in eating the villain, did Rafaela eat him-as-car, and thus eat a whole car?), nor for the crumpled human ear (following black fur, should not the human ear be a jaguar’s ear?), I can account for a bruised and battered female victim who had been developing spatial strategies of feminist subversion in order to enact reversals of hegemonic logic, to deconstruct the normative assumptions of neoliberalism. If this is Rafaela’s trajectory, then her literalized status as a man-eater is a fitting response that reverses her position vis-à-vis an attacker and rapist symptomatic of globalization’s darker side: Rafaela subverts sexual predation by stepping into the literality of an expression designed to connote, figuratively, a sexually promiscuous woman. First, she is forced into the body of the jaguar, but by following through on her mode of spacing-off and reversing, she forces the body of the jaguar into her.

#### 4. A Condition of Literature in the Guise of Geographic Form

Unless you want to believe that the speed of light can be violated—a notion that gives physicists the jitters—you might have to accept that reality just is nonlocal.

—Timothy Morton (2013), *Hyperobjects*

So far I have identified two strategies at work in *Tropic of Orange* that serve to subvert the hegemonic logic of patriarchy, and I have attempted to scrape to the spatial core of each strategy. In the first instance, domestic space, which traditionally epitomizes the location of private conformity, can be used quite specifically as a site of public nonconformity. Yamashita supplements Fraiman's ethnographic archive with a novelistic account of this strategy so compatibly that her depictions of homemaking by the unsheltered are subversively nonconformist even as they retain their domestic feminine qualities. In the second instance, the masculine framework of representation that holds women in its objectifying gaze is hijacked and reversed when Rafaela makes use of the narrative's discarded, peripheral space. In both cases, the strategies challenge and overturn a number of violent and interlocking assumptions, especially when the spaces in question are treated as literally as possible. My priority in this final section is to track these spatial literalities according to the overall logic that drives them in the first place, which is of course the novel's overarching premise that the Tropic of Cancer ends up cutting across L.A.'s latitude; that is, that the Tropic's presence is divorced from its locality, from a set of physical conditions subtending it. To track this logic is to make sense of a wildly imaginative dislocation and repositioning of conditions, and to make sense of a wildly imaginative dislocation and repositioning of conditions is one way of asking what difference localization makes. What is at stake in locality? If I put something somewhere else, especially if I do so in such a way that severs the alignment between locality and presence, what have I done, and why does it matter?

In answering these questions, I rely on my definition of spatial virtuality, which refers to that which is present without being local (Frank 2014), and by extension, on my definition of a condition of literature, in which a novel refers to the conditions of its own making instead of referring to the conditions that create it (ibid.). The novel's tendency to delocalize the conditions from which it springs marks its unwillingness to accept normative accounts of the connection between locality and present conditions; by refusing to accept this arrangement—indeed, by imagining a different arrangement—*Tropic of Orange* achieves an impersonal affect predicated, specifically, on spatial virtuality.

Recalling that Señor Rodriguez casts his dark, accusatory stare upon Rafaela after the Tropic's northward migration threatens his labor, introducing a host of nonlocal geographic conditions to which he is unaccustomed and for which he is ill-equipped to adjust, and recalling too that a few of the novel's literalizations have been attended to while its major entanglements have been intimated, we are in good position to apply pressure to what the novel means when it says "Tropic of Cancer." Perhaps unexpectedly, this discussion of nonlocal presence centers on the nature of metaphor and the novel's treatment of it, since, on the one hand, metaphor counterpoints the novel's many literalizations, and since, on the other hand, metaphor is language's way of presenting, or better, *presencing*,<sup>16</sup> nonlocal realities. Etymologically, we know that metaphor indicates language's ability to "transfer" or "carry over" meaning (*meta*: over, across; *pherein*: to carry, bear). Now consider how one of *Tropic of Orange*'s more conditioned or overdetermined characters conceives of the Tropic of Cancer:

*In Gabriel's mind the Tropic ran through his place like a good metaphor* (p. 5, emphasis added).

Here, a simile is used to describe an actual line of geography as a metaphor: figurative language deploying the figure of figurative language in order to intensify the literality of the situation. But this

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<sup>16</sup> See Sten Pultz Moslund, "The Presencing of Place in Literature: Toward an Embodied Topopoetic Mode of Reading" (Moslund 2011, pp. 29–43). Moslund, who is working from Heideggerian foundations, describes "a mode of reading that moves away from the *representation* of place in literature to a direct presencing or sensation of place" (p. 31, emphasis in original), and he defines presencing as the way in which "a work makes a world present or how it produces a presence in the literal sense of 'production' as a physical 'bringing forth' of something. Presence effects 'exclusively appeal to the senses' the way art, in 'moments of intensity' touches our bodies and brings 'the things of the world close to our skin'" (pp. 31–32, emphasis in original). The quoted phrases refer to Hans Ulrecht Gumbrecht's *The Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Gumbrecht 2004, pp. 18–19). This footnote appears verbatim as footnote 8 in "Remapping the Present" (Frank 2014).

is only the case if we take “Tropic of Cancer” to be an immediate (read: unmediated) reality per se. If, on the other hand, we take “Tropic of Cancer” not as a geographic reality but rather as the cartographic squiggle according to which we can *locate* (to say nothing of knowing, understanding, or apprehending) a *corresponding* geographic reality (which we also call “Tropic of Cancer”), then Gabriel’s simile is in the service of representation: figurative language deploying the figure of figurative language in order to intensify the metaphorical nature of the situation.

Yamashita certainly does not shy away from such compounding proliferations of figurative language. The introductory description of Arcangel is a case in point:

When he removed his clothing, he revealed weathered skin stretched like fragile paper over brittle bones, revealed the holes in the sides of his torso and the purple stain across his neck, the solid scar tissue of that padded both his feet. He possessed the beauty of an ancient body, a gnarled and twisted tree, tortured and serene, wise and innocent all at once. Here, in this body-tree—more like bamboo than birch, more like birch than oak, more like oak than pine, more like pine than sequoia, more like sequoia than cactus, more like cactus—was the secret of his youth and the secret of his age (p. 47).

Here the novel’s metaphorical circuitry closes, allowing a passage of likeness from cactus to bamboo to fragile paper to Arcangel’s bodily attributes by way of several intermediaries. But even such a fantastic character as Arcangel, replete with his pierced sides and his centuries of wisdom, which we take to be as literal in storyworld terms as Rafaela’s consumption of the villain-turned-jaguar-turned-Jaguar, is not actually a tree. Similarly, Gabriel’s conception of the Tropic of Cancer is only *like* a metaphor; in the reality of *Tropic of Orange*, the “Tropic of Cancer” is not transferring or carrying anything over. Rather, *it is precisely what is being carried*, nested in a line threaded through an orange. Its metaphorical circuit switches off—and not just for Gabriel, for whom the Tropic is *like* a metaphor. Gabriel’s figuration of what he takes to be the “thing-in-itself” *as* figuration short-circuits the possibility of the Tropic acting “merely” cartographically, as a representative vehicle carrying a set of real geographic conditions across some object-subject divide.

Acting not merely cartographically, the Tropic’s cartographic shape (a line) acquires a tangible physicality and is generally described, *sic passim*, as resembling a hair-thin, translucent, silken thread. Or a tangled line. Like Rafaela’s consumption of the villain, we take this as a literality of the storyworld’s reality. Moreover, this line is attached to a migrant orange such that the orange’s movements dictate the line’s movements, as if it were “towing the sun, and the entire southern hemisphere behind it” (Wallace 2001, p. 153). In less magical realities, the orange’s movements would signify relationships between the sun and the southern hemisphere, rather than transport them. If my aim in this section is to demonstrate the consequences of nonlocal presence, I dial into the textual dynamics of literalization as a reminder that how nonlocal presence is achieved is just important as the fact that it is achieved: formalistically, I am elevating the *how* to the same plane as the *what*. Ideology isn’t just in your head. It’s in the shape of *Tropic of Orange*. Yet, this novel’s shape is beset with a host of elliptical contents: presence, materiality, conditions, actuality, reality, literality, an orange usurping a novel’s metaphorical energies . . . spatial virtuality. I want to offer a clarification of the relations between so many terms by way of recognizing how my identification of this final strategy of feminist subversion sidles somewhat obliquely alongside a coruscating reading of the novel by Ruth Hsu, for whom relating reality, materiality, and presence is also of paramount importance. In her article “Justice and Truthful Refractions” (Hsu 2006), Hsu is every bit as interested as I am in meditating on the conditioned vs. the conditioning:

We are whom others say we are; that is, we are defined by others. We define ourselves, or we are reduced to mere reflections in a hall of distorted mirrors furnished by those who would define us. We are defined—passive tense. We define ourselves—an active construction; I define myself (Hsu 2006, p. 76).

Hsu pits the determinism of social constructivism against the will of affective resistance. Moreover, Hsu's investment in reading resistances to neoliberalist hegemony (i.e., defining oneself, which of course runs the risk not of resisting, but of participating in, individualism) leads directly to her investment in sorting out various ways of thinking about what, and how, something (in this case, Los Angeles), can be *real*. After contemplating "concrete-physical" ways of being real, as opposed to "ethereal or nonphysical" ways of being real, Hsu makes the following synthesis:

A more interesting way to think about "real" is to think of images or concepts, uttered or not, as occurring then eventually dissipating, but only after marking, indelibly, the time and space in which it [sic] occurred, which are never the same again. It is in this sense that the ethereal or the nonphysical has a material presence; it is real (Hsu 2006, p. 77).

Hsu's passage dislodges something in my own thinking. That the nonphysical can have a material presence is certainly not the same as saying that the nonlocal can have a material presence. Physicality and locality are not coterminous. Moreover, what Hsu calls a "material presence" predicated on nonphysicality clearly differs from what I call a nonlocal presence marked by a spatial separation of presence from its physical substrate.<sup>17</sup> Yet Hsu's "material presence" and my "spatial virtuality" are both, significantly, grounded in *presence* in such a way as to call attention to our different treatments of materiality and its relationship to presence. Previously, I separated materiality from presence in spatial virtuality because I removed *locality* from presence. What emerges here (in my formulation) are seeming adequations between locality and materiality, presence and reality. But how strange: Hsu's formulation *also* aligns presence and reality: "the nonphysical has a material presence; it is real." So now—unexpectedly, counterintuitively, and in fact incorrectly—it is the virtual and the real that *appear* to be coterminous, according to my and Hsu's respective readings of presence.

The resolution to such seeming identity between two terms that have traditionally served as structural foils to each other lies in clarifying treatments of materiality and virtuality. Following Elizabeth Grosz, as I did the first time I wrote about a condition of literature, I suggest that virtuality *is* writing (I harden Grosz's phrase, that virtuality is "*the strangeness of writing*" (Grosz 2001, p. 77. Emphasis added)); following, Heidegger, I suggest that virtuality is "*art*," as agency wedged between artist and art work, as "*the becoming and happening of truth*" (Heidegger 1971, p. 69. Emphasis in original). But these suggestions move quickly and elide a relational teasing-out of the material-virtual relationship. I see now that we are, all of us (myself, Hsu, Hayles), susceptible to a slipperiness in our ways of thinking through *materiality*, most specifically.<sup>18</sup> Now, following Karen Barad (2007), as I have only recently begun to do, I will suggest that materiality is *written* (in her terms, performed, enacted, or marked through an "agential cut"), which is to say that materiality is *conditioned* physicality.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Hayles corrects the popular misconception that information somehow trumps materiality by explaining that "the efficacy of information depends on a highly articulated material base" (p. 185), that "the perceived primacy of information over materiality obscures the importance of the very infrastructures that make information valuable" (p. 186), and that "information must *always* be instantiated in a medium" (ibid., emphasis in original). In 2014, I mistook such things as "material base," "infrastructure," and "medium" for localized physicalities; hence my use here of "physical substrate" rather than "material substrate." Given Hayles's later nuance in defining materiality (see footnote 18), her use of "material base" *seems* to imply the same mistake, but I doubt it. More likely, she simply had a different focus in that moment.

<sup>18</sup> For Hayles, "the idea of" materiality as "a human technical hybrid" depends on *attention*: "Materiality comes into existence, [she argues], when attention fuses with physicality to identify and isolate some particular attribute (or attributes) of interest" (Hayles 2012, p. 91). Hayles (curiously) does not cite Karen Barad, but her definition does comport with Barad's "new materialist understanding of naturalculturalpractices" (Barad 2007, p. 226) in the important sense that materiality is, for both theorists, physicality *plus* some kind of mental resolution.

<sup>19</sup> This is not to suggest that Barad is immune from any slipperiness in thinking through materiality, nor that my use of her agential realism somehow ends all slipperiness. Graham Harman and Manuel DeLanda find fault in Barad's sense of materialism, and in fact Harman believes that overtly materialist philosophies detract from the rich vein of continental philosophy that has only recently begun to take realism seriously again. C.f. Harman and DeLanda's co-authored *The Rise of Realism* (Harman and DeLanda 2017) and Harman's "I Am Also of the Opinion that Materialism Must Be Destroyed" (Harman 2010).

But . . . written/conditioned how? Here I must recall Hayles's rehearsal of "the condition of virtuality," in which virtuality "is the cultural perception that material objects are interpenetrated by information patterns" (Hayles 1997, p. 182; qtd. in Frank 2014). Through this definition of virtuality as a condition (albeit one that does its own conditioning, as I hope to make clear), Hayles astutely calls attention to the main thing that virtuality (as a cultural condition) so beguilingly tends to do: virtuality brings information into contact with physical (née material) objects—and more, it prioritizes the information over the object, so that the condition is now a hierarchical one. Moreover, the hierarchy is so attractive as to become hegemonic. And of course: this hierarchical hegemony is built upon flawed assumptions.

This contact between information and objects would be straightforward enough, if only information and objects were themselves straightforward; however, Hayles is also right to blow the dialectic cover off information and materiality, wherein it is revealed that information discourse houses its own pattern-randomness negotiation, while materiality (if we're still calling it that) discourse is furnished by a tug-of-war between presence and absence. In the hierarchical chain of command, patterns subjugate presences (randomness and absences can excuse themselves from the discussion) with the result that Hsu's phrase, "material presence," becomes not only dialectically redundant, but also dialectically squashed, such that we are discursively barred from thinking such possibilities as, say, "material absence," which sounds a lot like exclusion. Thus, Gayle Sato's description of a Japanese American subjectivity in *Tropic of Orange* as an "absent presence" (Sato 2013, p. 121 and passim), which, drawing from Caroline Chung Simpson's formulation (Simpson 2001), also sounds a lot like exclusion. Here, Sato hotwires the dialectic of materiality in order to expose the version of virtuality that supports the information-materiality hierarchy as identified by Hayles.

But what if, in crossing materiality's binary wires (as Sato does), a virtuality were to emerge that was itself a form of escape, and not the thing to be escaped? What if absent presence, rather than describing the exclusionary effects of Japanese American internment, and the "ineradicable painful memory" of it (Sato 2013, p. 121), were literalized such that "that which is present without being local" describes an affective response to a set of exclusionary conditions, a sort of Trojan horse<sup>20</sup> that somehow infiltrates its target from afar? In this case, not only would presence (so imagined) undercut hegemonic assumptions about materiality, but it would help to reposition materiality discourse vis-à-vis information discourse by re-elevating and unsquashing it. Materiality can space-off and reverse information's gaze, but to do so, it must step out of a spotlight frame of presence and into a marginalized, discarded frame of absence. Here is a new take on what Sato calls "the transpacific gaze" that shows how spatial virtuality might flip the script, generate conditions, and mark reality.

As it turns out, Hsu's approach to the reality of Los Angeles in *Tropic of Orange* takes her through the virtuality of absent presence ("ethereal, nonphysical"), whereas my approach to the virtuality of the city, and the novel's other sites, takes me through Yamashita's literalized (and therefore entangled) realities. To see spatial virtuality at work in *Tropic of Orange* is simply to see how the novel's various sites are marked by its nonlocal presences. Simply put, it is to see how places like Mazatlán and L.A. are constantly "marking, indelibly" the other, and which, as a result, "are never the same again" (Hsu 2006, p. 77). The climatic and geographic reversals that ensue when the tropical south goes north and the sub-tropical north goes south is the most literal and earthly-tangible way that Yamashita could have expressed this dynamic (all it requires is spellbindingly imaginative vision with virtuosic execution to match); that the bottom and the top trade places in a movement that uses geographical difference to magnify geopolitical and socioeconomic difference on a global scale is the novel's impersonal imitation of Rafaela's space-off. When Rafaela is abducted, for instance, "[t]he sound of her screams traveled south but not north" (p. 220). That is the novel's doing, not Rafaela's—a textual agency

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<sup>20</sup> Trojan horse imagery as a heuristic for thinking the relation between private and public under neoliberalism can also be found in Faranak Miraftab's article, "PublicPrivate Partnerships: The Trojan Horse of Neoliberal Development?" (Miraftab 2004).

at work. By going south, Rafaela's screams are really going to a virtual north, a negotiated space in Yamashita's writing where presence is nonlocal. As Rafaela's screams echo across an ethereal, nonphysical landscape, they also sound out new counterhegemonic realities that materialize the strangeness of Yamashita's writing (Grosz). There is a *truth* to the novel's sites that *becomes* and *happens* according to Yamashita's art (Heidegger). L.A. may never be the same again.

## 5. Conclusions: From the Locality of Narrative to the Globality of Database

If we are to apprehend the Anthropos, we must find the means to globalize—to globalize our response, to globalize our dissent, and to globalize our conception of space, time, and species being.

—Jesse Oak Taylor (2017), "Globalize" in *Veer Ecology*

When Huehls remarks that *Tropic of Orange* "rejects metaphor," he does so to reinforce a reading of the novel in which "private and public have no inherent value beyond the differential role they play in the ongoing score of spatial production" (Huehls 2016, pp. 76–77). Huehls and I agree that "the tropic of orange supplants the Tropic of Cancer's metaphorical logic, replacing it with a trope that refuses to turn," that "in place of metaphor's representational logic . . . , Yamashita's orange forges connections and accrues affiliations," and "that connectivity, emptied of metaphorical value, frees the orange to serve as a nodal point in a broader network of constellated and inevitably political value" (pp. 77–78). While Huehls's analysis thus provides a useful way to pivot from a discussion of the novel's literalizations to a discussion of networks and constellations, it also highlights the different interpretative options available to those focused on "the orange [as] a figure that refuses figuration" (Huehls 2016, p. 77). Huehls and I, for instance, ground the possibility of politics divergently even as we do so from the common starting point of literality and literalization. For Huehls, difference makes all the difference: "it's in this right to difference [of spatial production], this right to assemble the world and constellate meaning, that something like politics can occur" (p. 76). Such a post-historical premise puts Huehls the company of those who see no way for politics and its forms to be ideologically conditioned, as "this approach precludes the application of predetermined political value and ideological belief" (pp. 76–77; see footnote 8 to see how difference figures differently for different theorists).

By contrast, I read a figuration-resistant orange to be in the service of an ideology unto itself, and I see Huehls's pivot from literalization to networks and constellations as suitably illustrative of this view. If *Tropic of Orange* is a novel of entangled literalities whose politically efficacious conceit is to show the consequences of taking neoliberalist assumptions at face value—to expose the assumptive expendability of the homeless despite the so-called universalization of the public and the private, to graphically render and subvert the violence of the male gaze, and to demonstrate the perils of globalization—then it is also a novel that literalizes itself as the global expression of its own narrativity (which, as we will see, is inherently local). Arguably this same conclusion could be reached through a reading of how the novel's media are foregrounded as precisely the technologies through which ideology materializes, with attention to the storylines that rely on Emi's TV- and Gabe's print-based journalism, and separately, Buzzworm's radio involvement. Such a conclusion might punctuate a Marshall McLuhan-inspired inquiry, updating the old adage that "the medium is the message." I have avoided this path in favor another that prioritizes how the excesses of impersonal affect make exactly the opposite point, and to therefore demonstrate that the novel enacts its own lack of an outside, its own immanent globality by refusing to stop at its own borders.

When thinking of a way to describe a novel that insists on going past itself through literalization, something like HyperForm comes to mind. Perhaps even HyperContent. But for Yamashita, "HyperContexts" accomplish what hyped-up forms and contents cannot, because contexts are the ultimate containers, containing forms which contain contents. Yamashita's HyperContexts is routinely read as a variation on a more narrative-style table of contents, coming as it does after "Contents" and arraying the same information in a grid-like matrix. For Rody, this is "a cleverly designed . . . chart"

(Rody 2009, p. 132); for Robin Blyn, it is a “chart . . . that invites the reader to experience the text in multiple ways, each of which reveals emergent connections among its diverse cast of characters”:

The novel, in short, presents itself as a network modeled on the World Wide Web. *Tropic of Orange* consequently implies that its own aesthetic production of the multitude as a network emerges from the specific historical conditions of Empire: the so-called “immaterial labor” that Hardt and Negri associate with the birth of the Internet (*Empire* 291) (Blyn 2016, pp. 195–96).

Though Blyn’s extension of HyperContexts from “chart” form to “World Wide Web” is brilliantly and convincingly argued, it crucially elides *database* as the formalism that bridges the online digitality of the Internet and the offline, analog aspect of charts. We can plumb this elision to tease out how the novel’s “own aesthetic production” goes beyond “specific historical conditions” even as it “emerges from” them. Not necessarily online or offline, database nevertheless establishes the formal parameters that materialize the virtualities of print narrative, a point that I, riffing on Hayles (2012), develop rigorously in “Transmentality” (Frank 2017; c.f. footnote 4) in order to further refine spatial virtuality, to posit that “narrative localizes the global” (p. 232). By the same token and following the same logic, and by synthesizing Hayles’s readings of Les Manovich with Marie-Laure Ryan’s articulation of “virtual narration” (Ryan 2001), we see how narrative mimicking database form highlights its capacity to globalize the local (Frank 2014, p. 234).<sup>21</sup> Much more than any medium or technology *within* the novel, this “databasing” of the novel itself accomplishes the literalization of an impersonal affective excess, and I think that it is important to see that such an accomplishment is bound up in a formalism that is specifically theorized apart from charts and Internet. What Yamashita does with HyperContexts is to take literalization as far as it can go—further even than an immanent neoliberal globality. HyperContexts, by definition, *exceed* contexts, so that the spaces produced by Yamashita’s writing are hyper-referential; the conditions to which the novel would respond are superseded by the conditions to which it ultimately refers.

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<sup>21</sup> Hayles paraphrases Manovich’s observation that narrative harbors a virtual database, and vice versa, “when he argues that for narrative, the syntagmatic order of linear unfolding is actually present on the page, while the paradigmatic possibilities of alternative word choices are only virtually present. For databases, the reverse is true” (p. 180; qtd. in Frank 2014, p. 232). Ryan’s “virtual narration” can then be seen as a “databasing of narrative” in the sense that it “enables us to convert the temporal flow of language into a global image that exists all at once in the mind” (p. 17; qtd. in Frank 2014, p. 234). This “conversion” of temporal flow into a global image is the work of HyperContexts.

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