

**Magic Capitalism and Melodramatic
Imagination—Producing Locality and
Reconstructing Asian Ethnicity in Karen
Tei Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the
Rain Forest****

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Abstract

This paper investigates the production of locality in Karen Tei Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (1990). The production of locality as dramatized by the novel consists of two phases of local spatialization in the context of time-space compression: deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Yamashita employs a specific narrative style that wavers between magic realism and melodrama to address the uncertainty, rupture, and incongruity derived from the condition in which transnational capitalism exerts both negative and positive impacts on local places in the

Received October 23, 2003; accepted June 10, 2004; last revised July 23, 2004
Proofreaders: Jin-shiou Lin, Kuei-feng Hu

* The completion of this article was made possible by a research grant provided by National Science Council (NSC-91-2411-H-005-003). I am much obliged to the generosity of NSC. I also want to express my gratitude to my research assistants, Yi-ting Luo and Shu-hong Liu for their ardent help in all aspects of the project. The generous and insightful comments from two anonymous reviewers help me trim out the redundant details to give the article a clear contour. I appreciate their time and attention for an underpaid job that is crucial for elevating academic expertise.

margin. While the novel's magic realist narrative mode manifests the uncanniness of deterritorialization, its melodramatic mode of narrative seems to reveal the process of reterritorialization with which the local people come to terms with the condition of globalization. It is within the process of reterritorialization, I contend, that the issue of Asian ethnicity can be investigated. In the novel, Asian ethnicity is redefined in materialistic terms to serve as social agents and means of cultural production whose power of mediation both challenges the violence of Western capitalism and supplements the rupture and the gap Western capitalism leaves behind in the local place. Asian ethnic specificity is thus reformulated by means of weaving family value and domestic cultural and imaginary production together. The novel's engagement with the production of locality, consequently, opens up a discursive and imaginary pattern that patches/matches the odd couple of magic capitalism and melodramatic imagination in an Asian style.

Key Words: magic realism, melodramatic imagination, the production of locality, Asian ethnicity

In the field of Asian-American literary studies, the two sides of the hyphenated term “Asian-American” usually refer to two cultural entities, with incompatible differences and hierarchical racial relations. To be Asian Americans is to be caught in the liminal space of the nation, vacillating not just between the two worlds, but also between politics of cultural nationalism and those of assimilation to the hegemonic cultural community. The nineties witnessed a sea of change in global politico-economic scenarios. For Asian-American ethnic groups, the designation of “Asia” surpasses its old connotation as the origin of traditional cultural imagination, calling for group loyalty and authenticity. It also exceeds its function as a discursive repertoire for the formation of cultural nationalism to indicate something more pragmatic and tangible. “Asia” is now conceived as a concrete geographical space, emerging on the cartography of late capitalist globalization, forming a relation of production with America or North America. The exchanges of capital, technology, media, information, population, and labor grow increasingly frequent between the two blocs, from which derives a region of the Pacific Rim or Asia Pacific that challenges the ethnic community formation based upon the politics of “claiming America.”¹

Within this nascent geopolitical context, this paper will investigate the production of locality in Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (1990). I argue that the production of locality as dramatized by the novel consists of two phases of local spatialization in the context of time-space compression: deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Yamashita employs a specific narrative style that wavers between

¹ For the definition of the terms “the Pacific Rim” and “the Asian Pacific,” see Dirlik (1993). The term is usually economically defined as a supregion formed through a network of economic zones located across the Pacific that transcend the borders of nations. As Dirlik argues, although the term of the Pacific Rim refers to a certain geographical location, it is fundamentally an “ideation constructs” characterized by human activity and interactions among cultural and economic networks. For his ideas on Asian-American communities in the age of globalization, see Dirlik (1996).

magic realism and melodrama to address the uncertainty, rupture, and incongruity derived from the condition in which transnational capitalism exerts both negative and positive impacts on local places in the margin. While the novel's magic realist narrative mode manifests the uncanniness of deterritorialization, its melodramatic mode of narrative seems to reveal the process of reterritorialization with which the local people come to terms with the condition of globalization. It is within the process of reterritorialization, I contend, that the issue of Asian ethnicity can be investigated. In the novel, Asian ethnicity is redefined in materialistic terms to serve as social agents and means of cultural production whose power of mediation both challenges the violence of Western capitalism and supplements the rupture and the gap Western capitalism leaves behind in the local place. This specific ethnicity, thus, is empowered by the fact that Japan is one of the driving forces of global capitalism nowadays. In what follows, I will start my discussion through a brief survey of the theories of the production of locality by various cultural critics. Important as they are to frame the investigation of the interaction between global forces and local people, however, these theoretical constructions only tell half of the story, since the novel is set in a remote region in the Amazon Forest in Brazil. I therefore include the concept of deterritorialization to try to fully explain the process of the production of locality in the Third World.

I. The Production of Locality

The problem of the local has gained increasing attention as the transnational flows of globalization become the important factors that shape and reshape our everyday cultural practices. While time-space compression in the process of modernization spreads the logic of capitalism deep into the remote regions of the world, reformulating their local modes of production, it also creates a sense of crisis when the "authentic" communities of the local place are threatened and undermined. To cultural critics who

are dedicated to the conceptualization of theories of globalization, the local in modernity takes on a dynamic meaning drastically different from the pre-modern definition of the term. Instead of an enclosed local community, whose cultural practice is shaped by its face-to-face relationship with the immediate surroundings, the local place is investigated in the principle of time-space distancing. As Anthony Giddens observes, in modernity the idea of locality is a result of the increasing tearing away of space from place. Using the term “locale” to refer to such a local place, Giddens contends: “[L]ocales are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them. What structures the locale is not simply that which is present on the scene” (1990: 19). Following Giddens, John Tomlinson asserts that “locales are not merely physical-geographical points or environments but, crucially, *physical settings of interaction*” (1999: 52; italics in original). Similarly, localities, as are suggested by Doreen Massey, “are *construction* out of the intersections and interactions of concrete social relations and social processes in a situation of co-presence” (1994: 138; original emphasis). All three of them recognize the on-going process of negotiation and interaction between the absent and the present, the local and the global, place and space, and the concrete and the abstract in the construction of locality. David Harvey, furthermore, provides an even more sophisticated understanding of the way global capitalism and local experiences come to interact with each other. Like other cultural theorists, Harvey conceives the production of place as a negotiation of all sorts of interconnection and intersection. Yet, following Lefebvre (1991), he specifies the material experiences of a place as the important conduits through which social relations come to be reshaped and redefined (Harvey, 1993: 17). In other words, the material experiences of modernity, i.e., capital, technology, media, forms of communication etc., come in between human and places to formulate not just one’s sense of place but also all kinds of social relations.

The principle of the production of locality as expressed by the

above theorists appears to be an objective formulation of how a local place comes into being in the age of globalization. Yet, depending on the specific location of the local place, the interactions between presence and absence, the immediate surrounding and capitalist agents could produce different impacts on different places. It is important here to note that for places positioned at the far end of Doreen Massey's "power-geometry" (1993), globalizing forces are experienced foremost as a shock, a rupture, and a force of deterritorialization.

II. Deterritorialization in the Margin

"Deterritorialization" is the term used by cultural critics to describe the ambivalent effect of globalization upon local places. In such an experience, the local is increasingly dis-placed and uprooted from its local condition by distanced forces. For Giddens, the formation of a modern place as it is increasingly lifted out of or disembedded from its immediate physical location is a natural process, something that is built into the very making of the local place. But such a sweeping generalization might not be sufficient enough to investigate the uneven impact globalization exerts on places that are not aligned with modernity through a smooth transition of history. It is here that Doreen Massey's concept of power geometry becomes most relevant. As made explicit by Massey, there is a distinctive power geometry of globalization in which "different social groups and different individuals are placed in a very distinct way in relation to these flows and interconnections.... [S]ome are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving-end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it" (1993: 61). John Tomlinson notes that globalization is an uneven process that works ambiguously at different places. It privileges some and disadvantages others, reproducing old and introducing new patterns of domination and subordination (1999: 132). Depending on its different access to the

control center, each of the local places is deterritorialized very distinctively. For places which experience globalization at the far ends of power geometry, such experiences could be a shock, erasing its original anthropological significance, rendering its people mobile physically, yet immobile socially or psychologically. It could also create the uncanniness of cultural hybrid, conflating the postmodern with the premodern, the Digital Age with the primitive, cyberspace with mythical rites, etc. It is even more complicated if we take into consideration the various boundaries of social relations: nation, race, class, gender, ethnicity, etc. as they are dissolved and reconstructed under the impact of deterritorialization.

III. Reterritorialization and Cultural Imagination

If Yamashita's novel dramatizes a panorama of the effects globalization brings to a locale in the margin, it also strives to come up with a progressive formula of how a deterritorialized place can start to reterritorialize itself, to rebuild a local place, while in the meantime annulling the forces of global capitalism that cause the rupture between people and place, the uneven development among social relations, and the gap between one's social, physical standing, and psychological well-being. Yamashita's formula of reterritorialization includes the process of cultural (re)imagining, which is a point argued quite cogently by David Harvey. As I have briefly shown above, for Harvey, social relations in a certain place are often mediated across time and space through capitalist cultural transaction and commodity exchange. In a different context, Harvey also recognizes the power of imagination as an important factor that constitutes one's identification with a place. By this he means to emphasize that even though cultural production and material experiences of modernity might affect our social relations and our relations to a place, our *imagination* and the power of *representation*, however, still play an important role in our

interpretations of and relations to a place (1993: 17).²

It is important to note that the concept of imagination proposed by Harvey is not one of romantic fancy, but one made possible by means of inter-ethnic, cross-class connections and collective memories across racial boundaries. For Yamashita, such cultural imagination is linked especially with capitalist cultural production. That is to say, cultural imagination is mediated through and produced by means of global communication that connect people at disparate sites of the globe with sounds and images via radio, cinema, TV, cyberspace, etc. Yamashita's idea is thus concordant with Arjun Appadurai's observation of global mediascapes. Appadurai writes:

The world we live in today is characterized by a new role for the imagination in social life. To grasp this new role, we need to bring together the old idea of images, especially mechanically produced images (in the Frankfurt School sense); the idea of the imagined community (in Anderson's sense); and the French idea of the imaginary (*imaginaire*) as a constructed landscape of collective aspirations.... (1996: 31)

Appadurai's observation points to a new cultural imagination that is deeply engaged with and made possible by the means of image production in the era of globalization. What is especially relevant to Yamashita's novel in Appadurai's formulation is the impact modern means of cultural production have on the social and psychological lives of the people. For Yamashita, innovative means of cultural production provide the route through which local people connect with one another on a cross-racial, trans-ethnic

² Using Times Square in New York City as a case in point, Harvey suggests that though the place is created as a representation of what is speculative, commercial and gaudy, New York citizens however have turned the place into a site where people from all classes and races can mingle. The commerce-oriented place thus invites imagination and evokes collective memories, while in the mean time it seems to cross the boundaries of all forms of social relations. See Harvey (1993: 17).

basis. While they provide the way that holds together a multifarious imagined community, the means of cultural production also open up an interior space that was previously blocked by the forces of deterritorialization. Yamashita's project of reterritorialization, thus, relies upon the strategy of re-imagination fueled by material experiences of modernity to counter the deterritorializing effects of globalization. And, as my following arguments will make clear, it is the modernity of Asia that gives substance to the collective cross-racial, trans-ethnic imagination that constitutes the process of reterritorialization.

IV. Magic Realism and Melodrama

In Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*, the Matacão in the age of globalization, i.e., in time-space compression, is caught in the vortex of high-speed transformation consisting of constant deterritorialization and reterritorialization. This globalizing process is entangled and intersected with the regular production of locality in modernity, both enabling and debilitating the (upward) social and spatial mobility of the local people. Parallel to the struggle between two contradictory forces that shape the life of the local place, Yamashita's novel is also intersected by two narrative styles, one magic realistic,³ the other melodramatic.

³ In an interview Yamashita defies the term "magic realism" as a proper generic label for her novel. But the contexts of her comments suggest that what she defies is the attempt to link Brazil with any sort of primitive myth or indigenous fantasy. For her there is no authentic Brazilian native culture to support a magic realistic mode that sees the local cultural as in any sense fantastic, mysterious and uncanny. She explains: "...the whole idea of the book being any sort of magic realism is on the edge of making no sense. Brazil has a very middle-class structure that involves international technology that comes from this country and from Japan, yet next door you have people who have no relationship to that technology or who use that technology in a manner that has nothing to do with it.... And that's the kind of thing *Through the Arc* is trying to convey about living in a country that's both developing and developed—and has an Indian and aboriginal culture that is undiscovered and dying" Yamashita (2000: 328). As my following arguments

The two forms, however, are not separated and entirely differentiated from each other. In fact, the melodramatic form is the expression of the realistic axis of “magic realism.”⁴ While the magic portion of the term is used as the vessel that expresses what is fantastic and uncanny in posthumanist, posthistorical time-place compression, the realistic portion—melodrama—dramatizes the efforts on the part of the trans-ethnic community to retain and reshape their social relations, while struggling to anchor themselves in a place that is increasingly losing its anthropological significance.

Magic realism is a literary mode that incorporates two polar experiences and two conflicting perspectives, one rational and mundane, the other supernatural or uncanny yet accepted as part of prosaic reality. The boundaries between the two are usually fluid and uncertain. Its difference with fantasy lies in its setting, as magic realism is often set in the modern world with realistic descriptions of people and society, while fantasy is often linked with the mythical world of far away places in ancient times. The mode is greatly adopted to portray specific cultural political situations in Latin American post/coloniality. The presence of the magic is often an expression of the indigenous native Indian cultural life, which exists in tandem with European rationality articulated through a realistic mode. The hybrid nature of the form

will make clear, I use “magic realism” not to underscore the uncanniness in the local, native, and aboriginal culture vis-à-vis a rationalistic First World presence. Rather, it is the uncanniness of the global forces that is rendered magical realistic.

⁴ Stephen Slemon’s definition of magic realism is relevant here. He argues “The term ‘magic realism’ is an oxymoron, one that suggests a binary opposition between the representational code of realism and that, roughly, of fantasy. In the language of narration in a magic realist text, a battle between two oppositional systems takes place, each working toward the creation of a different kind of fictional world from the other.” While I do not stress the blurred boundary between magic realism and melodrama in my arguments, it is important to note that since the driving forces behind deterritorialization and reterritorialization are identical, the distinction between the two processes and the line between the two modes of narrative cannot be all that clear. See Slemon (1995: 409).

addresses the specific condition of cultural hybridity that is the daily reality of the colonial and the postcolonial. It blends various uneven social experiences together: rural and urban, Western and indigenous, agrarian and industrial, emphasizing especially the process of mixing and bordering within the context of the uneven power hierarchy that privileges the West. The mode, however, is characterized by its political intent to make salient the irony that emerges from the juxtaposition and interaction between two forms of reality. Such irony is often the weapon the writer uses to disturb the power hierarchy that structures the social reality the characters inhabit.

Yamashita translates magic realism to delineate a local place in the margin caught in the whirlwind of time-space compression in postmodernity. In her rendition of the narrative mode, the fabulous and the uncanny do not always point to the primitive or the indigenous; whereas the ordinary and everyday experiences are not constituted by the pragmatic reality defined by Western rationality either. There is a sense in this novel that it is the transnational cultural flows that implement the elements of uncanniness to the relatively banal life experiences of the local community in the Third World.

On the other hand, the changing social relations and the construction of locality unfold in a melodramatic mode. The melodramatic conventions of the novel, like the “magic” portion of magic realism, are reconfigured to express the specific local cultural transition in a largely deterritorialized, hybridized locale. In other words, melodrama—what is often deemed as trite and sensational, therefore lacking artistic value—is empowered to serve as a textual innovation that is able to highlight the complex social relations of the local people in globalization. To make my point clear, I will try to differentiate Yamashita’s use of melodrama from the conventional understanding of the form.

Traditional melodramatic mode of narrative is often taken as a tool to support the traditional and the mainstream ideologies in a relatively enclosed and stable social environment. Originally a

genre for mass-cultural imagination, melodrama depicts highly personalized and intensely enacted conflicts in ways that often evoke astonishment and sense of excess.⁵ Peter Brooks explicates the characteristic features of melodramatic mode of narrative as follows: “the indulgence of strong emotionalism; moral polarization and schematization; extreme states of being, situations, actions; overt villainy, persecution of the good, and final reward of virtue; inflated and extravagant expression; dark plottings, suspense, breathtaking peripety” (1985: 11-12). Because of these banal and sensational narrative features, melodrama and melodramatic modes of narrative in fiction are rarely considered serious artistic forms capable of expressing the complexity of human (un)consciousness, multiple temporality, split subjects, and fragmentary experiences of the real—those tissues and fabrics that constitute modern and postmodern experiences. Brooks traces the historical context in which melodrama is formed: “It comes into being in a world where the traditional imperatives of truth and ethics have been violently thrown into question, yet where the promulgation of truth and ethics, their instauration as a way of life, is of immediate, daily, political concern” (1985: 15). Melodrama and melodramatic modes of narrative are, therefore, often employed to “make the ‘real’ and the ‘ordinary’ and the ‘private life’ interesting through heightened dramatic utterance and gesture that lay bare the true stakes” (1985: 14).

Yamashita takes up the narrative mode to represent the sentiments, feelings, and human relationships in the private sphere of the local people, which are increasingly threatened and rendered vulnerable by the hyperactive developments instigated by global capitalism. In Yamashita’s hand, the banality and the superficiality of the mode is transformed to address a different mass imagination, one that is akin to postmodernist aesthetic populism. Because of this rendering, melodrama becomes an appropriate form to address the issues of family, and private feelings in trans-local, trans-ethnic

⁵ See Brooks (1985).

interactions mediated by Japanese cultural production. By juxtaposing the uncanny imaginary and the banal trans-local, trans-ethnic interactions in global cultural production, Yamashita attempts to tackle the highly contradictory, ambiguous, conflicting, and incongruous process of the production of locality in the margin. In the following analysis of the text, I will start by reading the novel's magic narrative in psychoanalytical terms, as it seems to be the most powerful tool capable of fully illuminating the significant relations of the novel's specific narrative modes and its global/local thematic engagements.

V. The Uncanny Experiences of Deterritorialization in the Margin

Delving into the deep structure of modernity, Anthony Giddens asserts that among other factors, “[t]he dynamism of modernity derives from the *separation of time and space...*” (1990: 16). He elucidates his points as follows:

In premodern societies, space and place largely coincide, since the spatial dimensions of social life are, for most of the population, and in most respects, dominated by “presence”—by localized activities. The advent of modernity increasingly tears space away from place by fostering relations between “absent” others, locationally distant from any given situation of face-to-face interaction. In conditions of modernity, place becomes increasingly *phantasmagoric*: that is to say, locales are thoroughly penetrated by and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them. What structures the locale is not simply that which is present on the scene; the “visible form” of the locale conceals the distanced relations which determine its nature. (1990: 18-19; original emphasis)

The use of the words “separation of time and space,” “tearing space from place,” “phantasmagoric,” all point to an increasing abstraction of the local social relations and the ubiquity of invisible

forces far away. Giddens uses the words “disembedding” and “lifting out” to highlight the growing abstraction of social relations from local contexts. I suggest reading such increasing phantasmagoria as the formation of the Real that serves as the presymbolic substance of globalization.⁶ The coming into being of the Real erases the significance of those tangible and immediate local contexts in defining the social relations of the place. It is as if the essence of the place was sucked out of its husk by this invisible vampire—the radical evil of the Real. Giddens maintains that the disembedding is followed by the recombination of social relations across time and space based upon trust; i.e. symbolic tokens (most prominent among them, money) and expert systems. Postmodernist theorists like Harvey and Jameson, however, are prone to highlight capitalist logic and the exchange of commodity as the means that reorganize local social relations. Thus, in the case of time-space distanciation, the return of the repressed does not make its uncanny appearance by way of the spirit and the phantom, but in the multiple forms of money, the abundant exploitable raw

⁶ Žižek’s definition of the Lacanian Real best illuminates the elusive, ambiguous feature of the Real of globalization. He writes: “The Real is the fullness of the inert presence, positivity; nothing is lacking in the Real—that is, the lack is introduced only by the symbolization; it is a signifier which introduces a void, an absence in the Real. But at the same time the Real is in itself a hole, a gap, an opening in the middle of the symbolic order—it is the lack around which the symbolic order is structured. The Real as a starting point, as a basis, is a positive fullness without lack; as a product, a leftover of symbolization, it is, in contrast, the void, the emptiness created, encircled by the symbolic structure” (1989: 170). In my reading, the Real is both the starting point and the product and leftover of the Symbolic of the globalized world. As the beginning, the Real of globalization designates the pervasiveness, the ubiquity of transnational cultural flows; yet, as the leftover of the Symbolic order constituted by such transnational flows, or forces from far away, the Real simultaneously functions as the kernel of emptiness, lack and scar created by the transnational flows. Wherein lies the radical evil of the Real. While it might appear to be an all-encompassing force of fullness, providing standardized, homogeneous cultural goods, its fullness is based upon a depletion of local specificity. The use of the idea of the Real, thus, prescribes the return of the repressed in a seemingly abundant, opulent, and prosperous transnational social historical context.

materials, advanced technologies, corporate cultural machineries, media industries, and communication networks. But what could be so uncanny about these materialist displays that appear to be ever so regular, familiar, rational, and real?

To be specific, what makes these materialistic embodiments of modernity the forces of the uncanny lies in the existence of a surplus value/enjoyment “that convert things (pleasure objects) into their opposite,” to render disgusting what is normally pleasurable (Žižek, 1993: 12). Commenting upon Shakespeare’s consistent attention on the paradoxes of “something begot by nothing”⁷ that find their dramatic delineations in *Richard II* and *King Lear*, Žižek perceives a change of the mode of production as the cause of confusion and distortion that instigates the change of social relations and the order of the world in Shakespeare’s times. Like Giddens, Žižek posits the appearance of money as the means by which “nothing begets something.” He expounds the historical transition of Shakespeare’s times as follows:

It was no accident that Shakespeare was so attentive to these paradoxes of “something begot by nothing”... for he lived in a period of the rapid dissolution of precapitalist social relations and of the lively emergence of the elements of capitalism, i.e., in a period when he was able daily to observe the way a reference to “nothing,” to some pure semblance (speculating with “worthless” paper money that is only a “promise” of itself as “real” money, for example), triggers the enormous machinery of a production process that changes the very surface of the earth. Hence Shakespeare’s sensitivity to the paradoxical power of money which converts everything into its opposite.... Lacan was well justified in modeling his notion of surplus enjoyment (*plus-de-jouir*) on the Marxian notion of surplus value: surplus enjoyment has the same paradoxical

⁷ Žižek defines this phrase as the logic of desire that posits its own cause, i.e., the *objet petit a*, paradoxically as the embodiment of the surplus of confusion introduced by desire into the “objective reality.” The *objet petit a*, therefore is both the cause and the route through which desire sees its own embodiment in reality. See Žižek (1993: 12).

power to convert things (pleasure objects) into their opposite, to render disgusting what is usually considered a most pleasant “normal” sexual experience, to render inexplicably attractive what is usually considered a loathsome act.... (1993: 12-13)

This “nothing” is exactly the process of abstraction Giddens promulgates to explain the advent of modernity, and, as its consequence, globalization. While Shakespeare lived and wrote in the beginning of the early modern, Giddens’s historical positionality enables him to see the surplus—the element of paradox that renders something uncanny—as embodied in postmodernist institutional expressions.

As a contemporary Asian-American writer who crosses multiple national and cultural borders,⁸ Yamashita sees the surplus of globalization from the margin which is, far from being disrupted and rendered chaotic or confused by the seminal logic of early capitalism, already a finished *product* of “nothing begets something” in late capitalist logic. In other words, unlike Shakespeare’s plays, which often initiate a time of social turmoil or impending disasters at the very beginning of the plays, Yamashita’s novel begins with the infinite prospect of a local place in the margin—the Matacão deep in the basin of the Amazon Forest in Brazil. The utopia-like place is depicted as a place full of hope, promise, and potentiality due to its participation and exchanges with the global forces. Its very vitality and fertility, paradoxically, is the outcome of contamination and massive destruction caused by the nonbiodegradable wastes accumulated and buried in other populated parts of the world. The molten mass of these wastes sinks down into the lower layers of the Earth’s mantle, producing liquid deposits, which are subsequently squeezed through underground veins to resurface in the virgin areas of the Earth—the Amazon Forest. By the time it reemerges, a miracle

⁸ Yamashita is a Japanese-American writer who was born in the United States, but had lived and written in Brazil for 10 years before she moved back to Southern California in 1984.

material is formed—a sort of wonder plastic that is indestructible and malleable to be used as a raw material for products of all kinds: “The remarkable thing about Matacão plastic was its incredible ability to imitate anything.... Matacão plastic managed to recreate the natural glow, moisture, freshness—the very sensation of life” (Yamashita, 1990: 142). The uncanniness of the deterritorialized locale of the Matacão, therefore, lies in the surplus value/pleasure of the plastic, which is paradoxically both the elixir of life, the source of beauty, health, and the force of the grotesque that turns the beautiful, and the highly beneficial into the nemesis of a plague.

The uncanniness of deterritorialized locales can also be found in the metropolitan center of New York City—GGG Enterprise, where the American entrepreneur Jonathan B. Tweep works and eventually takes it over. GGG, as the source of capital which, unlike the Matacão, occupies the upper level of Massey’s power geometry, cannot but be deterritorialized by the force of capital to become one of what French anthropologist Marc Augé would have called the “non-places”—the places where organic social relations and interactions are replaced by their functionality in capitalist modernity. Serving as the nodal points of a network of cultural flows, they are but “transit points” and “temporary abodes” which no organic social relations can be attached to and reproduced in.⁹ GGG’s transformation into a non-place starts at the time when the

⁹ The French anthropologist Marc Augé defines “non-places” as follows: “If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place.... A world where people are born in the clinic and die in hospital, where transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating under luxurious or inhuman conditions (hotel chains and squads, holiday clubs and refugee camps, shantytowns...); where a dense network of means of transport which are also inhabited spaces is developing; where the habitué of supermarkets, slot machines and credit cards communicates wordlessly, through gestures, with an abstract, unmediated commerce; a world thus surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral, offers the anthropologist (and others) a new object” (Augé, 1995:78 cited in Tomlinson, 1999:109).

company grows beyond the control of its creators, Georgia and Geoffrey Gamble. By the time the stockholders take over the company, the mechanism of corporate culture has already dehumanized the place, turning it into a gigantic machine constituted by “positions” and “offices” of all kinds. Yamashita highlights GGG’s dehumanization by means of a uniform portrayal of the clone-like female staff, who are all characterized by “a curly redhead with matching red nails and a Dallas telephone operator’s voice” (Yamashita, 1990: 29). It is as if in order to become a better “human” in the corporate culture, one has to become non-human. Exactly because GGG is sustained not by anthropologically significant human beings, but by functioning particles and nodes in the corporate machine, the unassuming J.B. can clandestinely become the invisible manipulator of the company, and transmit the supermodern forms of corporate culture into the *Matacão*.

A few of the characters positioned on different locations of the global divisions of labor in late capitalism also carry the magic of uncanniness: Jonathan B. Tweep (J.B.), for example, our three-arm entrepreneur, “single-handedly” (using his appendix arm) and stealthily renovates and regenerates GGG Enterprises in New York and turns the *Matacão* into a paradise for investors, scientists, and interested parties of all kinds from all over the world. J.B.’s surplus arm is an index of his surplus value; namely, J.B.’s extraordinary gift of business management, in which his human value lies, is paradoxically derived from his active dehumanization of himself into a functional and invisible node in the complex networks of the company’s transnational operations. His very invisibility and dehumanization guarantee his and the company’s viability.

And, of course, Kazumasa Ishimaru, the Japanese immigrant with a ball twirling a few inches before his forehead, cannot but be the very embodiment of uncanniness. Even though Kazumasa’s life story does not dominate the complex structures of the plot (his story is but one of at least 5 other sets of stories surrounding other Brazilian civilians’ lives), his appearance in the novel, no doubt, is

the major factor that we can still link up the novel with Asian-American literary tradition (besides the fact that the author is an Asian American). Kazumasa's appendage arrives, to quote Caroline Rody, in "the thunderclap of postmodernity" (2000: 629), while he was still a child in Japan. As Rody argues: the ball arrives

to disrupt any earlier story or identity of which Kazumasa might have been a part and to spin him into a realm of destabilized literary possibility, not to mention a realm of migrancy, interethnic encounters, globalized systems, an international trade in simulacra and rip-offs, and competing religious, scientific, and touristic engagements with a collapsing environment. (2000: 629)

The ball is therefore the embodiment of the uncanniness of postmodernity that redistributes our Asian immigrant on the power geometry of globalization, up-scaling his class status and the nature of his labor, thus alienating him from the earlier stereotypical portrayal of Asian-Americans as manual laborers or railway workers. Rachel Lee has pointed out that Kazumasa "seems a subtle parody of a familiar archetype, the Chinese American railroad worker.... Instead of doing the backbreaking work of laying rails, Kazumasa—by virtue of his technical gifts (his having a supernatural ball that can sense railway deterioration)—renders travel more efficient by proleptically remedying breakdowns before they occur" (Lee, 1999a: 242-244). Lee, therefore, sees the ball as a narrative invention with which Yamashita challenges an old Asian-American narrative tradition that sought to integrate the labored bodies of the immigrants as the functioning parties of the nation. Kazumasa's ball brings us to a postnational, global scenario dominated not by "national utilities," but by "competing capitalist units" (Lee, 1999a: 244).

While I agree with the contention that Yamashita is driving at postnational geopolitics with regard to the portrayal of Kazumasa with the ball, I choose to see the ball differently, not merely as a symbol of techniques and skills that contribute to Kazumasa's Asian immigrant social upward mobility and his ability of

transnational movement. Rather, I read the ball first as a sign of Asian postmodernity that renders Kazumasa a pseudo-cyborg, and second, as the rupture, the cause and the route, the *objet petite a* of the magic realistic narrative, calling for the intervention of transnational community through a melodramatic lens.

First of all, the advent of the ball occurs in Japan, one of the major political economic players in the Pacific Rim. In the novel, Japan is portrayed and highlighted, not according to its ethnic or cultural characteristics, but its capitalist restructuring. No longer the motherland to which Japanese Americans turn to reinvent their ethnic specificity or cultural memories, it is the source of capital and technology that enables Kazumasa to become a pseudo-cyborg. Donna Haraway defines cyborgs with the following features: "The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality"; it is severed from its cultural or genealogical origins, it "is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity"; it transgresses boundaries of all kinds, it is willing "to formulate joint kinship with animals and machine" (1991: 150-154). While Haraway concentrates on sketching the cyborg's possible features and infinite possibility in upsetting and fracturing unified, hierarchical, boundary-rigid subjects, and its potency in amalgamating with both organic and non-organic beings, what is kept silent are the material conditions that enable such imagination. Obviously, cyborg imagination can only occur in locations with progressive urbanization, advanced technology, solid scientific infrastructures, and refined media industries and communication systems. In other words, Japan has to become "one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes" for such imagination to take place (Appadurai, 1996: 31). Kazumasa's ball, thus, points to the uncanniness of Yamashita's nostalgia for an ethnic imagined community that is associated not with memories in the past but, as I will make clear in the following, "memories" for what is possible in the future.

As the omniscient narrator of the novel, who returns to tell the story after its disintegration in the plague, the ball is also an

uncanny narrator. The voice we hear is uttered, not by the ball, but by the phantom of the ball. In this manner, the ball as a narrator is laden with memories and desire. As the ball claims, while it comes to the end of story-telling:

By a strange quirk of fate, I was brought back by a memory. Memory is a powerful sort of thing, although at the time I made my reentry into this world, no notice at all was taken of the fact. In fact, everyone was terribly busy, whirling about, panting and heaving, dizzy with the tumult of their ancestral spirits. This was one of these monthly events under the influence of the full moon on a well-beaten floor of earth on what had once been known, many years before, as the Matacão. That I should have been reborn like any other dead spirit in the Afro-Brazilian syncretistic religious rite of Candomblé is humorous to me.... Instead, brought back by a memory, I have become a memory, and as such, am commissioned to become for you a memory." (Yamashita, 1990: 3)

The uncanniness of the ball as the narrator lies in the fact that even if it is "brought back by a memory," the memory cannot be completed without its story-telling. It seems that the memory—the cause of the ball's return—is paradoxically produced and completed at the very moment it is articulated and embodied by the ball. The trajectory of the ball's memory thus reminds us of Žižek's description of the *objet petit a*, the object cause of desire. For Žižek, the *objet petit a* is:

an object that is, in a way, posited by desire itself. The paradox of desire is that it posits retroactively its own cause, i.e., the object *a* is an object that can be perceived only by a gaze "distorted" by desire, an object that *does not exist* for an "objective" gaze. In other words, the object *a* is always, *by definition*, perceived in a distorted way, because outside this distortion, "in itself," *it does not exist*, since it is *nothing but* the embodiment, the materialization of this very distortion, of this surplus of confusion and perturbation introduced by desire into so-called

“objective reality.” (1993: 12; original emphasis)

The ball’s memory thus functions as the desire which gives birth to the ball—the *objet petit a*—which can only be perceived through the distortion of the memory/desire.

But, whose memory and desire does the ball embody? As the ball challenges the reader at the very end of the novel: “Now the memory is complete, and I bid you farewell. Whose memory you are asking? Whose indeed” (Yamashita, 1990: 212). The only hint the ball reveals is that it is not one of those Afro-Brazilian religious spirits. And judging from the tone of its own account—“That I should have been reborn like any other dead spirit in the Afro-Brazilian syncretistic religious rite of Candomblé is humorous to me”—it might be something quite opposite to such local spirituality. I suggest that we read the ball’s memory/desire as the memory/desire of the radical Evil of the Real of globalization. As Žižek emphasizes: “The object *a* is “objectively” nothing, though viewed from a certain perspective, it assumes the shape of “something” (1993: 12). The ball, the *objet petit a* of postmodernist desire thus lends us an askewed optic through which we see the distorted images produced by the Real of globalization—the uncanniness of the Matacão plastic, GGG and the three-arm American entrepreneur, Kazumasa with the ball, the outburst of myriad products made of the plastic, Chicolândia, the plague, and other outlandish, uncanny factors of the novel—as if they are prosaic, familiar, regular, and real.

The uncanniness of this awry look, however, instigates “a nostalgic yearning for the ‘natural’ state in which things were only what they were... in which our gaze had not yet been distorted by the anamorphic spot” (Žižek, 1993: 12). In other words, to prevent taking the object *a*’s awry vision for granted, to curb us from sliding into psychosis, a symbolic order of the gaze is in order. Therefore the novel invites us to read and see the stories told by the ball in the Symbolic order of melodramatic soap opera. In the novel’s foreword, the author inserts an “author’s note,” giving clear instruction as to the genre of the story and the role such

genre plays in Brazilian collective imagination:

The story that follows is perhaps a kind of *novella*, a Brazilian soap opera, of the sort which occupies the imagination and national psyche of the Brazilian people on prime-time TV nightly.... The prime-time *novella* in Brazilian life is pervasive, reaching every Brazilian in some form or manner regardless of class, status, education or profession, excepting perhaps the Indians and the very isolated of the frontiers and rural backlands. In traveling to the most remote towns, one finds that a single television in a church or open plaza will gather the people nightly to define and standardize by example the national dress, music, humor, political state, economic malaise, the national dream, despite the fact that Brazil is immense and variegated. (Yamashita, 1990: "Author's Note")

It is important to note that the Brazilian's national pastime is not in any sense an "authentic" local practice concentrating only on homogeneous historical and spatial concerns. Rather, it is a vibrant engagement with the mass media that is open and receptive to outside influences, while in the meantime, it brings together the public's collective imagination as to their specific local cultural practices. It is, therefore, not off the mark to say that in the symbolic order of the soap opera, the surplus of globalization is turned into fantastic interaction between what Arjun Appadurai would have termed, the image, the imagined, and the imaginary. As I have shown earlier, through the intersecting relationship of the three terms, Appadurai attempts to show imagination in globalization as a mediated process that restructures our field of imaginary.

In *Through the Arc*, the melodramatic plot of the novel provides just such a terrain in which imagination works through various modes of capitalistic mediation—technology, mass media, and corporate culture—to invoke a new imagined community, thus constructing a different pattern of desire. To make such terrain possible, Yamashita's reformulation of the concept of Asian ethnicity proves to be a crucial move.

VI. Reterritorialization, Melodrama, and Asian Ethnicity

If the magic realistic thrust of the novel makes salient the impact of deterritorialization upon local culture, the melodramatic aspect of it affirms the process of reterritorialization through an innovative reconstruction of the concept of ethnicity. Historically, Asian ethnicity is often represented through Orientalist discourses that put stress upon its exoticism, its association with primitive modes of production and lower class status, and its docility and lack of masculine characteristics. In response to such discursive as well as social racism, Asian-American writers tend to resuscitate the masculinity of the ethnic members, to place its labor class ancestors in positions where they can negotiate their original cultural traditions and the demand of the nation. In other words, they strive to claim America through the strategies of cultural nationalism. The problematics with such strategies lie in the fact that the concept of nation remains bounded by White discursive construction, and the designation that marks the specificity of the ethnic group—"Asia" grows increasingly abstract and insignificant. On the other hand, Asian ethnicity as a category of social relation is either associated with Orientalist fantasy of the East, or nativist longing for a cultural origin. Or it becomes a sign laden with the traumatic memories of suppression, internment, and exclusion.¹⁰

The 90s' witnessed a growing dissatisfaction with such identity politics. The rise of Asia in the cartography of globalization provides new fuel for Asian-American communities to link up their social and economic success in America with the success of the Asian economic tigers. Evelyn Hu-DeHart argues that the two success narratives converge "to produce the articulation of a new narrative: Asian Americans as transnationals and bridge builders on the Pacific Rim. As a grand, new narrative, it also posited an

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of Kazumasa as a revised version of earlier Asian-American male characters/railroad workers, see Lee (1999a: 242-250).

articulation between Asia and America, with Asian Americans as the primary instrument of this linkage and connection" (1999: 9). David Palumbo-Liu, likewise, seeks to include Asia Pacific as a determining factor that not only helps shape America's sense of the nation, but might eventually help restructure Asian/American psyche and redefine their "space as Pacific Rim space and the transnationalization of the local" (1999: 7).

Published in 1990, *Through the Arc* heralds the shift to transnationalism in the arena of Asian-American writing tradition. In the novel, Yamashita dislodges the concept of ethnicity from its earlier attachment to cultural nationalist longing for a sign of the origin. While she reinserts the concept into an Asian-Pacific context with vibrating global capitalist transactions, she simultaneously projects it into the realm of futuristic fantasy. As Rachel Lee suggests, Yamashita endows upon Kazumasa's Asian ethnicity a postmodernist, transnational quality of higher social standing, metropolitan background, and the ability to move transnationally (Lee, 1999b). It is, however, important to note that there is a poststructuralist attempt on the part of Yamashita to reformulate not just the "content" of ethnic components, but the very forms and structures that define what we usually connect with the concept of ethnicity. Rather than serving as the sign of historical victimization, Asian (Japanese) ethnicity is reformulated to serve as a functional social agent that produces social imaginary through an Asian style cultural production—karaoke—and creates a condition where trans-ethnic coalition can be possible. On the other hand, the idea of family, which was often taken as the site for the transmission of ethnic cultural tradition in Asian-American literary tradition, is reconfigured to serve as the stage on which trans-ethnic social intercourses take place to bind together a private sphere that is increasingly falling apart and rendered into "non-places" by global forces.

Beside Kazumasa's story, the melodramatic plot of the novel consists of four other sets of stories; three of them concern the Brazilian commoners' interaction with global capitalism brought

about first by the commercial benefit of feathers and in plastic, later. In contrast to the foreign influences represented by Kazumasa and J.B., *Through the Arc* incorporates stories of various local people from the lower social strata of Brazilian society: Mané Pena, the Brazilian farmer who discovers the commercial use of the feather, and the owner and discoverer of the impenetrable field of solid substance called the Matacão; Batista and Tania Aparecida Djapan, the couple from São Paulo, who successfully establish a thriving pigeon business through an ingenious combination of local belief in miracle messages and Tania's smart business management; Chico Paco, the former fisherman who alone establishes a cult by using substitutes in a walking pilgrimage to carry out promises made to the saints; and Lourdes, Kazumasa's competent and loyal maid and his love interest.

As grassroots samples of what can be counted as the representatives of their racial, local, and ethnic cultural specificity, these characters are surprisingly devoid of any ethnographical "authenticity," or anthropological relationality to their historical past and cultural roots. It is fair to say that the melodramatic narrative mode delineates these local people in a way that deprives them of their psychological depth and severs their connection with a linear local history. Rather than well-rounded characters defined by, and restricted to, their local cultural and historical traditions, these characters seem but mere displays of local "types" whose local colors are painted from the outside, not characteristics that intrinsically creates conflict and psychological development. Even though they are shown to practice local religious rites, pilgrimages for answered prayers, for example, the ridiculing accounts of the fad of substituted pilgrimages immediately diminish the spiritual significance of the rites. The organic relations between the rites and the local community are, therefore, absent.

Nonetheless, it is this lack of depth and psychological sophistication in terms of its description of Brazilian local cultural life, that the melodramatic valence of the novel is affined to postmodernist celebration of "aesthetic populism"—"a kind of

wonderment at and valuation of everything ordinary and banal, an embrace and incorporation of the whole degraded landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and *Readers' Digest* culture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and the grade-B Hollywood film, of so-called paraliterature with its airport paperback categories....” (Jameson, 1984: 54-55; cited in Sobchack, 1991: 335). As the author’s note describes so vividly, what brings the Brazilian local people together is not any religious rites with cultural significance, but the “rites” of soap opera watching that goes on every night, “which occupies the imagination and national psyche of the Brazilian people” regardless of their “class, status, education or profession.” The locality of Brazilian community thus involves a different framework of imagination with mediated images as its central reference and dynamics of change and adaptation to what is new and foreign, which eventually becomes part of the local memories, even if they are given to them through mediation. Depthlessness, banality, borrowed memories, enthusiasm for fad and fashions created by mass media, receptivity to global forces, and easy compliance to technology and global mechanism of production and consumption—this postmodernist cultural logic has become the local cultural logic that operates in the melodramatic world of *Through the Arc* and eventually defines its process of the production of locality.

Even though the novel discloses the deterritorialized effect of globalization upon local places through the exploration of the force of the uncanny, in the melodramatic expressions of the text, the local people’s encounter with capitalism seem to bring new opportunity for them to reinvent their social and cultural identities. Free from any allegiance to what is traditional and authentic, the grassroots figures in the novel possess the remarkable ability to be pliable, to bend and stretch to all situations that prove to be beneficial for individual and collective survival. Mané becomes a feather guru and honorary professor on featherology at a university, who makes TV appearances from time to time; Tania

transforms herself from a housewife to a smart businesswoman whose work sends her all over the world, and liberates her from a jealous husband. Chico becomes Radio Chico when he turns his free service into a radio station to mediate between those who need substitute pilgrims and those who are willing to do the job. While retaining his boyish, angelic charm, Chico Paco has learned “to be verbal and vocal on the radio” (Yamashita, 1990: 163) like a disc jockey. In all three of the cases, what started as local cultural practices are soon involved with, and mediated by, the forces of media and corporate culture. Local belief systems—pilgrimages performed in return to answered prayers, miracle messages carried by pigeons, and trivial hobbies of life like the use of feathers to reduce the pressures of life, are commodified and turned into fashions and money-making businesses. The Matacão becomes a booming town with the presence of Mané’s cult of featherologists, Radio Chico and his radio station, pilgrims and faithful listeners, Batista’s “Djapan Pigeons Incorporated,” and on top of that, numerous speculators swarming into town to attempt to locate, mine and manufacture the newly-discovered plastic.

Yet the novel seems to suggest that a remote Third World town’s involvement with globalization has to strike a subtle balance between commercial prosperity in the public sphere and intimate human relationships in the domestic sphere. The novel’s plot development takes a downward spiral as the characters start to feel the threat of the disintegration of human relationships by characters traveling too far, moving too much, and making too much money. Batista, for example, makes a fortune out of the pigeon communication business. But as the company’s operation turns global, he and his wife, Tania Aparecida, start drifting away from each other. Chico’s invalid playmate and homosexual love interest, Gilberto, likewise, after recovering from his disability because of a miracle, becomes hyperactive and grows out of control, and eventually dies in an absurd accident while performing as a human cannonball. Furthermore, the feathers that bring fame and fortune to Mané cause the death of many cultists who jump

from mysterious and unknown high places in a feather-induced trance. Worst of all, the feathers carry a kind of bacteria, which not only causes a typhus plague, but is also responsible for the final downfall of the Matakão, because the bacteria that cause typhus are also capable of devouring the plastic.

Only Kazumasa, our Japanese immigrant, survives the sudden fortune, the separation from Lourdes, the kidnapping by J.B., and the disintegration of the Matakão. And unlike Batista, he also gets the woman. What is the cultural investment on Yamashita's part to arrange such a plot? And what kind of hero is Kazumasa? These questions seem to provide the gangway through which we can start to ruminate on the function of Asian (Japanese) ethnicity in the age of globalization.¹¹

As a type character, Kazumasa is cast as kind-hearted, other-oriented, almost Christ-like, open to cultural differences and easily assimilated to his surroundings. With his ball he is skillful in the high-tech world. He is employed by the railway company to detect track deterioration back in Japan; in the Matakão, he is pursued and hunted for his ability to locate the plastic mine. Yamashita completes the profile of the Japanese immigrant by adding Cousin Hiroshi as Kazumasa's alter ego. Indeed, Hiroshi does not have a story of his own; his sole function in the novel is to embody Japanese talent in investment and finance which

¹¹ Recent Asian-American studies have stressed upon the individual literary tradition of different ethnic group to avoid universalizing a certain ethnic group's specific experiences of diaspora as *the* experiences for the bigger community of Asian-America. I conflate Kazumasa's Japanese-American identity with his Asian-American identity because, while Kazumasa's life story originated from Japan, Yamashita's portrait of Kazumasa as an improved version of Asian-American male character seems to respond to and attempt to challenge Asian-American writing tradition as a whole, not just Japanese-American writing tradition. Kazumasa's earlier profession as a railroad engineer, for example, appears to resonate with Chinese-American railroad workers found in Maxine Hong Kingston's and Frank Chin's texts. Kazumasa's transnational traveling from Japan to Brazil and his involvement with a trans-ethnic community also makes it hard for us to situate him as a prototype *Japanese-American* male character.

Yamashita finds incongruous to Kazumasa's characteristics, yet necessary to paint a better picture of Japanese cultural specificity in the age of globalization.

Kazumasa's involvement with the local community occurs when Batista accidentally writes about him in one of his miracle pigeon messages. Inspired by the miracle message and pushed by Lourdes, Kazumasa wins numerous lotteries and finds himself a billionaire overnight. Unlike other local people who capitalize on what are considered local cultural practices, Kazumasa localizes his capital by giving away the money to whoever stands in his charity line. Even though Kazumasa is envisioning a return of the money to the people, the outflow of money is balanced out and returned many times over through Hiroshi's international investments. Without his knowledge, Kazumasa simultaneously becomes the biggest shareholder of GGG and what the local people call the "Japanese Robin Hood." Here Yamashita seems to make a bold suggestion that Asian engagement with global capitalism can work to mediate the capitalists on top and the grassroots down below. Her plot arrangements seek to topple the image of the "ugly Japanese" who attempts to buy out real estate and enterprises in the West; she also attempts to dismantle Asian-American discursive constructions that link Asia or Asian-American communities with the down-trodden in the third world. Indeed, Kazumasa feels a natural kinship with the local people, but it is so not because they share a history of suppression or white domination, but because they share a dream of simple happiness based upon family values, which are hard to come by while their world is quickly deterritorialized by transnational cultural flows.

As a result, it is Asian-style capitalism that seems to offer a solution for the uneven development between the public and private spheres under the influence of Western capitalism. As is shown above, Western capitalism, represented by J.B. and GGG, turns the town into a hyperactive money-making machine, a town in which people experience upward social mobility and transnational movements at the expense of personal relationship in

the private sphere. In other words, if western capital affects local people's imaginary pattern by offering them a better position from which they can cross the boundaries of gender, class, race, and ethnicity, they seem to do it with a sense of loss. What is experienced as "surplus" in the novel's magic narrative is expressed in its melodramatic grammar through a feeling of incongruity, a sense of loss, and an indefinite longing for something that can only be experienced by people caught in the historical juncture between the residual and the emergent forms of cultural life.¹² Chico Paco's mother, for example, insists on a country life style while living in his fancy Matacão apartment by installing a clay wood-burning stove in his modern kitchen and taking taxi to wash clothes by the river everyday. Mané Pena, likewise, also experiences the contradictory effect the commercialization of feathers has brought upon his life. He discovers the soothing effect of feathers which can help people relax. But the process in which the feathers are commodified brings increasing pressure on Mané to find the most exotic, and, therefore, the most relaxing, feathers. In other words, the more he contributes to featherology, the less he is able to enjoy the effect of the product. His fame and wealth in the public sphere thus cause his alienation from his laid-back Brazilian life style.

In the novel, the feeling of rupture, of incongruity, of something missing is expressed by the use of the word *saudades*. *Saudades* is described as a specific Brazilian bittersweet feeling of longing and nostalgia. For different people it means different things. For Kazumasa it is his feeling and longing for Lourdes; for Tania Apacida it is her "wanderlust, which kept her from staying anywhere long enough to form attachments.... Perhaps, it was part of something the Brazilians called *Saudades*, the bittersweet sensation of exuberant but temporary joy. To have it all the time, you have to keep moving on and savoring memories" (Yamashita, 1990: 174). Tania's liberation through the feeling of *Saudades*,

¹² Raymond Williams uses "the dominant, the residual, and the emergent" to define different moments of cultural expressions. See Williams (1977: 121-127).

however, leaves Batista a lonely man. Both Kazumasa and Batista are suffering from the pain of separation from their loved ones. Overcome by the feelings of despondence and despair, they weep and wail while calling the names of their loved ones. The overt emotionalism expressed through the delineation of the characters' sentimental reactions to their loss, and their nostalgia for their loved ones might be perceived as trait of bad tastes and artistic flaws. But in my view, *Saudades* is an important emotional component that provides the disintegrating community a link with their anthropological significance. It is a nostalgic emotion that makes possible a longing for home and family at the time when their anthropological function and significance are increasingly emptied out.

While family and home are rendered into non-places, Yamashita inserts a substituted place where people gather to express their feelings and formulate trans-ethnic relationships—cousin Hiroshi's karaoke chain stores. In contrast to GGG's Matacão office building, where human traits and human relationships are completely wiped out, the karaoke stores are shown as the sites where human feelings find their expressions. This banal and shallow form of entertainment provides an imaginary mechanism through which one is able to reattach to one's human feelings and human worth. Both Kazumasa and Batista frequent Hiroshi's karaoke store during times of depression and longing. As part of Japanese postmodern inventions, karaoke satisfies the desire of ordinary people in many aspects. Unlike movies—what Benjamin calls the works of art in the age of mechanical reproduction—karaoke does not just seduce and channel the audience's gaze and desire through its image reproduction. With the accompaniment of an entire orchestra, produced by the sound system, and the visual image on the screen to respond to all emotions expressed through the song one sings, one is able to embody, stage, and project ordinarily unutterable emotions. The expressions of feeling through kinetic, vocal, musical, and image production and reproduction thus create a site where subjective mood and emotions interact with the work of art

in the Age of Asian mechanical reproduction to produce a specific mode of imagination: an imagination that is able to soothe the pain inscribed by the gap and the rupture created by the transition from deterritorialization to reterritorialization at the local place.

The domain of feeling, sentiments, and emotions is usually left outside the consideration of serious artistic writings. Even within the discursive terrains of minority literature, it appears relatively insignificant and inconspicuous in front of grand issues like history, memories, and resistance. Through the narrative mode of melodrama, Yamashita takes up the issue of private feelings, the inner chamber of one's heart, as the site where an ethnic form of capitalist cultural production can start to construct a pattern of imaginary expression fit for those who are left behind, thrown outside the institutions, caught in between mobility and immobility. Yamashita thus reinvests on postmodernist "aesthetic populism" to give it a materialist history, and to endow upon its banality and shallowness, not a depth, but an ethnic position on the cartography of globalization. From that position Yamashita draws down a route for trans-local, trans-ethnic grassroots imagination.

VII. Conclusion

To investigate the Matacão's process of reterritorialization through Harvey's formula of the construction of place, we find some interesting and significant modifications. In the novel, the logic of global capitalism—corporate culture, the principle of production and consumption, media and communication, commodification of cultural expressions and religious rituals—indeed changes social relations in the Matacão. People who are formerly situated at the lower strata of social scale—domestic women, farmers, fishermen—find ways to reinvent themselves by means of becoming deeply involved with global forces. A domestic woman becomes a global traveler, a farmer becomes a TV celebrity, and a fisherman becomes a DJ/prophet. Yet, as they enjoy the immense possibility of mobility, attract thousands of audience and

listeners ready to take in whatever they have to say, they seem to have less ability to locate themselves, and less worthwhile things to say. They are situated in the non-place on Massey's map of power geometry. Unlike Harvey's New York City citizens, who are able to re-imagine Times Square—the symbol of speculative, gaudy capitalism—as the landmark and the spectacle, in front of which all classes can intermingle to produce collective memories and to inspire a sense of community (Harvey, 1993: 17-18), the Matacão's plastic production fails to create such an opportunity for re-imagination. While the powers of imagination and representation gradually die out in the sector of western capitalism, they are redistributed to Asian capitalist cultural production. The banality and superficiality of the specific grassroots forms of expression, plus Kazumasa's sentimentality, become the only source of imagination.

Through the Arc of the Rain Forest challenges Harvey's and Massey's theories accordingly. While Harvey maintains that it is possible for people to reinterpret and re-imagine local places originally constructed for the sake of profit and speculation, turning them into a place where cross-racial coalition can be formed and collective memories evoked, *Through the Arc* demonstrates that the uncanniness of global capitalism might confine and restrict Third World people's imagination within its logic. Massey, on the other hand, is concerned with the uneven power relationship at different ends of the power geometry in time-space compression. The worry is that transnational cultural flows might not be able to benefit or affect people evenly; some might become immobilized because others turn out to be highly mobile. The novel shows that the success in promoting yourself through the mediation of transnational cultural products or institutes, the ability to cross racial, gender, class, and ethnic boundaries, and the opportunity to move and travel, might not be able to compensate for the losses resulting within the domain of the home, domestic space, inner feeling, and private relationships. Its melodramatic form seems to address the failure of such a

domain in the face of the magic capitalism; yet, in the meantime, it struggles to come to terms with such failure through an Asian immigrant with his capital, technology, kind heart, karaoke, and a specific power of imagination for trans-ethnic coalition through sentimental bounding. Asian ethnic specificity is thus reformulated by means of weaving family values, domestic cultural and imaginary production together. The novel's engagement with the production of locality, consequently, opens up a discursive and imaginary pattern that patches/matches the odd couple of magic capitalism and melodramatic imagination in an Asian style.

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魔幻資本主義與通俗想像
——山下凱倫《穿過雨林的弧線》中的
在地性生產與亞裔族裔性重構

陳淑卿

摘 要

本文討論日裔美籍作家山下凱倫《穿過雨林的弧線》一書中的在地性生產。小說以在地社會空間化的兩個過程：去地域化與再地域化，來呈現在地性的生產。山下的敘述結合魔幻寫實與通俗想像來鋪陳跨國資本主義對邊緣在地的正負衝擊所產生的不穩定、裂痕、及不協調的狀況。小說的魔幻敘述點明去地域化的詭譎離奇特質；它的通俗敘述模式則揭露在地人民與全球化狀態周旋的再地域化過程。通過對再地域化的討論，本文試圖描繪亞裔族裔性的重構。小說的亞裔族裔性被重新定義為足以挑戰西方資本主義暴力，補足西方資本主義留下的傷痕和欠缺的文化生產機制及社會中介，亞裔族裔性通過連結家庭價值與與私有空間的情感想像與文化生產而得以重新組構，小說對在地性生產的觀照打開了一個連結魔幻資本主義與通俗想像的敘述結構。

關鍵詞： 魔幻寫實、通俗想像、在地性生產、亞裔族裔性