“We are not the World”: Global Village, Universalism, and Karen Tei Yamashita’s Tropic of Orange

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"WE ARE NOT THE WORLD":
GLOBAL VILLAGE, UNIVERSALISM,
AND KAREN TEI YAMASHITA'S
TROPIC OF ORANGE

Sue-Im Lee

In Karen Tei Yamashita’s political realist-fantastic novel, Tropic of Orange, 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 that stands as the "we" in the "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 the popular slogan for global interconnectedness and oneness. The best encapsulation of the globalist "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 electronic communications medium overcomes and diminishes the physical and temporal distance that separates the world's inhabitants, "global village" has been the dominant term for expressing a global coexistence altered by transnational commerce, migration, and culture. More importantly, "global village" translates that altered material condition into a hitherto unrealized condition of proximity, intimacy, and interconnectedness, the ultimate basis for a singular, collective "we."

Arcangel's critical role must be understood in light of the uncontakable authority that 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" (148), 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. So when Arcangel rebuts the global village sentiments, he is not specifically deriding the First World's philanthropic enterprise at large but the facility with which the globalist "we" circulates in the First World's political, economic, and cultural discourse. The globalist "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 like NAFTA (that free trade and trade increases will benefit all of "us") is also a highly marketable—indeed, invaluable—concept in the First World's culture industry ("we are the world"). However, Yamashita offers more than a critique of the First World's unilateral "we" in Tropic. The novel also argues the need to conceive of a new collective subject positioning that can express the accelerated movement of capital and humans traversing the world. Set in Mexico and Los Angeles, the novel highlights the transnational crisscrossing of labor, goods, resources, languages, and cultures in the late twentieth century, and its characters, whose formally disparate lives, separated by oceans and continents, are brought into hitherto unknown proximity and interconnectedness with each other.

This essay delineates the two dueling tensions in the novel's exploration of the globalist "we," and examines those tensions in relation
to contemporary debates on universalism. The globalist "we" under critique, I argue, is fundamentally a universalist "we," and *Tropic*'s denunciation of the global village celebration is an indictment of the imperialist nature of the few who presume to speak for all, whose particularity presumes the status of the universal. In *Tropic*, the First World’s deployment of a global intimacy and shared fate is the latest rendition of imperialist—that is, unidirectional—universalism. In its stead, the novel postulates another model of global collectivity, a different rationale for a globalist "we" that can express the transnational, transcontinental nature of human existence without imperialist dimensions. Simultaneously, this new model of global collectivity bears the seeds of its own negation, demonstrating the fragility, and indeed, the impossibility, of achieving an absolute universalism. *Tropic*’s dueling tension, in essence, simultaneously declares that "We are not the world" and that "We are the world." This essay unfurls the theoretical and philosophical implications of these contradictory declarations through recent poststructuralist recuperations of universalism.

To begin with, it is crucial to note 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. A Japanese American writer whose years spent in Brazil, Japan, and the US 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. 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, ethnic, nation, or culture), Yamashita's novels explore and celebrate the porous categories of identities emerging from the phenomena of globalization. Conversely, her novels explore the ways in which the unmooring of identities and affiliations translate into formations of new moorings. The altered condition of coexistence presents a pressing challenge: on what basis, through what rationale, may a globalist "we" be conceptualized?

Nowhere does this challenge press more imperatively than in *Tropic*, in which the geography of the globe literally shifts. The Tropic
of Cancer, the imaginary line that divides the globe into two hemispheres, 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 US, traveling toward, as they sarcastically call it, their "manifest destiny" (132).

Allegorical of 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 city to explore the novel’s pressing challenge—what is the role of the universal in the various conceptualizations of a globalist "we"?

_Tropic_’s project, then, has much in common with recent reconsiderations of universalism. Aggressively countering the delusional "we" at the heart of unidirectional deployments of universalism (such as Eurocentricism, colonialism, imperialism, racialism, nationalism, sexism, paternalism, heterosexism, and more) has been central to the anticolonialist, antiracist, antisexist scholarship of the late twentieth century. Generally traced back to Descartes and the ascendancy of the Enlightenment through thinkers like Rousseau and Montesquieu, the history of universalism is 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 paradoxical 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 starts from 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. 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 rationalist defense of universalism, best represented by Habermasian use of rationality as the foundational feature of humans and the speech act. A recent consideration of universalism’s paradoxical function is best represented in _Contingency, Hegemony, Universality_, in which Judith Butler, Laclau, and Slavoj 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 that supersedes any particular instantiation,
"a process or condition irreducible to any of its determinate modes of appearance" (3).

The poststructuralist revitalization of universalism, then, 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. Not only does the novel sit at the nexus of current discussions of universalism, it postulates its own model of universalism that I call a romantic universalism. As the novel's final answer to the challenge of a globalist "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. Furthermore, through the modality of the romantic, the novel enriches our understanding universalism's impossible and ideal dimensions.

In the transnational, transgeographical flow of people, labor, capital, and culture, Yamashita suggests that a coming together is inexorable. The task of conceiving a new singular collective "we" and of conceiving a new use for universalism becomes not a matter of choice, then, but a pressing task. Hence, *Tropic* does more than contribute to the impressive body of scholarship that looks critically at the global village celebration. It pushes beyond the critique to attempt a nonimperialist, nonparticular, absolutely total universalism.

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." The "village" is not just a denotation of a smaller scale of coexistence however. It simultaneously connotes a particular relationality at work. Just as the village is a scale of coexistence that is always already in the past—the primordial aspect that Anderson identifies—it suggests a simpler and more immediate relationality of person to person contact.
The global village concept is perhaps the ultimate fetishization of the village's primordial aspect. This fetishization is explicit in Marshall McLuhan's formulation of the global village. As he writes in *The Gutenburg 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 primordialism (human family, tribal drums) in translating high-speed electronic medium 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* 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 a high-speed electronic medium, such as television, "retribalizes the world" (12). 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" (330).

*Tropic* mulls over precisely this unidirectional logic of the globalist "we" by sharply delineating the material inequalities that obstruct the binding of the First World and Third World into one subject position. In its depiction of Los Angeles, too, the novel focuses on extremely disparate socioeconomic positions and emphasizes the growing fissures that run through the global village discourse. There is an illegal immigrant couple, Bobby and Rafaela, and a white-collar professional couple, Gabriel and Emi. Revealing the highly uneven benefits of globalization in First World's major metropolis, Manzanar and Buzzworm represent the mass of urban homeless. The novel's fragmented form also dramatizes the fracture in the First World's use of global village universalism. Yamashita begins the book with a "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, such as illegal human organ harvesting and sales, cocaine-injected oranges, and major freeway pileups and explosions affect the lives of the characters. All the while, the Tropic of Cancer steadily moves northward, unsettling all rules of space and time.
Within this instability and chaos, Yamashita posits her challenge to the global village universalism. In an emblematic scene, 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 make-up 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, feels it his duty to expose and criticize 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 LA 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 follows an entirely consumerist logic. Contact is entirely reduced to consumption. If you can eat "their" food, travel and sight "them," then you have made contact. As she reifies difference into food matter, she also 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 globalist "we," 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 and her fetishizing of different cultures are shown to be indefensible, even to herself ("An Interview").

So who is in this overworked global village? The village is occupied by First World consumers who rationalize their privileged mobility and consumption as responsible acts of global citizens. 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 universalism demonstrates its unidirectional and imperialist nature. 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, the white woman's privileged mobility and consumption circulates as evidence and criteria of global village universalism. In constituting a "we" out of "my" experience, the 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.

Precisely this global village universalism 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 of illegal immigrants', experience. Bobby is a Chinese Singaporean who entered the US as a boy, posing as a Vietnamese war refugee. Through years of low-wage physical labor, he achieves economic security, owning his own business of an office cleaning service. He marries Rafaela, a Mexican, during a trip to Tijuana, and they set up a home in a Los Angeles 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 appliance and goods, and Bobby supports his family in Singapore as well as sends his younger brother to college in the US. 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 nighttime 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; she learns, and feels deeply about, 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 in Bobby's atomistic vision of life to be lived: "She didn't 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 the two representative immigrants of Los Angeles, then, Yamashita throws a discord in the celebratory vision of Los Angeles as a model of the global village. While these two might be the ideal candidates of Los Angeles's "international world" in the eyes of the white woman in the sushi restaurant, Bobby's and Rafaela's terror and alienation make a mockery of any unified claims of Los Angeles as the ideal amalgam of difference. Yamashita further compounds the delusory nature of a unified, globalist "we" by highlighting the homeless population of Los Angeles. Buzzworm, an African American Vietnam War veteran, is a self-elect, 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 segments of the homeless population who live on the street—teenagers, 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 Los Angeles'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 challenges any conception of unity in the global village pretensions of Los Angeles.

In a spreading arc of criticism, Yamashita extends her critique 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), he travels through Mexico, reciting his poetry. In a striking food scene, Arcangel offers a counterpoint to the scene in the Los Angeles sushi restaurant. On his northbound travel toward Los Angeles, Arcangel is eating lunch at a roadside tavern called "Misery and Hunger" (130). 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."
"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 only makes sense 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 the health of the global village, 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 rift
that make the globalist "we" impossible. The waiter and the diners of this roadside restaurant in Mexico exemplify an absolute immersion and identification with the 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 globalist "we" as the central protagonist in the First World's economic discourse of universal progress. Yamashita employs dramatographical strategies, staging Arcangel's protest principally through a highly stylized back-and-forth dialogue. It is in one such exchange that Arcangel announces his role as the champion of the Mexican/Third World labor against the US/First World industry. The crowd asks:

"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. Spivak argues the very concept of globe as a singular, integrated unit serves the interests of First World industry: "Globality is invoked in the interest of the financialization of the globe, or globalization" (330). In the celebratory discourse of globalization, "[T]he great narrative of Development is not dead" (332).

The unidentified voices of Arcangel's chorus coalesce into one indictment: that the globalist "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 measures progress by the volume of trades between nations, tout the "universal progress" that will benefit all of "us."¹⁰ 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, of low-wage work force 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 US 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 universalism is an equally strong acknowledgement that coming-together of the South and the North is inexorable. I use the rather awkward phrase "coming-together" to describe the complex nature of this encounter—the confrontational nature of as well as the inevitability of the relationship. As Yamashita makes explicit, the wrestling match of "The Great Wetback" and "SUPERSCUMNAFTA" is the Third World's refutation of the global village universalism. 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) is 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 coming-together becomes the literal dramatization of coexistence and of the inevitability of the singular plural "we." As Los Angeles becomes the site of inexorable coming-together—of bodies, labor, capital, and geography—the question becomes: in a novel filled with indictments of false universalisms, can a singular plural "we" be formulated without the unidirectional imposition of intimacy and collectivity?¹¹

Yamashita offers her answer in the character of Manzanar, a homeless man who stands atop LA's freeway bypasses and "conducts" the traffic. In the mold of the messianic figure who disowns a life of comfort for a penurious one of serving others, Manzanar is a surgeon who leaves his family and profession to pronounce the absolute interconnectedness of humans. A Japanese American, his name stands as a quiet protest and reminder of the internment of Japanese Americans during World War Two. A homeless man, his visibility poses a resistance against the public policy of enforced invisibility for the homeless. However, as he stands atop freeway by-passes, 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.

My argument is that Manzanar's romantic universalism richly illuminates the modality of the ideal and the impossible in the post-structuralist recuperation of universalism. In reviving universalism as an antifoundational, nonnormative force of political necessity, the ideal and the impossible dimension are crucial—universalism as an ideal that cannot be achieved and as a perennial ingredient in all human struggles for hegemony.¹² Indeed, the ideal dimension of universalism is the constitutive feature in Etienne Balibar's "Ambiguous Universalism." While there are numerous, specific manifestations of universalism, the liberatory potential of universalism rests on 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). This "symbolic" or "ideal universalism" exists in "all the idealistic philosophies which view the course of history as a general process of emancipation" (72).¹³ Thus ideal universalism stands as the core principle behind any institutional practice 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 the 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. The impossible and the ideal are related concepts, of course, since the ideal may be defined as that achievement which is equal in its impossibility as in its necessity. Although Butler, Laclau, and Žižek, in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality*, employ different metaphors to describe that impossibility of absolute universalism, they are joined in their argument that universalism remains of perennial relevance in any and all political struggles for rights. Laclau’s metaphor of the "void" or the "empty place" plays a pivotal role in their 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 . . . politically 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. (58)

As specific groups seeking hegemony formulate their political claims as universal rights, they ceaselessly and variously fill the empty space with the particular. In this dialectic relationship, the universal is never completely filled. Inasmuch as it manifests itself only through the particular instantiations, the universal will only manifest itself through the particular. As Laclau repeatedly argues, exclusion and antagonism are crucial in struggles for hegemony; indeed, they are foundational features of a democratic society. Individual groups’ use of universalism, as in a particular group’s claim of and for rights, is fundamentally the exercise of a few speaking for some rather than for others. Hence, actual manifestations of universalism are always necessarily incomplete, inasmuch as they are never completely devoid of the particular that requires exclusion and antagonism. “[T]he complex dialectic between particularity and universality, between ontic content and ontological dimension, structures social reality itself” (*Contingency* 58).

In Butler’s and Žižek’s revitalization of the concept, too, the political necessity of universalism is paralleled by its fundamental
incompleteness. Rather than Laclau's "empty place" metaphor that may suggest the universal to be a static category "filled" by "political content," Butler opts for the figurative concept of "non-place": "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).

Žižek, in turn, theorizes the conceptual permanence of the universal through the concept of "negativity." When considered in the "Hege- lian 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" (Ticklish 177). Thus universalism's perennial political relevance emerges from the impossibility of its completion (Contingency 110).

Through these various—but interrelated—metaphors, poststructuralist recovery of universalism posits universalism's incompleteness as the constant feature in any specific application of the concept.

The absolute nature of Manzanar's romantic universalism, then, 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 universality—an achievement whose impossibility renders it an imaginary thing, an achievement that stands as a standard of perfection inspiring imitation. Manzanar alone supersedes the paradox of urban coexistence—the dense, physical proximity counterbalanced by the atomistic nature of the population's movements and the division of spaces by race and class. The richest example of this proximity/atomistic paradox may be the automobile culture of Los Angeles, the millions who hurtle alongside each other, each in his own home away from home. While LA's freeways have long occupied the contemporary imagination as the ills of chaotic urban living, in Manzanar's eyes, the freeway is the most vital organ of the 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 civil utilities
like the pipelines, the tunnels, waterways, pipes, electric currents, telephone cables, cable TV, fiber optics, computer networks, and many more. "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 complex grid of pattern, spatial discernment, body politic" (56). 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 speaks 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." 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 totality, 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 finds a single symphony out of atomistic disorder.

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)

Indeed, Manzanar's romantic universalism is foundational to a greater vision—a single totality that encompasses not only the geographical span of Los Angeles, but of 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). He also he foreshadows the inexorable coming-together of the North and the South, the joining of the two hemispheres: "he knew the entire event was being moved, stretched. And he was quite sure that the direction was south" (123). In the scope and reach of Manzanar's
romantic universalism, Yamashita offers her own dramatization of the globe as a village—the globe as a single totality, whose disparate parts are interconnected into a single organism.

What distinguishes this model from the other universals that abound in the novel? First, this global village 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 an unidirectional affection and affectation. In contrast, the crowds that accompany Arcangel's Third World labor "we," and the cacophony of unidentified voices that join Buzzworm's urban homeless "we," characterize these deployments of universalism as reciprocal ones. There is no slippage between "my" and "we," as Arcangel and Buzzworm speak as the particular subject positions they represent.

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 (claims of specific marginalized groups, such as of Third World labor or of the homeless) are incomplete inasmuch as they are claims of the particular. Thus universalism of the Third World labor "we" or the homeless "we" observe the fundamental contradiction in the idea of universalism and the political application of universalism—what Žižek calls the "split" grounded "already on the level of the notion" (Ticklish 177). 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 thing as saying that there is no possibility of exclusion. Romantic universalism's "we" is a unity of a limitless nature, whose absolute lack of particularity completely fills the "empty space" or the "non-space" of universalism. Romantic universalism becomes the very horizon of universalism.

In its absolute inclusiveness, romantic universalism fulfils 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, exemplified by institutions such as the church or the state, the governing function of fictional universalism is also the function of normalization. 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 recipro-
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."

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 totality. 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 romantic universalists’ conducting heralds the arrival of Arcangel and the Third World labor underscores the transformative power of universalism. Literally dramatizing the perennial relevance of universalism in the particular claims of specific groups, Manzanar’s all-inclusive, all-voluntary universalism becomes foundational to the march of Third World labor and later, of 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 actors and their claim for human rights take place on Manzanar’s romantic universalism. As the crowd breaks into cheers and tears, their solidity 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 coming-together, the confrontation of Arcangel and SUPERNAFTA does not result in a single winner. Each vanquishes the other in the ring, while 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 symbolic oneness of the South and the North joined in conducting. For a brief moment, Los Angeles enacts a model of global village universalism 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" (238) and "symphony" (265) that frame the coalition of Arcangel's Third World universalism, Manzanar's romantic universalism underwrites Buzzworm's particular universalism for the homeless. The literal geographical shift of the globe causes a meltdown of LA freeways, and chaos abounds between drivers who abandon their cars, the homeless who move in, and the law enforcement officers who combat them. The upheaval comes to an inevitable conclusion—a shootout between the law enforcement and the homeless—and the homeless are massacred in great numbers. As Buzzworm considers the blight and the reconstruction work that await him, his vision is profoundly altered by Manzanar's vision. 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." 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 takes place 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." A mythic reality differs from the cult of love in its constructivist dimension—one remains fully conscious of the fact that one chooses the myth that best accompanies one's desired real-
"Unplugged and timeless, thinking like this was scary, Buzzworm gritted his teeth. Took a deep breath. Manzanar's symphony swelled against his diaphragm, reverberated through his veteran bones. Solar-powered, he could not run out of time" (265).

**Conclusion: A Global Village Through Romantic Universalism**

In romantic universalism's all-inclusive, all-voluntary, and non-normative "we," Yamashita offers an answer to the challenge: how to build a collective subject positioning in the face of seemingly irresolvable discrepancy and fissures. The white woman's celebration of the "international world," emblematic of the stance that globalization results in "our" unity and intimacy, is an instance of some speaking for all. In the unidirectional manner of this exercise, the discrepancies and fissures that contest that single subject positioning are simply ignored. In contrast, in Arcangel's and Buzzworm's deployments of universalism, they speak as the particular subject positions they represent. Through the dramaturgical use of "crowds" (132) to represent the Third World labor and the urban homeless, in which the voices merge between the chosen speaker and the "crowd," Yamashita emphasizes the active, reciprocal nature of these singular collective formations.

Romantic universalism affects all of these instantiations of universalism 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 place, the ever-receding horizon of the ideal itself.

Romantic universalism, however, must not be simply understood as the solution that rescues the concept from the dialectic tension. The absolute nature of romantic universalism invokes its own set of inquiries. First, what is the political utility of a universalism that is all-inclusive? What is the progressive, emancipatory aim of a collectivity that claims to speak for all? How does it specifically challenge fictional
universalisms—the normative, governing forces of institutions such as the state or the church? Second, 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?

The answer to both inquiries, I suggest, returns us to the impossible/necessary dialectic. In presenting us with the seemingly impossible feat—an absolute "we"—romantic universalism also presents us with the fact that the idea of universalism itself—the empty space—does not serve specific political needs except as it serves particular instantiations. The only satisfactory way of asserting the political utility of romantic universalism—and 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. Assessing the transformative power of romantic universalism within particular instantiations is the only means of identifying its political utility. 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 human rights.

In returning to the particular dimension of universalism, the novel's conclusion encounters the dialectic bind. Rather than being a solution that overcomes the impossible/necessary dialectic, then, romantic universalism adds great nuance to the ideal of universalism propelling the dialectic. Through her use of the fantastic genre in representing romantic universalism, Yamashita renders a greater complexity to the theoretical conception of the "empty place," "non-place," or "negativity" at the heart of universalism. A globe that literally shifts its spatial perimeters, the city and the continent that joins 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, extravagantly fanciful) dimension of universalism. Indeed, the ideal of universalism can be profound and facile at once, and Yamashita richly illustrates these modalities through her use of the fantastic genre.

What, then, of the global village? Tropic amasses the spectrum of needs and uses fulfilled by universalism, from the unidirectional imperialist, consumerist kind, to the particular groups' struggle for hegemony, and to the absolute horizon of the concept. As the novel concludes with a vision of an absolutely total global village, the mo-
dality of the romantic directly colors the terms under which we can conceive of the globe as a village. That is: to transport the kind of relationality, intimacy, and shared fate of the primordialist village onto the globe can be simultaneously a profound and trite act. The distinction can only emerge from the ways in which the ideal of universalism serves particular instantiations of universalism. That is, how does the ideal serve specific subject positions' claims for universal human rights? 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 the romantic universalism—the transformative power of its imaginary and unrealistic vision, as well as its inspirational power as the ringing reminder of the ever-luring horizon of universal human rights.

Notes

I thank Temple University for its Research Leave during which time this essay was written. I also thank Josephine Nock-Hee Park, James Salazar, and the readers of MFS for their insightful suggestions for revision.

1. "Third World" is a phrase that Tropic of Orange uses quite explicitly to challenge the celebratory discourse of globalization. The novel deliberately deploys this politically challenged term to directly refute the view that globalization will remove the economic and geopolitical disparity between the "First World" and the "Third World."

2. Further references to this text will be cited parenthetically as Tropic.


5. Through the Arc of the Rainforest (1991) shows a fascination with the communication and entertainment mediums, such as the Brazilian
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daytime soaps that enthrall the entire nation. It also explores the far-ranging impact of a multinational corporation in the daily life of working Brazilians as well as on the environmental damage to 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. Yamashita's wide-ranging treatment of nations, ethnicities, and continents stands out as an example of the intraethnic, 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" ("An Interview" par. 72). Yamashita's approach also echoes the internationalizing vision for a postnational American studies. As John Carlos Rowe describes, a postnational American studies "should be contextualized in a larger understanding of the United States in the comparative context of Western Hemispheric and finally global study" (31). Yamashita's focus on border crossing and hybridity in the Americas recall works by Native American writers like Leslie Marmon Silko and Gerald Vizenor, or works by Chicana and Chicano writers like Gloria Anzaldua, Cherrie Morago, Ana Castillo, and Alejandro Morales. Yamashita also aligns the transnational nature of her work to Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters* ("An Interview" par. 72).


6. See the special issue of *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 7.1 (1995) devoted to universalism, which includes essays such as Etienne Balibar's "Ambiguous Universality," Naomi Schor's "French Feminism is a Universalism," Joan Scott's "Universalism and the History of Feminism," and David Palumbo-Liu's "Universalism and Minority Culture." See also, elsewhere, Naomi Schor's "The Crisis of French Universalism" and Eric Lott's "After Identity, Politics: The Return of Universalism." Ernesto Laclau's numerous essays on universalism are collected in *Emancipation(s)* and are continued in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* with Judith Butler and Slavoj Žižek.

7. For instance, Butler points out that Habermas pursues a "procedural method" "which establishes universalizability as a criterion for jus-
"We Are Not The World"

tifying the normative claims of any social and political programme. Although the procedural method distances itself from making declaration about human substance, "it does implicitly call upon a certain rational capacity, and attributes to that rational capacity an inherent relation to universalizability" (Contingency 15). In a roundabout way, then, the procedural method implicitly makes a foundational claim about human beings. Another example of the antifoundationalist approach to universalism can be found in Laclau's constructivist defense. In response to Richard Rorty's assertion that liberals who disown commonalities among humans must also disown universalism, Laclau suggests that if we approach universalism as a social product that emerges out of specific historical necessities, we can have a universalism that is not a metaphysical fact about human nature or the human condition. "It is enough to recognize that democracy needs universalism while asserting that, at the same time, that universalism is one of the vocabularies, one of the language games, which was constructed at some point by social agents and which has become a more and more central part of our values and our culture. It is a contingent historical product" (Emancipation(s) 122).

8. Huyssen notes that while McLuhan's theory of the media was crucial to the political strategies of the 1960s counterculture, his "unbounded optimism about the effects of electronic communications on human community and his blindness to the relationship between the media and economic and political power could only be read as an affirmative culture, as an apology for ruthless technological modernization, or, at best, as naïve politics" (9).

9. A critique of such imperialist views of travel has been offered by postcolonial writers like Derek Walcott and Jamaica Kincaid. In Asian American fiction, too, the critique of the reification of ethnic-specific locales, like Chinatown, has been a central theme.

10. An example of such discourse: "And, the fact is, NAFTA has been an outstanding success. Between 1993 and 2002, merchandise trade between the United States and Mexico increased by 178 percent, from $79 billion to $220 billion, and, between 1988 (the year before the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA's precursor, went into effect) and 2001, agricultural trade among the United States, Canada, and Mexico increased by 155 percent. According to the U.S. Trade Representative's office, trade between NAFTA partners increased 104 percent between 1993 and 2000—twice as fast as U.S. trade with the rest of the world. By lowering barriers, NAFTA has reduced the costs of imports for American businesses and consumers" ("Unfair" 7).

11. Molly Wallace, in "Tropics of Globalization," astutely points out that proponents of NAFTA use the metaphor of the weather to argue the inevitability of South-North economic integration. Such rhetorical moves "not only naturalize capitalism" but make it "a veritable law of nature" (145). In my formulation of "coming-together," I emphasize the importance of distinguishing the inevitability of greater economic,
political, and social interdependence from the particular policies put in place for regulating such an activity and from the celebratory view that such policies uniformly benefit a singular, globalist "we." To discuss the three as if they are one and the same phenomenon is a disingenuous move that parallels the unidirectionalism of imperialist universalism. "Coming-together," then, does not argue the "naturalness" of particular policies like NAFTA but the inexorability of the accelerated movements of human, labor, and capital.

12. It is important that "hegemony" in this discussion be understood not as the negative force wielded by a few to oppress the many, but as in the Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics, as the contingent articulation by different subject positions that take place in the field of limitless, differential relations that is the social. Hence, rather than being the political logic/attribute of a specific social sector or identities, hegemony is the articulation of power for which all subject positions strive.

13. Baliber distinguishes "ideal" universality from "real" and "fictional" universality. "Real universality," describing the actual condition of increased interdependency of individuals, invokes the shift in the human experience of time, space, and distance brought about by globalization. Like the coming-together in Tropic, then, "real universality" renders "humankind" a single web of interrelations" for the first time in history (Baliber 56). As in Yamashita’s treatment of globalization, Balibar is careful to point out that "real universality" also marks an unprecedented condition of polarization, inequality, hierarchies, and exclusions (52). "Fictional universality" describes the "constructed" universals which are enacted by all ruling institutions, like the church or the state. Hence fictional universality embodies both a progressive and a coercive aspect; 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).

14. The three thinkers also crucially differ in their theory of the subject. More specifically, they differ on their respective use of Georg Wilhelm Fredrich Hegel and Jacques Lacan in theorizing the negativity at the heart of identity (the discrepancy between identity-claims and the actual constitution of identity). Their different theorization of the subject as an incomplete project, then, leads to the divergence in their theorization of universality as an incomplete (impossible/necessary) project.
Works Cited


