

# The Junkyard in the Jungle: Transnational, Transnatural Nature in Karen Tei Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*

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Maybe the “trans” is what my writing is.

—Karen Tei Yamashita, interviewed by Te-Hsing Shan

Since the emergence of environmental criticism as a field of literary and cultural studies in the early 1990s, comparatively little attention has been paid to literary texts written by “ethnic” writers in the US, with the obvious exception of Native American literature,<sup>1</sup> an omission that has only recently begun to be rectified.<sup>2</sup> Another significant absence in contemporary environmental criticism is that of updated reexaminations of early ecocritical theories, a neglect which may implicitly foster the view that such theoretical models have become useless in the new historical context: a postindustrial world where the natural and the cultural/technological engage in increasingly complex interactions, a globalized world engulfed in transnational consumerist capitalism, but whose population is at the same time showing signs of a certain environmental awareness. The purpose of this essay is to recover and breathe new life into a by-now master theory in (proto)ecocriticism, the theoretical framework put forward by Leo Marx in *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), by inserting it in the new context of a postmodern, transnational, and, I would argue, “transnatural” world, and to do so with the help of *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (1990), the first novel published by Karen Tei Yamashita.<sup>3</sup> However, before exploring Yamashita’s work and its peculiar revamping of “the machine in the garden,” it becomes necessary to outline the new developments in ecocriticism that have

rendered classic ecocritical work, such as Marx's, not so much obsolete as in need of reassessment.

### **Ecocriticism in the New Millennium: Transdisciplinary, Transnational, and Transnatural Challenges**

Ecocriticism has been variously described, from Glotfelty's simple but influential definition of the field as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment"<sup>4</sup> or Buell's equally seminal description of ecocriticism as the exploration "of the relationship between literature and the environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmentalist praxis,"<sup>5</sup> to more elaborate explanations that describe it as a "branch of green studies" that "considers the relationship between human and non-human life as represented in literary texts and which theorizes about the place of literature in the struggle against environmental destruction."<sup>6</sup> What all of these definitions have in common is the fact that they incorporate an explicit ethical and political agenda into their descriptions of the field: the ultimate goal of ecocriticism would be that of preventing environmental deterioration through a theoretically informed analysis of literature and culture.

Although the "green wave" of environmentalism did not acquire social visibility and prominence until the institution of Earth Day in 1970, it can be argued that environmental concerns gradually became part of the social and political agenda in the 1960s, at the same time as other countercultural movements. In "Give Earth a Chance," Adam Rome argues that the emergence of environmentalism owes much to the interaction of three factors taking place in the sixties: "the revitalization of liberalism, the growing discontent of middle-class women, and the explosion of student radicalism and countercultural protest."<sup>7</sup> In 1962, an "eco-book," Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, became a bestseller and influenced a whole generation.<sup>8</sup> Also in the 1960s and in the early 1970s, we have examples of what can be considered protoecocriticism or ecocriticism avant-la-lettre: Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973), and Joseph Meeker's *The Comedy of Survival* (1974).<sup>9</sup> And yet it was not until the 1990s that ecocriticism became a distinct field within literary theory and criticism, with the creation of academic associations such as the ASLE (Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment) in 1992, and its associated journal, *ISLE* (*Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment*), which was first launched in 1993.<sup>10</sup> Two seminal books of ecocriticism would also appear in the mid-1990s: Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) and Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's anthology, *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996).<sup>11</sup> Although, still in 1999, several critics continued to refer to ecocriticism "as a newly-emerging field,"<sup>12</sup> with the turn of the century and of the millennium, ecocritical theory and practice have gained both respect and visibility.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, it has had to face new challenges, among them the very "nature" of ecocriticism.

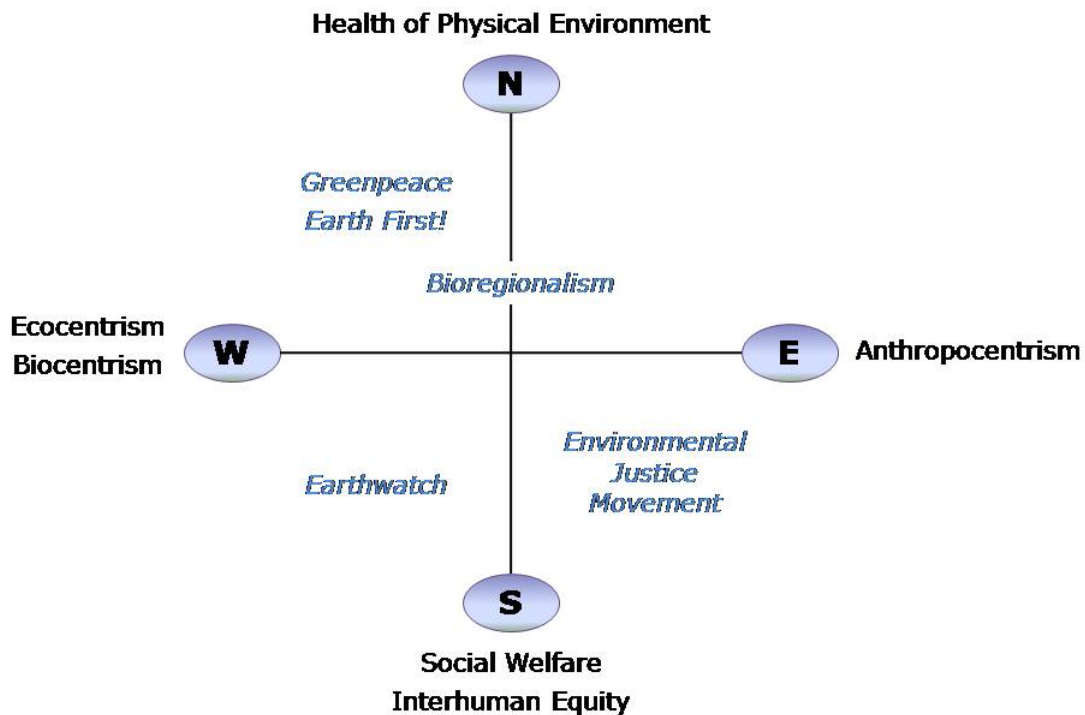
“Nature” has traditionally conjured up images of more or less “unspoiled” nonhuman contexts such as woods, jungles, mountains, etc. And yet we human beings are often viewed as part of “nature” as well; therefore, human artifacts and anthropogenic ecosystems should be considered as much “natural” as “unnatural.” Try as we may, we cannot get away from this aporetic situation, especially when we realize that, as Timothy Morton reminds us, “nature” is both inside and outside, we and the other(s). Morton’s *Ecology Without Nature* (2007) starts with a deliberately polemical attack on the very concept of nature: “Strange as it may sound, the idea of nature is getting in the way of properly ecological forms of culture, philosophy, politics and art.”<sup>14</sup> However, he is not the only critic to have pointed out the radical indeterminacy of the very notion underlying ecocritical analysis: “nature” has proved problematic from the beginning. Prominent ecocritics such as Williams or Buell have noted that the term itself is a “fictive” or “discursive” construct,<sup>15</sup> “a notorious semantic and metaphysical trap”<sup>16</sup>; in sum, “nature” is a nominal nightmare, hardly possible to define, fully laden with “human history,” “complicated and changing.”<sup>17</sup> Precisely because of the changing and ever-expanding meanings of “nature” and while still recognizing the widespread use of “nature”-based ecocriticism as an umbrella word for disparate trends within the critical movement, in his 2005 book Buell prefers the less common label of “environmental criticism.”<sup>18</sup> For him, this term better reflects the recent tendency to broaden the notion of “environment” in order to include not only (as used to be the case) the more or less unspoiled “nature” and wilderness of canonical nature writing, but also urban settings and degraded natural landscapes, a shift which is matched by an accompanying effort, slow but inexorable, to incorporate a global, transnational perspective to the traditional local one.<sup>19</sup>

Not only Buell but also other critics envision the future of ecocriticism as moving beyond the already sanctioned nature writing. Already in 1996, while reviewing Glotfelty and Fromm’s *Ecocriticism Reader*, Sven Birkerts pointed out the risk of “programmatically simplicity” of too literal a focus on traditional understandings of nature and argued instead for a “more inclusive idea of ‘environment’” on the part of ecocritics.<sup>20</sup> In a polemical article published in 1999, Dana Phillips deals with the uneasy relationships between literary theory and ecocriticism and insists on that danger of “programmatically simplicity” that Birkerts had first noted some years earlier. Phillips warns against a simplistic type of environmental criticism in which ecocritics confine themselves “to reading realistic texts realistically,” as if they were merely some sort of “umpire,” “squinting to see if a given description of a painted trillium or a live oak tree is itself well-painted and lively.”<sup>21</sup> In *The Greening of Literary Scholarship*, Steven Rosendale takes up both of the objections raised by Birkerts and recognizes that the “received nature-writing canon and the relatively small arsenal of critical approaches that have been applied to it have been too narrowly limited.”<sup>22</sup> In their introduction to the significantly titled *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace contend that for environmental criticism “to have a significant impact as a literary methodology

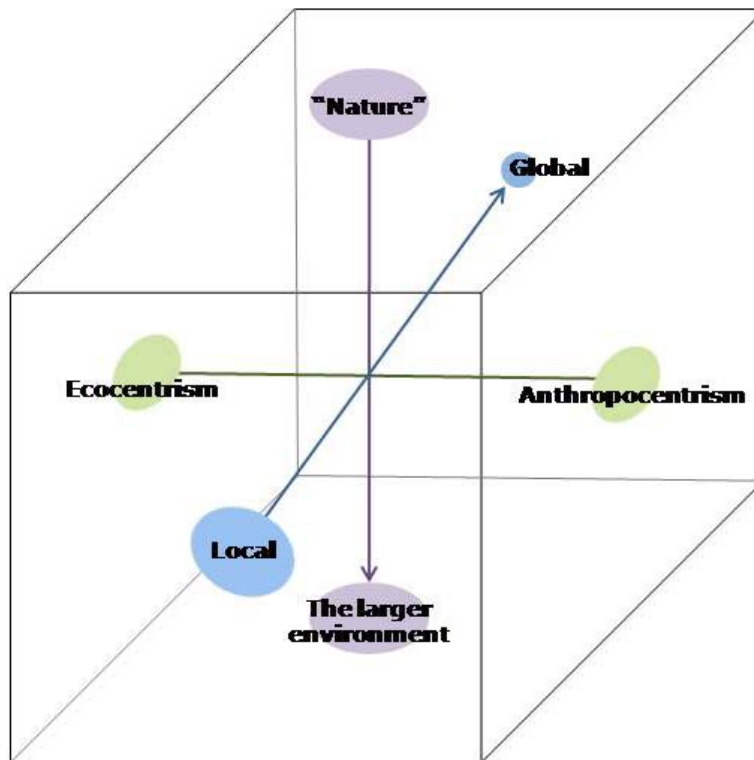
beyond the study of nature writing,” ecocritics have to prove that such an approach is more than relevant to critics working in other literary and theoretical fields and explore texts other than nature writing,<sup>23</sup> or, using Timothy Morton’s words, “the time should come when we ask of any text,” as we have done in the realm of gender, what that particular literary text says about the environment, instead of “hav[ing] already decided which texts we will be asking.”<sup>24</sup> In the aforementioned anthology, Armbruster and Wallace not only argue for the need to go “beyond nature writing,” but also maintain that such expansion is already, albeit timidly, taking place, as the essays in their collection demonstrate by engaging an “enlarged” environment that comprises “cultivated and built landscapes, the natural elements and aspects of those landscapes, and cultural interactions with those natural elements,” and by “applying ecocritical theories and methods to texts that might seem unlikely subjects because they do not foreground the natural world or wilderness.”<sup>25</sup>

However, Armbruster and Wallace’s chosen scope was rather exceptional at the time, for attention to texts other than nature writing has been rare in ecocriticism until fairly recently. In *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, Buell reviews the development of the ecocritical school from its inception and posits two main stages in environmental criticism: a first wave that exhibited a restricted understanding of “environment” and a second wave, more “socially oriented,” which includes schools such as ecofeminism and social ecocriticism. First-wave practitioners of ecocriticism, consciously or not, regarded “nature” and humankind as rather separate realms and chose to focus on “ecocentric values.”<sup>26</sup> In contrast, second-wave critics have started “to question organicist models of conceiving both environment and environmentalism,” by pointing out how the categories of the “natural” and the “man-made” are irretrievably mixed and imbricated with each other, and by arguing for a revised environmental ethics that includes the vexed issue of “environmental justice” (22), also known as “ecojustice.”<sup>27</sup> Both first-wave and second-wave ecocritics, Buell adds, have equally endeavored to make visible “neglected (sub)genres like nature writing or toxification narratives,” as well as proffering the much-needed interpretation “of environmental subtexts through historical and critical analyses that employ ready-to-hand analytical tools of the trade together with less familiar ones.”<sup>28</sup> Last but not least, ecocritics have rescued from oblivion and/or reinterpreted subgenres and themes such as the “pastoral, eco-apocalypticism, and environmental racism” (130).

In order to explain the different trends coexisting in ecocriticism today, or, as he puts it, with the aim of “plotting internal disparities” (98), Buell describes a continuum along two axes, a vertical and a horizontal one, which can be graphically translated as follows (including, in blue italics, how certain associations and movements would be placed in this “map,” according to Buell):



The shift Buell perceives in recent environmental criticism would travel from north to south. To Buell's initial schema I would like to add a third dimension in order to incorporate the transfer of focus from local to global concerns, the "global shift" or "transnational turn."<sup>29</sup> In the cube below, the depth line (in purple) signifies the metaphorical north-south axis above (from the northern pole of the physical-natural environment to the southern pole of the social environment); the line going from left to right (in green) refers to the west-east axis (with the west standing for the radical ecocentrism of deep ecologists, and the east representing the traditional anthropocentric view); finally, the new axis I propose, moving from the front to the back wall of the cube (in blue), signifies the shift from the local (front) concerns to the global (back) concerns. In the north-south and front-back axes, an arrow, not just a line, has been drawn to emphasize the two main shifts described above, the geographic and conceptual broadening of environmental criticism.



While the graphic models above attempt to capture the present situation of environmental criticism,<sup>30</sup> they also point to the challenges of ecocriticism in the near future. There is some consensus among literary critics and theorists today that the ecocritical turn is here to stay. However, there is also the shared belief that, even though much has been attained in the last decade or so as regards both the popularization and the academic prestige of environmental criticism, the ecocritical movement is bound to face several important obstacles in the coming years. There are several challenges waiting around the corner, so to speak. In *Ecocriticism*, Greg Garrard summarizes the main problems for the future of environmental criticism as follows: first, “the difficulty of developing constructive relations between the green humanities and the environmental sciences,” and second, “the relationship between globalization and ecocriticism,” which, according to Garrard, had hardly been addressed by ecocritics before the turn of the century.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, at least two major challenges accost ecocriticism: the transdisciplinary and the transnational ones, to which I would add the “transnatural” challenge.

## (1) THE TRANSDISCIPLINARY CHALLENGE

As Glen A. Love explains in “Ecocriticism and Science: Toward Consilience?” one should not forget that the very origins of ecocriticism lay in the need for interdisciplinary bridges, or, echoing Meeker’s words, “the growing need among people . . . to find a sense of integrity for their own lives and for their understanding of the world around them.”<sup>32</sup> Still, it is true that very little real interdisciplinary work has been done that affects the “green sciences” and the “green humanities,” mostly due to our shortcomings and mutual distrust.

However, my lexical choice hints at something qualitatively different from interdisciplinarity. The very prefix *trans-* in transdisciplinary involves a movement *beyond* the traditional division of disciplines. I am partially referring to the theory of transdisciplinarity as put forward by Basarab Nicolescu. In “Transdisciplinarity as Methodological Framework,” Nicolescu explains that both multidisciplinary (“studying a research topic in not just one discipline only, but in several at the same time”) and interdisciplinarity (involving “the transfer of methods from one discipline to another”) continue to work “within the framework of disciplinary research.”<sup>33</sup> In contrast, a transdisciplinary approach “concerns that which is at once *between* the disciplines, *across* the different disciplines, and *beyond* all discipline.” Therefore, whereas interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches are necessary in ecocriticism, the ultimate goal would be to achieve transdisciplinarity.

## (2) THE TRANSNATIONAL CHALLENGE

In “Ecocriticism and the Transnational Turn in American Studies,” and in *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*, both published in 2008, Ursula K. Heise stresses the relevant role of localism in the emergence of environmental criticism, and the concomitant suspicion of and resistance to—at least on the part of first-wave ecocritics—anything vaguely reminiscent of globalization, even when the incipient social environmentalism of the 1960s and 1970s was paradoxically linked with “global” slogans and icons.<sup>34</sup> As a whole, Heise pessimistically notes, “the theories of subjecthood and agency that undergird ecocritical discourse do not in any systematic way incorporate the changes that globalization has brought about, whereas they do extensively and with great philosophical sophistication reflect on the modes of inhabiting local environments.”<sup>35</sup> And yet, as early as 1990, Love maintained that ecocriticism, a powerful branch of ecocriticism, had, as one of its three main premises, “the supplanting of nationalist with global, ecological critical perspectives.”<sup>36</sup> Apparently, then, it has taken some time for the “global shift” to take hold. However, by the time Garrard pointed out the challenge of globalization (2004), it could be argued that the “global ecological perspective” was in full sway. Indeed, in the almost contemporary *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005),

Buell expresses conviction that this global shift has already occurred and that it will acquire more and more visibility and prominence in the coming years.<sup>37</sup>

### (3) THE TRANSNATURAL CHALLENGE

The literal broadening of ecocriticism, signified by the global shift outlined above, has likewise been accompanied by a conceptual broadening and problematization of the very notion of “the environment.” That is, to the transdisciplinary and transnational challenges outlined by Garrard, I would add a third one, the “transnatural challenge.” Over the last few decades, environmental criticism, while not abandoning the study of traditional texts like nature writing (e.g., accounts of the wilderness and “unspoiled nature”), has turned its attention to urban settings, sometimes plying a comparative lens so as to analyze rural and “wild” natural environments together with less “pristine” ones. Even the “nature of nature” has been thoroughly reexamined and questioned, most notably the slippery boundaries between what is deemed “natural” and what is considered “human-made.”

In talking about the “transnatural” shift, however, I am not arguing for a “postnatural” era that both critics and scientists have announced in different ways.<sup>38</sup> Rather than envisioning a postnatural scenario, I favor instead understanding our world as “transnatural.” What I want to mean with this term is not so much living in a planet where nature no longer exists—I do not want to imply either transcending or going beyond nature; what the term “transnatural” foregrounds is the hard fact that “natural elements” are continually interbreeding with categories other than “natural.” In such a context, the choice of “transnatural” keeps reminding us of the very fluid and constructed nature of the natural-artificial divide. After all, as Garrard insightfully notes, environmental criticism “is essentially about the demarcation between nature and culture, its construction and reconstruction.”<sup>39</sup>

And yet a caveat should be added here. Ecocritics have surely been encouraged “to go against the grain of dominant, normative ideas about nature,” but under no circumstances must we forget that we have to engage in such an interrogating process precisely “in the name of sentient beings suffering under catastrophic environmental conditions.”<sup>40</sup> In other words, despite the necessary emphasis on the “constructedness” of the category of the “natural,” such realization does not exempt us from “the need for better scientific understanding of our place within the biosphere,”<sup>41</sup> and, I would add, it does not exempt us from the exigency for social and political action to save our “used planet” and to save ourselves.

#### **“Plastic Flesh”**

Yamashita’s *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* not only illustrates the interpenetration of the local and the global, the “transnational challenge” that I have previously outlined, but it also broaches the transnatural challenge, with abundant

examples of the reworking of the culture-nature divide.<sup>42</sup> Foremost among these revealing episodes and motifs are, on the one hand, the novel's double trope of the ball-Matacão, and, on the other, a vivid description of a "metal cemetery," in other words, "the junkyard in the jungle."<sup>43</sup>

*Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* constitutes an apt illustration of the recent developments in environmental studies, which, as mentioned earlier, not only rehearse the movement from the local to the global, but have also broadened the concept of what we mean by "nature" and "the environment."<sup>44</sup> As a good exponent of the global shift sketched above, Yamashita's novel features an international cast of characters who end up meeting at a globalized national locale: Brazil. Among these multifarious characters, we find a pilgrim who becomes a successful radio preacher, a Brazilian couple that builds a pigeon-communication empire, an Amazonian peasant who becomes an expert in "featherology," an American businessman with three arms, a fittingly complementary ornithologist with three breasts, and a recent Japanese immigrant, Kazumasa, whose idiosyncrasy lies in his personal satellite, a small ball constantly spinning inches from his forehead that emerges as the narrator of the story.<sup>45</sup> By the end of the book, all of these bizarre characters will have converged at a single symbolic site, the "natural" wonder of the Matacão plateau, which suddenly surfaces in the middle of the Amazonian forest.

The unfathomable Matacão expanse is made of an unknown, highly resilient material, the same kind of plastic that, we later learn, also constitutes the "flesh" of Kazumasa's ball. The Matacão eventually turns out to be the eruption of nonbiodegradable waste from industrialized countries in the middle of the rainforest. Thus, it could be argued that the emergence of the Matacão clearly and effectively turns the wilderness of the Amazonian rainforest into a hybrid bionetwork, an overlapping of organic and inorganic realms, an *anthrome*.<sup>46</sup> Due to its versatility and resilience, the "miracle plastic" is soon greedily mined and extracted from the Matacão site, and all sorts of products are made of the new, apparently indestructible material, inaugurating the Plastics Age.<sup>47</sup> Like the Matacão itself, many of the plastic artifacts made of Matacão material seem about to traverse the boundary that separates the natural from the artificial, even the living from the nonliving. Plastic, for instance, imitates feathers (157), body parts (142–43), food (143), all sorts of plants and animals like palm trees, zebras, or lions (168). The Matacão is the perfect simulacrum indeed: "The animated animals, also constructed in the revolutionary plastic, were mistaken for real animals until people questioned their repetitive movements, their obviously benign nature, and the trade-off in smells: the warm stench of animal refuse for a sort of gassy vinyl scent" (168). And yet the literal copies become even more convincing when trying to reproduce immobile beings such as plants. They come even closer to perfection than "the real thing" and, paradoxically, they prove more apt at conveying "the very sensation of life" than their living counterparts: "At the plastic convention, two tiger lilies, one natural and the other made from Matacão plastic, were exhibited for public examination. Few, if

any, of the examiners could tell the difference between the real and the fake. Only toward the end of the convention, when the natural tiger lily began to wilt with age, bruised from mishandling, were people able to discern reality from fabrication. The plastic lily remained the very perfection of nature itself. Matacão plastic managed to recreate the natural glow, moisture, freshness—the very sensation of life” (142). The flaw of the argument, of course, lies in the fact that nature is not necessarily “perfect,” in the sense that it involves physical deterioration, violence, death. Indeed “the very perfection of nature” is not “natural.” It is, as all social and linguistic constructions, human-made.

Together with the mystifications accruing to “the perfection of nature” and the temporary confusion of real/plastic life, the very origin of the Matacão contributes to eroding not only the boundaries between the natural and the artificial, but also those between the local and the global, as several critics have pointed out. In her insightful “‘A Bizarre Ecology’: The Nature of Denatured Nature” (2000), Molly Wallace critiques Fredric Jameson’s and Bruno Latour’s theories and argues instead for an understanding of postmodern ecology that does away with the dualistic vision of a nature-culture dichotomy. For Wallace, Yamashita’s novel builds bridges across traditional divides, by proffering “an ecosystemic vision of nature and culture which provides a model for and a critique of hybridity.”<sup>48</sup> In “Local Rock and Global Plastic,” Ursula Heise addresses the manner in which the phenomena of “disembedding” (Giddens) and deterritorialization (Tomlinson) figure in *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*, as well as the links “between ecological and cultural globalism” that the author forges in her novel.<sup>49</sup> As Heise convincingly claims, while Yamashita successfully addresses “the ambiguities of an ecologically based sense of place in the age of globalization” (132), she eventually circumvents the need to provide adequate answers to the ecological problems raised in the book by proffering a sociocultural solution instead: “Ecological deterritorialization is contained by cultural reterritorialization” (139).

Nature and human actions, global and local threads crisscross and get entangled in the Matacão. Well into the novel we learn that the Matacão expanse, as mentioned earlier, is the result of huge “landfills of nonbiodegradable material buried under virtually every populated part of the Earth,” which under “tremendous pressure” had “pushed ever farther into the lower layers of the Earth’s mantle,” from where these “liquid deposits of the molten mass had been squeezed through underground veins to virgin areas of the Earth.”<sup>50</sup> In the very formation of the Matacão plateau, therefore, both human activities—mostly the excess they generate in the form of nonbiodegradable waste—and natural forces—in this case the pressures and movements that take place under the external layer of the planet—combine to create a material that, although anthropogenic, cannot be totally disengaged from nature.

At this stage, then, we cannot but wonder whether the traditional natural-artificial dichotomy still remains in place in our postmodern, transnatural world. With

the advent of poststructuralism, it has become hardly possible for any critical school to embrace the essentialist naïveté that is so noticeable in early ecocriticism. As Jameson puts it, the issue of “how antifoundationalism can thus coexist with the passionate ecological revival of a sense of Nature is the essential mystery at the heart of what I take to be a fundamental antinomy of the postmodern.”<sup>51</sup> Can we actually locate some element or thing that has not been tampered with or directly produced by human beings? Leo Marx indirectly points at this dilemma in his rhetorical question about the apparent paradox and clash between the machine and the garden: “If technology is the creation of man, who is a product of nature, then how can the machine in the landscape be thought to represent an unresolvable conflict?”<sup>52</sup> Armbruster and Wallace urge ecocritics to continue to engage in a revision of the nature-culture divide by approaching both poles of the dichotomy “as interwoven rather than as separate sides of a dualistic construct.”<sup>53</sup> In “Ideas of Nature,” Williams explicitly argues against trying to sever “nature” from human action, since, then, “it even ceases to be nature.”<sup>54</sup> Contrary to what we would expect, the “separation between man and nature,” claims Williams, “is not simply the product of modern industry or urbanism,” but can be found in “many earlier kinds of organized labour, including rural labour” (295).<sup>55</sup> In a similarly paradoxical phrasing, Williams explains how the more human-nature interactions increase, the more necessary the separation between both entities becomes (295–96). In the end, it does not make much sense to insist on the dichotomies people vs. “nature” or “natural” vs. “artificial”: human beings “have mixed our labour with the earth, our forces with its forces too deeply to be able to draw back and separate either out” (296).<sup>56</sup> It is by carefully looking into the specific material practices that complicate the interactions between humans and “nature” that we may arrive at some honest reassessment of the situation.<sup>57</sup>

The very question of what is natural and what is artificial, as raised by the Matacão plastic, is prefigured in an apparently insignificant episode at the beginning of the novel: the origin of sand-bottling. The narrator tells us how the first innocent gesture of filling a bottle with multicolored sands as a nostalgic memento of one’s birthplace is soon co-opted and marketed as a tourist souvenir:

A young talented boy had then gotten the idea of pouring the colored sand in bottles in such a way as to create pictures. . . . One day, a tourist brought a picture of the Mona Lisa and asked the boy to duplicate it in a sand bottle, and he did. After that, the boy left the town and went away to be famous, sand-bottling every sort of picture from the President of the Republic to the great Pelé. Someone said he no longer used real sand but some synthetic stuff dyed in every color you could imagine. Someone said he was even making sand pictures in bottles of fine crystal and mixing the sand with gold and silver dust.<sup>58</sup>

The drift from the simple to the elaborate, from the natural to the artificial, is here described as the shift from the “real” to the “synthetic,” obliquely presented as nonreal, that is, ambiguously construed as either (postmodern) virtual or (premodern) magical.<sup>59</sup> Likewise, the central natural-artificial trope, the Matacão, is both adored as some ancient substratum erupting from the depths of the earth and praised as the ultimate modern scientific discovery. In fact, as mentioned earlier, Matacão plastic becomes the postmodern material par excellence, a superbly malleable simulacrum, a “virginal” product that the transnational corporation GGG soon eyes with equal amounts of perplexity and greed, until it literally becomes “plastic money”<sup>60</sup>:

The wonderful thing about the Matacão plastic was its capability to assume a wide range of forms. . . . Every industry from construction to fashion would jump into Matacão plastics. At a plastics convention, all sorts of marvels were displayed—cars made completely out of Matacão plastic, from the motor to the plush velveteen fabrics of the seats; imitation furs and leathers made into coats and dress pumps; Danish furniture made of Matacão “teak”; and all sorts of plants, from potted petunias to palm trees. The remarkable thing about Matacão plastic was its incredible ability to imitate anything. (142)<sup>61</sup>

In spite of such malleability, this apparently nonbiodegradable plastic that excels at imitation, like the junkyard in the jungle, as we shall shortly see, is eventually swallowed by and integrated into “nature,” enacting the symbolic—though not uncomplicated—“return” that the title of the final section hints at. The Matacão plastic, which seemed to be immune to all life forms, eventually falls prey to some mysterious bacteria, which literally gnaw it away. The whole range of products made of Matacão plastic, from clothes to food, soon start deteriorating and finally crumble down, and with them the plastic empire itself. The first sign of such destruction can be seen in the narrating ball and its “plastic flesh.” One day Lourdes and Kazumasa notice that the swirling ball looks more “lopsided” and less spherical than usual; indeed, the ball claims,

I seemed fraught with tiny holes. . . . Something was eating me, carving out delicate pinhole passages, which wound intricately throughout my sphere. . . . Every day, Kazumasa watched more and more of me disappear, my spin grow slower and more erratic. . . . One day, he touched me tenderly and was shocked to find his finger pierce the now very thin veneer of my surface. Within, I had been completely hollowed

out by something, by some invisible, voracious and now-gorged thing.

The next day, Kazumasa awoke and wept uncontrollably at the unobstructed view of the room before him. (205–6)

The oxymoron of “plastic flesh” intuited both in the person-cum-ball known as Kazumasa and in the very ambiguity of the *Matacão* has already been encoded in the shape of cryptic omens ensconced in every nook and cranny of the novel: in the reference to the “plastic snakes” that vendors sell on the street (35), in the GGG memos about “Natural vs. Plastic Plants and Employee Morale” (52) or about the viability of “artificial non-polluting snow” (54), in the contrast of the “dense concrete jungle” with the Amazonian “living jungle” (82), in the depiction of GGG as “a great functioning miracle, a living, breathing organism” (111), or, as we shall next see, in the very paradox of “nature” imitating human artifacts (100) in the junkyard ecosystem. The oxymoron natural-artificial reappears in a more explicit way when we witness how the “plastic paradise” of Chicolândia, including its plastic plants and animals, becomes “horribly disfigured, shot full of tiny ominous holes, the *mechanical entrails* of everything exposed beneath the once-healthy *plastic flesh*” (206–7, emphasis added). However, it is in the description of the aforementioned junkyard ecosystem that the paradox of “mechanical entrails” and “plastic flesh” is articulated in all its complexity; it is there where the existence of an “artificial nature” becomes especially notorious and significant.

### **“The Junkyard in the Jungle”**

Just as the sand-bottle episode prefigured the oxymoronic plastic flesh, the huge dump that the *Matacão* turns out to be finds a smaller replica in the “natural-artificial” ecosystem born around a metal cemetery where abandoned planes and cars coexist with sentient beings. Yamashita’s “ecological experiment” has been interpreted as an apt commentary on the nature-culture divide, thus reinforcing the issues previously raised by the *Matacão*.<sup>62</sup> Heise cogently explains how, in the description of this peculiar ecosystem, Yamashita has exaggerated what are, in principle, “basically plausible processes of adaptation,” and she has done so in order to emphasize both “the transformability of biological species and their partly natural, partly technological environments” (145). For Jinqi Ling, the metal cemetery episode most prominently functions as a painful reminder of “systematic imperialist violence” on the part of the United States, since the abandoned war aircraft and other vehicles, all US-made, bring echoes of “the post-WWII U.S. hegemonic control over Latin America.”<sup>63</sup> Complementing these various interpretations, I will argue that the particular bionetwork created around the metal cemetery can be read as “the junkyard in the jungle” in the light of Leo Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden*.

Marx's seminal book mulls over the multiple ways in which American literature records the irruption of technology in what had long been regarded as a natural, even virginal, landscape. The author first explores the tropes of the garden and the machine in a separate fashion before putting them side by side as "two kingdoms of force" (echoing *The Education of Henry Adams*). Marx claims that the pastoral tradition, with its emphasis on escape from urban life and retreat into "nature," acquires a special import in American literature, as America has traditionally been viewed as an Edenic new land, the Brave New World indeed. Marx particularly focuses on what he terms the "Sleepy Hollow" moment, where the intrusion of a machine (or its surrogate) interrupts (and effectively disrupts) a pastoral moment.<sup>64</sup> In order to render this literary *topos* less nationally specific and more transnational, I have rechristened Marx's "interrupted idyll" with a name deriving from another famous Latin literary *topos*: *locus amoenus truncatus*. In order to substantiate his theory, Leo Marx includes analyses of canonical American texts from the perspective of this "interrupted idyll" and the clash of tropes that it entails.

Marx's thesis is both captured and turned on its end in Yamashita's perceptive description of "the junkyard in the jungle." Halfway through the novel, we learn from the narrator how a huge parking lot is discovered in the middle of the Amazonian rainforest, a space full of abandoned planes and cars, wrapped up in "criss-crossing lianas [that] completely engulfed everything."<sup>65</sup> One part of this peculiar parking lot now contains "a large pit of grey, sticky goop," composed primarily of napalm (99). Incredible though it may seem, this idiosyncratic anthrome, the anthropogenic ecosystem of the jungle junkyard, has actually produced new species of fauna and flora, among them mice that "burrowed in the exhaust pipes," wrapped up in "splotchy green-and-brown" hair (mimetically camouflaging themselves in old military vehicles) or else in "shiny coats of chartreuse, silver and taxi yellow" (imitating the colors of other cars and planes); a "rare butterfly" whose "exquisite reddish coloring" is given by "a steady diet of hydrated ferric oxide, or rusty water"; the new air plant with "carnivorous flowers" that "attached itself to the decaying vehicles"; or the tribe of monkeys that "had established territory in the carcasses of the bomber planes" and had shot another tribe to extinction (100-1).<sup>66</sup>

Should we apply Marx's grid to this significant *locus amoenus truncatus*, we would record not only the obvious similarities but also the ways in which this episode departs from the master theory. True enough, the abandoned "parking lot" is found by teams of entomologists who, like the tourists before them, in a neopastoral move, try to escape from their urban environments in search of "genuine" nature, in this case, more specifically, in search of a rare butterfly. The physical intrusion or "emergence" of a junkyard full of old vehicles in the middle of the apparently pristine, virgin rainforest not only interferes with their pleasure but totally disrupts the pastoral moment: an obvious case of *locus amoenus truncatus*. Despite the ostensible similarities, one cannot ignore the differences between Marx's "interrupted idylls" or *loci amoeni truncati*, and Yamashita's peculiar brand of "the machine in the garden."

To start with, Yamashita's chosen location is a jungle, not a "garden," a middle landscape in between "civilization" and "wilderness." In addition, we cannot fail to notice that the setting for this episode, and for most of the novel, is not the US, but Brazil. And, last but not least, in *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* it is not a noisy, active machine that interrupts the immersion in nature, but a heap of old, useless cars and planes, silent and passive.

It could be argued that the first departure from Marx's theoretical framework can be easily bypassed. More often than not, the *locus amoenus* of the pastoral mode used to be the garden or some other version of the middle landscape in between "civilization" and "wilderness."<sup>67</sup> But a careful reading of the Amazonian forest as portrayed in Yamashita's book leads us to the realization that, early in the novel, especially after the discovery of the Matacão, the rainforest the readers come across has been "tamed" to such an extent that it comes closer to a domesticated middle landscape, a garden, than to "pure" wilderness. By the same token, the next divergence could be circumvented by noting that Brazil is indeed America in the strict geographic sense and has equally been construed as a virgin land, the New World, the occasion for a rebirth of countless immigrants (among them Kazumasa). However, while America as a continent remains the setting for *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*, it is clearly not the America Leo Marx had in mind, the United States of America.

The change in location involved in this second departure poses new, interesting challenges, most notably because Yamashita's work is usually labeled Asian American.<sup>68</sup> After decades of "claiming America," the field of Asian American Studies has undergone a gradual process of "denationalization" since the early 1990s.<sup>69</sup> And yet this is not an isolated phenomenon, one that only affects certain minorities. The deterritorialization attendant in globalization has unmoored all types of national and ethnic subjecthood. The concept of the nation-state has fallen into academic disrepute and globalization has rendered traditional national/ethnic identities if not obsolete, at least in need of revision.<sup>70</sup> With "the advent of the global," identities have been so thoroughly altered that, as Koshy cautions us, it now becomes "imperative that the transformed meaning of the ethnic [and national] subject in transnationality be reexamined."<sup>71</sup> While such a reexamination lies well beyond the scope of this article,<sup>72</sup> it cannot be denied that previous understandings of American national identity in early ecocritical work, such as Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden*, have to be revised in our globalized world, a task that Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* and subsequent novels entice readers to do.<sup>73</sup>

Finally, the third departure from the master theory involves the "nature" of the machines in the junkyard, which will directly determine the ecosystem they are part of. The "living," noisy machines, most notably the train, of the *loci amoeni truncati* described in Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* are here replaced by "dead" machines, a reminder not of the point of origin but of destination, that is, a stark

comment on the by-products of consumerist capitalism. In this postmodern, postindustrial context, the junkyard in the jungle becomes a “cyborg ecosystem,” where machines and living organisms meet. According to Donna Haraway’s famous definition of the cyborg, the latter is “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism,” “a condensed image of both imagination and material reality,” which renders the frontiers between living organisms (humans, animals, plants) and machines particularly “leaky.”<sup>74</sup> As boundary-trespassing hybrids, cyborgs, including cyborg ecosystems like Yamashita’s junkyard, contribute to the problematization of entrenched hierarchies and watertight categories, such as the natural and the artificial. In order to survive in the surprising “cyborg-network” imagined by Yamashita, the new species of mice living in the junkyard adapt to and copy human-made vehicles (military jeeps and planes), which in turn try to imitate “nature” in their camouflaging green and brown colors.<sup>75</sup> Nature and culture chase each other’s tails. Read in the light of cyborg theory, therefore, the ecosystem created around the metal cemetery constitutes a further exploration of the dualisms “nature vs. culture” and “nature vs. technology,” confirming the previous insight that such divides should be understood as interconnected dialectics rather than as clear-cut dichotomies.

From both the analysis of the Matacão phenomenon and the cyborg parallel above, we could apparently conclude that we are indeed living in a “transnatural” world where nothing remains “untouched,” everything has been directly or indirectly “contaminated” by human actions, and culture and technology have invaded what used to be the inviolable realm of “nature.” But the reverse is also true and becomes conspicuous not only in the catastrophic end of the Matacão plastic empire, but also in a complementary reading of the trope of the junkyard in the jungle. Once more deviating from the master theory, in Yamashita’s novel the abandoned, rusty planes and cars appear to be a monument to the past—or rather, a denunciation of the American imperialist past—not an anticipation of the future, as is the case in *The Machine in the Garden*. Extricated as they are from the utilitarianism attached to machines, the vehicles in Yamashita’s novel become “denaturalized” machines that, paradoxically, become “naturalized,” that is, literally invaded by “wild nature.” On this occasion, therefore, the pastoral idyll is not totally interrupted, but it acquires unsettling undertones: as dead machines,<sup>76</sup> as technological corpses, these old vehicles are soon “ingested,” processed, incorporated, by “nature” itself, a “composting” that can be read as enticingly positive despite the initial nightmarish shock. Indeed the machine, or rather, the junkyard made of old machines, becomes part of the land, of the (natural? transnatural?) environment. Machines serve as the basis for a microecosystem within the larger ecosystem of the Matacão-rainforest, in a thinly disguised *mise en abîme*. In both cases the separation between the natural and the artificial is severely undermined. The “junkyard in the jungle” starts with Marx’s intrusion of the machine in the garden, only to have the natural environment adapt to and finally swallow the machine. The garden in the machine.

## Conclusion: Towards a Transnational, Transnatural Pastoral

From Kazumasa's metaphorical little planet in *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* to the great shifting of the Tropic of Cancer in the larger planet in her *Tropic of Orange* (1997),<sup>77</sup> the effects of globalization have been a recurrent concern in Yamashita's work, which, as Sue-Im Lee reminds us, urges readers "to conceive of a new collective subject positioning that can express the accelerated movement of capital and humans traversing the world."<sup>78</sup> In addition, in *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*, Yamashita's transnational concerns are further interrogated and compounded with pressing ecological issues that can be read as "transnatural," that is, not so much transcending or going beyond nature, as interbreeding it with categories other than "natural." In sum, the very challenges that environmental criticism is currently facing, the broadening of its object of study and the global shift, have both been encoded in Yamashita's novel.

At the same time, as this essay has attempted to demonstrate, a significant episode in *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* harks back to the paradigm put forward by Leo Marx in the 1960s, "the machine in the garden." Yamashita's peculiar "plastic pastoral" not only revisits the old master theory but, more importantly, revamps it by destabilizing the classic human-nature divide inherent in first-wave ecocriticism and by adding the transnational ingredient. Thus, the machine-in-the-garden paradigm is updated in order to incorporate the broadening of current environmental criticism, both literally (globalization) and conceptually (transnatural nature). While at times Marx's paradigm may metamorphose and undergo a reversal, so that we encounter a peculiar "garden" sprouting from the machine,<sup>79</sup> the old trope also corroborates its continuing validity. Though filtered by the sieve of globalization and shaken by the emergence of cyborg ecosystems, "the machine in the garden" has survived as a compelling ecocritical framework, even if it occasionally mutates into a junkyard in the jungle.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> This phenomenon is known as the rise of the myth of the “Ecological Indian.” See Shepard Krech III, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> There were a few significant articles that focused on multiethnic literature at the turn of the century—see, for example, Patrick D. Murphy, “Environmental Ethics, Environmental Justice, and Multicultural American Literature,” *Fiction and Drama* 10 (1998): 41–53; and Michael Bennett, “Anti-Pastoralism, Frederick Douglass, and the Nature of Slavery,” in *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, ed. Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 195–209. However, in 2002, Jonathan Levin still denounced the “relative dearth of attention to ethnic American writing” among ecocritics, and Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace specifically wondered “why so few African American voices are recognized as part of nature writing and ecocriticism.” Jonathan Levin, “Beyond Nature? Recent Work in Ecocriticism,” *Contemporary Literature* 43, no. 1 (2002): 181; and Armbruster and Wallace, *Beyond Nature Writing*, 2. See also Terrell Dixon’s, Elizabeth Dodd’s, Patrick D. Murphy’s, and Andrea Parra’s contributions to Jean Arnold et al., “Forum on Literatures of the Environment,” *PMLA* 114, no. 5 (1999): 1089–1104. In the last few years, such dearth is slowly but effectively coming to an end, with the appearance of more and more articles on the subject, and even specialized volumes on the conjunction of ecocriticism and ethnic literature, such as Joni Adamson and Scott Slovic, eds., “Ethnicity and Ecocriticism,” special issue, *MELUS* 34, no. 2 (2009). See also Jesús Benito, Ana Manzananas, and Begoña Simal, “Of a Magical Nature: The Environmental Unconscious,” in *Uncertain Mirrors: Magical Realisms in US Ethnic Literatures* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 193–237.

<sup>3</sup> Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964); and Karen Tei Yamashita, *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Cheryll Glotfelty, “Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis,” in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), xix.

<sup>5</sup> Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 430.

<sup>6</sup> Laurence Coupe, ed., *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2000), 302.

<sup>7</sup> Adam Rome, “‘Give Earth a Chance’: The Environmental Movement and the Sixties,” *Journal of American History* 90, no. 2 (2003): 527.

<sup>8</sup> Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (1962; repr., New York: Mariner, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Marx, *Machine in the Garden*; Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975); and Joseph W. Meeker, *The Comedy of Survival: Literary Ecology and a Play Ethic*, 3rd ed. (1974; repr., Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> The last decade has witnessed the proliferation of ASLE-type organizations around the world, such as the European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and the Environment (EASLCE, 2007), the Association for Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada (ALECC, 2007), etc., while branches of ASLE have appeared in countries such as Japan (1994), the UK (1999), Korea (2001), Australia and New Zealand (2005), India (ASLE-India, renamed OSLE in 2006), and Taiwan (2008).

<sup>11</sup> Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995); and Glotfelty and Fromm, *Ecocriticism Reader*.

<sup>12</sup> See Glen A. Love, "Ecocriticism and Science: Toward Consilience?" *New Literary History* 30, no. 3 (1999): 561–76; Dana Phillips, "Ecocriticism, Literary Theory, and the Truth of Ecology," *New Literary History* 30, no. 3 (1999): 577–602; and T. V. Reed, "Toward an Environmental Justice Ecocriticism," in *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy*, ed. Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002), 145–62.

<sup>13</sup> Compare the somewhat bleak panorama drawn by Cheryll Glotfelty at the beginning of her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, especially the disparity she observed between the media attention to the environmental crisis and the total neglect on the part of literary critics (Glotfelty, "Introduction," xvi), with the more optimistic, though still not triumphant, view of ecofeminism offered by Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy two years later, in *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism*: "In the 1990s ecofeminism is finally making itself felt in literary studies." Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy, introduction to *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism: Theory, Interpretation, Pedagogy*, ed. Gaard and Murphy (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 5. Speaking from a mid-position, Lawrence Buell contends that, although the debate around environmental issues, most poignantly our (humans') relationship to Nature, is as old as the Book of Genesis, ecocriticism is still struggling for visibility and recognition in academic circles (Buell, *Future of Environmental Criticism*, 1–2).

<sup>14</sup> Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 1.

<sup>15</sup> Lawrence Buell, "Green Disputes: Nature, Culture, American(ist) Theory," in "Nature's Nation" Revisited: *American Concepts of Nature from Wonder to Ecological Crisis*, ed. Hans Bak and Walter Hölbling (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2003), 43; and David Mazel, *American Literary Environmentalism* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 187.

<sup>16</sup> Leo Marx, "The Pandering Landscape: On American Nature as Illusion," in Bak and Hölbling, "Nature's Nation" Revisited, 30.

<sup>17</sup> Raymond Williams, "Ideas of Nature," in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, 3rd ed., ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 2007), 284–86. Not only the "nature of nature" but also its apparent uniqueness have been problematized in recent criticism. In the polemical *War of the Worlds*, Bruno Latour maintains that the emergence of a postmodern "multinaturalism" (Viveiros de Castro) has already replaced the "mononaturalism" that had provided the

bedrock for modernist confidence. See Bruno Latour, *War of the Worlds: What about Peace?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> For ecocritics such as Glotfelty, the term “environment” has pejorative, “anthropocentric and dualistic” connotations, whereas the prefix “eco-” suggests positive images of “interdependent communities, integrated systems” (Glotfelty, “Introduction,” xx). However, I do agree with Buell’s reasons for favoring the term “environmental criticism,” even if ecocriticism continues to be the most widespread label.

<sup>19</sup> Buell, *Future of Environmental Criticism*, 12, 21, 82, 90–92. My understanding of the term “global” coincides with Robert P. Marzec’s definition in *An Ecological and Postcolonial Study of Literature*: “the complex of contemporary transnational forces of capital and culture governed by an endeavor to homogenize and reduce difference and distance, an evolving network first laid down in the eighteenth, nineteenth centuries with the development of the Dutch, French, and specifically British Empires.” Robert P. Marzec, *An Ecological and Postcolonial Study of Literature: From Daniel Defoe to Salman Rushdie* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 25. For an interesting exploration of the contrast between a restrictive, biased “globalist we” and a more inspiring brand of “romantic universalism,” as applied to Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange*, see Sue-Im Lee, “‘We Are Not the World’: Global Village, Universalism, and Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange*,” *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 53, no. 3 (2007): 501–27.

<sup>20</sup> Sven Birkerts, “Only God Can Make a Tree: The Joys and Sorrows of Ecocriticism,” *Boston Book Review* 3.1 (1996): 6, quoted in Armbruster and Wallace, *Beyond Nature Writing*, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Phillips, “Ecocriticism,” 586.

<sup>22</sup> Steven Rosendale, “Introduction: Extending Ecocriticism,” in *The Greening of Literary Scholarship: Literature, Theory, and the Environment*, ed. Steven Rosendale (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), xxvii.

<sup>23</sup> Armbruster and Wallace, *Beyond Nature Writing*, 3–4.

<sup>24</sup> Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, 5.

<sup>25</sup> Armbruster and Wallace, *Beyond Nature Writing*, 4–5.

<sup>26</sup> Buell, *Future of Environmental Criticism*, 21–22. “Ecocentrism” upholds the belief that our planet is an interconnected community with no boundaries between sentient and nonsentient beings, humans and nonhumans, since we all depend on one another. Buell defines ecocentrism as the belief “that the interest of the ecosphere must override that of the interest of individual species,” in contradistinction with anthropocentrism (137).

<sup>27</sup> In 2002, a book definitively launched the question of ecojustice: *The Environmental Justice Reader: Politics, Poetics, and Pedagogy*, edited by Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, and Rachel Stein. In their groundbreaking introduction, the editors defined “environmental justice as the right of all people to share equally in the benefits bestowed by a healthy environment,” while

the environment would encompass all those “places in which we live, work, play, and worship” (Adamson, Evans, and Stein, *Environmental Justice Reader*, 1).

<sup>28</sup> Buell, *Future of Environmental Criticism*, 130.

<sup>29</sup> See Ursula K. Heise, “Ecocriticism and the Transnational Turn in American Studies,” *American Literary History* 20, no. 1–2 (2008): 381–404.

<sup>30</sup> Admittedly, these graphic models do so in a somewhat simplified manner that risks being misunderstood for a renewed type of “binary thinking.” It cannot be sufficiently emphasized that, despite the precise contours of the cube metaphor, here we are not engaging in clear-cut dichotomies, but in lines signifying a continuum, lines creating a mesh, a fluid crisscrossing space, where the different positions interpenetrate each other, as befits the ecocritical, relational approach of this article.

<sup>31</sup> Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 178.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph W. Meeker, “Fields of Danger and the Wilderness of Wisdom,” *North American Review* 263, no. 1 (1978): 71, quoted in Love, “Ecocriticism and Science,” 561.

<sup>33</sup> Basarab Nicolescu, “Transdisciplinarity as Methodological Framework for Going Beyond the Science-Religion Debate,” *Global Spiral*, May 24, 2007, <http://www.metanexus.net/magazine/tabid/68/id/10013/Default.aspx>.

<sup>34</sup> See Heise, “Ecocriticism and the Transnational Turn,” 383–87; and Ursula K. Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 28–49.

<sup>35</sup> Heise, “Ecocriticism and the Transnational Turn,” 386.

<sup>36</sup> Rosendale, “Introduction,” xvi.

<sup>37</sup> An example of the increasing presence of the transnational approach can be found in Patrick D. Murphy, *Ecocritical Explorations in Literary and Cultural Studies: Fences, Boundaries, and Fields* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), which argues in favor of a “transnational ecocritical theory” that should “transect, that is, cut across the limitations of national perspectives and boundaries” (63; see 63–76).

<sup>38</sup> See Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 1989); or the shorter piece by ecologist Erle Ellis, “Op-Ed: Stop Trying to Save the Planet,” *Wired Magazine*, May 6, 2009, <http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2009/05/ftf-ellis-1/>. See also Cynthia Deitering, “The Postnatural Novel: Toxic Consciousness in Fiction of the 1980s,” in Glotfelty and Fromm, *Ecocriticism Reader*, 196–203; and Mazel, *American Literary Environmentalism*, 34, 157–60.

<sup>39</sup> Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 179.

<sup>40</sup> Morton, *Ecology Without Nature*, 12.

<sup>41</sup> Love, “Ecocriticism and Science,” 569.

<sup>42</sup> The novel also has abundant examples of the rural-urban divide. The blending of “natural” and urban realms, for instance, can be illustrated through the flourishing pigeon business that punctuates the novel. The pigeon provides a good illustration of the intersection of the natural and the urban, since it is the epitome of the “urban bird.”

<sup>43</sup> Yamashita, *Through the Arc*, 99.

<sup>44</sup> Although it can hardly be considered “nature writing” in the traditional sense, *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* has also been read as such, specifically as an allegory of the natural cycle of the rainforest. See Toshi Ishihara, “Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*: Nature’s Text as Pilgrimage,” *Studies in American Literature, The American Literature Society of Japan* 31 (1997): 59–77.

<sup>45</sup> The narrating ball can be literally and figuratively linked to the Matacão, but it can also be construed as a replica of the larger ball that is our planet. For an insightful analysis of the ball as narrator and of Yamashita’s narrative strategies, see Caroline Rody, “Impossible Voices: Ethnic Postmodern Narration in Toni Morrison’s *Jazz* and Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*,” *Contemporary Literature* 41, no. 4 (2000): 618–41. In “Local Rock and Global Plastic,” Heise also addresses the consequences of the choice of a nonhuman narrator. See Ursula K. Heise, “Local Rock and Global Plastic: World Ecology and the Experience of Place,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 41, no. 1 (2004): 147–49. For a reading of the ball’s ambiguous import, see Benito, Manzananas, and Simal, “Of a Magical Nature,” 215–17. Finally, for an interpretation of the ball as “the memory of modernity” and beyond, see Robert Wess, “Terministic Screens and Ecological Foundations: A Burkean Perspective on Yamashita’s *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*,” *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 7, no. 1 (2005): 112–13.

<sup>46</sup> According to the ecological theory put forward by Ellis and Ramankutty, we should favor the term “anthropogenic biomes” or *anthromes*, instead of just “biomes,” in order to “describe the terrestrial biosphere in its contemporary, human-altered form, using global ecosystem units defined by global patterns of sustained direct human interaction with ecosystems, offering a new way forward for ecological research and education.” Erle C. Ellis and Navin Ramankutty, “Putting People in the Map: Anthropogenic Biomes of the World,” *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 6, no. 8 (2008): 439–47.

<sup>47</sup> Yamashita, *Through the Arc*, 143.

<sup>48</sup> Molly Wallace, “‘A Bizarre Ecology’: The Nature of Denatured Nature,” *ISLE* 7, no. 2 (2000): 149. For the author, Yamashita’s novel manages to “synthesize the kind of Marxist critique of postmodernism offered by Jameson with the kind of interrogation of the nature/culture binary offered by Latour” (146).

<sup>49</sup> Heise, “Local Rock and Global Plastic,” 127.

<sup>50</sup> Yamashita, *Through the Arc*, 202.

<sup>51</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 46, quoted in Wallace, “‘A Bizarre Ecology,’” 138. For a study of the ways such an antinomy is

overcome, see Wallace, ““A Bizarre Ecology””; for a Burkean inflection to Wallace’s discussion, see Wess, “Terministic Screens.”

<sup>52</sup> Marx, *Machine in the Garden*, 242.

<sup>53</sup> Armbruster and Wallace, *Beyond Nature Writing*, 4.

<sup>54</sup> Williams, “Ideas of Nature,” 294.

<sup>55</sup> The changing “nature” of the terms is fully documented. Williams comments on how what was natural could be read in rather disparate ways: in a positive way, as a blessed state of innocence, or in a negative one, as “the mere beast” that would drag us into sin (290). However, the fallacy of “nature” as pure, pristine, “separate from men” (293), can be traced to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when “nature” came to mean “all that was not touched by man, spoilt by man: ‘nature’ as the lonely places, the wilderness” (291).

<sup>56</sup> In *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*, for instance, there is an explicit reference to “the sweat of human labor” mixing with the forest (Yamashita, *Through the Arc*, 145).

<sup>57</sup> Williams, “Ideas of Nature,” 296–97.

<sup>58</sup> Yamashita, *Through the Arc*, 24–25.

<sup>59</sup> For an analysis of the conjunction of magic(al) realism and ecocriticism, see Benito, Manzanos, and Simal, “Of a Magical Nature.”

<sup>60</sup> Yamashita, *Through the Arc*, 141.

<sup>61</sup> Here, *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* clearly echoes Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*, which also features an incredibly malleable plastic called Imipolex-G, a homage that both the title of Yamashita’s novel and the name of the transnational corporation chosen (“GGG”) seem to confirm. I am highly indebted to Professor José Liste Noya for this insight.

<sup>62</sup> Heise, “Local Rock and Global Plastic,” 144–45.

<sup>63</sup> Jinqi Ling, “Forging a North-South Perspective: Nikkei Migration in Karen Tei Yamashita’s Novels,” *Amerasia Journal* 32, no. 3 (2006): 10. See also Wess, “Terministic Screens,” 110; and Aimee Bahng, “Extrapolating Transnational Arcs, Excavating Imperial Legacies: The Speculative Acts of Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*,” *MELUS* 33, no. 4 (2008): 123–44.

<sup>64</sup> Marx, *Machine in the Garden*, 11–16.

<sup>65</sup> Yamashita, *Through the Arc*, 99.

<sup>66</sup> The “rain forest parking lot” has also modified the customs and attire of some Amazonian Indians, who sport “reflective materials in the masks, headpieces and necklaces” thanks to the old mirrors from the car and plane cemetery (100).

<sup>67</sup> Although the garden has been read both as wilderness or as “middle landscape,” the latter is more common. This ambiguity is quite evident in Robert Beverley’s conception of the

garden, as displayed in his *History and Present State of Virginia* (1705). According to Marx, Beverley wavers between two different “garden metaphors: a wild, primitive, or pre-lapsarian Eden . . . , and a cultivated garden embracing values not unlike those represented by the classic Virgilian pasture” (Marx, *Machine in the Garden*, 87). Significantly, the garden imagined as middle landscape has been commonly read as the key to dismantling the nature-culture divide, since “it mediates between the human and the natural without any claims for purity.” Louis H. Palmer III, “Articulating the Cyborg: An Impure Model for Environmental Revolution,” in Rosendale, *Greening of Literary Scholarship*, 168. For contemporary theories advocating the “garden solution,” see Palmer, “Articulating the Cyborg,” 168–69.

<sup>68</sup> Although, in a 2007 interview, Heise doubts whether we can consider Yamashita an Asian American or even an American writer (favoring the “Latin American” label instead, at least for this first novel), Yamashita herself has recently voiced her preference for Asian American and, more specifically, Japanese American self-identification: “I call myself a Japanese American writer.” Te-Hsing Shan, “Interview with Karen Tei Yamashita,” *Amerasia Journal* 32, no. 3 (2006): 125. Even more telling is Rachel Lee’s grounding of Kazumasa, the Japanese with the ball, in the Asian American master narrative of the railroad worker, even though she problematically conflates a Chinese immigrant icon with a Japanese immigrant. See Rachel Lee, “Asian American Cultural Production in Asian-Pacific Perspective,” *boundary 2* 26, no. 2 (1999): 242–46.

<sup>69</sup> See Sau-Ling Cynthia Wong, “Denationalization Reconsidered: Asian American Cultural Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads,” *Amerasia Journal* 21, no. 1–2 (1995): 1–27.

<sup>70</sup> And yet, Koshy claims, while capital seems to have no frontiers, thus confirming the deterritorialization inherent in global economy, political and legal systems, most notably human and workers’ rights, still seem unable to transcend traditional national boundaries. See Susan Koshy, “The Postmodern Subaltern: Globalization Theory and the Subject of Ethnic, Area, and Postcolonial Studies,” in *Minor Transnationalism*, ed. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 109–31. In a book primarily concerned with the impact of the enclosure movement on our “ontological understanding of land” (22), Robert Marzec goes further in his indictment of transnational capitalism, focusing primarily on how such a globalized economic system “deterritorializes the singularity of territories” (Marzec, *Ecological and Postcolonial Study*, 116). Echoing Deleuze and Guattari, he contends that “capital can be grafted upon any territory, and upon any difference generated within a particular territory,” thus “deterritorializ[ing] what was once intrinsic or peculiar to a territory, placing it within the universal flow of the global economy” (23). For studies of deterritorialization in Yamashita’s work, see Heise, “Local Rock and Global Plastic”; Heise, “Ecocriticism and the Transnational Turn”; Heise, *Sense of Place*; and Shu-ching Chen, “Magic Capitalism and Melodramatic Imagination—Producing Locality and Reconstructing Asian Ethnicity in Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*,” *EurAmerica* 34, no. 4 (2004): 587–625. In this postnational scenario, alternative notions, such as Patrick Murphy’s “allonational formations,” have been suggested in order to critique and totally dispense with the nation-state. See Patrick D. Murphy, “Grounding Otherness and Answerability through Allonational Ecoliterature Formations,” in *Nature in Literary and Cultural Studies: Transatlantic*

*Conversations on Ecocriticism*, ed. Catrin Gersdorf and Sylvia Mayer (New York: Rodopi, 2006): 417–34.

<sup>71</sup> Koshy, “Postmodern Subaltern,” 111, 117.

<sup>72</sup> See Shelley Fisher Fishkin, “Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies—Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004,” *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2005): 17–57. For an interesting proposal of a “philosophy of transnationalism,” see Laura Doyle, “Toward a Philosophy of Transnationalism,” *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 1, no. 1 (2009), <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/9vr1k8hk>.

<sup>73</sup> As Sue-Im Lee notes, Yamashita has paid a great deal of attention to the deterritorializing effects of globalization throughout her literary career. In her books she has explored the transformation of (ethnic) identities, by “celebrat[ing] the porous categories of identities emerging from the phenomena of globalization” and delving into “the ways in which the unmooring of identities and affiliations translate into formations of new moorings” (Lee, “We Are Not the World,” 503).

<sup>74</sup> Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto,” in During, *Cultural Studies Reader*, 315, 317.

<sup>75</sup> Yamashita, *Through the Arc*, 100.

<sup>76</sup> These dead machines are, at the same time, *death* machines. I thank the article reviewers for pointing this out to me.

<sup>77</sup> Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1997).

<sup>78</sup> Lee, “We Are Not the World,” 502.

<sup>79</sup> Much like cars house improvised gardens in Yamashita’s *Tropic of Orange*.