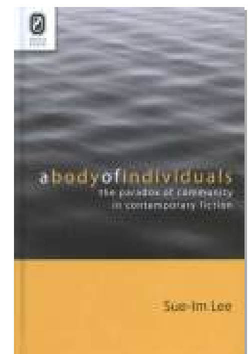
2. "We Are Not the World:" Global Community, Universalism, and Karen Tei Yamashita's Tropic of Orange



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CHAPTER 2

"We Are Not the World"

Global Community, Universalism, and Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*

In Karen Tei Yamashita's political realist-fantastic novel, *Tropic of Orange* (1997), Third World labor confronts First World industry in a professional wrestling match. The champion of the Third World is a five-hundred-year old messianic man called Arcangel, who fights under the name of El Gran Mojado (colloquially translated, "The Great Wetback"). The champion of the First World is NAFTA, alternately called "SUPERNAFTA" or "SUPERSCUMNAFTA." The representatives of the two hemispheres face each other in a Los Angeles stadium, amid all the pomp and screaming splendor of a televised pro-wrestling match. As the champions strut around the ring in the prematch show of self-promotion, Arcangel declares:

> I do not defend my title for the
> rainbow of children of the world.
> This is not a benefit for UNESCO.
> We are not the world.
> This is not a rock concert. (259)

When Arcangel mocks the popular slogans with which the First World describes a global community, he expands his challenge beyond his immediate opponent, the economic and political policies of NAFTA. He denounces the very notion of a collective, singular subject position

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that stands as the "we" in "We Are the World." Sung by the biggest American pop stars of the mid-1980s who called themselves "Band Aid," "We Are the World: U.S.A. for Africa" was a worldwide phenomenon in 1985, and the title came to function as a popular slogan for envisioning the globe as a single community. The best-known encapsulation of the global "we" is, of course, the concept of the "global village." Since Marshall McLuhan famously used the term in the 1960s to foreshadow a new world order, one in which the medium of electronic communications diminishes, and overcomes, the physical and temporal distance that separates the world's inhabitants, "global village" has been the dominant term for expressing a global commonality that results from transnational commerce, migration, and culture. More importantly, the celebration of global village translates that altered material condition into a hitherto unrealized condition of proximity, intimacy, and, ultimately, fusion. The magic of global village, then, overcomes the paradox of community: it transforms innumerable individuals into a single body of individuals.

Arcangel's critique of this global village community must be understood in light of the unmistakable authority with which Yamashita endows him. Arcangel is a prophet and a messiah who masquerades as a bawdy performance artist and street vagrant. He travels throughout South America and Mexico singing "political poetry," recounting the southern continent's history of exploitation at the hands of Europeans. He literally bears, on his body, the scars of slavery and colonialism and is the self-identified voice and the consciousness of the colonized and of the Third World.[1] So when Arcangel rebuts global village sentiments, he is not specifically deriding the First World's philanthropic enterprise at large but the *facility* with which the global "we" circulates in the First World's political, economic, and cultural discourse. The global "we," indeed, is a central protagonist in the First World's discourses of politics, commerce, and culture, crucial to its narrative of "progress" and "development." It underwrites trade policies such as NAFTA (i.e., free trade and trade increases that will benefit all of "us") and is also a highly marketable—indeed, invaluable—concept in the First World's culture industry ("we are the world").

Most importantly for the argument of this book, this global village community rests on the cornerstones of idealized community discourse. The rationale for this first-person plural "we" rests on the supposed commonality that binds all members of the globe into one. Furthermore, the power and the influence of this commonality are so potent that they override the great physical distance, the great material divide,

and the great inequity in political and cultural capital amongst its members. As commonality supersedes the paradox of community, billions of individuals fuse into one and become a single "we." What Yamashita offers, through Arcangel's mockery of the global village "we," is a dissenting community critique of the idealization of community. What unsupported claims of commonality justify the transformation of multiple individuals into a single body? Who chooses the criteria of "sameness" that blankets the entire group? Whose difference is elided for the coherence of unity? What happens to the possibility of conflict and antagonism amongst the members when cohesion, intimacy, and fusion are valorized as *collective* values? Ultimately, what coercive operations are justified in the name of community as the site of sharing, intimacy, and collective health?

As "we are not the world" becomes the rallying cry of Third World labor against the First World discourse of global village community, *Tropic* articulates precisely these dissenting community suspicions of idealized community. When community is conceived through a commonality, Jean-Luc Nancy argues, community becomes an expression of a fusion formed around an essence—as "people," "nation," "destiny," or "generic humanity"—and community becomes "totalitarianism" (39). In a similar vein, Ernesto Laclau argues that the valorization of oneness in idealized community discourse casts conflict and antagonism as obstacles that must be excised. Instead, antagonism is "the ontological possibility of clashes and unevenness [that enables us] to speak of freedom[,] . . . the very condition of a free society" ("Community" 92). For Jean-François Lyotard, the valorization of unity and solidarity is a "totalitarian apparatus" that struggles to suppress the "'presence' of the unmanageable"—the radically different, the heterogeneous ("À l'insu [Unbeknownst]" 43).

Like the "unmanageable" that cannot be completely suppressed, Arcangel's protest dissents from the global village "we" and challenges the assumptions, values, and goals of idealized community discourse. However, a crucial distinction must be observed between the novel's critique of global village community and dissenting community's negation of idealized community. That difference rests on the fact that *Tropic* holds on to a key ingredient of idealized community—the desirability of multiple individuals becoming a body of individuals. In tandem with the critique of global village community, the novel argues the need to conceive of a *new* first-person plural "we" that can capture the accelerated movement of capital, cultural practices, and humans traversing the world. Set in Mexico and Los Angeles, the novel highlights the transna-

tional crisscrossing of labor, goods, resources, languages, and cultures in the late twentieth century. Its characters, who had formally led disparate lives and had been separated by oceans and continents, are brought into hitherto unknown proximity and interconnectedness with each other—and ultimately into fusion. In its new vision of the globe as a community, then, *Tropic* espouses the single body community as a political *necessity.* In the process, the novel irrevocably diverges from dissenting community discourse and its central aim—to negate the idealization of single body community, oneness, and fusion. This divergence forms the basis of the ambivalent community that I delineate in this chapter. The novel's sharp criticism of global village discourse echoes dissenting community's condemnation of idealized oneness. Yet this criticism of idealized community concludes by embracing the kernel of idealized community: that multiple individuals can fuse into a single body community. The dialectic movement between the competing values of idealized and dissenting community results in the novel's fluctuating treatment of concepts such as commonality, oneness, and fusion. Under contestation is the matter of the global "we." How should this first-person plural subject be envisioned?

This chapter examines the complexity of *Tropic*'s global "we" through the concept of *universalism*. Like identification that transformed multiple subjects into one in Morrison's novels, universalism functions as the most powerful force in *Tropic* for fusing billions of individuals into a "body of individuals." Unlike Morrison's affirmation of identification, however, Yamashita casts universalism as a dual-edged sword—the greatest force for saying "we," as well as the most dangerous force for saying "we." That is, the novel's critique of idealized community discourse is inextricable from its critique of universalism, as the global village "we" under critique is a *unilateral* "we." The novel targets the global village community that unidirectionally conscripts the entire globe into a single body community—into an ultimate unity forged from commonality and shared fate, maintained by a relationship of intimacy, mutually benevolent interchange, and direct connections. Thus *Tropic*'s denunciation of the First World's global village celebration indicts the imperialist nature of a few who presume to speak for all.

It is crucial to note from the outset that the subject under indictment is not globalization per se, but a particular *view* of globalization—the view that globalization results in the economic, political, and cultural intimacy and shared fate of a primordialist village.[2] As this chapter will demonstrate, what is under critique in *Tropic* is the most self-serving and *unreflective* use of the idealized community discourse manifest in the

form of the global village celebration. The invocation of the "village," one of the key models of Gemeinschaft unity, best represents the First World's self-serving and unreflective use of idealized community. This distinction between the novel's treatment of globalization and of global village celebration is very important, for globalization as a subject is a continuing interest in Yamashita's novels. A Japanese American writer whose years spent in Brazil, Japan, as well as the United States reflect a thoroughly transnational imagination, Yamashita's novels have consistently attempted to read the momentous and minute changes affecting individual lives as a result of globalization. Indeed, Yamashita's novels are deeply immersed in the phenomena of globalization: the high-speed information, media, and transportation technologies; the transnational modes of production and consumption; the accelerated flow of people, capital, goods, information, and entertainment; all of which result in the shift in the human experience of space, distance, and time.

Through the Arc of the Rainforest (1991) shows a fascination with the communications and entertainment media, such as the Brazilian daytime soap operas that enthrall the entire nation and literally forge a single body community out of viewers. It also explores the far-ranging impact of a multinational corporation on the daily life of working Brazilians and the environmental damage the corporation inflicts on the rainforest. In *Brazil Maru* (1992), Yamashita explores the early turn-of-the-century Japanese migration to Brazil, while in *Circle K Cycles* (2001), she addresses the Japanese Brazilians who live in Japan as "foreign" migrant workers in the late twentieth century. Yamashita's wide-ranging treatment of nations, ethnicities, and continents stands out as an example of the intra-ethnic, transnational nature of Asian American writing. As she puts it, "in order to study this thing, whether or not we call it Asian-American—means that we're going to have to know a lot more about it than just talking about the United States" (Gier and Tejeda n.p.). Thus globalization as a force of *deterritorialization* is a constant interest in all of Yamashita's novels, as she explores the unmooring of fixed ethnic, national, and geographical identities and of established categories by which humans are organized and distinguished. Indeed, contesting the discourse of purity (of blood, race, ethnicity, nation, or culture), Yamashita's novels explore, and celebrate, the porous categories of identities emerging from the phenomenon of globalization. Conversely, her novels explore the ways in which the unmooring of identities and affiliations translates into formations of *new* moorings. The physical, material, and cultural challenges of globalization translate into a literary challenge for the writer: upon what basis, through what ratio-

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nale, may a different global community be imagined?[3]

Nowhere does this challenge press more imperatively than in *Tropic,* in which the geography of the globe literally shifts and Northern and Southern hemispheres merge into one. The Tropic of Cancer, the imaginary line that divides the Northern Hemisphere into northern clime and tropical clime, becomes attached to a magical orange growing in Mazatlan, Mexico. In the hands of Arcangel, the orange—and the Tropic of Cancer—moves northward to Los Angeles. Accompanying Arcangel and the Tropic of Cancer are Mexicans seeking work in the United States, traveling towards, as they sarcastically call it, their "manifest destiny" (132). Allegorical of the labor's movement from the south to the north, from the Third World to the First World, the shift literally destabilizes the topography of the land. Yamashita's choice of Los Angeles as the ultimate site of confrontation speaks to the city's synecdochical role in the contemporary imagination as the epicenter of global confluence, or, some would say, global conflagration. Yamashita uses the contradictory significance of this city to articulate her ambivalence about the project of transforming the globe into a community: How can the globe become a single body of individuals, given the severe fissures separating its population? At the same time, how can the inexorable fact of globalization's cultural, material, and human convergence be acknowledged?

Tropic's project in conceptualizing a nonoppressive global community, then, has much in common with recent reconsiderations of universalism. Aggressively countering the delusional "we" at the heart of unidirectional deployments of universalism (e.g., Eurocentricism, colonialism, imperialism) has been central to the anticolonialist, antiracialist, and antisexist scholarship of the late twentieth century. Generally traced back to Descartes and the ascendancy of the Enlightenment through thinkers such as Rousseau and Montesquieu, the history of universalism is at once a history of a tool of oppression, the discursive and material coerciveness of a few who presume to speak for all. What complicates this rendition of universalism, however, is the pivotal place that universalism occupies in progressive political movements. Ernesto Laclau encapsulates the contradictory role of universalism succinctly: "without a universalism of sorts—the idea of human rights, for instance—a truly democratic society is impossible" (*Emancipation(s)* 122).

Recent recuperation of universalism begins with precisely this oppressive/progressive function of universalism, and Laclau is representative of the poststructuralist attempt at recuperating universalism principally through the discourse of human rights and progressive politics.[4]

As the poststructuralist recuperation argues for the perennial relevance of universalism without relying on foundational tenets (claims about the essence of "human nature"), it distinguishes itself from the neo-Kantian defense of universalism, best represented by Habermasian use of rationality as the foundational feature of humans and the speech act.[5] A recent consideration of universalism's paradoxical function is best represented in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality,* in which Butler, Laclau, and Žižek exchange a series of essays on universalism. Despite their many differences, the three thinkers are bound in the assertion that universalism is a concept which supersedes any particular instantiation, "a process or condition irreducible to any of its determinate modes of appearance" (3). Hence, the poststructuralist revitalization of universalism crucially renders a dialectic tension within the concept—as a concept constitutive of *any* discussion of human rights, justice, equality, and dignity, yet whose particular instantiations invariably fall short of the expansive promise held therein. A model of universalism as the site of an "impossible/necessary" dialectic, I suggest, is crucial in understanding projects like Yamashita's, which reject the unidirectional, imperialist deployments of universalism without rejecting the concept itself.

In contrast to the First World's deployment of a global intimacy and shared fate that comprise the latest rendition of imperialist universalism, *Tropic* pursues another model of global community: to take account of conflict, disparity, and injustice as realities of globalization while still acknowledging the inexorable convergence of peoples, cultures, and materiality in the profoundly altered state of global coexistence. This vision of the global "we" walks a careful balance between observing the key tenets of dissenting community discourse, such as heterogeneity, conflict, antagonism, and unassimilable difference, while keeping in sight the newly formed connections and the deep interdependence emerging from globalization. Hence, not only does the novel sit at the nexus of current discussions of universalism; it postulates its own model of universalism that I call "romantic universalism." As the novel's final answer to the challenge of a global "we," romantic universalism richly illuminates the transformative power of universalism in serving the political needs of those rendered invisible in the great material divide of globalization. At the same time, this new global community bears the seeds of its own limitations, limitations that bring us back to the "impossible" and "ideal" dialectic of universalism. In the transnational, transcontinental flow of people, labor, capital, and culture, Yamashita suggests that a need to conceptualize a global community is inexorable. The tasks of conceiving a new singular collective "we" and of conceiving a new

use for universalism become not matters of choice, then, but pressing needs.

The Overworked Village

As Benedict Anderson put it, "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined communities. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness but by the style in which they are imagined" (6). The concept of the global village surely requires a stretch of the imagination. The conjoining of two vastly different scales of human coexistence demonstrates the domesticating work performed by the smaller scale of the "village" in defusing the threat posed by the immense scale of the "global." Like the "family" or "sisterhood" that provided ready-made context for conceiving of community in Morrison's novels, the village, in the global village celebration, counts on its seemingly self-evident desirability as a model of unity. Thus the village is more than a denotation of a smaller scale of coexistence. Contemporary valorization of global village directly reinvigorates the idealized values of the village in Tönnies's theory of community. As I discussed in the Introduction, the village exemplifies the key values of Gemeinschaft—a unity formed from bonds of family, kin, faith, tradition, habit—all of which come together to form a "common center." "Each individual receives his share from this common center, which is manifest in his own space, i.e., in his sentiment, in his mind and heart, and in his conscience as well as in his environment, his possessions, and his activities" (224). The Gemeinschaft idealization of the village simultaneously connotes a particular relationality at work. Just as the village is a scale of coexistence that is always-already in the past—the "primordiality" that Anderson identifies—it suggests a simpler and more immediate relationality of person-to-person contact, of unconditional connections, belonging, and intimacy.

The global village concept is perhaps the ultimate fetishization of the primordial village in the discourse of idealized community. This fetishization is explicit in Marshall McLuhan's formulation of the global village. As he writes in *The Gutenberg Galaxy:* "[T]he electro-magnetic discoveries have recreated the simultaneous 'field' in all human affairs so that the human family now exists under the conditions of a 'global village.' We live in a single constructed space resonant with tribal drums" (31). McLuhan's global village discourse fundamentally appeals to primordi-

alism (human family, tribal drums) in translating high-speed electronic media into a *social* relationality of intimacy, cooperativeness, and familiarity: “electric speed [brings together] all social and political functions in a sudden implosion,” and “the electronically contracted globe is no more than a village” (*Understanding Media* 20). As Andreas Huyssen notes, the “constant sliding of categories in McLuhan from the technological to the social and vice versa” reveals a mix of technological and theological discourse. “Rather than offering a media theory McLuhan offers a media theology,” in which high-speed electronic media, such as television, “retribalizes the world” (12).[6] Gayatri Spivak, discussing McLuhan’s *The Global Village,* casts a more political condemnation: “global village” is an “appropriation of the rural.” The concept of global village, built on the “[e]lectronification of biodiversity . . . is colonialism’s newest trick” (“Cultural Talks” 330).

By sharply delineating the material inequalities that separate First World and Third World subjects, *Tropic* mulls over precisely this self-serving celebration of commonality, intimacy, and connectedness in First World’s celebration of global village. In its depiction of Los Angeles, too, the novel focuses on extremely disparate socioeconomic positions and emphasizes the stark fissures that counter the global village discourse. The characters include an illegal immigrant couple, Bobby and Rafaela, and a white-collar professional couple, Gabriel and Emi. Revealing the highly uneven benefits of globalization in the First World’s major metropolis, too, Manzanar and Buzzworm represent the mass of urban homeless. The novel’s fragmented form also dramatizes the fracture in the First World’s vision of global village community. Yamashita begins the book with “HyperContexts,” a diagram that shows, in one glance, the division of the narrative into the seven days of the week, with each chapter attending to one day in the life of one of the seven major characters. This disjunctive organization leads to an atomistic sense of each character’s life, as each chapter seems to stand on its own with little continuity from the other. Always, there is a sense of impending doom, as various human and natural catastrophes—rumors of illegal human organ harvesting and sales, a mass scare of cocaine-injected oranges on the market, and major freeway pileups and explosions resulting from the spatial distortions—affect the lives of the characters. All the while, the Tropic of Cancer steadily moves northward, unsettling all rules of space and order.

Thus, through content and form, Yamashita enacts a dissenting community suspicion of idealized oneness—the global village “we” that ignores the great material divide between its members, that overrides

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actual moments of political and cultural conflict, and that imposes a commonality that binds "us" all. In an emblematic scene that challenges the use of commonality in global village discourse, Gabriel and Emi are dining in an upscale Japanese restaurant in Los Angeles. Emi, a Japanese American TV producer who delights in spoofing any orthodoxy, including that of political correctness, is speculating on the racial makeup of another diner sitting at a distance. Emi is engaging in her familiar game of unsettling her much more somber boyfriend Gabriel, who, as a Mexican American reporter, is committed to exposing and criticizing social injustice. A nearby diner takes umbrage at Emi's speculations. Identified only as "a white woman," she remonstrates Emi on the importance of cultural diversity: "I happen to adore the Japanese culture. What can I say? I adore different cultures. I've traveled all over the world. I love living in L.A. because I can find anything in the world to eat, right here. It's such a meeting place for all sorts of people. A true celebration of an international world" (129).

Her model of global village community epitomizes the self-serving and unreflective use of idealized community discourse. It represents a response to globalization in which the material and cultural benefits enjoyed by *some* are translated into benefits enjoyed by *all,* into apolitical commonalities that connect the globe's innumerable members into a Gemeinschaft model of the village. Her view of global "commonality" follows an entirely consumerist logic. If you can eat "their" food, and travel and sight "them," then you and they have a "commonality." This commonality, furthermore, is a sign of *contact* between "you" and "them." As she reifies commonality into consumption, and difference into food matter, she exemplifies a view of globalization as an exchange in free-floating "cultures" without any material referents or consequences. Further continuing the capitalist logic in which the more choices the consumer has, the healthier the overall state of economy, in the white woman's rationale, the greater the number of different cultures' foods available, the "truer" the celebration of an international world. This unidentified white woman stands as the synecdoche of the First World's imperialist assumption of global community, and Yamashita's mockery turns unabashedly didactic. Emi notes that the woman sports chopsticks as hairpins. She calmly holds up two forks and asks whether the woman would wear these in her hair, or whether she would consider the wearing of food utensils as an unsanitary practice. The woman "blanches" in response (129). In the hands of Emi, the protagonist that Yamashita identifies as approximating her mouthpiece, the white woman's consumerist celebration of a global village community and her

fetishizing of "different cultures" are shown to be indefensible, even to the woman herself (Gier and Tejeda n.p.).[7]

So who is in this overworked global village? This village is occupied by First World consumers who rationalize their privileged mobility and consumption as responsible acts of global community. These First World "villagers," oblivious to their own role in the relations of power, project the consensual participation of *other* fellow villagers, those of "different cultures." Thus, "[a]s 'universal,' the dominant erases the contingencies of time and space, history and location, and with the same gesture elides its operations of domination, projecting instead the appearance of being democratic" (Palumbo-Liu 188). As "my" consumption becomes "our" celebration, the slippage of the subject in the First World's global village community speaks its unidirectional and imperialist deployment of global village *universalism*. Ernesto Laclau's discussion of nineteenth-century European imperialism highlights the enormity of the slippage. In the work of imperialism, European culture of the nineteenth century circulated as "a particular one, and at the same time the expression . . . of universal human essence"; and in the *simultaneity* of this circulation, the particularity of European culture takes on the ontological status of universality itself: "The crucial issue here is that there was no intellectual means of distinguishing between European particularism and the universal functions that it was supposed to incarnate, given that European universalism had constructed its identity precisely through the cancellation of the logic of incarnation and, as a result, through the universalization of its own particularism" (*Emancipation(s)* 24).

Likewise, as the white woman's privileged mobility and consumption circulate as evidence of global village universalism, she transforms the particular into the universal. The First World's global village community deploys a key aspect of idealized community discourse in the most unreflective and self-serving manner: commonality becomes a matter of "natural" assertion, an observation that has nothing to do with politics, power, or disparity. It seems natural to go from enjoying "different" cultures to asserting the similarities connecting oneself and those "different" people.

Precisely this claim of apolitical commonality is contested in the novel's focus on the disenfranchised and uncounted subjects. Bobby's and Rafaela's struggles are representative of first-generation immigrants', especially illegal immigrants', experience. Bobby is a Chinese Singaporean who entered the United States as a boy, posing as a Vietnamese war refugee. Through years of low-wage physical labor, he achieves economic security, owning his own business, an office cleaning service.

He marries Rafaela, a Mexican, during a trip to Tijuana, and they set up a home in an L.A. suburb. For all intents and purposes, Bobby and Rafaela exemplify the immigrant success story: they are small-business owners, they own property, their house is filled with appliances and goods, and Bobby supports his family in Singapore as well as sends his younger brother to college in the United States. Bobby's and Rafaela's visibility—as people of color and as immigrant success stories—are crucial to the global village discourse of Los Angeles as the true celebration of an international world.

However, what Bobby and Rafaela experience most deeply is not their economic comfort but their social invisibility, a pervasive sense of disaffiliation from the larger city. Their work, representative of the army of office cleaners whose night-time work remains unseen by the white-collar workers, is symptomatic of the invisible nature of cheap, immigrant labor. Bobby recalls: "Ever since he's been here, never stopped working. Always working. Washing dishes. Chopping vegetables. Cleaning floors. Cooking hamburgers. Painting walls. Laying bricks. Cutting hedges. Mowing lawn. Digging ditches. Sweeping trash. . . . Keeping up" (79). Indeed, Bobby exemplifies an immigrant model whose only sense of affiliation to his larger community is economical—as a laborer and a consumer. He lives under a perennial sense of anxiety—terror that his illegal immigration status will be prosecuted, that all his economic achievements will be taken away, and that his family's welfare will be threatened. As his wife sees it, Bobby lives in "this fear of losing what you love, of not feeling trust, this fear of being someplace unsafe but pretending for the sake of others that everything was okay" (149). Bobby's only way to keep terror at bay is to purchase appliances, gadgets, and furniture, affirming to himself that a good American is a consuming American. "Happier he is, harder he works. Can't stop. Gotta make money. Provide for his family. Gotta buy his wife nice clothes. Gotta buy his kid the best. Bobby's kid's gonna know the good life. That's how Bobby sees it" (17). While Bobby lives to work and to buy, Rafaela seeks an inclusion in the larger social, economic, and political structure. She attends community college and involves herself in the causes of labor activism. Bobby actively discourages and ridicules Rafaela's growing political awareness, keeping to his policy of keeping his mouth shut and keeping his head down. Rafaela, in turn, feels stifled by Bobby's atomistic vision of life to be lived: "She did not want any of this [Bobby's purchases]. She wanted more" (80). Rafaela finally leaves Bobby, fleeing to her hometown in Mexico with their child. In these two representative immigrants of Los Angeles, Yamashita casts a dissenting community skepticism on the cel-

ebratory vision of Los Angeles as a global village community. In the eyes of the white woman in the sushi restaurant, Bobby and Rafaela are ideal candidates for the "international world" of Los Angeles, but their terror and alienation make a mockery of any claims of an apolitical, "natural" commonality that unifies the globe as a village.

Yamashita further critiques the self-serving idealization of the globe as a village by highlighting the homeless population of Los Angeles. Buzzworm, an African American, Vietnam War veteran, is a self-elected, one-man champion for the homeless. He walks the streets everyday armed with nothing but a card that reads "Angel of Mercy," providing medical, housing, and legal assistance. Through his eyes, Yamashita relays the fleet of marginalized and uncounted homeless population who live on the street—teenagers, the elderly, veterans, families, children, people with mental problems, drug addicts, criminals, and youth gangs. Los Angeles, through Buzzworm's eyes, is a den of social injustice and economic iniquity. Speaking of L.A.'s insatiable car culture in which cars are better housed than homeless people, he remarks: "All these people living in their cars. The cars living in garages. The garages living inside guarded walls. You dump the people outta cars, and you left with things living inside things. Meantime people going through the garbage at McDonald's looking for a crust of bread and leftover fries" (43). Buzzworm's encounters with the people who eat, sleep, and live in the street indict the great discrepancy of welfare in Los Angeles and challenge any claim of commonality that fuses the city into a community.

In a spreading arc of criticism, Yamashita extends her dissenting community skepticism of global village universalism beyond Los Angeles, extending it to Mexico, the novel's prototypical example of the Third World labor. Arcangel's political poetry, which Yamashita sets apart in italicized style, functions as the testimony of the indigenous, the displaced, the exterminated, the poor, and the workers. Identifying himself simply as a "messenger" (199), Arcangel travels through Mexico, reciting his poetry. In a striking scene involving food, he offers a counterpoint to the scene in the L.A. sushi restaurant. On his northbound travel towards Los Angeles, Arcangel is eating lunch at a roadside tavern called "Misery and Hunger." As his waiter cites a long list of American beers that the tavern offers, Arcangel asks:

> "You don't think it strange? . . . All American beers. But we are in Mexico, are we not? Where are the Mexican beers?"
>
> "Perhaps you would prefer Coca-cola or Pepsi?"
>
> "Perhaps I would like a hamburger, Fritos, and catsup."

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> "It is our special today."
> It was true. Arcangel looked around at all the hungry and miserable people in the cantina—all eating hamburgers, Fritos, catsup, and drinking American beers. Only he, who had asked the cook for the favor of cooking his raw cactus leaves, ate nopales. (131)

The vastly different significance given to the food of "different cultures" highlights the role of geopolitical context in the fetishization of the other. The transmogrification of the other into consumable goods makes sense only within the capitalist consumer logic—that the wealth of consumer choices indicates the health of the overall system. While the availability of tacos and fajitas in Los Angeles would be another evidence of "our" commonality and connectedness in the global village discourse, in this Mexican tavern the flow of American fast-food staples is no cause to claim an access to the other. Quite the contrary, the omnipresence of American fast food and the dominance of American brands are reminders of the economic, political, and cultural rifts that make the global "we" impossible. The waiter and the diners of this roadside restaurant in Mexico exemplify an absolute immersion in American fast-food fare and brand dominance. What Arcangel finds remarkable is their obliviousness to this fact as being in any way noteworthy. Yamashita crucially employs Arcangel's surprise and irony to highlight this economic takeover and brand saturation.

As Arcangel heads north, he also indicts the global "we" as the central protagonist in the First World's economic discourse of "universal progress." Yamashita employs dramaturgical strategies, staging Arcangel's protest principally through a highly stylized back-and-forth dialogue with unnamed masses. It is in one such exchange that Arcangel announces his role as the champion of the Mexican/Third World labor against the U.S./First World industry:

> "El Gran Mojado, what are you doing here?" someone in the crowd wanted to know.
> "Fool. He is going north, of course." Everyone knew his story. His manifest destiny.
> "Ah," said El Gran Mojado, lifting a can of Budweiser, "But for the moment the North has come South."
> "Haven't you heard? It's because of SUPERNAFTA!" someone shouted.
> "While you are busy going north, he's here kicking ass. And he's saying we are North, too!"

> Another said, "It's all hot air what he says. What's the good of being North when it feels, looks, tastes, smells, shits South?"
>
> "That's right! If Martians landed here, they would know. They would swim nude in Apaculpo, buy sombreros, ride burros, take pictures of the pyramids, build a maquiladora, hire us, and leave."
>
> "El Gran Mojado! Stay here and save us!" (132)

The crowd dramatizes what postcolonial critics have long voiced—that the great narrative of development and progress underwriting the First World's global economic policies must be understood in direct continuation with imperialism. The very concept of globe as a singular, integrated unit serves the interests of First World industry, argues Spivak: "Globality is invoked in the interest of the financialization of the globe, or globalization. . . . The great narrative of Development is not dead. . . . [The global electronic future] is to provide the narrative of development an alibi[,] . . . [just as] the functionaries of the civilizing mission of imperialism were well-meaning" ("Cultural Talks" 330, 333).

The unidentified voices of Arcangel's chorus coalesce into one dissenting community indictment against the global village community. It is a critique directed not only at the oppressive deployment of commonality but also at the oppressive deployment of universalism. The global "we" as the central protagonist of universal progress is once again the particular (the interest of the First World) serving as the universal (the interest of all). Trade-led models of progress, which measure progress by the volume of trades between nations, tout the "universal progress" that will benefit all of "us."[8] When restrictions and barriers to trade are removed, the rise in trade of labor, services, goods, and raw resources will lead "the South" to be like "the North," until the geographical distinction is no longer synonymous with "the Third World" and "the First World." Instead, Arcangel and the crowd decry, the "North has come South." As the dominance of American fast foods and brands at the roadside tavern demonstrates, the South has become another marketplace for the north's goods. The south functions as a source of raw material—a low-wage workforce who earn a fraction of what their counterparts earn in the north, who work without health care and environmental and legal protection, whose small businesses and farms cannot compete with the massive dominance of U.S. products in the domestic market. While the great narrative of universal progress promises to unsettle the Third World/First World designations, Arcangel's chorus argues NAFTA to be yet another example of a zero-sum game. That the benefit of trade-led "progress" goes to a select few, and not to all, is the requisite condition

of the game itself. As Arcangel later pronounces, the narrative of universal progress is a "myth of the first world" (259).

Recuperating the Universal

Counterbalancing the novel's strong denunciation of global village community is an equally strong acknowledgment that *some* vision of oneness between the south and the north is inexorable. This insistence on oneness as a *necessity* is the novel's point of divergence from the discourse of dissenting community, and it demonstrates the novel's ambivalence about community as a proposition. While the novel's critique of global village celebration moves in tandem with dissenting community critique of commonality, intimacy, and collective health, upon the most important point in contention—the political significance of oneness—*Tropic* unabashedly embraces an idealized community vision. Multiple individuals *can* become a body of individuals. The paradox of community *can* be superseded. This global community is not only necessary; it is also inexorable. Arriving at this final destination, however, is a process much more complex than the global village celebration: *this* global community, as confrontational in nature as it is inevitable, requires the most absolute conception of universalism.

As Yamashita makes explicit, the wrestling match of "The Great Wetback" and "SUPERSCUMNAFTA" is the Third World's refutation of the global village community. But the destabilization of the Tropic of Cancer is also a dramatization of the thorough interdependence that binds the north and the south. Symbolic of the millions of human migration, Arcangel's travel northward takes place in a bus filled with Mexicans seeking work in the north. In tandem with "the rising tide of that migration from the South" (240) are the "waves of flowing paper money: pesos and dollars and reals, all floating across effortlessly—a graceful movement of free capital, at least 45 billion dollars of it, carried across by hidden and cheap labor" (200). The interdependence is certainly no guarantor of equitable relationship, as Yamashita amply demonstrates. But a confrontation between two interdependent parties, whose fates and interests are interwoven, results in a particularly nuanced conflict. The physical convergence of the south and the north becomes the literal dramatization of fusion and of the inevitability of the globe as a first-person plural "we." As Yamashita takes pains to highlight the disparity and inequities informing her characters' lives, *this* vision of global community contains conflict, antagonism, competi-

tion, vast differences, and unassimilated heterogeneity. It retains, in fact, key facets of dissenting community discourse voiced by postmodernist thinkers such as Young, Laclau, Lyotard, and Nancy as they refute the idealization of community. In an antithesis to its dissenting community vision, the novel's global community *also* retains the idealization of *fusion.* As global bodies, labor, capital, and geography converge upon one site, the question is: how can the globe be formulated as a body of individuals without the most uncritical idealization of community?[9]

Yamashita offers her answer in the character of Manzanar, a homeless man who stands atop L.A.'s freeway bypasses and "conducts." In the mold of the messianic figure who disowns a life of comfort for an austere one of serving others, Manzanar is a surgeon who leaves his family and profession to pronounce the absolute interconnectedness of humans. A Japanese American, he chose his name as a quiet protest and reminder of the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. His visibility despite his homeless status poses a resistance against the public policy of enforced invisibility for the homeless. However, as he stands atop freeway bypasses, Manzanar functions as the symbolic nodal point in which *all* of humanity, in a spiral of ever-increasing scope, is joined. It is significant that Buzzworm, the street-wise activist for the homeless, calls Manzanar the "ultimate romantic" (235). Buzzworm's description encompasses the spectrum of meanings in the word "romantic"—unrealistic, hopelessly idealistic, and even mad, as it represents a vision endorsed by no one else.

In a novel filled with oppressive universalism, Manzanar represents a unique version, a romantic universalism that unabashedly announces the globe as a single body community. This romantic universalism richly illuminates the modality of the ideal and the impossible in the poststructuralist recuperation of universalism. In reviving universalism as a non-normative force of political necessity, the dimensions of the ideal and the impossible are crucial—universalism as an ideal that cannot be achieved and as a perennial ingredient in all human struggles for hegemony.[10] Indeed, the ideal dimension of universalism is the constitutive feature in Étienne Balibar's "Ambiguous Universalism." While there are numerous, specific manifestations of universalism, the liberatory potential of universalism rests upon the fact that "universality also exists *as an ideal,* in the form of absolute or infinite claims which are symbolically raised against the limits of any institution" (63–64; original emphasis). Ideal universalism can be distinguished from "real" and "fictional" universalism. "Real" universalism describes the actual condition of increased interdependency of individuals and invokes the shift

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in the human experience of time, space, and distance brought about by globalization. Like the inexorable convergence of humans, capital, labor, and culture in *Tropic,* "real" universalism renders "'humankind' a single web of interrelations" for the first time in history (56). Just as Yamashita emphasizes the material disparity in globalization, Balibar is careful to point out that real universalism also marks an unprecedented condition of polarization, inequality, hierarchies, and exclusions (52). "Fictional" universalism describes the "constructed" universalism espoused by all ruling institutions, such as the state and the church. As the "official values" (62) of institutions, fictional universalism embodies both regulating and progressive function; it is a site of normalization, with the power to determine the norm and standard behavior, as well as being a "powerful instrument of opening a space for liberties, especially in the form of social struggles and democratic demands," as when individuals protest the "contradiction between its official values and the actual practice" (62). In the earnest and hopeful figure of Gabriel, for instance, we can locate fictional universalism inspiring this Mexican American newspaper writer to report unvarnished accounts of racial and labor relations in the hopes of realizing equality and justice for all. Thus ideal universalism stands as the principle that underwrites fictional universalism's propositions of human equality, liberty, and rights. Concomitantly, the principle of ideal universalism is repeatedly contradicted in the actual practices of, say, the church or the state. Hence ideal universalism stands as an immortal promise, an irrepressible principle that is revived again and again in different situations but is continuously displaced in history.

In order to fully appreciate the *absolute* nature of Manzanar's romantic universalism, we must also attend to the modality of the "impossible" that sits at the heart of the poststructuralist dialectic model of universalism. The impossible and the ideal are related concepts, of course, since the ideal may be defined as that achievement which is as equal in its impossibility as in its necessity. Although Butler, Laclau, and Žižek, in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality,* employ different metaphors to describe the impossibility of absolute universalism, they join in the argument that universalism remains a perennial relevance in any and all political struggles for rights. Laclau's metaphor of the "void" or the "empty space" plays a pivotal role in these authors' discussion of universalism as a constitutive feature in any struggle for hegemony:

> From a theoretical point of view, the very notion of particularity presupposes that of totality. . . . [P]olitically speaking, the right of particular

> groups of agents—ethnic, national or sexual minorities, for instance—can be formulated only as *universal* rights. *The universal is an empty place, a void which can be filled only by the particular, but which, through its very emptiness, produces a series of crucial effects in the structuration/destructuration of social relations.* It is in this sense that it is both an impossible and necessary object. (*Contingency* 58; original emphasis)

As specific groups seeking hegemony formulate their political claims as universal rights, they ceaselessly and variously fill the empty space with claims of the particular. Inasmuch as it manifests itself only through the particular instantiations, the universal will manifest itself only through the particular. In this dialectic relationship, the universal is never completely filled—never absolutely nonparticular. As Laclau repeatedly argues, exclusion and antagonism are crucial in struggles for hegemony; indeed, they are foundational features of a democratic society. An individual group's use of universalism, as in a particular group's claim of/for rights, is fundamentally the exercise of a few speaking for *some* rather than for all. Hence actual manifestations of universalism are always necessarily incomplete, inasmuch as they are never completely devoid of the particular that requires exclusion and antagonism—"the complex dialectic between particularity and universality, between ontic content and ontological dimension, structures social reality itself" (58).

In Butler's and Žižek's revitalization of the concept, too, the political necessity of universalism is paralleled by its fundamental *in*completeness. While Butler critiques Laclau's universal/particular conceptualization as being too compartmentalized and naturalized (as if two such concepts existed irrespective of specific contingencies), in her revitalization of the universal as an invaluable political concept, she continues to build upon the impossible/necessary dilemma. Rather than Laclau's "empty space" metaphor which may suggest the universal to be a static category "filled" by "political content," Butler opts for the figurative concept of "non-space" to envision the universal's utility. Butler employs the analogy of linguistic/cultural translation in this formulation. All claims of universality are "bound to various syntactic stagings within culture" and therefore "cannot be articulated outside the scene of their embattlement." It follows, then, that claims of universality must "assume the risks of translation" (37) into another group's usage, syntax, and conventions. Just as the politics of translation embody both colonialist and anticolonialist possibilities, politics of universality also embody both coercive and progressive possibilities. In this trope of

the non-space, Butler emphasizes the open-ended possibilities of universalism as an invaluable and ceaselessly utilized political tool. "The universal announces, as it were, its 'non-place,' its fundamentally temporal modality, precisely when challenges to its existing formulation emerge from those who are not covered by it, who have no entitlement to occupy the place of the 'who,' but nevertheless demand that the universal as such ought to be inclusive of them" (39).

While Žižek fully agrees with Laclau and Butler on the universal's pivotal role in progressive politics and on the notion of universalism as impossible/necessary (101), he identifies a transhistorical assumption in the way they maintain the conceptual permanency of universalism throughout human struggles. To leave the conceptual permanence of universalism unquestioned, he believes, is to assume the permanence to be the *consequence* of universalism's political uses. But inasmuch as political uses of universalism are unquestionably contingent upon historical context, should not the permanence of universalism be painted with the variability of historical specificity? How, then, would they "account for the enigmatic emergence of the space of universality itself" (104), a challenge that is akin to "historiciz[ing] historicism itself"? (105). In contrast, Žižek conceives the impossible/necessary dialectic of universalism via the concept of negativity. In the Lacanian terms of the "real-impossible," in which every noun may be seen as a deadlock, trauma, or open question, as something that resists symbolization, the impossibility of universalism's completion is a constitutive factor in the concept itself (110). When considered in the "Hegelian determinate negation," the deficiency between the actuality and the notion can be explained by the fact that "a particular formation [for instance, of the state] never coincides with its (universal) notion" (*The Ticklish Subject* 177; original emphasis). Through various—but interrelated—metaphors (the empty space, the non-space, negativity), poststructuralist recovery of universalism posits universalism's *in*completeness as the constant feature in any specific application of the concept (*Contingency* 110).[11]

The absolute nature of Manzanar's romantic universalism attains a greater significance against this poststructuralist backdrop. Manzanar personifies the impossibility of universalism—an instantiation of universalism that is absolutely full because there is no exclusion or antagonism. Relatedly, romantic universalism enacts the ideal dimension of universalism raised in Balibar's vision—an achievement whose impossibility renders it an imaginary thing, an achievement that stands as a standard of perfection inspiring imitation. Manzanar alone supersedes the contradiction of urban coexistence—the dense, physical proximity

counterbalanced by the atomistic nature of the population's movements and the division of space by race and class. The richest example of this proximity/atomistic contradiction may be the automobile culture of Los Angeles, the millions who hurtle alongside each other, each in his own home-away-from-home. While L.A.'s freeways have long occupied the contemporary imagination as the ills of chaotic urban living, in Manzanar's eyes they represent the most vital organ of human cohabitation. "The freeway was a great root system, an organic living entity. It was nothing more than a great writhing concrete dinosaur and nothing less than the greatest orchestra on Earth" (37). Manzanar sees the artificial construct in the same realm as the elemental structures of nature and, through the language of elemental organism, describes the interconnected nature of urban existence.

Likewise, he alone sees the infrastructure that contains the urban mass of Los Angeles, the artesian rivers and the faults that run underground, as well as the human-made grid of civic utilities such as the pipelines, tunnels, waterways, pipes, electric currents, telephone cables, cable TV, fiber optics, computer networks, and many more (57). "*There are maps and there are maps and there are maps.* The uncanny thing was that he could see all of them 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" (56; original emphasis). To Manzanar, such an "inanimate grid structure" (238) is a physical reminder that we occupy a single structure of existence and that the wires, pipes, cables, and freeways are all evidence of our bounded-ness, our interconnectedness to each other in the making of a single organism. Thus the hurtling cars on the freeway speak of "a kind of solidarity: all seven million residents of Greater L.A. out on the town, away from their homes, just like him, outside" (206). A crowd leaving the football stadium has all the movements of a symphony, "a percussive orchestration that even Manzanar found incredible[,] . . . the greatest jam session the world had ever known" (206).

As Manzanar envisions the population as a single body of being, the rationale for his universalism is as banal as observing that we share the same power and phone company and as profound as observing that we exist in the one and the same here-and-now. Put another way, Manzanar's romantic universalism is one that draws the most profound conclusions from the most banal observations. Yamashita repeatedly endorses this transformative process in the narrative, continuing and sharing Manzanar's language of organicity that "create[s] a community" out of atomistic disorder:

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> And perhaps they [freeway drivers] thought themselves disconnected from a sooty homeless man on an overpass. Perhaps and perhaps not. And yet, standing there, he bore and raised each note, joined them, united families, created a community, a great society, an entire civilization of sound. The great flow of humanity ran below and beyond his feet in every direction, pumping and pulsating, that blood connection, the great heartbeat of a great city. (35)

Thus in sharp contrast to the imposed commonality in the global village discourse, Manzanar's romantic universalism generates the most expansive understanding of commonality. It is a view of commonality based on no particularities—no specific shared experience, history, ideology, race, gender, class, nationality, religion, or any other aspects by which one distinguishes oneself from another. This commonality-without-criteria echoes the kernel of Jean-Luc Nancy's theory of dissenting community: "community is a matter . . . of existence inasmuch as it is *in* common, but without letting itself be absorbed into a common substance" (*Inoperative Community* 38). Only by negating the understanding of commonality as *substance*—of similar history, identity-claims, objectives, interests, or, in the case of global village discourse, commonality of consumption—can commonality evade being a tool that some use to conscript others into a unidirectional "we."

This nonparochial, nonparticular, featureless commonality forms the basis of the most absolute universalism in the novel. While embracing this most central of dissenting community vision, however, Manzanar's "we" employs the nonparticular commonality towards building the final objective of idealized community: fusion. Thus the central visions of dissenting community and idealized community come together in a most incongruous manner, announcing the ambivalent community at work. To begin with, Manzanar's romantic universalism is foundational to a greater vision—a single body community that encompasses the geographical span of not only Los Angeles but countries, continents, and oceans. His vision extends to "the great Pacific stretching along its great rim, brimming over long coastal shores from one hemisphere to the other" (170), and he foreshadows the convergence of the north and the south, the joining of the two hemispheres (123). In the scope and reach of Manzanar's romantic universalism, Yamashita offers her own dramatization of the globe as a community—the globe as a single organism, whose disparate parts are inexorably drawn together. What distinguishes this model of single body community from the other instances of idealized community that abound in the novel? First, this

global community is not an instance of the particular "making empire out of its local meaning" (Butler 31). In constituting a "we" out of "my" experience, the white woman's global village universalism performs a unidirectional conscription: she speaks *for* the millions and billions of others in prescribing the supposed unity and the intimacy. The singular "we" that results is a unidirectional affection and affectation. In contrast, Manzanar's community, like the "crowds" that accompany Arcangel's Third World labor "we," and the cacophony of unidentified voices that join Buzzworm's urban homeless "we," is a reciprocal deployment of universalism. That is, there is no slippage between "my" and "we," as all three articulations of "we" emerge from spontaneous and voluntary fusion.

But it is also important to distinguish Manzanar's romantic universalism from Arcangel's and Buzzworm's particular deployment of universalism. As Laclau argued most forcefully, antagonism and exclusion are not unique features of imperialism and Eurocentricism: in the dialectic logic of universal/particular, *all* instantiations of universalism are incomplete inasmuch as they are claims of the particular. Thus universalism of the Third World labor "we" or the homeless "we" observes the fundamental contradiction in the idea and the political application of universalism—what Žižek calls the "split" grounded "*already on the level of the notion*" (*The Ticklish Subject* 177; original emphasis). Only Manzanar's romantic universalism supersedes that negativity, as it postulates a "we" that is absolutely inclusive because there is no criterion for inclusion, which is the same as there being no possibility of exclusion. Romantic universalism's "we" is a community of a limitless nature, whose absolute lack of particularity completely fills the "empty space" or the "non-space" of universalism.

In its absolute inclusiveness, romantic universalism fulfills another ideal dimension of universalism: a logic of "we" that does not exert a normalizing function. As Balibar identified in his model of fictional universalism, the governing function of institutions such as the church or the state also serves a regulating function. The dilemma that Balibar poses is: what deployment of universalism can avoid being a normative force? Through romantic universalism, *Tropic* offers an answer: when the participation in the universalism is entirely voluntary and reciprocal. In addition to bringing people to tears (235), Manzanar's conducting begets other believers, inspiring them to start conducting themselves. A spontaneous uprising of romantic universalism grabs hold of Los Angeles. As Arcangel and the Tropic of Cancer approach the city, causing geography to literally shift and streets to expand and distort,

Manzanar notes a different kind of organization to the city: "Little by little, Manzanar began to sense a new kind of grid, this one defined not by inanimate structures or other living things but by himself and others like him. He found himself at the heart of an expanding symphony of which he was not the only conductor" (238). As the entire city of Los Angeles become self-inspired "conductors," Manzanar's romantic universalism generates a "we" greater in scope than Arcangel's "crowd" or Buzzworm's homeless. Indeed, each of the conductors begins to personify, as Manzanar had done, the immensity of humanity as a single body. Manzanar notes that "the tenor of this music was a very different sort, at times a kind of choral babel. . . . The entire City of Angels seemed to have opened its singular voice to herald a naked old man [Arcangel] and a little boy [Bobby and Rafaela's son] with an orange followed by a motley parade approaching from the south" (238).

That the entire city's conducting "heralds" the arrival of Arcangel and the Third World labor underscores the *transformative* power of romantic universalism. Literally dramatizing the perennial relevance of universalism in the particular claims of specific groups, Manzanar's all-inclusive, all-voluntary, absolute universalism becomes foundational to the march of Third World labor and, later, to Buzzworm's vision for the homeless. When Arcangel finally confronts SUPERNAFTA in the wrestling ring, his address to the crowd, like his earlier addresses to the crowd in Mexico, becomes an emblematic Third World labor's protest against the First World's myth of universal progress:

> You who live in the declining and abandoned places
> of great cities, called barrios, ghettos, and favelas. . . .
> The myth of the first world is that
> Development is wealth and technology progress.
> It is all rubbish.
> It means that you are no longer human beings
> But only labor. (258–59)

As Arcangel protests a reality in which they are "no longer human beings," the formation of Third World labor as historical actor and Third World labor's claim for human rights take place in the contxt of Manzanar's romantic universalism. As the crowd break into cheers and tears, their fusion is:

> accompanied by a choral symphony that came from outside the auditorium and slowly swelled to fill it by the people themselves. Everyone

> knew the music and the words in their own language, knew the alto, bass, and soprano parts, knew it as if from some uncanny place in their inner ears, as if they had sung it all their lives. Some people jumped up to conduct entire sections of the auditorium. (260)

Illustrative of the complex nature of the global community formed by the north and the south, the confrontation of Arcangel and SUPERNAFTA does not result in a single winner. Each vanquishes the other in the ring, but the mythical manner of Arcangel's death by conflagration foreshadows his eventual rise again. What remains the greatest achievement of the confrontation, however, is the fusion of the south and the north joined in "conducting." For a brief moment, Los Angeles enacts a model of global community that is absolutely all-inclusive, all-voluntary, and all-reciprocal, and Manzanar can finally "let his arms drop. There was no need to conduct the music anymore. The entire city had sprouted grassroots conductors of every sort" (254).

Like the spontaneous "chorus" and "symphony" that frame Arcangel's Third World universalism, Manzanar's romantic universalism enables Buzzworm's particular universalism for the homeless. The literal geographical shift of the globe causes a meltdown of L.A. freeways, and chaos abounds between drivers who abandon their cars, the homeless who move in, and the law enforcement who combat them. The upheaval comes to an inevitable conclusion—a shootout between law enforcement and the homeless. The homeless are massacred in great numbers, and "order" is restored. As Buzzworm considers the blight and the reconstruction work that awaits him, his vision is profoundly altered by Manzanar's romantic universalism. Buzzworm separates himself from his main source of connection to the world, the radio. The radio, he notes, is always singing "one big love song. I love you. You love me. I love myself. We love us. We love the world. We love God. We love ourselves but hate some of you. I hate myself but would love you if. You screwed me and I'm learning to love me or that other one" (265). Instead of the facile cult of love that characterizes popular music, Buzzworm opts for what he calls a "mythic reality," a term he hears on the radio before he makes his final disconnection. A mythic reality occurs when "everyone gets plugged into a myth and builds a reality around it. Or was it the other way around? Everybody gets plugged into a reality and builds a myth around it. He didn't know which. Things would be what he and everybody else chose to do and make of it. It wasn't gonna be something imagined" (265). A mythic reality differs from the cult of love in its constructivist dimension—one remains fully conscious of

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the fact that one *chooses* the myth that best accompanies one's desired reality. "Unplugged and timeless, thinking like this was scary, Buzzworm gritted his teeth. Took a deep breath. Manzanar's symphony swelled against diaphragm, reverberated through his veteran bones. Solar-powered, he could not run out of time" (265).

A Global Community through Romantic Universalism

In romantic universalism's all-inclusive, all-voluntary, and non-normative "we," Yamashita offers a model of a global community that acknowledges the innumerable fissures, conflicts, competition, and antagonism running through it. Romantic universalism affects all specific instantiations of universalism in the novel in unique ways. As the most expansive and nondiscriminatory instance of "we," it highlights the unidirectional and imperialist nature of the First World's global village universalism. In lending its transformative power to Third World labor "we" and the homeless "we," romantic universalism also proves its perennial relevance to all political struggles. In romantic universalism's absolute nature, then, Yamashita offers one answer to the impossible/necessary dialectic in the poststructuralist recuperation of universalism. The impossible/necessary dialectic may be superseded, romantic universalism suggests, in an instance of universalism that includes *all* of humanity. When an instance of universalism has absolutely no remnant of the particular, it becomes that "empty space," the ever-receding horizon of the ideal itself.

In a powerful way, then, romantic universalism casts a new light on one of the most suspect words of contemporary theory: totality. As a word used synonymously with "totalitarianism" in contemporary political, philosophical, and cultural theories, especially in dissenting community discourse, totality is equated with the force of oppression and coercion in the name of solidarity, homogeneity, and unity.[12] However, what the absolute, sweeping nature of romantic universalism demonstrates is that "totality" is also the abstract notion for "absolute whole." As a formal concept of "entirety," totality resides at the center of romantic universalism, encapsulating the absolute inclusion that is nonparticular, nondiscriminatory, nondeliberative, and nondiscerning. As romantic universalism fulfills the very criteria of "ideal" and "impossible" universalism, it shows that the final horizon of universalism *itself* is totality—an absolutely sweeping, all-encompassing entirety, an unqualified wholeness. It shows that concepts equated with political oppression and totalitari-

anism—"totality," "oneness," and "fusion"—are also abstract ingredients in the ideal of universalism itself. Thus, not only is *Tropic*'s final "we" distinct from the "we" of idealized community based on specific commonalities; it is different from the "we" of dissenting community that eschews any prospective of totality, fusion, or oneness.

This nondeliberative, nondiscerning totality is what sets romantic universalism apart from cosmopolitanism, the closest conceptual cousin in contemporary theory in envisioning a global unity. As I elaborated in the Introduction, recent revitalizations of cosmopolitanism as a politico-ethical vision fundamentally rests on a vision of deliberative belonging. Envisioned as a politico-ethical vision against a nationalist, primordialist, and parochial sense of belonging, attachment, and identification, cosmopolitanism as a corrective against the single body community theorizes a vision of unity that is much more flexible, adroit, and deliberative than universalism. As Bruce Robbins states, cosmopolitanism "better describes the sensibility of our moment" because "the word is not as philosophically ambitious as the term 'universalism'" (196). In other words, in contrast to absolute universalism, whose final horizon is totality, recent revival of cosmopolitanism deploys "self-conscious" and "self-corrective" as key terms to envision a global unity that can evade precisely that pull of totality. Thus, while absolute universalism claims the entirety of the global "we," cosmopolitanism might be seen as a claim of global unity that is paradigmatically suspicious of the very concept of wholeness and entirety.[13]

In dramatizing totality as the horizon of romantic universalism, Yamashita offers a symbolic resolution to the impossible/necessary dialectic in the poststructuralist model of universalism. Romantic universalism, however, must not be understood simply as the solution that rescues universalism from the dialectic tension of necessity/impossibility. What about the necessity? What does romantic universalism *do*? What is the political utility of a universalism that is all-inclusive? What is the progressive, emancipatory potential of a unity that speaks for all? How does it specifically challenge fictional universalisms, the normative, governing forces of institutions such as the state, government, and trade regulations? Also, when the emblematic moment of romantic universalism is the Third World and the First World joined in song, just how much can romantic universalism distinguish itself from the cult of love that rules the radio airwaves?

In locating the answer to both inquiries, Yamashita returns us to the impossible/necessary dialectic. In presenting us with the seemingly impossible feat—an absolute "we"—romantic universalism also pres-

ents us with the fact that the idea of universalism itself serves no specific political needs *except* as it serves particular instantiations. The only satisfactory way to assert the political utility of romantic universalism, to distinguish it from the "We Are the World" variety, lies in assessing its specific manifestations—the "we" of the homeless or the "we" of the Third World labor. The political function of universalism can emerge only from the particular instantiations of universalism. Like Manzanar's conducting that encompasses all revolutions, both individual and collective, romantic universalism transforms individual protests (of Third World labor, of the homeless) into historical forces and into historical actors pursuing the ideal of universal human rights.

Rather than being a solution that overcomes the impossible/necessary dialectic, then, romantic universalism adds great nuance to the "empty space" of universalism that propels the dialectic. Through her use of the fantastic mode in representing romantic universalism, Yamashita renders a greater complexity to the theoretical conception of the "empty space," "non-space," or "negativity" at the heart of universalism. A globe that literally shifts its spatial perimeters, cities and continents that join in song: the fact that envisioning an absolute universalism requires the mode of the fantastic enriches our understanding of the impossible (improbable, unrealistic, unrealizable) nature of an all-inclusive "we." Furthermore, Yamashita's use of the fantastic to actualize the ideal of universalism enhances our understanding of the romantic (imaginary, unreal, and extravagantly fanciful) dimension of universalism. Indeed, the implications of absolute universalism can be profound and facile at once, and Yamashita richly illustrates these modalities through her use of the fantastic mode.

What, then, of the globe as a community? *Tropic* provides an array of models for conceiving the global community, from the imperialist, consumerist kind, to particular groups' unity and struggle for rights, and to absolutely total global oneness. To the paradox of community, then, the novel answers: absolute universalism transforms multiple individuals into a body of individuals. As Yamashita deploys the most expansive "we" as the foundation for the political articulations of Third World labor and the urban homeless, she unmistakably asserts the work of romantic universalism—the transformative power of its imaginary and unrealistic vision, as well as its inspirational power as the ever-elusive horizon of universal human rights.