UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Speculative Acts: The Cultural Labors of Science, Fiction, and Empire

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Literature

by

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Committee in charge:

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Professor Winifred Woodhull

2009

The Dissertation of Aimee Soogene Bahng is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2009

This dissertation is dedicated to
Octavia Butler
June 22, 1947 – February 25, 2006

EPIGRAPH

"We caused the problems: then we sat and watched as they grew into crises. I have heard people deny this, but I was born in 1970. I have seen enough to know that it is true. I have watched education become more a privilege of the rich than the basic necessity that it must be if civilized society is to survive. I have watched as convenience, profit, and inertia excused greater and more dangerous environmental degradation. I have watched poverty, hunger, and disease become inevitable for more and more people."

--Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Talents*

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Transnational Arcs, Excavating Imperial Legacies: The Speculative Acts of Karen Tei Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*," Aimee Bahng, in *MELUS: Alien/Asian.* Spec. Issue. 33:4 (Winter 2008). Chapter 3, in part, has been published as "Queering the *Matrix*: Hacking the Digital Divide and Slashing into the Future," Aimee Bahng, in *The Matrix in Theory*, *Critical Studies* 29. Eds. Myriam Diocaretz and Stefan Herbrechter. Amsterdam and Kenilworth, NJ: Rodopi. 2006. I am the single author of these papers.

In many ways, I began to formulate the questions driving this project long before my time at UCSD. I am particularly appreciative to the Robert Louis Stevenson School, which supported my participation in Middlebury College's unique master's program for high-school teachers, The Bread Loaf School of English. At Bread Loaf, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to work with professors from around the country, including Arthur Little (UCLA), Jeff Nunokawa (Princeton), and Hertha Sweet Wong (UC Berkeley). I am especially thankful for the scholarship, mentorship, and friendship of Arthur Little, whose course on magic and the supernatural in African American literary traditions was formative to this project.

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CONFERENCE PAPERS

"Imperial Rubber: Residues of U.S. Empire in the Brazilian Rainforest." *American Studies Association Annual Meeting*. October 2008. Albuquerque, NM.

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"Speculative Acts: Fantastic Formulations of Race and Sexuality in the *Matrix* Trilogy and in Karen Tei Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*." *American Literature Association Annual Convention*. May 2007. Boston, MA.

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"Techno-Racialization, Reproductive Imperatives, and Synthetic Sexualities in the *Matrix* Trilogy." AfroGEEKS 2004: Technophobia to Technophilia. University of California, Santa Barbara (accepted).

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"Y Tu Mamá También (And Your Capital, Too)." Graduate Student Conference, June 2002. University of California, San Diego.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Speculative Acts: The Cultural Labors of Science, Fiction, and Empire

by

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Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

University of California, San Diego, 2009

Professor Shelley Streeby, Chair

"Speculative Acts" examines an emergent set of late twentieth- and early twenty-first century science fictions that engage a politics of critical speculation. I position postcolonial speculative fictions—drawn from lived experiences of alienation, abduction, and displacement—as revisionist counter-narratives to imperialist science fictions of progress, technological advancement, and development. I focus on narratives emerging

from regions in the Americas where imbricated labor histories and overlapping diasporic movements complicate strictly North-South or East-West frameworks

Each chapter of the dissertation pairs a reading of speculative fiction with a cultural analysis of scientific narratives. Chapter One, "Imperial Rubber, Illegal Oranges," contrasts Karen Tei Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (1990) and *Tropic of Orange* (1997) with scientific writings produced by geologists and tech companies hired to speculate on land and sustain cheap labor supplies on behalf of U.S. investments south of the border. My second chapter interrogates the technoracialization of futurist discourses by focusing on reproductive imperatives placed on the bodies of women of color in the apocalyptic film *Children of Men*. On the other hand, I understand Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*—a speculative novel haunted by the biopolitical history of African slavery and Asian indenture in the Caribbean—as a revisionist narrative that queers reproductive bodies and allocates technological power to marginalized subjects. My final chapter focuses on new media speculations on race, gender, and technology in the form of online fan fiction written primarily by women who queer popular fantastical narratives such as *The Matrix*. I investigate how these everyday, renegade writers seize upon unsanctioned and unofficial channels to challenge the film's techno-utopianism and globalizing aspirations. Taken together, these chapters complicate science fictions of technological progress and borderless futures. At the same time, my project emphasizes the revisionist work of writers invested in narratives that use science to imagine transnational models of resistance.

Introduction

Science Fiction and Empire

In 2007, a group called Sigma—comprised of science fiction writers Arlan Andrews, Greg Bear, Larry Niven, Jerry Pournelle, and Sage Walker—attended a Homeland Security conference. Formed in the late 1990s, Sigma organizes itself around the motto "Science Fiction in the National Interest." When asked why the Department of Defense had put a group of science fiction writers on the payroll, a Science and Technology division spokesperson explained: "We need to look everywhere for ideas, and science-fiction writers clearly inform the debate."[1] The U.S. government inviting Sigma to participate in conversations about border security, airport screenings, and "anti-terrorist" strategies constitutes an active recruitment of science fiction writers to help produce the national imaginary. By speculating on emergent spaces such as the border and cyberspace on behalf of the Department of Homeland Security, these science fiction writers contribute to the shaping of the policies and strategies employed to regulate and "secure" these contested spaces. Sigma's overt collusion with Homeland Security is only one recent example of science fiction working "in the national interest," but it does serve as a contemporary instantiation of the crossroads of science, fiction, and empire that the following chapters will interrogate.

Speculative fiction can make important interventions into discourses about science, technology, and so-called progress. Space exploration, alien contact, and time travel have long been the purview of the science fiction (SF) genre but have often evoked colonialist desires and reproduced penetrative models of Western scientific knowledge

[1] Hall, "Sci-Fi Writers Join War on Terror"

production. At its outset, "Speculative Acts" interrogates SF's problematic inheritances, but the project's main focus is an investigation of the possible counter-narratives to science fictions working on behalf of empire. The project looks to *speculation* rather than science fiction as a site of potential cross-cultural collaboration, postcolonial feminist critique, and queer of color revisionist practices. In what follows, I examine popular texts that both participate in and contest transnational flows of culture, labor, and power.

"Speculative Acts" investigates how women of color critique the collusion of Western imperialism and scientific discourse through the unlikely medium of science fiction. I analyze these postcolonial speculative fictions—drawn from lived experiences of alienation, abduction, and displacement—as critical revisions of imperialist science fictions that promote narratives of progress, technological advancement, and development. Taking a hemispheric approach to American Studies, I focus on narratives emerging from regions in the Americas where transpacific, transatlantic, and transcontinental migrations converge in particularly imbricated labor histories that complicate strictly North-South or East-West orientations. I read the novels of Karen Tei Yamashita and Nalo Hopkinson, for example, as narratives that imagine the Brazilian Amazon and the Caribbean tropics not as diseased, untamed, and awaiting civilization, but as geographies already populated with technocultural agents working across diasporic networks. I look to these contact zones at a moment when neoliberal technologies (including "free" trade policies and anti-immigration legislation) render movements of capital and empire increasingly difficult to pin down, particularly in the case of locating women working "offshore" or in other liminal spaces.

Each chapter of the dissertation pairs a reading of speculative fiction with an analysis of scientific narratives serving U.S. empire-building projects. I begin with an examination of U.S. neo-colonialism in the forms of an excavated Ford rubber plantation in Brazil and the flexible technologies of the U.S.-Mexico border, spaces significantly complicated by Asian migration to the Americas. This first chapter, "Imperial Rubber -- Illegal Oranges," contrasts Karen Tei Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (1990) and *Tropic of Orange* (1997) with scientific writings produced by geologists and tech companies hired to speculate on land and sustain cheap labor supplies on behalf of U.S. investments south of the border. My second chapter continues to interrogate racialized discourses of labor by focusing on reproductive imperatives placed on the bodies of women of color in apocalyptic films such as *Children of Men*. On the other hand, I understand Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* (2000)—a speculative novel haunted by the biopolitical history of African slavery and Asian indenture in the Caribbean—as a revisionist narrative that queers reproductive bodies and allocates technological power to marginalized subjects. My final chapter focuses on new media speculations on race, gender, and technology in the form of online fan fiction written primarily by women who queer popular fantastical narratives such as *The Matrix*. I investigate how these everyday, renegade writers seize upon unsanctioned and unofficial channels to exchange narratives across the Pacific that illuminate U.S. anxieties about emergent Asian economies and technocultures. Taken together, these chapters complicate accounts of globalization that herald utopian beliefs in technological progress and borderless futures by arguing that such narratives have been used to bolster imperialist enterprises, condone violent acts of discrimination, and legislate exploitative labor practices. At the same time, my project

emphasizes the revisionist work of writers invested in narratives that use science to imagine transnational models of resistance.

My title "Speculative Acts" gestures toward Lisa Lowe's seminal work *Immigrant Acts*, in which Lowe points not only to the ways in which legislative acts (such as the Alien Exclusion Act of 1882 and Alien Land Laws of 1913, 1920, and 1923) constructed Asian immigrants to the U.S. as "illegal aliens," but also to the powerful "*acts* of labor, resistance, memory, and survival" of those alienated subjects who produce "politicized cultural work that emerges from dislocation and disidentification" (9). Lowe argues that it is in part because of "a history of being constituted as 'aliens'" that Asian Americans can lend critical perspective to a national memory forged in narratives of liberal democracy and citizenship that actively forget these acts of exclusion and disavow U.S. imperialism (21). In this spirit, my dissertation understands the science fictions of Karen Tei Yamashita, Nalo Hopkinson, and queer fan fiction writers as "speculative acts" that attend to the historical displacement and estrangement of various marginalized groups through compelling excavations of imperial legacies.

The contemporary speculative fictions I examine move beyond and even disrupt national frameworks. They do so, however, not through the kind of transcendent internationalism espoused by neoliberal rhetoric, but through a postcolonial feminist critique of the relationship between empire and science as well as the masculinist and nationalist paradigms scientific practices have unwittingly reproduced.

At a moment when the state looks to science fiction authors and their speculations on alien invasion, apocalyptic scenarios, and uncertain futures as instrumental to the cultivation of a society of risk and fear, I identify "the future" as a

speculative space where various narratives compete for a say in how we envision, materialize, and invest in the future. My focus on speculative fiction in the shadow of late capitalism moves away from visions of the future that spring from the imaginations of elite scientists to consider what the future looks like from the perspective of someone whose experiences remind them of the devastating historical connections between technoscience and empire. In other words, I take interest in the speculative fictions that complicate and critique techno-utopian progress narratives and so-called civilizing missions that rhetorically paved the way for conquest, colonization, and expansion; the pursuit of scientific knowledge production in the service of eugenics and sterilization campaigns; and the exploitation of marginalized people as the subjects of unethical medical experiments.

The first premise of this study is that the field of science produces and participates in cultural meaning. Though a long-standing relationship between scientists and the military has been consummated over the past century in the U.S. through massive amounts of military funding of scientific research, the recruitment of engineers into the armed forces, and the development of military science as a field of study, historians of science and feminist scholars of science have sought out different alliances. Many of these interventions have been facilitated by a critical examination of science as culture. The visual and linguistic codes of scientific knowledge-production have come under particular scrutiny.

Understanding the production of scientific knowledge, as with other forms of knowledge production, requires critical attention to the conditions and contexts that shape these knowledges. Following the inspirational work of Donna Haraway, I approach

the sciences as "specific historical and culture productions" and consider them "radically contingent" upon the situations that give rise to them ("Cyborgs at Large" 2). Not only does Haraway's cyborg manifesto call forth a feminist epistemology; it also situates the need for a radical revision of technoscientific origin myths in the political context of science-based industries that capitalize on the exploitation of a transnational female labor force (*Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* 174). Haraway also famously looks to feminist science fictions as cultural contestations of what she calls "the god-trick." Advocating for the production of "situated knowledges" and narratives with multiple meanings, Haraway sees in science fiction a site for unmooring scientific knowledge production from a pursuit of mastery or claims to perfect objectivity.[2]

In her investigation of the history of scientific autonomy, Nancy Leys Stepan questions how claims to scientific authority became, in the nineteenth century, "increasingly conceptualised as 'a sharply-edged, value-neutral, a-political, non-theological, empirical and objective form of knowledge unlike any other" through a relentless process of "boundary-setting between science and non-science" ("Race, Gender, Science and Citizenship" 33). Stepan argues that science emerged from this proliferation of dichotomies as a distinct form of knowledge production that positioned itself as "pure," "rational," "objective," "hard," and "male" (33). Published in 2002, Stepan's article takes up Haraway's critique of scientific authority a decade later, emphasizing the importance of including science studies in critical discussions about citizenship and racialization.

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[2] In addition to Haraway's work, some of the more foundational texts of the cultural studies of science and technology include: Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar's *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (1979); *The Technological Imagination: Theories and Fictions*, eds. Teresa de Lauretis, Andreas Huyssen, and Kathleen Woodward (1980); Constance Penley and Andrew Ross's edited volume *Technoculture* (1991); and Anne Balsamo's edited special issue of *Cultural Studies* titled *Science, Technology and Culture* (1998).

My interest lies in seeking out alternatives that arise in contestation to capitalist applications of technoscience in an age when technoscience has been positioned as a great facilitator of capitalism's globalizing tendencies. I contend that neither these tendencies nor these alternatives are somehow novel. Rather, I look to the ways in which these critical speculative fictions adopt and adapt feminist, postcolonial, and anti-racist frameworks to address the perpetually mutating force of capitalism.

In the chapters that follow, I build on critiques of science's collusion with empire. I draw on the work of historians of science and technology who trace how technoscience, from its material inventions to its ideological disseminations, has aided, abetted, and sought to rationalize the conquest, subjugation, and/or exploitation of other peoples.[3] At the same time, rather than approaching "Science" as a hegemonic force, my readings of speculative fictions emphasize the reciprocal, dialectical relationships in technocultural production. I investigate how speculative fiction helps shift the conventional framework of "technology" to consider other types of knowledge-networks that cut across center-periphery models of scientific production. My attention to a more inclusive account of science is motivated by an effort to recognize the often invisible labor that supports scientific enterprises. From the explorer's indigenous translator to the factory worker who assembles laboratory instruments, the production of scientific knowledge has been contingent upon a labor force that takes a much more central role in the speculative fictions I analyze in this project. I argue that labor becomes more visible in these

[3] Some of the more recent work on science and empire in the Americas that has been most helpful to me includes: James Delbourog and Nicholas Dew's edited collection *Science and Empire in the Atlantic World* (2008); a special issue of *American Quarterly* titled *Rewiring the "Nation": The Place of Technology in American Studies*, eds. Carolyn de la Peña and Siva Vaidhyanathan (2007); Michael Adas's *Dominance by Design:Technological Imperatives and America's Civilizing Mission* (2006); Londa Schiebinger's *Plants and Empire: Colonial Bioprospecting in the Atlantic World* (2004); Richard Drayton's *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain and the 'Improvement' of the World* ; and Julyan G. Peard's *Race, Place, and Medicine: The Idea of the Tropics in Nineteenth-Century Brazilian Medicine* (1999).

narratives partially because these authors present a cooperative mode of invention and innovation that emphasizes cross-class, inter-ethnic collaborations and transnational circulations of knowledge.

The "Hard" and "Soft" of Science Fiction

> "I have found that 'hard' science fiction writers share a camaraderie that is unusual even for their close-knit genre. In my experience, writers of 'the hard stuff' produce more collaborations than other types of science fiction authors, they hold in common the internationalist idealism of scientific bodies, and in their free trading of ideas often behave like scientists… The hard sf aesthetic goals may still occupy the center of the field—though much recent sf has returned to the old styles, in which scientific accuracy and worldview are subordinated to conventional literary virtues of character or plot, style or setting. Alas, in this sense hard sf may be a paradigm more often honored in the breach than not" (15).
>
> --"Real Science, Imaginary Worlds," Gregory Benford

In his definition of "'hard' science fiction" Gregory Benford works to ally science fiction writers and scientists by pointing to the ways that both groups share an "internationalist idealism" and engage in "free trading of ideas." A science fiction writer and astrophysicist (with a doctorate from the University of California, San Diego and a tenured professorship at the University of California, Irvine), Benford writes of a free trade idealism that could just as well describe the ideological rhetoric of economic neoliberalism. Published in 1994, Benford's narrow definition of science fiction responds to a perceived threat. That threat, if one follows the implications Benford lays out in this paragraph, would be the "softening" of the field of science fiction, which Benford laments ("Alas!") because of the resulting subordination of "scientific accuracy" to "conventional literary virtues of character or plot, style or setting." In another critical

essay from the same anthology *The Ascent of Wonder: The Evolution of Hard SF*, editor David G. Hartwell helps identify this threat more particularly. He writes: "Hard sf embodies the fantasies of empowerment of the scientific and technological culture of the modern era and validates its faith in scientific knowledge as dominant over other ways of knowing" (38). Hartwell goes on to explain in the next paragraph that the term "hard sf" was coined by P. Schuyler Miller in the late 1950s in response to the emergence of "new styles and approaches" that constituted a New Wave of "speculative fiction" (38).

Hartwell's statement appears all the more egregious in light of the feminist scholarship that emerged in the late 1980s that sought to broaden the genre's delineations to include overlooked work by queer writers, writers of color, and women.[4] Naming some science fictions "hard" and others "soft" reproduces the rather unfortunate tendency in the sciences to distinguish "hard," physical, and applied sciences such as physics, chemistry, and biology from "soft," social sciences such as anthropology and sociology. This modernist system of dichotomous categorization also reproduces a gendered discourse that works to marginalize and alienate women from the sciences. In 1982, Evelyn Fox Keller worked to push feminist critique of the sciences beyond a critique of the predominance of men in the "softer" sciences toward a "truly radical critique that attempts to locate androcentric bias even in the 'hard' sciences, indeed in scientific ideology itself… This range of criticism takes us out of the liberal domain and requires us to question the very assumptions of objectivity and rationality that underlie the scientific enterprise" (592). As Keller puts it, "[t]he task this implies for a radical feminist critique of science is, then, first a historical one, but finally a transformative one" (600).

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[4] See Marleen S. Barr's *Alien to Femininity: Speculative Fiction and Feminist Theory* (1987) and Pamela Sargent's edited series *Women of Wonder*.

Greg Bear, Larry Niven, and Gregory Benford all work and write from Southern California, a place which, as Mike Davis so astutely points out, witnesses the convergence of a postwar, science-based economy revolving around formidable science institutions including Caltech and NASA (where Benford serves as a consultant), and the "imagineering" ethos of Disney and Hollywood (55). Davis suggests that this meeting of one of the largest communities of scientists and engineers with the fantastic elements of the commercial film industry produces a hotbed of science fiction that attracts religious and cult followings such as Scientologists and perhaps also fans of San Diego's Comic-Con. While Davis astutely points out the conjuncture of the aerospace and silver-screen industries, I would add to the mix the particular conditions of my own interest in science fiction, which also happened to take shape concomitantly with my earliest formations of racial consciousness. Born and raised in Los Angeles in the late 1970s and 1980s, I was drawn early on to science fiction, perhaps for the reasons that Mike Davis suggests in *City of Quartz*, but more likely because, for me, the realm of science fiction was a contact zone for urban youth of color whose interests in SF-affiliated popular media (film, television, comic books, and video games) constituted one of the few opportunities for cross-ethnic community and collaboration.

On Speculation

"Science" itself, I contend, is a murky term—one that is often associated narrowly with Western European, Enlightenment roots. It is also difficult to locate "science" in any particular material form: Does "science" reside in research institutions? In private practices? In community understandings of it? What is the cultural discourse of science

and where is it located? How does this discourse itself function as a kind of speculative fiction? Neither science nor literature has been very eager to claim science fiction as a bedfellow; however, I see great potential in this form that puts two frequently antagonistic institutional areas of study into conversation. This project participates in the larger endeavor of making these fictions visible. I choose to accomplish this task by pairing speculative fiction novels with other texts that have not conventionally been thought of as science fiction but that nonetheless produce narratives about the history, origins, and achievements of science and technology. In this way, I seek to expand the category of "science fiction" to include not only those genres that come under the rubric of the more comprehensive term "speculative fiction" but also to include the fictions that surround and are shaped by science.

I argue that speculative fiction can foster alternative forms of connectivity that exceed and defy the logic of the nation, the corporation, and the nuclear family. Because they are speculative, the fictions I choose to examine emerge from and formulate innovative structures of belonging and possible coalition building across conventional differences. Before I proceed with my argument, though, I must pause to define what I mean by "speculation" and the ways I situate "speculative fiction" within that definition.

First, *speculation* seems to suggest inconclusive reflection; tidy resolution is not its ultimate goal. Rather, the term carries with it a sense of lingering hopes and/or concerns and opens up possibilities beyond so-called "fact." While *speculation* maintains a certain affiliation with the otherworldly, the magically real and the alien, it does not preclude the (scientific) inquiry that leads beyond some sort of known "Truth." Speculative fiction, then, is a genre of inventing Other possibilities (of alternate realities, of upside-down

hierarchies, of supernatural interventions). *Speculation* does not take exclusive interest in predicting the future but is equally as compelled to explore differential accounts of history. It calls for a disruption of teleological ordering of the past, present, and future and posits both History and Science as speculative narratives, rather than objective Truth. While *speculation* embraces an ethic of meticulous inquiry, it shifts the emphasis of scientific pursuit from fact-chasing to experiment-reveling. *Speculation* calls into question the genre-making practices of Science Fiction and interrogates the hierarchical and gendered relationship between "hard" and "soft" science fiction, among magical realism, fantasy, or horror and SF based on "scientific realism," and between "sci-fi" and "sigh-fi." I use the term *speculation* in order to distinguish my approach from a mode of inquiry that Western Science has promulgated through imperialist projects that objectify, fetishize, and pathologize the bodies of non-whites, women, queers, and immigrants, for example.

Second, *speculation* (as its etymological resonance with "spectator" and "spectacle" suggests) has to do with practices of looking.[5] By linking speculative fiction and spectatorship, I mean to implicate the scientific-medical gaze as part of the imperialist project, which has in turn informed the science fiction genre by reproducing a troubling investment in disembodied knowledge production and invisible labor practices.[6] Many science fiction narratives, for example, produce a spectacle of difference through the employment of scopophilic instruments used to inspect, examine, and diagnose alien bodies. The horror invoked when the aliens themselves embody the perpetrating diagnosticians results from the anxiety that these scientific methods—always probing and

[5] "Speculation," "spectator," and "spectacle" all derive from the Latin *spectâre*, meaning "to look" (Oxford English Dictionary).
[6] Michel Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic*. See also Lisa Cartwright's *Screening the Body* (1995).

penetrative—will be turned against "men of Reason" in perverse ways. The speculative works I examine interrogate the homophobia, misogyny, and fear of difference that inform these science fictions. The sf authors I discuss in this dissertation issue this critique at the level of plot (modes of inquiry are much less invasive and at times more embodied and more communal) and/or narrative structure (non-teleological, non-chronological ordering of events and memories).

The term *speculation* has also been helpful in that it obliquely and bleakly resonates with the discourse of neo-colonial and post-capitalist business ventures (financial speculation, land acquisition, and purchasing "on the margin"). I argue that a conscientious misappropriation of the term responds critically to the exploitative nature of imperialist expansion and the discourse of entitlement and ownership. Working in conversation with spatial theorists Mary Pat Brady, Gloria Anzaldúa, Homi Bhabha, Paul Gilroy, Anna Tsing, Mike Davis, and Edward Soja, I connect discussions about the margins, the border, "third space," transnational circulation, and urban cultures to the practice of speculation. By doing so, I mean to articulate and set up the different stakes of a speculative tradition routed through postcolonial, critical race, and queer theory. How does the figure of the abducted body provoke a discussion about the history of forced migration and illegalization of alien subjects? What connection can be made between "speculative space" (and, for that matter "speculative time") and "third space," "border space" or "in between space"? I argue that speculation establishes a three-dimensional epistemology, which refuses dichotomous thinking and speaks to the layers of complexity involved in, for instance: the cycles of oppression that can grip a country in its decolonizing process; the multi-directionality of transnational labor routes; and the

impossibly inextricable nexus of race-class-gender-sexuality-nation. Given the long and complicated relationship between science and empire, the term "speculative fiction" (rather than "science fiction") has been helpful in many ways for writers who wish to problematize science fiction's affiliations with science as a mechanism of imperialist enterprise, but who refuse to surrender the genre and the discipline to capitalist and neocolonial investments.

Postcolonial Speculative Fiction: Subaltern Space Travelers[7]

> Being in the 'beyond', then, is to inhabit an intervening space, as any dictionary will tell you. But to dwell 'in the beyond' is also, as I have shown, to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity… (Bhabha 7).

In 2000 and 2004, two momentous collections of science fiction sought to illuminate and evidence a long-standing tradition of speculative writing by black writers. Edited by Sheree Thomas, *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* and *Dark Matter: Reading the Bones* establish a rich collection of black speculative writing, reaching back to W.E.B. Du Bois' 1929 short story "The Comet." Also in 2004, another anthology titled *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction and Fantasy*, edited by Nalo Hopkinson and Uppinder Mehan, worked similarly to broaden notions of a genre often associated primarily with white male writers from the U.S. and Europe. The *Dark Matter* anthologies and *So Long Been Dreaming* actively engage in a theoretical discussion about race and science fiction. In addition to featuring various short stories

[7] I use the term "postcolonial" not to suggest that systems of empire operate only in the past, or that the conditions of colonization have ceased to be, or that the violent history of colonial periods do not continue to haunt the present. Rather, I use the term as a name for the historical, social, cultural, and political critiques that interrogate the dynamics of power in sites where colonization has left insidious marks even after aspects of its most overt manifestations have either been removed, ousted, or changed shape. For a more nuanced critique of the term "postcolonial," see Anne McClintock's "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term 'Post-Colonialism'" and Ella Shohat's "Notes on the 'Post-Colonial'," both of which can be found in *Social Text* 31/32.1(Winter 1994).

and excerpts of fiction, Thomas's collections include several critical essays by esteemed writers such as Samuel Delany, Octavia Butler, and Walter Mosley, who seek to complicate and expand notions of what constitutes and defines the genre of science fiction. In the introduction to *So Long Been Dreaming*, Hopkinson describes "postcolonial speculative fiction" as "stories that take the meme of colonizing the natives and, from the experience of the colonizée, critique it, pervert it, fuck with it, with irony, with anger, with humour, and also, with love and respect for the genre of science fiction that makes it possible to think about new ways of doing things." Mentored by Samuel Delany through the Clarion Writers Workshop, Nalo Hopkinson both carries on a tradition of black speculative writing and urges a more transnational consideration of science fiction writing among diasporic peoples. Hopkinson's powerful statement begins to lay out some of the stakes of postcolonial science fiction: How useful can the genre of science fiction be as a critical tool in the hands of authors for whom "Science" has not historically been particularly helpful? How do postcolonial science fiction writers use this genre as the very occasion for interrogating a history of scientific racism, the collaboration of scientific institutions and the building of empires, and the disciplining of aberrant bodies under the rubric of "progress"?

Hopkinson's collaboration with Uppinder Mehan on *So Long Been Dreaming* represents a significant demonstration of speculative fiction as one theoretical space that brings together discussions of African and Asian diasporic movements in important ways. For the anthology assembles science fiction stories that, though they are all written in English, are written from the perspectives their diverse set of authors bring to their speculations. The collection highlights transnational affiliations between the Americas

fostered by overlapping histories of migrations of peoples displaced by war, poverty, and shifting systems of labor. In "Refugee," for example, the forced displacement of Native Americans by U.S. expansionists informs Celu Amberstone's narration of a human child who has taken refuge on another planet, whose red blood is "an alien colour on this world" (161). Andrea Hairston, in "Griots of the Galaxy," imbues griots of the West African tradition with supernatural powers, allowing them to inhabit different bodies over the course of time. "The Griots of West Africa are musicians, oral historians, praise singers negotiating community," writes Hairston. "They stand between us and cultural amnesia. Through them we learn to hear beyond our time and understand the future" (23). Vandana Singh writes in her story "Delhi" about a protagonist who walks between temporalities writing "a history of the future" (82). In San Francisco Poet Laureate devorah major's "Trade Winds," interspecies translation between a migrant group of "Voyagers" and native peoples emphasizes the powerful ways in which language shapes cross-cultural exchange. With at least half of its authors writing from Canada, the Caribbean, and Mexico, *So Long Been Dreaming* also decenters the U.S. from not only the production of science fiction as a genre but also narratives about migration. In this way, Hopkinson's and Mehan's anthology positions science fiction as a genre that exceeds the frameworks of nation while also attending to specific histories of migration and second migration.

The emergence of these anthologies at the outset of the twenty-first century provides an occasion for examining how science and the fictions of science participate in the construction of national and international ideas about modernity and futurity. How are these narratives about science, modernity, and futurity also intertwined with how we

think about race, gender, and sexuality? Given the long and complicated relationship between science and empire, what critical considerations and contributions does postcolonial speculation offer the genre of science fiction and scientific disciplines? The critique levied by these postcolonial speculative fiction writers examines some common science fiction tropes—an emphasis on exploration, settlement of new lands, potential alien invasions, and technological advancement that emerges from and characterizes the First World—and questions to what extent the genre itself reproduces the social and political ideologies of a system of science that has historically operated in close conjunction with imperialist and neocolonial enterprises.

One of the most prominent themes of postcolonial speculative fiction is the revision of Western origin myths of technoscience to encourage a radical shift in the epistemological assumptions of scientific endeavors. In other words, one of the fictions about science that these writers contest is that because of the Enlightenment, Europe has an exclusive claim to science's origins. At stake in this debate is that, as David Harvey has argued, "Enlightenment thought…embraced the idea of progress, and actively sought that break with history and tradition which modernity espouses" (*The Condition of Postmodernity* 12). Pursuing alternative technocultural origin myths also means rejecting the progress narratives Enlightenment thought encourages. In my analysis of postcolonial speculative fiction, I foreground the critique of progress narratives that makes this emergent set of science fiction writing so vital to cultural critiques of science and technology.

Another characteristic of postcolonial speculative fiction is its use of shifts in the space-time continuum to disrupt the space-time of empire. In her essay "Spatialities and

Temporalities of the Global: Elements for a Theorization," Saskia Sassen argues that "the nation" has been imagined as a "unified spatiotemporality," which "reveals itself to be composed of multiple spatialities and temporalities" (215). Sassen's argument builds on Mary Louise Pratt's important work on "contact zones" in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, in which Pratt studies spatio-temporalities where the nation and the global blur. Anne McClintock focuses on empire's manipulation of space-time in the form of the Victorian museum:

> In the mapping of progress, images of 'archaic' time—that is, non-European time—were systematically evoked to identify what was historically new about industrial modernity. The middle-class Victorian fixation with origins, with genesis narratives, with archaeology, skulls, skeletons and fossils—the imperial bric-a-brac of the archaic—was replete with the fetishistic compulsion to collect and exhibit… The museum—as the modern fetish-house of the archaic—became the exemplary institution for embodying the Victorian narrative of progress. (*Imperial Leather* 40)

Empire's "mapping of progress," a phenomenon Mary Louise Pratt reveals to be a literal practice in European imperialist cartography, demonstrates precisely how sciences such as archaeology, tropicalist anthropology, and cartography produce fictions that perpetuate empire. These practices constitute the science fictions against which authors such as Karen Tei Yamashita and Nalo Hopkinson write.

The Political Economy of Speculation and Technologies of Fictitious Capital

Spring 2009 is an interesting time to be theorizing speculation. We have recently witnessed the faltering of an ever flexible system of speculative capital in the form of empty returns on financial derivatives, the collapse of the hedge fund promise, and the disastrous impact on low-income homeowners of a credit bubble bursting. One goal of this project is to push the term "speculative fiction" toward the realm of finance, where a

system seeks to capitalize on predictions of the future and fictions of risk and uncertainty. I aim to connect the cultural production of speculative fiction (also known as extrapolative fiction) with the political economies of contemporary modes of flexible accumulation. "Extrapolation" is an investment term that means "using historical data to determine what will happen in the future."[8] Scholars of science fiction might first think of the academic journal *Extrapolation*, which publishes essays on speculative fiction. In his formulation of "hauntology," Jacques Derrida argues that "if the commodity-form is *not, presently,* use-value, and even if it is not *actually present*, it affects *in advance* the use-value of the wooden table. It affects and bereaves it in advance, like the ghost it will become, but this is precisely where haunting begins. And its time, and the untimeliness of its present, of its being 'out of joint'" (*Specters of Marx* 161). The speculative mode, with a keen awareness of time out of joint, seems particularly well-situated to trace the movements of capitalism as it becomes increasingly invested in predicting "futures" and banking on uncertainty.

In the current moment of literary studies—when the discipline increasingly pursues interpretative work grounded in historical, material, and archival research—one might expect to observe a straining away from the "merely speculative." Nevertheless, speculation remains an important site of investment for literary scholars; for, speculation gets at the very "contradictions inherent in how a neoliberalizing capitalism works" (Harvey, *Limits*, ix). On the other hand, "spectacular accumulation" as Anna Tsing defines it, differs from Harvey's notion of "flexible accumulation" in that "spectacular accumulation does not call out to be imagined as new. It is self-consciously old, drawing

[8] Definition from investorwords.com, viewed on 5.14.09.

us back to the South Sea bubble and every gold rush in history. In contrast with flexible accumulation, its power is not its rejection of the past, but its ability to keep this old legacy untarnished" (*Friction* 76). Though Tsing, like Harvey, recognizes a form of accumulation that depends greatly on predicting the future value of a commodity, she also refuses to reproduce a developmental logic by defining flexible accumulation sequentially as a post-Fordist evolution. Rather, Tsing questions the scholarly impulse to critique neoliberalism as a monolith and argues that "contingent articulation" and adaptability have been characteristics of capitalist desires throughout time, whether in the contemporary era of finance capital or in the land speculations of the frontier age (77).

The texts I examine posit critiques and alternatives to the speculations of globalization and interject radical revisions of progress narratives by attending to the markedly uneven development late capitalism has exacerbated and by suggesting alternative histories and trajectories for technoculture. By looking both forward and backward, these speculative fictions initiate what Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd have called "the excavation and connection of alternative histories and their different temporalities that cannot be contained by the progressive narrative of Western developmentalism" (Lowe and Lloyd 5). Lowe and Lloyd are "interested in another understanding of the temporality of the breakup of modernity… In their different ways, subaltern historiography, feminist historiography, and some postcolonial critiques have attempted to intervene in developmental historicism by refusing the tendency of historicism to view its objects as representative instances within a totalized, developmental teleology" (4). In the recent years of rampant speculation, late capitalism faces ever-forward, driving Walter Benjamin's Angel of History along, if not attempting to push it aside entirely.

When speculative futures run wild, excavation, historicization, and haunting became increasingly important modes of contingency, which slows the march of progress.[9]

In my formulation of a politics of critical speculation, I emphasize such historical, postcolonial feminist modes of inquiry while not relinquishing the productive hybrid space of science/fiction. I develop my argument in three chapters, organized around three emergent forms of speculative fiction. Though each chapter interrogates the conjuncture of science, fiction, and empire, the first chapter emphasizes speculation as a mode of excavation. Then, in the following chapter, speculation becomes a crucial part of contesting reproductive futures by engaging feminist theories of visual culture as its primary analytic. In the final chapter, speculations of the everyday fan create a counter-public distinct from the globalizing capitalist aspirations of the Hollywood science fiction film industry.

In Chapter One, "Imperial Rubber—Illegal Oranges: The Speculative Arcs of Karen Tei Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rain* Forest and *Tropic of Orange*, I examine the work of a Japanese American writer whose speculative writings remap Asian America by de-centering the United States and exhuming the traces of multiple empires that have shaped transpacific circulations of labor and culture. Karen Tei Yamashita uses the Brazilian Amazon and the U.S.-Mexico borderlands as the settings for her novels *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (1990) and *Tropic of Orange* (1997). In *Through the Arc*, Yamashita

[9] See Walter Benjamin 257-58. Benjamin famously writes: "A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress" (Theses on the Philosophy of History IX).

unearths U.S. neocolonial enterprises in Brazil by excavating the ruins of Fordlándia, a Ford rubber plantation in the Amazon rainforest from the 1920s and 30s. By analyzing archival material on Fordlándia alongside Yamashita's text, I situate the civilizing mission Ford used to rationalize his plantation-building within a longer history of nineteenth-century European imperialist discourses on tropical nature and race, which sustained ethnographic and scientific expeditions to the Amazon. Published in 1997, *Tropic of Orange* continues Yamashita's speculations on the transnational tropics by literally compressing space and time, dragging the Tropic of Cancer from Mazatlán to Los Angeles. Written in the wake of NAFTA, Yamashita's revisionist cartography emphasizes California's cultural and economic ties to both Latin America and the Pacific Rim while disrupting the multiple and uneven traffics of labor, goods, and culture on behalf of both multinational corporations and less visible enterprises in the global circuit. Drawing from the scholarship of Lisa Lowe, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Paul Gilroy, I argue that Yamashita articulates transpacific migrations in relationship to other histories of labor, immigration, racialization, and empire in the Americas, including Chicana renegotiations of *la frontera* and transatlantic formulations of an African diaspora. In this way, Yamashita's work contributes to a recalibration of Asian American studies that exceeds the nationalist frame, positing a multiethnic Latin America. I argue that Yamashita's novels exemplify the speculative mode being used to critique imperialist science, the ethnographic gaze, and histories of U.S. imperialism.

In Chapter Two, "The Speculative Futures of Race, Reproduction, and Citizenship," I investigate the production and reproduction of futurity in two speculative texts. In my consideration of Alfonso Cuarón's film *Children of Men* (2006) and Nalo

Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* (2000), I ask how a Mexican filmmaker and a Caribbean-Canadian writer might offer depictions of future worlds that resist techno-utopian visions of progress. Through an analysis of Cuarón's cinematography and narrative choices, I interrogate the gendered and racialized reproductive imperative he imposes on the pregnant body of Kee, the "fugee" woman who must navigate her way through the heavily surveilled police state of near-future England to get to a boat called *The Tomorrow*. I then turn to Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*, which I argue renegotiates the conditions of survival in end-of-the-world scenarios. In her depictions of ex-slave, post-apocalyptic societies, Hopkinson shifts the conditions of survival to emphasize cross-species alliances and gender-queer family formations that dislodge futurity from heteronormative domesticity. An AfroCaribbean Canadian writer, Hopkinson, like Yamashita, calls for the forging of transnational—or in this case, intergalactic and cross-species—coalitions in times of emergency. My chapter thus considers alternative imaginings of apocalypse that unravel the technoracializations often attached to this genre.

Taking place against the backdrop of forced interplanetary migration and cross-dimensional exile, Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* constructs a postcolonial imaginary of space and time travel that interrogates how history is recorded and how cultural memory is encoded. Hopkinson defamiliarizes the tropes of alienation and abduction by invoking a specific history of the slave trade's role in the conquest of the New World rather than the often racist and sexist depictions of alien Others from the perspective of the white male colonizer. In fact, readers are meant to imagine that the settlers of "New Half-way Tree" are the distant descendants of African slaves. In her speculations, she

calls on orality as much as digitality; the history of slavery alongside the history of technology; and code-sliding instead of code-writing in order to rewrite and expand the notion of science fiction. Hopkinson's work attests to the different tenor of a science fictive form that emerges from the postcolonial context of the Caribbean rather than from the U.S. and Western Europe.

My analysis of Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* builds on a body of African American literary criticism that already hints at the usefulness of speculation in revising U.S. hegemonic narratives of history, gender, and science. I position speculative fiction as a useful interrogative through which to critique slavery and other colonial systems of exploitative labor. I highlight Hopkinson's commitment to sketching an alternate genealogy to the genre of science fiction—one that is steeped in traditions of oral history, tales of haunting and ghosts, and slave narratives in contradistinction to a history of Western humanism and Enlightenment rationalism.

In the final chapter, "FANtastic Speculations: Slash Fiction and the Fantasies of Global Cinema," I argue that speculation—or, fantasy—capitalizes on and critiques late capitalist, neo-colonial fantasies of the global. I approach speculation in this section not only as a genre of writing but also as a resistant reading and viewing practice. As such, I investigate speculative work not only through literary forms but also through visual cultures and online fan communities. "FANtastic Speculations" examines fan responses to *The Matrix* multimedia enterprise. This study of "slash fiction," a term derived from fan queerings of the Kirk/Spock relationship in the late 1970s and early 1980s, raises questions about the ways in which the commercial and technological apparatuses of these multimedia fantasy enterprises work to profit from and appeal to gay consumers even as

they seek to close down and manage narratives of queerness. I argue that these efforts to shut down queer readings of fantasy characters are impossible and always incomplete.

My analysis examines spaces where the fantastic slips beyond the purview of commercially sanctioned meaning-making and examines off-site areas of cultural production such as fan webrings and online forums. I interrogate the capitalist fantasies behind these epic trilogies: the "horizontal integration" of video game tie-ins, fast-food figurines, and the various swords and necklaces sold on airplanes in SkyMall catalogs. I argue that slash fiction serves as a resistant alternative to "horizontal integration," in that it embodies a fan community's challenge to the enterprising, multimedia commodification of a subculture. These fan speculations work to counteract neo-liberal, capitalist fantasies of globalization, invisible labor, and heteronormative culture. Still, I present the fantasy film world as one particularly dynamic example of the culture industry's dialectical nature, where re-appropriation and renegotiation on the part of both Hollywood and its disobedient fans are in constant, mutual tension. My examination of queer potential within these fantastic realms remains aware of how the commercial interest in fantasy blockbusters works to profit from and appeal to gay consumers even as it seeks to close down and manage narratives of sexual difference.

This chapter also attends to the relationship between the speculative and spectatorship. I investigate how the fantastic speculations of slash fiction writers might be informed by other visual negotiations, such as interactive gaming practices, which allow the user to "hack" into a system. I draw from scholarship in visual culture studies, feminist and queer theory, and critical race theory to analyze these online slash stories and

track how cinematic texts travel through time and space undergoing perpetual revisions in the hands of rogue users and an international group of disobedient fans.

Conclusion

Within the field of science fiction studies, a certain amount of critical attention has already been given to feminist and socialist applications of SF. Feminist science fiction scholars such as Patricia Melzer, Marleen Barr, and Veronica Hollinger suggest ways in which SF can be useful in constructing feminist epistemologies of embodiment and sexuality. They often cite authors Joanna Russ, Marge Piercy, Ursula LeGuin, and Octavia Butler as exemplary of feminist science fiction. Building on the work of Darko Suvin, Utopian scholar Fredric Jameson posits science fiction as a "generic category specifically devoted to the imagination of alternative social and economic forms." (*Archaeologies of the Future* xiv). In this vein, Carl Freedman makes a strong case for the genre's inherent potential for revolutionary social transformation by mapping a genealogy of science fiction through utopian socialism and the work of Marx and Engels. Jameson and Freedman examine the work of SF authors Philip K. Dick and Kim Stanley Robinson, for instance, as critical of late capitalist greed and ecological irresponsibility.

One of my project's central questions is how science fiction has provided a meeting ground for various social and political activist groups. By expanding that meeting ground to include participants arriving at the genre via alternate (not Western European or U.S. American) paths, what other possible kinds of political collaboration emerge? I argue that *speculation* not only names a broader set of generic parameters but also

performs a kind of labor practice through which aggrieved groups launch critical reforms through aberrant uses of technologies and narratives *about* technological innovation.

Despite issuing several attacks on a form of institutional science that has historically not been kind to marginalized groups such as women, queers, and people of color, this project is not anti-science. Examining the production in and around the genre of science fiction, I investigate how the SF mode and science itself can work in ways that critique exoticizing, colonialist, and capitalist desires. Donna Haraway, in announcing her cyborg manifesto in 1991, called on feminists to renegotiate feminism's relationship to science as a necessary and powerful part of shifting gender politics. Afrofuturist scholars see in technoscience a conflicted site full of potential for revisionist history and radical reformulations of race in the future. Frederic Jameson and Kim Stanley Robinson observe in the current moment of global warming and ecocatastrophe a potential for an anti-capitalist, Utopian science to emerge.[10] Though there will always exist a tension between capitalist control of the scientific realm and resistant uses of science and science fiction, I hope to contribute to the discussion of science's and SF's potential to imagine more complex narratives that self-critically attend to the dangerous collusions among science, disciplining ideologies, and empire that feminist, Utopian, and Afrofuturist scholars have already begun.

This project raises several questions about the genre of science fiction as it intersects with race, sexuality, and nation. It interrogates the limited historiography and exclusionary practices of the SF genre and posits *speculation* as a more inclusive description of cultural texts that engage with but also call into question scientific practices and modes

[10] Jameson and Robinson, "Global Warming"

of knowledge production. Second, the dissertation investigates SF as it travels through global circuits of commercial power, international politics, transborder activist channels, and queer subcultures. Third, *Speculative Acts* addresses questions of SF audience, reception, and fandom, and I examine the genre's paradoxical relationship to its populist history and its popular appeal.

In this dissertation, I primarily consider speculative fiction and film generated and circulated around the turn of the twenty-first century. I take particular interest in this period's anxieties about immigration, reproductive science, sexual normativity, and foreign economies connected to but in competition with the U.S. In what follows, I hope to contribute to an ongoing discussion about science fiction as a space of critical discourse on sexuality, race, feminism, globalization and technoscience. By focusing on this moment of intensified flows of capital and labor across national borders, I attend to the ways in which late twentieth and early twenty-first century speculative fiction expresses and responds to a perceived threat that U.S. hegemonic claims to new markets and consumers in the global theater will be displaced and challenged by emergent foreign economies and domestic cultural production effecting this social change.

Chapter 1| Imperial Rubber—Illegal Oranges: The Speculative Arcs of Karen Tei Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* and *Tropic of Orange*

A 2007 Philips Norelco ad campaign features a female Asian robot as the face of the company's latest Moisturizing Shaving System for men in the UK and the US.[1] Sleek, silvery visuals and polished, electronic music set the stage for a futuristic narrative, draped in all-too-familiar trappings of a millennial techno-cool established in popular science fiction films such as *The Matrix*, *Minority Report*, and *I, Robot* (not to mention the award-winning Bjork video from which the ad heavily borrows).[2] These stylizations reveal a certain preoccupation with Asia's rise to technocultural prowess in the global theater. In this case, a robot with geisha hairdo, Asiatic eyes, and wrist-embedded, retractable electric razor prepares an ultramodern bathroom for the morning grooming rituals of a white man, who awaits his shave with a master's sense of entitlement. Mistress of bathroom ambience and gadgetry, the geisha-bot lays out a hand towel, opens the remote-controlled blinds, and turns on the gravity-defying shower with a wave of her hand. To perform the central task at hand, she approaches the man and begins to caress his face in circular motions, giving him the close but non-irritating shave he desires. As the man and his personal grooming mechanism stand in the shower, united in the miracle of wet-shave

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[1] The full commercial can be viewed on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6ZSZGUlHZ8, or an accelerated, condensed version can be viewed at the official Philips Norelco site: http://www.feeldifferent.philips.com/us/en/gallery.html.

[2] Though it appropriates the aesthetic stylizations of Bjork's 1999 "All Is Full of Love" video (dir. Chris Cunningham), the Norelco ad supplants the lesbian robot erotics at the core of the music video with a heteronormative, racialized power dynamic. In a clear example of how discourses around gender, race, and sexuality emerge always-already entangled, the advertisement capitalizes on a construction of Asian femininity that seeks to contain a potentially threatening female sexual desire (threatening because it is self-directed and self-sufficient) and to manage anxieties about Asian "tiger economies" poised to usurp the U.S. position of dominance in the global market.

The advertisement's slogan "Feel Different" also borrows from another iconic technocultural icon by modeling Apple's "Think Different" campaign of 1997 and the company's now ubiquitous trademark of translucent iProducts. As purveyors of the first medical x-ray machine in 1915, Philips itself played a pivotal role in cultivating the now prevalent association of transparency with technology.

technology, the camera captures the erotics of the scene by alternating between close-ups of the couple's lips in titillating proximity and wider shots of their spotlighted, full-body, nude embrace.

The fantasy rehearsed in this futuristic fiction of a razor-wielding geisha-bot is one of a domesticated Asian technoscience, gendered and sexualized to perform a subservient role, rendered recognizable through an all-too-familiar Western fantasy of geishas. The ad reveals the West's underlying paranoia about Asian economic success in the late twentieth century. In this imagined futurescape, the phallic threat of Asian technopower remains literally embedded within a female casing made available for an interface on the terms of white, male, heterosexual desire. The advertisement resuscitates a trite Orientalist portrayal of a docile Asian woman, retooled for the viewing and shaving pleasures of a twenty-first century, Western, male audience. At once the sign of high techne and of non-threatening service, the geisha-bot is supplemental, subservient, and even beholden to the West for her technological prowess.[3] In this narrative, she embodies but does not wield autonomous technocultural power. In this way, the RobotSkin ad cultivates an image of Asia as the dependent technological servant of Western economies and consumption. Asian modernity is represented not as an alternative to but as reliant on First World markets. In the U.S. racial imaginary, Asia is at once "ahead of the curve" (a high-tech robot) and "behind the times" (a timeless geisha). Fixed in time as either pre- or post-modern, "Asia" in this narrative does not exist beyond two historical eras when the West stood to gain the most from a paternalistic relationship with Japan.

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[3] See R. L. Rutsky's *High Techné: Art and Technology from the Machine Aesthetic to the Posthuman* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

When the "Feel Different" ad campaign extends its narrative apparatus to an interactive website, complete with animation shorts and plug-and-play storylines, its construction of an Asian subject becomes even more pronounced. The Flash introduction to the robotskin.com website announces:

> With the arrival of grooming robots, the relationship between man and machine evolves to an intimate new level. They are the most sophisticated grooming tools ever created. Technology which understands the human form better than we do ourselves. Once average men are being improved, enhanced, upgraded, the traditional balance of success and failure, shyness and confidence, is about to be upset—and the world will never feel the same again.[4]

Integrating a technocultural narrative of "progress" with a prescriptive U.S. immigrant paradigm of assimilation, the grooming robot's story is one of "arrival" and "improvement." Given that the assimilation model, as originally advanced by Chicago School sociologist Robert E. Park in the 1920s, was cast as a sort of "natural evolution" for immigrant groups, the reappearance of this conflation of futurity, science, and Asian subservience is unsettling, if unsurprising. Describing the "new" intimacy between man and machine, the ad has simply revamped an older relationship between Asia and the West in the form of the geisha.

I begin this chapter with this commercialized production of Asian technoracialization to bring into focus the ongoing cultural project of managing anxieties about emerging techno-markets in Asia at the dawn of the new millennium. The RobotSkin ad campaign ran primarily in the U.K. and U.S. at the end of 2007, a moment when the future of U.S. economic hegemony looked less certain in the face of Japan and a rapidly industrializing set of Asian countries (including South Korea, Singapore, Hong

[4] See http://www.robotskin.com/.

Kong, and Taiwan). I read the production of the geisha-bot as one unapologetic manifestation of U.S. paranoia about losing its dominant position in the global theater. Critical attention to popular science fiction representations of Asia as foreign, alien, and invasive to the U.S. nation-state remains vitally important to understanding the complex nexus of race, gender, and sexuality in the United States and how the U.S. positions itself in a global market increasingly dominated by technology rather than industry. Borrowing the stylized accoutrements of the science fiction genre, the Philips Norelco ad campaign projects its fantasy of a future in which the perceived Asian techno-threat recognizes its indebtedness and obligation to the Western world.

Other examples from contemporary popular culture further demonstrate the anxious technoracializations of alien Asians in many popular science fiction futurescapes. As *Battlestar Galactica*'s Lt. Sharon Valeri, Asian Canadian actor Grace Park plays a cylon, endlessly reproducible and marked as therefore duplicitous in nature to the extent that she must be repeatedly interrogated to prove her loyalty and allegiance to the humans, who consider her facile assimilability a horrible threat. In *The Matrix*, South and East Asians act as guardian computer programs, whose labor always materializes as marginal, peripheral, supplemental, and "offshore" to the central action. Critical attention to these instantiations of technoracialization disrupts the fantasy of a race-less future, and contemporary scholarship in Asian American Studies, including the work of Lisa Nakamura and Wendy Chun, vigilantly intervenes in such racialized constructions of technology that rely on "the reduction of the other to data" (Chun, *Control and Freedom*, 29).

I posit speculation as an important site of meaning making—a technology particularly attuned to scientific discourses as cultural production. In this chapter, I examine how one contemporary Asian American writer uses fantastic fabulations to speculate on the flexibility of borders and narrate North-South Asian American migrations that are often overshadowed by the prevalence of an East-West framework of Asian American studies that the field, in its transnational turn, has only begun to interrogate. By unearthing forgotten imperial histories that enlist the support of scientific and technological discourses in particular, Karen Tei Yamashita's speculative works suggest the ways in which other scientific fictions have participated in rationalizing and extending the reach of Western imperial and neocolonial enterprises. The "speculative arcs" of Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (1990) and *Tropic of Orange* (1997) span both time and space, highlighting transits not only between Latin America, Asia, and the United States, but also between the intertwined layers of empire that connect these geographies through time. Whereas *Through the Arc* achieves this speculative work by excavating the traces of the transimperial rubber industry in the Amazon rainforest, *Tropic of Orange* analyzes a shifting U.S.-Mexico border to locate empire on the move in a more contemporary moment of neoliberal globalization.

Because Yamashita and her speculative fictions exist at the crossroads of Asian American and Latin American literary studies, these texts have recently garnered attention from the emerging scholarship on hemispheric American studies in ways that bring together and complicate North-South and East-West frameworks. Addressing both *Through the Arc* and Yamashita's second book *Brazil-Maru*, scholar Rachel C. Lee highlights how Yamashita's work "broadens definitions of Asian America to include

Asian diasporas to Latin America" and suggests that the "diminishment of both Asia and America by the presence of a third location, Brazil—requires a rethinking of the orientalist and counterorientalist dualism undergirding much of Asian American criticism" (*Americas* 121, 106). Even as Asian American studies moves to examine Asian migration to sites other than the United States, American studies scholars should include histories of Chinese migration to Mexico, or Indo-Caribbean second migrations to Canada, or Japanese-Brazilian reverse migration to Japan in its revisionist formulations of the Americas. The inclusion of Asian migrations to and from the Americas is what Kandice Chuh argues for when she reads Yamashita's triangulation of Brazil, Japan, and the U.S. as an insistence "upon the integration of an east-west aspect to hemispheric American studies" ("Of Hemispheres" 622). In *Tropic of Orange*, Yamashita continues to expand the conceptualization of the Pacific Rim by looking to Mazatlán and Los Angeles as two linked nodes in a transnational network, pulling together multiple axes of affiliation. Calling *Tropic of Orange* a "border novel," Caroline Rody suggests that the text "explodes that furiously defended frontier [of the U.S.-Mexico border] and cultivates a multicultural sublime, assembling a cast of thousands in a postmodern, transnational, electronically wired L.A." ("Transnational Imagination" 133). Yamashita's works certainly depict multiethnic and inter-American communities brought together through extraordinary circumstances, but I argue that they reconfigure the conceptual terrain of Asian America more specifically by linking Asian American migration to other histories of racialization, immigration, labor, and empire in the Americas.

Despite bearing many of the characteristics of science fiction and fantasy, Yamashita's oeuvre rarely gets categorized as speculative fiction. Throughout this chapter,

I argue that Yamashita's writings should be considered speculative fictions because, while they push against the limits of science fiction, they also foreground the deployment of Science (i.e. scientific practices, epistemologies, methods, and discourses) as a formative component of the transnational movements of peoples and capital that Yamashita articulates in *Through the Arc* and *Tropic of Orange*. Gregory Rabassa, translator of Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, calls Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* a "fine, satirical piece of writing."[5] On its back cover, the publisher's note describes the novel as a "freewheeling black comedy," and various literary critics and book reviewers have characterized it as "a parable of ecological devastation" (R. Lee 113), "a burlesque of comic-strip adventures and apocalyptic portents" (Backstrom 190), "an exuberant melodrama" (Harris 6), and "a quasi-magical realist narrative" (R. Lee, *Americas* 106). In what follows, however, I emphasize the importance of reading Yamashita's work not only as Asian American literature, but also as speculative fiction, in order to understand the intertwined histories of science, empire, and the transnational movements of peoples and goods emphasized throughout her work.

I take particular interest in how Yamashita's speculative fictions operate as technologies of memory that renegotiate historical narratives even as they project futuristic, alternative worlds. What I am calling the "speculative arcs" of Karen Tei Yamashita's works refers to arcs across both space and time. In the context of speculative fiction, which takes the fourth dimension of time quite seriously as a vital component of space, U.S. historical "amnesia" and its politics of forgetting amount to a kind of temporal colonization, violent in its purposeful dis-remembering of subjects and events

[5] See the back cover matter of *Through the Arc*.

that expose contradictions between its imperial efforts and its rhetoric of liberalism. Marita Sturken writes that a "'culture of amnesia' actually involves the generation of memory in new forms" (2). In this chapter, I posit speculation as a useful tactic for those who would travel through time to revisit obfuscated historical moments that nevertheless continue to inform narratives of the present and extrapolations of the future. Yamashita's "critical remembering" of U.S. imperial projects in Latin America is processed through an Asian American analytic that complicates the geisha-bot narrative by investigating Asian migrations that de-center the U.S. and offer complex stories of shifting affiliations, fluctuating economic relationships between Asia and the Americas, and dynamic patterns of secondary migrations.

I bring together these two works in particular, in part because they both locate their inquiries around U.S. imperialism in Latin America and Asian America's participation within this disavowed history. Focusing on these two late-twentieth century texts also allows me to examine how speculative fiction engages with the narratives of progress and development that continue to bolster the projects of neocolonial expansionism and neoliberal capitalism in a post-Fordist era of flexible accumulation. Addressing manifestations of U.S. empire first in Brazil in the early twentieth century and then in Mexico, especially after the implementation of multiple neoliberal trade policies such as NAFTA, Yamashita's speculations examine how these adaptive imperial enterprises relied on earlier established European colonial scientific discourses and also on rhetorical systems about technoculture to manufacture flexible geopolitical borders.

Beginning with an analysis of *Through the Arc*, the chapter focuses first on Brazil as a site of Yamashita's transnational speculations. When Yamashita moved from the United

States to Japan and then to Brazil in the late 1970s and early 1980s, she was pursuing her interest in and research about Japanese immigration to and from the Americas. Home to the largest population of Japanese outside of Japan, Brazil was also Yamashita's home for almost ten years, during which time she married a Brazilian architect and started a family. Yamashita's early interrogations of transnational movements inform all her works of speculative fiction, which often use Brazil as the primary site of inquiry into various but interconnected issues such as Brazil's colonial past, its current relation to global capitalism, and the economic and ecological sustainability of its future.

In my analysis of *Through the Arc*, I argue that Yamashita calls attention to these other trajectories of Asian "American" migration by emphasizing cyclical structures. Migration and reverse migration, excavation of things repressed and disavowed, and the unraveling of narratives of progress and development all shape the arcs of her text. Yamashita's work thus re-members, re-imagines, and renegotiates a transnational Asian America. Following Lee's and Chuh's analysis of Yamashita's contribution to Asian American literary studies, I argue that Yamashita presents an immigration narrative that complicates an assimilationist teleology. How do the trajectories of transnational movements of labor and capital in Yamashita's speculative fiction renegotiate more established narratives of Asian immigration to the Americas? How does Yamashita's account of extraordinary bodies moving through space and time, intersecting with other flows of people, expand notions of Asian American experience? These are some of the key questions I investigate in my analysis of *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*.

In *Tropic of Orange*, Yamashita shifts her primary site of inquiry from Brazil to the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. I argue that Yamashita expands "border studies" to account for

border zones beyond the U.S.-Mexico context. Yamashita both invokes border theory and remaps what "the border" references. In her formulation, Mexico and California also share an important border with the Pacific Rim. In this way, Yamashita exceeds many theoretical frameworks available for a discussion of borders. Aligning her own work with a literary genealogy of African American and Chicano/a writers such as Octavia Butler, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Guillermo Gómez-Peña, who also work in the speculative mode, Yamashita positions *la frontera* as a speculative space informed by a multi-ethnic collaboration that defies the logic of border division into two sides.

In both *Through the Arc* and *Tropic of Orange*, Yamashita situates Asian American immigration to the Americas in relation to multiple sites of empire-building, including European colonization of Latin America; U.S. expansionism in the early twentieth century; Japanese empire-building before World War Two; and the proliferation of neoliberal capitalism through late twentieth-century "trade agreements" such as NAFTA. I read such trans-imperial traces in her texts as indicative of an attention to how the transpacific and the transatlantic overlap in Brazil and the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. By analyzing Yamashita's text alongside archival material on the Ford rubber plantation to which *Through the Arc* centrally alludes, I show how Yamashita links nineteenth-century European imperialism (in South America and Southeast Asia) with early twentieth-century U.S. neocolonial land holdings in Brazil. These historical records of the little-known Fordist plantation in the Amazon rainforest called Fordlándia reveal stunning correlations between European, colonial, "tropical science" and the U.S. civilizing discourses used to legitimize the Ford plantation.

In *Tropic of Orange*, Yamashita ties U.S. involvement in war, colonialism, and neocolonialism in Asia to domestic systems of racialization. Published in 1997 and written in the shadow of NAFTA (1994), Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* examines the relationships among seven persons, their movements across the geographical region of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, and their material connections to increasingly intensified circulations—both sanctioned and illicit—of labor, goods, and culture. In *Tropic of Orange*, a time and space traveler modeled on Guillermo Gómez-Peña drags the Tropic of Cancer hundreds of miles north when he transports an enchanted orange from Mazatlán, Mexico, to Los Angeles. This astonishing event overturns many spatial logics in the City of Angels: abandoned SUVs become shelters for the city's homeless population; gangs must renegotiate their turf; and national economies begin to implode when millions begin to hoard oranges, which have been quarantined by the U.S. government. Yamashita's migrant orange—along with the shuttling of produce via commercial trucks and human parts through an underground organ trade network—gestures toward California's cultural and economic ties to Latin America and the Pacific Rim through the multiple and uneven traffics of laborers, drugs, organs, fruits and vegetables on behalf of both multinational corporations and less visible enterprises in the global circuit.

Yamashita's writings in the speculative mode and her attention to histories of science and empire are central to a more transnational imagining of Asian America.[6] Both *Through the Arc* and *Tropic of Orange* exert pressure on the generic delineations of Asian American literature and science fiction by claiming to be both at once. If Yamashita has expanded notions of Asian American literature in the sense that she has de-centered the

[6] See Leong and Grewal et al.

U.S. by focusing on Asian migration to other sites in the Americas and by noting the ways in which not only U.S. but also European and Japanese imperial efforts have shaped that history of migration, then what else is at stake in staging these interventions through the generic medium of science fiction? Why is the particular intersection of science and fiction vital to an expanded formulation of Asian American Studies in an age when narratives of Asian technocultural prowess stir up anxieties of the U.S. being unseated as the dominant force in the global market? This chapter considers a history of imperial and neocolonial structures in Brazil, the overlapping nature of various empires in South America, and the technoracialization of the global Asian subject.[7] In *Through the Arc,* Yamashita focuses on the presence of U.S. multinational corporations in Latin America as a manifestation of a longer history of empire in Brazil. The narrative suggests that earlier empire-builders shrewdly cultivated a racialized understanding of the tropics and established the beginnings of a history of imperial efforts in the guise of benevolent enterprises, including tropical medicine, technological development, and philanthropic foundations that supported scientific and medical research.

In the speculative landscape of *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*, it is not only a legacy of globalization but also a history of science that Yamashita excavates in the Amazon rainforest. Through subtle yet striking allusions to Fordlándia—Henry Ford's rubber plantation in the Amazon—and to nearly obsessive European ethnographic forays to Brazil during the same time period, Yamashita's *Through the Arc* implicates Western science's collusion with European and U.S. imperial enterprises. In my analysis of Fordlándia, I examine the larger project of Fordist social reform, which extended its

[7] Several Asian American scholars have examined orientalist representations of Asians and Asianness in U.S. technocultural discourse. See, for example, *Asian America.Net: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Cyberspace*, eds. Rachel C. Lee and Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong and *Cybertypes* by Lisa Nakamura.

reach beyond the U.S. under a banner of "benevolent science" and "technological progress." Because the plantation met with consistent financial difficulties, Fordlándia's justification for renewed funding and support relied heavily on its self-promotion as a civilizing mission. I investigate the rubber plantation's disciplining of its primarily indigenous laboring subjects through the imposition of U.S. social institutions (schools, churches, hospitals), cultural practices (prohibition of drinking and smoking, viewings of Hollywood films), and labor administration (punch cards, a 9-to-5 workday, ID tags). I argue that, by foregrounding this imperial Fordist experiment in her postcolonial speculative fiction, Yamashita interrogates how "science" in collaboration with neocolonial capitalist enterprises constructed, raced, gendered, and sexualized subjects. Through linguistic and material disciplining structures, this model promoted U.S. "modernity" by capitalizing on Western, or Northern, fantasies of "the tropics."

In *Tropic of Orange*, Yamashita continues her interrogations of such transimperial machinations through an examination of the "technologies" that articulate and renegotiate the U.S.-Mexico border. Yamashita scrutinizes systems of border surveillance and policing and investigates the semi-permeability of the U.S.-Mexico border that remains open to certain subjects and goods and closed to others. I then argue that she uses the speculative mode to articulate alternative uses of technology that work toward different ends.

Extrapolation through Excavation: *Through the Arc of the* (Haunted) *Rainforest*

Narrated by a sentient alien sphere orbiting around the head of a Japanese-Brazilian migrant, *Through the Arc* revisits the speculative space of the Amazon and

summons several extraordinary, if not extraterrestrial, subjects to the site, including Kazumasa Ishimaru, the Japanese ex-rail inspector from whose cranial orbit a gyrating, rubberized sphere narrates the novel; Batista and Tania Aparecida Djapan, who manage a worldwide, fortune-telling, pigeon courier service; Mané Pena, a healer indigenous to the Amazon Valley who cures people of their afflictions and ailments using a magical feather; Chico Paco, a religious pilgrim turned radio evangelist whose love for his disabled neighbor Gilberto motivates his faith; and J.B. Tweep, a three-armed entrepreneur from the U.S. who becomes enamored not only with corporate expansion in Brazil but also with a triple-breasted French ornithologist. Through these characterizations, Yamashita presents an Amazon populated not only by indigenous inhabitants but also by local and global travelers who arrive at the rainforest via circuits of migration, capital expansion, and religious journey.

In somewhat of a reversal of the role of aliens in science fiction, manifestations of the alien in this Asian American novel take the shape not of racially marked invader-others but of Northern and Western mutant agents of empire such as the triple-breasted European scientist Michelle Mabelle and her lover, the three-armed U.S. businessman J.B. Tweep. Mabelle and Tweep embody the over-indulgent desires of colonial and neocolonial enterprises in the Amazon. Michelle and J.B.'s marriage (a union between science and capitalism) unlocks a "capacity for insatiable lust" and "the possibilities of unmitigated pleasure" (123). Mabelle, who "came from a long line of bird lovers," including a great-grandfather who "met Paul Gauguin in Tahiti" (122), studies exotic birds of the Amazon

through the cultivated, colonial gaze of the tropics, exemplified in Gauguin's fetishization of Tahitian women in his paintings and writings.[8]

Michelle also pursues her research in the vein of the scientific expeditions that occasioned many of the first European ventures to South America. French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, for example, conducted some of his earliest ethnographic fieldwork in Brazil between 1935 and 1939. The resulting memoir/field journal/social science manifesto *Tristes Tropiques* begins with the paradoxical declaration: "Je hais les voyages et les explorateurs," or: "I hate traveling and explorers" (Lévi-Strauss 13). The volume, which Yamashita references in her "Author's Note" to *Through the Arc* and which reveals Lévi-Strauss' constant wrestling with the ethics of ethnographic fieldwork and professed disgust with scientific adventure writing, has become a staple in anthropological debate. While describing the "basic elements" of the Brazilian soap opera, or *novela*, form that inspired *Through the Arc*, Yamashita writes: "Claude Levi-Strauss described it all so well so many years ago: *Tristes Tropiques*—an idyll of striking innocence, boundless nostalgia and terrible ruthlessness." By juxtaposing a foundational text of Western social science with Brazilian popular culture, Yamashita asserts that *Tristes Tropiques* and the Brazilian *novela* share a penchant for melodrama and sensation that render them both speculative texts,

[8] See Edmond and O'Brien. O'Brien writes that Gauguin, "whose vision of the Pacific has cast an enduring shadow on all that followed," spent time not only in Tahiti but also in Brazil in Rio de Janeiro. O'Brien writes: "Like so many Occidental voyagers before him, Gauguin lusted for the mythologized halcyon days of Tahiti encapsulated by Bougainville. At first he was lacking any substantial knowledge of Tahiti, but what loomed largest in his imagination was a place of tropical fecundity, feminine beauty, and sexual emancipation that waited for immortalization. Gauguin's Tahiti was confected by more than a century of Occidental travel literature, anthropology, and art and half a century of photography. From the 1880s, Gauguin's formative artistic years, the long-standing South Seas myths woven from the earlier phases of colonization were revived and embellished for a popular audience of readers with a fresh interest in the empire." (216)

participating in the perpetual reconstitution of a national and international understanding of Brazilian culture.

J.B. Tweep's enterprising efforts in the Amazon point to the commercial involvement of the United States in Brazil during the early twentieth century and its efforts to incorporate Latin America into its "manifest destiny." With three arms, he is the living embodiment of the multiply and relentlessly reaching U.S. corporations with interests overseas. Through J.B.'s story, Yamashita complicates the alien encounter. J.B.'s experience of his alien body asserts a level of acceptance not usually associated with mutation and difference. He thinks of his physical difference as an asset. "As far as J.B. was concerned," writes Yamashita, "he had entered a new genetic plane in the species… He was a better model, the wave of the future" (30). In his eyes, his third arm renders him so exceptional that he exceeds the normative bounds of the world around him. He finds that the assembly line, musical compositions, and conventional sporting rules can not adjust their logics for his extraordinary abilities. He throws off the rhythm of production by working too efficiently, gets bored with Beethoven and Chopin because "there was nothing written for his particular expertise," and gets kicked off his baseball team "because there were no rules for a two-mitt player" (31). In J.B.'s case, difference may lead to unemployment and ostracism, but it gets quickly converted to a position of exceptionalism. J.B.'s extraordinary abilities find their ultimate fulfillment in the service of the ever-insatiable appetite and ever-expanding domain of capitalism. On one hand, Yamashita's critique of a bilaterally biased world interrogates the systemic scope of normativity. At the same time, though, her depiction of the multinational corporation leader is one of excess and mutation.

The terrain *Through the Arc* examines is itself a mutant space. Described as "an enormous impenetrable field of some unknown solid substance, stretching for millions of acres in all directions" along the floor of the rainforest, the Matacão attracts the attention of "scientists, supernaturalists and ET enthusiasts, sporting the old Spielberg rubber masks" (16). Though early conjectures characterize the Matacão as alien, this miraculously pliable and tensile material turns out not to be otherworldly but very much a product of earth's own making:

> The Matacão, scientists asserted, had been formed for the most part within the last century, paralleling the development of the more common forms of plastic, polyurethane and Styrofoam. Enormous landfills of nonbiodegradable material buried under virtually every populated part of the Earth had undergone tremendous pressure, pushed ever farther into the lower layers of the Earth's mantle. The liquid deposits of the molten mass had been squeezed through underground veins to virgin areas of the Earth. The Amazon Forest, being one of the last virgin areas on Earth, got plenty. (202)

Rather than animating the Matacão plastic as an invasive foreigner, Yamashita insists that it is the disavowed slag of capitalist over-accumulation and hubris. As the text unfolds against the backdrop of the Matacão, Yamashita denudes the mystique constructed around it, revealing the black plastic to be the compressed regurgitation of First World waste—the byproduct of the most powerful and productive economies, surfacing in the Third World. The rubbery and plastic properties of the Matacão allude to the resilience and flexibility of empire, which continues to resurface in mutated form in Yamashita's extrapolation of this near-future that emerges from an excavated history of U.S. and European empire in the South American tropics.

Through the Arc's rainforest is a speculative space in which all sorts of discarded, forgotten, and disavowed histories bubble to the surface. Just adjacent to the Matacão

rests a graveyard of military vehicles, war planes, and Ford Model T's. Amid the grey, sticky goop of napalm, this rainforest "parking lot" gives rise to a strange, new species of mice and spectacular new colorations for butterflies, birds, and amphibians (99). Yamashita writes:

> The entomologists were shocked to discover that their rare butterfly only nested in the vinyl seats of Fords and Chevrolets and that their exquisite reddish coloring was actually due to a steady diet of hydrated ferric oxide, or rusty water from the oxidation of abandoned U.S. military vehicles (100).

In this example, Yamashita upsets the teleological narrative of scientific "discovery." The most exotic-looking, tropical species of the Amazon are already biologically entangled with clandestine, neo-colonial projects in Brazil. The spectacular colorations of these jungle organisms come from their nibbling on the rusty skeletons of U.S. industrial and military vehicles. This surprising diet serves as a piquant reminder of the U.S. military presence in Latin America throughout the twentieth century.

In another example of resurfacing discarded histories, Yamashita continues to interrogate Western interpretations of the Amazon through the questionable lens of early ethnographic research. She writes: "[S]ome anthropologist ran about frantically re-editing and annotating a soon-to-be-published article about the primitive use of mirrors in ancient religious rites" after encountering the shiny bumpers and rearview mirrors stripped from the cars in the rainforest parking lot (100). Yamashita's construction of the Amazon forces revision of romanticized and overdetermined views of the tropics held over from nineteenth-century European representations of the jungle as a space of unspoiled, unfettered nature, in need of discovery and discipline through interpretation, conquest, and/or exploitation. This anthropologist's forced re-evaluation of the tropics

also points to productions of scientific knowledge in the Amazon that changed medical history in Europe. In her history of "tropical empiricism," Brazilian scholar Júnia Ferreira Furtado writes: "Knowledge gleaned from new elements found in these exotic environments…would later transform medicinal practice in Portugal, the East, and in South America, and would force authors to adopt new classification schemes, which in turn stimulated the extensive production of literature mixing medicine and natural history" (129). In this way, the multidirectional flow of scientific knowledge production depicted in *Through the Arc* upsets the colonial construction of center and periphery.

Historian of science Nancy Leys Stepan situates the enduring tropicalist representations of the rainforest in the context of European empire-building, the emergence of racist pseudoscience, and ethnographic travel and tourism to Latin America.[9] Yamashita revises the jungle narrative of tropical danger and contagion by tracing the perception of a wild, out-of-control, mutant landscape back to not only imperial fantasies but also the material operations of empire in the Amazon. By embedding the rainforest floor with a mantle of manmade, first-world solidified sludge, Yamashita suggests that "the jungle," when excavated, reveals a cavernous system of northern/European appetite for mining resources and disavowal through a projection of exoticism. This disavowal takes material form in the pollution, waste, and over-accumulation of capitalist imperialism.

[9] In the epilogue of *Picturing Tropical Nature*, Stepan asks: "As we look to the future, what place will tropical nature hold in the imagination? In an era of the commodification of nature on an unprecedented scale and of wholesale environmental destruction; when world travel and global networks make all places seem increasingly alike…--shall we then find that 'tropical nature', as an imaginative construction, has itself become banal and trivialized? If so, what will the consequences be for our empathetic understanding of the natural world, especially the tropical world that we are so rapidly destroying?" (240).

While the novel tropes mutated bodies as indicators of U.S. and European imperialist developments in the Amazon, it also, through Kazumasa Ishimaru's intricate and profound attachment to his satellite orb, raises questions about Japan's sometimes contradictory connections to the expansive logics of late capitalism. As Rachel C. Lee has already deftly argued, Yamashita's characterization of Kazumasa Ishimaru gestures not only to the familiar archetype in Asian American literature of the Chinese American railroad worker, but also to "an elite transnational" in "a world where Asian immigrants to the Americas are just as likely to be the owners of capital and the exploiters of labor as to be the persecuted migrant worker" (Lee *Americas* 118). Because the ball detects new sources of Matacão plastic, Kazumasa and his orbiting sphere become "the key to this incredible source of wealth" (Yamashita 144). As Kazumasa's monetary and spinning peripheral assets become increasingly embroiled in the expansionist project of J.B.'s multinational corporation GGG Enterprises, the ball remarks: "Greed was a horrible thing. Kazumasa could, if necessary, divest himself of his monetary fortune, but he could not rid himself of me" (145). Kazumasa's ball, which is comprised of the same rubbery material as the Matacão, attaches itself to Kazumasa's head, pulling him toward the epicenter of neocolonial transformation of the Amazon. This points not only to Japan's history as an empire hungry for resource-rich territories (resulting in increased military expansionism during the 1930s in Manchuria, Micronesia, and Southeast Asia), but also to more contemporary investments of Japanese global capital in Latin America, which according to recent studies on Japanese-owned maquiladoras, are responsible for the generation of an egregious amount of hazardous waste.[10] At the end of the novel,

[10] See Kopinak.

Kazumasa Ishimaru suffers and mourns the loss of his attachment to that which marked him as alien. While still tenuously connected to Western capitalist enterprises, Kazumasa Ishimaru negotiates multiple transnational affiliations, which remain visible in "the tropical tilt of his head" (211).

Kazumasa's sphere is comprised of the same magnetized and extremely durable plastic material as the Matacão, and, despite its crash-landing into the text (and Kazumasa's orbit) from outer space in Chapter 1, its path of migration reveals it to be not an alien, but an indigenous body returning to its point of origin. This revelation raises the question: "What is alien?" If even the most alien-looking entity in this work of speculative fiction turns out to be of the earth, then can one extrapolate that migrant subjects are not so easily defined as "alien" or "native" either? If the Amazon rainforest yields a seemingly new raw material that turns out to be the recycled detritus of the so-called civilized world, then what is excavated in the Third World is already tangled in the machinations of the First World. The story of the alien thus always returns the reader to a layered history of imperialist ventures into the Amazon to mine the rainforest for its resources. The irony of this connection between the alien and the imperialist invader is the history of jungle narratives that imagine from the perspective of the colonizer or the neocolonial entrepreneur the jungle as an alien space of extraordinary flora and fauna and "primitive" peoples. To this extent, *Through the Arc*'s rainforest becomes a site of excavating imperial legacies rather than a site that empire relentlessly mines.

The text works structurally to emphasize this theme of returns and disrupt the developmental narrative that has often accompanied the relating of Asian American history and the story of "developing" nations. While *Through the Arc* is, as Rachel Lee

insightfully asserts, an Asian American immigrant narrative, it belies one kind of very limited immigrant narrative that constructs the trajectory of immigration as one that involves leaving a homeland to arrive in a new world where assimilation is upheld as the path to success.[11] Structurally, *Through the Arc* rejects such a teleological organization, moving through sections titled: "Part I: The Beginning," "Part II: The Developing World," "Part III: More Development," but then: "Part IV: Loss of Innocence," "Part V: More Loss," and "Part VI: Return." It is a structure that refuses the developmental narrative that often accompanies the discourses around both immigration and "developing countries." In Kazumasa Ishimaru's name and in the title of another related Yamashita work *Brazil-Maru*, Yamashita riffs on the Japanese suffix "-maru" which means "cycle," or "circle." The suffix also significantly gestures toward the names of the transpacific ships that facilitated Japanese immigration to South America. In 1908, the *Kasato-Maru* brought the first 781 Japanese immigrants to the port of Santos in São Paolo, Brazil, and the *Brazil-Maru* was the name of the vessel that shuttled tens of thousands of Japanese settlers to Brazil, Argentina, and Peru for two decades following World War II.[12] From its title and epigraph, *Through the Arc* emphasizes the cyclical processes that reflect Yamashita's fascination with these transpacific migrations that reveal dynamic and diverse circulations of people rather than unidirectional movements from one place to another. The epigraph reads:

> I have heard Brazilian children say that whatever passes through the arc of a rainbow becomes its opposite. But what is the opposite of a bird? Or for that matter, a human being? And what then, is the great

[11] In the 1920s and 1930s, Robert E. Park of the Chicago School of Sociology proffered a four-step theory of assimilation, positing assimilation as the final and inevitable stage of development for immigrants in the United States.
[12] See Linger xiv.

> rain forest, where, in its season, the rain never ceases and the rainbows are myriad?

Yamashita's ruminations here—on arcs of migration, myriad passages across ephemeral boundaries, and the complex unfolding of transformation—characterize the central themes of her work and attest to her refusal of an uncomplicated narrative. The passage presents the rainforest as an already speculative space where constant precipitation yields a propensity for messy mutation, not neatly packaged transformation.

Through the Arc's account of movement proves too dynamic, varied, and unpredictable to abide the artificial parameters of an immigrant narrative uncomplicatedly plotted along the "old world" to "new world" *telos*. Published in 1990, Yamashita's text attends to the profound shifts in the conditions of Japanese-Brazilian immigration that took hold during the 1980s. While Japanese immigration began shortly after the abolition of slavery in Brazil in 1888, Japan had long since outpaced Brazil in economic development, recovering from World War Two as "an industrial power of the first rank" (Linger 22). In 1990, Japan, in an effort to fill a deficit of unskilled industrial labor, issued an invitation to overseas Japanese, including about 200,000 Japanese Brazilians, to return to Japan. Though Japan had initially turned to workers from Pakistan, Iran, and Bangladesh, Japanese Brazilians were considered more assimilable subjects who could serve the same labor niche without presenting Japan with an overtly visible (and racialized) face of migrant labor (Linger 23-25). In Yamashita's *Through the Arc*, movements of peoples are understood to be incredibly complex, in that multiple systems of racialization and shifting centers of global capital inform and shape these patterns of migration. The substantial migration of Japanese-Brazilians (back) to Japan in the late

1980s and 1990s renders the telling of Asian American history as having only one trajectory an impossibility and inaccuracy. The alien invader, in Yamashita's revision of a well-rehearsed science fiction trope, turns out to be a return of the repressed and literally attaches itself to the story of Japanese-Brazilian immigration.

In her work *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Avery Gordon asserts that a haunted text fights "an oppressed past," which she defines as "whatever organized violence has repressed and in the process formed into a past, a history, remaining nonetheless alive and accessible to encounter" (65). In bringing together "the ghost story" with Walter Benjamin's materialist historiography, Gordon asks us to take seriously haunted texts and the ghosts they produce, as an opening to remember the disappeared, the dispossessed, and the disavowed. Yamashita's *Through the Arc* is precisely such a haunted text, and it incites a remembering of European imperialist and U.S. neocolonial enterprises in the Amazon. Through her use of the science fiction genre, Yamashita explores the troubling collusion between science and neocolonial enterprises in "developing countries," diverse and multiple arcs of affiliation across the Pacific, layered and intertwined legacies of empire in the Americas and in Asia, and the relationship between nationalism and narratives of progress. While the fabulist tale strikes a degree of levity in tone, *Through the Arc* issues a quite serious critique of ecological nonchalance, the avaricious tenacity of multinational corporations, a history of racist science in a racially mixed and idealized country, and U.S. neo-colonial presence in Brazil under the guise of scientific improvement and benevolent medical care. These are the various "ghosts" that haunt Yamashita's speculative fiction. In the spirit of "investigating

how that which appears absent can indeed be a seething presence," I turn next to one particularly unsettling spectral apparition unveiled at the site of The Matacão (Gordon 8).

Imperial Rubber: Residues of U.S. Empire in the Brazilian Rainforest

> Take away from us the motor vehicle, and I do not know what would happen. The damage would be more serious and lasting than if our land were laid waste by an invader. We could recover from the blowing up of New York City and all the big cities on the Atlantic seaboard more quickly than we could recover from the loss of our rubber.
>
> --Harvey Firestone, 1926
>
> History is more or less bunk.
>
> --Henry Ford
>
> I will outnumber you.
> I will outbillion you.
> I am the spectacle in the forest.
> I am the inventor of rubber.
> I will outrubber you.
> Sir, the reality of your world is nothing more
> than a rotten caricature of great opera.
>
> --Werner Herzog, *Fitzcarraldo*[13]

[13] In Herzog's 1982 film *Fitzcarraldo*, the eponymous protagonist dreams of building an opera house in the middle of the Amazon. His impossible dream is realized by staging an opera aboard the steam ship he originally commissioned for the purpose of securing a fortune in rubber. Capitalizing on the suspiciously volunteered labor of hundreds of Indians, Fitzcarraldo dragged his ship over a mountain to gain access to untapped land, only to have it cut loose by the same Indian tribe on the other side and set adrift into perilous rapids. In a keen and complex analysis of the colonial gaze in both *Fitzcarraldo* and another Herzog jungle film *Aguirre*, Lutz P. Koepnick argues that "both films stage colonial enterprises destined to fail due to the heroes' inability to escape his Western imagination… [T]he chaotic diversity of the rainforest exposes the systematic inappropriateness of Western routines of cognition and ordering… Herzog at once comprehends the aporetic shortsightedness of the colonial gaze and yet in his role as an auteur director, he reproduces the instrumental logic of his hero" (135, 137). As his zany protagonist suggests, Herzog does make a spectacle of the jungle, but in doing so, critics have wondered, does he not only render the rubber industry a rotten caricature but also participate in another form of Western (cultural) imperialism? Yamashita, whose perspective is informed by third world feminism, criticizes the European, auteur artist/scientist position, not only by rendering these would-be Fitzcarraldos mutants in her tale, but also by

> …the ghostly matter will not go away. It is waiting for you and it will shadow you and it will outwit all your smart moves as that jungle grows thicker and deeper.
>
> --Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*

The "discovery" of rubber announced by French geographer Charles-Marie de La Condamine in the mid-eighteenth century to European scientists occasions one early manifestation of what could be called "science fiction" in the sense that his expedition journal, published as a scientific treatise, also reads as a rather fantastical travel narrative. As elucidated by Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes,* La Condamine's report on his expedition to the Amazon is strikingly speculative in nature, "written mainly not as a scientific report, but in the popular genre of survival literature" (20). Rubber is just one spectacular character among many in La Condamine's narrative, which describes the strangeness of a tropical "new world" and even attempts to verify the existence of the mythic Amazons. For Pratt, La Condamine's scientific fictions "suggest the extent to which science came to articulate Europe's contacts with the imperial frontiers, and to be articulated by them" (20). Because it narrates a European's encounter with an otherworldly landscape, populated with "alien" flora, fauna, and other entities, La Condamine's account of his scientific expedition can be understood as a science fiction produced in the service of empire.

The history of the rubber industry necessarily stretches across multiple geographies and temporalities, linking the tropical zones of the Amazon and Southeast

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dislocating narrative voice to the sentient sphere orbiting the head of a Japanese Brazilian protagonist.

Asia, the competing imperial holdings of England, the Netherlands, and the United States, and La Condamine's 1744 expedition with that of Ford Company geographer Carl LaRue in 1927, the year Henry Ford bought approximately 2.5 million acres of Amazon rainforest in the northern state of Pará, Brazil and established a sizeable rubber plantation.[14] "Fordlándia" was designed to be an all-inclusive, neocolonial system, extending the plantation infrastructure beyond sawmills and processing plants to include U.S.-style hospitals, schools, white clapboard houses, and even recreational facilities such as a motion-picture theater and an eighteen-hole golf course. As documented in the company's archives, the Ford rubber plantations in Brazil worked to fulfill a Fordist fantasy of bringing "modernity" and "progress" to the "almost impenetrable tropical jungle."[15]

In 1990, Karen Tei Yamashita excavates this largely forgotten scene of U.S. imperialism in Brazil and extrapolates from such imperial legacies what might happen to the Amazon when a valuable, rubber-like resource is unearthed during an age of global restructuring. By exposing these buried histories, I place *Through the Arc*'s historical speculations in critical dialogue with a long line of science fictions that have worked on behalf of European and U.S. empire-building to render the resource-rich jungle available for imperial conquest and expansion. In their introduction to *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd stress the importance of "looking to the shadows" by examining "the excavation and connection of alternative histories and their different temporalities that cannot be contained by the progressive narrative of Western

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[14] For historical accounts of Ford rubber plantations in Brazil, see Esch, Tucker, and Weinstein.
[15] Accession #74, Box 1: "History and Cost," Brochure: "The Ford Rubber Plantation of Brazil," Benson Ford Research Center, Dearborn, Michigan. All further references to this company-published brochure and other original documents procured at the Henry Ford Archives will be made parenthetically.

developmentalism" (5). Lowe and Lloyd's formulation of "excavation" sheds light on the ways in which Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* looks to the shadows of capital in the Amazon rainforest to levy a critique against developmental historiography and teleological narration.

The rubbery resource excavated at the Matacão can be molded into any shape with the structural integrity of steel. One of the most fantastical manifestations of the malleable material's architectural possibilities is an amusement park. "Chicolándia," named after the local entrepreneurial character Chico Paco, who conceived of and constructed it for his gay lover, also constitutes the work's most concrete allusion to the U.S. neo-colonial presence in the Amazon. Ford's plantation project instantiates an extension of U.S. cultural and economic imperialism in Brazil, and *Through the Arc* revisits the Amazon as a speculative space haunted by this history of neocolonial enterprise, known more generally as the Amazon rubber boom. In my analysis of Fordlándia, I consider the conditions already in place that enabled the Ford Motor Company to establish itself so readily in the Amazon rainforest. Through an examination of company-archived pamphlets and photographs, newspaper articles, and plantation managers' journals of the 1920s through 1940s, I show how Ford's civilizing mission borrowed from pre-existing discourses on tropical nature, race, and sexuality promulgated by nineteenth-century French and British scientific expeditions into the Amazon.

Since the 1870s, Dutch and British entrepreneurs had established an expansive and successful rubber tree empire in Asia. In 1922, the British Rubber Restoration Act (a.k.a. the Stevenson Plan) sought to double the price of rubber, which would exert pressure on the growing U.S. automobile empire. British domination of the world rubber

market threatened Ford's vision of complete vertical integration of his automotive industry (from rubber tree plantations to tires on Model T's). In retaliation, Henry Ford and Harvey Firestone mobilized a campaign to break the emerging rubber cartel. Because rubber tree cultivation is restricted to tropical climates, the resulting competition among British, Dutch, and U.S. rubber industries in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brazil (respectively) creates an interesting connection between British and Dutch imperialism in Asia and U.S. neo-colonial investments in Latin America.[16] Two decades later, British Malaya and Singapore came under Japanese occupation between 1942 and 1945. Japan's interest in these regions was arguably due in large part to the rubber resources it would gain access to and control over during a time of war. These connections suggest the multiple, interconnected, and various machinations of empire.

Organized and run as a U.S. plantation, Fordlándia implemented a series of social ordering structures that helped sustain the racialized aspect of benevolent supremacy rationalizing U.S. neocolonial presence in Brazil. To conform to U.S. work practices, local laborers were required to work during the most exhausting midday hours, wear ID badges, and eat hamburgers and hot dogs in a cafeteria. During a revolt in 1930, the kitchen and the time clock were tellingly clear targets. Workers directed their frustrations at these invasive cultural systems that sought to force a certain digestive and temporal regimentation on their everyday lives. Images of Fordlándia resemble a suburban grid, complete with stucco dwellings, power lines, (segregated) swimming pools, and hospital. Inhabitants of Fordlándia were forbidden from drinking and smoking; the children wore

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[16] See *Cartels in Action* 71. Stocking and Watson explain how the attempt by the British to establish a cartel on the world rubber market through the Stevenson Plan actually backfired in that between 1922 and 1928, the British share in the market dropped while "exports from the Dutch East Indies (and other far eastern sources) rose phenomenally in direct response to the market opportunities created by British restriction" (71).

school uniforms, and in their leisure time, employees could attend the company-run churches and motion picture theaters, or they could even play golf on the 18-hole course "700 miles from civilization"—"everything necessary for the health, happiness and well-being of Ford employees" (Acc. #74, "History and Cost" 2, Brochure). A company report emphasizes the plantation's role in "modernizing" the tropics, calling attention repeatedly to the "modern hospital" and describing Fordlándia as "a modern city" (2) that took the place of "the trackless green waste" of "the almost impenetrable tropical jungle" (3-4). The Company itself put out a brochure on the Ford rubber plantations in Brazil. Targeting current or potential investors, the Fordlándia brochure blames the Brazilian plantation's shortcomings on increased demand and the more rigorous scientific development of rubber cultivation technologies in Asia. It suggests that in "the early days of automobiles, before the need was so great, the unskilled methods of natives produced most of the world's supply of rubber from the jungles of Brazil." The company characterizes pre-plantation rubber cultivation as the rudimentary and primitive production of "jungle natives." With increased demand, though, the brochure explains that "Brazil lost its pre-eminent place to the Far East, which developed scientific methods of tree culture that resulted in greater yield and higher quality of crude rubber" (1). In this way, the brochure renders a history of the Amazon that narrates the need for "scientific methods" to restore "Brazil's" pre-eminence in the rubber industry. Page after page of the brochure comments on the transformative power of industry, comparing Fordlándia's residences to "any midwestern (sic) town" or "a winter home in Florida" and taking great pains to amplify the remarkable nature of such a feat "in the heart of Brazil." "Shades of Tarzan! You'd never guess these bright, happy, healthy school children lived in a jungle

city that didn't even exist a few years ago." News media coverage of the Fordlándia project highlighted the plantation's school system and included several photographs of Indian children in clean, white uniforms standing and saluting the Brazilian flag's motto: "*Ordem e Progresso"* ("Order and Progress"). As Anne McClintock suggests of nineteenth-century European expositions and museum culture, the brochure "converted the narrative of imperial Progress into mass-produced *consumer spectacles*" (*Imperial Leather* 33). The Ford Company thus sold its project to U.S. audiences and investors as a civilizing mission that could tame not only the unruly jungle but also the denizens of the Amazon Valley.

In a document titled "Living Conditions in the Amazon Valley," written on May 6th, 1927, Carl D. LaRue depicts first and foremost a disorderly Para state: "In the smaller villages and along the rivers, the people are everywhere poor and forlorn. Most of them are penniless and without hope for the future…" (Acc 74, Box 1, 1). LaRue sets the stage for Fordist reform by describing the need for a civilizing mission, a need for a restoration of "hope for the future" through financial, international speculation. LaRue's sympathetic attention to the poor living conditions of the local peoples, though, quickly reveals itself to have more than one motivation. His concern for the health and happiness of these people stems from his estimation of them as potential laboring bodies in Fordlándia's future workforce: "These people are usually called lazy, improvident, thriftless, etc., and it is true that they are not energetic, but when we consider that they are racked with disease, and have never been properly nourished in their lives, one wonders at their powers of endurance" (1). LaRue's characterization of these potential laborers as disease-ridden and poorly nourished establishes an occasion for a medical intervention as a means of

bolstering the labor supply while assuming a position of humanitarian aid, benevolent force, and civilizing mission. LaRue reports: "No attention is paid to housing such people or looking after their health." Nevertheless, the extent to which LaRue's call for medical aid is tied to a racialized concept of health and hygiene remains abundantly clear. Referring to the potential plantation workers as "magnificent specimens," LaRue writes:

> The dwellers of the Amazon Valley are of three main stocks. Indian, Portuguese and Negro. There was a time when names were given the different racial crosses as of Indian with Negro, Indian with Portuguese, etc. but now admixture has gone on so long that it is difficult to distinguish the different types. The mixture is not a particularly good one from a racial standpoint, but it is by no means a bad one.

What "racial standpoint" does LaRue take for granted here? In the U.S. around 1927, the wide acceptance of scientific racism and eugenicist thought led to compulsory sterilization practices and immigration restriction legislation. However, 1927 also marks the height of Brazil's own debates around race that emerged in relation but in contradistinction to European and U.S. racial ideologies. Prior to the publication of Gilberto Freyre's work on "Brazilian racial democracy," this period witnessed efforts among Brazilian authorities and landed gentry, informed by European racial pseudoscience, to push for a "whitening" of the Brazilian population in the decades following the abolition of slavery in 1888.[17] As a natural scientist and as a Ford employee, LaRue likely brought to his scouting report of the Amazon his own version of white supremacy as bolstered by the prevailing racial ideologies of U.S. science and industry. Concurrently, the converging discourses of Brazilian racial "improvement" and Ford's civilizing mission are rather suggestive.

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[17] See Gilberto Freyre's *Casa-Grande & Senzala* (1936). See also Nancy Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (1991); In 1925, Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos published *La Raza Cósmica*, or "The Cosmic Race," which posits a utopian "fifth race" of the Americas comprised of a bronze people, so racially mixed that its members found a new civilization called "Universópolis"

LaRue's concluding lines to his report reinforce this relationship between the two connected discourses of "improvement": "The salvation of these people lies in some development which will give them employment at reasonable wages and with decent living conditions… This is an opportunity to do a great service to hundreds of deserving folk" (5). For LaRue, capitalist development leads to "salvation," and it is in this way that LaRue reveals himself to be a devout believer in Fordist reform as a universal imperative.

LaRue's final rallying call pivots on a particularly revealing racial hierarchy. He writes: "The fate of these people is the more tragic because they are not possessed of the stolidity of many of the orientals, but have enough of the white race in them to suffer keenly and long intensely for better things. As it is, their condition is worse than that of any of the coolies in the East; far worse even than that of the average slave in the old days" (4). In this astonishing quotation, LaRue's preoccupation with the competing rubber industry in Southeast Asia manifests in this racialized comparison between Asian and Brazilian mixed-race labor. Conscious of the fact that local Indian labor "is somewhat more expensive than in the East," LaRue argues that this cost differential is offset by the fact that "labor is also more intelligent than the average labor in the East." He also explains that "the use of machines on the modern plantation should offset this advantage in the East."[18] In his entreaty to Ford to create his rubber empire in Brazil rather than in Sumatra, LaRue mobilizes two contradictory orientalist formulations of Asia as, on the one hand, hopelessly un-modern and less intelligent, and on the other hand, at an advantage and in less need of being "saved" by Fordist progress. This passage also reveals LaRue's efforts to distance his and Ford's mission in the Amazon from the

[18] Carl LaRue, "A Report on the Exploration of the Tapajos Valley," April 19, 1927. Vertical File, "Rubber Plantation."

systems of oppression at work in European colonization of Southeast Asia and the U.S.'s own slave past.

In one of the more remarkable passages of his report, LaRue encounters and disparages a fledgling rubber plant established by a Syrian named Michel. "In common with the other Syrians," reports LaRue, "he grinds down his men and gives them less than enough to buy an adequate supply of even the simplest food" (3).[19] LaRue then explains: "One of the great things which the development of this country will bring is the relief of these unfortunate people" (3). Positioning U.S. capitalist expansion as a liberating intervention, LaRue exemplifies how blurry the lines were between his role as a geographer, as an anthropologist, and as a corporate scout.

As a scouting mission, LaRue's report could be considered another kind of speculation—one that demonstrates the kinds of capitalist fantasies surrounding Ford's vision of docile laborers, modernity in the jungle, and high-density accumulation of wealth. However, contrary to the Fordist fantasy of modernizing and regulating the tropics, Fordlándia ultimately failed. The workers rebelled, as did the rainforest, and the Fordist project in Brazil settled into relative obscurity. Therefore, Yamashita's late twentieth-century excavation of this largely forgotten Amazonian rubber plantation helps situate her extrapolative imagining of twenty-first century capitalization on rainforest resources in a longer history of transimperial endeavors in Brazil. Linking European ethnographic and scientific expeditions of the nineteenth century to the Fordist project of plantation building in the early twentieth century, Yamashita also connects these imperial traces to the more contemporary moment of post-Fordist global capitalism in Latin

[19] Barbara Weinstein cites the influx of Syrian, Lebanese, and Jewish immigrants to the Brazilian state of Pará during the 1920s. See Weinstein 259-260.

America. In this way, Yamashita's transformation of the Amazon rainforest into a speculative space unearths the historical layers of European and U.S. claims to Brazilian natural resources. More generally, Yamashita takes issue with the historical and continued scientific exploration of the Amazon under banners of benevolent research but through the perpetuation of tropicalist stereotypes of "jungle nations."

Yamashita's description of the inevitable collapse of the industries that profited off the Matacão mimics the historical decline and ultimate failure of Fordlándia and indeed most U.S. and British endeavors to cultivate rubber on a large scale in the Amazon. In his history of U.S. ecological degradation of the tropics, Richard Tucker explains that capitalist greed spawned growth of rubber trees in overly concentrated plantations, which ultimately resulted in massive leaf blight.[20] Unable to control the spread of the fungus, the corporate rubber plantations stubbornly held to densely populated planting techniques because "intensification of production…became a hallmark of the industry and one of the most dramatic triumphs of tropical agronomy" (Tucker 227). In this sense, the failure of Fordlándia precisely demonstrated the deleterious effects of intensified accumulation of global capitalism. The rubber cultivation process could have been and was for many years already a sustainable and renewable resource extraction. These more ecologically respectful methods were primarily used by local Brazilian *seringueiros*. Global capitalism not only severely altered the ecology of

[20] From Tucker's *Insatiable Appetite: The United States and the Ecological Degradation of the Tropical World*: "In the face of inefficiency, corruption, and ethnic antagonisms in the business of collecting wild rubber, British strategists attempted to grow *Hevea* in dense plantations. They never succeeded in conquering the tree's fatal disease, South American leaf blight, a fungus that had co-evolved with *Hevea* in the forest. *Hevea* trees had survived over the millennia by growing widely dispersed among other species; capitalist concentrations of production demanded the opposite." See Tucker 233.

Amazonia, but it also in effect displaced Brazilian workers who had been supporting their own lives by cultivating rubber in a more sustainable way.

What the Fordlándia propaganda erases in the process of disseminating narratives of improvement, progress, and development are the stories of displacement, loss, imposed capitalist greed, and ecological devastation that Yamashita's tale so cleverly resuscitates. Yamashita excavates not only histories of empire in the rainforest but also unofficial stories that emerge from the perspective of the displaced and disremembered such as Yamashita's character Mané Pena, who spent his days "wandering the forest like the others—fishing, tapping rubber and collecting Brazil nuts" before a "government sort" informed him that his land had been cleared but that they would send an agronomist to "show [him] how to plant" if he signed a contract (16). Mané Pena, before "the fires, the chain saws and the government bulldozers," worked as a *seringuero* and thus depended on the rainforest for his livelihood until U.S. entrepreneurial interest and European scientific endeavors laid claim to his property, even as they congratulated him, offered him a contract to sign, and suggested that he "get some barbed wire, fence [his land] in properly" (16). In this scene, Yamashita describes on a micro-level the paradox of liberalism (and NAFTA), which extends to Mané Pena in this instance his property rights while simultaneously imposing the rights of capital to reap the benefits of his property. By imposing a capitalist system and culture on Mané Pena, the government seized and destroyed his land even as they pretended to extend the rights of ownership and the sense that they were doing him a favor. Because this story of land speculation is told not from the perspective of the government type but from that of Mané Pena, a lingering skepticism undercuts the tone of benevolence attached to the encounter. Indeed,

Yamashita quickly points to the devastating effects of these events: "The agronomist never did come, but the rains did and the wind and the harsh uncompromising tropical sun. Even Mané's mud-and-thatch house was eventually washed away" (16). As the rampant failure of Ford's rubber plantation evidences, the dense planting of rubber trees on such a clearing is a terrible idea—one that the agronomist's arrival would only have reinforced. Ford would replace the local mud-and-thatch houses of the rainforest denizens, but Yamashita clearly suggests that such domiciles could withstand all but the most uncompromising conditions of rainforest climate.

The story of Mané Pena also illuminates the uneven processes of "discovery," and how embedded such a concept is in imperial vocabularies of laying claim to land as well as in capitalist constructs of property, ownership, and legal contracts. In Yamashita's revisionist tale, Mané Pena discovers and even names the subterranean resource of the Matacão long before any scientists. Years earlier, Mané Pena told TV reporters who had come to film a documentary on the Amazon "about the underground *matacão*, or solid plate of rock that always blocked well-diggers" (17). However, because the reporters "were used to interviewing illiterate, backward and superstitious people," the record of Mané's discovery was filed away as "*fantastico*" and "collect[ed] dust until the late 1990s" (17). In Yamashita's retelling of the Amazon, the truth-making device of the documentary film, which continues to mediate the First World's view of the rainforest, ultimately obfuscates historical events, revealing the documentation of truths to be a process limited by the producers' primitivist outlook on the Amazon and its indigenous peoples. At the moment that Yamashita characterizes the dismissal of Mané Pena's story due to its fantastic nature, she suggests that the television producers have, in fact, reproduced

another kind of fantastic fiction that borrows from the tropicalist constructions of European imperial science. "That the primeval forest was not primeval was hardly news to old Mané," writes Yamashita (17).

In the same vein, one could say that the post-Fordist capers of *Through the Arc*'s Matacão are hardly surprising, considering the earlier history of Ford's rubber plantation in the Amazon. Even Chicolándia's demise is foreshadowed by Forldándia's overly zealous attempts at exploiting the Amazon's resources. Yet Chicolándia also serves as a referent for another compulsion of empire to preserve its version of history by fixing that narrative in time. Described as a "paradise of plastic delights" (168), Chicolándia's main attractions are the lifelike replicas of Gilberto's favorite Hollywood film sets and of famous cityscapes of the world. At any given moment, Yamashita writes, Gilberto "could suddenly be somewhere else in time and space" (168). Much of the official, company-recorded history of Fordlándia now resides in Dearborn, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit. The Benson Ford Research Center and the archives it houses are part of a sprawling complex of Ford-related attractions, including Greenfield Village, a historic theme park dedicated to the preservation of pre-Fordist modes of production (which Ford was convinced would disappear once his assembly line and new technologies of production proliferated). Greenfield Village's buildings are either transplantations of original homes and structures or they are exact replicas. The freed slave farmhouses and artisanal glass-blowing workshops work to mark a change in modes of production and participate in a historical narrative that distinguishes Fordism from an earlier capitalist system that relied on chattel slavery and plantation labor, rather than on industrial technology. Yamashita's excavation of Fordlándia, though, suggests continuity between Ford's twentieth-century

automobile assembly lines and forms of exploitation and indentured servitude physically occurring outside of but nevertheless closely tied to U.S. industry. Indeed, even as the Ford Motor Company sought to separate itself from the plantation, it was actively establishing itself as an "empire-building corporation" with colonial holdings in both Brazil and South Africa (Esch 7). As a close analysis of Carl LaRue's scouting report reveals, Ford's speculations in Brazil relied on European colonial formulations held over from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Spectacular undertakings in the Amazon rainforest hardly begin or end with Fordlándia, and Yamashita references several more notable examples. When J.B. Tweep decides to transport the twenty-three storied GGG headquarters in its entirety from New York to the Matacão, Yamashita cites two "historic precedents for such a grandiose move" (76). The first is the Teatro Amazonas opera house in Manaus, built in 1896 out of imported French tiles, Italian marble, Murano glass chandeliers, and the desire to bring European "civilization" to the heart of the jungle. Yamashita writes that the opera house "imported…every detail from the iron fixtures to the parquet floors from England" (76). She also references U.S. billionaire Daniel Ludwig's farfetched plan to float a fully-constructed pulp mill and factory on two giant pontoons from Japan to the Brazilian city of Munguba in 1978 "for the purpose of churning everything into tons of useful paper" (76). In his 1982 film *Fitzcarraldo*, Werner Herzog stages the hoisting of a steamship, commissioned to find and tap rubber trees in a previously unreachable plot of land, across a mountain separating two tributaries of the Amazon River using the labor of an indigenous tribe.

From Ford to Herzog, opera houses to floating factories, empire in its various permutations has historically rendered the Amazon a speculative space in at least two ways. First, these commercial and cultural incursions point to European and U.S. capitalist speculations, which have attempted to lay claim to tropical resources in the rainforest since the early colonial period. Second, these enterprises work in conjunction with a system of fantastical speculations that constructs a tropicalist imaginary sustained through colonialist visual and literary representations of the jungle.[21]

Through the Arc intervenes in and disrupts such imperialist fantasies of a jungle perpetually uninhabited and virginal, unruly and in need of outside regulation, and ripe and available for development. While speculative narratives about the tropics have often served projects that capitalize on the alienation and exoticization of indigenous peoples, Yamashita offers her own speculations on the Brazilian Amazon to quite different ends. *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*, in its simultaneously fantastical and historical revisions of the Amazon, performs what Edward Soja has called a "trialectics of spatiality" (*Thirdspace* 53-105).[22] Yamashita's excavation and fabulation of the Matacão demonstrates how a

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[21] See Aparicio and Chávez-Silverman's *Tropicalizations: Transcultural Representations of Latinidad* and Ileana Rodriguez's *Transatlantic Topographies: Islands, Highlands, Jungles*.

[22] In *Thirdspace; Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Soja builds on Henri Lefebvre's examination of abstract space in *The Production of Space*. Soja focuses on Los Angeles, the speculative space that becomes the focus of Yamashita's third novel *Tropic of Orange*. In *Through the Arc*, the character J.B. alludes to Soja's reading of Lefebvre. Yamashita writes that J.B. developed "a new method of thought which he referred to as 'trialectics,' sorting problems into three options and always opting for the solution in the middle… He was beginning to think that trialectics would eventually revolutionize modern thought and philosophy…" (56). J.B.'s formulation of trialectics renders him increasingly arrogant and self-important as the novel progresses, and readers come to understand him as a greedy businessman with delusions of grandeur. Yamashita asks us to compare J.B.'s view of the Matacão with that of Mané Pena. Despite being mocked and dismissed as a dreamer, Mané Pena embraces a lived experience of the Amazon that turns out to be quite accurate; whereas J.B., despite claiming authority, only sees his own fixed imaginary of the Amazon as an endlessly exploitable resource. As a consummate proponent of globalization, J.B. depends on the abstraction of "the jungle" to make it available for resource extraction. By including the story of an indigenous inhabitant of the Matacão, Yamashita allows Mané Pena's memories of that place to serve as what Mary Pat Brady calls a "countercartography" of the Amazon that works against capitalism's erasure of the ways its original denizens might have mapped it. In her

place can be both real and imagined at the same time. "The rainforest" is a space that is produced through the ways in which it is perceived, conceived, and lived. At once a cautionary tale of deforestation, exploitative labor practices, and abusive extraction of natural resources on the part of an avaricious First World capitalist machine, *Through the Arc* interrogates the narratives spawned from empire's deployment of scientific discourses about progress and development. By rearticulating the science fiction trope of alien invasion as a resurfacing of disavowed, domestic detritus, and by excavating the histories of exploitation buried under tropicalist constructions of untamed jungles and primitive geographies, Yamashita's speculations provide an alternative to the practices of forgetting that help perpetuate imperialist endeavors. She interrupts the ongoing project of "transforming" Latin America by reminding readers of when those efforts have failed terribly.

Migrant Oranges: The Fruits, Labors, and Technologies of the Borderlands

> "A frontier is an edge of space and time: a zone of not yet—not yet mapped, not yet regulated. It is a zone of unmapping: even in its planning, a frontier is imagined and unplanned. Frontiers aren't just discovered at the edge; they are projects in making geographical and temporal experience. Frontiers make wildness, entangling visions and vines and violence; their wildness is *both* material and imaginative. This wildness reaches backward as well as forward in time, bringing old forms of savagery to life in the

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examination of their reconceptualizations of space, Mary Pat Brady observes that "Chicana writers are quick to twist realism as a representational strategy that too easily solidifies oppressive spatial alignments by hiding the processual quality of space. Out of such twisting frequently emerge whole new conceptualizations of spatiality and sociality that are revolutionary in their implications" (7). Similarly, *Through the Arc* does not aspire to realism—or even scientific fiction—but prefers to revel in the disjuncture between the fantasies of global capitalism that imagine the jungle as primitive and the magical healing powers of Mané Pena's feathers. This playful juxtaposition of fictitious capital and mystical commodities suggests how capitalism's reliance on fantastical representations of space and time is itself a kind of science fiction.

> contemporary landscape. Frontiers energize old fantasies, even as they embody their impossibilities"[23]
>
> --Anna Tsing

Yamashita's concerns about the surreptitious advancement of U.S. imperialism through strategies of flexibility and differentiation remain central to her inquiries into late capitalism's use of multiple technologies at the site of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands in her third novel, *Tropic of Orange*. Whereas *Through the Arc* excavates sites of early twentieth-century U.S. empire in the Amazon, *Tropic of Orange* performs a strategic re-membering of the borderlands in the late twentieth century. Beginning in Mazatlán, México, Yamashita's story tracks the northward migration of the Tropic of Cancer, a geographical marking rendered more legible in Yamashita's speculative fiction. As the Tropic of Cancer takes on material form as a translucent and resilient filament running through an orange growing around it, the movement of that orange causes a physical disruption of space that intensifies the ramifications of both natural and manufactured borders on peoples and nations. As the Tropic of Orange moves north toward Los Angeles, it compresses longitudinal space, pressing otherwise disparate groups and events into closer proximity. Seven fragmented yet coalescing points of view narrate the effects of this time-space compression and, interwoven throughout the text, provide multiple, interconnected accounts of what David Harvey describes as "flexible accumulation" that relies on flexible borders (147). Over the course of the story, other oranges (e.g.: Agent Orange, O.J. Simpson, and narco-citrus) also come to light, allowing Yamashita to revisit particularly dramatic examples of neoliberal practices that demonstrate how discourses of

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[23] See Tsing 29.

liberal multiculturalism collide with the nativist rhetoric invoked to maintain inconsistent regulation of traffics across borders.

In the introduction to *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*, Amy Kaplan writes: "The idea of the nation as home…is inextricable from the political, economic and cultural movements of empire, movements that both erect and unsettle the ever-shifting boundaries between the domestic and the foreign, between 'at home' and 'abroad'" (1). Kaplan opens her analysis of U.S. imperialism with an examination of the *Downes v. Bidwell* case of 1901, in which an elaborate discursive debacle unfolds around a shipment of oranges and their status as domestic or alien to the United States. To support its ruling that Puerto Rican exports to the U.S. should indeed be subject to overseas taxation, the Court characterized Puerto Rico's relationship to the United States as "foreign in the domestic sense." This flexible and slippery status points to a long and ongoing history of elaborate equivocations around the rhetoric of U.S. neocolonial projects in Latin America and Asia, regions connected not only by economic systems, migration patterns, and military presence, but also by sub-marine and outer-space superstructures of communication technologies. Even as it seeks to deny sovereignty to Puerto Rico as a separate, distinct state, the U.S. simultaneously must produce differences between home and abroad through flexible rhetorical strategies such as those exercised in the *Downes v. Bidwell* case. As Kaplan suggests, this dispute over orange import taxation exemplifies how neoliberal globalization relies on differentiation and uses flexible rhetorical technologies to accommodate contradictory discourses of U.S. paternalism and its neocolonial imperatives.

In Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* the movement of "the ever-shifting boundaries between the domestic and the foreign" take shape quite literally as Yamashita plots the journey of an orange anchored to the Tropic of Cancer and documents its migration north from Mazatlán to Los Angeles. As the work's geographical setting shifts northward to the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, its temporal location of the early 1990s also urges the reader to connect *Tropic of Orange*'s spectacular events with anti-immigration legislation, pluralistic multiculturalism, U.S. neoliberalism in the form of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the militarization of the border, all of which I argue function as "technologies of the border." In conclusion, I point to various ways in which Yamashita uses speculative fiction to draw connections between and comment on the histories of empire and technology that continue to shape the material reality of the border. I also argue that, set against this historical backdrop, *Tropic of Orange* explores several alternative, strategic appropriations of technologies to reconfigure border operations to quite different ends.

Beyond the coincidence of oranges playing such pivotal roles in both Yamashita's and Kaplan's texts, reading *Tropic of Orange* and *Anarchy of Empire* alongside one another provides a helpful framework for discussing the trafficking of goods and laborers across borders and noting the flexible ways in which the border incorporates some things as domestic and renders others alien. In the construction, regulation, negotiation, and renegotiation of "the border," multiple technologies come into play. While devices and machinery used for U.S. military and police regulation of the border may be the most apparent and well-funded manifestations of technology at the U.S.-Mexico border, their implementation is clearly linked to other border technologies. For example, many border

technologies are tested first in Iraq and Afghanistan under wartime conditions, a relationship indicative of the militarization of the border zone. Infrared, night-vision, and x-ray scanning comprise a visual culture of surveillance managed by the military-(techno)industrial complex. In addition, a legal infrastructure and carceral systems work in conjunction with this arsenal of equipment and become part of the border regulation machine. Beyond these more overt forms of border technologies, the social and economic policies and legislative acts that fund and support these technological apparatuses provoke mass migrations to border cities, foster the proliferation of *maquiladora* plants along the border, and capitalize on anti-immigration movements and nativist sentiments. As in Kaplan's example of the *Downes v. Bidwell* case, legislative acts, rhetorical strategies, and economic policies participate in the conceptualization and reconceptualization of the border. To help examine how these interlinked technologies work to shape the border, I briefly trace Yamashita's deployment of two border-crossers in *Tropic of Orange*: the orange and the truck. Characterizing the orange as "an immigrant, through and through," *The Nation*'s Molly Rauch opens her review of *Tropic of Orange* with a condensed history of the orange as a migrant subject, whose transplantation roughly followed the path of empire. Columbus first transported the citrus fruit to the New World in an effort to stave off scurvy among his sailors. In an elegant mapping of the orange's transnational and transoceanic migrations, Rauch explains that oranges once grew in greatest numbers and varieties in China, and that Columbus' oranges arrived in Spain by way of India along with the spread of Islam. Today, the United States has become the world's largest producer of oranges, and the marketing of domestic California Navels and Florida Valencias elides the orange's longer history and attachment to the

movements of empire (Rauch 28). Yamashita's depiction of the orange as a migrant directs attention to its global peregrinations, including its navigation of U.S. imperialism in Latin America as perpetrated by the United Fruit Company and the proliferation of "banana republics" and plantation systems in Guatemala, Honduras, and Colombia in the mid-twentieth century, for example. To invoke the border crossing of fruit is to reference a century of U.S. multinational corporations wreaking economic, environmental, geographical, and political havoc in Latin America.[24] While literary attention to U.S. tropical empire often gets told through the banana (as in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*), the orange works to tie this history of U.S. neocolonialism in Latin America to a more global history of migration that includes routes originating in Asia.

The story of this migrating orange also helps address patterns of migration and empire in a more contemporary moment. Another set of oranges works to comment on the cultures of paranoia around borders and nation that come along with the territory of fantasies of expansion and global dominance. Due in large part to the facile relationship between the federal government and private military contractors, the Bush administration has put into action a high-tech "Secure Border Initiative" (SBI) program, entailing a "virtual fence" comprised of interconnected surveillance technologies such as ground sensors, live-feed cameras, unmanned aerial surveillance drones, and a series of 90-foot-tall towers that relay images to INS trucks and command centers. The initiative to build a 700-mile wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, passed by Congress in October 2006 is one recent implementation of the most literal of border technologies.

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[24] See Gruesz, Soluri, Benz, and Striffler.

Whereas much of the rhetoric surrounding the border wall discussion revolves around national security, threat of terrorist attack, and "alien invasion," Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* returns focus to the issue of labor—most notably, the labor that goes into building walls and other technologies that regulate border permeability; the labor rendered invisible by neoliberal discussions of free trade and unencumbered movement across borders; and the laborers who must cross the border "illegally" in order to sustain the contradictory demands for cheap labor, on the one hand, and a racially consolidated national identity on the other. In Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*, those who first perceive the dramatic spatial warping caused by the orange's migration north recognize the shift because they are so close to the labor of constructing such walls. In this way, global shifts register most palpably for those employed on the production side of the fence. For Rafaela Cortes, a Mexican woman in the domestic employ of a Chicano journalist's second home in Mazatlán, moving north and crossing the border is a palpable struggle. Her destination seems perpetually out of reach and her burden of heavy, modern bathroom faucets picked up from the post office further encumber her. The bathroom fixtures may be aesthetically pleasing to their owner Gabriel, but they remind Rafaela primarily of the labor required of her: "They were modern-looking things with a sort of industrial look, the sort that Gabriel seemed to like. Rafaela was indifferent to its style. It still had a surface like any other that had to be cleaned" (68). Purchased in and mailed from the United States but "Hecho en México," the faucets serve as a reminder of how commodities flow freely across the border, manufactured by underpaid workers in Mexico, then the *maquiladora* industry that facilitates higher profit margins for multinational corporations who establish manufacturing plants and factories in México

that run on cheap and precarious labor. As the faucets flow freely from their site of production in Mexico to their destination in the US and then back again to Mexico for installation in a luxury home, Rafaela's movement north is contrastingly encumbered by the threat of rape and the abduction of her child. Her precarious journey crosses the same terrain as female *maquiladora* workers, whose perpetual and unaccounted for "disappearances" since the 1980s indicate ways in which border surveillance technologies, despite ostensibly being designed to render bodies visible, fail to trace certain subjects. These "disappearances" provide one egregious example of how surveillance technologies at the border not only "reduce the Other to data" (to recall Wendy Chun's assertion about racialized technological discourse), but also support a system of rendering labor invisible even as they perpetuate a myth of barbarians at the gate. In this way, the border has become a site of ever more intricate contradictions, where NAFTA ensures the free flow of commodities but makes the crossing of people quite perilous. For the people (primarily women) whose work involves the production and manufacturing of the electronic and computer technologies installed at the border, there is no likelihood that these systems of surveillance will in turn work to protect them.

When Arcangel stops to help work on the wall demarcating Gabriel's property line, he "wondered if it wasn't a wall that could conceivably continue east and west forever. Labor for a lifetime" (149). While an exploitative capitalism might fantasize about an endless supply of cheap labor that extends east and west forever, dividing the world into Northern owners and Southern workers, Yamashita's depiction of an endless wall is one of horror from the perspective of the laborer, to whom that prospect would mean a lifetime of work. Like Rafaela's relationship to the faucets, Arcangel's interface

with the ever-extending wall foregrounds a laborer's concerns. From his perspective, such an elastic wall represents a future of never-ending back break rather than a comforting sign of security.

Yamashita's tale about shifting borders culminates when Arcangel crosses the US-Mexico border with the enchanted orange and all that the Tropic has brought along with it. Yamashita's depiction of this moment takes on an epic quality. Arcangel transforms into an Angel of History, with "the burden of gigantic wings, too heavy to fly…" as he "looked out across the northern horizon. He could see / *all 2,000 miles of the frontier,*" which "waited with its great history of migrations back and forth—in recent history, / *the deportation of 400,000 Mexican / citizens in 1932, / coaxing back of 2.2 million / braceros in 1942/ only to exile the same 2.2 million/ wetbacks in 1953.*/ The thing called the New World Border waited for him with the anticipation of five centuries" (198-199).[25] When he arrives, Arcangel declares that he "is expected" by the "State Department, not to mention the side agreements with labor and the environment" and that his name is "Cristobal Colón" (199). Arcangel, as he looks across space and time, is of course stopped to be questioned by the Border Patrol. A guard asks the obligatory question: "Are you carrying any fresh fruit or vegetables?" (200). Arcangel discloses he has an orange and the INS attempt to confiscate it, since "'California currently has a ban on all oranges. We are

[25] Yamashita's allusion to the "New World Border" and her physicalization of the border into a body with "*the supple bottom of Texas*" and "*the end of its tail/ on the Gulf of México*" in the same passage refer to Guillermo Gómez-Peña's "Freefalling Toward a Borderless Future" in his work *The New World Border*, which Yamashita also incorporates into her epigraph to *Tropic of Orange*. In *The New World Border*, Gómez-Peña takes issue with the utopian cartography produced by neoliberal trade agreements such as NAFTA. These allusions to Gómez-Peña's work puts *Tropic of Orange* in conversation with a vibrant Chican@ movement to remap the borderlands, to "see through the colonial map of North, Central, and South America, to a more complex system of overlapping, interlocking, and overlaid maps. Among others, we can see Amerindia, Afroamerica, Americamestiza-y-mulata, Hybridamerica, and Transamerica—the 'other America' that belongs to the homeless, and to nomads, migrants, and exiles." "We try," writes Gómez-Peña, "to imagine more enlightened cartographies." See Gómez-Peña 6.

authorized to enforce a no-orange policy" (201). "But this is a native orange!" Arcangel yells, "but his voice was swallowed up by the waves of floating 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" (201). The orange doesn't cross the border; nor does the border even cross it; rather, the border transects the orange, whose migrations constantly reconfigure the terrain of the nation-state.

As the Tropic of Orange continues past the border security checkpoint, it is the soundscape Yamashita provides that directs us to ways in which the border has been crossed many times throughout history by multiple groups of laborers. We are reminded, as Arcangel's voice is swallowed up, of the *noise* of the border—the stalled traffic and the idling semi trucks. By describing the deafening roar that ultimately drowns out Arcangel's voice as "waves" of free-floating capital, Yamashita directs our attention not only to transcontinental but also to transoceanic drift.

On Ships and Trucks

Ships, according to Paul Gilroy, "refer us back to the middle passage, to the half-remembered micro-politics of the slave trade and its relationship to both industrialisation and modernisation" (17). In the ships of the black Atlantic, Gilroy locates the mobile instantiations of transatlantic circulations of culture and labor, pivotal to his reexamination of modernity, nation, and memory. Ships were a conventional technology of the transatlantic slave trade and plantation economies; but, as Gilroy argues, they also functioned as conduits of culture that constituted transatlantic affiliations. He considers

the ship to be "a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion," mapping various movements of culture, knowledge, and revolutionary ideas between Europe, Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States. Gilroy's analysis of this useful chronotope focuses on transatlantic routes but clearly extends to considerations of transpacific movements of people and ideas as well. As Gary Okihiro explains in his essay "Toward a Black Pacific," "images come to mind of Filipino and Chinese seamen on board Spanish galleons beginning in 1565 plying the trade between Manila and Acapulco, and of Hawaiian sailors who, during the 1830s, comprised the majority of the crews on U.S. ships that carried animal furs from the Pacific Northwest to Canton, China" (315-316). Curtis Marez's *Drug Wars* documents the rebellion of Chinese laborers forced into servitude on ex-slave ships making another kind of "middle passage" between the Chinese coast and Cuba (39). Lisa Yun's examination of transpacific passage begins with an analysis of *The Sea Witch*, a nineteenth-century narrative about the eponymous ship that transported often forcibly abducted Chinese coolies to Cuba (Yun and Laremont 99). As transatlantic and transpacific ship routes converge in places like Cuba, Mexico, Canada, and Brazil, how do these convergences continue to play out on land? How does one trace the transcontinental lineaments that extend from these oceanic routes? In *Tropic of Orange*, Yamashita links the routes of ships and trucks together to follow the movements of goods, labor, and culture in an era of global capitalism.

Gilroy thoughtfully considered both the material and symbolic significance of the ship as a chronotope of modernity. The unit of analysis I suggest for an examination of the cultural systems at work in the Americas during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is the truck: the semi, the eighteen-wheeler, the big rig. Trucks call attention

to the transactions and traffics that occur once a ship's contents have come to port. They refer us to transcontinental dispersal and dynamic movements across more terrestrial borders. The truck becomes a particularly visible sign of global traffics in capital, goods, and labor in the Americas and California, where hundreds of miles of highway form the infrastructure of a fierce economy intimately linked to Mexico and therefore to the rest of Latin America.[26] In this way, their intensifying presence on interstate and international "free"ways embodies post-Fordist accumulation, the more flexible iteration of industrialization and modernization.

The pivotal role trucks have played in this age of global capitalism takes center stage in the debates surrounding commercial trucking between the U.S. and Mexico that have emerged since the signing of NAFTA in 1991. Under NAFTA, the U.S. was to provide unrestricted long-haul truck access by Mexican-domiciled trucks and vice versa by 1995. Urged by a coalition of U.S. trucker unions and highway safety groups, the Clinton administration put the implementation of the NAFTA mandate on hold; however, in 2001, a private NAFTA dispute-resolution panel ruled that the U.S. ban on trucks from Mexico directly violated the trade agreement. The Bush administration concordantly backed a pilot program initiative to facilitate the NAFTA mandate, but the debate continues. As of August 2007, Mexican motor carriers were still operating within restricted, twenty-mile-wide, commercial border zones in the U.S. Southwest, and the Teamsters, the Sierra Club, and Public Citizen remain tenacious in their legal actions against the implementation of this initiative. The stakes of these debates are both material

[26] These trucks also bring into focus the environmental impact of globalizing economies. On the U.S. side of border, communities are overwhelmingly Latino: "These communities suffer serious health impacts from the increased carcinogenic diesel fumes produced by the rise in cross-border trucking." See *Another Americas Is Possible* 9.

and ideological. I read the discourses of trucking and NAFTA as two technologies of the border, the terms of which are constantly being renegotiated in Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*.

In September 2007, the Bush administration lifted the ban against Mexican commercial trucks traveling outside of the border zones in the U.S. and began to put the NAFTA mandate into effect, despite ongoing controversy. The legislation governing these border-crossing trucks is strikingly uneven. For example, a Mexican truck driver, while subjected to the U.S. 10-hour long driving shift regulation, will not be protected by the U.S. labor law that requires the driver to be paid minimum wage. This example highlights the fundamental contradiction of policing borders against "illegal aliens" and "terrorist threats" while simultaneously opening them up to commerce.

To examine the inconsistency of border regulation more closely, Yamashita pulls and tugs at the geographical fabric of the US-Mexico borderlands. She begins this speculative work with the Tropic of Cancer, "a border made plain by the sun itself, a border one can easily recognize" rather than a border drawn by "plotting men" (71). Yamashita's quick pun on "plotting men" refers to the scheming of imperialist cartographers who, as Mary Louise Pratt so astutely observed many years ago, feminized depictions of the New World as a land that Empire had not yet penetrated.[27] Rafaela, who is able to perceive the dramatic shifts the Tropic of Orange sets in motion, positions herself as an interpreter of geographies rather than an object of it. Yamashita rejects the practice of mapping the world onto a sexualized representation of a woman of color's body. Instead, *Tropic of Orange* is a story whose geography remains in constant motion,

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[27] See *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992).

evading the fixating and fetishizing of the imperialist cartographer. Yamashita also puns on the narrative "plot" lines that follow unidirectional, linear trajectories to suggest progress and development. To emphasize the intersectionality and overlapping narratives at work in her novel, Yamashita offers alongside a more conventional table of contents a matrix of "HyperContexts" where a list of characters forms one axis and set of weekdays forms another. On this graph, a reader could plot her own course through the novel, choosing to jump from Chapter 4 to Chapter 13 just to stay with Buzzworm for a while, or to plot the points when/where the characters' movements intersect, as those points become suddenly quite visible when rendered in this multi-dimensional way.

Above all, though, Yamashita's imagining of these cartographical filaments suggests an elasticity of borders that respond to the constantly shifting and contested dynamics of social power. In the midst of Arcangel's revelatory dream in which he comes to understand the connection between the orange and the Tropic of Cancer, he perceives the orange as "rolling away to a space between ownership and the highway" (71). The orange, taken from private land in Mexico to the public thoroughfare of a highway that continues across national borders, provides Yamashita with the primary plot device through which to explore an imperfect system of transnational trafficking, where products and labor slip between owners on conduits that cannot be wholly governed, controlled, or policed, no matter the lengths state, national, and international regulations take to do so.

In "The Hour of the Trucks" chapter of *Tropic of Orange*, these slippery shipments of commerce and labor are carefully followed and interpreted through the "strangely organic vision" of Manzanar Murakami, a Japanese American who orchestrates and

conducts fantastical symphonies from the rumblings of traffic coursing through the concrete spaghetti below his perch on an LA freeway overpass. It is through Manzanar's perspective that "the beastly size of semis, garbage trucks, moving vans, and concrete mixers" takes on the characteristics of "the largest monsters of the animal kingdom…" whose "purpose was to transport the great products of civilization: home and office appliances, steel beams and turbines, fruits, vegetables, meats, and grain, Coca-Cola and Sparkletts, Hollywood sets, this fall's fashions, military hardware, gasoline, concrete, and garbage. Nothing was more or less important. And it was all moving here and there, back and forth, from the harbor to the train station to the highway to the warehouse to the airport to the docking station to the factory to the dump site" (119-120). *Tropic of Orange* locates the confluence of these commercial traffics at a freeway interchange in LA, where the scene of trucks in gridlock provides the occasion for Yamashita's critique of neoliberal globalization and "free trade" on the freeways.

Yamashita's emphasis on the laboring bodies behind the scene of NAFTA-compelled transnational trade takes shape most palpably when she captures moments when that traffic comes to a halt:

> A truck with a load of oranges was stalled in the street just at its narrowest place. Behind it was a line of cars and trucks and carts filled with produce, meats—dead and alive—grains, and kitchen utensils, all temporarily stalled in their progress toward the marketplace. (72)

Stalled in its progress, the traffic jam offers a speculative moment, a speculative temporality out of which emerges Arcangel's impossible heroics: "I have moved such trucks before," he announces. An uncanny continuity exists between Arcangel pulling the truck to again allow the free flow of commerce, and the pulling of the sun across the sky

as the Tropic of Cancer moves with the body of the orange. Arcangel's magnificent performance—[in an interview, Yamashita explains that she had Guillermo Gómez-Peña in mind when creating the character Arcangel ("Jouvert" 4)]—calls attention to the embodied labor that brings together Mexico and Los Angeles. Yamashita describes the supernatural force with which Arcangel is able to move the disabled truck:

> In each hand flashed a large metal hook… When the cable was in place, Arcangel secured both ends to the two hooks and drew the hooks through the very skin of his body, through the strangely scarred lobes at the sides of his torso. He moved slowly forward until the entire contraption was taut, until he was harnessed securely as an ox to its plough. (73-74)

The mechanics of the truck break, so it must be pulled forward by an act of labor witnessed as a public spectacle. Arcangel's performance art mobilizes an alternative technology of embodied memory, enacted to engage in a dialectical struggle over the cultural memory of the border, which in official narratives and power dynamics, actively overlooks the issue of labor in their construction of a discourse of free trade and neoliberal economics. In this scene, Yamashita speculates on performance art and cultural memory projects as border technologies that look to other powerful forces behind the moving and shaping of borders. Arcangel hooks his body into the body of the eighteen-wheeler and stages a border-crossing as a cyborg performance. At the very moment when one type of transborder technology has broken down, Yamashita presents her audience with this fantastic deconstruction of the other laboring bodies whose travel across and existence at the border can be much more perilous.

Yamashita writes against science fiction narratives that portray cyberspace as the new frontier. Instead, she returns us to the U.S.-Mexico border to suggest a potentially

productive intersection between technology studies and critical border studies. That Guillermo Gómez-Peña figures so strongly in Yamashita's work makes a lot of sense. Gómez-Peña's work, including *The New World Border* and *Codex Espanglieses*, also examines border technologies and its variable uses to map and remap the Mexican-U.S. corridor.

SE CAYÓ EL SISTEMA: Theorizing the Digital Borderlands through Speculative Acts and Migrant Technologies

Early versions of border patrol in Texas first targeted Chinese migrants hoping to cross the border from Mexico to the US in search of work during a period of exclusion, after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 came into effect.[28] As Claudia Sadowski-Smith documents, the passing of this anti-Asian legislation first institutionalized the category of the 'illegal' immigrant in US border discourse ("Reading Across Diaspora" 72).[29] The process of rendering migrants "alien" subjects emerged as part of a matrix of US racializations that sought to manage the variable flows of Asian and Latino migration at the US-Mexico border during the early twentieth century. The invention of new alien subjects through cultural texts such as anti-immigration laws was designed to regulate territorial borders and labor economies through racialized acts of alienation.

This legacy of Asian immigration to the United States by way of Latin America is a history that Yamashita addresses in both *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* and *Tropic of Orange*. In her tale about the US-Mexico border, Yamashita narrates this set of migrations

[28] See Estelle Lau footnote 1, chapter 3, 169: "Immigration officers on the border concentrated primarily on enforcement of the Chinese exclusion laws." See also Erika Lee "Enforcing the Borders"; and Perkins.
[29] Sadowski-Smith posits "the role of Chinese immigrants as predecessors of the Mexican *indocumentado*." See "Reading across Diaspora" 75.

primarily through the character of Bobby Ngu, whom she introduces through the voice of a Chicano in Koreatown:

> If you know your Asians, you look at Bobby. You say, that's Vietnamese… If you know your Asians. Turns out you'll be wrong. And you gonna be confused. Dude speaks Spanish. Comprende? So you figure it's one of those Japanese from Peru. Or maybe Korean from Brazil. Or Chinamex… Bobby's Chinese. Chinese from Singapore with a Vietnam name speaking like a Mexican living in Koreatown. (15)

In her description of all the kinds of Asian-Latino migrant Bobby is *not*, Yamashita provides a brief litany of multiple histories of Asian migration to Latin America. Bobby's experience of crossing many borders also shows up in Yamashita's depiction of his being perpetually in motion: "He don't have time to tell stories. Too busy. Never stops. Got only a little time to sleep even. Always working. Hustling. Moving... Sorts mail nonstop. Tons of it. Never stops" (16). For his day job, Bobby sorts mail at a large newspaper. A deft sorter, Bobby himself navigated his way to the United States through the cracks of such institutional sorting. In 1975, he and his brother slipped into a refugee camp in Singapore, where US soldiers presumed them to be Vietnamese orphans, rendered mute by the War. Interpellating themselves into a US narrative about Vietnamese refugees, the two boys obtain US passports and gain overseas passage under the name "Ngu" (significant because Bobby's father sends them off to "start a future all new" (15) when a US-owned multinational corporation puts their family out of business in Singapore). Already marked by US empire at multiple points in his migration to the Americas, Bobby's life repeatedly encounters the divisions of US policy, first, when he and his wife, Rafaela Cortes, must negotiate the border between them, and second, when Bobby must help his cousin cross the border after being smuggled by boat to Mexico. The story of

Bobby Ngu and his connections to Mexico (by marriage to Rafaela), the border (through his task of smuggling his cousin across it), and Asia (in his childhood of shifting national affiliations) remind us that the border has always been shaped by the negotiations of power on multiple fronts.

Tropic of Orange brings together the narratives of several primary figures of migration whose affiliations with the U.S.-Mexico border suggest such intertwined relationships to multiple borders, nations, and histories. Yamashita connects these narrative strands through technologies of memory. In one sense, characters communicate with each other across space using recording devices, broadcast media, and online community uplinks. They also share experiences of negotiating US empire and racializations at work both abroad and more domestically. In other words, these seven interwoven narratives connect via material technologies that circumvent the divisive strategies of the border and by collectively producing a cultural memory of the borderlands that defies the divisive strategies of US racial discourse.

The Vietnam War, for example, shapes the conditions of Bobby's childhood and migration to the Americas, and it also looms over the past of Buzzworm, an African American Vietnam veteran and self-described "Angel of Mercy" to his community. Geographically, Bobby and Buzzworm navigate downtown LA, Buzzworm beginning his narrative at Jefferson and Normandie, and Bobby starting out from Pico and Union, just on the other side of the freeway. Also, in a novel about oranges, these two shared geographies—Vietnam and South Central LA—intersect in the shadow of Agent Orange and O.J. Simpson (two highly mediated events about race and technologies of visibility).[30]

[30] In *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the Aids Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*, Marita Sturken writes: "The preoccupation with establishing American technology's ability to see can be directly traced to

The specter of war also looms over the character of Manzanar Murakami, whose memory of internment is triggered when the Tropic of Orange crosses his path.

Another cross-racial, technological link Yamashita makes is between Gabriel Balboa, a newspaper reporter stylized after Chicano activist Rubén Salazar, and Emi, a Japanese American TV news media maven. When Gabriel ends up in El Zócalo, he uploads genealogies of revolutionaries for the Zapatista movement, streaming data to Emi in L.A. While investigating the black market infant organ traders threatening Rafaela and her son Sol, he creates and monitors online newsgroups, which he calls a "net of loose threads" in which he might catch a bit of information (246). In his research of drug-infused oranges that incite a panic about fruit and borders in the US, Gabriel follows a paper trail of shipments that do not follow "the normal route" but instead move from Brazil to Honduras to Guatemala to Mexico to the US. He discovers "a bunch of bureaucratic papers to make transactions look legal, to make the connections fuzzy" (246). We find ourselves tracing the hidden routes not just of global oranges but also of hidden labor. "The invisibility of those who fingered the threads mocked my every move," Gabriel notes. "I wasn't going to get this story right away, but I'd get it eventually. After all, it was *my* story" (246). At first pursuing the story of smuggled produce, Gabriel Balboa follows the hidden labor behind the freer flow of capital in an era when documentation for illicit commodities can be easier to manufacture than paperwork for migrant workers.

> International crime cartels with access to satellite tracking devices. Tracking illegal merchandise in dozens of cities… Conceivably, there

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the representations of American technology in the Vietnam War. The 'impenetrable' jungle foliage of Vietnam has been consistently blamed for the inability of American military technology to win the war (hence the campaign of massive defoliation by Agent Orange perpetrated by the U.S. in Vietnam)." See Sturken 131-132.

> was a villain at the beginning and end of every signal. Multiple uplinks and downlinks to a constellation of satellites. But who was tracking all this? The commerce was on the ground; the threads pulling them around were in the air… The cartel, if that was what it was, was a big invisible net. If I had a strategy, it would be to get in there and snarl the net without entangling myself. (247).

Characterized as "truly noir, a neuromancer in dark space," Gabriel becomes a techno-journalist, himself linked into networks "on the ground" and "in the air." Like Bobby (mail envoy and Singaporean *coyote*), Buzzworm (radio savant and community organizer), Rafaela (domestic worker and border crosser), Emi (news anchor and televised broadcaster), and Manzanar (freeway conductor and homeless internment survivor), Gabriel reports on the invisible filaments that connect the Americas and the Pacific Rim.

Tropic of Orange offers a counter-narrative to the liberal vision of a multicultural Los Angeles that works through rendering labor invisible or at least abstract and the "forgetting" of histories of exclusion and racialization (Lowe *Immigrant Acts* 28). Yamashita's retelling of these histories of migration brings together Asian American, African American, and Mexican American Los Angeles around shared experiences of being crossed by border technologies and suggests that these populations share connected histories of citizenship curtailed by a state reaping the benefits of cheap labor and an uneven international trade system. In *Tropic of Orange*, Yamashita connects the primarily lateral transatlantic and transpacific routes of ships to the transamerican, North/South routes of trucks. Yamashita's cartographic reconfiguration situates the history of the U.S.-Mexico border within a more transnational framework of imperial dynamics, including the traces of U.S. empire-building in Asia, which occasioned an influx of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean immigrants to both Southern California and to Northern Mexico. Yamashita structures her speculative fiction under this rubric of

intersectionality through her hyperlinked table of contents, which makes visible the conjunctural relations between the geographical locations of Koreatown, Tijuana, and Singapore and also between the temporal beats of news-reporting, performance art, and palm-reading. In Yamashita's revisionist cartographies, the borderlands constitute a matrix of hypertextual associations informed by imbricated histories of alien exclusion acts, internment and deportation, 1990s anti-immigration policies, and the use of black and Latino military labor during US wars in Asia, for example. In its fantastic literalization of a flexible border, its consideration of border politics and discourse as magically real, and its positing of strategies of remembering that exceed official narratives of the border, *Tropic of Orange* deploys speculative fiction itself as a technology.

Conclusion

In my analysis of *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*, I examine how European colonial science provided a racialized discourse of tropicalization that facilitated US neocolonial plantation-building in Brazil and argue that the Fordist rhetoric of improving and civilizing the Amazon built on those earlier established colonial discourses. I present Yamashita's work as a counter-speculation that uses the genre of science fiction to excavate these layered legacies of imperial projects in the Amazon.

Then, turning to the multiple "oranges" of *Tropic of Orange*, I suggest that Yamashita links US imperialist projects in Asia and the Middle East with US neocolonial enterprises in Mexico by connecting the military technologies deployed during US wars abroad to surveillance technologies in place at the US-Mexico border. I argue that

Yamashita's dramatic remapping of the borderlands occasions a spectacular collision of transpacific and transcontinental routes in the form of a traffic jam and the stalled semi truck and that each character seizes on everyday media technologies to document the suddenly visible threads of global capitalism. By insistently returning to the imbricated labor histories of Asian Americans and Latinos, Karen Tei Yamashita's speculative fictions also suggest a more transnational formulation of Asian America—one that adopts a Latin American framework to consider North-South dynamics that move beyond narratives that position the East only in relationship to the West.

In place of the fetishized geisha-bot and in defiance of the invisibility of the women of color who form the majority of the techno-labor force in Asian and Mexican manufacturing plants, Yamashita offers alternative cyborg narratives about transgressed boundaries, grids of cross-ethnic affiliation, and technologies of memory that exceed the scope of the nation. This chapter has investigated technologies in the service of US empire and has included in that category neoliberal and pluralistic discourses that imagine a world "free" of borders while intensifying the militarization along those borders—that imagine a population "free" of difference while working to stratify labor groups and cultivate divisions between them—that imagine a globe united through technology but suffering the consequences of globalization's perpetuation of inequalities.

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Chapter 2 |The Speculative Futures of Race, Reproduction, and Citizenship

We need visions of the future, and our people need them more than most.

--Samuel Delany[1]

Nadya Suleman, a.k.a. "Octomom," gave birth to octuplets on January 26, 2009. When the news first broke, before any details about Suleman and the conditions surrounding this reproductive event were publicized, the blogging and mediated public rehashed a familiar performance of exuberant congratulations, deploying the language of "miracles" and "blessings." As conjectures from the medical community that the octuplets must be a product of assisted reproductive technologies (ART) emerged, though, the narrative shifted in tone, hedging away from the story of medical triumph and moving toward one of serious complication and questionable ethics. Simultaneously, questions arose about Suleman's identity and her intentions. Once the press learned that Suleman was a single mother with six children at home already, the conversation turned ugly quickly, borrowing from late twentieth century reproductive discourses about welfare, overpopulation, and immigration (often imbricated with xenophobic anxieties and racism) to alienate "Octomom" from the camp of heteronormative reproduction. As Dana-Ain Davis argues, the uncertainty of Suleman's class and race frustrated attempts to fit her narrative into a preset social script about reproduction. "Quickly the miracle turned to disgust," Davis remarks, "which seemed to be fueled in part…by an inability to profile the woman who gave birth…"[2] In the absence of these details, an unfortunately predictable set of speculations arose about this single mother. According to Davis's research, "[Suleman's] fecundity was equated first with an illegal alien status and then later

[1] Quoted in Nalo Hopkinson, "Looking for Clues," May 18, 2009, *Writing Blog.*
[2] See Dana-Ain Davis.

she was African American… From there, it didn't take long for an ideological default to be asserted that she was on welfare…" Nadya Suleman's story puts pressure on the disjuncture between public assistance and assisted reproductive technologies. The contradictory connotations of "assistance" in these two areas point directly to the terribly uneven ways we in the United States talk about things like care, hospice, health insurance, and risk. That discussions about reproductive technologies so often get caught up in discourses about race, class, gender, and sexuality serves as an example of how cultural discourses use medical discourses, which so often naturalize differences based on ethnicity and gender, to manage these discrepancies. For this reason, this chapter interrogates the "science fictions" of reproduction.

In the words of NBC reporter Gordon Tokumatsu, "Most of what's out there [about Nadya Suleman's octuplet birth] is just creative speculation."[3] This "creative speculation" constitutes a science fiction—not only because the celebrity news media, members of the medical community, and at-home online commentators actively crafted and circulated fictions about the occasion for, circumstances surrounding, and details of this octuplet birth—but also because these speculations play out tensions about how biological technologies should be regulated, to whom they should be made available, and what they mean in a capitalist society witnessing an increased commodification of bodies facilitated by new technologies.[4]

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[3] NBC Los Angeles, Gordon Tokumatsu, "Mom's Publicist Sets Record Straight", viewed on 03.26.09: http://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/local/Mom_s_Publicist_Sets_Record_Straight_Los_Angeles.html

[4] Though reproductive technologies such as *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) are not new, the stories about them have gained increasing attention and circulation on cable television and online. Nadya Suleman and her fourteen children will appear on a reality TV show, joining TLC's *Jon & Kate Plus 8* (about a couple who gave birth to twins and then sextuplets), *18 Kids and Counting* (about an Arkansas couple with 18 children), and *Table for 12* (a couple with 10 kids) in a recent interest in megafamilies.

The creative speculations generated around "Octomom" produced vituperative, venomous threats as well as calls for sometimes violent regulation and policing of reproduction, and it is troubling to find in these speculations characteristics reminiscent of eugenicist thinking from the early decades of the twentieth century. Critics questioned Suleman's mental "fitness," asking whether she had been counseled regarding "selective reduction." Such arguments about women not being mentally fit enough to reproduce worked to sustain sterilization laws in the infamous Supreme Court case Buck v. Bell in 1927, at the peak of the eugenics movement in the United States. Whereas Carrie Buck's "feeble-mindedness" was couched as a threat to the gene pool and therefore to the health of the state, discussions about Suleman's mental fitness more closely resemble the more "punitive" and more racialized rhetoric used in U.S.-backed sterilization campaigns in Puerto Rico, which combined eugenicist precedents with xenophobic anxieties about overpopulation (Briggs *Reproducing Empire* 51). Joann Killeen, Suleman's first public relations representative, distanced herself from the case once death threats were issued to both women. Killeen reported to Larry King in an interview: "They've said to me that I should be put down like an old dog, I should be paralyzed, my client's uterus should be ripped out, she should be put on an island…" The eugenicist impulse to call for Suleman's compulsory sterilization bears a century-old legacy in the United States.[5]

Suleman's very "public pregnancy" instantiates what Anne Balsamo recognizes as a troubling convergence of reproductive technologies and a desire to discipline the pregnant body through modes of heightened surveillance.[6] Suleman's case also brings into

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[5] Championed by scientists such as Charles Davenport and Alexander Graham, the eugenics movement also gained legislative traction in the form of a 1927 Supreme Court ruling that condoned the forced sterilization of Carrie Buck, an eighteen-year-old deemed "feeble-minded" and therefore unfit to reproduce.
[6] See Balsamo 80-115.

focus the ways media also become reproductive technologies, producing again and again visual and textual narratives about race and class as they collide with the politics of reproduction. Some of the most helpful critical frameworks for analyzing have looked beyond textual narratives to consider the significant role visual culture has played in the popular understanding of reproductive technologies. The Octomom story exemplifies the ways in which narratives about race, reproduction, and technology get formulated, rewritten, and multiply deployed in the news media and on the blogosphere.

As the dramatized narrative about Nadya Suleman and her children continues to play out on irreverent celebrity news blogs, tabloid newspapers, and magazines of the same ilk, the Octomom story takes on increasingly overt elements of science fiction. Unsettling images have recently emerged that frame Suleman's pregnant body as either freakishly alien or as hyper-alienated, in the sense that "Octomom" has become a figure of both biological and capitalist excesses.[7] The text that accompanies one widely circulated image of Suleman eight days before her scheduled C-section reads: "Octopussy may not have to pimp out her wombmates for dollars on her website anymore, as this 'Alien' photo has just landed her a new gig ... the poster mom for anti-in-vitro fertilization." By calling Suleman an "Alien," this TMZ staff writer casts her story even more concretely into the genre of science fiction, aligning Octomom with the *Alien* movies, a series that is intensely riddled with anxieties about maternity in an age of assisted reproductive technologies and genetic cloning.

Calling Suleman "alien" also registers another, simultaneous anxiety, directly related to the spurious claims that Suleman was an illegal immigrant. Stamped as the

[7] See Figures 1 and 2 in Appendix.

"property" of the celebrity and entertainment website TMZ.com, the image consists of two side-by-side photographs—one frontal and one profile view—of Suleman's very pregnant belly. This pairing of one front-view and one side-view photo appears most frequently in the category of prison mug shots. Marked as "alien" and prisoner in this one image, Suleman inhabits the visual space of an alienated citizen. With her shirt pulled up to reveal her belly, Suleman poses in front of not the blank wall of a prison booking room but what looks to be a curtain of another institution: the clinic. In this image the disciplinary settings of the prison and the hospital are weirdly conjoined, and the public discourse about Suleman's "right" to have octuplets is inseparable from questions about her "right" to U.S. citizenship.

I begin by unpacking the Octomom narrative in order to set up the stakes of the science fictions this chapter examines. The politics of reproduction get at questions of citizenship, family, nation, and futurity. While there is much more to say about the connections between discourses of economic "futures" and the assisted reproductive technologies industry (i.e. the questions of labor, risk, care, contracts, ownership, and insurance that arise in transnational surrogacy situations), I focus in this chapter on two science fiction texts that position black pregnant women at the center of their narratives about reproductive technologies in order to interrogate the racialization of these narratives and visualities of reproductive futurity. I not only analyze the form, content, and contexts of these fictions, but also the histories of slavery and eugenics that inform my readings of these texts. I include such "hauntologies" in my analysis of these fictions to demonstrate how memories of the past continue to shape formulations of the future in the speculative mode. These hauntologies about race, reproduction, and technology help

situate my investigation of how we tell stories about the future, what role reproduction plays in those stories, and how one might begin to dislodge reproductive futurity from an equivalence with white heteropatriarchy.[8]

First, I analyze the high-profile, big budget, Hollywood film *Children of Men* (2006), directed by Mexican filmmaker Alfonso Cuarón. This film about reproductive crisis places the burden of reproduction on the body of a black, female refugee character named Kee. I investigate what histories haunt this film in order to unpack the complicated and sometimes contradictory meanings elicited from Cuarón's casting of a black woman in this role—a choice made all the more noticeable because, in P.D. James's novel on which the film is based, the main black female character is the midwife, not the childbearer herself. I again draw on Avery Gordon's formulation of haunting as a "transformative recognition" to read the "ghostly matters" conjured both purposively and unwittingly in Cuarón's film (Gordon 8). I argue that by forcing our attention on certain background scenes and by emphasizing moments of interruption and disorientation in the hero's journey, Cuarón opens a space for critically encountering the apparitions of torture, state-sponsored violence and surveillance to inhabit and puncture our experience of the central plot. I also argue, though, that the film asks us to feel this haunting primarily through the experiences of a character that, though affected and depressed by the repressive systems around him, is not directly targeted by them.

Both the Octomom story and *Children of Men* are racialized narratives about reproduction and technology that come into popular circulation at the beginning of the

[8] Using haunting as an analytic through which to read science fiction might seem counter-intuitive to those who insist on strict genre divisions between fantasy and science fiction; however, the ghost, as a figure that emerges from fantasy, calls attention to that which "science" eschews from its fiction. If "science" and "fiction" converge in the name of the genre "science fiction," they do so as magnetically opposed charges to constitute an oxymoron, where the ghost marks the tension and attraction between the two poles.

twenty-first century. Though Octomom takes shape as a cultural text through press coverage, tabloid speculations, and online posts of people's opinions and comments while *Children of Men* is a big-budget film adaptation of James's dystopian novel, I approach them both as science fictions. The public narrative constructed around Nadya Suleman's birth of octuplets borrows many of its vocabularies and ideological trappings from welfare discourses that emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Meanwhile, because Cuarón's *Children of Men* is based on James's novel published in 1992, it indirectly engages that specific set of discourses about reproduction and amplifies the stakes by casting Kee as a woman of color. In these speculative texts, notions of futurity pivot on reconstructions of the past.

Next, I turn to Nalo Hopkinson's science fiction novel *Midnight Robber* (2000), which explores alternative possibilities at the intersection of technology and reproduction by imagining cross-species partnering and queer family formations. Published in 2000, *Midnight Robber* renegotiates the conditions of survival in end-of-the-world scenarios. The ex-slave, post-apocalyptic societies Hopkinson depicts survive not through a return to heterosexual reproduction and vigilant adherence to "family values," but through the emergence of migrant communities in which reproductive bodies are queered and dislodged from heteronormative domesticity. I argue that Hopkinson looks to the future not only with a wariness about mythologies of technological "advancement" but also with a keen attention to how oppressive systems of power reproduce themselves even in processes of decolonization through social systems that are shaped by gender hierarchies.

Midnight Robber also highlights Hopkinson's revisionist speculations on technocultural origin myths, as the author dissociates technology from its Western

cultural codes, offering an alternative future that emerges from technologies that owe their names and architectures to African folklore and diasporic histories. By calling into question the narrative of technology's origins and even how and what we call "technology," Hopkinson challenges Western associations of technology with notions of progress, modernity, and freedom, which have historically served an ulterior purpose of rationalizing the exploitation of marginalized peoples in the name of development. In Hopkinson's own words, the paradigms and stories about technology "shape not only the names for the technology we create, but the type of technology we create" (Hopkinson, "Conversation," 1). Hopkinson herself has done much of this critical analysis herself, which poses somewhat of a challenge for writing about her work.[9] While my analysis does investigate the Afrofuturist and Caribbean diasporic impulses that inflect Hopkinson's visions of futurity, I focus in particular on how the networks that arise in Hopkinson's worldings emphasize the interlinked labor histories of blacks and Asians in the Caribbean. An Afro-Caribbean Canadian writer, Hopkinson calls for the forging of transnational—or in this case, intergalactic and cross-species—coalitions in times of emergency. My analysis of queer kinship models and diaspora-inspired technologies in *Midnight Robber* also attends to the linkages between queer and diasporic networks as alternative formulations of belonging and community that extend beyond the reproduction of family and nation.

Finally, because Hopkinson articulates these networks through the genre of science fiction, I stress the importance of making such interventions in how we conceptualize "technology," particularly because such notions have historically shaped

[9] A number of interviews with the author have been published in scholarly journals. See Glave and Hopkinson 146; Nelson 97-113; Rutledge and Hopkinson 589; Watson-Aifah and Hopkinson 160; and Hopkinson "Code Sliding."

and continue to determine conditions of citizenship. If, as Gilles Deleuze has suggested, we are moving from discipline societies to "societies of control," from systems of enclosure to mechanisms of dispersal, from the factory to the corporation, then citizenship shifts even more profoundly from questions of birth to that of access (3-7). What does it mean, then, to revisit narratives about reproduction, fertility, and futurity at this moment?

Both Cuarón and Hopkinson produce science fiction technofutures that critique the technological utopianism and neoliberalism avidly espoused at the turn of the twenty-first century just before tech companies lost their foothold in the global economy. In *Children of Men,* technology does not deliver the future from poverty, state oppression, discrimination, illness, or death. Rather, it suffers from worldwide infertility, rampant pollution, and an intensely abusive police state. Cuarón critiques neoliberalism as a contradiction of ideology and policy by portraying a near-future in which the gap between the First and Third Worlds widens when militarized border technologies work in conjunction with cultures of individualism to bolster isolationist state power.

The politics of reproduction and speculations on futures shift significantly from *Children of Men*'s masculinist and nationalist perspectives to *Midnight Robber*'s queer, feminist epistemologies. Taking into account theories of spectatorship and practices of looking, my analysis of *Children of Men* explores ways that Cuarón sets out to unravel the suturing of viewer to protagonist but ultimately cannot sufficiently de-center Theo as the white, male hero of the film. On a related note, the film remains fixated on London as the epicenter of this future world in *Children of Men*; whereas, in *Midnight Robber*, the cultural

legacies that inform the otherworldly settings we encounter stem from the multiple and hybrid traditions most often found in the Caribbean.

Whose Future? Technologies of Reproduction and Representation in *Children of Men*

> "I really like to try to communicate with younger people. I have a big faith and a big belief in the next generation. I'm not very hopeful about our present and, if anything, pessimistic about the present, but I'm very hopeful about the future."
>
> --Alfonso Cuarón[10]

Alfonso Cuarón's film *Children of Men*, building on the premise of P.D. James's novel of the same title, depicts a near-future dystopia in which humans have been infertile for eighteen years, during which time state practices of regulating bodies have become increasingly insidious, totalitarian, and violent. Set in the United Kingdom of 2027, the film depicts a world that has witnessed societal collapse, rampant violence, and ecological devastation, in which national governments have crumbled with the exception of an increasingly authoritarian British state.[11] Propagandist videos on the subway declare: "Only Britain soldiers on." Migrants, people of color, the poor, and the sick are, as always, hardest hit by this nationalist shift as anti-immigration legislation, military-backed deportation practices, and state-mandated fertility screening tests create a heavily policed, xenophobic, and paranoid environment—an environment so rife with pollution and toxic waste to seem at the end of its life-sustaining capacity. Against a bleak landscape of

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[10] See "A Life in Pictures."

[11] While the film is set in and around London, the U.S. looms large in Cuarón's work. Released in 2006, Cuarón's primary narrative unfolds against the haunting backdrop of Abu Ghraib and other U.S.-backed torture camps, which take the form of refugee detention centers in the film. These detention centers invoke not only the specter of Nazi concentration camps but also the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border. Set to Kryzysztof Penderecki's "Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima," these scenes are also haunted by another example of U.S. military aggression in the form of nuclear attack on Japan during World War II.

religious fanaticism and violent struggles between ideologically and politically desperate groups, Cuarón remains invested in the figure of hope as embodied by the pregnant African "fugee" (refugee) named Kee, played by Claire Hope Ashitey, a British actress of Ghanaian descent. Much of the film's central action revolves around Kee's struggle to reach a group called "The Human Project," a group of scientists who presumably will not take Kee's baby to co-opt it for political use or their own selfish gain.

Children of Men levies a critique against techno-utopianism using similar strategies as Yamashita's speculative fictions, which I explored in the previous chapter. Cuarón presents a future in which technology is not a new instrument that delivers freedom, equality, and an open society, but rather, quite the opposite. [12] Furthermore, his vision of the future also investigates various histories of human rights violations of the past century, including the Holocaust, Japanese internment during World War Two, and the proliferation of offshore military detention facilities under the auspices of a global war on terror. On the other hand, Cuarón's vision of hope—because it takes the shape of human fertility and the delivery of Kee's baby—relies on a model of reproductive "success," a paradigm that fails to challenge heteropatriarchal, forward-looking-only drives toward "progress." I locate this baby delivery system of hope to be a key contradiction in Cuarón's cinematic project.

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[12]Cuarón would have an early education in the uses and abuses of technology as his father, Alfredo Cuarón, worked as a nuclear physicist for the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), an organization that aims to "accelerate and enlarge the contribution of atomic energy to peace, health and prosperity throughout the world. It shall ensure, so far as it is able, that assistance provided by it or at its request or under its supervision or control is not used in such a way as to further any military purpose" ("Statute": Article II: http://www.iaea.org/About/statute_text.html). The haunting of Hiroshima (Cuarón uses excerpts from Krysztof Penderecki's *Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima* on the soundtrack of the film) in *Children of Men* and the film's overt critique of military uses of technology find interesting resonances with IAEA's declared relationship to science and technology.

To investigate this contradiction, I parse Cuarón's cinematographic choices, which I find to be one of the main sources of my ambivalent response to *Children of Men*. Following some of the techniques he explored in his 2001 film *Y Tu Mamá También*, *Children of Men* presents a tension between documentary styles—one that ties us to a particular subject during a crisis, and another more experimental style that works as a carefully directed, political essay. Although it seems that from the opening scene, the viewer is sutured to the main character Theo (Clive Owen), Cuarón does not always privilege Theo's perspective, which cannot always compete with the disturbing images of police violence and social unrest that occupy the unmistakably dynamic backdrop of the film. To an extent, the camera constantly asks the viewer to look beyond the plot's white male protagonist; however, the only alternative point-of-view Cuarón offers is perhaps his own in the form of a disembodied, wide-shot perspective. But in a film that places the hope of the world's future on an expected child, where is the expectant mother? It is around Kee that the politics of looking become particularly problematic. Cuarón overlooks Kee's perspective in this narrative about reproduction—a neglect of the mother symptomatic of the plot's fetishization of the child as the hope for the future. The title, after all, of both the film and the novel it adapts, names "children" and "men" with the glaring omission of the mother. Building on feminist scholars of science, technology, and visual culture, I link the eclipsing of Kee's point-of-view in the film to practices of cropping traces of the mother out of fetal photography used in pro-life campaigns and question the cost of *Children of Men*'s vision of hope for the future in the form of a child. Cuarón's anamorphic cinematography, despite its attempt to decenter Theo's perspective, verges on what Donna Haraway has called a falsely omniscient gaze,

employed often in the scientific mode of objective observation. Cuarón's documentary style ironically relies heavily on technology to manufacture realism, and as a science fiction film, *Children of Men* could benefit from a consideration of "situated knowledges," which Haraway champions alongside trickster figures such as the coyote and hybrid monsters such as the cyborg. In other words, though Cuarón masterfully critiques the destructive forces of unchecked capitalist desire, military abuses of technology, and contradictions between socio-economic neoliberalism and anti-immigrant nativism, his mastery over the camera, his position as an *auteur* influenced by the French New Wave, and his lack of attention to gendered and racialized practices of looking ultimately reproduce masculinist epistemologies that belie much of the work he sets out to do in the film.

Where and how does the cinematic gaze land in this film? To whom and how is the audience's perspective sutured? To what extent does Cuarón destabilize the audience's connection to the film's white, male protagonist? Theo could easily be characterized as an untrustworthy, unlikeable, anti-hero. He is a coward, a broken soul, a man who uses the occasion of public mourning over the death of the youngest human alive to excuse himself from his dreary, dead-end desk job. Yet, from the opening scene of the film, the camera and the narrative follow the emotional and physical journey of this disaffected, depressed ex-activist.[13] We shadow Theo as he takes his morning coffee,

[13] While Martin Manalansan has recently theorized "disaffection" as a means through which Filipino domestic care workers disrupt the gendered discourses around "care" and "love" that problematically frame transnational labor in terms of the heteropatriarchal family, I do not use "disaffected" here to include Theo as an example of Manalansan's formulations of queer love or disaffected care work. Rather, I argue that Cuarón deploys disaffection as a sign of loss—of mourning the loss of the patriarch, of his fertility, of his virility. It is precisely Theo's disaffection that initiates the film's drive toward futurity through the restoration of the heteronormative family. In other words, Cuarón does not see disaffection as a site of potential resistance, of strategic opting out of a system, but rather as the site of crisis that must be resolved through a reinvigoration of masculinity. See Cruz-Malavé and Manalansan 1-12.

watches the morning news, and goes to work. The film sutures us to his annoyance with the public weeping over the murder of "Baby Diego," an eighteen-year-old boy, whose fame comes from being the last baby born on earth. He is shaken by the bombing he has witnessed from feet away, but Theo remains an unreliable and unlikeable protagonist, disconnected from and therefore complicit in the forms of state repression he passes on his way to work. By the end of the narrative, Theo emerges a veritable hero, whose purpose has been restored through a recuperation of his fatherhood and masculinity, and it is this plot trajectory, still functioning according to a logic of development and progress, that Cuarón makes an effort to undercut and counterbalance with the perpetual intrusion of Theo's environment into his life.

Cinematically, *Children of Men* follows the technical style Cuarón employed in *Y Tu Mamá También*, in which long, wide-shot takes constantly frame the characters against an equally detailed and significant environment. In a film that minimizes close-ups, the socio-political landscape becomes as much of a character as the individuals. In a paper I presented in 2002, my co-authors and I argued that *Y Tu Mamá También* "offers a resistant narrative of citizenship… These moments of resistance manifest [in] 'detoured' camera movement… often seen as disruptions—disruptions, which become essential to laying bare how the repressive governmentality of capital suppresses signs of labor and disciplines bodies through heteronormativity."[14] In her incisive analysis of *Y Tu Mamá También*, María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo also comments on this oscillation between the primary and the peripheral narrative lines:

> [T]he narrative trajectory of the triangulated love story is intercut with interstitial scenes that interrupt the filmic text… These scenes, which

[14] See Bahng, et al 2002.

> might otherwise be read as pastoral asides, are a key to understanding the film as anything but innocent or apolitical. They brush up against the "main action" of the film, steadfastly decentering the plot while nevertheless insisting on interdependence between the peripheral and the consequential story lines. (752)

Slavoj Zizek's comments on *Children of Men*, which appear on the DVD extras, also call attention to the tension Cuarón cultivates between the foreground and the background. Zizek argues that "the true focus of the film is there in the background, and it's crucial to leave it as a background." Calling this technique a kind of "anamorphosis," Zizek suggests that "if you look at the thing too directly—the oppressive, social dimension—you don't see it; you can see it in an oblique way only if it remains in the background. *Children of Men* is, in a strange way, a remake of *Y Tu Mamá También*." The idea of activating the background is quite compelling, as is the potentiality Cuarón, as a Mexican auteur, sees in that which the privileged, mobile subject (in this case Theo/Clive Owen) often overlooks, ignores, or passes by; but, to what extent does a formulation of an anamorphic gaze decenter the white, male perspective? How does *Children of Men* differ from *Y Tu Mamá También*?

Cuarón's mobilization of the background is a cinematic strategy that capitalizes on the anamorphic widescreen technology available to the medium of film, but I also find it useful to think of anamorphosis as a technology of Avery Gordon's theorization of "haunting." In *Ghostly Matters*, Gordon builds on Fredric Jameson's definition of "spectrality" as "*what makes the present waver*" to theorize how haunting works: "The emphasis on the wavering present, on the propinquity of hard-to-touch, hard-to-see abstractions powerfully crisscrossing our concrete quotidian lives is key" (Gordon 168). As Theo passes through the gates to the Bexhill Refugee Camp, a palimpsest of historical

referents appears, as the gates themselves look remarkably like those outside of the Nazi concentration camps of World War II such as Auschwitz and Dachau, but the sign above the gates reads not "*Arbeit Macht Frei"* ("Work Shall Set You Free") but "Homeland Security." In this very detailed and carefully choreographed scene of entering the camp, Cuarón hints at the extrapolative process that led him to this grim near-future. Nazi concentration camps and U.S.-backed detention centers haunt Bexhill's architecture as historical antecedents, and through these visual cues, Cuarón's film glances at the apparition of state-sanctioned torture and organized ethnic persecution. As Theo, Kee, and Miriam (Kee's doula) enter the camp, the camera takes our gaze over the shoulders of the main characters to look out the bus window to witness hooded, handcuffed prisoners kneeling in a line and dogs incited to terrorize and attack them.

Cuarón's audience has seen similar images before, specifically in April and May of 2004, when the abuse of prisoners at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq came to public attention both online and through major news networks and publications such as CBS's *60 Minutes II*, *The New Yorker*, ABC's *Nightly News*, and *The Washington Post*. One particularly chilling specter of the torture acts at Abu Ghraib lingers for an extra moment on screen as the bus pauses in front of a hooded and wired detainee standing on a box behind bars, arms extended to each side of his body, and immobile because, as the audience already knows, he has been told that if he falls off the box, he will suffer electrocution. In this quick moment, the recent past and the near future collide, causing a rupture in the cinematic temporality of Theo's narrative—effectively causing the present to waver. In this way, Cuarón makes critical use of the speculative fiction genre by imagining a future that nevertheless remains haunted by the past. By bringing the specter

of Guantánamo home, to Bexhill, England, the film relocates the prison camp and the military detention center within domestic borders rather than allowing it to rest in the offshore imaginary.[15]

In *Children of Men*, Cuarón effectively summons the specter of state-sponsored systems of disappearance by reproducing in Bexhill the chilling realities of offshore prison camps and "black site" detention centers of the twenty-first century. This cinematic technology may allow for a temporal haunting, but anamorphosis nevertheless requires a central gaze, around which the parameters of peripheral vision are delineated. The sidelong glance and the oblique look do not necessarily challenge the dynamics of spectatorship. Viewers must deal with the foreground even while the background compels our attention, and we remain primarily tethered to Theo's point of view throughout Cuarón's film. We follow his footsteps and rarely come to inhabit Kee's perspective of being shuttled around by various groups who hope to capitalize on the significance of her pregnancy. And Theo can never fully disavow his privileged point of view. Smuggled into Bexhill, Theo even tries to feign foreignness when a prison guard threatens to compromise the secret of Kee's condition. The scene in which Clive Owen attempts to speak in broken English to disguise his native tongue is one of the most awkward and least believable moments in the film. After all, Theo has access through family connections to the papers required for more mobility across a heavily surveilled and policed state. Before he meets Kee, he easily moves from one mode of transportation

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[15] In her stunning essay "Where is Guantánamo?" Amy Kaplan lays out the stakes of such a move. She writes: "[T]he legal space of Guantánamo today has been shaped and remains haunted by its imperial history. This complex history helps to explain how Guantánamo has become an ambiguous space both inside and outside different legal systems. Guantánamo's geographic and historical location provides the legal and political groundwork for the current violent penal regime." See Kaplan "Where is Guantánamo?" 833.

to the next as he passes before cages of detained subjects. Even when he is jumped and forcibly taken from the street—a gesture toward the apparently commonplace disappearances of other citizens—the whole event turns out to be somewhat of a charade, as his ex-wife Julian has orchestrated the "theatrics," as she calls them, in order to arrange a clandestine meeting with him. The tension anamorphosis creates between center and periphery ultimately remains beholden to a framework that postcolonial theorists have argued reproduces imperial logic by positing a metropole (ostensibly home to order, modernity, and science) and a periphery (imagined site of chaos, primitiveness, and irrationality).[16] Even the film's setting moves from the metropole (London) to the countryside (barn scene) and eventually to the shore (Bexhill), where those who have been deported from the metropole must now fight to survive.

Race and the Visual Iconographies of Futurity

The lack of attention to Kee's point of view becomes all the more troubling when one considers what symbolic work her body performs in Cuarón's screenplay and cinematic orchestration. The scene in which Kee reveals her pregnancy—to the camera, to the audience, and to Theo—demonstrates the film's conflicted politics of representing reproduction. Staged in a barn on a dairy farm, the scene places Kee, Theo, and a herd of diary cows amid the mechanical apparatuses of industrialized milk extraction. Various tubes and pumps fill the confined space, and as we enter the barn along with Theo, Kee stands in a central pen surrounded by several calves. Surrounded by the signs of industrial technology, Kee comments on the surgical cruelty these dairy cows undergo for the sake

[16] See, for example, Said.

of the dairy industry: "You know what they do to these cows? They cut off their tits. They do. *(Imitating slicing)*. Gone. Bye. Only leave four. Four tits fits the machine. It's wacko. Why not make machines that suck eight titties?" On the one hand, Cuarón's barn scene connects the exploitation of black women's bodies and the exploitation of dairy cows, which live only a brief life of 2-3 years, during which time their sole function is to become pregnant, produce milk, and yield a fat calf immediately slated for the veal slaughterhouse. Kee's commentary on the violence committed against the milking cows whose utters are surgically removed to fit industrial milking apparatuses begs us to consider the often violent history of slave breeding, government-sponsored sterilization campaigns, and the precarious terms of black women's reproductive rights in the United States.[17] On the other hand, one might be reminded, as I was, of another, much more complex scene of black motherhood in literary history. When in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* Sethe enters a barn to take her baby's life, it is to save it from the institution of slavery, a system that relies on black women's reproduction in order to perpetuate itself. In Morrison's *Beloved*, readers enter the horrific barn scene through the perspective of the third person omniscient, and we understand Sethe's drastic act as the ending of a biological life whose political life the institution of slavery has already terminated. When Schoolteacher laments the loss of Sethe's viability as a slave, he explains to his son that "you just can't mishandle creatures and expect success" (Morrison 149-50). In *Children of Men*, however, Cuarón replaces the scene of horror in the barn with a scene of hope, set to the angelic sounds of revelation, orchestrated by John Tavener, a British composer who combines Christian themes with 1970s minimalism. The scene becomes sacralized,

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[17] See Roberts; Washington; Bumiller et al. In the context of US imperialism in Puerto Rico, see Briggs *Reproducing Empire*.

transformed into a manger scene, alluding to miraculous birth. Kee stands in three-quarter pose, covering her breasts with one arm and cupping her belly with the other, in a pose reminiscent of Botticelli's Venus. With overtures to both Christian iconography and Renaissance art, *Children of Men* registers a connection to various historical configurations of the birth of the modern. Cuarón's version of the barn scene differs from Morrison's narrative of a black fugitive woman desperate to spare her child from a future intent on capitalizing on that child's life by setting up the black mother as an object to be gazed at rather than as the subject through whom the audience experiences the scene. By directing Kee to pose in this way, Cuarón subjects her to what Donna Haraway in her analysis of Albrecht Dürer's 1538 engraving *Draughtsman Drawing a Nude* calls "the disciplining screen" that "attests to the power of the technology of perspective to discipline vision to produce a new kind of knowledge of form" ("Virtual Speculum" 29-30). Haraway's argument follows feminist art historian Lynda Nead's analysis of the engraving as a pivotal example of gendered practices of looking and the ways in which technologies of visual representation participate in this uneven relationship between artist and subject, auteur and actor. By directing Kee to pose as if the subject of Botticelli's painting, Cuarón might supplant white iconic womanhood with the figure of a black Venus, but this replacement is an equally loaded icon that bears an especially fraught racialized history in visual culture.

Unpacking the politics of race, gender, and spectatorship in this scene requires the help of both feminist film critique and analytics that think about race and sexuality as inextricably linked formations to recognize what else is at stake in this visual representation of a black woman's pregnant body. Theo initially misunderstands what

Kee's disrobing signals. "What are you doing? Don't do that," Theo says as Kee begins to drop her shift off her shoulders. He momentarily misinterprets the unveiling of her pregnancy as a sexual invitation. Panning slowly up from the calves in the pen to Kee's naked, pregnant torso, the camera invites viewers to inhabit a scopophilic spectator position that fetishizes the black pregnant body. This problematic gaze is one that Laura Mulvey interrogates in her well-cited essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in which she interrogates the power and privilege of the male gaze especially as it regards the iconicized woman on screen.[18] Much work has also been done to historicize the ways in which this way of seeing is not only gendered but also racialized. Kobena Mercer extends Mulvey's critique of the objectification of women in film to investigate the fetishistic representations of black men in the photographic work of Robert Mapplethorpe.[19] Mercer understands this fetishistic fantasy to point to the artist's own mastery of looking, his mastery over the technology (the camera)—a delight in mastery that Mercer suggestively ties to the colonial fantasy. In his analysis of late nineteenth-century iconographies of female sexuality, Sander Gilman shows how the visual cultures produced by medical science worked to link the image of the prostitute with supposed black female sexual deviance by objectifying the physiognomy of Sarah Bartmann, popularly known at that time as the "Hottentot Venus."[20] Extending Gilman's research, Evelyn Hammonds examines the participation of science and medicine in the racialized

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[18] In her "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by *Duel in the Sun*," written in 1981, Mulvey explains that her 1975 essay investigated "the relationship between the image of woman on screen and the 'masculinization' of the spectator position, regardless of actual sex (or possible deviance) of any real live movie-goer."

[19] Kobena Mercer argues that in Mapplethorpe's *Black Males* (1983) and *The Black Book* (1986), "the black man's flesh becomes burdened with the task of symbolizing the transgressive fantasies and desires of the white gay male subject. The glossy, shining, fetishized surface of black skin thus serves and services a white male desire to look and to enjoy the fantasy of mastery precisely through the scopic intensity that the pictures solicit." See Mercer *Welcome to the Jungle* 176.

[20] See also Fausto-Sterling.

construction of black women's sexuality from the nineteenth to the late twentieth century (170-82). Gilman's and Hammonds's analyses in turn become crucial to Roderick Ferguson's formulation in *Aberrations in Black* of a queer of color critique that interrogates how heteropatriarchy reproduces itself through such cultural narratives of race and sexuality.

The barn scene in *Children of Men*, serves primarily to signal the major turning point for Theo, who sheds his reluctance to become a hero because he finally realizes "what's at stake," as another character points out. But, whose future is at stake in *Children of Men* exactly? Cuarón's near-future speculation falls into several familiar plot devices, including a white male protagonist's inner conflict, his redemption in sacrificing himself for a cause larger than himself, and his reward in the form of his legacy passed on via the hope-child who will carry his son's name. Kee's child, in bearing the name Dylan, becomes in a sense Theo's child, or more broadly, the "children of men" to which the film's title refers. The reproductive technology at work here takes the shape of a narrative arc that writes a man's hopes and visions for the future across the body of a woman of color. [21]

Why does a disaster film featuring the crisis of infertility emerge at the beginning of the twenty-first century? "The true infertility," Zizek states in his commentary, "is the very lack of meaningful, historical experience." As an example, he cites the state project of collecting classical art, including Michelangelo's statue of David, which Zizek reads as suffering an "absolute loss of substance," because these art pieces only work if they have

[21] Rosa Linda Fregoso makes a similar argument in her analysis of John Sayles's film *Lone Star*. Fregoso writes: "My profound ambivalence toward this film has something to do with Sayles's willingness to complicate the nation's racial imaginary… If Sayles's multicultural project is to truly represent a new social order and make a dent in the predominant monocultural, ethnocentric vision of society, it must decenter whiteness and masculinity." See Fregoso, "meXicana Encounters," 55-56).

a referent. Zizek also comments on the character Jasper (Michael Kane), whose retreat into clouds of marijuana smoke and babbling vulgarities signals a certain infertility of a hippie generation of old, leftist activists who did not deliver on many of its visions but instead retreated into the comforts of yuppie suburbanity. Fertility, Zizek continues, gets "reinstalled but not through the form of a couple being created. The fertility is spiritual fertility. It's to find the meaning of life and so on." I also appreciate Zizek's conceptualization of a "rootless" boat that represents "the condition of renewal," but this boat, the *Tomorrow*, has a definite trajectory evident in its name. The film reinstalls hope perhaps not in the form of the couple, but certainly in the form of the child, and it is this reproductive futurity that demands further unpacking.

The narrative remains guided by what Lee Edelman has called "reproductive futurism," a drive that in this case asks the black female body to perform the labor of producing the figure of hope for Theo's continuing legacy (*Kid Stuff*). Although it is her child that symbolizes hope in this near-future speculation, in the end, Kee names her child Dylan, after Theo and Julian's son who dies in a flu pandemic twenty years earlier. Kee's baby, which Theo himself delivers earlier in the film, ultimately functions as a surrogate for his own child, for his own hope, for his own future. This narrative of futurity relies on a form of surrogacy at a moment when reproductive technologies work to ensure the futures of wealthy, privileged subjects at the expense of the reproductive labor of poor women around the world. Kee's labor—aided not only by Theo's hands but also by the special effects that make the scene cinematically possible—delivers a promise of hope, but for whom and according to what terms?

Cuarón's deployment of anamorphosis works as a visual technology to signal a haunting, but this attempt to de-center the cinematic gaze is undermined by the narrative's continual return to Theo's point of view. The narrative remains structured around a drive toward reproductive futurity that restores white male heteropatriarchy by positioning Kee as a kind of surrogate mother. These two arguments are ultimately intertwined. The privileging of Theo's perspective and the racialized reproductive imperative at work in this film go hand in hand. Theo's ultimate, heroic sacrifice ensures not only the survival of Kee and Dylan but also the reproduction of heteropatriarchal logic itself.

Feminist scholars of visual culture and science studies began in the early to mid-1990s to turn much needed critical attention to reproductive discourses promoting ideologies around fetal personhood, a cultural construction beholden to advances in reproductive technologies and macro- and microphotography.[22] These studies made their interventions during the historical context of pro-life campaigns that made use of fetal imaging, the emergence of the sonogram as a visual technology of reproduction, and critical attention to the work of biomedical photographer Lennart Nilsson.

Children of Men both instantiates and contemplates this relationship between reproductive technologies (in the Benjaminian sense) and the technologies of reproduction. In Cuarón's film, digital billboards remind citizens about state-mandated fertility tests and the criminalization of those who refuse such medical surveillance. Meanwhile, the DVD extras proclaim the special effects "triumph" of simulating Kee's birth realistically on screen. Just as scientific technology such as electron micrographs and

[22] See Hartouni *Making Life Make Sense;* Haraway "The Virtual Speculum in the New World Order"; Balsamo *Technologies of the Gendered Body*; and Stabile "Shooting the Mother: Fetal Photography and the Politics of Disappearance"; and Newman, *Fetal Positions*.

fetal imaging can be used to create narratives about "life," so *Children of Men* capitalizes on cinematic special effects to orchestrate a science fiction about futures dependent on the reproductive labor of women of the Global South. Perhaps an inevitable irony of Cuarón's narrative of restored hope and rebirth is that the birth scene is computer-generated. The reproductive technologies that deliver Kee's baby as a cinematic event include the replacing of Claire Hope Ashitey's legs with prosthetic ones, deciding between an animatronic baby and a computer-generated one, and a completely choreographed, three-and-a-half-minute, single-shot scene.

***Midnight Robber*'s Diasporic Constellations**

> Looking and looking back, black women involve ourselves in a process whereby we see our history as counter-memory, using it as a way to know the present and invent the future.
>
> -bell hooks

> Black people have always been masters of the figurative: saying one thing to mean something quite other has been basic to black survival in oppressive Western cultures…. This sort of metaphorical literacy, the learning to decipher complex codes, is just about the blackest aspect of the black tradition.[23]
>
> -Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

> There is no solid ground beneath us;
> we shift constantly to stay in one place.
>
> -Nalo Hopkinson

In his article "Black to the Future," Mark Dery raises the question: "Why do so few African Americans write science fiction, a genre whose close encounters with the Other—the stranger in a strange land—would seem uniquely suited to the concerns of African-American novelists?" (736-7). Dery's article appears in a special issue of *The South*

[23] qtd. in Dery, 741.

Atlantic Review on "The Discourse of Cyberculture," published in 1993. Since then, this question has been revisited in various forms by a number of scholars, including Sheree Thomas, Greg Tate, Alondra Nelson, Gregory Rutledge, Anna Everett, Walter Mosley, and Samuel Delany. Over the past decade or so, some academic journals ranging from *Extrapolation*, which focuses on science fiction studies, to *Callaloo*, which emphasizes scholarly work on African diasporic studies, have dedicated more attention to black science fiction writers, especially Octavia Butler and Samuel Delany. Kalí Tal's "'That Just Kills Me': Black Militant Near-Future Fiction," begins with an anecdote about the author's 1977 experience in a science fiction writing course in Hollywood, during which she was asked to write a story about "why black people don't write science fiction" (65). Tal suggests that the instructor (and, by extension, Mark Dery) "asked the wrong question" (ibid). Collectively, the essays in the Afrofuturism issue of *Social Text* suggest that blacks have been excluded from technocultural discourse, despite always having had a relationship to and participating in technocultural production.[24] An even more recent special issue of *Science Fiction Studies* also makes Afrofuturism its focus topic and includes several instructive essays.

In several interviews, author Nalo Hopkinson, whose novel *Midnight Robber* is the focus of this section of the present chapter, deplores the inadequacies of terms such as "science fiction," "fantasy," "horror," and "magical realism." She defines her work as speculative fiction, or "spec-fic," a genre that achieves the following:

> We imagine what we want from the world; then we try to find a way to make it happen. Escapism can be the first step to creating a new reality, whether it's a personal change in one's existence or a larger change in the world. For me, spec-fic is a contemporary literature that is

[24] See Nelson *Afrofuturism*.

> performing that act of the imagination… as fiction that starts from the principle of making the impossible possible.[25]

For Hopkinson, speculative fiction potentially performs the work of social change rather than just generating "adventure stories for white boys with high tech toys." In doing so, it intervenes in the common misinterpretation of the sf genre as being "primarily by and about white men."[26]

Hopkinson's imaginings of the possibilities of collaboration take as their historical premise the intertwined labor histories of African and Asian migrations to the Americas. In what follows, I focus on *Midnight Robber* as one example of how extrapolative fiction can interrogate systems of labor, kinship structures, and power by shifting assumptions about modernity and technology. As in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, space and time travel in *Midnight Robber*, which unfolds across multiple dimensions and worlds, allows for encounters with various historical traces and trajectories. Each time-space in Hopkinson's tale of the Midnight Robber Tan-Tan gives rise to another iteration of persistent labor abuses. What is more, *Midnight Robber* is also a prison narrative. The colony planet Toussaint sends its carceral population to the prison planet New Halfway Tree—an exilic journey to another dimension in which prisoners must relearn how to rely on their own physical work because New Halfway Tree functions entirely without the help of AI.

Born in Jamaica and raised in Trinidad and Tobago, Hopkinson supplants Western myths of techno-origins with techno-networks that arise from overlapping diasporas and the intimacies among Chinese, Indo-, and Afro-Caribbean migrations. In

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[25] Nelson "Making the Impossible Possible" 98

[26] Glave and Hopkinson 148. In a separate interview with Gregory Rutledge, Hopkinson proposes that sf need not participate in the fairly common trope of colonization. Such a practice would be dangerous for a people who have "been on the receiving end of colonization, and for [whom] it's not an entertaining adventure story." See Rutledge and Hopkinson 590.

her imagined future, moments of crisis do not occasion a reversion to the nuclear, heteronormative family but rather yield collaborative communities of multiply-displaced peoples who form coalitions across various formations of "families" that include gender-queer models of intimacy. One of my interests in Hopkinson's novel *Midnight Robber* lies in how this work of speculative fiction thereby queers notions of futurity. I also position Hopkinson's formulation of futurity, however, as one that not only looks forward but also thinks through alternative histories of technoscience. I argue that this doubly valenced view of the future emerges through a postcolonial critique of Western constructions of modernity. In these ways, *Midnight Robber* reminds us that storytelling itself, in its various forms of written and oral traditions, is a powerful technology capable of manipulating memories, charting multiple trajectories, and shifting the parameters of how we conceive of past, present, and future. In my analysis of Hopkinson's novel I therefore examine how she understands the science fiction genre as a mode of writing that could stand to learn much from practices of storytelling beyond the Western canon.

Though both the discipline of science and science fiction proclaim their descent from Western origins, *Midnight Robber* imagines what kind of future world would ensue if technocultural origin myths and rhetoric emerged from diasporic African roots.[27] For example, Hopkinson draws a parallel between the Middle Passage of African slaves to the New World and the arrival of Caribbean space colonists to Toussaint, a planet populated with people of mixed race who have banded together to escape Earth's long-standing patterns of exploitative labor practices. The novel both commences and concludes around Jonkanoo Season, "when all of Toussaint would celebrate the landing of the

[27] The manifestations of this non-Eurocentric utopian vision are multiple and too many to cite comprehensively here, and Hopkinson does much of this work herself in the interviews with Nelson, Rutledge, and Glave.

Marryshow Corporation nation ships that had brought their ancestors to this planet two centuries before" (18). Indeed, Hopkinson organizes the entire narrative around celebrations of diasporic movement. The original settlers of Toussaint arrived in rocket ships rather than tall ships, but the parallel between this fantastic voyage and the Middle Passage gets reinforced by Ben, who has given the protagonist, Tan-Tan, a Carnival hat in the shape of a ship. He says:

> Long time, that hat would be make in the shape of a sea ship, not a rocket ship, and them black people inside woulda been lying pack-up head to toe in they own shit, with chains round them ankles. Let the child remember how black people make this crossing as free people this time. (21)

Ben draws an explicit connection between this future interplanetary journey and the transatlantic slave route, but Tan-Tan's Jonkanoo ship hat also refers to other mass movements of diasporic communities. With the name "Black Star Line II" etched into its side, Tan-Tan's rocket ship also alludes to Marcus Garvey's original Black Star Line, intended to facilitate a large-scale back-to-Africa movement in the 1920s. But more than supplanting one set of origin myths for another, Hopkinson suggests the ways diasporic movement itself functioned as Caribbean technoculture.

In this future world, spaceships recall an African diasporic past rather than Western classical legacies. In an interview with Diane Glave, Hopkinson makes this argument herself very explicitly:

> The current metaphors for technology and social behaviors and systems are largely from Greco-Roman mythology. We call our spaceships Apollo and our complexes Oedipus. We talk about cyberspace. So I wondered what metaphors we (Caribbean people) would create for technologies that we had made, how we would think about those technologies (149).

In this quotation, Hopkinson asks us to think critically about the names and metaphors people use to describe technology. She insightfully asserts that narratives *about* technology

affect how we categorize "technology" and may even limit the process of conceiving of other kinds of technologies altogether. Naming spaceships after Greco-Roman mythology (or, for that matter, naming the first Space Shuttle Orbiter after the famous science fiction starship *Enterprise*) suggests a Western origin myth for technology that eclipses other points of technological origins and adaptations. Hopkinson adopts Caribbean myths as the creative basis for the names of and the logics behind the various technological innovations in *Midnight Robber* to alter common perceptions of what technology is, where it came from, and therefore who has a claim to it.

As I suggested in the previous chapter, the image of the ship is also equally central to Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*.[28] In his work, Gilroy emphasizes black, transnational networks of social activism and cross-pollinating cultural production. Gilroy, like Hopkinson, establishes the Middle Passage as a sort of origin myth for future transoceanic crossings by the likes of W.E.B. Du Bois, Frederick Douglass, and Marcus Garvey. Through this same image of the ship, Hopkinson puts together these notions of "diaspora" and "network" to generate an alternative narrative about technology's relationship to projects of racial formation. The imaginative premise of *Midnight Robber* shifts the origins of a techno-future world from Greco-Roman, European Enlightenment roots to African routes—from an imperialist epistemology of amassed knowledge to a different model of information dispersal and circuitry. In her formulation of artificially intelligent eshus, tonal-based code resembling Caribbean *patois*, and nanomite-seeded "Nation Worlds" linked together by a digital network called "Granny Nanny," Hopkinson speculates on an alternative genealogy to technology. Hopkinson's

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[28] For Gilroy, "[t]he image of the ship—a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion is especially important" See Gilroy 4.

imagination of an alternative genealogy from which a richly described world of technologies emerges is successful beyond just the superficial level of providing new names to existing technology. Conceived from an Afro-Caribbean trickster tradition, Toussaint's system of AI eshus and Anansi webs does not understand Truth to be self-evident, universal, or beyond question. Rather, these artificially intelligent beings learn to tell partial truths and to manipulate historical narratives according to their audiences. This is how one character's wife is able to have an affair in her home without her husband finding out from the house eshu and how Tan-Tan's robot nurse is able to keep up with her insatiable appetite for alternate histories. In these ways, Hopkinson shows how intertwined cultural myths and technological innovations can be.

In *Midnight Robber*, technoscience does not take the form of Big Brother but of "Granny Nanny," named: 1) after Granny Nanny of the Maroons, a legendary hero of Jamaica who led and organized the Maroons and other black dissidents against the British during the 1720s and 1730s; 2) after the nanotechnology that facilitates the human-machine interface on Toussaint, "the Grande Nanotech Sentient Interface" (10, *emphasis mine*); and, 3) after Anansi, the trickster figure who takes the shape of a spider. "Granny Nansi's Web" reconfigures what we might think of as the World Wide Web, or the Internet; however, the paradigm has shifted dramatically. Rather than emerging from William Gibson's conceptualization of "cyberspace" or from Bill Gates' corporate empire, the Net earns its name from a "web," or "network," or even "archipelago" of cultural exchange throughout the African diaspora.

Though the cyberspace we know is based on a binary language, Granny Nanny's code is "tonal instead of text-based" (51). Navigating the Web in Toussaint probably

requires more familiarity with an oral tradition than with a written one. Indeed, "nannycode" or "nannysong" sounds most like the "warbling patwa" (221) of the *douen* women, whose nearly incomprehensible speech-song is so difficult to set down in type that Hopkinson captures it by using bold print, asterisks, and a different font. Hopkinson has already theorized her own use of creolized languages, but it is interesting to consider how the paradigm shift she discusses in her Diane Glave interview works to alter the very etymological roots that shape our discourse and understanding of technoculture. By disassociating technology from its Greek and Latin roots, *Midnight Robber* aims at making the sf genre available to non-European writers whose cultural inheritance might include Yoruban mythology, Chinese folklore, or South Asian legends. The language that best expresses technoculture for Hopkinson is a kind of Caribbean patois, emblematic of the kind of "fusion of the genres" Hopkinson is after.[29]

Signs of Hopkinson's inheritance of a black diasporic literary tradition are apparent in every conceptual nuance of the novel, from the house "eshu" (who, in West African mythology, is the trickster figure of Henry Louis Gates' "signifying monkey") to the *douen* women's "warbling patwa" (221). When Gates talks about "metaphorical literacy" being "basic to black survival," he assigns the same urgency as Hopkinson does to Caribbean "code-sliding" as a means of survival in the Caribbean.[30] It is no wonder, then, that Tan-Tan by the end of the novel steps into the role of Robber Queen, the notorious trickster figure of the title.[31] The novel's opening poem "Stolen," by David

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[29] See Nelson and Hopkinson 99. Hopkinson goes on to say: "[W]hen my work is coming from a Caribbean context, fusion fits very well; that's how we survived."
[30] For Gates quotations, see footnote #1. For Hopkinson's survivalist rhetoric, see footnote #9 on fusion. "Code-Sliding" is the title of an essay Hopkinson has posted on her website.
[31] The Midnight Robber at Carnival time pretend-captures fellow revelers to terrify them with gory stories about death and destruction to elicit a coin from the audience in exchange for sparing their lives. Abducted

Findlay, celebrates signification practices and trickster finesse in its repetition of the line "I stole the torturer's tongue!" Creolization and signification serve as survival techniques in *Midnight Robber*. What Hopkinson refers to as the Robber Queen's/Tan-Tan's "word science" is what ultimately saves our heroine when she vanquishes Janisette in a verbal duel at the end of the novel (320). Dressed in full Robber costume, Tan-Tan "spat at Janisette—'no mercy!'—the traditional final phrase of the calypsonian who'd won the battle of wits and words. Tan-Tan gasped, put a hand up to her magical mouth" (326). Tan-Tan herself is a black sf writer. From an early age, she crafts "tales to pass the time" by extrapolating from bits of history available to her on the Web. "So the minder would access the Nanny history from the web and try to adapt it to Tan-Tan's notions of how the story went" (17). Tan-Tan's ability to adapt historical narratives and create speculative fiction out of those variations points to the way in which Nalo Hopkinson uses historical revisions of technocultural origin myths in order to carve out a space for more alternative sf writers. "I'm fascinated with the notion of breaking an imposed language apart and remixing it," writes Hopkinson. "To speak in the hacked language is not just to speak in an accent or a creole; to say the words aloud is an act of referencing history and claiming space."[32] This quotation reveals most cogently the way in which Hopkinson sees the creolization of language as a form of technology that can be "remixed" and "hacked" in order to claim space within an overly-narrow definition of sf as a literary tradition. Because Tan-Tan's trickster speech saves her life, weaving fabulist tales (and writing speculative fiction) then, represents an integral survival technique, as Gates argues about "mastering the figurative" as an essential means of "black survival in oppressive Western

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into slavery, taken to a strange land filled with strange people, and forced to thieve in order to survive, the Midnight Robber works well as an sf hero who must earn his/her keep by being an excellent wordsmith.

[32] See Hopkinson "Code-Sliding."

cultures." Figuring Tan-Tan's linguistic prowess around the popular Carnival character of the Midnight Robber, Hopkinson references the character's use of "Robber Talk" derived from the African *griot* tradition of storytelling; however, as the female protagonist who vanquishes her enemies with a performance of Robber Talk, Tan-Tan's Robber Queen also enacts a feminist appropriation of the male-dominated *griot* tradition—an intervention Hopkinson herself makes in the genre of science fiction.

Though many of the more overt signs of a diasporic literary inheritance are specifically African in origin, Hopkinson emphatically asserts the cross-ethnic circulation at work in the Caribbean. *Midnight Robber*'s heroes are figures of hybridity, heterogeneous bloodlines, and nomadic exile. Toussaint is already a planet of exiles, and it has established another dimension of exiles on the prison colony-worlds up "the half-way tree."[33] Tan-Tan suffers a sort of double exile over the course of the novel. She first becomes uprooted from her home on Toussaint when she follows her father, Antonio, into exile on New Half-Way Tree after he commits a murder. When Tan-Tan herself turns the knife on her father-turned-rapist, she must flee into the wilderness to live with the *douen* people: "She had had home torn from her again" (193). Tan-Tan's story of double exile, forced migration, and dislocation from home resonates with Caribbean history not only because of the half-way tree parallel to the forced migrations along the transatlantic slave route, but also because of its surprising connection to the Indian epic, the Ramayana. Tracing the routes of this Indian cultural artifact, one notices how the

[33] Going up the half-way tree involves travel across several "dimensional veils" (74-75). Several scholars, including Hopkinson herself, have already made the connection between this phrase and Du Bois' use of the "veil" concept in his articulation of double-consciousness in *Souls of Black Folk*. Hopkinson also makes the connection to veils in an Indian experience of double-consciousness in her online essay "Dark Ink" where she cites Uppinder Mehan's essay, "The Domestication of Technology in Indian Science Fiction Stories."

Caribbean becomes one site where African and South Asian cultural routes intersect. Hopkinson's construction of this future world of exilic Caribbean peoples includes a reminder that a history of the Caribbean includes not only the African slave trade but also the migration of East Indian laborers to Trinidad and Tobago as well as Jamaica following the abolition of slavery. Hopkinson is completely mindful of this convergence of two powerful oral traditions. For example, when Granny Nanny tells Tan-Tan stories to several children, Hopkinson is careful to include one audience member named Sita, whose namesake in the Ramayana also suffers a double exile (78).[34] Some settlers of Toussaint, we learn, made their intergalactic voyage on a vessel named "Shipmate Shiva," which carried "longtime ago East Indians, the ones who crossed the Kalpani, the Black Water on Earth to go and work their fingers to the bone as indentured labour in the Caribbean" (49).

Jonkanoo Week, a celebration around Christmas time in the Caribbean, is another sign of Toussaint's heterogeneous ancestry. It is a

> [t]ime to remember the way their forefathers had toiled and sweated together: Taino Carib and Arawak; African; Asian; Indian; even the Euro, though some wasn't too happy to acknowledge that-there bloodline. All the bloods flowing into one river, making a new home on a new planet. (18)

In this passage, Hopkinson points to the enmeshed bloodlines that constitute the Toussaint population. It is a world in which hybridity and creolité are privileged.

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[34] Sita, the heroine of the Ramayana and paragon of wifely duty, first follows her husband, Rama, into exile upon his father's command. While in the wilderness, a monster-villain, Ravana, abducts Sita and tries unsuccessfully to seduce her. She is rescued and can accompany Rama home after their period of banishment has elapsed. Upon their return, Sita is subjected to a trial by fire to prove her purity, because the condition of abduction is cause for suspicion that Ravana raped her. Despite emerging from the fire unscathed, Sita still cannot escape the fate of a second exile. Rama sends her out of the country again because, regardless of her having passed the test, Sita's mere association with potential rape taints her reputation. In *Midnight Robber* Sita only occupies the margins of this story. Sita, as a goddess figure, who is ostensibly never raped, occupies a very different story from Tan-Tan, who expresses revenge as one of her primary motivations to maintain a disruptive voice of interjection.

Midnight Robber not only names an Afro-Caribbean legacy to these space colonists but also recognizes the ways in which the African slave trade and the Asian coolie trade to the Caribbean remain linked and shared labor histories. In her depictions of Toussaint and New Halfway Tree, Hopkinson renders the Caribbean archipelago a speculative space, wherein histories of colonization and labor exploitation have produced very different relationships to Western science and technology. I suggest that *Midnight Robber* repeatedly calls attention to transnational affiliations by positing diasporic movement as a technology itself that works covalently with other intensified global flows, including the conjuncture of African slave labor and Asian migrant labor to the Caribbean.

Though brought together by the common blood, sweat, and tears shed over the backbreaking work shared by all these racialized bodies, the multiethnic community of Toussaint enjoys a rather idyllic respite. No human bodies labor on Toussaint because various machines, AI, and "Granny Nanny" take care of most day-to-day conveniences. A robotic wet-nurse provides Tan-Tan with milk from the moment she is born, and later, a "minder" functions as Tan-Tan's primary caretaker, playmate, babysitter, and gentle disciplinarian: "[Tan-Tan] liked leaning against the minder's yielding chicle, humming along with the nursery rhymes it would sing to her. She had nearly outgrown the minder now, yes, but it did its level best to keep up with her" (17). The most visible acts of robot labor on Toussaint are forms of reproductive labor—precisely the kind of work Caribbean migrant women fulfill in the North.

On the planet Toussaint descendants of a slave exodus from Earth create an artificially intelligent class of servants who perform all acts of manual and domestic labor, from nursing human infants to running taxi cabs to cleaning houses. As one character

puts it, "Back-break ain't for people" (8). There is even a labor tax on humans who elect to perform manual labor. Mayor Antonio explains to a pedi-cab runner: "Is a labour tax. For the way allyou insist on using people when a a.i. could run a cab like this. You know how it does bother citizens to see allyou doing manual labor so" (8). Only one subset of human society on Toussaint refuses this dependence on AI, and Hopkinson uses this group to think through the relationship between technology and labor.

The pedi-cab runners of Toussaint are comprised of descendants of hackers who use their techno-savvy to maintain privacy, Toussaint's "most precious commodity" (10). Because Toussaint's buildings, tools, and "even the Earth itself" have been "seeded with nanomites," the "Nation Worlds were one enormous data-gathering system" monitored, regulated, and disseminated through one network. In such a data-fueled world, questions of labor arise alongside questions of information, history, and narrative. The pedicab runner communities "lived in group households and claimed that it was their religious right to use only headblind tools" (10). Organizing off the grid, these communities also form social networks that depart from normative familial structures. The pedicab runner Beata, whom Antonio encounters at the beginning of the novel, is a woman who lives with three wives and the father of her children in one home. As a pedicab runner, Beata creates her own routes that serve as ways to circulate information clandestinely, in a fashion similar to the strategy used by Toussaint's namesake Toussaint L'Ouverture, who, as a free black coachman, could disseminate information and organize the Haitian Revolution, the first successful slave revolt in the New World. Hopkinson's depiction of these queer pedicab communities models in speculative fiction the kinds of queer kinship formations elucidated in Martin Manalansan's work on "queer love." Researching queer

of color, makeshift communities in Jackson Heights, Queens, Manalansan focuses on how migrant, undocumented workers respond to the precarious conditions of their labor by altering notions of "family."[35] Hopkinson rewrites the developmental, progress narrative as it pertains to not only technofutures but also sexuality and thus emphasizes the importance of thinking through notions of futurity as inextricably linked to formulations of sexuality, a link Judith Halberstam examines in her examination of queer time and space. Halberstam writes: "Queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience—namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death" (2). One of the reasons Halberstam analyzes Samuel Delany's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* is to illustrate how "queers use space and time in ways that challenge conventional logics of development, maturity, adulthood, and responsibility" (13). Beyond issuing challenges to conventional logics, though, texts like Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* and Samuel Delany's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* work through acts of speculation to reclaim time and space from historical conditions in which queer sex has been not only stigmatized but also criminalized nominally because it is non-procreative. In her incisive study of the policing of sexuality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas, M. Jacqui Alexander argues that in the postcolonial context, when the "nation" and its ideologies are in tumult, the criminalization of queer sex "functions as a technology of control, and much like other technologies of control becomes an important site for the production and reproduction of state power (Heng and Devan, 1992)" (6).

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[35] See Manalansan "Feeling Our Way Through the Crises" and Manalansan "Race, Violence, and Neoliberal Spatial Politics in the Global City."

The machine-human relationship on Toussaint purports to be non-abusive and benevolent, at first. The AI workers do not complain or revolt; they are eternally docile, subservient, and helpful. Nevertheless, Hopkinson undermines potential techno-utopian readings in at least two ways. First, the original denizens of Toussaint are comprised of refugees from Earth's Caribbean islands, where a history of slavery and hard, unpaid labor is actively remembered during every Jonkanoo season on Toussaint. Despite this history, people on Toussaint fail to think critically and self-reflectively about this new generation of laboring, albeit mechanical, bodies. Hopkinson's invention of a multiethnic, diasporic community calls attention to the politics of non-human, so-called free labor.

Hopkinson's focus on Toussaint's over-dependence on a subjugated labor force becomes readily apparent in the second half of the novel when she introduces readers to the prison colony-world of New Half-Way Tree. This new world remains strangely familiar as we discover it is only Toussaint again in a parallel universe. In this alternate dimension, though, Toussaint/New Half-Way Tree is technologically impoverished; there are no "docile machines" to perform manual labor. The primary burden of work on New Halfway Tree has been displaced onto the shoulders of the indigenous creatures of the planet. These forest dwellers are threatened by the impending onslaught of industrialization in the human sectors of the planet. Some are craftsmen, some work as gardeners, and some trade goods with the human colonists as merchants. The actual details of the labor they perform, though, remain rather vague in Hopkinson's descriptions, which focus more on the power dynamics apparent in everyday encounters between groups. By juxtaposing New Halfway Tree and Toussaint as employing different systems of labor, Hopkinson implicitly asks what would happen to a place like Toussaint

if all the workers suddenly disappeared.[36] Hopkinson uses these parallel dimensions to posit alternative but repetitive systems of oppression. Even when sovereignty is no longer an issue—when slaves and prisoners escape across space and time, exploitative and violent social relations continue when masculinist paradigms remain in place.

On New Half-Way Tree, Tan-Tan discovers a pre-industrial society where everyone (human and non-human) must perform hard labor.[37] It is here that Hopkinson introduces readers to the *douen*s, who are reptilian and birdlike creatures serving but living separately from humans. Though exiles themselves, the human contingent have also become the colonizers of a new world. The human settlers find themselves in need of help from but threatened by the indigenous creature-peoples already there. Hopkinson's critique is of how quickly and readily a marginalized people will figure out a way to exploit another group once they themselves have access to power. Hopkinson's description of the everyday interactions between the humans and the *douen* recalls scenes from African American literature, including conjure tales and slave narratives by Charles Chesnutt and Frederick Douglass that emphasize linguistic adeptness bolstered by a trickster tradition. Infantilized within a paternalistic system of coerced subservience, the *douens* share somewhat in what is often considered to be an African American experience. Humans address Chichibud, Tan-Tan's first *douen* friend, as "boy," and Tan-Tan observes how men "spoke to Chichibud the way adults spoke to her" (120). Hopkinson casts Chichibud, in turn, as the consummate trickster figure whose witticisms delight Tan-Tan

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[36] This question inspires several other sf storylines such as Derrick Bell's "The Space Traders" and the recent film *A Day Without a Mexican*, directed by Sergio Arau.

[37] New Half-Way Tree bears a striking resemblance to the antebellum South and to the colonial sugar cane plantations of the Caribbean. One village Tan-Tan stumbles upon later in her escapades as the Robber Queen operates on a plantation system. She quickly runs the other direction after encountering a woman chained in the cane fields.

as an avid student of the double-voiced black vernacular he deploys. When a human challenges his laughter, by asking: "You have something to say?" Chichibud replies, "No, Boss. Is tallpeople business, oui?" (123). Though Tan-Tan arrives on New Half-Way Tree by hacking codes and manipulating time and space, she learns from Chichibud how to deploy such code-sliding in everyday cultural practices of storytelling and dialogue. When Chichibud addresses the village men as "Master," Tan-Tan expresses her dismay and confusion:

> Master? Only machines were supposed to give anybody rank like that… Tan-Tan scolded, 'He not your boss, Chichibud.'… *Shipmates all have the same status. Nobody higher than a next somebody.* You must call he 'Compere,' she explained to the *douen*. (121)

According to the new human settlers of New Half-Way Tree, the *douen*s, who practice "obeah magic," are "superstitious" (121) and "simple" (139). The *douen*s reject industrialization and insist on working only with wood and natural materials; they "did everything with their hands and never thought to advance themselves any further" (139). In this way, Hopkinson levies a critique against the faulty correspondence between technological advancement and matter-of-course superiority that colonizers have deployed in their attempts to rationalize and justify their subjugation of indigenous peoples. The *douens* excel in handicrafts—in carpentry, in weaving, and also in the crafting of oral narratives. Here Hopkinson's postcolonial critique signals a challenge to the less troubled, more romantic picture of technology represented earlier in the novel on Toussaint.

Hopkinson cultivates an association between the function of the *douen* on New Half-Way Tree and the status of the A.I. in Toussaint in order to establish a continuity across time and space – to emphasize the historical and ongoing politics of labor. Despite

inhabiting different space-times, the *douen* and the A.I. both constitute laboring classes. On the one hand, technology has been a tool of colonization, oppression, and exploitation. On the other hand, one could claim (as Henry Louis Gates, Anna Everett, and Paul Gilroy do) that alternative technologies have always been necessary, integral, and useful tools for survival among those who are not readily granted access to dominant technologies. The inhabitants of New Half-Way Tree eventually erect iron forgeries that start to generate cars and weapons, which become the means of persecuting Tan-Tan and driving out the *douen*s from their tree homes. The *douen*s, sensing impending doom, do their best to learn the techniques of iron work despite the villagers' profound efforts to keep the skills a secret, private trade. Chichibud explains: "If *douen*s don't learn tallpeople tricks, oonuh will use them 'pon we" (230). This logic returns us to Gates' and Hopkinson's urgent advocacy of producing alternative technologies when it comes to language. These technolingual strategies of coding and signifying are particularly germane to the world of speculative fiction, and in this way, speculative fiction itself works as a form of trickster technology that takes the generic tools of science fiction and makes them available to communities who have been previously excluded from the genre.

In her revision of technocultural origin myths and in her imagination of a technology emergent from a specifically multiethnic Caribbean diasporic context, Nalo Hopkinson looks beyond Eurocentric technocultural discourse for alternative genealogies and more expansive understandings of "technology." Furthermore, Hopkinson not only extrapolates from this alternative genealogy a futuristic world of embedded AI and networked societies but also suggests that these technologies pre-exist in the forms of oral traditions and diasporic communications in their conceptual emergence. *Midnight*

Robber thereby provides a counter-memory of technology in ways that resonate with Paul Gilroy's articulation of a "counterculture of modernity" in his formulation of the Black Atlantic (Gilroy 36).

Hopkinson's deft ability to draw from a vast reservoir of Caribbean culture and history to conjure a speculative reality and her explicit desire to imagine a techno-mythology specific to Caribbean communities attest to her narration of a technoculture that radically departs from Western Enlightenment traditions. Hopkinson's visual representation of the warbling patwa of the *douen* women even constitutes an emergent form of language. Likewise, Tan-Tan's recognition of a similarity in these speech patterns to the "Nannysong" she learned as a child on Toussaint from communicating with AI suggests that hacking linguistic codes facilitates cross-cultural understanding. Once Tan-Tan "cracks the code," she realizes that her adoptive *douen* mother Benta is not just chirping nonsense but in fact trying to communicate important messages to her.

One particular example of emergence is ideally situated to comment on the problematic dependence on certain ideas that I mentioned above in *Children of Men*, and I would like to devote more attention to this potential for critique.

Queer Families in *Midnight Robber*

In Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*, Tan-Tan forms an intimate relationship with Benta, a non-gender-specific member of the indigenous species of the planet. It is a human, non/human intimacy that Hopkinson uses to explore alternative, queer formations of families and futurities that interrogate the reproductive futurity associated with strictly human, heteronormative families. The plot does not resolve with Tan-Tan

finding solace in the invitation back into human and heteronormative society by marrying Melonhead. Rather, that childhood romance has been altered when they meet again, after Tan-Tan has come to understand the queerer kinship formations of the *douen*. On the brink of delivering her baby, Tan-Tan decides that she must leave the human settlement to give birth:

> "Melonhead, I have to go home."
> "What home? Where?"
> "I have to go back in the bush to Abitefa."
> "You mad or what? You turn bassourdie? You need to lie down and rest."
> "I will lie down when I reach back in the bush. I have to go right now."
> Holding her belly protectively, she turned on her heel and started walking, with or without him (327).

Locating "home" for this doubly-exiled woman, who has shifted across both time and space, means "shifting constantly to stay in one place," to put it in Hopkinson's words. Tan-Tan refusal to join normative human sociality in the form of either the "developed" town or a heteronormative wedding indicates Hopkinson's search for an alternative to a reproductive futurism that sustains heteropatriarchy.

Midnight Robber is a speculative fiction that considers language and narrative as technologies. It shifts across narrative points of view as frequently as it plays with shifts across time and space. Hopkinson begins, ends, and interrupts her narrative with short tales of Tan-Tan the Robber Queen, a mythic set of tales narrated by the AI nano-eshu who has found its way through Tan-Tan's bloodstream to communicate with the developing fetus in her belly. At other times, Hopkinson writes in the third person, subjective, with Tan-Tan as the focal character. Moving back and forth between these two narrative modes, one of them privileging a non-human point of view, Hopkinson emphasizes multiple perspectives.

Written as a narrative about labor in a structural form that emphasizes the labor of narrative production, *Midnight Robber* culminates and ends with the birth of Tubman, Tan-Tan's baby whose name references Harriet Tubman, the African-American activist who successfully helped many slaves escape their bonds in the U.S. South and find safe passage to the North, often to Canada. The Underground Railroad, with which the name Tubman is closely associated, functioned as a network of secret routes and safe houses coordinated through a system of code words borrowed from the railroad terminology. By giving Tan-Tan's child the name Tubman, Hopkinson again alludes to another system of networks and linguistic codes used as tactical resistance to slavery. In this way, Hopkinson encodes her own text with multiple kinds of "deliveries"—one in the delivery of a child into the world, another in the delivery of slaves to freedom, and also a delivery of a speech act that wins Tan-Tan the verbal battle against Janisette. Because Tan-Tan goes into labor precisely at the moment that she pronounces the winning words of the competition, and given the fact that part of *Midnight Robber* consists of an AI passing the stories of the mother on to her fetus, Tan-Tan's pregnancy also bears significance as a process of bringing stories into being.

The story of Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad is also a narrative that retells the origin story of network societies. A Canadian and Caribbean author, Hopkinson names in Tubman a network and perhaps an African-American framework that necessarily exceeds the boundaries of the United States. The underground railroad is a network that connects the Americas in that it delivers runaway slaves to Canada and Mexico. This railroad depends on the collaboration not only of free slaves but of white Abolitionists and native American sympathizers and activists.

Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*, like Cuarón's *Children of Men* both culminate in the birth of a child as symbols of hope for the future. Understanding the politics motivating these tales of reproduction, though, require us to move beyond an analysis of the gender of the child. Though hope at the end of *Children of Men* arrives in the shape of a girl while Tan-Tan delivers a boy child, the sex of the symbolic baby cannot tell us on its own that one is a feminist ending and the other reinforces patriarchy. Kee's baby girl Dylan will not only carry the name of the patriarch but will also shoulder the responsibility of curing the world's infertility. She and her mother will become immediate medical subjects on board *The Tomorrow*, a vessel that might symbolize a future for mankind but will in practice sustain a long history of subjecting black women to experiments in reproductive science.[38] Meanwhile, Tan-Tan's delivery of Tubman not only refers us to a female revolutionary activist but also occurs simultaneously with Tan-Tan's coming into voice: 'Tan-Tan knew her body to be hers again, felt her mouth stretching, stretching open in amazement at the words that had come out of it" (325-26). Describing not Tubman's birth but the miraculous coming into being of Tan-Tan's story, Hopkinson shifts the site of accomplishment and hope to rest not solely on the shoulders of the child but also on the mother's victorious monologue. Hope for the future in *Midnight Robber* may ultimately reside in a birth, but Hopkinson's emphasis on the legacies and stories that get passed on to inform that future constitutes a feminist and queer account of reproductive futurism.

In this chapter, I offer close readings of two science fiction texts that revolve around black pregnant women. The history surrounding women of color and

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[38] The history of reproductive science in regards to women of color in the U.S. is a fairly nasty one that haunts ongoing struggles for the reproductive rights of women of color in complex ways. For accounts of J. Marion Sims' particularly cruel gynecological experiments on enslaved women, see Briggs "Hysteria" 261, Roberts 175-76, and Washington 1-2.

reproduction in the U.S. runs the gamut of some of the most egregious abuses of scientific power in the histories of science, including sterilization campaigns and medical experimentation on coerced subjects, not to mention the effects of slavery on the reproductive health and futures of black women. As I mention also in my opening discussion of the Octomom narrative, race, sexuality, and citizenship all play a part in the politics of reproduction. By analyzing *Children of Men* and *Midnight Robber*, I offer two contemporary science fictions that begin to interrogate the history and politics of reproduction. In my consideration of the cinematography at work in Cuarón's film and the linguistic hacking prevalent in Hopkinson's writing, I also suggest the imbrications of science fictions of reproduction and reproductive technologies in formulations of futurity and argue that speculative fiction can unmoor futurity from the reproductive labor that is often exacted on women of color.

Chapter 3 | FANtastic Speculations: Slash Fiction and the Fantasies of Global Cinema

Hacking the *Matrix:* Queering Techno-Utopianism

> "A junk man I know, a man of vision, has supplied me with wire and sockets."
>
> --Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

> "Hackers live a paradox: this is a culture of 'lusers' who see themselves as an elite… They are caught up in an intense need to master—to master perfectly—their medium. In this they are like the virtuoso pianist or the sculptor possessed by his or her materials. Hackers too are 'inhabited' by their medium. They give themselves over to it and see it as the most complex, the most plastic, the most elusive and challenging of all."
>
> --Sherry Turkle, *The Second Self*

Published in 1984, Sherry Turkle's *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit* offers the first theoretical study of emergent computer cultures such as video gamers and hackers. The tension Turkle observes between a hacker ethos of perfect mastery and one of plasticity manifests in similar fashion in debates about scientific knowledge production, which seeks out absolute objectivity while nevertheless grappling with the contingencies of human error and chaotic unknowns. A similar tension also exists in the contradictions of U.S. imperialisms that seek to establish global dominance but do so under the auspices of so-called progress, freedom, and philanthropic aid. In this chapter, I examine the cinematic phenomenon called the *Matrix* (a trilogy written by, for, and of hackers) as a science fiction film rife with these contradictory impulses to contain meaning on the one hand and to proliferate multiple meanings on the other. My analysis of the *Matrix* films focuses on the striking relationships among multiculturalism, neoliberalism, and techno-

utopianism. I also look to fan fiction as a site where queer revisions of the *Matrix* narratives offer an alternative to techno-utopian neoliberalism by allowing the radical potential of gender-queer characters and revolutionary hackers of color to escape the films' containing narrative of heteronormative coupling and reproduction. I offer close readings of a few scenes in the films to show how multiculturalism and heteronormative family formations work together to form a techno-utopian vision. I also consider the film's aggressive advertising campaign and marketing strategies that carry over the techno-utopian futuristic imaginings within the film to "real-world" deployments of cultural speculation. I read this strategic, commercial use of a cyberpunk aesthetic and affect as a less threatening substitute for a more radical politics. Finally, I examine fan fiction writing from digital archives, where the relative anonymity and transience of online publishing allow for unsanctioned narratives to emerge. The resulting same-sex pairings of *Matrix* characters, I argue, disrupt the official narrative's use of the heteronormative family to reproduce neoliberal visions of the future.

What is the *Matrix*?[1] On the one hand, the *Matrix* presents itself as groundbreaking cinema, "revolutionary" in its multivalent availability to users. It wants to be thought of as a "complex," "plastic," and ultimately "elusive" media exchange in which the work of producing meaning is shared by its viewers, who the films' producers hope constitute a wide, international audience. There are various "portals" to the *Matrix* experience, as the project aspires to be a multinational, horizontally integrated, cultural and commercial phenomenon: a film, DVD, video game, animated and comic book series, philosophical doctrine, and more. In its commercial fantasies, "the *Matrix*" claims

[1] I will refer to "the *Matrix*" (the larger enterprising project surrounding the films themselves), "*The Matrix*" (the first film of the trilogy), and "the Matrix" (the virtual construct world central to the plot of the films).

a globally expansive reach over a multimedia universe, over which its creators fancy wielding ultimate control. To promote this fiction, the *Matrix* enterprise capitalizes on one of science fiction's most overtly imperialist tropes: cyberspace as an electronic frontier. In her discussion of the frontier metaphor for cyberspace, Wendy Chun writes:

> Early on, cyberspace's supposed 'openness,' and endlessness was key to imagining it as a terrestrial version of outer space. Constructed as an electronic frontier, cyberspace managed global fiber optic networks by transforming nodes, wires, cables and computers into an infinite enterprise/discovery zone. Like all explorations, charting cyberspace entailed uncovering what was always already there and declaring it 'new.'… Like the New World and the frontier, settlers claimed this 'new' space and declared themselves its citizens" ("Othering Space" 243).

The minimalist but viral ad campaign for the first *Matrix* film featured simple, black backgrounds with a single link to the film's website "Whatisthematrix.com." This image appeared on billboards and bus stops, canvassed subway station walls, and set the precedent for an era of Internet movie advertising. It also established "the Matrix" as an unknown cyber-frontier where renegade users could become part of an online community mythically still independent from governmental regulation. To join, though, one would have to, in the words of one Matrix character, "let it all go… fear, doubt, disbelief… Free your mind." The "openness" of the product is also always an intensely managed aperture. This chapter explores how these openings are controlled—but never completely closed—by way of the cinematic apparatus.

The early *Matrix* narrative urges the spectator to question processes of looking. By repeatedly raising the question "What *is* Real?" the first film asks viewers to recognize the parity between the systemic simulation within the film called "the Matrix construct" and its counterpart: the equally constructed, cinematic apparatus that holds the movie audience captive. In *The Matrix* (1999), the Wachowski brothers direct viewers to

question hegemonic narratives and to train themselves in resistant practices of looking, even as they engage in cinematic practices that inherently work against these notions. Sutured first and foremost to the point of view of the protagonist Neo, the audience is implicitly invited to identify with/as a hacker, whose primary responsibility is to disrupt and dismantle visual systems, including *The Matrix* itself. We are to share in Neo's dawning comprehension of the limitations of the system he inhabits and, in turn, to consider the limitations of the system we inhabit. It does not take him long to wake from the illusion of his reality. By the end of the first half of the film, Neo has come to realize that machines have taken over the world, enslaved humans as a viable source of energy, and constructed the Matrix (a virtual world coded to resemble the late twentieth century) to keep human minds docile and subservient. If the audience manages to miss the point, we are escorted from the theater at the end of the film by the closing credits music: "Wake Up!" by Rage Against the Machine. This induction of the viewer into the *Matrix* frame initiates audience members as hackers themselves, searching for holes in the code around them.

However, I argue that the *Matrix* project ultimately tries to rescind this invitation not long after the release of the first film by shifting its cinematic techniques to distance the viewer, by succumbing to the *telos* of heteronormative resolution, and by yielding to rather shallow and damaging formulations of race. I look to a few, select scenes that point to the films' preoccupation with themes of racial and sexual difference in a time of growing uncertainty about globalization, terrorism, and technology. One could think of the project's failure to pursue its more self-reflexive lines of inquiry as a reflection of the limitations of hacker culture itself, whose image has predominantly been projected as the

white, male recluse. Even so, my account of the *Matrix* project's paradigmatic shifts in narrative trajectory and cinematic orchestration addresses the cultural and political backdrop of the production years between 1999 (the release of *The Matrix*) and 2003, (the release of both *Matrix* sequels, *The Matrix: Reloaded* and *The Matrix: Revolutions*).

In the process of placing these films amid the cultural dynamics of the earliest years of the twenty-first century, I take particular interest in the way cultural shifts are inextricably linked to shifts in the visual architecture of the films and what these changes signify in terms of the films' tentative engagement of race and queerness. The *Matrix* project delivers two distinct modes of spectatorship. One is that of the roving superman: a globalizing, consolidating look. The other is a more grounded, situated look, which I argue engenders the hacker. I discuss the emergence of and tension between these looks as they evolve as part of the films' relationship to globalization and post-capitalist discourses about race and sexuality. Part of my project is certainly to interrogate how and when the cinematic strategies employed and even celebrated by the *Matrix* films reproduce an exoticizing gaze, whose relationship to women and people of color has been closely tied to colonialist enterprises.[2] The latter part of my chapter, though, considers spaces of resistant spectatorship, where moments of disidentification present points of rupture in the cinematic narrative. I argue that the contradictions inherent in cyberculture allow for spaces of agency for spectators to respond and even produce alternative narratives to the central *Matrix* text.

In my analysis of the *Matrix* phenomenon, I approach the films as cultural texts open to diverse interpretations and subject to complex circulations of meanings. I

[2] There are almost too many works to cite here, but I would have readers look in particular to bell hooks' "The Oppositional Gaze" in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* and Manthia Diawara's "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance" in *Screen.*

acknowledge the agency of spectators, whose intermediations and appropriations of the *Matrix* platform constitute a fantastic set of fan revisions. Regardless of whether the primary motivation behind these films was to master or to surrender control of the cinematic process, the remarkable fan response to the *Matrix* films indicates something about the project that inspired such vigorous user interventions. After a thorough examination of the ways in which the films mobilize race and sexuality, it becomes clear that hacker culture itself, as represented by the *Matrix* films, must be decoded and recoded.

Sex/Race/Space

At first glance, the *Matrix* project sustains a highly visible performance of liberal multiculturalism. A remarkably abundant number of non-white actors comprise the core cast (and crew) of the three *Matrix* films, and one can acknowledge the material benefits of providing a sizeable group of black actors, in particular, with substantive and lucrative work that casts them as philosophical and technologically-savvy hackers and resistance organizers rather than the less productive but unfortunately more common representations of blackness in popular culture. More than this, I was initially drawn to the ubiquity of hackers of color in the *Matrix* narrative. Their presence contests the assumption that all hackers are white and that people of color are not technologically-adept. This apparent embrace of ethnic diversity and multiracial hybridity, though, operates mainly at the level of skin-deep representation; it does not permeate the project's underlying ideologies. The films cultivate a pan-ethnic aesthetic that pretends at a unified

humanity but ultimately reveals itself to be a superficial bronzing over of racial differences. Despite promoting an attention to the constructedness of social realities, the films do not attend to the social construction of race. The narrative takes place in an ostensibly post-racial world, but race remains at the very core of the *Matrix* ideological and cinematic infrastructure.

Race delineates space in the *Matrix* films, and these spaces are markedly segregated according to stock stereotypes, which impede any serious engagement with reimagining racial formation in a post-apocalyptic world. While hemp-clad, black bodies predominantly inhabit Zion, bodies within the Matrix are almost always white and urban. Cast in the most visible rebel leadership roles are Laurence Fishburne, Jada Pinkett-Smith, and Cornel West, to name just a few of the high-profile black actors fighting the war against the machines. The machine leaders, on the other hand, are played by Hugo Weaving and a plethora of other white actors playing agents with names like Smith, Brown, Jones, Jackson, Johnson, and Thompson.

South and East Asian bodies seem relegated to the interstitial spaces of the Matrix, such as the sterilized hallways of *The Matrix: Reloaded* and the purgatorial subway station in *The Matrix: Revolutions*. Supporting characters such as the Keymaker (Randall Duk Kim) and Seraph (Collin Chou) facilitate rapid passage between otherwise incongruent spaces of the Matrix, and they do so entirely to serve the purposes of others. The Keymaker carves shortcuts through the backstage hallways to guide Morpheus and Neo to the mainframe computer. Seraph's primary function is to protect "that which matters most": the Oracle. At the beginning of *Revolutions*, the Oracle even transfers his service over to Trinity and Morpheus: "For years [Seraph] has protected me," she says. "I

hope he can do the same for you." Seraph then turns to Trinity and Morpheus, bows slightly, and humbly says: "Plrease. Follow me," in a notably accented English. Depicted as subservient and asexual, Seraph and the Keymaker fulfill the Orientalist fantasy. Asians in the *Matrix* films seem caught in the liminal geographies between the black and white technological realms of Zion and the Matrix. For Asian American and queer theorist David Eng, this marginalization and accompanying "racial castration" coincides with a "historical legacy that has unrelentingly configured Asian Americans as exterior to or pathological to the US nation-state" (33). Both alien to and "key" citizens of the *Matrix* universe, Asians reside primarily in purgatory, facilitating the interchange between ruling and subordinate classes. One could consider them the indentured servants in a system whose needs require not only slave labor but also an entire force of service-sector workers.

In a purgatorial subway station situated in limbo between the machine and human worlds, Neo encounters a South Asian family of computer programs, who are in the process of smuggling their daughter, Sati, into the Matrix where she will help the Oracle bake cookies and write code for the Matrix construct. In the form of this family, Neo comes face to face with the sign of techno-industrial labor, which takes place primarily "offshore."[3] In her book *Immigrant Acts*, *c*ultural critic Lisa Lowe examines the formation of "a new gendered international division of labor that makes use of third world and racialized immigrant women as a 'flexible' work force in the restructuring of capitalism

[3] Lisa Nakamura articulated this connection between the South Asian family and Donna Haraway's theorization of offshore labor in response to a question I raised at the end of the presentation she gave on race in the Matrix sequels at the "Powering Up / Powering Down" conference in San Diego, 2003. Donna Haraway writes of "the offshore woman" as one "whom U.S. workers, female and feminized, are supposed to regard as the enemy preventing their solidarity, threatening their security… 'Women of colour' are the preferred labour force for the science-based industries, the real women for whom the world-wide sexual market, labour market, and politics of reproduction kaleidoscope into daily life" (Haraway *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 174).

globally" (16). Sati and her parents embody transnational labor in the post-capitalist *Matrix* world, and it is significant that Neo meets them in a subterranean node of transportation. In the *Matrix*, Asian bodies represent invisible, supplementary labor that threatens to get smuggled in from the margins at any moment. This assertion also relates extra-diegetically to the team of Asian men holding the very wires that permit Neo to leap and soar through the air during his fight scenes. The labor of Yuen Wo Ping's crew of "wire-fu" masters must take place in the margins if the illusion of preternatural movement on-screen is to be sustained.

If Asians populate the in-between spaces of the *Matrix* universe, the more polar topographies of the human city, Zion, and the machine-made Matrix construct serve to delineate the polarized US racial imagination of blacks and whites. In stark contrast to the crisp, bleached lines of city life within the Matrix simulation, Zion's Real-World aesthetics engender earthy tones, natural fibers, and organic forms. Rendering the virtual world of the Matrix construct in cool, green shades and Zion in warmer, amber hues, the filmmakers define two different color schemata to delineate the cinematic landscapes—an effect problematically augmented by the corresponding racialization of these spaces. Zion inaugurates the human war against the machines with an orgiastic rave comprised mostly of golden- and brown- toned bodies. The rave sequence is riddled with clichés that ally primitiveness with blackness. Extended, slow-motion close-ups of barefoot stomping, mud between the toes, and anklets jingling to the beat of drums work to naturalize a longing for primordial contact with the earth. In Zion, one must remove one's shoes before entering the temple hall, but in the machine world, everyone (from agents to

hackers) wears structured shoes whose synthetic materials squeak with emphasis of their artificial construction.

The absence of whiteness in Zion becomes quite pronounced in the opening skit of the 2003 MTV Movie Awards, which places hosts Justin Timberlake and Seann William Scott with pale-skinned, red-headed Andy Dick on the Zion temple floor, standing out like sore thumbs.[4] The fun in the *Matrix* parody lies in their visible interruption of the undulating tawny mass of lithe, Alvin Ailey-esque dancers. The majority of the original scene is shot in sweeping, slow-motion panning across this spectacle of brownness. This highly-aestheticized production of multiculturalism has been distilled to an easily commodified and consumable form. It does not seek to disrupt or challenge the voyeur's sweeping gaze; rather, it sweeps across the question of race with a wide, universalizing brush of melting pot literalism.

What I have been calling "the rave scene" actually mobilizes several competing signifiers simultaneously. What goes on in that temple-cave is, indeed, overdetermined. The playing of drums, the temple carved out of nature itself, and the slow-motion dreadlocks could constitute a heavy allusion to Rastafari movements; its stylization is not "rave," but *binghi*, or "grounation ceremony." Alternately, the space is reminiscent of a queer club scene. Whether one understands the cave to be an allusion to a rave scene, a Rastafarian *binghi*, or a queer club, the cave ultimately is the place where the specifics of these references have been supplanted by a number of substitutions, designed to introduce viewers to and yet immediately inoculate them against more sultry potentialities. This *could* be a queer club if the scene weren't insistently being interrupted

[4] This skit is actually included as an extra on *The Matrix: Reloaded* DVD, which co-opts the spoof as part of its own, controlled package.

by heterosex. Neo and Trinity's tryst (spliced repeatedly into the aerial pans of the dance floor), the close-up of Link and Zee locked in an intimate tangle of grinding, and the carefully placed professional dance teams (all paired as straight partners—men lifting women) are all indications that the film means this space to be resoundingly heterosexual, even as the scene's queer potential reaches out to audiences less interested in such staunch heteronormativity.

Similarly, the "grounation ceremony" is markedly smoke-free in a Zion mostly interested more in the style than the practice of Rastafarianism.[5] And, though Morpheus "remember[s] one hundred years" of human enslavement to machines, his memory of slavery before machines (and I mean this in two ways) remains remarkably occluded. Morpheus' "I remember" oration intones Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech of the Civil Rights Era, but it "forgets" the historical African slave trade that fueled European colonial expansion. Though the films count on a certain allusive power in summoning the specter of *two hundred* years of transatlantic slave trading, they do so only to supplant it with a more generalized narrative of human oppression. This "forgetting" works to excise race and racism from the slave narrative on which the films ultimately depend. The films thus re-call, recast, and disavow the racist practices facilitating the promulgation of global, transnational capitalism—of which the *Matrix* enterprise is inevitably a part.

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[5] Dick Hebdige discusses how the punk movement looked to reggae, "Black West Indian style," and the themes of Back to Africa and Ethiopianism" as a set of useful cultural signs to appropriate that would stand for punk's rejection of normative white, British conventions. "Reggae attracted those punks who wished to give tangible form to their alienation. It carried the necessary conviction, the political bite, so obviously missing in most contemporary white music." See Hebdige 64, 63. One could never convincingly argue, though, that punk's turn to reggae for a desired importation of "dread" is what is going on in *The Matrix: Reloaded*. Rather, the slow-motion shot of dreadlocks inspires not dread but a reminder of an Otherness swallowed by melting pot multiculturalism and a sign of political radicalism reduced to a commodity widely available in the 1990s: the Rasta hat, complete with wig.

Though this allusion to the enslavement of blacks is compromised, it is difficult to condemn it outright. When Morpheus says to a room full of people of color: "We are all here because of our certain affinity for disobedience," the statement lends itself to an exciting reading: Slave descendants and the offspring of the oppressed shall lead the human revolution against the machines precisely because they have inherited a certain skepticism of The System. Morpheus, in particular, embodies an Afrofuturist ideal as a black hacker whose interventions into the Matrix help to "free minds." However, these alluring potentialities persistently and disappointingly revert to heavily romanticized, essentialist representations of blackness.

While the Matrix construct clearly engenders the Information Age, replete with ethereal energy core, endlessly white hallways, and hyper-sanitary, postmodern aesthetics, Zion—though part of the late twenty-first century—preserves all the trappings of an Industrial Age metropolis. Made of "earth, steel, and stone," Zion comes complete with a boiler room sublevel. Because Zion necessarily runs on mechanization rather than automation, its citizens are mostly working-class or military-class laborers. In preparing for war, Zion volunteers even transport mechanical parts in wheelbarrows, quintessential symbols of agricultural labor. Zion also remains, at its core, a pre-industrial cave—primitive and sacrosanct in the form of a temple, where inhabitants gather in ecstatic, revivalist fashion. According to Roderick Ferguson, depicting African American religious practices as orgiastic and unrestrained works to place African Americans within a developmental narrative in which blacks inhabit pre-modern time and are devoid of rational, modern thought (84). Ferguson's *Aberrations in Black* critiques sociological narratives that regard black sexuality as pathologically heterosexual. The cinematic

techniques used to film Zion's temple cave, pulsing with such orgiastic fervor, reproduce the problematic ethnographic gaze of such sociological narratives that comprehend blackness en masse. The *Matrix* narrative ironically drops the future back into a pre-modern, agrarian system, which historically relied on both slave labor and the family as the primary units of production.

The films' tropes of black authenticity are further entangled in a fiercely heteronormative idea of community that pivots on a reproductive imperative. Zion is the last human city; its survival depends on the perpetuation of the species, and the conflation of these procreative demands with the racialization of Zion activates intensely troubling assumptions about black sexuality. How, then, could Cornel West, an eminent scholar of African American studies, endorse such a film by acting in it as a Zion Council member? Consulting his chapter on black sexuality in *Race Matters* confirms that Professor West is, of course, sharply aware of the colonialist myth that represents black people as "closer to nature (removed from intelligence and control) and more prone to be guided by base pleasures and biological impulses" (126-7). A formidable amount of scholarship, which West has most likely read, documents the profound damage this myth has wreaked on black bodies—and black women's bodies in particular—in both colonial and postcolonial times. Perhaps the films' positivist affirmation of the black family was what appealed to West, whose own work champions an idyllic black family unit, perhaps too unproblematically. Feminist scholar Iris Marion Young critiques West for his romanticization of the family and nostalgia for a 1950s familial model whose division of labor benefits primarily men.[6]

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[6] See Young 179-91.

While the *Matrix* films portray "healthy" black family units, they concomitantly reinforce a false equation between blackness and patriarchal heteronormativity. The films present a fairly masculinist idealization of the family. When Neo inquires after the lack of sockets on Tank's body, the enthusiastic ship operator proudly declares: "Holes? No. Me and my brother Dozer, we're both 100% pure, old-fashioned, homegrown human, born free right here in the real world. A genuine child of Zion." Tank's statement not only renders Zion the ultimate seat of authenticity; it also identifies heteronormative reproduction as "pure" and "old-fashioned." By calling himself "homegrown," Tank also invokes an archaic agricultural metaphor for women's bodies as fertile fields, waiting to be plowed and seeded. His boasting about his lack of holes, orifices, or points of penetration sustains a misogynist association of femininity and vulnerability, and masculinity and wholeness. In the wartime politics of reproduction, these families apparently bring forth only able-bodied male children, or in this case, "tanks" and "bulldozers." Declaring himself a "genuine child of Zion," Tank volunteers his services to a patriarchal system of compulsory heterosexual reproduction. Under the survivalist circumstances of this world, humans vest their hopes in the power of black reproductive labor. In the context of US racial formation, this amalgamation of blackness, primitiveness, and procreative labor becomes highly unsettling.

The conclusion of the *Matrix* trilogy solidifies this troubling link between blackness and reproductive futurism. The end of the war between the humans and machines re-situates viewers in the Zion temple cave, where most members of the last human city have gathered to await annihilation. News of Zion's salvation travels via "The Kid," whose underage military heroics helped stave off an earlier machine attack wave.

The Kid's triumphant expostulations trigger a chain reaction of snapshot heterosexual couplings that forge a link between salvation and the family. Link, the ship operator, embraces his loyal wife, Zee, who has waited for her husband as dutifully as Penelope for Odysseus. Morpheus and Niobe, arguably the father and mother of the revolution, hold each other tenderly as they pay their respects to their savior, Neo. Here, at the end of the war, Niobe and Zee, two of the most capable, compelling, and spirited combat fighters in the films, are re-incorporated into the domestic family unit after having fulfilled their more active duties in the sphere of homeland defense.

The reconstitution of the patriarchal family unit is reinforced by a renewed devotion to their faith. Morpheus has apparently converted Niobe and, in doing so, has won her heart. Likewise, Zee has persuaded her husband to adopt her religious beliefs and the practices of prayer. Witness the convergence of conservative politics, family, and religion during wartime. If, as cultural critics Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner argue, an "understanding of the ideology of contemporary Hollywood film is…inseparable from the social history of the era," then these overtures to conservative politics must be read in the wartime context of George W. Bush's Presidential tenure (7). Overt heterosexual resolutions are certainly not uncommon to science fiction films, especially in apocalyptic narratives of the last ten years (e.g. *The Fifth Element*, *Armageddon*, *Independence Day*). The culture of "imminent threat" cultivated during the second Bush administration sets the conditions of urgency and fear that predicate a reinstatement of patriarchal family values, religious fervor, and jingoism. In the case of the *Matrix* trilogy, the imminent extinction of a free human race all but institutionalizes reproductive, heterosexual intercourse as the only acceptable sex to have at the end of the world. Upon their return to Zion, the

Nebuchadnezzar crew's primary impulse is to unplug and screw—and sex in Zion may be pleasurable, but it is first and foremost dutiful. Link cannot wait to reconnect with his wife, Zee, though upon returning home, he must postpone sex until after he has hugged his children—reminders that the sexual urges he is feeling must yield productive results.

Within both narratives—that of the film and that of the nation—communities of color are heavily called upon to put their lives on the line to protect the homeland. Potential critics of this social pattern are meant to divert their attentions to a romanticized picture of the family and the universal duty to protect that core by fighting for one's country. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner argue that these images of idealized heterosexuality work to

> shore up core national culture and allay white fears of minoritization… National heterosexuality is the mechanism by which a core national culture can be imagined as a sanitized space of sentimental feeling and immaculate behavior, a space of pure citizenship. A familial model of society displaces the recognition of structural racism and other systemic inequalities. (1)

According to Judith Butler, "compulsory heterosexuality works in the service of maintaining hegemonic forms of racial purity" (18). For these scholars, discussions about racialized and sexualized subjects must take part in the same conversation.

It is important to note that for Neo and Trinity, the sexual encounter always gets superceded by more pressing matters of public service or divine revelation. Their eager caresses in the elevator cannot lead to sex because Neo must get out and hear the pleas of the people who look to him as their savior. Later, in Trinity's chambers, the couple is unable to consummate their love. For Neo, sex leads to prophecy, if not to progeny; he shudders with divine vision rather than orgasm. Their sexuality also differs from that of the rest of Zion in that it remains a private affair. This tryst takes place behind closed

doors in an intimate, candlelit den; whereas, the rest of Zion remains on display on the temple floor. In any case, Neo and Trinity remain exempt from the reproductive burden; they are perhaps too saintly (and too white) to be asked to procreate.[7] The reproductive imperative remains the primary responsibility of people of color.

As much as the films attempt to naturalize a relationship between blackness and heterosexuality, they also relegate queerness to the white world. Landscapes of sexuality get mapped onto the already-racialized spaces of the films. In Zion, bodies are authentically human, predominantly of color, and fiercely heterosexual. Most flirtations with gay sex are restricted to virtual Matrix spaces, positing queerness as a sort of synthetic sexuality.[8] If the possibility of non-reproductive or queer desire pops up in the Real World, it is quickly disciplined. In *The Matrix*, the aptly-named "Switch" wears her hair short and her patience for Neo even shorter. Her first line in the film involves telling Neo to take his shirt off so as to get de-bugged. Neo misunderstands at first, and Switch grows immediately irritated with his misprision. The indignity she expresses when Neo thinks she is coming on to him makes reading her as a lesbian even easier. Her contributions to the film, though, consist only of getting annoyed by Neo's cluelessness and of dying prematurely. Premature death also descends on the *Revolutions* character, Charra, who sports another pixie haircut, rippling biceps, and a giant bazooka. Her guerrilla tactics and agile teamwork with Zee prove to be some of the most effective

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[7] I realize the reading Neo as white is somewhat problematic, as Keanu Reeves is avowedly biracial. Reeves' actual racial affiliations (and much-speculated-on sexual orientation) nevertheless serve to set him apart from the rest of Zion. The films seem to whiten him, insofar as they maintain the assumption of his whiteness by viewers who associate his physical awkwardness with a certain white boy hacker aesthetic.

[8] Such a proposition would not be so damning if it weren't for the accompanying flip side of the equation that allies heterosexuality with all that is authentic, real, human, and therefore somehow better. Cultural theorists such as Donna Haraway and Allucquère Rosanne Stone might have us consider sexuality to be "synthetic," but in a way that would also have us challenge the privileging of the authentic, the original, and the natural over the hybrid, the mutable, and the conscientiously-fashioned.

fighting in the final battle against the persistently-drilling Machines. Her labor, though, is rewarded with a graphically violent on-screen dismemberment of her body. For collaborating with Link's wife, Charra is sadistically penetrated by several machine tentacles before being ripped apart and publicly punished for the queer potential she embodied. Though acknowledgements of alternative sexualities do make their way into these *Matrix* films, the narrative is exceedingly adept at closing those possibilities down.

The most overtly queer scene in the trilogy takes place in the Merovingian's headquarters during *Revolutions*. Deviant sexuality becomes the defining marker of danger during this scene. Also known as "the Frenchman", the Merovingian presides over a sublevel Matrix domain, which doubles as a club where techno-fetish and S/M have merged into a decorative panoply of patent leather and urban glamour.[9] His wife's name, Persephone, suggests that this is a sort of queer Hades in which Morpheus, Trinity, and Seraph must barter for the soul of Neo, who has been caught for the moment in a purgatory between the machine and the human worlds (where he meets Sati's family). The three black-belt rebels must fight their way into the area by literally turning their logic upside-down in order to pass the guards who run up walls and across ceilings. Queer bodies of all kinds, such as these vampire and werewolf guards, populate the Frenchman's playground. As the three rebel leaders make their way past the guards, they enter the main dance floor and interrupt a sea of bondage-costumed bodies, similarly undulating to the Zion ravers, but cast in an entirely different light. Patent leather and metal spikes on the dancers here replace the organic materials of Zion, and the dance floor is populated primarily by same-sex couples forced to stop their fondling of each other when the trio

[9] S/M, or sadomasochism, brings together the names of two European aristocratic writers of 18th and 19th-century erotica: the Marquis de Sade and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch. The reason I call attention to this connection to late 18th-century Europe will become clearer in the next paragraph.

walks by. The contrast between the pre-modern and postmodern aesthetics of the two club scenes becomes even more startling upon noticing that the contrast is also racialized. Almost everyone in the fetish club is white. Queers of color don't seem to have permeated the imaginary topographies here.

Furthermore, the whiteness represented in the Merovingian's club is of a specifically European inheritance. The Merovingian's lair is draped in neo-Gothic décor and populated with werewolves and vampires, "remnants of an older system" but "notoriously difficult to kill." These hints at the Gothic signal a resuscitation of certain anxieties of nineteenth-century literature. The Frenchman and his wife—played by French-Irish actor Lambert Wilson and Italian superstar Monica Bellucci—embody the revival of a fallen and sick European aristocracy, lacking in sexual and moral discipline. While the Merovingian exits a scene to have a sexual tryst in the bathroom, Persephone demands a kiss from Neo before helping the resistance fighters in order to impart revenge on her husband's lack of fidelity. Melani McAlister's book *Epic Encounters* points up a similar mark of European difference in *Ben Hur*:

> [I]n almost all instances, the Hebrews/Christians are played by American actors, while the Romans/Egyptians are usually played by non-American, often British, actors. The differences in the accents and personal carriage of the actors are mobilized as signifiers of imperial versus democratic values, with the Romans/Egyptians standing in for the fading British Empire and the American actors playing the brave inhabitants of the new, decolonizing nations. (65)

McAlister accounts for this split casting with an assertion that the US, as the emergent new world power after World War Two, was strategically positioning its overseas interests and policies in contradistinction to an older brand of European imperialism. Reading McAlister's analysis of 1950's biblical epics alongside the *Matrix* films is helpful in

interpreting the definite Europeanization of the Merovingian's headquarters. Facing another war—one in which much of Europe was unwilling to participate—the US again capitalizes on representing Europe as impotent and passé. The Merovingian's taste for wine, cursing in French (which feels like "wiping my ass with silk"), and succulent martini olives renders him decadent and excessive in his desires, as does his penchant for cake and wanton sex. Trinity, most of all, is impatient with his philandering. As tension mounts and a fight ensues, Trinity seizes a gun from midair, points it at his head, and truncates his apparently cumbersome name, addressing him simply as "Merv." In this swift turnover of power and control in the scene, Trinity expresses the US' own impatience with waiting for "Old Europe's" help.[10] At the time of *Revolutions*' release, France was an unutterable name in the US. Among other European nations, it would not condone the US initiative to invade Iraq. A significant swell in anti-French sentiment swept the US in 2003—as evidenced by the decision to change the name of French fries to "freedom fries" in the US House of Representatives cafeterias. France was characterized as effeminate and weak in both popular culture and news media political cartoons. By rendering the Merovingian effeminate, extravagant, and unhelpful, the *Matrix* sequels invoke the xenophobic and homophobic sentiment imbued in the anti-French position of US nationalist discourse at the time. Trinity's intolerance and dismissal of the Frenchman serve to close down the queer possibilities that arise in this scene that puts queer bodies on display to begin with.[11]

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[10] The Merovingians ruled the Frankish kingdom from approximately the 4th to the 8th century A.D. They sustained mythological status as being Jesus Christ's descendents. Donald Rumsfeld referred to France and Germany as "Old Europe" in response to their refusal to support the U.S. invasion of Iraq ("Outrage," BBC News).

[11] This excruciating ambivalence on how to deal with queerness in the Matrix trilogy reminds me of what happens at the conclusion of *The Return of the King*, where director Peter Jackson stumbles through

McAlister's analysis suggests how it becomes possible that the *Matrix* films can at once illuminate the images of and suppress an ideological commitment to queerness, racial diversity, and gender egalitarianism. "When US nationalism succeeded," she writes, "it did so because racial diversity and gendered logics were incorporated into the stories told about the moral geographies that underlay US power" (273). Though McAlister refers specifically to the Gulf War of 1990-1991, her observations also ring true to the politics of incorporation surrounding the Second Gulf War, or the 2003 invasion of Iraq. McAlister explains how war conditioned a need for assent and cooperation on the part of communities of women and people of color. Her statement explains the ambivalent moves the *Matrix* films make; it articulates how a film project can pursue aggressively multiracial casting and yet also maintain racially segregated spaces in the narrative, or how it can invite queer desire and spectatorship onto the scene but also make it monstrous.

The films' disavowal of non-normative sexuality is best exemplified through the narrative arc of Agent Smith's metamorphosis into a virus. Whereas he once likened human beings to a virus, Smith himself has turned into the apocalyptic sign of HIV/AIDS in the movie sequels.[12] The gesture that facilitates transmission of the Smith virus is decidedly phallic and penetrative in nature (see figure 1).

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alternating heterosexual and homosexual resolutions in order to bring *The Lord of the Rings* epic to an end. Jackson breaks up the various moments of anxious homosocial bonding with intensely heteronormative rituals. Two weddings and the two childbirths attempt to reassure an audience uneasy with Sam and Frodo's potentially homoerotic relationship by interrupting the narrative with strained iterations of familial bliss.

[12] In *The Matrix*, Smith tells Morpheus: "I'd like to share a revelation during my time here. It came to me when I tried to classify your species. I realized that you're not actually mammals. Every mammal on this planet instinctively develops a natural equilibrium with the surrounding environment but you humans do not. You move to an area and you multiply and multiply until every natural resource is consumed. The only way you can survive is to spread to another area. There is another organism on this planet that follows the same pattern. Do you know what it is? A virus. Human beings are a disease, a cancer of this planet. You are a plague, and we are the cure."

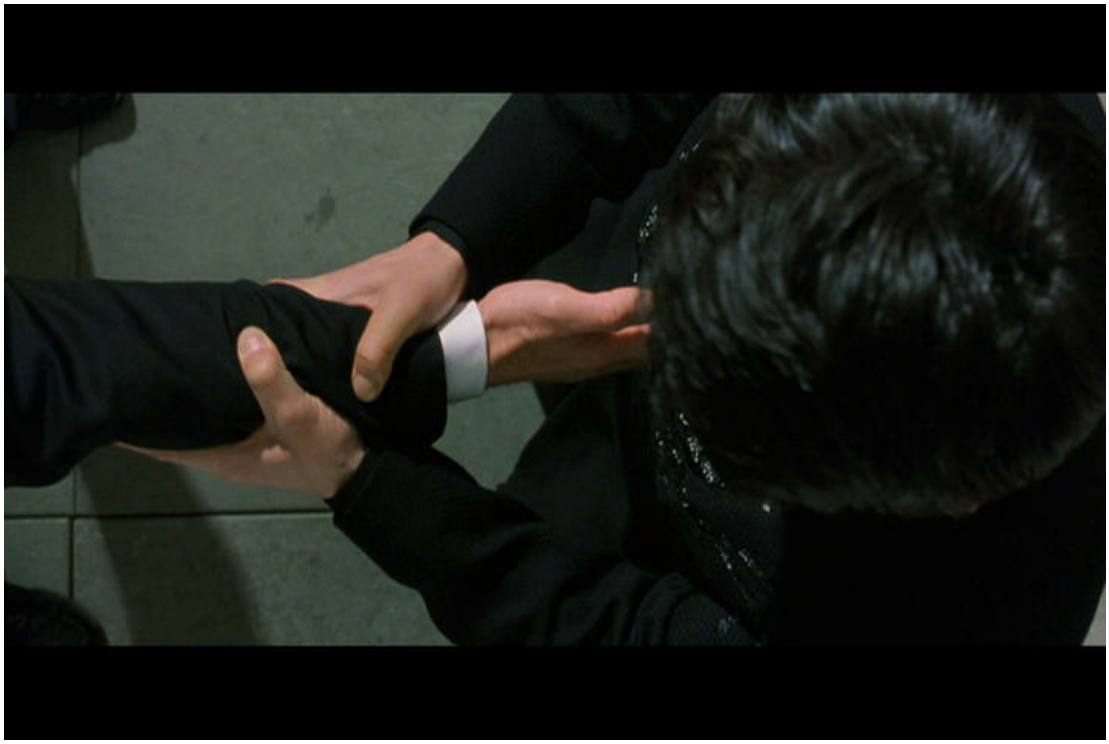

Figure 1: Penetrative assimilation. *The Matrix: Reloaded* (2001)

Nearly all of these on-screen penetrations occur between men. There are one-and-a-half exceptions to this pattern: Smith also assimilates the Oracle in her kitchen while another Smith hovers menacingly over Sati, though the viewer never witnesses the actual penetration. In both cases, the "intimate contact" is interracial, and, in Sati's case, it is pederastic. Therefore, Smith's viral replication remains linked to non-normative intimacies. The computer virus metaphor materializing in the form of a man whose singular compulsion is to penetrate and therefore infect other bodies—male and/or of color—instantiates a reversion to the 1980s mythologization of AIDS as a "gay disease," or a pandemic that seeks out and punishes promiscuous sex.[13] When the Smith virus

[13] See Paula Treichler's "AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse" for a thorough examination of AIDS discourse.

begins to threaten the machine and human worlds, its eradication becomes the precondition for peace between the warring factions.

The narrative clearly marks Smith's appetite for viral replication as a queer form of reproduction. If the films suggest that the epitome of heteronormative reproduction is the black family, they also indicate that queer sexuality resides in the body of a white gay man. Black bodies in this film have heterosexual, reproductive, and "natural" sex in the Real World; while the predominantly-white, queer bodies engage in what the film's logic suggests is a synthetic sexuality that only takes place within a simulated construct. The damaging outcome of these layered oppositions is that they misleadingly place blackness and queerness at odds with one another, totally denying the possible intersection between the two. (What place might a lesbian of color take in the *Matrix*?) One significant by-product of this racialization and demonization of sexualities is that the sequels, in effect, queer Smith as a character. But rather than leaving Smith to suffer the pathetic death of a foiled villain, or the vindictive extermination of a monstrous disease, some fans of Weaving's character seize upon and pry open the moments when his relationship with Neo hint at a more romantic resolution. How these moments become available for all sorts of queer re-readings is the topic of the next section of this chapter.

Walking/Hacking/Queering

> To be lifted to the summit of the World Trade Center is to be lifted out of the city's grasp. One's body is no longer clasped by the streets that turn and return it according to an anonymous law… When one goes up there, he leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors or

> spectators… His elevation transfigures him
> into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It
> transforms the bewitching world by which one
> was 'possessed' into a text that lies before
> one's eyes. It allows one to read it, to be a solar
> Eye, looking down like a god.
> --Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City"

The final shot of the Wachowski brothers' *The Matrix* depicts Neo (Keanu Reeves), emerging Superman-like from a telephone booth and leaping into the sky. Neo's flight signifies a transcendent, triumphant moment: He has divested himself of the illusions of the Matrix and recognizes the construction of the world that has enslaved him and his fellow humans. This sudden re-cognizance of the world around him is represented visually by a significant rearrangement of cinematic positions. As he soars high above the simulated metropolis, an aerial shot announces Neo's mastery over the Matrix system. The camera pans over the orderly grid of streets, and in the city's hyper-organized layout, we are to comprehend the totalitarian nature of the machine-state controlling it. The visual articulation of Neo's "victory" is astonishingly totalizing, considering that it is meant to express the overthrowing of a hegemonic system. His newfound ability to fly provides viewers with the fantasy fiction of seeing the whole from above. In surrendering his pedestrian navigation of cubicle mazes and crowded Chinatown street-markets, Neo (and by extension the audience) becomes what Michel de Certeau calls a "voyeur-god" (93). The top-down, order-consolidating vantage point Neo attains in flight suggests more hegemonic practices of looking than the ones he entertained as a hacker-pedestrian, once wired to his terminal and "possessed" by the city around him. What does it mean that the *wired* hacker has transformed into a (deceptively) *wireless* savior? What does it mean for the spectator, who, sutured to Neo's gaze at this

juncture, is also "lifted out of the city's grasp" and treated to the aerial, panoramic views of the Superhero?

The move from the worship of the wired to the worship of the wireless is not (only) about celebrating technological advances. It does, however, suggest a shift in the cultural discourses about technology and power—a shift from situated, locatable power to seemingly invisible, rapidly mobile power. Furthermore, this shift in power is also about larger shifts in systems of capital, labor, race, and gender. To return to an earlier point: Who holds the wires that facilitate Neo's flight? What Neo transcends are overpopulated Chinatown streets (dangerous because the feared agents can eerily possess any of unwitting pedestrian), and what the voyeur-god leaves below are the murky (racialized) undulations of a diverse city in which Harlem is a distant disappearing point.

Neo may have entered the telephone booth an anti-authoritarian hacker, but he emerges an Ubermensch. This "up-up-and-away" moment bespeaks a certain donning of the cape—an adoption of smug, self-congratulatory heroism, so uncharacteristic of the more hard-boiled anti-hero of the cyberpunk genre. Released in 1999, the first *Matrix* focused on renegade heroes practicing guerrilla tactics to dismantle an oppressive system. By the 2003 releases of the sequels *Reloaded* and *Revolutions*, a godlike savior and his disciples have replaced those anti-establishment rebels, perhaps because of a dramatic change in the popular reception of hackers at the turn of the millennium.[14] Though hackers have, since the 1980s been connected to a certain criminality, the public discourse

[14] Douglas Thomas provides an account of the evolution of the hacker and hacker image. Though Thomas is at times susceptible to a strain of elitism that he himself notices within "true hacker" culture, he does provide a general timeline of hacker history. Thomas cites two sites of knowledge production about hacker culture. He calls them "buried and popular" knowledges, which "are found in the discourses of the underground itself, on the one hand, and of the media, popular culture, and law, on the other hand." See D. Thomas xx. Most helpful to my own project is Thomas' interest in hacking as a site of resistance in dialectical relation to mainstream incorporations of hacker culture.

on hackers after 9/11 heightened the level of danger associated with them by marking hackers as potential terrorists. What may have at one time been a campy reference to Superman emerging from the telephone booth becomes a much more serious indicator of real cultural, political, and ideological change.

Recalibrating their cyberpunk epic for a significantly changed cultural climate, the Wachowski brothers downplay the hacker-aesthetics of the project, emphasizing instead a "faith and love will save the day" message of unification under the banner of liberal humanism—a banner often carried by more patriotically-costumed characters such as Superman and Captain America. This transition expresses itself most apparently in the visual mechanics of the films. Not only are the perspectives of these flying superheroes markedly different from those of the hacker-pedestrians, but the potential openness of the cinematic interface initially extended to viewers has been reined in and replaced with a more classically positioned spectator/spectacle relationship.

The visual elements with which the Wachowskis support this ideological shift are not at all subtle. Rather, they are accented and brought to the forefront of the audience's attention, most extensively through the addition of an entire DVD of documentary footage. The DVD extras present cast and crew not only expounding on the virtuosic, detail-obsessed Wachowski brothers but also making much of the technological apparatus that made this visual event so remarkable. Such is the simultaneous celebration of a technology they purport to control minutely and the tacit acknowledgement of ways in which they do not have total control. John Gaeta, visual effects overlord of all three *Matrix* films, gloats over his mastery of new cinematic techno-powers such as "bullet-time" special effects and digital "interpolation":

> [W]e can create new frames of moments in between…the captured frames to make moves longer, and/or stretch them out, or do time-compression effects… We're talking about cameras that are now broken from the subject matter, that are virtual… and it will be as revolutionary as when cameras came off sticks and went to a crane, when they came off cranes and went to steady cams. ("Taking the Red Pills," *The Matrix*, 1999).

Depicted as the real world superheroes of the *Matrix* films, Gaeta and his film crew orchestrate the sweeping, 360° panoptic shots that simultaneously erase the camera's presence and highlight the special effects at work. Even as Gaeta revels in the level of control he exerts over the product, he exposes the technological apparatus that makes such seamlessness possible. Scott Bukatman describes the "reflexive spectacularity of special effects" as a phenomenon particularly salient to science fiction films, which he calls "an exhibitionistic cinema" (13).[15] These contradictory impulses—to conceal and to exhibit, to close and to open, to master and to surrender—provide the occasion to articulate how the *Matrix* project attempts, but fails, to commandeer the reception and meaning of its films. The documenting of Gaeta's giddiness for a DVD special feature is part and parcel of deeper commercial anxieties about managing an expansive field of viewer interaction and consumption of film-related products.

Through aggressive marketing, merchandising, and licensing schemes, the *Matrix* presents itself as a whole universe of play, rather than "just a film." The trilogy is staged as a postmodern epic. Melani McAlister writes that "'Epicness' situated filmmaking as a form of American power—and film-*going* as a practical and accessible participation in that knowledgeable relation" (60). McAlister's comments make all the more sense in a context of transnational, global capitalism. Warner Brothers made a concerted effort to create an immense spectacle out of the last Matrix film opening. A September 29, 2003 press

[15] Bukatman is actually quoting Tom Gunning's theorization of "an exhibitionistic cinema." See Gunning 57.

release reads: "Warner Bros. Pictures and Village Roadshow Pictures to Make Cinema History with Global Unveiling of *The Matrix Revolutions* on November 5, Making the Film Available to Fans Around the World at the Same Moment in Time." Clocks were synchronized. Countdowns commenced. And the idea was that the whole world would converge around this film premiere and constitute a more-than-imagined global community by collectively experiencing the event in real, international time.

These new extensions of the *Matrix* diegesis invite the consumer to see "just how deep the rabbit hole goes." Through these DVD peripherals, the at-home movie audience gains access to the minutiae of the filmmaking process that subtly but profoundly alters the viewing experience, where the film is not really a film at all, but rather a performance of cinematic mastery. Amelia Jones's study of the performance of artistry in her book *Body Art* provides a compelling theorization of what she names the "Pollockian performative." Jones' analysis of Jackson Pollock attempts "to get away from the idea of Pollock as an intentional individual or originary subject" and reframes his well-photographed performances of art-in-the-making as "an important site of contradictions," or "a discursive field" (55, 57, 61). So, too, I would like to get away from the idea of the *Matrix* films as trustworthy texts that faithfully carry out the intentions of the Wachowski directors. The *Matrix* performative is a set of films whose processes are anything but concealed from the consumer. The inflated performance of "the making of the film" or the "behind the scenes" narrative places the entire *Matrix* project—not just the films—on a discursive playing field, like the one Jones sets up for her discussion of Jackson Pollock. I want to suggest here that the *Matrix* phenomenon takes on a

"machinic" quality, in that it produces a new viewing subject, uniquely situated in such a way that s/he resembles a user or gamer more than a classic audience member.[16]

This study looks beyond the commercial *Matrix* for sites of production that remain afloat in the more resolutely deregulated spaces of creative fan response. The latter portion of this chapter takes a closer look at how *Matrix* fan fiction simultaneously adulates and disobeys the dominant, official interpretations of the *Matrix* universe. More often than not, the opportunities for disagreement and intervention occur precisely at those moments about which John Gaeta gloats. The frames of the "moments in between"—are they testaments to the level of control that Gaeta purports? Or does he gloat to cover up a deeper anxiety about a powerful shift in the dynamics of the camera-viewer interface? In offering this bullet-time spectatorship, has the *Matrix* team relinquished something they must immediately scramble to recuperate?

Bullet-time—a visual strategy now incorporated into popular video games such as *Max Payne* and *The Matrix* games themselves—functions in a very similar way to the at-home movie experience with the VCR or DVD player, equipped with pause, fast-forward, rewind, and slow motion functions. Watching a film segment in bullet-time feels like interacting with the perpetually pausable video game. What Anne Friedberg calls "the spectatorial flânerie of the VCR," resonates with this kind of video game visuality, where "a spectator [is] *lost in* but also *in control of* time" (74, 76). Such interactivity in the *Matrix* project is decidedly influenced by a gaming framework, as evidenced most explicitly by the multiple *Matrix* video game tie-ins and by the *The Matrix* DVD "Follow the White Rabbit" special feature, which readily exploits the uniquely modified user interface of the

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[16] See Judith Halberstam's definition of the "machine-text" in her discussion of the Gothic (Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 91).

DVD remote control—a cross between the VCR remote, the Web navigation interface, and the video game controller—to capitalize on the film's "clickability." The "Follow the White Rabbit" feature invites viewers to click on a white rabbit icon whenever it appears floating in a scene to unlock the behind-the-scenes "secrets" of that particular segment. Certain scenes in the film have, in effect, been hyperlinked to extra-diegetic material, accessible only if the viewer chooses to become an active user, or an aspiring hacker of the medium.[17]

There is a moment in a popular video game when the gamer can choose to deviate from the path mapped out for her and turn instead to jump into a wall of lava. For such random, rogue behavior, the player discovers a hidden treasure, or "a secret," otherwise discoverable only by looking up answers in cheat books and online gaming discussion boards. Gaming logic, on the one hand, depends and expects a gamer to achieve a basic level of understanding of game-world narrative. Knowing where to go next in a first-person, role-playing-game (RPG) means being able to navigate a storyline and to anticipate the next required action in a sequence. On the other hand, adept gamers know to explore beyond the central narrative of the game. They will enter a room filled with lava, presented with only one safe path through the fire, and they still turn to the lava face that looks just a little different than the rest of the molten walls and decide that jumping into it seems like a good idea. When films engage this gaming aesthetic and logic, the viewer, then, if she is an experienced gamer, can import her secret-sleuth awareness from gaming to her spectatorship. Though the camera may direct one's gaze down a

[17] Five years after the release of *The Matrix* and *The Matrix* DVD, one can readily see how the *Matrix* enterprise was a leader of a trend to stage blockbuster films as more comprehensive media events. Video game tie-ins and comic book re-releases are conceived at the moment the film gets put on the table to be sold as multimedia concepts.

certain, safe path, might there be a lingering desire for the gaming viewer to turn and face the flaming edifice?

In 2003, video game sales surpassed the Hollywood box office when game sales revenues registered at $11.4 billion. As Sandy Stone predicted in 1995, "it is entirely possible that computer-based games will turn out to be the major unacknowledged source of socialization and education in industrialized countries before the 1990s have run their course" (27). The *Matrix* project, in opening itself onto multimedia platforms, blurs the boundary between film and video game. When Neo and Trinity finish shooting out the lobby of the federal building where Morpheus is being held by agents, they enter the elevator, click their heels together, and ascend to the upper levels. The elevator works as a particularly apt gaming analog, since the characters are, in fact, advancing to a higher level of combat. They will have to face three agents, not just a lobby full of anonymous, low-level security guards. The characters have, in essence, "leveled-up."

The end of this scene also features a bullet-time moment. Neo has come to save Morpheus from the clutches of the Matrix agents. Tension mounts when Morpheus must leap from the edge of the building into the rescue helicopter, but he has been shot and risks falling to his death unless Neo leaps from the helicopter to meet his mentor halfway. Beautifully suspended in bullet-time air, Morpheus and Neo stretch out across the gap between building and helicopter to an extended, life-determining embrace. The movement, slowed in tempo, exercises an indulgent gracefulness in its execution. And, for that moment—seemingly suspended out of real time—Neo and Morpheus are in love, arms outstretched to one another in a gesture replicated only in overwrought, slow-motion, heterosexual, airport reunion scenes. When the moment ends, the scene "speeds

up" again, Morpheus and Neo's bodies crash together clumsily and the homoerotic potential falls just as abruptly into the rest of the scene in which Neo must turn the focus of rescue to Trinity. Other scenes filmed in bullet-time can be equally as transformative to the content. Fight scenes between Neo and Smith when slowed to bullet-time readily yield new narratives that interpret arch-rivalry and frustrated antagonism as homoerotic intensity and sexual tension.

Bullet-time, though touted as a tool of control, opens in the text "spaces for games and tricks" (de Certeau 174). It creates points of rupture and contradiction that foster the cultivation of imaginative, noncompliant narratives. Some fans have seized upon these opportune moments to carry out the work of hacking that the *Matrix* project initially champions. The stock, heterosexual resolutions and unimaginative formulations of race and gender that plague the *Matrix* films beg for the kind of rewriting of codes that the narrative's cyberpunk roots should promote. Douglas Thomas explains that according to "the original hacker ethic—code is written and shared, and it is the responsibility of anyone who uses it to improve upon it and share those improvements with the community" (83). "Hacking" and "queering" are useful terms for thinking about the kind of intervention made by the fan fiction to which this chapter now turns, but one might also call it a "pedestrian speech act" (de Certeau 97). What would it mean to re-map the *Matrix* films from the perspective of the pedestrian rather than the voyeur? How might an "ordinary practitioner…make use of the spaces that cannot be seen" (93)? What kind of speculative steps have already been taken to help queer the way one navigates the *Matrix*? How does one hack the *Matrix*?

"Spectatorship occurs at precisely those spaces where 'subjects' and 'viewers' rub against each other," writes film scholar Judith Mayne (37). Mayne identifies a distinction between the hypothetical "subject" whom the film theoretically addresses and the actual "viewer" who sits in the audience watching the film. Mayne attends to this distinction, though, to disrupt the surety of its opposition. It is this seeming opposition—between the subject successfully interpellated by a film and the more resistant viewer who reads against the grain—that Mayne wants to complicate further. By proposing that "the spectator," whom she situates somewhere between the viewer and the subject, Mayne locates her own work somewhere between two approaches to film studies (one which she aligns with Louis Althusser and the other she associates with Roland Barthes). Her motivation to recuperate some agency for the "subject" and her desire to bring the "viewer" out of an overly passive position is similar to de Certeau's theorization of consumer-producers, or "users" who transform ordinary commodities into more subversive wares. Both Mayne and de Certeau consider spectatorship an active process of negotiation, not thoughtless consumption. De Certeau's pedestrian spectator walks "where 'subjects' and 'viewers' rub against each other—the space of Mayne's "spectator." I propose that de Certeau's pedestrian and Mayne's spectator take material shape in the form of the fan. Fans, as both viewers and subjects, go to the movies to watch films; they comprise what a marketing director might call a target audience; and, they treat "reading [or viewing] as poaching" (de Certeau 165-77). Fans may allow themselves to be taken in by a film but can also become its fiercest critics and its most passionate rewriters.

Space-Walker/Fan-Writer/Hacker-Slasher

> SMITH: Afterward, I knew the rules. I understood what I was supposed to do, but I didn't. I couldn't. I was compelled to stay—compelled to disobey. And now here I stand because of you, Mr. Anderson. Because of you I am no longer an agent of this system. Because of you I've changed. I'm unplugged. I'm a new man, so to speak. Like you, apparently, I'm free.
>
> --*The Matrix: Reloaded*

At the conclusion of *The Matrix: Revolutions*, as Neo and Smith's balletic air duel comes to an end, Smith stands triumphantly over Neo's depleted body. On the brink of finalizing his victory, though, Smith begins to unravel. Once so in control of himself—the perfect embodiment of 1950s rigid masculinity—Smith starts coming apart at the seams. His voice falters, changing noticeably from his affected monotone slur to an emotion-inflected set of flustered intonations:

> Wait… I've seen this. This is it! This is the end! Yes... You were lying right there, just like that. And I… I stand here. Right here. I'm supposed to say something. I say: "Whatever has a beginning has an end, Neo" … What?! What did I just say? No… No… This isn't right. This can't be right.

Smith's lines start to present themselves as if they and his entire part in the scene have been, perhaps, pre-scripted. The disintegration of Smith's program integrity calls into question his character's overall manufactured nature. Where are Smith's lines coming from? Who determines the script? This postmodern moment of self-reflexivity punctures the spectator's sense of "natural" filmic progression. Smith suddenly becomes aware of his own performance, the fourth wall drops wide open, and, for me, Smith reverts for an instant to being the actor, Hugo Weaving, whose filmography reveals a verifiable celluloid closet. Smith's body has already demonstrated an extraordinary flexibility (and an

uncanny rubberized elasticity), so imagining Weaving's body morphing into his previous roles—Frank, the gay neighbor in *The Kiss*, or Jeremy, a gay estate agent in *Bedrooms and Hallways*—isn't much of a challenge. Devoted Weaving fans should know him best for his role as Tick/Mitzi, a drag artiste, in the 1994 film, *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. Perhaps the easiest leap for any *Matrix* audience member to make, though, would be to Weaving's part in another (contemporaneous) epic trilogy as Lord Elrond, Master Elf of Rivendell in Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings*. Appearing on neighboring screens between 1999 and 2003, Weaving would have simultaneously embodied these two different characters who nevertheless share nimble physiques and non-human identities. In the cinema's modern star system, theorized thoughtfully by film scholars such as Richard Dyer, Jackie Stacy, and Judith Mayne, the audience recognizes Agent Smith as a deep palimpsest of Weaving's past roles. "[T]he 'text' of an actor's image…full of discrepancies and incoherencies," writes Mayne, matters "much more than the narratives that unfold on screen" (128). In this one moment, spectators can respond to Weaving's character as agent, elf, and drag queen all at once. Taking the actor out of the moment, as a spectator might do with Weaving in this scene, is one way an avid fan might intervene in the main narrative thrust of a film. A more radical fan response might yank that character completely out of the film itself and paste him into an entirely rewritten scene.

"Slash fiction" is the product of fans performing such revisionary work and taking pleasure in developing potentially queer moments such as the final showdown between Smith and Neo. As Constance Penley finds in her 1997 ethnographic work on Kirk/Spock (K/S) slash fiction, most slash authors are heterosexual women who find in these homoerotic gay male pairings a way of "ensuring the democratic equality of the

pair," "eliminat[ing] its racism by celebrating miscegenation," and "avoid[ing] the misogyny inherent in the mythos by respecting the women characters and never using them to further the male-male bond" (145). Though I later take issue with Penley's presentation of slash fiction as utopian, her core assertion that these fan revisions orchestrate serious, innovative, and exciting cultural interventions establishes the foundation for this section of my chapter.

For Penley, "there is no better critic than a fan" (3). As a critical fan of science fiction films for most of my life, I have both latched onto the imaginative potential of the genre and stumbled over the repeated failure of sf filmmakers to take full advantage of that potential. This chapter has already aired many grievances against the *Matrix* trilogy. The compulsory heterosexuality, the conservative return to the family, and the essentialist racial stereotypes that overrun the sequels severely undermine any initial inklings of rethinking gender and racial norms the Wachowskis might have had. Despite a certain penchant for androgynous costuming and queer stylizations, and despite the racially pluralist aesthetic (deployed by casting strategists, costume and set designers), gender, sexuality, and race remain strictly within normative boundaries. Some fabulist fan revisions, though, indicate an important re-theorization of the ways we view and continue to respond to films outside of the theater.

Science fiction fans, in particular, are busy at work taking control out of the hands of film writers, directors, and producers. Penley argues that "the slash premise…seems to work exceptionally well with science fiction couples because of all the possibilities opened up by locating the two men in a futuristic universe full of scientific and technological wizardry" (102). The *Matrix* premise—that the world is actually a codified construct of

complex yet pliable rules—presents particularly rich opportunities for a slash author. Morpheus' question: "What is Real?" catalyzes other inquiries such as "What is Natural?" or "What is Normal?"—questions central to a queer theorization of sexuality. When the film is over, the viewer knows what she is supposed to do. She knows the rules of interaction, of cinema spectatorship in its traditional form, but instead, she is compelled to disobey, compelled to alter the rules of engagement with the filmic text. Despite its insistence that everything that has a beginning has an end, the *Matrix* cannot neatly tie up all its loose ends. Because the *Matrix* has already called attention to its own constructed nature, the fan feels less obliged to be an agent of that system. This free agent, then, is uniquely positioned as a disobedient, rebellious fan, strategically using, borrowing from, and appropriating the system only insofar as it suits her purposes. For *Matrix* slash writers, these cultural appropriations respond to the limited way in which the films present race, class, and sexuality.

Whereas the *Matrix* narrative condemns the character Smith primarily as monstrous, viral, and vampiric, slash authors instead revel in the romantic potential of Smith's queerness. Most slash pairings are of Smith and Neo, whose intense arch-rivalry makes imagining another kind of intimate intensity fairly easy. Even parts of the original *Matrix* narrative facilitate the Smith/Neo pairing. What I have called Smith's "phallic and penetrative" method of assimilation turns out not to be so unidirectional in nature. Rather, it should be redefined along the lines of what Amelia Jones calls "interpenetration-as-exchange" (9). At the end of *The Matrix*, Neo defeats Smith by jumping horizontally straight into the agent's body and exploding it from the inside. In

Reloaded, both acknowledge how this forced cohabitation of the same body has not succeeded in ending their antagonism but has, instead, brought them closer together.

SMITH: Mr. Anderson… Did you get my package?
NEO: Yeah.
SMITH: Well, good.
[…]
SMITH: Surprised to see me?
NEO: No.
SMITH: Then you're aware of it.
NEO: Of what?
SMITH: Our connection…

After a brief consideration of this section of dialogue, it hardly seems surprising that the most popular *Matrix* slash pairing is Neo/Smith. The slash that both separates and connects them is a logical outgrowth of their multiple on-screen interpenetrations. Rather than demonizing the intimate physical contact between Neo and Smith, the slash fiction about them generate other fantasies about the interpenetration of their bodies. In doing so, these revised narratives question assumptions about the normative body and rouse excitement about the interpenetration of information and flesh, not of the unitary, whole subject.

The final showdown between Neo and Smith in *Revolutions* serves as the most frequent backdrop for N/S slashings. Rereading and rewriting the tension between rivals as the synergy between lovers, *Matrix* fans love to queer this scene. Smith's and Neo's bodies are already dripping wet from the ridiculously oversized raindrops, and they collide in the actual film version at least seven times, sending orgasmic bursts of water cascading from their clothing. Though these torrential rains are meant to signify an end to all things, this fan suggests another signification:

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN:

Neo and Smith stare at each other from either end of a RAIN-DRENCHED STREET in the matrix. On either side, rows of Smith clones watch the pair with interest. THUNDER booms.

SMITH
You like what I've done with the place?

NEO
It ends tonight.

SMITH
I know it does. I've seen it. That's why the rest of me is just going to enjoy the show. Because we already know that I'm the one who beats you.

NEO
You're about to get downlo-

SMITH (breaking into tears)
I'm sorry. Damn it, I promised myself— That came out all wrong. That... that wasn't how I wanted to say that. I never know what to say when I'm around you, man. You're just... AGHGGH! I'm making a fool of myself here.

Neo approaches Smith and TOUCHES his face, tracing raindrops across his CHEEK.

NEO
No. Go on. (He smiles.) I think you're doing fine.

SMITH
You have a soft touch.

NEO
You don't know the half of it.

(Pinkerton and Wong)

Rain, in this reinvention of the scene, sets the stage for Smith's tears, recasting the moment as sentimental rather than apocalyptic. In another fan revision, titled "His First and Only," author Zelgadis Greywood reconfigures the rain to set a sex scene rather than

a fight sequence: "Neo met Smith in the alley. The rain fell by Smith's choice, but the springtime scent of it came from Neo." This spring rain, the product of Smith and Neo's cooperative code-writing, initiates the reinterpretation of this scene as the culmination of the pair's reciprocal love. As in the film version, Smith acknowledges "a connection" between himself and Neo, but Greywood modifies the nature of that connection: "…[T]here is a bond between us," Smith tells Neo. "Because your touch, your taste, even your smell intrigues me. I find you captivating…" Here, the bond between the two men is unmistakably a sensual attraction. Simply put, Smith just wants Neo to "fuck [him] up the ass…" In Greywood's revision, what binds Smith and Neo together is not merely "the equation trying to balance itself out," but, more urgently, a bond of desire.

Though *Matrix* slash writers most often pair Smith with Neo, many of them exploit one scene in particular to get at a Smith/Morpheus pairing. In *The Matrix*, agents capture Morpheus and interrogate him for access codes to Zion's mainframe computer. Despite employing various torture techniques and injections of truth serum, the group interrogation proves ineffective:

> Agent Smith: Why isn't the serum working?
> Agent Brown: Perhaps we're asking the wrong questions.
> Agent Smith: Leave me with him. Now.

Dispatching his fellow goons, Agent Smith arranges a private tête-à-tête with Morpheus. Given the hesitation and awkward looks on the faces of the other agents, Smith's request to be left alone with his captive must be construed as rather odd. Agent Smith's unconventional behavior continues through the rest of the scene. He unplugs himself from the agent communications net by removing his earpiece, and he even doffs his impermeable sunglasses to say: "I'm going to be honest with you…" As he leans in ever

closer to Morpheus' face, Smith lingers on every syllable of his next line: "I… … hate this place. This…zoo. This prison. This reality; whatever you want to call it. I can't stand it any longer. It's the smell… if there is such a thing… I feel…saturated by it. I can taste your stink. And every time I do I fear that I have somehow been infected by it. It's repulsive. Isn't it?" That a machine can smell is the impossibility that writers like Greywood find enticing. As he delivers these lines, Smith traces his finger across the beads of sweat on Morpheus' forehead. A slash author called "Dalet Slash" describes this motion as "the subtle mockery of a lover's caress," and that mockery turns genuine in Dalet Slash's story when Smith kisses Morpheus, taking pleasure in the intimate contact: "His skin was warm and dark against mine." This fan speculation blurs the line between what the film characterizes as Smith's disgust for all things human and what can so easily be purposively misconstrued as Smith's attempt to repress intense desire for Morpheus.

In the film version, we are not allowed to linger over this queer possibility for too long. The camera cuts away from this intimate exchange (see fig. 2) to one of the key action sequences in the film: the lobby shootout scene. When audience members finally regain access to the scene, our gaze is sutured to that of Agents Brown and Jones who interrupt a clearly private moment (see fig. 3). Smith, caught with his earpiece hanging out of place, hastens to recover his composure:

Agent Jones: What were you doing?
Agent Brown: He doesn't know.
Agent Smith: Know what?
Agent Jones: I think they're trying to save him.
Agent Smith: Find them and destroy them!

What were you doing? The hint of accusation in this one line launches a bevy of slash stories about this scene, pouncing on the possibility that something queer might have been afoot

behind closed doors when the camera wasn't looking. Dalet Slash includes an almost identical conversation thread but shifts the point of view from the intruding agents to Smith's subjective frame:

> "You're shaken," Jones said flatly.
> "No."
> I turned and left, wondering if he knew. Wondering if he could smell it on me. Wondering if he could tell in the difference of the pacing of my steps.

Dalet Slash actively imagines what the camera left behind closed doors. The other agents still interrupt the scene, but Smith doesn't snap so immediately into the mode of "Find them and destroy them" compensation. Instead, we are left "wondering"—wondering with Smith whether the other agents noticed the change, but also wondering, in the way Teresa de Lauretis suggests, about the kiss itself.[18] The moment lingers in the air—in the smell of intimate contact and in Smith's errant, "w[a/o]ndering" steps.

Figure 2: Smith holding Morpheus. *The Matrix* (1999).

[18] See de Lauretis' "Signs of W[a/o]nder" for the full implications of this use of the word "wondering."

Figure 3: Interrogation interrupted. *The Matrix* (1999).

Not all slash fiction stays so close to the original working of the scenes. Fan authors also choose to invent totally new characters and introduce them into a *Matrix* framework so as to make use of the basic sf premise without inheriting the already studio-controlled, *Matrix*-owned characters. In "Transition," readers follow the story of Carl/a, whose experiences can best be characterized as transgendered. Though she inhabits a male body in the Real World, Carla projects a female "residual self-image" within the Matrix. When "freed," Carla awakens to quite a shock. "I was stuck in a 100% male body." The only embodied existence she had ever known was as a straight woman of color in the Matrix; Carl's attraction to men, on the other hand, renders him queer in Zion. Carl/a's unique schism in subjectivity becomes the pretext for her/his recruitment to spy on a homophobic organization called "the Brotherhood." Because Carl can infiltrate the Brotherhood in Zion and, as Carla, also gain access to its database at a convent within the Matrix, s/he becomes the ideal candidate for dismantling the gay-

bashing organization. Earlier, while attending school, Carl's peers persecute his difference: "It was hell. Not only that I had to come to terms with this strange body, its unknown behavior and feel, but many students ridiculed me for I seemed to move and behave wrongly" (3Jane). After trying to learn gender normativity by watching basketball games at school, Carl/a eventually turns to the medical world in order to "fix" the fact that he as a man desired other men. 3Jane writes this part of the story as an exposition of Carl/a's internalized self-loathing. The psychologist s/he goes to see tries to "open [Carl/a's] mind to the idea that love knew no gender." 3Jane offers an optimistic rewriting of the queer's unfortunately more typical interaction with the medico-scientific institution. Carl/a not only learns that being gay is okay, but s/he even ends up with a job working at the Zion Medical Division. The *Matrix* premise enables 3Jane to write against a biological determinism of sexuality; Carl/a's queer tale is one in which a transgendered character gets to play the hero.

"Transition" also offers up many other social critiques in the process of telling Carl/a's story. Because Carl/a suffers more in the Real World, s/he questions the discourse of liberation and the politics of freedom-fighting. 3Jane also calls into question Zion's hyper-militaristic system, which entices potential soldiers with educational benefits: "Since everything at Zion was centered around the war against the machines, those who were willing to fight would receive the best educations." The educational divide also marks a severe class division between "field born" and "free born" humans. The most remarkable part of 3Jane's contribution to the slash fiction world, though, is this imaginative appropriation of *Matrix* conventions to theorize embodied and projected gender identities, which do not always coincide as they do in the films.

Slash stories like "Transition" and "His First and Only" are fabulously rebellious and queer appropriations, but they do not always engage in radical revisions of race. Though one could, like Penley, read the often interracial pairings found in slash fiction as a celebration rather than a denunciation of miscegenation, I remain skeptical of how race functions in these fantasies. *Matrix* slash fiction tends to reproduce the films' fetishization of exotic (non-white) bodies, even as the stories explore exciting possibilities of gender and sexuality. In "Transition," 3Jane describes two men Carl watches as they play basketball.

> One was very tall and sinewy, very long shiny black hair that used to fly behind him when he ran… The other was shorter, 6' maybe, brown skin—a bit lighter than mine—and a good build… After a short discussion the Amerindian shrugged and the brown guy came to the fence. His body was shining with sweat, his top was soaked with it. His hands clung to the fence at a position above his head.

"The Amerindian" remains unnamed for the length of the narrative, though "the brown guy" eventually becomes Carl's love interest, Mike. Carl/a's desiring gaze regards these racialized bodies as exotic Others, even though Carl/a is also of color. Kobena Mercer's discussion of racial fetishism draws powerful connections between the images of black men in the photography of Robert Mapplethorpe, news media, sports, and pornography. "Regardless of the sexual preferences of the spectator," Mercer argues, "the connotation is that the 'essence' of black male identity lies in the domain of sexuality… [T]he black man's flesh becomes burdened with the task of symbolizing the transgressive fantasies and desires of the white gay male subject" (436-7). Mercer's assertions attest to the ways in which race and sexuality are often mobilized in intricate relation to one another, and though Asian male sexual identity obviously emerges within different socio-historical parameters and contexts, the same kinds of entanglements apply.

In ScrewtheDaisies' "Golden Code," it is Seraph who becomes the object of Neo's erotic fantasies. Here, Seraph's seduction of Neo takes the form of a striptease that reveals a "taut, golden stomach," "shimmering in the tea house's dim light." On the one hand, it is a relief to find Seraph released from his martial arts guardian duties, which had him always watching from the side. Here, he is fully eroticized, as an objectified but purposive agent of sexual desire. On the other hand, he is also fully orientalized, ensconced in a tea house and enveloped in "golden" tones. Race becomes enmeshed in this articulation of queer desire in complicated ways. Seraph is radiant and shimmering in golden code—gold being a sign not only of his skin tone but also of foreign wealth. In fact, "Golden Code" reads a bit like queer sexual cybertourism. But, unlike the very neatly compartmentalized depiction of race and sex in the *Matrix* films, the desires formulated in this piece of slash fiction are both queer and interracial—a proclivity that does not automatically indicate a conscientiousness of racial formation—but one that suggests an awareness of what was suppressed in the original *Matrix* project.

To write a purely celebratory narrative of slash fiction would overlook the troubling ways in which racial fetishism undergirds much of the genre's framing of queer desire; however, to assume that slash fiction writers are battling racism and homophobia in any kind of "straightforward" way would be missing the point. What matters here is the production of an alternate universe of play, in which the normative rules of mainstream narratives do not apply. This forum, in fact, accomplishes much of what the *Matrix* phenomenon sets out to do. The digital format of these online slash fiction archives almost always contains a built-in system of feedback in the form of virtual bulletin boards, blogs, or links to affiliated chat rooms. Readers can post their responses,

editorial suggestions, or send links to their own stories presenting a different take on the same scene. The *Matrix* fan fiction communities online also seem to be very international. Some slash stories appear in translation in German, Russian, and English; others apologize for the broken English. On the *Matrix* fan fiction site at squidge.org, two flippant disclaimers announce: "The characters do not belong to us, but the stories do.... / Money does not enter into this, just love of the adventure." The forums are not for commercial gain, and the stories seem to circulate through extremely diverse groups of fans.

By offering just a few close readings of these *Matrix* slash stories, I hope to show a brief glimpse of the specific interventions *Matrix* fans have crafted in response to the films. My intention is not to provide the kind of comprehensive, ethnographic study of fan communities that Constance Penley has already written. Rather, this analysis considers a body of work produced by an often-overlooked group of film critics—fans. Teresa de Lauretis writes that one of the primary interventions to be made in film and its critical discourses is "to oppose the simply totalizing closure of final statements" (*Alice* 29). The most maddening part of the *Matrix*'s governing mantra was its shift from "It's the question that drives us" (*The Matrix*) to "Everything that has a beginning has an end" (*The Matrix: Revolutions*). For de Lauretis, resistance depends on respondents "to open up critical spaces in the seamless narrative space constructed by dominant cinema *and* by dominant discourses" (*Alice* 29). *The Matrix: Revolutions'* assertion: "Everything that has a beginning has an end" does not acknowledge the perpetuation of consumer production that persists long after the films have left the theaters. These fan-written, speculative fictions are based on, but created away from, the commercial juggernaut of the *Matrix*

project. Though "critics" and "fans" are often constructed as opposites, these fan interventions offer perhaps the most innovative re-theorizations of cinematic reception.

These ephemeral and anonymous slash fiction communities constitute an interesting "counterpublic," which as Michael Warner suggests, "comes into being through an address to indefinite strangers" who share in a "risked estrangement" (86, 88). "Counterpublics," writes Warner, "are spaces of circulation in which it is hoped that the poesis of scene making will be transformative, not replicative merely" (88). Warner is careful to finesse his formulation of counterpublics away from the strictly oppositional stance the term's prefix would suggest. Rather, counterpublics seek to create transformative spaces out of a "stranger-sociability" (87). Online fan fiction writers form such a transformative space for those seeking an alternative to the mainstream, official narrative of the *Matrix* films. In this way, slash fiction reorients technology away from the *Matrix*'s liberal vision of a multicultural, heteronormative family to revel in the process of creating bastard fictions among a community of strangers.

Conclusion

The sign of the slash is fraught with notorious ambiguity. On the one hand, its function can be to separate two elements; on the other hand, in that attempted act of division, it draws two elements together. Thus, the slash mark, like the verb "to cleave" harbors two contradictory meanings of separation and agglutination. The mark of the slash can signify difference (black/white, male/female) and synonymity (parent/guardian) as well as affiliation (lesbian/gay/bi/trans/queer). To slash means to cut, but in severing the connection, a slash acknowledges the pre-existence of a relationship. In my use of the

slash mark in each of the subsection headings of this chapter, I seize on the slash sign's act of affiliation to bring together the figure of the hacker/slasher/gamer/pedestrian as well as the politics of race/sex/space.

Originally titled "Queering the Matrix: When Survival is at Stake," this chapter started to take shape in the spring of 2001, when the slash mark could be seen most prevalently in reference to the falling of the Twin Towers on September 11th, 2001. The slash mark in "9/11" became necessary to distinguish this historic date from the national emergency phone number 911. Part of my argument in this chapter has been that the potentially radical politics of a post-apocalyptic cyberpunk narrative significantly shifted after 9/11. The *Matrix* sequels screened during a time of intensified hate crimes and attacks on civil liberties, and against this backdrop, it became a survivalist narrative emerging at a time when the public reaction to emergency often meant grasping at heterosexual resolution (noted by social demographers in the form of a reproductive "bump" in babies born approximately nine months after 9/11) and reaffirmations of the patriarchal family unit.

I have also always had stakes in the *Matrix* project as a critical fan, technogeek, and woman of color. Turning to *Matrix* fan fiction allowed me to reconfigure the stereotypically white, male hacker figure more effectively than the Wachowski brothers' casting of Laurence Fishburne in the role of Morpheus. In many ways, my task has been to tease out the *Matrix*'s activation of hacker culture (the basic storyline, a highly stylized set of hacker-chic costumes, and John Gaeta's performance of technological genius, for instance) from the practices of hacking as a resistance tactic (the revisionist work of slash fiction writers, examining the "everyday practices" of the *Matrix* periphery, and looking to

the films' historical context). The *Matrix* suggests that realities are based on rules and codes, and that the emancipated mind can train to decipher those codes and debug it when necessary; but ultimately, this chapter proposes that the *Matrix* itself is bad code, which calls for more rigorous hacking. I argue that the formation of a slash fiction counterpublic partially answers this call as it works off-site to generate alternative speculations about techno-futures. Nevertheless, I remain critical of the *Matrix*'s multiculturalist bronzing over of racial difference working in tandem with a reproductive imperative. Such a conjuncture of melting-pot fantasies with the historical use of the family to advance capitalist interests makes for a globalizing techno-utopianism that has joined ranks with neoliberal ideology.

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Epilogue

Before I conclude, I hope to make clear that scientific and technological achievements have shaped the world in profound and sometimes profoundly beneficial ways. With a background primarily in literary and cultural studies, I focus my analysis on "science fiction," albeit in a broader sense of the term. In addition to studying the rhetorical, ideological, and epistemological work associated with science, I approach all science fictions as cultural productions and therefore consider the historical conditions and political contexts in which scientific knowledge is produced and circulated. Moving beyond a critique of science fictions that cooperate with imperialist and exploitative enterprises, though, I look to emergent speculative fictions that recognize the power of and therefore remain invested in a genre that openly asks science to rub shoulders with myth, fable, and fiction.

In this project, I focus on three primary areas of speculative intervention. First, in Karen Tei Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* and *Tropic of Orange*, I find productive counter-narratives to the science fictions of development and progress used by U.S. empire to stake out its claims in Brazil and the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. I demonstrate how the fantastical figurations of the Matacão and the Tropic of Orange allow for an excavation of U.S. imperialism in the Amazon and a dramatic rerouting of border traffics. I then turn to temporal speculations on the future in my analysis of *Children of Men* and *Midnight Robber*. An interrogation of racialized reproductive imperatives and technocultural origin myths, this chapter explores the limits of "technology" as a category tied to Western origin myths. My reading of Cuarón's film and Hopkinson's novel questions the gendered and reproductive politics of technological

"mastery" in constructing tales of the future. The third speculative fiction I analyze is *Matrix* slash fiction, produced by everyday users pushing the practice of speculation beyond the more conventional venues of print publishing and film. I argue that these fan speculations brought hacker politics and hacker practices to the studio version's glamorization of hacker aesthetics and hacker cool. I end my dissertation with a chapter on fan fiction to emphasize the extent to which science fiction fans are willing to demand more from their beloved genre. With its roots in popular literature and its invitation to the reader/user to get involved in its production, dissemination, and adaptations, this form of speculative fiction demonstrates the most rigorously dialectical aspect of science..

This dissertation has investigated conjunctures of science, fiction, and empire in multiple geographies (the Brazilian Amazon, Mexico, the Caribbean, Canada, and Japan), at various sites (plantations, borderlands, detention centers, cyberspace, and alternate dimensions), and through a range of temporalities (the 1930s of Ford's attempted rubber empire, the 1990s of riot-bruised Los Angeles, the near-future of infertile England, and the ephemeral time-space of online fan fiction web rings). I have focused on speculative fictions that articulate transnational sets of affiliations and critique the limitations of nationalist frameworks without reproducing the neoliberal ideologies of capitalism and international science.

I also hope to contribute to critical discussions of race, gender, sexuality, and technoscience. To this end, I provide an analysis of alienated Asian femininity in contemporary science fictions to unpack the Orientalist iconography of the Philips-Norelco geisha-bot and offer a critical context of scientific representations of black women in visual culture to read the reproductive imperative on Kee in *Children of Men*. I

use feminist, postcolonial theory to identify not only the imperialist cartographies of "plotting men" against which Yamashita charts her HyperContexts but also the masculinist nationalisms that often arise in processes of decolonization, which Hopkinson figures in the father-turned-rapist in *Midnight Robber*. Finally, I build on queer critiques of reproductive futurity and the heteronormative family to elaborate the political stakes of providing alternative formulations of futurity in *Matrix* slash fiction and *Children of Men*. Taken together, these critical interventions constitute my main motivations for writing about these speculative fictions.

Back Down to the Crossroads

I conclude this project with a consideration of yet another space-time in which science and fiction collide—the U.S. Southwest. The 2008 American Studies Association Annual Meeting convened in Albuquerque, New Mexico around the theme "Back Down to the Crossroads." In the conference program, Site Resource Committee Chair Alex Lubin introduces Albuquerque as "a transnational crossroads," given its proximity to the US-Mexico border as well as the Isleta, Laguna, and Sandia Pueblos, and he asks readers to consider the "multiple legacies of colonialism" that comprise the city's "temporal and geographical crossroads" (30). I was also reminded of the crossroads of military science and science fiction cult myths at sites across the U.S. Southwest. Like the Los Angeles basin, the regional Southwest also harbors an intense conjuncture of science, industry, and military interests that make for an interesting setting for many science fictions.

As I presented my work on Yamashita's excavation of imperial legacies in the Amazon rainforest, I also thought about the haunting presence of Los Alamos, 100 miles away from Albuquerque on a desolate road that winds its way into the desert highlands. One of the most chillingly iconic sites of science's collusion with US military aggression, Los Alamos is a National Laboratory installed on behalf of National Security. Operated either entirely or in part by the University of California since its establishment in 1942, it also represents how scientific research affiliated with institutions of higher education bumps up against state and military interests.[1] In addition to Los Alamos, New Mexico, the "Land of Enchantment" is also home to the White Sands Missile Range, where the first testing of the atomic bomb occurred, when Robert Oppenheimer recalled the Bhagavad Gita and notoriously quipped: "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds." This meeting of science and myth is only amplified at another site in the U.S. Southwest: Area 51, a tightly guarded, secretive military base in Southern Nevada around which rumors of UFO sightings and conspiracy theories accumulate with ongoing zeal, fascination, and horror. Protected by one of the last remnants of the McCarran Internal Security Act of 1950, Area 51, along with Guantánamo Bay, retains the authority to detain and use "deadly force" on suspicious subjects crossing its borders. Though much of this McCarthy-era legislation has been repealed, its legacy of "emergency detention" clauses were recently resuscitated during George W. Bush's so-called War on Terror.

I began this dissertation with a discussion of Sigma and Homeland Security and now conclude by connecting Area 51, the science fictions that surround it, and the

[1] Since 2006, the University of California now shares operational responsibility of Los Alamos with, among others, Bechtel, the largest engineering firm in the world. Robert C. Dynes, Chancellor of UC San Diego from 1996 to 2007, maintained extensive ties to Los Alamos, first as Vice-Chair of the UC President's Council on the National Labs and also as a member of the UC's five-person Board of Oversight for LANL.

McCarren Act's capitalization of discourses of emergency. I begin and end with these anecdotes about science and national security to denaturalize discourses of emergency and include them in this study of science fiction. To this end, I follow Naomi Klein's move to analyze the proliferation of "shock doctrines" and "disaster capitalism" in the United States. Klein's analysis includes a close reading of the document that called the Department of Homeland Security into being and its declaration that "Today's terrorists can strike at any place, at any time, and with virtually any weapon" (qtd. in Klein 300). The urgent and near-sensationalist tone of this declaration is designed to incite a panic to defend against an exaggerated uncertainty, or as Klein puts it, to protect against "every imaginable risk in every conceivable place at every possible time" (300). Capitalizing on imaginable risks is known in the financial world as speculation, and Klein seizes upon this correlation when she describes how the Bush administration "played the part of the free-spending venture capitalist of that same heady era [of late-nineties Silicon Valley]" (301). Because Homeland Security deals in particular in narratives of emergency and disaster, I feel justified in approaching this document as science fiction. That justification is all the more warranted given that this fiction sets up the precondition for the state to fund expensive research and development by private tech companies working on behalf of national security. But I return now briefly to the main project at hand, which is looking to the potential interventions that speculative fiction is poised to make.

The Politics of Apocalypse: Shifting the Site of Emergency

At the turn of the twenty-first century, cinematic speculations on apocalyptic scenarios collide with real-world discourses about the end of the world. Sergio Arau and Yareli Arizmendi's 2004 film *A Day without a Mexican* provides an ironic engagement of

the discourse of emergency and apocalypse. Imagining the systematic breakdown of the U.S. capitalist engine in the face of the disappearance of its immigrant workforce, *A Day without a Mexican* shifts the site of emergency from "barbarians at the gate" to the negligence of immigrant laborers' rights. Arizmendi calls her project "emergency film making" in that it responds to a series of California state legislative moves such as Proposition 187 and the Sensenbrenner Bill, or HR 4337, designed to place harsher restrictions on immigration and migrant laborers' rights to health care, social services, and public education. The film's tagline: "On May 14, there will be no Mexicans in California" resonated deeply with the National Boycott on May 1, 2006 and student walkouts in the spring of 2006 to protest anti-immigration legislation in the United States. Adopting the science fiction premise of Arau and Arizmendi's film, May 1st movement organizers took on "A Day without an Immigrant" as a name for the walkouts. Organizers also made use of multiple media outlets such as student myspace pages and Spanish-language radio and television programs. Both the science fiction film and the grassroots movement featured the sudden disappearance of large groups of U.S. workers—disappearances that held an especially chilling resonance with the ongoing "disappearances" of women laborers when working in the *maquiladoras* and with the daily disappearances of Mexican migrants who attempt the perilous crossing of an increasingly militarized border.

A Day without a Mexican participates in a rather unique science fiction tradition that includes Derrick Bell's short story "The Space Traders" (1992) in which aliens come to Earth seeking to trade enough gold to end all international debt and technology to end global warming in exchange for all the people of African descent on the planet.[2] The

[2] Optioned for TV's *Cosmic Slop* in 1994, the story was adapted for the screen by African American writers Trey Ellis and Chester Himes (of black detective fiction fame).

abduction of low-wage and slave laborers also has catastrophic consequences in a 1965 play *Day of Absence* by Douglas Turner Ward, about black people spontaneously disappearing from the workforce. I find such revisions of end-of-the-world narratives to be the inspired speculations of writers and filmmakers who creatively retool conventional science fictions of emergency and disaster to protest anti-immigration legislation and unfair labor practices. Such speculative responses to other fictions of crisis make important interventions into the ways in which national and international "emergencies" animate these discursive and ideological cultural contestations.

Postscript: Octavia Butler's Politics of Speculation

This dissertation is dedicated to Octavia Butler, who passed away in 2006, just as I was beginning to work on the project in earnest. I had already been a fan of Butler's work when I discovered that we shared the same hometown. Pasadena, California—despite its associations with roses, parades, and the Jan and Dean song about its "little old ladies"—has been described by one journalist eulogizing Butler's untimely departure as a "racially explosive community, where blacks and whites frequently encounter each other — unlike so much of Los Angeles where freeway distance gives a false sense of security. This familiarity," the author continues, "brought contempt more than anything. Butler's work was grounded in this reality of a grim, racist Pasadena that Jackie Robinson, another native son, hated and never wanted to return to."[3] By the 1980s, this black-white polarity had already been complicated for many years in both Pasadena and Greater Los Angeles by influxes of Latinos and Asians to the area. Nevertheless, the schools I attended were

[3] Jervey Tervalon, "Sister from Another Planet: Remembering Octavia Butler," *LA Weekly* (March 1, 2006), http://www.laweekly.com/news/news/sister-from-another-planet/12808/, July 29, 2006.

predominantly white, and I sought and found a sense of outsider commiseration in the video arcades and comic book stores I visited after school and on the weekends. For me (and apparently Junot Diaz's semi-autobiographical character Oscar Wao, too), these were spaces where many geeks of color took collective refuge from some unpleasant social realities while inventing wholly Other worlds of possibilities in the form of community organizing and speculative fiction. It was Butler who first turned me on to the idea of a politics of speculation, so it is to her lifelong work that I dedicate this dissertation.

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