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Toward an Infrastructural Sublime: Narrating Interdependency in Karen Tei Yamashita's Los Angeles

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Wherever we are, what we hear is mostly noise. When we ignore it, it disturbs us. When we listen to it, we find it fascinating. The sound of a truck at fifty miles per hour. Static between the stations. Rain.

John Cage (3)

Commuters traveling down Los Angeles's Harbor Freeway in Karen Tei Yamashita's 1997 novel *Tropic of Orange* encounter an unusual sight: a "sooty homeless man on an overpass" wielding a conductor's baton and converting traffic into minimalist symphony (35). Manzanar Murakami, the freeway's maestro, translates the city of LA into musical composition: "Each of the maps was a layer of music, a clef, an instrument, a change of measure, a coda." LA's hidden layers begin "with the very geology of the land," the "man-made grid of civil utilities" meshing with the "historic grid of land usage and property." By sounding together the systems that undergird a globalizing LA—the municipal, geological, and historic grids that "ordinary persons never bother to notice" (57)—Manzanar excavates the oft-invisible infrastructures that regulate metropolitan life and on which its residents unwittingly depend.

Manzanar's sonic composition transforms the static grid of the city into an interdependent ensemble of moving parts both material and human, a dynamic cartography that diverges from the superficial maps cluttering the novel. One particular map—torn from "*Quartz City* or some such title"—frustrates another of Yamashita's characters, Buzzworm, a "big black seven-foot dude, Vietnam vet," and South Central native. Pondering the map, Buzzworm imagines a string of possible alternatives: "Might as well show . . . what kind of colored people (brown, black, yellow) lived where; . . . which houses on welfare; which houses making more than twenty thou a year; which houses had young couples with children." Although he intuits the city's interlinking racial and economic geographies, Buzzworm yearns for a mapping practice that can reflect LA in its totality:

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“If someone could put down all the layers of the real map,” he reflects, “maybe [I] could get the real picture” (81). Manzanar’s freeway symphony, as the novel makes clear, offers a means of mapping the city’s layers. It renders audible a stratiform LA and invites the reader to hear the underlying networks of labor, maintenance, and civic support that the novel amplifies.

Akin to Manzanar’s mapping practice, *Tropic of Orange* attunes its readers to LA’s infrastructures—the oft-unnoticed roads, pipes, and labor networks that enable the city to function—in order to highlight *interdependency* as both political and aesthetic value. Interdependence, as understood by scholars in feminist disability studies, suggests a condition of mutual dependence, an ecology of contingent relations, in which dependency can be conceptualized in terms of its mutualistic, symbiotic properties.¹ This term issues a challenge to dominant understandings of dependency, which frame it pejoratively as a parasitic relation abused by certain populations. The novel’s emphasis on city support systems positions infrastructure as *itself* a critical lens, one that can reassess the relationship of ethnic American literature and subjectivity to the values of self-ownership, protest, and independence.² Indeed, accounts of ethnic struggle have frequently privileged the politicized subject engaged in projects of self-determination, which pivot on conventional understandings of human autonomy and agency. Rey Chow encapsulates this particular narrative in her oft-cited quip, “*to be ethnic is to protest*” (48). Across ethnic studies, Chow argues, the “ethnic” has been predominantly imagined as a “resistant captive engaged in a struggle toward liberation,” with liberation conceptualized as “self-ownership and self-affirmation” (40–41).³

Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange* enables another paradigm for narrating ethnic American subjectivity—perhaps even subjectivity writ large—in the age of globalization and free trade. This paradigm posits the impossibility of anyone’s self-ownership, reaching beyond the liberatory telos of protest and *recuperating* the condition of dependency. It does so by highlighting the overlooked infrastructural networks that underpin fictions of self-sufficiency, a practice that performance scholar Shannon Jackson has termed *infrastructural avowal* (*Social* 8). According to Jackson, aesthetic works that draw our attention to infrastructure, such as *Tropic of Orange*, demand “an acknowledgement of the interdependent systems of support that sustain human beings” (“Working” 10). Infrastructural avowal as aesthetic practice, in other words, involves foregrounding, openly affirming, and in some cases reenvisioning the infrastructural networks—material, prosthetic, and living—that enable us to survive. Infrastructure, as a “present but barely visible” entity nonetheless vital to the functioning of cities and the global distribution of resources, represents a key vehicle for thinking about contemporary ecologies of assistance, power, and provision, and for mapping the global imbalances of power that render certain dependencies hypervisible while erasing others (Yaeger 16).

The novel's recuperation of dependency proves particularly significant in light of pernicious and persistent dependency mythologies, such as the "illegal immigrant," that frame certain—often racialized—subjects as parasites on state resources, and others (for example, wealthy, propertied citizens) as independent. Through highlighting the city support networks upholding LA, *Tropic of Orange* challenges the mythology of "illegal immigrant" as public drain, a dominant narrative used to manage racial difference in an LA newly transformed by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the defining event and nucleus of Yamashita's novel. Infrastructural avowal thus enables a critical reorientation toward these racialized myths, positioning dependency as an aesthetically generative category rather than a transparently pathological condition.

Form as Infrastructure, Infrastructure as Form

Infrastructure, as defined in this essay, refers to the underground grids listed in Manzanar's map—"the man-made grid of civil utilities," "pipelines of natural gas," "great dank tunnels of sewage," human social systems such as traffic, and of course, the freeway network—that prop up Yamashita's LA (57). Beyond the scope of Yamashita's novel, infrastructure broadly represents the "equipment, facilities, services, and supporting structures needed for a city's or region's functioning" (Yaeger 15). The term further evokes architectures of connectivity and circulation; as networked forms, infrastructures "link separable nodes, including bodies, spaces, machines, and objects" and "provide channels for the movement of bodies, energy, information, and waste" (Levine 597). Yet, despite its central role in city operations, infrastructure often constitutes nothing more than white noise, occupying only the background of awareness. In their introduction to the 2015 *Modern Fiction Studies* special issue on infrastructuralism, editors Michael Rubenstein et al. note infrastructure's downright "boring" nature, reading this invisibility as a sign of its effectiveness: "Infrastructure is supposed to go unnoticed when it works" (576). Yet, given the ongoing dismantling of infrastructures designed to support the world's most vulnerable populations, processes driven by imperatives of austerity and privatization, Rubenstein et al. highlight the necessity of attending to infrastructure in our current political moment. They underscore the role of literature and fiction as a vital means of "[defamiliarizing] our daily dependency on infrastructures" (581).

How then, does infrastructure as fictional strategy enable *Tropic of Orange* to foreground questions of dependency, access, and material provision within the context of a globalizing, multi-ethnic LA? Relatedly, how does *Tropic of Orange* employ infrastructure to map a distinct set of relations between ethnic American subjectivity and literary production, shifting narrative aims toward

interdependency? How might this differ from other accounts of ethnic American struggle? Chow describes one predominant narrative of ethnic struggle as the achievement of self-ownership. This struggle frequently takes the form of a “linear plot” that advances from “oppression . . . to self-awakening . . . to ultimate liberation” (39). Derived from Georg Lukács’s model of class consciousness, this liberatory narrative is a staunchly modernist account that reflects “notions of captivity and resistance” (Chow 41). While Chow continues her line of argument to situate ethnic protest within late capitalism, positing protest as vital (rather than antagonistic) to capitalist structures, I focus here on the account of self-awakening she identifies as central to narrating ethnic subjectivity, an account perhaps best exemplified by social protest literature such as Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940).⁴

By drawing on the interdependent properties of city support networks, *Tropic of Orange* diverges from this liberatory account of struggle in four primary ways: it features an ensemble of equally weighted characters whose interlinked storylines bypass the story of self-ownership; its plot and narrative structure assume the form of multilayered infrastructural grids, rather than telescoping into a linear arc; it imagines ethnic subjectivity as an *effect* that emerges from an interplay among historic, laboring, and migratory grids, rather than a self-contained identity made legible through the act of protest; and it acknowledges shared dependency on social and prosthetic networks of support. Although infrastructure often occupies the background, in *Tropic of Orange* it becomes fantastic, animate, and even alive, imposing itself on the reader’s consciousness.⁵ With its multiplicity of layers and multidirectional circulation of people and products, infrastructure provides a formal rubric for *Tropic of Orange*’s multiperspectival account of a globalizing LA.

Yamashita’s infrastructural avowal begins at the level of plot: multilayered city grids form the basis of the novel’s narrative architecture. In *Tropic of Orange*, the narrative elements of character, temporality, setting, and plot are re-visioned through the matrix-like form of street intersections. As Yamashita herself observes, the novel began as a spreadsheet using the software Lotus and was driven initially by form rather than content: “[T]here was here a structure before there was a book” (Yamashita and Imafuku). The published *Tropic of Orange* builds its narrative on the grid-like (infra)structure of the spreadsheet, a form reproduced in its spatialized table of contents (see fig. 1).

Labeled “HyperContexts,” a nod to the Internet’s rhizomatic pathways, the table of contents projects a novel organized by time on its *x*-axis and character on its *y*-axis.⁶ The meshing of time grid with character grid evokes the calculated crossing of roads, pipes, and wires that structure a city’s chaotic flows. It systematizes the zany material of Yamashita’s genre-bending novel into a mathematical whole, with each storyline supported by and embedded in a wider narrative web. Just as infrastructures, according to anthropologist Brian Larkin, “are material

HyperContexts

	Monday Summer Solstice	Tuesday Diamond Lane	Wednesday Cultural Diversity	Thursday The Eternal Buzz	Friday Artificial Intelligence	Saturday Queen of Angels	Sunday Pacific Rim
Rafaela Cortes	Midday -Hot, Too Far from Mazatlán chapter 1	Morning -En Mexico chapter 10	Daylight -The Cornfield chapter 18	Dusk -To the Border chapter 24	Dawn -The Other Side chapter 30	Nightfall -Aztlán chapter 38	Midnight -The Line chapter 45
Bobby Ngu	Benefits -Koreatown chapter 2	Car Payment Due -Tijuana Via Singapore chapter 12	Second Mortgage -Chinatown chapter 15	Life Insurance -L.A./T.J. chapter 26	Visa Card -Final Destination chapter 34	Social Security -I-5 chapter 40	American Express -Mi Casa/Su Casa chapter 49
Emi	Weather Report -Westside chapter 3	NewsNow -Hollywood South chapter 9	Disaster Movie Week -Hiro's Sushi chapter 20	Live on Air -El A chapter 27	Promos -World Wide Web chapter 29	Prime Time -Last Stop chapter 41	Commercial Break -The Big Sleep chapter 44
Buzzworm	Station ID -Jefferson & Normandie chapter 4	Oldies -This Old Hood chapter 13	LA X -Margarita's Corner chapter 16	You Give Us 22 Minutes -The World chapter 22	AM/FM -FreeZone chapter 31	The Car Show -Front Line chapter 37	Hour 25 -Into the Boxes chapter 48
Manzanar Murakami	Traffic Window -Harbor Freeway chapter 5	Rideshare -Downtown Interchange chapter 8	The Hour of the Trucks -The Freeway Canyon chapter 19	Lane Change -Avoiding the Harbor chapter 28	Jam -Greater L.A. chapter 35	Drive-By -Virtually Everywhere chapter 42	SigAlert -The Rim chapter 46
Gabriel Balboa	Coffee Break -Downtown chapter 6	Budgets -Skirting Downtown chapter 14	The Interview -Manzanar chapter 17	Time & a Half -Limousine Way chapter 25	Overtime -El Zócalo chapter 32	Working Weekend -Birt Shoulder chapter 39	Deadline -Over the Net chapter 43
Arcangel	To Wake -Marketplace chapter 7	To Wash -On the Tropic chapter 11	To Eat -La Cantina de Misericordia y Hambre chapter 21	To Labor -East & West Forever chapter 23	To Dream -America chapter 33	To Perform -Angel's Flight chapter 36	To Die -Pacific Rim Auditorium chapter 47

Fig. 1. Spatialized table of contents from Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*.

forms that allow for the possibility of exchange over space” (327), so Yamashita’s chart structures narrative and informational exchange over the imagined space of LA, with each character tracing a different map of LA’s socially and economically stratified cityscape. Given the mathematical precision of the “HyperContexts” chart, no single voice dominates the story—a democratization of perspective that parallels the novel’s mistrust of “official” LA maps. This matrix-like form effectively de-prioritizes individual expressive acts. Rather than centering on one protagonist, then, *Tropic of Orange*’s forty-nine chapters distribute evenly across seven characters, with the effect of city, character, and novel emerging from the interplay among “mapping layers” (Yamashita 56).

The novel’s narrative grid interweaves seven storylines of racialized characters traveling toward, away from, or around LA, who hail from different locations in the global economy. They include Manzanar Murakami, a Japanese American surgeon-turned-homeless maestro once interned at the Manzanar camp; Gabriel Balboa, a Chicano news reporter who owns a second home in Mazatlán; Emi Sakai, a perpetually aroused Japanese American TV producer and Gabriel’s girlfriend; Rafaela Cortes, Gabriel’s Mazatlán housekeeper and part-time student of globalization theory; Bobby Ngu, Rafaela’s distant husband and Chinese Singaporean expat posing as Vietnamese refugee; Arcangel, a Global South prophet and performance artist based on border brujo Guillermo Gómez-Peña; and Buzzworm, an African American “Angel of Mercy” armed with a Walkman, a watch collection, and a progressive social agenda. This multiperspectival story, comprised of shifting points of view and distinct narrative voices, plots a cross section of multi-ethnic LA—its homeless population, its professional classes, its ghettoized residents, and its migrant laborers—through a dispersal of focalization. The novel’s constant motion between characters imparts a sense of urban chaos, surges of unceasing energy that taper into seven ambiguous endings. Indeed, some early readers of the novel, as Yamashita notes, found *Tropic of Orange* dissatisfying due to its lack of resolution (Yamashita and Imafuku). *Tropic of Orange*’s character grid does not formally lend itself to a *telos* but gestures in a multiplicity of directions. Moving between third-person narration (Rafaela Cortes, Buzzworm, Manzanar, Bobby Ngu) and first-person narration (Gabriel Balboa), *Tropic of Orange*’s disjunctive narrative generates numerous maps of LA, with no single map gaining precedence.

Over the course of a week, Yamashita’s novel charts the lives of its seven characters as they navigate the warped topography produced by the mutual imbrication of Global North and South—a clash generated by a wayward orange traveling north from Mazatlán to LA. This mystical fruit carries with it the Tropic of Cancer, whose latitudinal shift drags Mexico into California. As the orange travels up the coast, bullets bend, streets expand and contract, time stutters, and Manzanar conducts, capturing even the “endless jam of shrieking notes” produced by a massive accident on the Harbor Freeway (55). While the novel’s fixation on freeways and

grids might invoke the Lefebvrian concept of *abstract space*, or the bureaucratic and oppressive space of capitalism founded on “the vast networks of banks, business centres, and major productive entities, as also on motorways, airports, and information lattices” (Lefebvre 53), the Harbor Freeway in *Tropic of Orange* is in fact rerouted to serve alternate representational ends. In particular, the image of the freeway as a “great root system” signals the novel’s interest in the evolving and often-coerced routes of people, products, and labor precipitated by the demands of global consumerism and the ways in which these circuits interact with histories of immigration, colonization, and displacement in the global city of LA (Yamashita 37).⁷ Emergent from these interactions among circuits of migration, labor, and history, ethnic subjectivity in the novel is imagined as a networked effect and conceptualized through the interfacing of infrastructural grids. In this way, infrastructure provides a formal organizational schema for narrating urban transformation and racial formation in the age of NAFTA, the trade pact that constitutes both the novel’s sociopolitical context and central plot device.⁸

Scholars have frequently acknowledged Yamashita’s unusual representations of globalization, which, in *Tropic of Orange*, draw on the generic conventions of magical realism, disaster fiction, noir, and postmodern satire to figure the remixed landscapes of a deregulated world economy. “Yamashita’s plots always begin,” writes Caroline Rody, “with someone on the move, someone whose footsteps set global changes in motion” (200). In *Tropic of Orange*, the largest “footprint” is left by an orange whose border-crossing journey reimagines multinational integration, a hemispheric clash similarly figured through the interweaving of Global North genres (noir, disaster fiction) with Global South genres (magical realism). This clash is further imaged as a wrestling match between contenders SUPERNAFTA and El Gran Mojado (“The Great Wetback”), Arcangel’s alter ego. While Arcangel prepares to meet his rival, the mass of homeless people lining the freeway’s underpasses repurposes the “mile-long abandoned car lot” (Yamashita 122)—a result of the accident—into a utopian mini-city. Here, freeway infrastructure becomes a theatrical site on which different versions of the global city are heard and felt. Once a symbol of racial, spatial, and economic division, the freeway temporarily becomes a site of democratic fantasy, a social safety net that offers undifferentiated support. The Harbor Freeway’s “vital materiality” (Bennett 14), figured in the novel as a “an organic living entity” (Yamashita 37), thus offers a compelling reminder that the built environment does not function merely as background but also is animated by volatile circuits of social meaning. Acknowledging how infrastructure can “aid or destroy, enrich or disable, ennoble or degrade us,” *Tropic of Orange* makes possible an account of environmental contingency, an acknowledgment of subjects as always only partial, fragments hinging on human and material worlds alike (Bennett x). By highlighting infrastructure and incorporating it into its narrative architecture, the novel figures for us the “ground” against which ethnic American subjectivities

and multi-ethnic cities take shape, underscoring the multiple networks that tie individual to community, community to city, and city to globe.

Yet rather than reaffirming the vision of multicultural celebration promoted in dominant accounts of a mid-NAFTA Los Angeles, Yamashita employs infrastructure to explore the root/route system of extra-national labor underlying the city's shifting racial composition and the anti-immigration sentiment accompanying such changes. Infrastructure, too, becomes a vehicle to examine how transnational trading agreements transform so-called "developing" nations into substructures propping up wealthier nations. Through its strategy of infrastructural avowal, *Tropic of Orange* allows us to consider who infrastructure supports, who it neglects, and which racialized and gendered subjects, through the forceful extraction of their unseen and undervalued labor, become the living infrastructure for others' fantasies of independence.

Infrastructure and Dependency in a Global LA

Yamashita's novel centrally depicts an LA transformed by free trade and the reconfiguration of global and metropolitan infrastructural networks, which accelerate the influx of products, people, labor, and capital. As scholars such as Grace Chang have argued, the "extraction of resources by the United States and other First World nations" through trade agreements such as NAFTA coerce workers from the Global South to "migrate to follow their countries' wealth." Part of what Chang terms a "calculated pull" (3) by the United States and other Global North nations, job-seeking migrants land in well-resourced cities such as LA, where they become part of a service sector industry that supports the city's larger operations.

These waves of migration, wrought by the exigencies of global capitalism, were managed contemporaneously by the discourses of multiculturalism and public dependency. A key term in the 1990s world of ethnic studies, *multiculturalism* refers to an anti-assimilative ideal or broadly describes the presence of diversity in a culture.⁹ Following critiques levied by Lisa Lowe, David Palumbo-Liu, Jodi Melamed, Vijay Prashad, and Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, to name a few, it also refers to the cooptation of diversity rhetoric by government and corporate institutions that apolitically celebrates, historically flattens, and commodifies cultural and ethnic difference. Relatedly, the discourse of public dependency, which *Tropic of Orange* recuperates through a politics of interdependency, frames racialized and low-income subjects as undeserving figures parasitic on the state. While these discourses worked to discipline racial difference in a majority-minority LA, and to serve the imperatives of free trade, *Tropic of Orange* reaches beyond these rhetorical abstractions to map the material underpinnings of a reconfigured world and city economy. Yamashita's novel dispels both corporate

multiculturalism and dependency discourses via its technique of infrastructural avowal: a rematerialization of the disavowed civic, historic, migratory, and labor networks that undergird LA and prop up its racial and economic geographies.

This strategy of avowal responds most directly to three interrelated moments: NAFTA, California's Proposition 187, and the emergence of multiculturalism and public dependency rhetoric. While *Tropic of Orange* comments on the reverberations of globalization writ large, it primarily focuses on NAFTA as shorthand for global capitalism's characteristic features: the deregulation of trade, the outsourcing of labor, the exploitation of the floating wage scale, and the decimation of local businesses. The easing of trade regulations accelerated the cross-border transit of products, information, and capital while simultaneously intensifying militarization along the US–Mexico border. As Mike Davis and Grace Kyungwon Hong have noted, the free-flow of goods and people across the US–Mexico border was accompanied by increasing anti-immigrant sentiment, which “[caused] people to blame the economic recessions not on capital re-organization and transnational corporate policies, but on Mexican immigrants, who were ostensibly taking American jobs while draining the United States of its scarce social service and welfare resources” (Hong 135). This wave of antipathy, which reached fever pitch with the passing of California's Proposition 187, imagined these racialized immigrants as parasitic to the nation-state. Passed in 1994, Proposition 187 (also known as the “Save Our State” initiative) denied undocumented migrants access to public services such as healthcare, public education, and welfare, ostensibly in order to curtail “illegal” immigration. However, “the real agenda” behind Proposition 187, writes Chang, “was to criminalize immigrants for presumably entering the country ‘illegally’ and stealing resources from ‘true’ United States citizens” (2). Dependency rhetoric thus divided LA's racialized populations into two distinct categories: deserving subjects and undeserving dependents.

As the putative celebration of the “deserving” ethnic, corporate multiculturalism is exemplified through LA's self-proclaimed title of “world city,” bestowed by former mayor Tom Bradley. In the 1988 plan *LA 2000: A City for the Future*, Bradley portrays LA as a multicultural paradise where cultures from across the globe can meet and mingle. Yet, as Lowe argues, this “aestheticization of multiculturalism” is contingent on obscuring “material histories of racialization, segregation, and economic violence” (30). Extending Lowe's argument, Melamed terms the fusing of anti-racism to the project of global capitalism “neoliberal multiculturalism,” which refers to the “[portrayal of] the United States as an ostensibly multicultural democracy and the model for the entire world, but in a way that has posited neoliberal restructuring across the globe to be the key to a post-racist world of freedom and opportunity” (*Represent* xxi). The multicultural fantasy critiqued by Lowe and Melamed rests on willfully forgetting the asymmetrical distribution of material resources across the globe, an uneven calculus in part

determined by categories of racial difference and the violent economic conditions that force migration to the United States.

Unsurprisingly, *Tropic of Orange* skewers corporate multiculturalism. Over a plate of restaurant sushi, television producer Emi Sakai states, “Cultural diversity is bullshit. . . . You’re invisible. I’m invisible. It’s just tea, ginger, raw fish, and a credit card” (Yamashita 128). Emi then confronts a clueless woman enamored with LA’s diverse restaurant culture, what she terms a “true celebration of an international world” (129). This scene parodies the multicultural ethos in which global interconnectivity translates primarily to increased consumer access to cultural products: tea, ginger, raw fish. While Yamashita’s novel features a pointedly multi-ethnic cast, thereby inviting multicultural celebration, it also underscores the divide between “deserving” ethnics (hypermobility, moneyed, and ostensibly self-sufficient global citizens) and undeserving dependents (undocumented migrants, homeless vagrants, and the racialized poor). On one side of this divide stands Emi Sakai and Gabriel Balboa, a professional, interracial couple, and on the other side, Bobby Ngu, Rafaela Cortes, Arcangel, and Buzzworm. Highlighting the increasing social stratification of LA, the novel’s collection of multi-ethnic characters captures in miniature the changing configurations of race and ethnicity in the era of corporate capitalism, in which “[p]rivileged and stigmatized racial formations no longer mesh *perfectly* with a color line” (Melamed, “Reading” 86).¹⁰ The line dividing *Tropic of Orange*’s diverse cast thus encapsulates corporate capitalism’s *selective* incorporation of racial difference, wherein “self-sufficient” consumers (of any color) are celebrated, and an indigent population, overwhelmingly black and brown, is punished—contained in ghettos, barrios, and prisons, exploited for cheap labor, and cast as parasitic on the state. Here, multicultural diversity functions as yet another static, superficial grid: a one-dimensional map of racial difference.

In response, *Tropic of Orange*’s strategy of infrastructural avowal excavates the historical and material conditions obscured by empty celebrations of cultural diversity. Drawing on magical realism’s fantastic properties, the novel renders infrastructure monstrous—gargantuan, alive, and threatening—to the “undeserving” residents it does not support. Accordingly, when the Harbor Freeway balloons due to the orange’s space-warping properties, Buzzworm, a character particularly sensitive to freeway expansion, calls Emi’s attention to its inexplicable growth:

“Can’t you see it? Where we are. Harbor Freeway. It’s growing. Stretched this way and that. In fact, this whole business from Pico-Union on one side to East L.A. this side and South Central over here, it’s pushing out. Damn if it’s not growing into everything! If it don’t stop, it could be the whole enchilada.”

“Kerry, what’s he talking about? Do you see something?”

Kerry shook his head.

“Look, there might be some video distortion, but reality is reality. Are you all right?”

Buzzworm wondered about this reality. If they didn't see it, they didn't see it. Like the homeboy said, anyone on the ground'd know. These folks weren't on the ground. They were online or somewhere on the waves. (Yamashita 189–90)

Expanding into the neighborhoods of Pico-Union, East Los Angeles, and South Central, the 110's bizarre growth hearkens back to the destructive paths cut through low-income, racialized communities during the height of freeway expansion.¹¹ Buzzworm, in a previous section, summons this history in his memory of bureaucrats “[widening] the freeway” through his neighborhood (82). In excavating this memory of displacement, Buzzworm recognizes the freeway as a system that supports the uneven topographies of LA. It can actually produce forms of spatial containment, as Buzzworm discovers when he gets “taken for a ride on the freeway”: “Got to pass over the Harbor Freeway, speed over the hood like the freeway was a giant bridge. He realized you could just skip over his house, his streets, his part of town. You never had to see it ever” (33). Yamashita's LA emerges from layers of accumulated histories—immigration policy, de facto segregation, and urban redevelopment—that undergird the shifting matrix of racial meaning shaped by globalization. Yet, Emi and her news crew cannot sense these changes or histories. An affluent Westside television producer invested in turning revolution into entertainment, Emi spends the novel unaware of the material world's inconveniences (175). Positioned “online or somewhere on the waves,” she is unable to discern the palpable, “on-the-ground,” and harmful effects of a freeway expanding past its limit. For hypermobile and moneyed characters such as Emi, the freeway never attains *thingness*.¹² However, for Buzzworm, a figure who “[walks] the hood every day,” it is menacing in its materiality (26). In *Tropic of Orange*, then, one's awareness of infrastructure functions as a barometer of vulnerability in a metropolitan ecology ruttled with power asymmetries.

In addition to amplifying the material histories disappeared through corporate multiculturalism, infrastructural avowal contests the discourse of dependency intensified by NAFTA-induced immigration. *Tropic of Orange* registers the impact of NAFTA on both sides of the border, from the “international breast milk” (91) shipped northward to LAX, emblematic of the increasing feminization of the immigrant labor force, to the American beers, sodas, hamburgers, and ketchup flooding the menu at the “Cantina de Miseria y Hambre” (131). A “new form of colonialism,” NAFTA allowed transnational corporations access to cross-border pools of labor and consumer markets, devastating local businesses and intensifying poverty (Thoma 7). Accordingly, it forced the migration of working populations to the United States and Canada in search of precarious employment.

Exemplified by Proposition 187, dominant discourses of dependency frame these migrant workers as parasitic to the nation-state, thereby obscuring the

necessary labor they perform for transnational capitalism. Drawing from AbdouMaliq Simone's formulation of "*people as infrastructure*," I extend my definition of infrastructure to include networks of human labor. While Simone originally used the concept of "people as infrastructure" to capture the "economic collaboration among [Johannesburg] residents seemingly marginalized from and immiserated by urban life" (407), I use it here to describe the labor of maintenance and support needed to operate the city of LA and the global economic system writ large. Encompassing occupations such as domestic, garment, food preparation, janitorial, and childcare work, these low-wage jobs are overwhelmingly occupied by racialized immigrant women of color both in the United States and abroad. In *Tropic of Orange*, such work is performed by

*all the people who do the work of machines:
human washing machines,
human vacuums,
human garbage disposals.* (Yamashita 200)

Given that this work supports the imperatives of global capital while remaining unseen and unvalued, it resonates with the function of infrastructure as a network of invisible reinforcement that supports a larger totality.

In Yamashita's novel, this unseen network of maintenance labor ("Washing dishes. Chopping vegetables. Cleaning floors. . . . Cleaning up. Keeping up" [79]) is embodied most fully by undocumented migrants Bobby Ngu and Rafaela Cortes. Partners in a janitorial business prior to their split, Bobby and Rafaela perform the material, embodied work required by an ostensibly dematerialized world of wireless communication and transaction. They "[w]ipe up the conference tables. Dust everything. Wipe down the computer monitors. Vacuum staples and hole punches and donuts out of carpets" (16). Rafaela further provides the much-needed labor for reporter Gabriel Balboa's vacation home, "sweeping both dead and living things from over and under beds" (3). This scene of industrious cleaning not only opens the novel, thereby setting the stage for a narrative indebted to maintenance labor, but also showcases Gabriel's incompetence and dependency: "Even though he tried, he was not a hands-on sort of person. . . . After all, he was a journalist, he just wanted a quiet place to write. Maintenance was the problem" (5). Yet, despite the necessary labor she performs for Gabriel and others, Rafaela feels the weight of dependency discourse: "But she [Rafaela] kept talking, saying we're not wanted here [in LA]. Nobody respects our work. Say we cost money. Live on welfare. It's a lie" (80).

As *Tropic of Orange* demonstrates, workers such as Bobby and Rafaela are not external to the system or parasitic on it. Rather, they provide the manual labor that enables it to run. Furthermore, they are part of a longstanding history of racialized infrastructural labor central to LA's growth. During one of his final

segments, Manzanar pays homage to the early systems of support that sustained the city—"the railroads and the harbors and the aqueduct"—and more specifically, the "immigrant and migrant labor that created the initial grid on which everything else began to fill in" (237). The construction of early transit networks, a precursor to our contemporary age of free trade, was contingent on the exploited labor of migrant bodies. As the novel foregrounds the global economy's maintenance labor substrate, we view capitalism's privileged citizens—ostensibly autonomous individuals—as enmeshed in a network of support, rather than the reverse.

In foregrounding the low-wage, racialized work that supports cosmopolitan wealth, *Tropic of Orange* reembodies the invisible living infrastructure—people as infrastructure—underpinning globalization. In so doing, it recuperates the category of dependency frequently used to devalue migrant laborers, reversing a dominant narrative of globalization that works to obscure them. This narrative emphasizes the hypermobility of capital and a new international class and the phenomena of time-space compression ensuing from advanced telecommunications and modes of transit (Sassen, "Power" 103).¹³ For proponents of this narrative, globalization inserts us into an efficient cyborgian realm in which technological prostheses free us from the inconveniences of the material world. Yet, as Saskia Sassen argues, the global economy cannot be disconnected from the local sites and laboring bodies that set it into motion. As such, *Tropic of Orange* traces the material flows that circulate within this cross-border region: "waves of floating paper money: pesos and dollars and reals, all floating across effortlessly" (Yamashita 200) and "oranges, bananas, corn, lettuce, guarachis, . . . electrodomestics, live-in domestics, living domestics, gardeners, dishwashers, . . . undocumented, illegals, aliens" (162).

The novel's centering of low-wage labor thereby fleshes out globalization's dominant narrative, which omits the work of racialized immigrant women and the work of laborers overseas. Sassen identifies the dominant construct of "global economy" as selectively pieced together through an overvaluation of corporate culture and a disavowal of non-expert jobs that, for many, do not register as part of the same system. The externalization of low-wage labor hinges on the racialization of this labor force—that is, the framing of immigration and ethnicity as Other. "Although these types of workers and jobs are never represented as part of the global economy," Sassen writes, "they are in fact *part of the infrastructure* of jobs involved in running and implementing the global economic system" ("Global" 81; emphasis added). Through the character Arcangel's eyes we see—in poetic detail—the brown and black laboring bodies that comprise the global economy's unseen layers:

Haitian farmers burning and slashing cane,
workers stirring molasses into white gold.

Guatemalans loading trucks with
 crates of bananas and corn.
 Indians, who mined tin in the Cerro Rico
 and saltpeter from the Atacama desert,
 chewing coca and drinking aguardiente to
 dull the pain of their labor.

.....

He saw
 the mother in Idaho peeling a banana for her child. (Yamashita 145)

Arcangel's poetry and performance art stems from his critiques of the US–Mexico border, which he summons in his poetic condemnation of the villain SUPERNAFTA. A spokesperson for the Global South's laboring poor, he speaks of the expansive grid of manual labor, what he terms *noble work*, that sources raw materials for consumption in the United States (143). This exchange is noticeably uneven; Arcangel juxtaposes the notoriously brutal work of sugarcane cutting and tin mining with the effortless act of "peeling a banana." In return for sinking the entirety of labor power into "draining their / homeland of its natural wealth," the workers receive "progress / technology / loans" (146). They exchange material goods for the dematerialized rhetoric of development.

With the inclusion of "hidden and cheap" (200) racialized laboring bodies on the stage of the global economy, we can now view the system of multinational capitalism as a parasitic ecology, wherein the devalued labor of allegedly dependent subjects in fact sustains the global economy's beneficiaries. *Tropic of Orange's* strategy of infrastructural avowal thus reverses the thought-system that imagines the low-wage migrant laborer as a public burden and the global citizen as a self-governing ideal, positioning the two as mutually imbricated. It further dispels the multicultural rhetoric that obscures the division of ethnic subjects into "deserving" and "undeserving" categories and the violent economic conditions that force migration en masse to the United States. Far from the static maps bemoaned by Buzzworm, *Tropic of Orange* outlines the "great root system[s]" (36) that prop up a multi-ethnic, economically unequal LA.

Toward an Infrastructural Sublime

Grids of labor, grids of traffic, gridlock—infrastructural avowal foregrounds the ecology of nested dependencies constituting a mid-NAFTA LA, thus returning us to the operative term of *interdependency* with which I began. This ecology, as the previous section discusses, centrally involves the migratory, historic, and laboring networks that prop up the city's uneven racial and economic geographies. Without this root/route system, LA simply cannot function.

As many scholars of Yamashita's work have noted, Manzanar is particularly attuned to the infrastructural web that the novel illuminates. I return here to his freeway opus, and with it, my final example of infrastructural avowal. Thus far, infrastructural avowal has primarily referred to the amplification of oft-disregarded systems of support. One other function of this literary technique is the reimagining of existing infrastructures as a means of writing the city anew, of envisioning it beyond the mandates of global capitalism. This reenvisioning might be understood in Lefebvrian terms as the production of differential space, or the seizing of abstract space (the bureaucratic, grid-like space of capitalism) to serve potentially revolutionary ends.¹⁴ With his sonic rewriting of the Harbor Freeway, Manzanar practices a form of avowal I term the *infrastructural sublime*: an overpowering awareness of our enmeshment, via infrastructure, in a webbed systemic infinity, which ranges from the molecular vibrations of concrete and steel to the panoramic vistas of the global economy. This awareness highlights a shared dependency on the social, historic, and civic support systems that constitute much of human ecology and most explicitly delivers us to the politic of *interdependency* embedded in the strategy of avowal.

From an aggregate of individual, interacting movements arises the emergent phenomenon of traffic symphony, a gestalt formation not reducible to the sum of its parts but rather a "great writhing concrete dinosaur" that supervenes on localized flows of traffic (Yamashita 37). As single cells, the agents in this organism—the drivers who trundle en masse—cannot predict traffic patterns. They "[take] advantage unknowingly" (34) of a momentary lag on the congested freeway, an occurrence that appears random to an agent embedded in the formation it comprises. Traffic exemplifies a self-organized complex system. To borrow a term from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, it assumes the form of an *assemblage*, a confederation of diverse bodies with no central point of governance. As a systemic totality, the assemblage's massed energies produce a unique effect "distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone" (Bennett 24). Traffic's overall effect, although comprised of individual drivers acting of their own accord, in turn affects the commutes of each constituent: "People in this traffic could count themselves lucky. They might reach their destinations ten to fifteen minutes early" (Yamashita 34).

Using music as an interface, Manzanar renders freeway traffic as palpable form, outlining the "contours of the swarm" from a jumble of parts (Bennett 32). In "[making] infrastructure sing" (Yaeger 17), he demonstrates how the song itself—and his role as musical conduit—hinges on numerous systems of support: the interplay of cars, the vibratory properties of concrete and steel structures, the "man-made grid of civil utilities" (Yamashita 57). Although *Tropic of Orange* foregrounds the singularity of Manzanar's vision, referring to him as a "conductor" seems misleading given that he does not exert his will onto the freeway. On the contrary, the freeway sings itself through Manzanar. When he

assumes his concrete podium, the collective pulse of traffic possesses him, inducing a succession of measured gestures punctuated by tears. The “vibration running through cement and steel” (34) flows through his being; his body becomes a node of amplification for “the great heartbeat of a great city” (35). This vision requires a mesh of supporting actors and resources whose travels provide for him the foundation of a musical ecology. Rather than subjects distinct from and deliberately acting on their surroundings, Manzanar and the drivers are inextricably embedded in and continuous with it; they simultaneously are obstructed by the whole and constitute its parts. His traffic symphony thus relays a multi-sited or “distributive” account of agency, wherein our capacity to act hinges on a multiplicity of entities both external to and conjoined with us (Bennett 32).¹⁵ Manzanar’s perception of the “complexity of layers” comprising the city elicits awareness of our shared contingency on infrastructural support systems and presents the individual, city, and novel as multiply determined (57).

This powerful sense of entanglement in LA’s supporting operations, a feeling captured and conveyed through Manzanar’s musical overtures, effectively delivers infrastructure from the realm of the functional mundane—its “inherent boringness”—to the realm of the aesthetic (Rubenstein et al. 576). By mapping the city’s grids through his symphonic opus, Manzanar approaches and exceeds the Kantian mathematical sublime, in which “the mind, overwhelmed by number, uses evidence of its own unifying perception to amalgamate the overwhelming many into the heroic one” (Yaeger 15).¹⁶ Regarding the mathematical sublime, Immanuel Kant speaks to the difficulty of apprehending infinity, stating, “the mere ability even to think [the infinite] as a *whole* indicates a faculty of mind transcending every standard of the senses” (85). However, Manzanar’s transcendent mind carries the capacity to grasp LA’s countless layers and does so through musical composition:

There are maps and there are maps and there are maps. The uncanny thing was that he could see them all at once, filter some, pick them out like transparent windows and place them even delicately and consecutively in a complex grid of pattern, spatial discernment, body politic. . . . Each of the maps was a layer of music, a clef, an instrument, a change of measure, a coda. (Yamashita 56–57)

His apprehension of these musical layers brings us to a vision of the infrastructural sublime, a sense of deep embeddedness within the networks of support that make up a shared human ecology.

In its overwhelming magnitude, the sublime seemingly defies any sense of (infra)structure, as it necessarily goes beyond that which has limits. The term *infrastructural sublime* thus holds an inherent tension, oscillating between the bounded and the infinite, between the exalted and the mundane. Rather than negating the term, this tension points to the potential of the sublime to transform infrastructure, to expand it beyond its intended purpose of reproducing the city as

it is—with all of its economic, racial, and social violence—and toward producing what the city could be. For instance, the many maps of the city engendered by the infrastructural sublime, which chart the multitude of dependencies comprising LA, defy the ideology of self-ownership that too often justifies racial and economic disparities. This vision diverges, too, from the popular narrative of the freeway as imparting a sense of unfettered independence, or as Ana M. Manzanar and Jesús Benito put it, as “[enforcing] freedom and equality” and thus “[conflating] the gospel of Manifest Destiny and mobility” (54). Manzanar’s is not a vision of self-ownership or utopian freedom; rather, it is a vision of the self’s dispersal across and dependency on human and material worlds.

Furthermore, Manzanar is not the only character who glimpses this vision. Gabriel Balboa, one of the novel’s most privileged characters (he is the only character shown riding a commercial plane), similarly feels the gravity of his surroundings and expresses a sense of “moving perceptively and imperceptively with the great flow.” In Mexico City, he merges with a crowd of “5,000 federales,” and situated there, regards “the whole thing” as “swelling and mobile. . . . It felt like being in a school of fish, a salmon run” (Yamashita 193). Standing over the Harbor Freeway, Gabriel imbibes traffic and joins the flesh of his body with the “flesh of the world”: “A sooty heat and din emanated from there, pressed against what I imagined to be all the elastic parts of my body: my lungs, my diaphragm, my tympanum” (46).¹⁷

The infrastructural sublime thus posits a model of subjectivity in which every body, human and nonhuman, is always influenced, permeated, or supported by a configuration of other networked bodies. As such, it prompts us to chart the interdependent relations linking subjects, environments, communities, and cities. In this sense, the “toast to a borderless future” given in performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s *New World Border*, one of the novel’s three epigraphs, might also be framed in terms of the “borderless” subject. We toast to a future where the discrete and self-determining subject no longer registers as an ideal. As much of the scholarship on *Tropic of Orange* observes, Yamashita’s depiction of borders and boundaries conveys the violence enacted by artificial divisions, as both imaginary constructs that cannot contain or describe the world as it is lived and militarized entities with devastating effects.¹⁸ The “line in the dust” separating Mexico from the United States is both a “slender endless serpent” and “as wide as an entire culture and as deep as the social and economic construct that nobody knew how to change” (Yamashita 253). The freeway, too, functions as a metropolitan border supporting socioeconomic striation, as the “new flat walls . . . [preventing] access to certain areas” represent, in many ways, the vertical walls that once encircled cities (Manzanar and Benito 54).

The infrastructural sublime, then, in all its magnitude and limitlessness, further rewrites the freeway’s function as a metropolitan border. The “thousand natural and man-made divisions” (Yamashita 57) separating Los Angelenos from

one another collapse into the unity of traffic symphony, transforming into a “great mass of people flowing to work and play” (56). Through the infrastructural sublime, the divisions between the self and its systems of support dissipate, creating a borderless subject contingent on the “Southern California pipelines of natural gas” and the “unnatural waterways of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power” (57). In so doing, this sublime works to unbind city inhabitants from the divisions separating the homeless from the affluent, citizens from undocumented populations, and the seemingly discrete self from the “great flow” of metropolitan and global life (193).¹⁹ Yet open borders, borderless subjects, and interdependent networks still do not guarantee a seamlessly integrated LA/Tijuana/Mazatlán even as the infrastructural sublime gestures toward a fantasy of unity. On the contrary, we see how cross-border and inner-city infrastructural networks also reproduce social inequity, and the ways in which borders, while porous, are unevenly so (259).

While gesturing toward a horizon of undifferentiated support, *Tropic of Orange* reminds us that the racialized processes and narratives that obscure particular infrastructural networks—the low-wage laboring substrate, the freeway as a mechanism of racial inequality—also reproduce the uneven topographies that characterize city and globe. That is, the sense of interdependency imparted by the infrastructural sublime does not necessarily imply mutual reciprocity or apolitical global harmony. After all, as Rubenstein et al. note, infrastructures “both produce and reveal a two-tiered version of citizenship in which much of the world’s population has little or no access to goods and services in common” (577), and as El Gran Mojado points out, “We are not the world” (Yamashita 259). *Tropic of Orange* thus compels us to acknowledge the asymmetrical power relations between supported and unsupported subjects and between deserving and undeserving ethnics, asymmetries too often disappeared by the mythologies of dependency and multiculturalism. This, indeed, is another political function of the infrastructural sublime: to give form and urgency to the abstracted, uneven support relations propping up city and globe—ecologies of power and provision that, again, “ordinary people never bother to notice” (57).

Manzanar’s musical consciousness, which imparts the most comprehensive sense of the infrastructural sublime, offers access to the support networks that so easily escape attention. Yet Manzanar’s symphony is largely a private one; he “sees and hears things nobody else sees” (157). Near the close of the novel, however, his vision becomes less exceptional:

Little by little, Manzanar began to sense a new kind of grid, this one not defined by inanimate structures or other living things but by himself and others like him. He found himself at the heart of an expanding symphony of which he was not the only conductor. On a distant overpass, he could make out the odd mirror of his figure, waving a baton. And beyond that, another homeless person had also taken up the

baton. And across the city, on overpasses and street corners, from balconies and park benches, people held branches and pencils, toothbrushes and carrot sticks, and conducted. . . . Manzanar nodded to himself. Not bad. (238)

At the center of yet another connective web, Manzanar witnesses the dissemination of his once-unique practice across the spectrum of LA's homeless population. Presumably, they, too, can see traffic as symphony and, below that, the infrastructural grids that support metropolitan life. Considering the characters' enmeshment in systems beyond their control, *Tropic of Orange* seemingly occludes many viable paths to political action. Yet, with the proliferation of the "heroic one" into the "overwhelming many" (Yaeger 15), a move that makes a thousand new mapmakers, the novel suggests the political and aesthetic import of Manzanar's vision.

By framing multi-ethnic metropolitan life in terms of interdependency, and foregrounding the social, economic, and prosthetic systems propping up *all* subjects, the infrastructural sublime challenges the pernicious myth of self-governance attributed to global capitalism's beneficiaries, and of self-ownership as a liberatory telos. This is not an account of Chow's "protestant ethnic"; this is an account of the infrastructural sublime, an alternate ontological horizon in which the "ethnic" is not constituted primarily through the act of protest but embedded in and propped up by networks of assistance, power, and provision. Here, liberation hinges not on the achievement of self-ownership, but on the recognition of the material support systems that regulate contemporary life.

Manzanar's aesthetic consciousness thus outlines a worldview in which liberation—or something like it—can only be approached once we honor the web of dependent relations binding us together. In this way, he models a kind of reading practice for scholars of ethnic American literature: an infrastructural analytic that attends to systems of support. In distinction from literary works and critical analytics that valorize the *independence* of ethnic American subjects, *Tropic of Orange* prompts us to view its characters as inherently dependent, and further, to consider the racialized inequities of power that highlight certain dependencies while obscuring others. Satisfied with his legacy, Manzanar "[lets] his arms drop. There was no need to conduct the music any longer. The entire city had sprouted grassroots conductors of every sort" (254). Together, they use music to map the interdependencies of worlds.

Notes

1. Although an extensive review of the term *interdependence* is beyond this essay's scope, it has been discussed by Susan Wendell, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, Eva Feder Kittay, and Eli Clare.

2. Similarly, Michael Rubenstein et al. identify what they term *infrastructuralism* as, among other things, a “literary-critical method” (581).
3. See Patricia E. Chu for a similar account of the resistance, social transformation, and national incorporation of the ethnic subject.
4. Reading Georg Lukács vis-à-vis Max Weber, Rey Chow contextualizes the narrative of contemporary ethnic struggle within the “economic and ideological workings” of transnational capitalism. In this context, the act of protest has effectively been aimed toward the acquisition of “worldwide visibility, currency, and circulation” rather than emancipation (48).
5. See Patricia Yaeger and Rubenstein et al. for accounts of dynamic infrastructure.
6. See Anastasia Lin’s scholarship on Karen Yamashita’s character grids and the ensuing themes of interconnectedness, which demonstrates how “literary cartographic approaches” grounded in geographic information systems methodologies can “engender new ways of re-envisioning not only the themes of a work of literature, but also the ways the geography of the text may counter or reinforce extant understanding of space” (41). Ruth Hsu argues that the “chaotics in the narration reveal a thematic landscape . . . in which functioning communities are rhizomatic collectivities” (106), a key insight that also resonates with my analysis of the infrastructural sublime.
7. For more on the topic of migration, see Grace Chang. I borrow the term *global city* from Saskia Sassen (“Global”), who uses it to describe cities whose economic significance and activity are extra-national.
8. The term *racial formation* comes from Michael Omi and Howard Winant, whose racial formation theory describes race as an “unstable and ‘decentered’ complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle” (55).
9. For a fuller discussion of multiculturalism, see Sarah Song.
10. In the 1970s and 1980s, LA underwent a period of “selective de-industrialization” that occurred almost simultaneously with a period of reindustrialization (Soja 201). During this time, manufacturing jobs disappeared entirely, as did labor unions, and the blue-collar workers of LA—many of whom were women and minorities—faced mass unemployment. Simultaneously, LA witnessed the growth of a professional class, which necessitated a large low-wage labor force in order to sustain them. The polarization of wealth became increasingly stark in the 1980s, with affluent household incomes (\$50,000 and above) nearly tripling, incomes below the poverty line (\$15,000 and below) increasing by a third, and those in the middle lessening by a half (Davis 7).
11. Displaying what LA historian Scott Kurashige terms “the two-sided face of post-war development,” the growth of the freeway system repatterned LA’s lifestyles and landscapes, facilitating the exportation of wealth to the suburbs while splitting the social and economic fabric of the inner city (240). As Kurashige and others have noted, the unfolding of the freeways devastated communities of

- color, many of whom viewed themselves as “the sacrificial lambs of freeway planners” (Kurashige 241).
12. I borrow the concept of *thingness* from Bill Brown’s “Thing Theory” (2001), where he writes, “We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, . . . when their flow within the circuits of production and distribution, consumption and exhibition, has been arrested, however momentarily” (4).
 13. See David Harvey, who coined the phrase “time-space compression” to refer to the condensation of space through advanced technologies of telecommunication and transit, a shift concomitant with the increasing rate of capital turnover.
 14. Henri Lefebvre states that abstract space “carries within it the seeds of a new kind of space[:] . . . ‘differential space.’” Such a space carries the potential for “the dissolution of old relations on the one hand and the generation of new relations on the other” (52).
 15. “Distributive agency,” according to Jane Bennett, is an understanding of agency in which a “subject” is not “the root cause of an effect”; rather, “[t]here are instead always a swarm of vitalities at play” (32).
 16. Rubenstein et al. note infrastructure’s proximity to the sublime, writing, “Because of [its] very vastness, infrastructure tends to have the same stupefying effect as the Kantian sublime” (576). The mathematical sublime is not the only Kantian sublime—Immanuel Kant also elaborates on the category of the dynamically sublime.
 17. “Flesh of the world” is a phrase commonly attributed to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s core phenomenological philosophy (144).
 18. For instance, Anne Mai Yee Jensen writes on the relationship between Yamashita’s use of magical realism and border politics: *Tropic of Orange*, she asserts, “[uses] Los Angeles as a microcosm of border politics, depicting the city as the center of social change” (106). On the border politics of *Tropic of Orange*, see also Jinqi Ling, Hsu, Caroline Rody, Sue-Im Lee, and Elisabeth Mermann-Jozwiak.
 19. I borrow the language of “unboundedness” from Ana M. Manzanas and Jesús Benito’s discussion of *Tropic of Orange*, in which they conceptualize Yamashita’s LA as an enactment of urban geographer Edward Soja’s concept of the *postmetropolis*, which examines the disaggregation of lines, borders, walls, and boundaries in contemporary cities. They write: “Within the two simultaneous processes of *unbounding* the city and *unbounding* the wall, [Yamashita] introduces a real crossing, a collision of races, classes, and realities on the freeway, the very premises of freedom” (50).

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